

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MINUTES

Committee: Council **Date:** 29 October 2020

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 8.50 pm

Members Present: Councillors H Kane (Chairman), J Share-Bernia (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, R Baldwin, R Bassett, A Beales, P Bolton, H Brady, L Burrows, D Dorrell, I Hadley, S Heap, S Heather, R Jennings, S Jones, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Lea, J Leppert, A Lion, C McCredie, M McEwen, J McIvor, L Mead, R Morgan, S Murray, S Neville, M Owen, A Patel, J Philip, D Plummer, C P Pond, C C Pond, S Rackham, B Rolfe, B Sandler, M Sartin, P Stalker, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies: Councillors N Bedford, R Brookes, G Chambers, J Jennings, A Mitchell, G Mohindra, C Roberts and D Roberts

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), S Jevans (Strategic Director), N Boateng (Service Manager (Legal) & Monitoring Officer), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and S Mitchell (PR Website Editor)

26. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

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

27. FORMER COUNCILLOR T. BOYCE

It was with much sadness that the Chairman informed Members that former Councillor Tony Boyce had recently passed away.

Tony Boyce served as a Conservative District Councillor representing the Moreton and Fyfield ward of the district from May 2008 until May 2017, where ill health forced him to step down. He had served on many of the Council's committees, working groups and outside bodies during this time. In May 2014 Tony was elected Chairman of Council and successfully raised over £25,000 that year for charity.

Members paid tribute to the memory of former Councillor Tony Boyce and a minute's silence was held in his honour.

28. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 30 July 2020 be taken as read and to be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

30. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Announcements by the Chairman of Council

Remembrance Day

The Chairman informed Members that due to the current Covid-19 restrictions there would not be any official wreath laying services. Ward Members would lay wreaths in their Towns or Parishes and would be doing this in their own time.

The Chairman advised that she would be laying her wreath in Waltham Abbey at the 11th hour on the 11th day.

The Chairman also advised that the Civic Offices would be lit up in red from the weekend of the 7 November in honour of the armed forces who had died in the line of duty.

31. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The Council noted that there were no public questions under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

32. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

The Council noted that there were no questions by members under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

33. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Council received written reports from Portfolio Holders. The Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide an oral report and the opportunity for other members of the Cabinet to give updates on matters concerning their relevant portfolios.

(a) Leader of Council

The Leader advised that it had been a very busy few months since the last Council meeting and gave thanks to Cabinet Members and Officers who had been busy over the recent months setting out a positive agenda, on a whole range of issues, despite the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic.

Members would have recently seen a presentation on the five sites in Epping and the ambitious plans to build a new sports centre in Epping. The Council Housebuilding programme was ongoing and the Council were supporting the High Streets in the District by maintaining the 20p parking charges for 2.5 hours up until Christmas.

The second wave of Covid-19 was now upon us and the Council took the decision, on the advice of the Public Health department, along with Essex County Council and all District and Borough Councils across Essex and asked the Secretary of State to consider Essex moving into tier 2 earlier rather than being told at a later date when the Covid figures per 100,000 would be much higher.

When we look at the figures for Covid-19 this week in Epping Forest, we were one of the highest districts with figures of over 100 for every 100,000. Therefore, it was the correct decision to move into tier 2 although there was a conspiracy that we moved into tier 2 for extra funding from the Government. After it had been decided and we had requested to move into tier 2, at that time there were no indications that that any extra funding would be provided. When it was agreed that Essex would go into tier 2 a few days later Government announced that there would be an extra £3 of funding per person across Essex which totalled £4.4 million that money was for welfare and supporting businesses. Essex County Council were working out a package for every District and Borough Council in Essex.

Essex County Council had put additional funding into food banks and schemes where food for the vulnerable would be provided.

There would be a long road ahead of us and he was pleased that all Districts and Borough Council's in Essex supported Essex County Council in their decision to ask the Secretary of State to move Essex into tier 2.

We were in difficult times and my thoughts go out to residents and businesses within the district and the disruption this Pandemic would cause to them but we must move forward to overcome this virus everyone should be encouraged to stick to the rules by wearing face masks, wash hands regularly and give other people space. It would not be an easy winter but together we would get through this Pandemic and look forward to the times when we could have less restrictions.

