

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 9 January 2018

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.15 pm

Members Present: Councillors M Sartin (Chairman) R Brookes (Vice-Chairman) R Baldwin, N Bedford, L Hughes, Y Knight, J Lea, A Mitchell, S Murray, S Neville, A Patel, D Stallan, B Surtees, H Whitbread and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors W Breare-Hall, A Grigg, H Kane, S Kane, A Lion and J Philip

Apologies: Councillors N Avey

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

By Invitation: M Hart (Transport for London)

41. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

42. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor L Hughes was substituting for Councillor N Avey.

43. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 31 October 2017 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11 (O&S Work Programme) on discussion of possible review of the Epping Forest Sixth Form Consortium, by virtue of being employed by that consortium. He advised that his interest was not prejudicial and that he would remain in the meeting.

45. TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

The Chairman introduced Mark Hart, the Transport for London Community Partnership Specialist (West) who was there to speak to and answer questions from members on their concerns in regards to the operation of local bus services within the Epping Forest District run by TfL.

Mr Hart began by saying that in 2016 bus routes 167, 397 and 549 were reviewed in March 2016 in preparation for a new contract with a service provider, to be let in March 2017. They reviewed all their services looking at capacity, reliability and, increasingly, costs, as they were also a publically funded organisation. They were now in a tighter financial position as TfL had lost financial support from Essex County Council and the grant from Central Government, which was roughly about £700 million per year. They had to now look at how they did things and to do them smarter, such as building on land owned, advertising etc. It also meant that they had to look at reducing the services they provided.

Route 167 had been cut back, so that it now finished in Loughton and still provided a cross boundary service. From there passengers could change onto the Central Line or other busses (routes 20 or 397). He accepted that this was not as convenient as staying on a single bus to their eventual destination. He noted that now passengers get a 'Hopper' ticket – where they only had to pay once even if they had to change buses.

There was also a demand for the 167 from school children so they created route 677, especially for school children.

The frequency of the service (167) had not been changed; there was still a bus every 20 minutes. The buses now had new engines that were more efficient and better for the environment.

They had no plans to change the 167 route at this time, but would be reviewing it again when the contract was due for renewal. Contracts tended to run for 5 years with a further 2 years depending on the performance of the contractor.

He had been asked if the route 20 would continue to deliver the same service. Route 20 was currently being reviewed for a new contract to start in March 2019. If any changes were proposed then they would go out to consultation on any proposals. So no change until March 2019.

Route 549 was reviewed also, and reliability was proving to be an issue, largely because of congestion on roads and also road works. Because of this TfL found they could not keep to the timetable they had, so reduced the frequency from every hour to every 70 minutes. The alternative would be to maintain that service but they would have to buy another bus. And buses were very expensive, and did not pass the value for money test they had.

The review of the 397 route proposed no changes and so no changes were currently planned.

Generally, because of the increase in bus journey times there had been a decline in passenger numbers. The current 5 year TfL business plan was looking at reductions in mileage run by the their bus service but then there would be an increase, largely because of increased new housing and a return to growth at the end of that 5 year period. There would a small reduction on the underground as well.

The meeting was then opened up for questions from members.

Councillor Neville noted that the 167 route had been strongly supported by a petition during the consultation period. The TfL response seemed inadequate and appeared that TfL had already made its mind up on this. Could he tell me what if any suggestions made in the consultation had been carried forward. Also, he noted that

the new 677 school bus service went along a different route to the 167 route and was only twice a day.

Also in terms of route 20; had there been an uptake in the usage of that bus since the 167 has been curtailed to Loughton.

Mr Hart noted the questions and said that he would consult his colleagues and get back to him.

The Chairman asked if the 677 only ran during school term time or throughout the year. Mr Hart said that he did not know for sure but suspected that it was only at term time and it only ran twice a day.

Councillor Murray commented that he wanted to focus on the 167 and the 20 buses. The 167 was an important service for the seventh largest conurbation in Essex, about 50,000 people; if TfL had not lost the financial support from Essex County Council and from the Government would the service have continued? His ward and the surrounding wards were the worst affected by this reduction in service, especially the young mums and their kids and the elderly; as they had problems getting to the High Road and the Doctor's surgeries. He accepted that the district had its problem areas in the rural villages, but here we had the seventh largest town in Essex and this vital bus service had been curtailed. Two big secondary schools had also been affected as pupils could not stay after school for any extra curricula activities and that was unacceptable.

Route 20 was essential for Debden and Loughton and was always full; was it under threat?

Mr Hart replied that he did not have enough information about the weighting given to financial matters and to how many people using the bus. Other factors would be the time it took to complete the route. As for the number 20 buses, if this was being used more would that mean that it would be insulated from cuts on its review. He simply do not know the outcome of that, although a great deal of attention would be paid to the consultation.

Finance was increasingly a factor for TfL and what it provided, and it wasn't only in Essex. His colleagues would be facing similar questions in Hertfordshire and Surrey in similar meetings where we were faced with making similar decisions.

Since I came here last year we were facing an increasing number of people using the Central Line and had rebalanced the service on that Line. We were aware of the numbers and did feed into the various plans and had to take long term views. He would take your questions back and get some details and get back to you on this.

Councillor Wixley agreed with Councillor Murray comments that the 167 affected the elderly passengers as it no longer went to Loughton High Road, and this was unacceptable.

Councillor Stallan noted that the comments made could be made for all areas in our district. He then asked if passenger numbers for the 167 had dropped off since the change. He noted that the contract was to run for 5 years and that TfL had been consulted on our Local Plan and asked what the lead-in time was for TfL for new development, as they have a contract for 5 years and up to 2033 to plan for more potential passengers. How would they react to that for providing more bus services? Mr Hart replied that their bus contracts were for 5 years; their infrastructure works were for longer periods. The population of London will eventually go up to about 10

million by 2030 so we cannot be bound by a 5 year plan and have to take a long term view while also feeding into various local authorities Local Plans. Cross Rail will also start to affect this area from 2019 onwards and should take about 10% of the journeys from the Central Line. So they did take the long term view, but it was complicated and made more so by the loss of funding.

Councillor Baldwin noted that the 397 service that he used could be unreliable in the early mornings and late afternoons with some of the buses being terminated before their final destinations. What were the reasons for this? And looking at your tendering process and minimum operating standards etc. what kind of control did you exercise over your contracted services? Mr Hart could not answer specifically about the 397 service. He noted that there had been comments about, for instance, buses that keep their engines running at the terminus points. We do carry out spot checks and do impose fines etc. he would go back and check out the performance for 397 with his colleagues and would feed this back.

Councillor Bedford asked if there had been any consideration to extend the TfL network as far as Epping to enable us to get a full service from TfL and not the half service we get at present. Mr Hart replied that the Mayor of London had offered to take over more services. TfL's reputation has improved over the last years, and was regarded as a competent provider of transport. But the Mayor's offers have not always been taken up by the Transport Secretary. We have good services compared to other transport providers.

Councillor Brookes asked what percentages of your passengers in London were paying passengers as opposed to those with free bus passes etc. Mr Hart could not say and promised to find out and get back to her.

Councillor Knight asked how often are the services reviewed and was there a public forum where you get feedback on your bus services and if there was one, was everything published? Mr Hart said that there was a forum where we received a lot of complaints and compliments as they carried 1.4 billion people on the tube and about 3 billion people on the busses. He believed that they were an easy organisation to get in touch with. But we do not do a performance report on complaints. In regards to the recent change to route 167 there have been very few complaints. They did compare complaints received to other industries and they did pretty well.

Councillor Knight asked again when the bus services were to be reviewed or was this now set in stone. Mr Hart said that the 167 was not being reviewed at present; the number 20 route was currently being reviewed and if there were any changes proposed we would consult on that.

Councillor Lea asked if they had any inspectors on the buses, as they seem to have a major problem in Waltham Abbey as the passengers get on busses, pay and not get tickets. So the bus company were getting told that only 10 people were using their buses when in fact much more people were using it. This kind of thing may well happen on your buses so do you have inspectors to check on passengers and their tickets. Also if we are to get hundreds more houses would we get better bus services as we did in years past? Mr Hart said that they did not have inspectors on the buses any more, but they do have revenue inspectors who make sure our money was spent wisely and travel incognito on the buses and they did prosecute people who did not pay. Our bus drivers nowadays do not take cash, it is either contactless bankcard or through the Oyster Card. Other operators may do things differently. The Oyster Cards also give us a lot of background data that help us plan our services.

