

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview & Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 2 February 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 9.40 pm

Members Present: Councillors M Sartin (Chairman), R Jennings (Vice-Chairman) R Baldwin, P Bolton, L Burrows, D Dorrell, I Hadley, S Heap, S Heather, J Lea, S Murray, S Rackham, P Stalker, D Stocker, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors N Avey, R Bassett, S Kane, C McCredie, A Patel, J Philip, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: Councillors D Plummer and N Bedford

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services / Commercial & Regulatory)), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), C Hartgrove (Interim Chief Financial Officer), P Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer), R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), L Wade (Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)), J Warwick (Service Manager (Contracts)) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

By Invitation: R Walker, Group Manager, North Essex Parking Partnership

69. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

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

70. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that Councillor S Heap had been appointed as a substitute for Councillor D Plummer.

71. MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 November 2020 and 7 January 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

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

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

74. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

75. NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP – SCRUTINY OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATION

The Chairman, Councillor M Sartin, introduced the Group Manager, Mr R Walker, who gave a comprehensive overview of its operations. Formed in April 2011 the north part of the partnership comprised Essex County Council (ECC) and six other local authorities – Colchester (lead LA), Braintree, Epping Forest, Harlow, Tendring and Uttlesford. NEPP had been set up to bring the operation out of deficit and reported to the Joint Parking Committee, which was made up of NEPP officers and partnership members. The governance arrangements allowed each authority member a vote plus up to six schemes a year. Kerbside parking management was funded from penalty income from patrols but was not an income generator. Funding also came from resident parking permits, pay and display schemes and sundry income. The operational team and patrols issued some 76,000 penalty charge notices (PCNs) in the year before the coronavirus crisis. NEPP had CCTV patrol cars and enforcement officers monitoring parking infractions, footway parking and obstructive parking. The enforcement process could be challenged by the public. Parking schemes encompassed ECC safety and congestion, new housing schemes, traffic schemes and socially necessary schemes. Most consultations were undertaken in the winter months as maintenance work was targeted for completion in the summer. The scheme process usually took a minimum of 50 weeks to be implemented. A project team was looking at innovation of the scheme process to try and automate it going forwards. NEPP was involved with school safety parking issues, especially near primary schools. A data led team was looking at efficiencies and investing in digital technology. It was developing fixed camera and mobile sites. A 3PR scheme was looking at safe parking at schools, so people parked where it was safe to park and then walked to the school. Parking in future included looking at footway parking, obstructive parking, active travel to get people in / out of town centres, connected, autonomous and new types of vehicles, and electric vehicles and environmental issues.

Councillor R Baldwin asked about single yellow line applications for parking schemes for individual roads that had to garner the support of 75 per cent of residents, which seemed bureaucratic and time consuming, so could this be done by ward? In his Loughton Forest ward he had observed delivery vans not being able to park in loading bays, buses parked on yellow lines, and it was rare to see any parking enforcement in Albion Hill, Loughton. Also, six schemes a year for each LA did not seem adequate. Mr Walker replied that problems differed road-by-road hence, a smaller rather than larger area of focus. Localism helped in the process to come up with the right scheme, but a consultation with all road users could derail an application. As a result of the Covid crisis, the prevalence of deliveries had increased over the last year, and there were now more patrol cars with fewer foot patrols to help staff safety. The Enforcement Team also mapped where it went. NEPP might need to investigate buses parking on yellow lines but they were usually exempt. At the start of the partnership everyone had a long list, so schemes were limited to six

per year, but NEPP now had the money and resources to be able to invest in more schemes.

Councillor S Rackham asked about speeding and the use of cameras, vehicles idling especially outside schools, footway parking near takeaways and electric vehicle charging points when people could not have their own. Mr Walker replied that vehicle activated signs for speeding came under County's remit so he could not advise on this. NEPP's fines for idling were not very high whereas the legislation for the London boroughs to promote cleaner air were more robust. Blue badge and permit parking misuse would also be investigated. NEPP had been lobbying for some time over footway parking, but obstruction and driving onto a footway were matters for the police. Electric vehicle fast charging sites were being looked at but also wanted to be careful not to end up with an excess of charging points when technology moved on. A team at ECC was investigating the potential of using streetlight columns as charging points.

