27 November 2014 7.30 - 8.35 pm

PRESENT

Overview Working Group Members
Councillor Maggie Hulcoop (Chair)
Councillor Ian Beckett (Vice-Chair)
Councillor David Carter
Councillor Simon Carter
Councillor Manny Doku
Councillor Waida Forman
Councillor Christine O'Dell
Councillor Dennis Palmer
Councillor Bill Pryor

Officers
Donna Beechener, Revenues and Benefits Manager
Joel West, Governance Support Officer

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Linda Pailing.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2014 are agreed as a correct record.

24. MATTERS ARISING

With reference to Minute 18, Community Based Assets report, Resolution B, the Overview Working Group noted that a question on this subject had been submitted by Councillor Linda Pailing to the Chair of the Council, Councillor Ian Beckett, at the meeting of Full Council on 23 October 2014. In response to the question, the Chair reported that he had received email confirmation from all three group leaders confirming their commitment to the direction of travel of the Overview Working Group’s Review of Community Based Assets. The Overview Working Group Chair, Councillor Maggie Hulcoop, reported that she had also seen the emails and was pleased that this matter had been resolved.
25. **LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Overview Working Group received a report, from Simon Freeman, Head of Finance, on the Review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Donna Beechener, Revenues and Benefits Manager, introduced and summarised the report.

In response to questions from Councillors, Donna provided more details on the proposed £70 penalty for claimants who incorrectly or knowingly fail to report changes in their circumstances. Donna explained that, if agreed, the penalty would be introduced following a lead-in period that would involve appropriate publicity. There would be an element of Officer discretion in the decision whether to apply in a penalty in each case and a claimant’s personal circumstances would be taken into account. There is both an internal appeals process and an external tribunal that claimants can turn to if they feel the penalty has been applied incorrectly.

The Overview Working Group expressed concern that some community groups (such as non-British Nationals or those with poor literacy/numeracy) may be more vulnerable to the proposed penalty as they are more likely to make mistakes on their Council Tax Support application. Councillors suggested that additional publicity to target such groups may be desirable. Donna explained that the Council has a corporate approach to translation services which the Council Tax Support application process must adhere to. The translation policy was approved by Cabinet in July 2014 following a review by the Resources, Housing and Governance Overview Working Group.

In response to queries from the Overview Working Group, Donna provided information on the data-matching exercises currently used, both to detect potential fraud amongst Council Tax Support claimants and to identify those who may be eligible for support, but do not claim.

**RESOLVED** that the Overview Working Group:

A  Acknowledges the current position regarding the 2014/15 Local Council Tax Support Scheme and endorses the principle of stability within the scheme for 2015/16.

B  Endorses the Pan Essex Business Case approach to protecting the Council Tax base and the proposal to introduce penalties as detailed in the report.

C  RECOMMENDS to Cabinet that:

(i) The Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2015/16, be unchanged from the 2014/15 scheme; and

(ii) The proposal to introduce penalties as detailed in paragraph 25 of the report be agreed.
26. **WORK PLAN**

The Overview Working Group received a report that outlined its work plan for the current year.

Councillors felt that it would be beneficial if background information on the Review of Empty Council Properties could be provided prior to formal consideration of the matter (to be scheduled no earlier than March 2015).

RESOLVED that:

A The Work Plan 2014/15 is noted.

B The Chairman will ask the Head of Housing if the Overview Working Group can be provided with any background information on the Review of Empty Council Properties work plan item that may help it prepare for this review.

27. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP