

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2019
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 8.45 PM**

Members Present: P Bolton (Chairman), R Bassett (Chairman of the Council), H Brady, R Brookes, D Dorrell, H Kane (Vice-Chairman of the Council), J M Whitehouse and M Sartin

Other members present: N Bedford, S Kane, A Lion, S Stavrou and H Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: D Stocker and S Rackham

Officers Present: J Chandler (Service Director (Community & Partnership Services)), N Dawe (Interim Strategic Director & Chief Financial Officer), J Dixon (Learning & Development Advisor), S Kits (Social Media and Customer Services Officer), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), W MacLeod (Senior Electoral Services Officer), P Maginnis (Service Director (Business Support Services)), R Perrin (Democratic Services Officer) and S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager)

10. 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.

11. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

In the absence of Councillor Stocker who had tendered his apologies for the meeting, the Chairman requested a Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor H Kane be appointed Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

12. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Committee noted that Councillor M Sartin would substitute for Councillor S Rackham for this meeting.

13. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 9 July 2019 be agreed as a correct record subject to the addition of Councillors H Whitbread, N Bedford, S Kane and C Whitbread as being in attendance.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference.

(b) Work Programme

The Chairman advised that previously the Committee had requested more involvement in the People Strategy. The Business Services Director, P Maginnis advised that a work shop for all members would be arranged in January 2020 and the work programme would be updated accordingly.

The work programme was noted.

16. PEOPLE STRATEGY - HIGHER LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS

The Business Services Director, P Maginnis advised the Committee that as part of the wider people strategy, the Council offered a two-year Level 2 apprenticeship scheme in customer service and multi-trade construction. The scheme was open to applicants who lived in the Epping Forest District, aged 16-18 years old and were expected to gain a standard pass level 4 or above in GCSE English, Maths and ICT.

Following the successful completion of the apprenticeship scheme, some of the 2017 cohort had been accepted onto Higher Apprenticeships within the Council.

The new apprentices introduced themselves to the Committee and the four Higher Level Apprentices each made a short presentation on their experience of the scheme, the four rotational work placements they had completed, their own personal development and future career paths. A former apprentice, R Moreton expanded on the benefits of working in the different departments across the Council and how this had led to her studying for a Chartered Management Degree.

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the scheme and acknowledged the success and value to the Council.

17. LOCAL ELECTIONS 2019 - REVIEW

The Committee considered a comprehensive report on behalf of the Returning Officer, reviewing the planning, management and delivery of the local elections held on 2 May 2019. The report had not addressed arrangements made for the European Parliamentary election held on 23 May 2019, as a number of arrangements and processes for the election had been prescribed by the appointed Regional Returning Officer for the Eastern Region (the Chief Executive of Chelmsford City Council). The Committee was advised that candidates and agents for the elections had also been offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the management of the local elections.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that an Elections Planning Group had met regularly from the autumn of 2018, in order to plan for the elections and to ensure that relevant processes were undertaken at the appropriate times. A project

plan and risk register was prepared for the election, which was reviewed and updated on a regular basis. However, the Returning Officer left the authority in late 2018 and the Council appointed D. Macnab (Acting Chief Executive) as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer at the Council meeting on 20 December 2019. The new Returning Officer attended the relevant training courses facilitated by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives during January 2019 which ensured a smooth transition.

There had been 19 seats on the Council due for election in May 2019, of which all were due in the electoral cycle and two of these seats were not contested. There were also elections held for 28 parish and town council wards across the district including two by-elections on 2 May 2019.

The relevant publicity was provided nationally by the Electoral Commission and locally by the Corporate Communications Manager throughout the period of the registration deadlines and during the run-up to the election. The ballot papers for the election were printed by the Council's Reprographics Section. However, with the closure of the Reprographics Section in August 2019, alternative arrangements for the printing of ballot papers for future local elections and any general election or referendum would need to be arranged.

In the run up to the election, the Returning Officer received valuable assistance from Essex Police and had recorded the Council's appreciation to Chief Inspector Basford and his officers for their support in maintaining the security of the election process and at the count.

The local elections illustrated that postal voting continued to be popular amongst registered electors across the district and a total of 6010 postal vote packs for the local elections were issued on 16 April 2019. The scanning equipment used for the postal vote opening experienced some reliability issues and would mostly likely need to be replaced soon, to ensure the effective management of the postal vote processes at future elections.