Councillor Neville, regarding the 549 service, asked if the Essex County Council subsidy had been withdrawn. Also he thought that all services needed to be reliable and consistent and arrive at the specified time every time. More people would use it if this was the case. And can he clarify if once a service has been cut or reduced, would that precipitate further cuts as you would not be making enough money on that service. Mr Hart replied that his understanding was the subsidy from ECC had been withdrawn, but he would confirm this. Consistency was important for TfL, if the services lacked consistency or reliability there would be a fall in numbers, and would this mean we would further cut the service, I shall have to go back and ask this question of the experts and come back to you with a full answer.

Councillor Patel asked if all the responses from Mr Hart be put in the member's bulletin for information. This was agreed.

A member of the public, Mr Bartlett, who had previously asked to pose some questions to the TfL officer, was given the opportunity to speak. The Committee noted that a lot of his questions had already been answered during the course of the meeting. Mr Bartlett echoed what had been said about the 167 and 20 bus services, and the problems it had caused. He noted that the Local Plan had the capacity for extra housing over the next few years and that the consultation on the 167 route seemed to have been ignored. Was it fair to say that it would not be reviewed again until 2023? And as for the number 20 route, any redirection of this route would pose a lot of problems for passengers from Debden and Loughton. Could you clarify the next 5 to 10 years plans you have in regards to these routes? Mr Hart said that they had no current plans to change the 167 route. The 20 route was currently under review. He understood the credibility of the consultations undertaken was in some doubt and that needed to be addressed. He did not know how much the finances of this were a factor; they clearly were significant, but he could not give a weighting to the loss of the ECC and the Government grants. He would get back to him and he would give his contact details to Mr Bartlett.

Councillor Murray noted that we needed someone with a more appropriate background knowledge to answer these types of questions for us.

The Chairman noted that there had been a lot of mention of ECC bus services and noted that we were trying to get ECC officers to the Neighbourhoods Select Committee to answer questions on this.

The Chairman then thanked Mr Hart for attending the meeting and appreciated that he would have a lot of questions to supply answers to.

46. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

It was noted that there were no public questions or requests to address the committee, for this section of the agenda.

47. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

There were no call-in of decisions to be considered.

48. KEY OBJECTIVES PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN 2017/18 - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE

The Director of Neighbourhoods, Mr Macnab, introduced the report on the Key Objectives Key Action Plan for 2017/18 second quarter performance. This was for April to end September 2017.

The Corporate Plan was the Council's key strategic planning document, setting out its priorities over the five-year period from 2015/16 to 2019/20. The priorities or Corporate Aims were supported by Key Objectives, which provided a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for these five years.

Progress against the Key Action Plan was reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure the timely identification and implementation of appropriate further initiatives or corrective action where necessary.

There were 50 actions in total for which progress updates for Q2 were as follows:

- 42 (84%) of these actions had been 'Achieved' or were 'On Target'
- 2 (4%) of these actions were 'Under Control'
- 6 (12%) were 'Behind Schedule'
- 0 (0%) were 'Pending'

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was requested to review progress against the Key Objectives Key Action Plan for 2017/18 at Quarter 2. This report was also considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 7 December 2017.

Councillor Wixley wanted to know the definition of 'empty' used in the term a 'higher value' empty property under Aim 1, objective 1a. He was told that it was a high value property that had become void.

Councillor Neville asked about the timescale for phases 2&3 and then onto phases 4&5 of the Council's Housebuilding Programme. Mr Macnab said that he would find out and get back to him.

Councillor Murray asked about item 6 on objective 1b that was behind schedule. Was this because of solutions for staff car parking at Oakwood Hill was still to be formulated and what Cabinet meeting would this go to? Mr Macnab noted that there had been a call in on this but it had been withdrawn after a meeting was arranged between the lead member of the call-in and the relevant Portfolio Holder who agreed to have traffic surveys commissioned with the opening of the shopping park. They would re-run the parking survey next week. He was not sure that it would come back to the Cabinet.

Councillor Brookes asked about item 3 on Objective 1b, if we were in dispute with East Thames as our Development Agent. She was told that this was not their core business and that they were refocusing on their core business.

Councillor Brookes asked about item 11 on Objective 1b, and the ongoing delays for St John's Road. She was told that EFDC were happy with the terms of the agreement but had reached an impasse on agreement with the Town Council. This should be resolved by the end of this month.

Councillor Bedford asked about item 3 of Objective 3b. He noted that this had passed its target date but it said that it was under control. Mr Macnab replied that it was behind schedule but had a revised date. Councillor Patel noted that this had been reported on at the last Resources Select Committee. The text messages had been sent out to remind customers when their payments were due had now been put into action, the first message had been sent out in November 2017 and there had been a

good response to this. The message sent out had included a link to the payment website.

Councillor Sartin asked about item 2 in Objective 3c, had the Careline handover taken place in November 2017. She was told that this had happened and was now in the hands of Tunstall Healthcare (UK) Ltd.; it was still being branded as Careline although the provider had changed.

Councillor Wixley asked what the difference was between empty and void properties. He was told that a council property was void in between one tenant leaving and another tenant taking possession. Empty was a term used for private sector housing.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee reviewed and commented upon the Q2 progress of the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan for 2017/18.

49. SCRUTINY OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS - REVIEW

The Committee noted that the Principal of Epping Forest College was due to attend the next meeting of this Committee on 27 February 2018. In preparation for this the committee was asked to identify areas that they wished to be covered at this meeting. The following topics were identified by members of the Committee:

- (1) The support, assistance and facilities provided by the College for disabled or disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs;
- (2) The support, assistance and facilities provided by the College for students from areas of identified social deprivation;
- (3) The educational subjects and qualifications in which the performance of the College is currently regarded to be 'failing' and those subjects and qualifications where the College is presently performing well in terms of attainment;
- (4) The success of the College's proposed improvements and achievements outlined to the Committee in February 2017 and its expectations for future improvement and achievement going forward;
- (5) The current position with regard to Luctons Field and the intentions of the College with regard to the future use of this area, which is currently restricted to educational or health service uses;
- (6) The success of the College's relationship with its 'sister' college (Barnet and Southgate College) in terms of the support, assistance and facilities provided to students; and
- (7) The success of the links and partnership arrangements that the College has established with the local community within the Epping Forest District, including the commercial and charitable sectors.

The Chairman informed the Committee that an item would be put into the Council Bulletin asking for any further topics that could be raised with the Principal.

50. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2017/18 - REVIEW**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee reviewed their current work programme, noting that the Transport for London had made a visit this evening and so that this could be taken off the work programme. The meeting had also discussed the proposed visit of the Principal of Epping Forrest College to this February 2018 meeting.

They also noted that they would also be receiving updating reports on the Transformation Programme.

Councillor Patel asked about the attendance of the Customer Services Manager at Scrutiny meetings and when was that likely to happen. Mr Macnab said that he had spoken to the Manager and that she would like to report to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April, as her service cut across the whole of the Council, this would come at the same time as the outturn Transformation Report presentation.

Councillor Patel also noted that work programme item 9(a) had promised an update report of the Transformation Programme at each meeting. What was happening about that? Mr Macnab said that had been altered slightly so that the Select Committees would now review their bits of the programme and an annual report would be brought back to this Committee at the end of the year.

Reserve Programme

(a) The Committee agreed that that they would like to receive the East of England Ambulance Service at their April 2018 meeting; and

(b) to ask for officers from Essex County Council to attend the first meeting in the new municipal year to speak about the ECC Passenger Transport (this item initially sat in the Neighbourhoods Select Committee work programme).

Select Committees**Communities SC**

Councillor Murray asked about item 16 on their work programme (briefing on proposed Council rent increases for 2018/19) – was that still going to the January meeting? Councillor Knight would take this up with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Murray also asked about item 32 (restructure of older people's housing services) was this going to the January meeting. Mr Macnab said that he had seen the draft of this report recently and it would be going to the Select Committee in the near future.

Governance SC

Mr Tautz informed the meeting that item 13 of the work programme, analysis of compliments and complaints, formed part of the Customer Services work load and it

would be drawn out of the report coming to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Governance SC.

Neighbourhoods SC

Councillor Bedford noted that there had been some complaints about Health and Safety investigations at Oakwood Hill depot and as a result he thought that his Select Committee should look at the procedures involved and investigate them; perhaps getting someone from Health and Safety to attend a meeting. Mr Macnab clarified that there had not been any issues at the Oakwood Hill depot but there had been some concerns at the Town Mead depot, which had been subject to an internal audit report. He was happy to have a report on how the Council fulfils its H&S responsibilities corporately and any specific items that the members would like to highlight. Probably if it was corporate wide then it should go to Governance SC but if it affected certain depots then it may well go to Neighbourhoods SC.

Mt Tautz noted that item 19 had now been handled at this meeting and should be removed and also item 20 would now be going to a future meeting of this main Overview and Scrutiny Committee and should also be removed from this SC's work programme.

Resources SC

Councillor Patel had nothing to add to the Work Programme.

CHAIRMAN