

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 15 March 2021 **Time:** 7.00 - 8.10 pm

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Members Present:

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillors H Kane (Chairman), C C Pond (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, J Lea, R Morgan, M Sartin, J Share-Bernia, J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors:

Councillors A Patel, S Heap and H Whitbread

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillors V Metcalfe and Whitbread

Representing Local Councils:

A Belgrave (Chigwell Parish Council), M Squire (Loughton Town Council), D Wixley (Loughton Town Council), S Jackman (North Weald Bassett Parish Council), S De Luca (North Weald Bassett Parish Council), C Feetham (Ongar Town Council), A Jones (Stanford Rivers Parish Council) and E Burn (Theydon Bois Parish Council) K Carter (Nazeing Parish Council)

Apologies:

Epping Forest District Council –

Councillors B Rolfe

Essex County Council –

Councillors Mohindra

Parish/Town Councils: -

L Petyt (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), B Rumsey (Epping Town Council), J Milovanovic (Moreton, Bobbingworth and The Lavers), L Ellis (Nazeing Parish Council), Ongar Town Council, N Wilkinson (Roydon Parish Council), Mrs J Ballard (Roydon Parish Council), R Northwood (Sheering Parish Council), J Burr (Stapleford Tawney Parish Council), A Clay (Theydon Garnon Parish Council), P Giles (Theydon Mount Parish Council), J Law (Waltham Abbey Town Council) and Weare (Abbess Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council)

Officers Present: N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), S Kits (Lead Corporate Communications Officer - People), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), J Shutt (Senior Housing Development Officer), L Wade (Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services) and Francisca Muonweokwu-Egbunike (Housing Enabling Officer)

By Invitation: External partners Laura Atkinson, Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) Rural Housing Enabler & Community Led Housing Advisor, Sophie Robinson and Isobel Wright from Hastoe Group on the Rural Affordable Housing and Community Led Housing Opportunities.

16. 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.

17. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record; and
2. The following responses were noted in relation to actions from the meeting on 7 September 2020;

(a) Issues Raised by Local Councils, Minute 4(a) Unauthorised traveller encampments.

The decision was made previously not to join ECTU in 2012 and 2016 due to following rationale:

- The additional cost/benefit of joining compared with EFDC enforcement officers historically already being very quick at responding to unauthorised encampments (UE) on EFDC land.
- Conceding decisions on the level of tolerance of UE to Essex County Council (ECC).
- Difference in decision process between EFDC and ECTU before eviction proceedings commence (ECTU perceived to be marginally more tolerant of UE).
- In 2012, "Cabinet members expressed their main reservation as being the likely attitude of the proposed Unit to urgent responses to unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments occurring in this District. Past practice has been for this Council to initiate action through the Police or the Courts very quickly in order to satisfy concerns expressed by the local community concerned". 2012 Minutes of cabinet meeting available at <https://eppingforestintranet.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=36074>

- The 2016 Portfolio holder report states “ECTU has informed the Council that the cost of being a member will reduce from the current cost of £7,200 per authority, to £6,500 a year. However, as this would not be offset by savings elsewhere, it would represent an increase in costs to the Council. In the light of this it is recommended that the Council does not seek to join ECTU at this time but would wish to continue sharing information and having regular contact with ECTU”. Full report available at <https://eppingforestintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=643&MID=8862#A155470>

Following the issue being raised again in the September 2019 by LCLC, the Community Resilience Service again considered membership of ECTU. The current costs are £8500 per annum, this would effectively provide an insurance policy for Parish and Town Councils, as we would continue to deal with any incursions on our and within our current resources

We currently provide advice to the Parish and Town Councils on unauthorised encampments; However, we do not go through the possession order process for them. Both Lea Valley and the Corporation of London deal with incursions on their land by way of byelaws. ECTU do not deal with any incursions on private land, nor do they deal with those who are rough sleepers (e.g. tent dwellers, and not travellers). Essentially, buying into ECTU underwrites any possible incursions by Gypsy & Travellers on Parish and Town Council land, and there is no added benefit to EFDC by signing up to the service.

Buying into ECTU can also limit our current local ability to resolve things quickly – EFDC would effectively hand over all control of dealing with the issue to County. We would still deal with the telephone calls from the members of the public and be liable (as would the Parish and Town Councils) for any clearance costs and would have little or no influence to move them on quicker. Our current relationship with the police is probably one of the best in Essex, (although we do appreciate that ECTU also have good relationships, but not at the local level that exist within Epping Forest.