Councillor S Murray praised the user friendly NEPP website but commented that footway parking in urban areas was a growing problem. He asked about the lack of consultation on the red routes installed in Epping Forest, which he hoped would not be there in perpetuity, and how NEPP ensured safety at work for enforcement officers. Mr Walker replied that the red routes had been done in an emergency in May 2020, as the Forest was frequently mobbed by people often travelling a long way. It was a temporary scheme for 18 months. A full consultation process for the whole of the red scheme including waiting and loading bays would need to be undertaken if the scheme was to be extended. Enforcement officers were doing a job, and they all wore a body camera. If they were prevented from issuing a PCN, the advice was to take a photograph and walk away as these could be posted. There had been few Covid incidences, but more officers were in vehicles, which were sanitised regularly.

Councillor D Sunger asked about commuter parking around stations and that he had previously tried to get a controlled parking zone (CPZ) installed. Although almost half the residents had not wanted it, residents were now asking when a re-consultation could happen. Also, members could become involved in congested parking by schools when headteachers contacted them, and did NEPP enforcement officers undertake a purge on areas identified by ward? Mr Walker replied that NEPP would look in more detail at CPZs and area reviews. When normality returned after Covid there was a bidding process in place for schemes. Previously, a scheme would not be looked at again for five years. For parking problems around schools, red routes might be considered. CCTV could be used on a red route and it was starting to trial CCTV at fixed camera sites. One operator could look at four fixed camera sites at a time. There was also legislation that could be used to stop moving traffic going into an area. To apply for a fixed camera to be installed at a site, this could be done either through the headteacher or ward member. Photos would help the case and lobbying by the ward members and public. Councillor M Sartin remarked that even though parking notices had been put up outside a school in her ward, parking problems still persisted.

Councillor S Heap queried if a scheme that had been set up could be removed. Also, had a budget had been put aside to remove the red routes in the Forest that had cost some £96,000 to install, how much had been made and could a PCN be issued to a car parked over a line into the Forest? Mr Walker replied that through the petitions scheme people could submit a report of the details with a diagram, which was assessed under a scoring system. The paint had been the main cost of the red route. Thus far some £40,000 had been made from over 1,000 PCNs being issued in under a year. The issue was not about PCN income, as this was a by-product, but if the aim

of the red routes in the Forest had been achieved, and if they were working in the right way leading up to a consultation. PCNs could be issued to cars parked in the Forest across a red route because it would be a decision on what was reasonable.

Councillor D Wixley said that some residents in his ward wanted junction protection installed, which was a small scheme, but did it count towards one of the six schemes a year allowed per partnership member and what was the application process? Also, the Safer Essex Roads Partnership took up speeding issues, but he did not know how SERP differed to the police. Mr Walker replied that there was delegation from ECC to be able to do a small scheme like junction protection. The Commercial and Technical Services Director, Q Durrani, could be apprised of these, but line painting would need to be done in the summer. Footway parking could be enforced through policy when legislation was in place.

Councillor J M Whitehouse said that informal consultation on parking schemes allowed residents to comment who knew best, but how did one capture that information by the time of the consultation? Mr Walker replied that informal consultation was part of the process of submitting a scheme. The score was based on residents' input and informal consultation, as early comments did bare some weight in helping to improve on the scheme during the early phase so that it developed. Qualitative measures were part of the process with scoring on the website to indicate the level of local support and the TRO (traffic regulation order) policy. Councillor J M Whitehouse questioned the use of residents parking zones (RPZ) when yellow lines could be a good way of dealing with minor traffic issues to do with certain times of the day. There seemed to be a patchwork of CPZs and RPZs so in his opinion there was an argument for rationalising some of them. Mr Walker replied that NEPP used RPZs and they were easy to manage. As single yellow lines applied to everyone, a resident's permit would not allow parking on a yellow line. Two years ago, NEPP brought in a system that digitised RPZs – traffic web. NEPP was going ahead with reviews to look at grouping RPZs. In a larger area possibly, simplification might be better as this had become very complex. Teams monitored all yellow lines, which were mapped, logged and scored, so that lines in need of repainting were rectified during the warmer months of Easter to the end of autumn.