(b) Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder

Councillor J Philip advised that for those Members who hadn't seen the press release that the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone had beaten off the competition to become top in the Country in the Cross-Sector Digital Collaboration of the Year category. We were voted into third place and in the judging we came first. Councillor Alan Lion was chair of the DIZ and a lot of the work was done on the DIZ by the Councils officers. He added that he would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that was involved.

(c) Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor H Whitbread advised that she and the Leader of Council had met with officers regarding the Epping Forest Youth Council and the exciting project they put forward at the last Cabinet Meeting. The project they were bringing forward was called MiLife Covid-19 and centred around mental health and the impact Covid-19 has had on young people. She advised that she would happy to bring that project forward and support the Youth Council to deliver it.

This project would go live very soon and would go onto a rejuvenated MiLife website, the MiLife project was well known and recognised throughout the Epping Forest District, the County and indeed the whole Country. It was good to see this scheme extended and applied to the current conditions that we were living in.

34. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Chairman thanked Members for giving notification of their intention to ask questions without notice and commented on how well this had gone at the last meeting and that every Member who wanted to had a chance to ask their question within the time limit.

(a) Proposed new Sports Centre in Epping

Councillor L Burrows asked the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder to confirm that the provision of a new sports centre, including a sports hall, squash courts and a swimming pool, would still be viable in a post-covid world.

Councillor N Avey advised that the Council was committed to providing leisure and sporting facilities to residents. A recent consultation by Qualis resulted in residents wanting a sports hall, squash courts and a swimming pool. The Council were listening to what the residents had indicated they would like in the proposed leisure centre. Given the likely aftermath of the Pandemic, leisure facilities would be ever more important for residents' health and wellbeing.

In this context he asked Members to note his report and the efforts being made with our partner, Places Leisure, to keep the districts' leisure centres open and working safely.

(b) Fly-tipping in Buckhurst Hill

Councillor S Neville advised that his question was to the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder and stated that he had recently been in contact with Portfolio Holder regarding fly-tipping in his ward, in particular the Hornbeam Close area. He stated that over the years the number of times he had been called to deal with fly-tipping in this area and instead of the Council sending out a team to clear this up it was about time to try and find the culprits for this. Therefore, would the Portfolio Holder come and visit the area to see what could potentially be done in a proactive way.

Councillor N Avey advised that he would be happy to come and visit the area to see what could potentially be done to alleviate this problem. Councillor H Whitbread was more on the enforcement side whereas his portfolio dealt with the clearing up of fly-tipping. Therefore, working together, it was hoped that we could come up with some solutions.

(c) Qualis Consultation

Councillor I Hadley asked the Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder how the second stage of the Qualis consultation would be handled this time with the current Covid-19 situation.

Councillor A Patel replied that the consultations were beginning on the 2 November 2020, there would be five days of virtual online sessions which would give residents a chance to see how Qualis Commercial had listened to their comments and fed them into the revised proposal for the five sites in Epping Town Centre. Residents were able to book a place on one of the virtual online events by visiting the Working Together for Epping website.

A pre-recorded presentation would also be available for residents from the 2 November on the Working Together Epping website and they would be able to leave comments up until the 13 November 2020.

(d) New Epping Sports Centre

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder if the contract the Council had with Places Leisure was still based on when it was expected that the replacement sports centre would be at North Weald. Now that

it had been moved to Epping what was the timetable for re-negotiations and when a decision on the future management of the replacement sports centre would be taken. There needed to be some sort of undertaking given by the Council to Qualis that the Council would take on the sports centre, once it had been built, what was the timetable indication of the process for that.

Councillor N Avey replied that he would update the Council when the timetable was available to him. Discussions were going on in the background, but that information was not yet ready for the public domain.

(e) Affordable Housing

Councillor D Stocker stated that his question was to the Housing and Community Portfolio Holder and highlighted that the Council had an excellent record providing affordable housing for local people and could the Portfolio Holder confirm that this Council was dedicated to continue with the Council House Building programme.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that the Council were committed to their Council House Building programme and at the October Cabinet meeting she announced that the programme was beginning Phase 5 where a more community led approach was being sought. When Phase 5 was finished the Council would have provided c500 new homes for the residents of the district which was a real achievement. She added that she was very proud and pleased to be continuing with this good work.

