

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Communities Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday 25 June 2024

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 8.50 pm

Members Present: Councillors J Lucas (Chairman), J Lea (Vice-Chairman), R Brookes, M Dadd, S Murray, C Nweke, W Marshall, C Amos and L Burrows

Members Present (Virtually): Councillor R Pugsley

Co-opted Member Present: Mr W Marshall

Other Councillors: Councillors I Allgood, R Balcombe, R Baldwin, N Bedford, C Whitbread and K Williamson

Apologies: Councillors R Sharif and S Yerrell

Officers Present: L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), J Taphouse (Interim Service Manager (Assets Strategy)) Surjit Balu, (Interim Director of Housing) and J Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer)

Officers Present (Virtually): M Picking (Democracy & Elections Apprentice)

Guests: Ben Johnson and Stuart Thompson, Qualis

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that this meeting would be recorded and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that:

- Councillor Amos had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Sharif and
- Councillor Burrows had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Yerrell,

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:

That the notes of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 3 March 2024 be taken as read and were agreed as a correct record.

5. WORK PROGRAMME & TERMS OF REFERENCE

Resolved:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed to propose the Community Lottery for inclusion in the work programme.

Action (1) relevant items submitted to the Members Bulletin should be circulated to Mr Marshall – L Kirman

6. HOUSING ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETRO-FIT

John Taphouse, Interim Service Manager, provided an overview of the planned approach to improve the energy efficiency of the Council's housing stock. This had two key phases: Phase 1 - all housing properties would be in SAP band C or above by the end of 2030/31, and Phase 2 - to be ready for net zero by 2050.

It was estimated that there were 2,374 homes below SAP band C. The initial measures would provide quick wins and would prioritise minimising fuel bills. The necessity to consider appropriate ventilation was highlighted. The customer experience was a key consideration to ensure the retro fit programme was completed. Phase 2 would require further consideration, closer to 2030 to determine affordable solutions that achieved the highest minimum level of energy efficiency.

The Committee welcomed the report and confirmed that it supported the key principle for Phase 1 should be to minimise fuel bills.

The Committee raised several queries and were advised that:

- grant funding estimates were based on the current level of 45%,
- the 30-year HRA Business Plan did make assumption on improving energy efficiency over the next 10 years
- there were no indicative figures, as yet, for the costs of Phase 2.
- the most cost-effective methods would be used to get properties to SAP Band C and this would be modelled for specific properties
- technological advances would be considered throughout the programme.
- standard specifications for specific materials as part of the retro fit would be developed.

Cllr Bedford, Housing Portfolio Holder reminded the Committee that boilers would not be on sale beyond 2025, this was a consideration for the replacement of boilers. He also suggested that a baseline figure for energy costs should be included in the report.

Resolved:

The Committee commended the report to Cabinet.

7. HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICES YEAR END PERFORMANCE & TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES OUTCOME

Surjit Balu, Interim Director of Housing, highlighted some of the key work that had been carried out by housing and property services over the previous year and advised that the report was structured into three key areas, performance, compliance and tenants' satisfaction. Specific details of each area were presented as shown in the report. Updated information from Housemark gave comparative data with others

in the sector, that showed the overall satisfaction from customers in Epping was at 75% in comparison to the average for local authorities at 65.7%.

The Committee raised concerns on the time properties were void and the impact for potential tenants and loss of income, They were advised of the process of reletting and works required, that pre-void works and processes were being developed with Qualis. The service performed well in relation to other social housing, although it was acknowledged that there was a differential with private sector housing. The Tenants & Leaseholder Panel had requested the presentation of KPI data, including voids, at future meetings.

Clarity was provided to the Committee that the Housing Management Target in relation to complaints received and resolved, related to how well the services performed in relation to the complaints process, and the performance was 94%. The tenant's satisfaction survey indicator was a perception indicator and reflected how satisfied individuals were with how the complaint was handled, the level of satisfaction was 36%, this was above the benchmark median of 33%.

The Committee acknowledged the progress made and the positive position of the Council in relation to compliance.

The Committee were advised that the estate management teams had be restructured into a north south split and the response to ASB had changed. It was acknowledged that caseloads could be challenging, and some customers had complex needs. The services were now operating with a full establishment and resident engagement officer role was being advertised.

Resolved:

The Committee provided comment and noted the report.

8. QUALIS PROPERTY SOLUTIONS PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS

Ben Johnson, Managing Director of Qualis, provided an overview of the performance of Qualis Property Solution for the last 6 months and noted that in future the years the year end for performance reports would align with the Council. The presentation focused on the achievements, challenges, performance for a range of measures, complaints and compliments, call handling, and business plan and the next 12 months, as detailed the agenda.

The Committee noted the positive element of performance around the speed of call handling and number of compliments and requested qualitative data on compliments.

The Committee were advised that:

- Qualis worked with existing volunteer schemes, local charities and organisation
- There were strong education links with New City College, around apprenticeships
- Qualis had supported developing interview skills with secondary schools.
- Three satisfaction surveys with HRA tenants had been completed and this allowed performance to be tracked.
- The Handy person and Garden Care Scheme had previously been provided by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF). 1 Handyperson and 2 Gardeners had transferred to Qualis and provided a service for vulnerable people who were unable to do the works that fell outside the repairs remit.
- Recruitment and retention was important and there had been challenges in relation to recruitment, but had stabilised.

- The use of sub-contractors was limited and 100% of grounds, 95% of repairs, 100% of gas servicing, and approximately 75% of planned works were provided by in house staff
- The position of Qualis in relation to Trade Unions remained unchanged.
- The reported position on voids was an average, across all the different categories of voids, a breakdown of the different categories was discussed as part of the core meetings with EFDC.

Resolved:

The Committee provided comment and welcomed the report.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED:

The committee noted the date of the next meeting would be held on 24 September 2024 at 7:00pm.

CHAIRMAN