Councillor M Sartin thanked Mr Walker for attending the meeting to give an overview of NEPP's work and answer members' scrutiny questions.

76. PEOPLE STRATEGY UPDATE

This update outlined the work being delivered under two workstreams – attracting, on boarding and retaining the best talent, and creating a culture of engagement wellbeing. The People Team were delivering new automated recruitment processes through iRecruit to recruit, attract and induct candidates, and help retain officer talent. The new careers landing page called “A Place of Opportunity” had been well received by hiring managers. There were various benefits to iRecruit, which included applicants using a CV and supporting statement rather than a lengthy application form.

The report concentrated on employee engagement in response to a question from Councillor S Murray at the Committee's meeting last November. The Service Director (Corporate Services), P Maginnis, reported that 87 per cent of the Council had signed up to the Perkbox initiative. Total savings of £5,000 on shopping discounts had been made by those staff. The Insight engagement platform had been developed by Perkbox and the People Team for employees to receive and answer questionnaires. To date 400 responses have been made by staff comprising nearly 250 feedback comments. The main themes of the initial surveys were on the lack of

(internal) communication; little visibility of senior leaders and new policies to support home working to aid home life balance. All feedback was anonymous and had been presented to employees in January 2021. The Recognition platform launched on 1 December 2020 and let staff nominate others as super stars. Lastly, mental health first aiders numbered 63, which had exceeded a 1:10 ratio target of trained employees.

Councillor M Sartin asked if the Council was having difficulty in attracting and retaining staff. The Service Director (Corporate Services) replied that the turnover was fairly stable. The People Strategy was still ongoing so hopefully this would reduce, but new blood and some turnover was healthy to bring in new ideas. There were some difficulties recruiting specialist staff. The Council was trying to grow its own, as it had a successful apprenticeship scheme and some higher apprentices, but planners were being recruited differently.

Councillor R Baldwin was pleased to see the Council had moved away from using long application forms to recruit by CVs. In relation to EVP (employee value proposition) what kind of values were expected and how were skills evaluated? The Service Director (Corporate Services) replied that the EVP was how the Council attracted people through skills and the recruitment process and test their values and behaviours. These were put on the role profile. It was not just about knowledge and skills, but how candidates did it.

Councillor D Wixley was disappointed over the use of the word on boarding and that it would be better if language was used that everyone understood. Councillor M Sartin replied that the different wording and language were the way HR worked but they were talking to a wider audience. The Service Director (Corporate Services) noted this but on boarding was certainly becoming a more used term in recruitment.

Councillor J H Whitehouse was impressed by the support offered to HR in mental health and would like to take up the invite on a session about Perkbox. She was impressed with the staff induction process but was concerned how staff learnt about the Council and how its decisions were made. There was nothing about scrutiny, which was not adequate, and proposed that four members should discuss this with the People and Democratic Services Teams. Councillor M Sartin was concerned by the staff joining who had not worked for a council before, but this issue could be looked at another time.

Councillor S Murray said language use did matter. Also, councillors could benefit from messages in the report on working collaboratively. He was impressed by the health and wellbeing risk assessment and the high number of staff mental health first aiders and would like information on this training. The Service Director (Corporate Services) offered to provide this for the minutes.

Councillor M Sartin advised members that future reports would be going to Stronger Council Select Committee but any specific business that required a broader audience could come back to Overview and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the progress of the work being delivered; and
- (2) That that details of the mental health training would be provided in the minutes.