(f) Services that could be transferred to Qualis

Councillor S Murray stated that his question was the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder with regard to a question asked at the October Cabinet meeting. Councillor A Patel was asked 'were there any limits to the services that could be transferred to Qualis' and his reply was 'I don't believe there was a limit'. Therefore my question was does the Leader or the Portfolio Holder realise that for many of us we would see that as a way of transferring services from the Council to the private sector and does he also realise that it had sent a message to all Council staff who were currently working in any service within Epping Forest District Council that they might find their future to be working for Qualis.

Councillor A Patel replied that only those services which could demonstrate commercial advantage in Qualis over being in EFDC would be considered. We would consider all services to understand whether a compelling case could be made for them to be delivered by Qualis.

For each service that warrants further consideration there would need to be a full business case that considered cost, quality and staff. Nothing would be transferred without full consideration; scrutiny and the Council being satisfied that transfer to Qualis represented the best option. We as a Council must not forget why we have Qualis, we need Qualis to provide revenue for the Council and in so doing protect our front line services.

(g) Relief of Food Poverty in the District

Councillor C C Pond asked the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder if she would agree with Councillor Pond that much good work was being done locally in the relief of food poverty. He believed that the Council had entered into an arrangement with the Epping Forest Food Bank who were doing excellent work. However, he also believed that the Rotary Club were working, through their organisation, with 3Food4U which operated in Waltham Abbey and Loughton.

Therefore, would the Portfolio Holder agree that she should facilitate the Rotary Clubs activities and agree a parity of esteem with the Epping Forest Food Bank.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that she was aware of the good work that 3Food4U were doing throughout the Pandemic, starting off as support for those in isolation with Covid-19 and now grown into a more wider food bank facility across the Epping Forest District. She advised that she was in discussion with the person that runs the 3Food4U and the conversations that have had stipulated that if Epping Forest District Council was to create a further relationship there would need to be some kind of sign posting for those who attended, at present there wasn't the support that perhaps was given at the Epping Forest Food Bank, she stated that she did have some concerns about that particularly in terms of referrals for the most vulnerable people. They were doing a really good job but if the Council entered into a more formal relationship with them, we would need to make sure that all of the boxes were ticked, because if residents needed the services that we offer, we as a Council would also need to be informed.

(h) Fly-tipping in Passingford

Councillor H Brady stated that her question was to the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder regarding fly-tipping in her Ward, she asked what the Council and it's Partners were doing to tackle fly-tipping.

Councillor N Avey replied that this question went across two different Portfolios and his Portfolio dealt with cleaning up the fly-tip when it was reported to the Council. Enforcement was underway against individuals and organisations when they were caught and it was important that this message was sent out to fly-tippers that if they were caught they would be dealt with.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that the Council were aware of the issues with fly-tipping across the district which continued to be an issue, particularly in the more rural wards. A Portfolio Holder decision had been written, to which had been signed regarding penalty notices and as a Council, have increased the penalty notices, for those who were committing fly-tipping. The Council were also looking to increasing the enforcement so those who did fly-tip would not be able to get away with it. The Council have also introduced a fixed term penalty notice for breach of household waste duty of care. The Council work in close partnership with Essex Police on this issue and they have been doing enforcement throughout the summer.

(i) Halloween and Firework Night

Councillor S Rackham asked the Housing and Community Services Portfolio what action was being taken to help keep the community safe over Halloween and firework night that we would all experience and what would be your advice to a younger person who wished to enjoy and celebrate these events.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that Halloween and fireworks night would be very different this year and unfortunately we wouldn't be able to celebrate in the way that we usually did. In relation to community safety, and issues that we have had in the past, particularly with anti-social behaviour at both Halloween and fireworks night, therefore the Council have taken the precautionary measure to increase the Park Guard patrols throughout the district during this period to make sure that residents who were out and about feel safe and also to ensure that people were strictly following the Covid guidance.

My advice to younger people would to please be more cautious than ever before, stay home be creative at home with your family bubbles rather than going out. Hopefully by this time next year we would have defeated this awful virus and be able to enjoy Halloween and fireworks again.