This is a breakdown of unauthorised encampments which we have had reported to us over the last 5 years. These are amended figures from those presented to the LCLC as we have reviewed all the reports and removed any references to rough sleepers, just strictly gypsy and traveller/Caravans/campers on side of road/etc).

Year	Number of incursions	On EFDC actionable land	On Parish/Town Council land	On Lea Valley/Corp London Land	On ECC land (including highway)	On Private Land
2020	14	0	0	2	2	10**
2019	8	1	1	2	2	2
2018	7	1	2	2	0	3
2017	11	4	1*	3*	0	4
2016	12	5	1	2	2	2
2015	7	1	0	0	2	4

** Includes 1 breach of planning control

* 1 encampment across land owned by both LTC and Corp London, so counted twice.

There is an option for the Parish and Town Councils to consider forming a consortium between themselves to buy into ECTU, which was suggested at the LCLC meeting, if all the councils participated it would cost £355 per council. ECTU have confirmed they in theory they could join, but with the same fee as the District and Borough Councils. If a group of Parish/Town Councils would like to consider pursuing ECTU membership independent of EFDC, we advise they contact Stephen Andrews, Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Manager Stephen.Andrews@essex.gov.uk

(b) Any Other Business Minute 9(b) Local Government Reorganisation

There were no further updates at this time.

(c) Digital Buddies, Minute 7.

Response from the Service Manager – Customer Services, S Lewis.

“Buddies workshop

We began the rejuvenation of our Digital Buddy Programme in September 2020 by undertaking a consultation with our existing Digital Buddies to identify barriers they were encountering to providing digital support and to get their ideas on how the programme could be further developed. We used this feedback to design and deliver a refresher workshop to Buddies where discussions were held to explore the work of our individual teams and how we can use our roles to provide digital support to residents. We gave consideration to our residents that are not digitally enabled who may be excluded when services changes are made, such as digitalising an application process, to ensure appropriate support is considered for these residents.

This has created good connections with internal departments who are approaching us when implementing these type of changes, so we can help them to explore the impact on residents who are not yet digitally enabled and look at how we can support these people so they can continue accessing our services. Digital Buddy support has also enabled residents to access a Council health and wellbeing challenge on the fitness App Strava, six residents have so far received help to access this app.

Reaching out to residents

We have set up a dedicated phone line that our residents in Council Sheltered Housing Schemes can contact if they require digital support. This support varies from setting up an email address, online shopping, or contacting friends and family via social media. So far, two residents have contacted us and been supported with mobile device issues.

The Community Culture and Wellbeing team have been visiting residents at their doorsteps in super output areas including Shelley and Paternoster, to identify who requires digital support so we can link them with a Digital Buddy. As a result, four residents have received support to access their family history records, watch online videos via YouTube and use email.

We have been working with our partner charities Digital Unite and Citizens Online to get useful technology guides uploaded to our website. This allows our digitally enabled residents to share information and easy how-to guides

with their friends and family who need it. This information is also regularly going out on our Social Media platforms.

Communication Campaigns

We have also been working alongside the Corporate Communications team to identify local and national campaigns that we can use as a platform to promote digital support to residents. The campaigns identified include All Digital Week at the end of March and Volunteers Week in June. We will use these campaigns as opportunities to promote the self-help support we have available in the form of technology guides on our website and to encourage residents to volunteer and spare some time to work with us to provide digital support to residents who need it.

What's Next

We're now exploring the possibility of teaming up with community leaders and existing volunteer groups to embed digital buddy support into the existing work they do. We're reaching out to new teams and partnerships including EFDC Community Champions, Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) and partner charity Voluntary Action Epping Forest to ensure there is no overlap with existing programmes and to minimise duplication. We are also making contact with various local authorities to share information and learnings in regards to how other authorities who are further ahead than us in the digital transformation journey to find out how they have been able to embed digital support in the services and projects they provide."

18. RURAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY LED HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

The Committee received a presentation from James Shutt, EFDC Senior Housing Development Officer and external partners Laura Atkinson, Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) Rural Housing Enabler & Community Led Housing Advisor, Sophie Robinson and Isobel Wright from Hastoe Group on the Rural Affordable Housing and Community Led Housing Opportunities. (attached)

The Committee enquired how 'rural' was defined, as there were many hamlets within urban areas of the District. Mr Shutt advised that the main criteria was a settlement of less than 3000 people. It was also noted that these opportunities would still have to be considered against the Council's planning criteria and Local Plan.

It was mentioned that previous developments within the District had relied on farmers releasing land for these opportunities and whether this was still the case. Ms Wright advised that yes there were opportunities although a lot of considerations had changed.

