

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 26 July 2021
Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 8.02 pm
Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, L Burrows, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane, D Sunger and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: R Brookes, S Heap, C McCredie and S Murray

Apologies:

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

24. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

26. MINUTES

Decision:

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 June 2021 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

27. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor Avey, advised the meeting that at a recent meeting with the Council's waste contractor, 'Biffa', he was advised that they may experience a shortage of drivers over the coming months, due to the lack of drivers being recruited and the ongoing effects of the Pandemic. This may result in reduced services.

Councillor Murray asked that all members be kept apprised of this situation over the coming months. Councillor Avey assured him that he would do so.

Councillor C Whitbread reminded the meeting that pandemic issues were still ongoing and that if possible, meetings should be kept virtual at present.

28. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

29. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

In the absence of the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee; the Leader reported that they had not had a meeting since the last Cabinet and therefore had nothing to report.

30. PROGRESS WITH THE PORTFOLIO ADVISORY GROUP ON AIR POLLUTION MITIGATION STRATEGY

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Councillor Bedford, introduced the report on the progress made by the Portfolio Advisory Group on the Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy. It was noted that the Council was already making significant progress with many of the environmental initiatives contained within the Local Plan, including bringing forward the first three of the green infra-structure projects and also significant developments in terms of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging, demand responsive transport and safer cycling routes. Specifically, in respect of air quality, the Council had implemented a published procedure where all new planning applications were scrutinised to determine whether they would deviate from the assumptions in the Local Plan air quality modelling, and to ensure that the necessary mitigation was built into their applications. Specifically, even with the release of small-scale developments, the environmental impacts of these were being re-evaluated, including held approvals, using the AECOM modelling approach. Councillor Bedford added that the detailed work continued as well as the promised establishment of an officer technical group to inform the development and implementation of IAPMS actions and measures and tap into technical knowledge to keep abreast of emerging air pollution mitigation initiatives .

He added that according to the latest government figures EFDC was now the second highest district in terms of ultra-low emissions vehicles on the roads in Essex. Initial surveys of council car parks to ascertain their electrical capability for charging points were taking place. It was anticipated that the first site would be at Oakwood Hill. We were working with Essex County Council to try and establish charging points in lamp-posts focusing on areas where off street parking was lower. We were establishing working arrangements with parish and town councils on addressing climate change and air pollution. The Council would also be developing new proposals for council owned car parks and looking into the electrification of the council's refuse fleet. They were also urging TfL to roll out further charging points at underground station car parks.

Councillor Philip welcomed this report and encouraged the portfolio holder to bring regular updating reports going forward. He would like to know about the amount of work that the City of London was putting in to improving the air quality in the forest. Councillor Bedford said he had raised the issue of car parking charges and one of the issues he was looking at was to maybe bring a zero charge for electric vehicles. As for the Corporation of London they would be discussing the possibility of making their car parks free for electric vehicles.

Councillor Avey noted that some good ideas had come from the aborted "Next" application around Woodriden Hill and the junction with the M25; would these be brought forward and explored? Councillor Bedford conceded that was a sensible approach and was something to explore.

Councillor H Whitbread asked how the Council was engaging with local businesses to be more carbon neutral. She was told that they were being contacted with advice and education they needed to start now and not wait until 2025. Councillor H Whitbread then asked what work they had done with the Essex Climate Commission, which she was a member of. Councillor Bedford said he had just attended a meeting with them. There were a lot of ideas coming forward, they were also bidding for additional government funding for electrical vehicle charging points on the streets.

Councillor Philip invited Councillor Bedford to write an article for the monthly business email newsletter.

Councillor Murray welcomed the report remarking that this was the way we should have done it from the beginning. He asked what progress had been made on safer cycling routes but took exception to the use of the phrase 'opposition parties' and would like to be referred as political groups. He was also very interested in the statement on page 17 of the agenda, starting 'Some improvements are already planned for the Rodding Valley section with better signage and clearance of green material...' and would like some information on this, but not necessarily tonight.

He noted that the statement at paragraph 10 was accurate but thought it was worth mentioning that the Corporation of London were using charging to encourage usage of the forest where people can go to and cause less damage and park for free.

Councillor Bedford said that the paragraph mentioning cycling routes was talking about the area behind the Bank of England and they had a short video clip showing the area and identified some improvements that could be made. They were also interested in looking after the nature reserve at Rodding Valley by having better signage etc. He also noted that the Corporation of London would be charging for every car park in Epping Forest. The problem was that they needed an electric supply to the car parks for the machines, or better phone coverage to use a parking app. We could help support this as part of the portfolio holder advisory group and minimising the effects on local residents by maybe having seven day parking permits so visitors to the forest did not take residents spaces. This will need looking into and consultation, but it does need an urgent review.