(j) Carline Home Care

Councillor S Heap asked the Leader of Council when the decision was taken to use Care Line was the Portfolio Holder aware that Care Line Home Care was owned by City and County Healthcare Limited who were owned by City and County Healthcare Holdings Limited, who were owned by C&C Bidco Ltd who were owned by C&C holdings Ltd who were owned by C&C Midco Ltd who were owned by C&C Topco Ltd and all of these shell companies were owned by Graphite Capital Central Partners VII (Guernsey) LLP and then ultimately by Graphite Capital.

Each stage of company ownership represented an opportunity to add debt and thereby lower the taxable revenues from the amount of profit that was being accrued by the influx of monies from councils.

The reason I have brought this up was to state that when Qualis goes forward Members must have a stakeholder view of the company and not a shareholder view of the company. Therefore, did the Leader think that this was the best approach to paying tax.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed it was very complex and that he did not know the ins and outs of every tender that the Council had but the Officers concerned would have done due diligence on those tenders.

With regard to Qualis the Council have been open and transparent and personally those Members who were still anti the idea of Qualis have to ask themselves whether they want a low Council Tax Authority and whether they want to continue to protect front line services because without Qualis and without ideas coming forward, which none of the opposition ever do, we will not have a low Council Tax Authority and be able to protect those frontline services that our residents care about.

(k) Homelessness

Councillor B Rolfe asked the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder what action had the Council taken to stop homeless people returning to the streets post the initial lockdown.

Councillor H Whitbread replied that we have all been aware of the challenges with homelessness during this Covid era and the Council were very proactive from the very beginning, the first step we took, before the initial lockdown had been announced, was to make sure that all of the vulnerable people and rough sleepers on the street were taken off the street and placed in appropriate accommodation so they were able to shield from the virus. Accommodation was found for 15 people, which was a lot higher than the usual number of rough sleepers across Epping Forest District.

The Council, along with a consortium of five other Essex Councils were successful in receiving funding from the Government and what we have done with that funding was invested in more permanent accommodation for the rough sleepers that we did home during the Pandemic.

(l) Sheltered Housing

Councillor J H Whitehouse advised that her question was for the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder and stated that she had recently been shown a letter by a resident at one of the Councils sheltered housing complexes and was concerned to discover that the communal areas had been closed since March. She stated that she understood why they had been closed but why weren't they opened when the restrictions were eased in the summer, where residents could have met in bubbles of six and given a time slot when they could meet in the communal areas. Therefore would the Portfolio Holder commit to reopening the communal areas once the district was out of the tier 2 restrictions.

Councillor H Whitbread replied that the Housing Team were looking closely at opening those communal areas but also being able to facilitate social distancing in a safe Covid secure environment. She advised that she would speak to the Housing Team and make sure that the communal spaces were opened once the restrictions had eased. She felt that it was very important to open those communal spaces as soon as possible to ensure the residents weren't lonely, which was obviously a key issue at this time.

Councillor Whitbread highlighted that during this Covid period Housing Officers had been calling tenants within the sheltered housing accommodation to provide that support and listen to any concerns that they had.

(m) Council Car Parks

Councillor D Sunger advised his question was for the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder. He stated that he was very pleased to note that the Council had been supporting local businesses throughout the Pandemic especially with the distribution of the business grants. It was also pleasing to note the reduced parking charges across the Councils car parks. Could the Portfolio Holder confirm that the usual free parking during the month of December would carry on this year throughout all of the Councils car parks.

Council N Avey stated that he was glad that the reduced parking fees had continued and that the Council had decided to continue due to the ongoing Pandemic. He advised that he would be signing off the usual free Christmas parking arrangements that the Council made every year.