(Post meeting update: Mental health first aid training:

A classroom run MHFA First Aider course would be two days but virtually this is over 4 days, this online course qualifies a Mental Health First Aider, giving:

- An in-depth understanding of mental health and the factors that can affect wellbeing*
- Practical skills to spot the triggers and signs of mental health issues*
- Confidence to step in, reassure and support a person in distress*
- Enhanced interpersonal skills such as non-judgemental listening*
- Knowledge to help someone recover their health by guiding them to further support - whether that's self-help resources, through their employer, the NHS, or a mix*

Format

- This is an online course delivered through the MHFA England Online Learning Hub*
- Learning takes place through four live training sessions, spread across one/two weeks, with self-learning activities in between.*
- Each session is built around a Mental Health First Aid action plan*
- We limit numbers to 12 people per course so that the instructor can keep people safe and supported while they learn*

Everyone who completes the course gets:

- A certificate of attendance to say they are a Mental Health First Aider*
- A manual to refer to whenever they need it*
- A quick reference card for the Mental Health First Aid action plan*
- A workbook including a helpful toolkit to support their own mental health)*

77. ELECTIONS PLANNING PROGRESS REPORT

The report provided an update to the May 2021 elections. The postponed 2020 elections and those due on 6 May 2021 were being planned by the Elections Planning Group at monthly meetings. Despite uncertainty if the May 2021 elections would be going ahead because of the Covid crisis, the Returning Officer, G Blakemore, was still planning on the assumption the elections would happen. The order of counts had been confirmed as Essex County Council on Thursday 6 May followed by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner on 7 May. Local elections would be counted on 8 May. Staff resourcing for the elections had been positive. Some of the polling stations might not be available in May. A hangar at North Weald airfield had been booked for the counts, which would be large enough to accommodate social distancing. A detailed project plan and risk assessment in line with LGA guidance were being regularly updated. It was likely there would be an increase in the number of postal votes this year and various measures would need to be in place, such as social distancing at polling stations.

Councillor S Murray was surprised by the order of the count as local elections usually had the highest number of ballots but was going to be counted last. He advised that Murray Hall in Borders Lane (Loughton) was a Covid vaccination centre and was unlikely to be available in May as a polling station venue. The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance, L Wade, acknowledged that Electoral Services were aware of this and looking into the possibility of using a local school.

Councillor D Wixley asked if an increase in postal votes was being anticipated, would Royal Mail give assurances that election post would be given priority? Its delivery services were being disrupted by the Covid crisis and might still be severe in May.

Also, were the postal vote envelopes marked to stand out? The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance replied that this was a national concern that would be closely monitored and led by Central Government discussions.

Councillor J H Whitehouse remarked that her car insurance did not cover liability on an airfield which might apply to many others. If there was an accident, would the Council cover the cost? The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance replied that she was not aware of this but would investigate. Councillor M Sartin said many cars were driven to the airfield for North Weald market.

Councillor D Dorrell observed that a massive increase in postal votes was probable. As postal votes had previously been low, were arrangements being put in place to take into account observation of the postal vote opening by councillors to ensure transparency if the postal vote percentage shifted? The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance advised the Council would need sufficient staff for the postal vote sessions and put in place mitigation measures on risk assessment issues. The Returning Officer advised the Council would definitely be looking at capacity, the potential shifting percentage of postal votes and transparency at the postal vote counts.

Councillor S Rackham asked how the Council would be monitoring postal vote fraud and could postal votes be brought into a polling station on the day? The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance replied that the Council was following all relevant guidance to mitigate the fraud aspect, and this was not an issue unique to this District. Postal votes could be brought into a polling station.

Councillor J Lea wanted reassurance that if there was a problem that the electorate would be aware of how to get postal votes into the Council in plenty of time. The Service Director Strategy, Delivery and Performance replied that this was handled in conjunction with the election project plan and communications plan.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the update of the Elections Planning process for the elections to be held in May 2021.

78. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN 2020/21 – QUARTER 3 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Committee reviewed the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2020/21 quarter 3 exceptions only, as the Stronger Council Select Committee. reviewed performance reporting. Based on comments made by select committee members, further work had been necessary on the website to remove the 'contact us' email address, which had been replaced by a new general enquiry – a recommendation of the Ombudsman. On the Sheltered Housing Review, the reason for the RAG red status was in relation to the high cost of Wi-fi access in communal areas and its impact on service charges. Disaster recovery was not progressing at the planned rate due to resourcing issues in ICT caused by a restructure with the loss of 17 individuals on the team, but 10 people had now been recruited.

Councillor S Murray referred to the Accommodation Programme and that the refurbishment was on time and in budget, However, he had read that Everything Epping Forest had stated that a report to Cabinet had revealed a £273.000 overspend. Councillor J Philip replied that the Accommodation project was on time and in budget so Everything Epping Forest was incorrect this time. The reason for the red status was to include discussions with partners by year end.

(Post meeting update: C Hartgrove, Interim Chief Financial Officer clarified that one small point to highlight was a – prima facie – forecast overspend on the Accommodation Project of £273,000 highlighted by Councillor Murray. Members should note that this excluded a commitment to fund up to £327,000 from the District Development Fund, which was revenue funding. Once that was factored in, then the project was forecast to underspend by £54,000 at the quarter 3 stage. The contribution was in the form of a year-end accounting adjustment, so was not obvious from the report and he apologised for that. It was a technical accounting point, forced upon the Council to comply with proper accounting practice).

Councillor M Sartin commented that hopefully the red status exceptions would move forward.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the quarter 3 Performance report.

79. DISPOSAL OF HRA ASSETS

The report related to the disposal of HRA assets and a proposed policy. The Council owned some 12,000 assets which included, properties, garages, land, pathways, unadopted roads, alleyways and grassed areas on residential estates. A standard assessment procedure (SAP) rating was used by the Government for energy efficiency. The Council would be looking at SAP ratings and costs so that if there was a deficit in income over the 30 years of the plan for an asset, the Council was looking to its disposal and to reinvest the capital into other projects in the HRA framework. The Project Director HRA, D Fenton, advised that two small parcels of land sold for £80,000 that the Portfolio Holder had approved had been used to reinvest in its estates. Therefore, the recycling of capital receipts of dwellings and land would be reinvested into the capital programme.

Councillor S Murray remarked that even on small pieces of land it would be quite useful for the Portfolio Holder to have input from ward members in the report on the decision and was this a legal requirement to sell HRA assets? The Project Director HRA, advised that Counsel had been consulted and the policy was asking members to commit to ringfencing income of HRA assets to create and plan places where people wanted to live. The officer was responsible for a decision on land below 80 square metres. The policy would ensure due diligence for land over 80 square metres. Officers could consult ward members and she thought a Portfolio Holder would want to know the views of a ward member and local residents, as it was about creating better places. Councillor J H Whitehouse also thought ward members should be involved and hoped it would take place in future.

Councillor D Wixley's concern was around allotments where the report detailed an allotment "was not necessary and was surplus to requirements" and that the Council had "actively promoted and publicised the availability of other sites and had consulted with the National Allotment Society". He wanted reassurance that every effort would be made before such actions were taken. Also, on land being disposed of and where the Council included maintenance costs, when the land had been sold could it still be maintained adequately? In his ward there was an empty pub site the Council owned that it was leasing out but was often subject to fly-tipping. The Council would not deal with the fly-tipping as he had been advised that this was the responsibility of the leaseholder. The Project Director HRA was aware of how important allotments were with Covid and mental health issues because people really needed to get out and allotments helped people achieve this. The Council could not dispose of an allotment without the permission of the Secretary of State and would

not, because allotments were a much-needed resource, and people could benefit from planters. Fly-tipping was a blight on land, so Councillor Wixley was asked to inform the Project Director of the fly-tipping at the pub site so that she could investigate.