There were some changes to traditional polling station arrangements for the local elections on 2 May 2019, where by the former polling station at Allnutts Institute, Epping moved to the nearby Scout Hut in Flux's Lane and the polling station at Hillhouse Primary School, Waltham Abbey moved to the Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre. No observations regarding polling stations were received either on the day of the election or as a result of the post-election consultation exercise. However, communication was received from a member of the public with regard to the alleged activities of tellers at the polling station at North Weald Village Hall, and the current protocol would be reemphasised as part of the briefing session for local election candidates and agents in May 2020.

A separate count plan was prepared for the verification and count stages of the election which took place at Debden Park High School in Loughton which represented the best option for the effective management of the Count.

Finally the Committee's attention was drawn to issues concerning the elections for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) for Essex and local elections on 7 May 2020 due to the movement of the May Day Bank Holiday for the national celebrations to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE day on 8 May 2020. This would mean that the verification and counting of ballots would be unlikely to be able to take place on 8 or 9 May 2020 as a result of the celebratory events. Therefore it may be necessary for counting activities for the PFCC and local elections to be

undertaken across the Sunday of the bank holiday weekend and into the early part of the following week. The Returning Officer would ensure that members were kept advised of these arrangements and when they were finalised over the coming months.

The Committee asked a number of questions including whether the Council had an alternative printing contract; if postal voting was popular and could be open to fraudulently activity; whether photographic ID would be required in the future; and if any postal votes were received after the election date. The Senior Elections Officer, W MacLeod advised that provisional arrangements had been made with a printing company and the Council had also used them in a recent Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Neighbourhood Plan referendum. The percentage of people opting for postal votes were about 10/11% of the electorate and in line with the national trend. Regarding potential concerns with postal voting, residents could in theory register at two different properties, for example if they had a holiday home but they were required to state which address they wished to vote from and some postal votes had probably been received after the election through the post. With regards to the future use of ID, she advised that colleagues in other areas had been testing photographic ID at the last election cycle which had been successful due to the range of acceptable forms of ID that had been agreed with Electoral Commission, but no further progress had been made in the wider roll out of such requirements.

The Senior Elections Officer advised that it the delivery of the local elections had been on the basis of a 60% - 40% split between existing staff and a data base of other volunteers had built up over time, but this provided a good balance of people and experience.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the review the management and delivery of the local elections held on 2 May 2019, be noted;
- (2) That the proposals of the Returning Officer for changes to arrangements for the management and delivery of local elections in future years be noted;
- (3) That no recommendations be made to the Returning Officer for changes to procedure for the future management and delivery of local elections; and
- (4) That the provisional verification and counting arrangements for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex and local elections to be held on 7 May 2020 be noted.

18. ACCOMMODATION UPDATE

The Community and Partnerships Service Director, J Chandler updated the Committee on the accommodation review. She advised that a report would be considered by the Cabinet on 31 October 2019, regarding the revised plans for the Civic Offices. Following the final decision, a listed building and planning application would be submitted on 11 November 2019 with an approximate 8 week processing period. Officers had been engaged with Historic England since 2017 and it was anticipated that there would not be any issues of concern. The tender process and planning was scheduled to take part in the first quarter of 2020.

Furthermore, a decant strategy for staff was taking place to enable the Civic Offices to be redesigned. This would be achieved through a phased approach and would allow for the mechanical and engineering works to be completed.

The Council was also negotiating with various partners including Citizens Advice, Essex Libraries Services and the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group to be based within the Civic Offices.

A Members Meeting Decant Strategy was also underway, to consider where members would be meeting going forward for 2020, whilst the works were being completed.

The Committee commented that a phased approach would be required for members meetings and wondered how long the process would take. It was suggested around nine to twelve months, although the Strategic Director, N Dawe advised that exact details would be forthcoming by the end of November 2019. The Committee asked whether the Council Chamber would continue to be made available throughout this period. The Strategic Director advised that officers were looking around possibilities about phasing the works, although there would be a period time where the power and services would not be available and further details would be advised by the contractor.

The Committee enquired whether prefab building would be required for staff and whether the option of offices at North Weald would be progressed. The Community and Partnerships Service Director advised that it was envisaged the existing assets and buildings would be used. The Strategic Director advised that the option at North Weald would come forward although it currently appeared to be an expensive option and officers were awaiting further details.

The Committee asked whether the market testing for the sale of land to the rear of the Civic Offices and Condor building and the potential office letting had been market tested, as suggested in the Cabinet decision in December 2018. The Community and Partnerships Service Director advised that she was unable to answer this but would provide a response for members.

The Committee asked whether members would be given a full briefing on the plans going forward. The Community and Partnerships Service Director advised that this would be after the Cabinet meeting on 31 October 2019.

19. ANNUAL EQUALITY INFORMATION REPORT 2019

The Committee were advised that the Equality Act 2010 required the Council to be subject to the public sector equality duty, which eliminated unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization; advanced equality of opportunity between different groups and fostered good relations between different groups. It also required the Council to have due regard for advancing equality to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; to take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these were different from the needs of other people; and to encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation was disproportionately low. The equality duty covered age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships.

The broad purpose of the equality duty was to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public bodies and for them to annually publish the information to demonstrate compliance with the equality duty. The report set out the work it had undertaken in the last 12 months, to improve equality for its customers and employees.

The Committee asked for further details on what the Councils strengths and weakness were and what robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management had been demonstrated. The Community and Partnership Service Director, J Chandler advised that she would find out the relevant information requested and email members of the Committee.

The Committee noted the aging population in the district and the drive towards digital enablement, although concluded that the traditional methods of communication would have to remain in some form for the elderly and that human interaction was required.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the Equality Information Report for 2019.

20. CORPORATE PLAN ACTION PLAN YEAR 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered the Corporate Action Plan (Year 2) Performance Report which set out the Council's progress on the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Programme of works within the Council's Corporate Objectives.

The Community & Partnership Service Director advised that following the last meeting the report had been updated to incorporate comments received from members, with regards to more clarity being given on each of the KPI's, the inclusion of mile stones within the work programmes and minor changes to some of the targets.

The Community & Partnership Service Director pointed out the following updates for the corporate objectives;

- (1) Engaging with the changing needs of our customers –
 - Increased Customer Satisfaction -This should be amber due to the request for the target to be increase from 67% to 80% and the target being achieved being was 75%.
 - Improved Customer first contact resolution – This needed to be changed to amber as it had not met it's target of 45%.
 - Insight & Behaviour – A report would be coming forward on the Digital Inclusion project and the outcomes achieved.
- (6) Provide culture & leisure
 - Increase new leisure centre attendees year on year – Further detailed information had been incorporated into the KPI, including Direct Debit membership across each leisure centre and casual swimming attendance.
- (8) Keeping the district clean & green

- Increase in recycling – This had exceeded the target which had demonstrated that the Council’s publicity had been successful.

(10) Planning developing priorities

- Local plan programme – This needed to be amended to amber due to awaiting the response from the Planning Inspector. Members would be receiving a briefing on the Local Plan on Thursday 17 October 2019.

The Committee commented that (15) Enhancing skills & flexibility of out workforce required amending to amber due to the Corrective Action referring to a delay due to team capacity.

The Committee queried what the ‘Quality Review Panel’ was in reference to the 12. Supporting business enterprise & attracting investment – St John’s Road Programme. The Community & Partnership Service Director advised that she would find out this information and report back to the Committee.

The Committee also commented on the figures in relation to the 6. Provide culture & leisure – Increased cultural activity attendance being very high. The Community & Partnership Service Director advised that these figures related to the recent exhibitions and the ability to view additional information online.

The Customer Services Portfolio Holder asked that the comments section for the previous quarter be updated with the missing information from quarter 1 in relation to 1. Engaging with the changing needs of our customers – Improved Customer first contact resolution.

Finally the Committee requested that any acronyms used in the document should be written in full so that the Committee were immediately aware of what they related to. The Community & Partnership Service Director advised that she would inform the relevant officers to update the report.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the second quarter of 2019/20 in relation to the Corporate Action Plan (Year 2) Performance with the inclusion of the comments above and amendments above.

21. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of the next two meetings to be held on 14 January 2020 and 14 April 2020.