(n) Housing Register

Councillor D Plummer advised that his question was to the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder and the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder. He stated that there were 1,218 applicants on the District Councils housing register at the end of September 2020 and 182 applicants on a supplementary waiting list for sheltered housing. A substantial amount of housing benefit, paid by the taxpayer, goes to private landlords and Council housing and its rental income could be taken out of the Councils housing stock by the right to buy. Would the District Council and Qualis commit to increasing the amount of housing benefit under the Council, increasing other rental income paid to the Council and increasing the amount of homes available for applicants on the housing waiting list and ensuring those homes remained within public ownership by formally acknowledging something akin to Qualis Homes as part of the Qualis Group of companies providing high quality, energy efficient social housing at rents that low-income families could afford and where needed the housing benefit paid out by the Council was returned to the Council, this should also have positive impacts on health, educational achievements and the local economy as there would be more spending money and secure housing.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that she was happy to answer part of the question that fell within her area of responsibility and would then ask Councillor Patel if he could address the remainder of the question.

Councillor Whitbread stated that she was not on the Qualis Board but she knew that Qualis would work within the Epping Forest District Council planning framework which meant delivering 40 percent affordable housing in line with the Local Plan.

Epping Forest District Council were very proud of the record they have on Council House Building, the Council were building first class Council homes throughout the district for local people. To qualify for Council housing, you had to have lived in the district for 7 years. She further added that she was aware of the impact of the right to buy on the Councils housing stock and it clearly was a challenge but it was also an important right that people have to be given a chance to be able to have a stake in homes that they might not otherwise have had. Therefore, from a housing perspective this Council continued to be dedicated on moving forward with their Council House Building programme, to build energy efficient homes for the future of local people.

(o) Housing News Tenant newsletter

Councillor D Wixley stated that his question was to the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder and referred to page 46 of the agenda under the Housing News Tenant newsletter and stated that he had a number of Council tenants in his ward and he would be interested in receiving a copy of the newsletter and wondered whether it could be sent to him individually or attached to the Members' Bulletin.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that she would be happy to get a copy sent to Councillor Wixley and look at also attaching it to the Bulletin.

35. MOTIONS

The Chairman reported that there were no motions to be considered at the meeting.

36. APPOINTMENT OF QUALIS BOARD MEMBERS

Mover: Councillor C Whitbread, Leader of the Council

Councillor C Whitbread thanked the members of the Interview Panel for giving up several evenings meeting and interviewing the potential board members. The Panel recommended the appointment of:

Role	Name
Chair – independent non-executive director	Paul ffolkes Davis
Independent non-executive director	Peter Baynham
Independent non-executive director	Farooq Mohammed
Council member	Cllr H Kauffman
Council member	Cllr R Bassett
CEO Council	Georgina Blakemore
Managing Director – Qualis	Sacha Jevans
Group Finance Director - Qualis	Nick Dawe
Group Operations Director – Qualis	Paul Hewitt

He stated that it was a good selection and it would be good now to move away from the interim board to a more permanent board.

Councillor S Murray stated that he was speaking because members had been asked to endorse the recommendations in the report and advised that he would be abstaining on the basis that he didn't feel he had enough information on some of the names on the list to know whether he could endorse the recommendations or not.

Councillor Murray asked how many Councillors had applied to become members of the board and of the two Councillors that had been successful he asked what their view was on a general principle that would have to apply in detail to actual situations. If other services were transferred to Qualis would they as a general proposition feel that any new staff should be on similar terms and conditions of the 'Tuped' staff who were doing a similar type of job.

Councillor C Whitbread stated when they interviewed people and brought reports to the Council for the appointment to positions within the Council very few of us would have known them before. We had a very experienced panel conducting the interviews. With regard to the rest of Councillor Murrays question that was not what this report had been asked to do, it had asked Members to endorse the recommendations from the Senior Management Selection Panel for the permanent appointment of the Qualis Group Board members. He advised that all members were entitled to apply for the position, it was advertised in the Members' Bulletin and there were four cross party members who did apply to be interviewed.

Councillor S Heap advised that he was one of the Members that did apply and thought that the Panel had chosen wisely and this report should be endorsed.

Report as first moved: **ADOPTED**

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations from the Senior Management Selection Panel for the permanent appointment of the Qualis Group Board members be endorsed.

37. QUALIS FINANCIAL REPORT

Councillor A Patel, Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder

Councillor A Patel submitted a report regarding the Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report – Q1/Q2 and Q3 2019/20. He advised that Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny had considered the Qualis Board Reports for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 at their respective meetings in September and October 2020.