Councillor D Sunger asked if the sites of small pieces of land had been identified? The Project Director HRA replied that the Estate and Land Team had been restructured and was scoping out parcels of land for planting schemes, disposal or to be sold to an occupier, who would be responsible for maintaining it. In terms of HRA land, the Council knew the number of sites it had, and a report would be going to Cabinet for approval.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the new policy on the disposal of small land sites and individual properties with all receipts ringfenced for HRA functions.

80. CO-OPTION OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER TO STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

At the last meeting of the Stronger Communities Select Committee on 14 January 2021, members agreed to recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that Mr W Marshall be co-opted to their select committee. Officers had also strongly supported his appointment, as he was currently the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Forum and his participation at meetings would ensure that tenants opinions and input would be considered in relation to Housing issues scrutinised by the select committee. It was also important that tenants had a voice at this level especially in relation to the publication of the Social Housing White paper. As Mr Marshall's appointment was close to the end of this municipal year, the Committee recommended his co-option to Council and that this should continue until the end of 2021/22 when it could be reviewed.

Resolved:

- (1) That Mr W Marshall be appointed as a non-voting Co-opted member of the Stronger Communities Select Committee until the end of the 2021/22 municipal year; and
- (2) That the appointment be recommended to Council for approval.

81. LOCAL HIGH STREETS TASK AND FINISH PANEL

N Dawe, Chief Operating Officer, advised the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it was the intention to take the next phase of the development of the high streets to Cabinet before the end of March with work progressing on the next three. Cabinet had already considered Waltham Abbey and Ongar. As the reports came forward, which it was hoped would be near the end of the third lockdown, this would be an opportunity for members to look at the high streets and how scrutiny should play into that scrutiny process. For the time being part of the remit of the Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder Advisory Group included the recovery of the District's high streets.

High street shops were not in a position to open up during the third national lockdown therefore, the Committee agreed with the report's recommendation that the

reconvening of the Task and Finish Panel be deferred until after the end of the third national pandemic lockdown.

Resolved:

- (1) That the reconvening of the Local High Streets Task and Finish Panel be deferred until after the ending of the third national Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

82. QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

Timing issues with Stronger Council Select Committee had resulted in this Committee reviewing quarter 3. The report set out the 2020/21 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) positions, for both revenue and capital, as at 31 December 2020. In terms of General Fund revenue expenditure, a budget over spend of £313,000 was forecast, with projected net expenditure of £18.122 million against an overall budget provision of £17.809 million. The General Fund revenue position was dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic most notably on:

- Budget pressures – leisure facilities (£2,318,860) from a combined impact of the management fee loss exacerbated by contract payments to the contractor to maintain the availability of the leisure centres; Qualis income (£2,312,071) owing to a major shift in economic assumptions such as property prices and interest rates that had reduced achievable income streams from the Qualis initiative in the year; and car parking (£1,350,528) from a major decline in Council car park usage in 2020/21 especially during the lockdowns.
- Government support – £1.947 million in general un-ringed funding had already been provided with further support through an income loss compensation scheme, which was forecast to rise to £2.177 million by the year end (i.e. combined funding of circa £4.1 million).

Income from planning applications had recovered quicker than expected. The HRA position was less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. On the General Fund Capital Programme, the Council had incurred capital expenditure of £37.34 million (including £30 million in Qualis Investments) at quarter 3, against an overall budget of £53.43 million. On the HRA, the Council had incurred capital expenditure of £8.825 million by quarter 3, against an overall budget of £25.31 million. The Civic Offices accommodation project was the largest General Fund project in 2020/21 with a core budget of £7.242 million (excluding £900,000 for IT costs). At 31 December 2020, over 60% of the allocated budget had been spent, and the new facility should be available for occupation in March 2021.