Councillor Brookes welcomed the emphasis placed on cycling. She noted that in London the more provision made for cyclists the more people took it up. But it was still very dangerous on our local roads, she also welcomed electric cars but noted that people with less income could not afford them. Councillor Bedford said that the issues of cycling routes had been raised by the advisory group and officers were looking for funding to improve them. He understood the problem about affordable electric vehicles but noted the current problem was the lack of computer chips for them. The costs were coming down slowly.

Councillor Patel asked what level of engagement did his group have with other local authorities. He was told that they were engaging with other surrounding authorities, such as Waltham Forest. Working with other authorities was key to them. We were part of a group who shared legal and technical advice with other Local Authorities, the Corporation and Natural England.

Councillor C Whitbread said that last week he had launched an ECC Social Value Strategy Catalogue, underpinning their procurement policy. They have now increased the social value element to this and have also added climate as a principle. He recommended that officers look at this and engage with our own procurement and social value policies.

He also noted that at present there was not much coming forward from the advisory group and wondered if group leader should look again at the makeup of the membership of the group to make sure they had the right people there.

Councillor Bedford agreed that it would be a good idea to review the membership and asked group leaders to consider this.

Decision:

- 1) The Cabinet noted the considerable progress made by the group since its inception and the number of additional ideas and suggestions made by the group that were currently being investigated prior to possible implementation; and
- 2) The Cabinet noted that the group's success was heavily dependent on the ideas generated by the group, the evaluation of these ideas and advice given on their implementation. All members of the group were thanked for their contributions to date, but it was considered that they would need to remain active in this regard over the following months.

31. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below as they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act indicated, and the exemption was considered to outweigh the potential public interest in disclosing the information:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Paragraph Number</u>
10	Proposed letting of 2 nd Floor, Civic Offices, Epping.	3

32. PROPOSED LETTING OF 2ND FLOOR, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET EPPING

The Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor Philip introduced the report. He noted that the Pandemic had accelerated alternative working practices and with this they could now think of letting the 2nd floor. This was an opportunity for EFDC to lease the 2nd floor of the Civic Offices (excluding the auditorium) for use as a Serviced Office to Seed Space 1 Limited who was the IWG approved and exclusive multi-unit franchise partner for this region and who would be trading as Regus. This had a number of benefits to EFDC such as:

1. Income generation of an area of the Civic Offices that has never before been commercialised. This also includes payment of Business Rates and Service Charge for the same part of the building EFDC have always historically paid themselves and represents further savings.
2. A benefit to the local community by offering professional, contemporary and flexible workspace to both new start up and existing businesses.
3. Regus was an Internationally known brand which helps to cement the image of the Council.
4. Suitable commercial lease terms have been agreed, subject to EFDC consent and other commercial stipulations set out in the Heads of Terms.

Councillor Patel asked what outcomes we were first looking for, and what was the best option. He was told that at first, we did not expect to rent out the second floor and it had a no-break clause.

Councillor Bedford asked if we would get additional funding from business rates and was there a service charge. He was told that yes there was a service charge (per square foot) covering all services except electricity.

Councillor Murray asked if the income was better than we anticipated and were we getting near the market rates. He was told that the definition of market rates was the maximum we could get for a space. This had been marketed extensively and this was the best offer. Councillor Murray commented that this was an excellent report and he was very supportive.

Councillor Patel asked what would be the impact on the day to day functioning of the Civic offices. He was told that the second floor would operate as a separate autonomous unit.

In response to Councillor Heap's query Councillor Philip said that due diligence had been undertaken on the company by officers and outside agencies.

Councillor Brookes expressed concern about the amount of parking spaces allocated to the second floor. She was assured that EFDC had sufficient space allocated. And as we did not have staff on the second floor, we had a reduced need for car parking spaces.

Councillor C Whitbread said that this would bring back life to our high street and for small businesses this was a way forward.

Decision:

The Cabinet agreed to lease the 2nd floor Civic Offices, High Street Epping CM16 4BZ to Seed Space 1 Limited for a Serviced Office and trading as a franchise of Regus.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Recommend that the Cabinet approve a lease of the 2nd floor Civic Offices to Seed Space 1 Limited. This will generate additional rental income and at the same time provide a flexible and professional workspace to the local community and at no cost to EFDC.

The 2nd floor has been extensively marketed jointly by two commercial agents, one local and the other national since November 2020. During that time, Seed Space 1 Limited were the primary bidder for the 2nd floor as a whole unit. Prior to this offer we had already rejected 3 other offers from the same tenant and believe this offer was the best achievable in the current market and within the office sector.

Other Options for Action:

Alternative options are:

1. Refuse to progress negotiations with Seed Space 1 Limited and look for an alternate commercial tenant. If we do not receive another offer for the entire 2nd

floor, additional capital costs will be necessary to separate the floor and install additional W/C facilities.

2. Retain the 2nd floor Civic Offices for EFDC use.
3. Explore other income generating options including residential use.

33. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

CHAIRMAN