

# **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**Tuesday 2 July 2024, 7.00 pm – 8:40pm  
Council Chamber - Civic Offices**

- Members Present:** Councillors J Parsons (Chairman), M Markam, I Allgood, R Bassett, L Burrows, M Dadd, M Morris, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse and S Rackham
- Apologies:** Councillor(s) A Ardakani and T Bromwich
- Officers In Attendance:** Laura Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), Phil Hawkins (Contract Compliance Specialist GM), Mandy Thompson (Service Director - Regulatory Services), James Warwick (Service Director (Contracts, Partnerships and Procurement)), Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Rebecca Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer) and David Marsh (Waste Management Team Manager)
- Officers In Attendance (Virtually):** Matt Picking (Democracy & Elections Apprentice)
- Contractor:** Christopher Burgess and Maria Sharples, Qualis Property Solutions

## **1 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the meeting would be broadcast on the Internet

## **2 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Committee noted that Councillor Rackham had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Ardakani.

## **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Bassett declared a non pecuniary interest as a non-executive director of Qualis.

## **4 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the notes of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 22 February 2024 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## 5 TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman advised the Committee of changes to the work programme. Item P1 North Weald Airfield New Control Tower / Fire Station development and Post Google Land Sale Obligations, the report had been to Cabinet and aspects of the report would be presented at the next full Council, and item P2 The Adoption of the Essex Waste Strategy had been to a previous Place Scrutiny, both items would be removed from the work programme.

The Chairman requested that the update on the new Epping Leisure Centre be scheduled for the scrutiny meeting on 21 January 2025.

### **Resolved:**

The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference and the Work Programme for 2024/25.

## 6 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE PERFORMANCE

Mandy Thompson, Technical Service Director and Maria Sharples, Head of Operations, Qualis Property Solutions (QPS) provided a summary of the background of the transfer of grounds maintenance to QPS on 1 May 2023, the management of the contract, and the scope of the services provided.

The Committee were advised that baseline data on performance had been collected, this had enabled agreed key performance targets to be developed for the next 12 months. The targets were currently being met and regular monitoring was carried out. It was highlighted to the Committee that customer satisfaction surveys were currently sent to housing tenants only.

Improving quality was a key focus, the initial grass cutting season and staff recruitment had created challenges, and the resulting impact was acknowledged. The IT system had been reviewed and by March 2025 the Confirm system would be fully utilised. The contract was now fully staffed and recruitment for an apprentice and a coordinator had commenced.

The Chairman reminded the Committee about the Councillor Grounds Maintenance 'walkabouts' and encouraged members to attend.

The Committee

- suggested that joint inspections could include Parish and Town Councils to ensure some clarity of the ownership and responsibility of specific areas.
- detailed that resident reported grounds issues and did not differentiate between ownership, the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Balcombe advised that he was aware of this and was looking for a way forward.
- acknowledged that enforcement for privately owned areas was the responsibility of ECC and suggested that, with permission, a paid for service could be developed with QPS or the highway rangers.
- detailed that when hedges and verges were cut, litter could be exposed and asked if litter picking could be co-ordinated with hedge cutting? The officer advised this would be investigated.

The Committee were advised that

- a pack based on a ward map and schedule of works was being developed for members. This should be available within 6 weeks, dependant on the licenses associated with the maps. The current maps did not show highways, which were the responsibility of Essex County Council (ECC)
- changes to the contract were being considered to see if some ad hoc works, e.g clearing alleyways, shrub maintenance, and basal growth could be incorporated

through more efficient working. Significant changes to the contract, e.g a new development, would require a change control notice and appropriate approval.

- weed spraying was the responsibility of ECC. The waste management team was contracted to carry out the works, twice a year in seven town centres in the district
- new trees, planted by ECC had a watering programme for three years.
- the Highway Rangers did support grounds and picked up some aspects which fall outside of the contract and were on council land
- the grounds co-ordinator role, coordinated the voluntary garden project (formerly mow and grow), scheduling, inspections regime and collating performance information,
- the first cut of grass could be variable depending on the weather conditions, and a second cut was ideal. The schedule and large area covered left no capacity for an additional cut at the start of the season. Alternative cutting equipment and mowers may provide a solution in the future.
- the apprentice would be incorporated into a variety of teams and have a buddy, there were clear development programmes for all new starters.

The Chairman Requested, that the seasonal variation be included in the next report to Scrutiny.

**Resolved:**

The Committee noted the report.

## 7 WASTE POLICY CHANGES

James Warwick, Service Director Contacts, introduced the report and advised the Committee that several operational waste policies had been reviewed to ensure that they were fit for purpose before the commencement of the new waste collection service with TVS in November 2024. Amendments were proposed to the exception policy, flats and communal buildings policy, supply of waste & recycling services policy, contamination policy, and container policy. The detailed amendments were highlighted and included in the appendices to the report.

The Committee

- suggested there could be greater awareness of recycling in flats and that further information could be included in the policy. The Committee were advised that the managing agents were responsible for waste in flats and officers worked them to support and encourage recycling, and that new regulation would support recycling in flats.
- raised concerns in relation how written permission would be gained for collection vehicle to access on private roads. The Committee were advised that if written permission was not given bins would be collected from the highway, the collection of bins on a private road was a concession, private roads were classified as not on the public highway. The amended wording would formalise the policy and reduce the risk of any insurance claims being made against the Council. If the policy change was adopted awareness and contact with residential committees and managing agents would be made
- The Committee were advised with the increase in kerbside collection the need for recycling banks had diminished. Recycling banks could attract fly tipping, and often waste materials were placed in them causing contamination.
- suggested early engagement with developer and the inclusion of access to private roads for waste collection vehicles in the legal agreement for new developments. Officers advised that the waste service had developed a waste policy guidance for planning, and would offer training to planners, meetings between the services took place and that planning conditions were used to address waste collection

- the blue bins trial had been well received; this was still in the trial phase as evidence was still being gathered. A member decision would be required to implement a change across the district. A business case would be developed this would be presented at Scrutiny, in due course.
- were advised that waste analysis showed up to 33% of waste in residual bins could be food, but there was a low proportion of garden waste in residual bins.
- regulations detailed that a charge may be made for clinical waste, this policy wording aligned with the regulations, but there were no plans to charge for this service.

There was agreement that there was a need to encourage and target awareness to increase recycling, and an acknowledgment that the space on the current recycling leaflet restricted information

The Committee voted for the proposed changes and gave the Lead Officer authority to amend the policies in line with the discussion.

**Resolved:**

The Committee commended the policy changes, in principle, to Cabinet and agreed that the Blue Bin roll out should be included in the work programme.

**8 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Resolved:**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting as 22 October 2024.