

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Cabinet	Date:	Monday 13 November 2023
Place:	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	Time:	7.00 - 7.32 pm
Members Present:	Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, S Kane, S Patel, J Philip, H Whitbread and K Williamson		
Other Councillors:	Councillors J Parsons and J M Whitehouse		
Other Councillors (Virtual):	Councillors S Heap, C McCredie and D Wixley		
Apologies:	None.		
Officers Present:	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), S Balu (Interim Director of Housing and Property), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), J Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)), R Schunemann (Principal Planning Officer) and A Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer)		
Officers Present (Virtually):	P Freeman (Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), T Larsen (Democratic Services Officer) and J Lewis (Team Manager - Benefits Operations)		

[A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

51. 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.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

53. MINUTES

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9 October 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

54. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

- (a) Regulatory Services Portfolio

Councillor K Williamson reported he had checked with officers but there were no real problems with the weekend Remembrance events in the Epping Forest District.

(b) Community Health and Wellbeing

Councillor S Patel remarked that the Chairman's Diwali celebrations at the Civic Offices had been well attended.

55. 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.

56. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, Councillor D Wixley, reported that members had pre-scrutinised the Local Council Tax Support Scheme on 24 October 2023 and the draft minutes were being published tomorrow. He noted that the Cabinet and Scrutiny Joint Meeting on 14 November had been cancelled. The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held on 21 November, which would focus on Qualis. Also, an All-Members Briefing on Whipps Cross Hospital was being held on 23 November.

The Chairman announced an extra Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting was being organised for 12 December to discuss the 2024/25 draft budget, which would be held in private session with the Cabinet. As this was an important meeting, he encouraged all other councillors to attend.

57. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip, introduced the scheme, which had been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and remarked that 75% of responses to the public consultation had been in favour of the new scheme.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1a) That the Cabinet approved the introduction of a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1 April 2024 to reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council since the introduction of Universal Credit and to target support to the lowest income families.
- (1b) That following the results of the consultation exercise the scheme proposed in (a) above be amended to include Child Benefit as a disregarded income.

58. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME - 1-YEAR REVIEW

The Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder, Councillor H Whitbread, reported that the scheme had been put in place last year and had largely been successful although there had been increased pressures on homelessness.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet agreed there would be no change to medical banding'.
- (2) That the Cabinet agreed there would be no change to homeless households.
- (3) That the Cabinet agreed there would be no change to lacking one bedroom or sharing accommodation.
- (4) That the Cabinet agreed there would be no change to bedroom sizes.
- (5a) That the Cabinet agreed the scheme was to remain unchanged for new applications from 26 September 2022 in relation to requests to move from a flat to a house for existing council tenants.
- (5b) That the Cabinet agreed an end date of 25 September 2025 be introduced for applicants with 'legacy' rights to move from a flat to a house under the previous allocations scheme.

59. HGGT GOVERNANCE / JOINT COMMITTEE

The Place Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Bedford, commented that although informal arrangements were already in operation, the HGGT Board members had endorsed the proposal to establish a Joint Committee in July, which had been referred to the governing bodies of the respective five partner authorities for ratification. The main reasons for a joint committee were outlined in the report.

Councillor J Philip thought it was advisable to pass this to Full Council for approval because of the £2 million finance level and queried this with N Richardson (Planning Services Director). However, the Cabinet agreed final approval was to be ratified by Council at the meeting on 19 December 2023.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet agreed to the establishment of a Joint Committee (JC) in respect of matters pertaining to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.
- (2) That subject to all authorities approving the agreement, the arrangements set out in the Inter Authority Agreement at Appendix A to this report be endorsed and agreed.
- (3) That the Cabinet delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, to make any necessary, non-consequential and minor amendments and refer to the HGGT Chair and Director.

- (4) That the Cabinet agreed to refer final approval of the agreement to Council on 19 December 2023.

60. NORTH WEALD BASSETT MASTER PLAN ALLOCATION SITE

The Place Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the North Weald Bassett Master Plan Area which responded to the adopted Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 and Policy P6 'North Weald Bassett'. This master plan formed one of the allocated Strategic Master plan sites where the need for an SMF was identified. It had also been reviewed by the Quality Review Board three times. A formal public consultation was to be undertaken from mid-November 2023 through to January 2024.

Councillor J Philip asked for the consultation period to be extended to Monday 8 January 2024, from 5 January 2024, to allow for delays in postal responses over the Christmas period, which was agreed.

Councillor J M Whitehouse asked what the process was for unresolved elements. R Schunemann (Principal Planning Officer – Planning & Implementation Team) replied that there were still matters that had to be resolved such as the sustainability of the project to meet sustainability standards and targets, and a more landscape-led master plan but those issues would be resolved when this master plan came back to Cabinet to be endorsed on 18 March 2024.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet approved the draft North Weald Bassett Strategic Masterplan Framework and commencement of the public consultation for the NWB Strategic Masterplan Area allocation identified under Policy P6 in the Adopted Local Plan.
- (2) That the Cabinet noted the staged public consultation would take place over a minimum of 8 weeks from mid-November 2023 and would run through to January 2024. The reason for the extended consultation period was to provide the public with the widest possible contribution and to take into account the Christmas / New Year period.
- (3) That the Cabinet noted a further update would be provided to share the results of the public consultation, any updates to the masterplan and/or framework document to reflect consultation and to endorse the masterplan, so that it could be given appropriate weight as a material planning consideration in the determination of future planning applications.

61. QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

The Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder presented the quarter 2 report, which set out the 2023/24 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget positions, for both revenue and capital, as at 30th September 2023. It also considered a range of other financial performance and risk indicators alongside the budget position as detailed in the agenda report.

The Leader, Councillor C Whitbread, emphasised the importance of scrutiny of the draft 2024/25 budget at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's extra meeting on 12 December 2023, which would be held in private session.

Councillor S Kane asked what the difference was between general reserves and earmarked reserves. Councillor J Philip replied that an earmarked reserve was used on purpose to set aside monies. General reserves were for monies not earmarked, so these could be used more flexibly. It would be helpful if the Audits had been signed off, but this was not the situation currently.

When Councillor D Wixley asked if more reserves were needed to account for inflation, Councillor J Philip replied that £4 million was the target. Although the Section 151 Officer could raise the target, it was better if this was not raised for next year.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet noted the General Fund revenue position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2023) for 2023/24, including actions being undertaken or proposed to ameliorate the position, where significant variances had been identified (including Appendix A).
- (2) That the Cabinet noted the General Fund capital position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2023) for 2023/24 (including Appendix B).
- (3) That the Cabinet noted the Housing Revenue Account revenue position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2023) for 2023/24, including actions proposed to ameliorate the position, where significant variances had been identified.
- (4) That the Cabinet noted the Housing Revenue Account capital position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2023) for 2023/24 (including Appendix C); and
- (5) That the Cabinet noted the wider position on Financial Performance and Risk at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2023).

62. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

CHAIRMAN