

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF GOVERNANCE SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 7 JULY 2015
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.00 PM**

Members Present:	T Church (Chairman), D Dorrell, L Hughes, S Jones, H Kauffman, M McEwen, S Watson, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley
Other members present:	J Philip (Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder)
Apologies for Absence:	Y Knight, B Sandler and J M Whitehouse
Officers Present	G Chipp (Chief Executive), N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Management)), S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), W MacLeod (Elections Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), B Copson (Senior Performance Improvement Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was advised that Councillor J H Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor J M Whitehouse.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE/WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The new draft Terms of reference were submitted to the Select Committee. Members agreed for them to be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

RECOMMENDED:

That the draft Terms of Reference for the Governance Select Committee be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

(b) Work Programme

The following items for the Work Programme were agreed:

(i) The Assistant Director of Development Management suggested that Item 6 of the Work Programme, Probity in Planning, should be re-titled Planning Appeals Performance. It would be scheduled for the 6 October 2015 Select Committee.

(ii) It was suggested that a new item should be added, Development Management Chair and Vice Chair's meeting. This would concern receiving feedback

from the meeting of Chair and Vice Chair's of Area Planning and Development Management Control Committees. The Select Committee agreed to a report being scheduled for the 1 December 2015 meeting.

(iii) It was advised that there should be new items for S106 Monitoring on 6 October and Planning Enforcement on 1 December meetings.

4. REVIEW OF ELECTIONS 2015 - LESSONS LEARNT

The Select Committee received a report regarding the Parliamentary and Local Elections 2015 – Lessons Learnt from the Returning Officer for the District Council.

The report discussed planning processes and implementation for the elections held on 7 May 2015, the results of which were the election of a Member of Parliament for the Epping Forest Constituency, one Councillor was returned for each of eighteen District Council wards and ten Parish Council elections took place with six contested wards.

This election followed the first year when the Council was required to implement Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Work undertaken to encourage further registration had prompted some 5,000 changes to the IER register, published in 2014.

Staffing

The levels of staffing for polling stations, verification and counts were adequate, it was noted that Service Directors were helpful in making officers available for all the processes.

Ballot Paper Printing

All of the election papers were printed by the Council's Reprographics Section, which, as before, provided an excellent service. The proofs of all District Council and Parish Council ballot papers were scrutinised carefully and all ballot papers were printed correctly. Manual checks were also made of each printed ballot paper, no errors were subsequently detected or reported at polling stations.

It was advised that nationally, there was an issue regarding a late change made to the logo of the Green Party. The Electoral Commission had agreed the change but had not transmitted this information effectively to Returning Officers. The Acting Returning Officer decided not to print new ballot papers and informed the agent so there was no confusion created for voters.

Due to the number of ballot papers required for the Parliamentary election it was necessary to engage an external printer for the 75,000 ballot papers. The split between internal printing for local elections and external for national ones worked well, it was recommended to continue with this for the 2016 Police and Crime Commissioner election where 100,000 ballots would be required.

Postal Votes

During the run up to the election, both Harlow and Brentwood Councils informed the District Council that they would not be issuing Postal Voting Packs for District and parish elections falling in their Parliamentary areas. This meant that postal voters in those areas received postal packs from two different issuing authorities at different

times. Although it was found that voters were able to deal with having two sets of papers, the District Council did get complaints that Brentwood postal packs had not arrived until shortly before the election.

The issue of postal votes for Epping Forest went smoothly. Nearly 10,000 postal voting packs were sent out, the most ever. Although there was no evidence of any postal vote fraud, 150 postal votes were rejected for various reasons. Regulations brought in recently required the Electoral Registration Officer to inform electors, after a poll, that their postal vote identifiers had been rejected.

Election Day Issues

All polling stations opened on time with no access issues. This year, four polling stations were changed due to unavailability of previous locations, no issues were raised in connection with these stations.

In Epping, where there were both District and Town Council elections, it was discovered at poll opening that Town Council ballot papers had been issued to transposed stations in the Hemnall and St. John's wards. Immediate action was taken to suspend the issuing of these ballots and corrected papers were taken to the polling stations. Those ballots issued incorrectly were subsequently rejected at the count and were shown as being rejected on the results sheets published. This situation was due to human error and the following revised processes had been agreed:

- (a) All ballot paper books would have labels on their front covers saying which ward and election they were for;
- (b) All ballot papers issued would be systematically double checked against issue lists for boxes generated by the computer system; and
- (c) All presiding officers would double check their allocations and also be reminded of the need to double check their ballot papers on collection.

The Returning Officer reiterated his apologies for this error which could have had an effect on the results in the Hemnall Town Council ward, however no appeal had been forthcoming within the statutory timescales and the result was therefore beyond challenge.