Councillor Patel highlighted that the Covid-19 Pandemic had dramatically impacted on all Council activities, including the set-up and initiation of the Qualis Business Plan. This had caused delay as Covid-19 became the focus of the Council, this could not have been foreseen when the plans were agreed, so taking this into account, the impact of Covid-19, Qualis had performed in line with the expectations for these periods.

For the first three quarters Qualis had been focused on set-up and not trading and given the Council's focus elsewhere the set-up had taken longer than originally anticipated. It should be noted that all deliverables were flagged as Green with the exception of agreeing the loan finance from EFDC to Qualis. He confirmed that this had now been agreed and that the first loans had been paid. Housing maintenance

activities had also been successfully transferred to Qualis and would appear in the Q4 monitoring report.

The Shareholder Agreement and Governance arrangement, agreed by Cabinet in February 2020, set out the decision-making framework for Qualis and the ways in which the Council, in its capacity as Shareholder, could influence or control the activities of Qualis. The principal control would be through the approval of the annual Business Plan which Qualis was required to present its proposals each year within the Business Plan and only if the Council agrees the Business Plan could Qualis implement the proposals contained within it. This represents the critical control over the activities of Qualis and detailed consideration would be given to the sign-off accordingly.

Finally, Members should note that Covid-19 was having a huge financial impact on the Council and now more than ever the Council needed Qualis to be a success in order to smooth the costs of Covid-19 and provide a new income stream. Members were asked to note the report.

Councillor J M Whitehouse stated that there was a long delay in publishing the Q3 report and given that we were a working day away from Q4, would the Q4 report be going to the next Cabinet meeting in November and if not when could Members expect to see the Q4 report.

Councillor A Patel replied that it would not be ready in time for the Cabinet meeting in November but that he could provide a verbal update at that meeting. The Q4 report would be ready to go to the Cabinet meeting in December.

Councillor J Philip advised that before the Q4 report could go to Cabinet, the end of Q4 had to be reached, the reporting on the end of Q4 had to be written by the financial officers at Qualis, it then had to go to the Qualis Board for approval before it could be passed onto the Shareholder. He agreed with Councillor Patel that it would not be ready for the Cabinet meeting in November 2020 and would therefore go to the Cabinet meeting in December 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report – Q1/Q2 and Q3 2019.20 be noted.

38. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council received a written report from Councillor M Sartin, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the meeting that was held on the 15 October 2020.

Councillor Sartin commented that Members took some comfort in the presentation from the Essex Partnership University Trust and the impact Covid-19 had on the mental health services and how they coped with the increased demands during this Pandemic and that they felt comfortable that they could continue to meet with the current demands.

Councillor Sartin highlighted paragraph 8 of her report and in particular, the last sentence which read, "Members were requested to inform Officers of potential lines of enquiry for the external scrutiny of the UK Innovation Corridor." She advised that there was some confusion around the name of the UK Innovation Corridor which was originally known as the London – Stansted - Cambridge Consortium and part of the

exercise the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be looking at was to learn more about the current set up of this organisation and what it was doing within our district. Therefore if Members did have any questions or thoughts could they let Gary Woodhall know and he would then pass them on to the Officer coming to give a presentation at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting from the UK Innovation Corridor.

Councillor S Murray thanked the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny for her report. He advised that he would like to endorse Councillor Sartin's views on the presentation regarding adult mental health services which was reassuring.

He stated item 4 of the report referred to the Accommodation Strategy and he would like to highlight again to Members that he was concerned that the community hub was not going to be like what we thought. We were aware that the Library would be relocated to the community hub and Voluntary Services but were not aware of anything else and hoped to see more developments in this area.

Councillor Murray referred to paragraph 7 of the report regarding the Council's response to the first wave of Covid-19 and wanted it put on record of how pleased he was with how the Leadership of Council, Councillor C Whitbread responded to the first wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Councillor Murray then highlighted item 9 of the agenda, Questions by Members without Notice, he and other members were referred to as 'the opposition', he advised that he had never thought of himself as opposition to the Council he stated he was an independent Member of the Council and not affiliated to any group, and because he questioned other Members did not make him the opposition a better phrase would be a 'critical friend'.

39. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Mover: Councillor I Hadley, Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee

Councillor I Hadley advised that at its meeting held on 28 September 2020, the Audit & Governance Committee considered the Treasury Management Outturn report for 2019/20. This report considered the compliance with the Council's adopted Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators and reported that full compliance had been achieved on most of the Indicators. However, the cash requirements of the Council's recently expanded commercial activities had resulted in some technical breaches, especially on Investment Limits. The current investment limits were £3m for Single Institutions and a total of £10m for all Money Market Funds but due to the purchase of Centric Parade, High Road, Loughton this limit was breached.

The Audit & Governance Committee were happy to agree to; (a) increase the Single Institution to £4m; and (b) to increase the £10m limit for the Money Market Fund to £10m for each Money Market Fund, but had reservations regarding recommendation (b) and the lack of a limit on the Money Market Funds that could be invested, thereby allowing no total limit on investments. As a result, the Audit & Governance Committee suggested that a limit of three Money Market Funds be adopted with any breach of this to be discussed at the Audit & Governance Committee prior to it happening. This was not intended to be a financial restriction but was a method of flagging up a possible risk situation.

However, since the Audit & Governance meeting on the 28 September, it had transpired that (b) was contrary to the Council's constitution and could be put forward

for approval at this meeting. The recommendations from the Audit & Governance Committee were:

Recommendations:

(1) That the following amended Treasury Management Investment Limits be approved:

(a) Single Institution (excluding the UK Government) to be increased to £4million (previous limit was £3million); and

(b) Money Market Funds to be increased to £10million per fund, with a maximum of 3 Funds to be invested in at any one time unless Officers have called an emergency virtual meeting with three members of the Audit & Governance Committee – preferably including the Chairman - to discuss the situation (previous limit was £10million in total for all Funds invested in).

Amendment moved by Councillor J Philip, Finance Portfolio Holder and Seconded by Councillor I Hadley

That (b) be amended to read:

(b) That the Money Market Funds be increased to £10 million per fund with a normal limit of 3 funds to be invested in at any one time. If operational requirements need further use of Money Market Funds the section 151 officer, in consultation with the Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, can authorise further use of these funds provided that this was reported to the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee and that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee at the latest.

Report as amended **ADOPTED:**

RESOLVED:

(1) That the following amended Treasury Management Investment Limits be approved:

(a) Single Institution (excluding the UK Government) to be increased to £4million (previous limit was £3million); and

(b) That the Money Market Funds be increased to £10 million per fund with a normal limit of 3 funds to be invested in at any one time. If operational requirements need further use of Money Market Funds the section 151 officer, in consultation with the Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, can authorise further use of these funds provided that this was reported to the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee and that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee at the latest.

40. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

(a) Royal Gunpowder Mills

The Chairman, Councillor H Kane highlighted her report and stated that there had been a successful bid of £104,000 from the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund.

Councillor C C Pond asked the Chairman to agree that it was axiomatic to get this site opened to the public as soon as possible both to secure its future and because of the scientifically historical interest of the site.

The Chairman agreed with Councillor Pond and stated that some of the funding was to get the site ready to be reopened and they were all working very hard in the background towards that, but in order for the funding to be released projects must be put forward and that was why there would be some delay.

Councillor D Plummer asked if there was any further information for PGL to take over part of the site and turn it into a holiday camp.

The Chairman advised that she had recently asked the Council's Planning department if there had been any planning applications submitted for the site and was informed that there had been none.

(b) Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF)

Councillor M Sartin asked if Councillor B Rolfe was the Council's representative on the Voluntary Action Epping Forest group and if so could he bring a report to the next Council meeting on the various areas of work that had been carried out in the District over the Covid-19 period.

Councillor B Rolfe advised that there hadn't been any recent meetings that he had been invited to but he would make enquires and report back at the next Council meeting.

Councillor S Murray added that he received regular emails from VAEF outlining what they had been doing and assumed that the emails went to all Members.

Councillor Sartin advised that she also got the emails but thought it should come to a Council meeting so that the wider audience could be informed.

(c) Epping Forest Care and Repair

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked if a report on the Epping Forest Care and Repair service could come to the next meeting as there had not been any updates for quite a while.

CHAIRMAN