

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 24 MARCH  
2026 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)  
Councillors G Bagnall, C Criscione, B Donald, R Haynes,  
S Luck, J Moran, A Reeve and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), B Brown (Director of  
Environmental Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services  
Officer), D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning) and  
V Reed (Climate Change Lead Officer)

Also in attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning), Councillor P  
Lees (Leader of the Council) and Councillor N Reeve (Portfolio  
Holder for Environment and Climate Change).

**SC50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillor Gooding.

There were no declarations of interest.

**SC51 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2026 were approved  
as an accurate record.

**SC52 CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

In response to questions from members about the planning items, the Strategic  
Director of Planning made the following comments:-

- The design code was being refreshed due to changes from Central  
Government and shortened to make it more accessible, it would then go  
to public consultation.
- The Planning Enforcement Policy was an internal document that was  
being updated and would not be publicly considered.

**SC53 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Work Programme was noted.

In response to questions from members, the following comments were made:-

- The Chair noted that the HRA 30 year business plan would be a very substantial item.
- The Leader said that there was no decision yet regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) but a meeting with a government representative was imminent.

The Director of Corporate Services made the following comments:-

- The Task and Finish group dates had been agreed at the last Scrutiny meeting.
- The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group was in April.

There was discussion about whether the Economic Development item should be included on the work programme, because members were always satisfied with their work.

The Director of Corporate Services said:-

- Economic Development was on the work programme because it had an action plan that went to Cabinet.
- It could be taken off if members thought it would be beneficial to focus on other areas.

Members particularly wanted to focus on Housing Repairs, Building Control and Planning Enforcement.

In response to a question from a member, the Strategic Director of Planning said that planning enforcement was monitored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and statistics could be seen on the government website. He said that the building control team had just been audited by the Building Safety Regulator and was a high performing team.

SC54

## **CORPORATE PLAN 2025/26 PROGRESS REPORT**

The Leader presented the Corporate Plan progress report and highlighted the following achievements:-

- The successful implementation of a curb side electrical recycling service.
- The waste fleet had moved from diesel to Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil (HVO).
- The Local Plan accepted as sound by the Planning Inspectorate and a vote at tomorrow's Council meeting.
- The overall rating of good in a mock regulatory inspection of landlord services.

She said that there were three areas in amber including two that were impacted by LGR:-

- Progressing emerging technologies
- Rural priorities programme.
- Housing Services, due to the impact on some areas of work caused by bringing repairs and maintenance back in-house, but this should be green by the next update.

In response to questions from Members, the following points were made:-

- There would be no increase in Council Tax due to the decarbonisation of London Road Office. This had been fully budgeted.
- On p28 the biodiversity report would be an executive decision by the Leader, it had a deadline of Friday at 4pm, after which it would be published.
- There was an agreement with Stansted Parish Council that meant it was not necessary to travel all the way to Braintree if you were unemployed, this would be rolled out in Saffron Walden as well. The Economic Development team would be at the next meeting and could give a more comprehensive update.
- Measures being implemented around rural isolation, poverty and crime included joining with partners across sectors to produce a shared action plan for the district and community led voluntary organisations working across this area.
- The staff retention rate at UDC was good and was reflected in the key performance indicators. The Leader said it was important to support staff through LGR.
- The number of social houses to be built in the next two years was unknown but the strategy and implementation would be in place before LGR so that it continued within the new unitary.
- There was discussion on the role of the Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) as this was no longer being funded in Stansted by UDC.
  - The Leader said that Essex Police had given their assurance that Stansted would still have the support of a PCSO.
  - There were other concerns that the budget was out of kilter focusing on the decarbonisation of London Road rather than policing which needed to be valued.
  - The Chair suggested that funding for the PCSO should be taken up with the relevant Portfolio Holder to take to the upcoming Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner meeting. They had raised their precept by 5.8% and therefore it was important to know that the PCSO role was still there.
- The Housing Delivery Strategy would be ready for member approval in April 2026.
- The Leader agreed to add mention of historic heritage within the section on protecting and enhancing the district. Councillor Haynes said it was important as houses were being left to decay and there needed to be a policy and recognition of the problem.
- There was an Essex Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy and AI was being explored in various parts of the council. When it was certain who UDC would be merging with, AI would be something that was worked on together. More detail would be added to the corporate plan next time.
- The Strategic Director of Planning commented on heritage buildings at risk and said:-
  - An item should go to the Planning Committee Working Group initially.
  - Heritage buildings at risk were part of enforcement, as they related to serving urgent work notices.
  - A report could be provided and added to the Scrutiny work programme.
  - He agreed to take this away and review with some urgency.