This year the ARO had taken the decision to continue with local conventions relating to tellers and issued instructions via presiding officers ensuring consistent practice across the stations. Additionally "meet and greet" staff were used at barrier stations, these arrangements worked well with only minor issues.

It was advised that as part of the national election the Government opted to fund Post Office sorting centre sweeps on the evening of the poll. Only a handful of packs were delivered (six) through this process and twenty-six were delivered in the normal post on the Friday. At a cost of approximately £600, this did not constitute a good use of public funds.

Verification and Counts

Verification and counting of parliamentary ballot papers took place at Debden Park High School enabling a larger number of count staff to be employed. Counting

started as soon as the polling finished, the process going smoothly. The final declaration of the Parliamentary seat was made at around 3.45p.m.

Appropriate publicity was made available at all stages with links to the Council's website. There was significant media interest and the Council provided effective media facilities at the count.

The District Council and the Parish Council election counts were undertaken from 1.00p.m. on Friday 8 May 2015. These counts were completed very quickly.

Arrangements were made with the North Essex Parking Partnership to relax the enforcement of parking restrictions on single yellow lines in the vicinity of Theydon Bois Village Hall, additionally refreshments were made available at the Count, which were well received by those attending.

Police Liaison

Discussions were held with Essex Police prior to the election. Polling stations received visits during the day and there were no instances requiring immediate police presence outside of the regular visits. Police support was also provided at the Count Centres on both Thursday evening and on Friday at Theydon Bois. The Returning Officer thanked Sergeant A Alcock from the Epping Forest and Brentwood Local Policing Hub and his officers for their help and assistance.

Complaints and Queries Received in the Elections Office

There were few telephone calls made to the Elections Office on 7 May, these concerned a few software issues sorted out by polling station staff enabling voters to vote, confusion around Government website wording regarding postal votes for overseas electors, some people had failed to update their registration in time and requests for emergency proxy votes, many of which did not fit the medical criteria.

Post-Election Consultations/Comments

Every agent had been written to asking for comments in relation to the running of the election. Only one response had been received by the time of agenda publication which concerned Budworth Hall Chipping Ongar polling station. Tellers there had experienced difficulties there as the gap between departing voters and tellers made number collection difficult. Officers had advised that Budworth Hall had no inside area for tellers to sit and use of the main entrance would mean difficult access for those with disabilities. There had otherwise been no comments in relation to the use of this station.

The Candidate's Evening, held on 16 April, was better attended than last year. All parties were encouraged to attend as it provided essential information about the running of the election.

Future Elections/Canvass

In May 2016 the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Election would be held, in addition, elections for a third of the district council seats and approximately half of the parish/town councils. The timing of the PCC election would be determined by the Police Area Returning Officer (PARO), however it was advised that the election was likely to be held on Friday 6 May 2016.

The Canvass for 2015 posed a significant challenge to deliver a level of accuracy and registration similar to this year. Officers were aware that going forward, there would be a number of local planning referendums, an EU referendum and a combined election in 2016.

Members advised officers that the current polling stations in Buckhurst Hill were inadequate for some voters as they were at extreme ends of their respective wards. Officers replied that there was a periodic review of polling stations undertaken by the Council, one had been completed last year. Any concerns could be discussed there, however officers were also reliant on local knowledge regarding the feasibility of buildings that could be used as polling stations.

Members extended their thanks to the Electoral Team for their hard work on the elections.

RESOLVED:

That the review of the Parliamentary and Local Elections held on 7 May 2015 be agreed.

5. CONSULTATION REGISTER 2014/15 AND 2015/16

The Select Committee received a report regarding the Consultation Register 2014/15 and 2015/16 from the Public Relations and Marketing Officer.

The District Council carried out a wide variety of consultations, both externally for public participation and internally for staff opinions. A list of these were compiled and published as a register on the Council's website, they set out the issues on which individual services would be consulting on or engaging with residents and customers during the year. They summarised the purpose, start and completion dates, service area administering the surveys, location of results and key findings. The register also set out the overall objective for consultation exercises yet to be undertaken.

Community Engagement and Involvement

Amongst the larger surveys carried out by the Council in the last 12 months were the Car Parking Review and the Tenant Participation Survey. It was advised that a further district – wide Community Safety Survey was being planned for the summer and autumn.

Neighbourhood Plans and the Local Plan were set to dominate much of the consultation agenda over the next 12 - 36 months. Five separate Local Area Neighbourhood Plans of Epping, Theydon Bois, Buckhurst Hill, Loughton and North Weald Bassett were at various points of progress.

Members felt that consultations which relied heavily on electronic media and responses would miss key groups within the public. Parish Councils could be advised of these consultations in advance and be persuaded to display them on their local notice boards. It was suggested that the Local Council's Liaison Committee would be the best place for advising Parish and Town clerks of current or future consultations.