Councillor S Heap asked about the Chief Executive Support Services costs for full year budget and other activities and he noted that Qualis' receipts were down but that was understandable in the current Covid crisis. C Hartgrove, Interim Chief Financial Officer, replied that he would provide more information on this after the meeting.

(Post meeting update: On the Chief Executive Support Services budget of £662,550, this budget contained the costs (salaries and other miscellaneous costs) of the Senior Leadership Team, including the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors. It was the gross cost. The costs of S Jevans (Qualis Managing Director on secondment to Qualis) was recharged to Qualis (including a 3% margin).

Councillor J Philip, Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, reported that the impact on reserves was not anywhere near as bleak as it could have been, and this was a timely review of where the Council finances were currently for revenue, capital and the HRA.

Councillor S Murray said that if the Council was to have no increase in the budget for 2021/22, what would be the implications of not having an increase in council tax, i.e. 0%?

Councillor J Philip replied that the Stronger Council Select Committee was trying to minimise the impact on residents and actively looking to see what could be done, but the budget was to be reported to Cabinet on 11 February 2021 and advised waiting until then.

Councillor S Heap queried if some of the underspend could be used for laptops for people who wanted them. Councillor J Philip replied that the Council was looking for grants that would be beneficial for the District but there were not any available yet.

Resolved:

- (1) That the General Fund revenue position at the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2020) for 2020/21, including actions being or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances had been identified, be noted (Appendix A);
- (2) That the General Fund capital position at the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2020) for 2020/21, be noted (Appendix B);
- (3) That the Housing Revenue Account revenue position at the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2020) for 2020/21, including actions being or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances had been identified, be noted; and
- (4) That the Housing Revenue Account capital position at the end of Quarter 3 (31 December 2020) for 2020/21, be noted (Appendix C).

83. CABINET BUSINESS

Cabinet's Key Decision List updated to the 1 February 2021 was scrutinised by the Committee and the following points were raised.

(a) Planning and Sustainability Portfolio

Councillor J Philip queried the last item (Town Centre Regeneration - Ongar, Loughton, Epping and Buckhurst Hill), which should be under the Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder.

(b) Finance and Economic Development Portfolio

Councillor S Murray remarked that Loughton High Road and The Broadway shopping centres should be dealt with separately as they would not need the same approach. Councillor J Philip replied that he was aware that these were two distinct areas and would have competing demands.

(c) Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio

Councillor S Murray asked if there would be scrutiny undertaken on charging for Environmental Information Regulation (EIR) requests before a decision was made. Would there also be an assurance for proper scrutiny on the transfer of services to Qualis of the Grounds Maintenance and Fleet Operations Services, and North Weald Airfield Operations before Cabinet made a decision on 20 April 2021? Councillor M Sartin replied that this would be an action for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee April 2021 meeting or the appropriate select committee. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Avey, replied that EIR requests came under Q Durrani, Environmental and Technical Services Director. There would need to be a proper look at the business case before the transfer on these service areas to Qualis in April and to provide adequate opportunity to scrutinise. The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder replied that the business cases would be scrutinised and come before this Committee.

Councillor J H Whitehouse remarked that Qualis had made a presentation to the Local Councils' Liaison Committee on 28 January 2021 and had asked about the scrutiny of the Housing repairs team. The reply was that Qualis as a whole was scrutinised a number of times a year and the opportunity to scrutinise services would be then, which she did not think was adequate. In her opinion the scrutiny process of Qualis needed to be looked at, and how these services could be scrutinised because just looking at Qualis would not be satisfactory. Councillor M Sartin replied that the reality was that everyone was feeling their way on how Qualis would be operating and interact with the Council. Councillor N Avey replied that governance was a key issue as between the subsidiaries and the holding company it was conjecture at the moment.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the Executive's current programme of Key Decisions of 1 February 2021 to enable the identification of appropriate matters for the overview and scrutiny work programme and the overview of specific decisions proposed to be taken over the period of the plan;
- (2) That scrutiny of charging for the EIR requests be undertaken before the Cabinet decision; and
- (3) That there be assurance for proper scrutiny of the transfer of services to Qualis of the Grounds Maintenance and Fleet Operations Services, and the North Weald Airfield by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or appropriate select committee, before a decision was made by Cabinet in April 2021.

84. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME**(a) Current Work Programme**

Work items 3 (Accommodation Strategy) and 4 (People Strategy) had been removed from the work programme by the Agenda Planning Group on 12 January 2021 so that in future scrutiny would be undertaken by the Stronger Council Select Committee. All three scheduled business items had been considered at this meeting. At the next meeting on 15 April 2021, Epping Forest Youth Council would be presenting its annual report and Ms S Garner from the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group for Young People's Mental Health Services had also accepted

this scrutiny opportunity. Councillor M Sartin commented that the aim of these two presentations was to achieve a crossover interest because of the work the Youth Council had done on the mental health of young people and it would be an opportunity for the youth councillors to ask questions.

Councillor S Murray was pleased by the two presentations being made in April to the Committee but asked what EPUT meant, which was Essex Partnership University Trust.

Councillor J H Whitehouse commented that as planning committee chairmen received training each year, could scrutiny chairmanship training be provided for new appointees when select committee memberships (item 7) were reviewed this June? Councillor M Sartin replied that this issue had been raised at the Joint Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen in January 2021. Training had been put on hold in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic but would be coming forward in the new municipal year.

(b) Reserve Programme

The reserve work programme was noted and that members would be asked to consider moving the Essex County Council (Children's Services) (Scrutiny of External Organisation) item up a level in relation to children and Covid.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2020/21 be noted; and
- (2) That the current reserve programme be noted.

85. SELECT COMMITTEES - WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Stronger Communities Select Committee

Councillor D Sunger reported that the Essex Police District Commander would be attending the next meeting of the Select Committee on 30 March 2021, as well as the Annual Report of the Community Safety Partnership. An additional meeting had been arranged for 22 April for the remaining business to be considered, which included universal credit and customer and social recovery items. At the last meeting in January 2021, the Councillor advised that he had attended a briefing to update stakeholders and community representatives on the progress of the Whipps Cross development and had considered an update on the Council's response to rough sleeping in the District during the pandemic.

Councillor S Murray asked if the officer would be able to give the parameters that the report on social recovery, post-Covid, would cover? Councillor H Whitbread, Portfolio Holder Housing and Community Services, advised that the Homelessness Team had done a lot of work throughout the Covid crisis. Furthermore, social recovery linked into the Covid recovery work and a wider programme of support via the community hubs for people who needed it the most, post-Covid.

Councillor A Patel added that the Policy Advisory Group had received an overview from the Community and Wellbeing Service Director, J Gould, as social recovery was linked in with health and the report would provide details on the large amount of work being undertaken.

(b) Stronger Council Select Committee

Councillor P Bolton reported that the draft budget proposals had been discussed in detail at the last meeting in January 2021 with a recommendation to be approved. On the Accommodation Strategy, the Committee was reassured that there were partners interested in taking up accommodation in the refurbished Civic Offices. The withdrawal of Wi-fi from sheltered housing because it was uneconomical was a concern, but the Select Committee had asked officers to look at this again and report back to see if this could be rectified, as future library closures were a possibility.

(c) Stronger Place Select Committee

Councillor S Heather reported that the Select Committee had received an update on the Local Plan and the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy but there had been no decision-making process. Income was down from the leisure centres because of the Covid crisis and closures during the lockdowns. On the waste management contract, residential waste had increased but Biffa had done an excellent job collecting it. A demand responsive transport trial along the number 87 bus route seemed to be going satisfactorily but this was being monitored. Also, officers were doing a lot of work on town centre rejuvenation.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Committee noted the work programmes of the three select committees;

86. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Committee noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

CHAIRMAN