The Chair said it was an impressive document, there had been hard questions asked but it contained specific timelines and deliverables. He thanked the Director of Corporate Services for his work on this item.

The Leader thanked the committee as it had helped to make the document even better.

## SC55 **CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN END OF YEAR REVIEW**

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and the Environment presented the report, he said that the report was to note and to advise Cabinet of any issues. He thanked the team for their contributions and highlighted the following:-

- There was a new report on renewable energy and energy planning which would provide guidance when looking at solar farm applications.
- There was no UDC non-recyclable waste going to landfill.
- A new food recycling scheme in flats was working well.
- There was new legislation from Government about a simpler recycling policy.
- The current focus was on the implementation of Local Plan policies relating to climate, biodiversity and energy.
- The green house gas report showed that the Council was heading towards achieving their net zero targets by 2030.
- He summarised the estimated costs of climate change to the Council.
  - Green tariffs £40K per year
  - HVO £70k per year
  - London Road Decarbonisation £45k per year
  - and other £20k per year
  - making a total of £175k of extra cost in order to meet the goals set out in the climate emergency to reach net zero.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- The air quality in Saffron Walden was measured at various sites and had been taken off the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) problem list.
- Although there was a responsibility to make sure that the Council's assets kept their value, the extra costs of net zero were relatively small but necessary to reach the targets set out in the climate emergency, which Council had voted on and agreed.
- The solar farm study was published on the website and would be a guide for officers and councillors in the planning process. It was best practice not policy and sought to extract benefits for the community.
- A suggestion from Councillor Haynes was accepted regarding the Local Nature Recovery strategy, which was currently guidance only, this would be considered and the sites within it designated to avoid them being built on in the future.
- The Biodiversity strategy was being given priority, and the Sustainable Uttlesford collaboration was also working with the community to achieve the goals within the strategy.
- The Big Green Festival would take place from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> June. One of the core sessions would include a focus on Local Nature Recovery, and

Dr Simon Lyster, the Chair of the Essex Local Nature Recovery Partnership would be a keynote speaker.

- The Social Housing Decarbonisation fund was in the region of £8million including the £3.8 grant from Government. It was expected that 90% of the 276 houses would meet the deadline to be started of 31<sup>st</sup> March.
- The Electric Vehicle Car Club revenue went to the operating company, Co-wheels. The Council provided the car parking bays and access to a public charge point and a small payment from the DEFRA grant to incentivise them to locate a car club here.
- The Saffron Walden Air Quality project grant was for Saffron Walden Town only. Most of the grants went to urban areas but DEFRA were keen to see the effects in a small market town. There were a number of initiatives that had been carried out including pollution awareness projects, a wood burning campaign, shared cycling, bike hire and the Co-Wheels Car Club as well as some air quality monitoring. There would be a close out report but evidence from the project had fed into the Local Plan and there had been 7,000 journeys by bike on the App bike hire scheme alone. This was being evaluated to see if there was a shift in getting people out of cars.
- The design guide to make historic buildings more energy efficient was in draft and would be published shortly, however it was important that the advice was careful and considered in order to balance the protection of the built heritage versus the climate change agenda.

The Chair said that value for money was important and according to the figures there had been a saving of 840 tonnes of carbon from 2019/20 to 2024/25 which equated to £200 per ton using the total cost figure of £175k, which was very good. He said that it was a very comprehensive and well written report.

## SC56 **STREET CLEANSING OVERVIEW**

The Director of Environmental Services went through the slides, which had been included in the agenda pack.

In response to questions from Members the Director of Environmental Services made the following comments:-

- The street sweeping schedules had remained the same for several years and continued to operate on their established routes.
- UDC investigated fly tipping and pursued prosecution as well as issuing fixed penalty notices, however, resources had to be managed and choices made. Other councils might focus more on minor littering which skewed the figures.
- It was difficult to breakdown the costs of fly tipping, the amounts for larger sites can be quantified but the smaller ones tended to be resourced through existing budgets.
- The Council was only responsible for fly tipping and litter on publicly adopted land and public rights of way. Private Roads were the responsibility of the relevant management company. Residents or parish councils were able to organise community litter picks and the Council could provide equipment and collect the waste afterward.

- Dog poo bins across the district were emptied by the Council if they were registered, however a number of bins were added without the Council being informed. Best practice would be to consult with the Council regarding new bins to ensure they were accessible and necessary.

*The meeting ended at 9.20pm*