Internal Consultation

Human Resources would be carrying out further employee “Pulse” consultation to compare and measure staff attitudes against previous survey results. Staff consultation would also ascertain preferred methods of engagement and how budgeted resources for staff projects could be spent.

Cost

The majority of public consultation were carried out in-house and costs kept low within current budgets. The total cost of consultations in the current Register was £97,200. The most significant item of planned consultation expenditure was the Local Plan, the Preferred Options consultation, due to commence in July 2016, was budgeted for £90,000.

Appreciative Enquiry

There were new public and staff consultations being undertaken with new techniques aimed at creating better communication with the public and also enhancing response rates for the workforce.

RESOLVED:

That the report and Consultation Register 2014/15 and 2015/16, setting out issues on which public consultation is being undertaken and those consultations completed during 2014/15, be noted.

6. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2014/15 - QUARTER 4 (OUTTURN) PERFORMANCE

The Select Committee received a report from the Assistant Director (Development Management) regarding Key Performance Indicators 2014/15 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) Performance.

The Local Government Act 1999 required local authorities to make arrangements for securing continuous improvement in the way in which its functions and services were exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. As part of this duty, a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relevant to the Council’s services and key objectives were adopted each year. Performance against the majority of KPIs was monitored on a quarterly basis, there were thirty six KPIs 2014/15 adopted in March 2014. From 2014/15 Select Committees (formerly Scrutiny Panels) became responsible for the review of quarterly performance against specific KPIs within their areas of responsibility. This particular report included in detail those indicators which fell within the areas of responsibility of the Governance Select Committee.

Key Performance Indicators 2014/15 – Quarter 3 Performance

The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance for all of the KPIs at the end of the year (31 March 2015) was as follows:

- (a) Twenty six (72%) indicators achieved the cumulative end of year target;
- (b) Ten (28%) indicators did not achieve the cumulative end of year target; and
- (c) One (3%) of these KPIs performed within the agreed tolerance for the indicator.

Six of the KPIs for 2014/15 fell within the Governance Select Committee's area of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at the end of the year for these six indicators was as follows:

- (i) Three (50%) indicators achieved the cumulative end of year target;
- (ii) Three (50%) indicators did not achieve the cumulative end of year target; and
- (iii) One (17%) of these KPIs performed within the agreed tolerance for the indicator.

The Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder advised that this report should be under his portfolio and not the Planning Portfolio Holder, as indicated on the agenda report.

The Select Committee requested more information on appeal decisions being upheld by the inspector. The Chairman felt that in their consideration of individual cases, the inspectors applied the same principles irrespective of local conditions. The Assistant Director of Development Management informed Members that all appeals information was posted in the Bulletin, it was helpful for Members of Area planning Sub-Committees to attend hearings to advise on their reasons for the decision taken. He added that there was a substantial workload connected with pre-application work which as well as generating an income for the authority, also assisted planning application development before final submittal and decision.

The Assistant Director of Development Management suggested that the select committee receive a report on pre-application work.

RESOLVED:

That the review of Key Performance Indicators 2014/15 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) be agreed.

7. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2012-2016 - QUARTER 4 PROGRESS 2014/15

The Select Committee received a report from the Senior Performance Improvement Officer regarding the Equality Objectives 2012 – 2016 Quarter 4 Progress for 2014/15.

The Equality Act 2010 placed a number of responsibilities on the Council in having regard to equality in the exercise of its functions, this included a Public Sector Equality Day (PSED). It aimed to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons sharing relevant characteristics and those who did not. Further specific responsibilities required the adoption of objectives for improving equality for service users and employees.

In March 2012, the Cabinet agreed four equality objectives for the four years from 2012-16, designed to assist the Council meeting the needs of the PSED. The objectives supported by an Action Plan, focused on key areas where improvement in relation to equality had been identified as follows:

- (a) Objective 1 Equality information;
- (b) Objective 2 Equality ownership;

(c) Objective 3 Engagement; and

(d) Objective 4 Equality in workforce development.

Members received a schedule detailing progress against individual actions, the reporting progress followed status indicators applied to individual actions. The actions delivering Objectives 1 and 2 were largely completed with progress being made across all actions for the remaining objectives. The Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) would continue to monitor progress.

It was advised that the current set of equality objectives would reach the end of their lifetime in March 2016, therefore CEWG would identify equality objectives for 2016-20.

The Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder informed the Select Committee that his aim was to embed equality into the Council's ethos, permeating everything the authority did. The Performance Improvement Officer added that developing staff understanding of equality was very important.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the review of progress against the Council's Equality Objectives 2012-16 up until March 2015, and other work in meeting its statutory equality duties, be agreed; and

(2) That the ongoing development of the equality objectives for 2016-20 be agreed.

8. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Select Committee would be held on Tuesday 6 October at 7.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.