The Committee asked what was meant by 80% ownership and legal protection for the housing developed in these schemes. Ms Wright advised that the properties could have up to an 80% ownership, which would mean that future purchases would have to fit the criteria of the legal agreement, to be able to purchase the property. Ms Muonweokwu-Egbunike advised that the housing association would work with the owner to assist with the sale of the property, to ensure the criteria was met and they were supported through the process.

19. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

(a) Epping Forest District Council Local Plan

The Service Director (Planning Services) Mr N Richardson advised that following the hearing sessions for the Independent Examination of the Local Plan, the Inspector had released her advice on 2 August 2019, which set out a number of changes to the Plan which were required to remedy issues of soundness in the form of Main Modifications (MMs).

In accordance with the high level programme in the Council's response to the Inspector, dated 24 April 2020, the Planning team had worked hard to ensure that the final tranche of Main Modifications (MMs) were submitted to the Inspector in September with a view to consultation on the MMs as soon as possible thereafter.

However, the Inspector wrote to the Council on 2 October 2020 (ED115) to advise that due to other work commitments during October and November it was unlikely that she would be able to provide a full response immediately. The Inspector provided an update on progress on 8 February 2021 (ED118) advising that the volume and complexity of the documentation meant that progress of finalising the MM schedule was taking some time and the current lockdown measures had unfortunately prolonged it. It was envisaged that the Local Plan would be adopted this year but firstly the MM's would need to go out to consultation.

(b) Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy

The Service Director (Planning Services) advised following a report to Cabinet on 20 July 2020 and Council on 8 February 2021, the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy (APMS), as adopted, would enable the Council to properly approve any planning application that could demonstrate no adverse effect on Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation.

At the meeting of Council on 8 February 2021 the Council agreed that the Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainability would form a cross party Portfolio Holder Advisory Group to support the delivery of the Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy and provide oversight of the work of the Technical Stakeholder Group. This could include working with officers to consider where further initiatives had not been identified in the APMS and could be brought forward to advance Air Quality Improvements with the objective of removing the need to introduce a Clean Air Zone (CAZ). Alongside the acceleration and enhancement of mitigation measures, the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group would provide democratic oversight of the development of any CAZ scheme prior to its consideration through the Council's formal decision-making processes and public consultation, in the event that future air quality monitoring and modelling continued to demonstrate that even after the acceleration and enhancement mitigation measures, a CAZ was required.

The Committee enquired who had been appointed to the Portfolio Holder Group. The Service Director (Planning Services) advised that any queries could be raised with the appropriate Ward members and who could contact the relevant members on this Group.

(c) Update on the Elections Planning Process for the Elections being held 6 May 2021

The Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance), Ms Louise Wade advised that 63 Polling Stations were being used for these elections including Murray Hall, which was currently being used as a vaccination centre, although the NHS had confirmed that there would be no reduction in vaccinations for local people as a result of this. The Polling stations would be run under covid-19 restrictions with either a one-way or one-in-one-

out system and voters were free to bring their own pen or pencil to the Polling Station. Any queues at the Polling Stations would be marshalled by staff, and regularly cleaning within the Station would be carried out throughout the day.

Postal Votes were available for any elector and the Postal Vote application forms needed to be received by 5.00pm on 20 April 2021, with issuing being carried out from 21 April onwards. Details of how voters could apply for a Postal Vote would be detailed on Polling Cards or via the Electoral Commission website and communications had been released by the County Council and individual political parties.

The Count Centre being used this year was a hanger at North Weald Airfield as follows:

- Thursday 6-May-21 10.00pm Full verification of all ballot boxes.
- Friday 7-May-21 9.30am County Council Divisions
District Council Wards
Town/Parish Council Wards
- Saturday 8-May-21 9.30am Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner
Any outstanding Town/Parish Council
Wards

Admission to the Counts would be strictly controlled and the Returning Officer had determined that invitations would be limited to the Candidate, the Candidate's Agent and one Count Agent per Candidate to enable social distancing to be maintained.

A Candidates/Agents briefing had been arranged for Monday 12 April 2021 at 6.00pm, via Zoom.

Finally, the District Council Election nomination paper for 6 May 2021 only required a Proposer and Secunder.

(d) Epping Forest District Council training Schedule and prospectus for 2021/22

The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager, Mr Gary Woodhall advised that the training schedule and prospectus for 2021/22 had been organised and officers were awaiting confirmation on whether they would be run virtually or face-to-face in line with the Government Roadmap for Covid-19.

20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there no other business raised.

21. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the dates for the next municipal year were as follows;

Monday 27 September 2021; and
Monday 14 March 2021.

CHAIRMAN