

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 15 October 2024, 7.00 pm – 8.45 pm
Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Members Present: Councillors L Burrows (Chairman) L Mead (Vice-Chairman), E Barnard, R Balcombe, C Amos, R Baldwin, I Allgood, R Bassett, N Bedford, R Brookes, B Church, B Cohen, T Cornish, A Ardakani, S Heather, S Jones, H Kauffman, W Kauffman, P Keska, J Lea, A Lion, M Markham, T Matthews, J McIvor, L Morgan, R Morgan, M Morris, S Murray, M Owen, J Parsons, S Patel, C C Pond, R Pugsley, S Rackham, D Sunger, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson and S Yerrell

Apologies: Councillor(s) M George, T Bromwich, M Dadd, I Hadley, J Lucas, C McCann, C Nweke, K Rizvi, R Sharif, D Stocker and G Wiskin

Officers In Attendance: Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Nathalie Boateng (Service Manager / Solicitor - Legal Services (Shared Services)), Gary Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services) and Rebecca Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer)

Officers In Attendance (Virtually): Andrew Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer) and Therese Larsen (Democratic Services Officer)

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

30 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Services Team Manager 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.

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, the Monitoring Officer, N Boateng, gave a dispensation to all Members who felt compelled to declare a pecuniary interest in item 13 of the agenda – Motions – if they were either in receipt of Winter Fuel allowance or affected by the rule changes recently announced by the Government.

32 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

(1) That the minutes of the following Council meetings held be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record:

(a) 23 July 2024; and

(b) 8 August 2024.

33 ANNOUNCEMENTS**(a) Announcements by the Chairman of the Council**

The Chairman announced that last month he had attended the Costermongers Harvest Festival in the Guildhall Yard, London, which was a colourful and historical event hosted by the Pearly Kings and Queens of London. The Chairman also had the honour to be invited to Epping Upland Church for the unveiling of a monument dedicated to Sergeant Pilot Feliks Gmur, who had served in 151 Squadron and died in the Battle of Britain after his plane was shot down and crashed at Epping Green, Essex. It was a very moving service attended by members of the local Polish community.

The Chairman reminded members that this year Remembrance Sunday would take place on 10 November, and the Council would be represented by past Chairman, Portfolio Holders and Ward Members at 15 wreath laying services around the District. In addition, the Civic Carol Service would be at St Mary's Church, Theydon Bois on Friday 13 December at 6.45pm, and the Chairman hoped many Members would be able to attend this very special service.

Finally, the Vice-Chairman, Cllr L Mead, had a supply of small pin badges in support of the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance, which could be purchased for a suggested minimum donation of £5 each after the meeting.

34 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The Council had received the following public question from a resident, Mr C Hansen, in accordance with the provisions contained within the Council Procedure Rules:

"I wish to ask a question relating to the standing water at the junction between Honel Lane and Woodgreen Road, opposite the Primo Piatto restaurant, which has resided on the highway for the past 25 years, exactly the length of time I have been corresponding with Councillors, including the Honey Lane ward, Thames Water, Essex CC (Highways) and at least two Epping Forest MPs.

Currently the area resembles a standing pond, in places to a depth of 5 – 10mm and in the past three weeks a huge hole has appeared in the road which presents a significant hazard to all road users. The area looks a disgrace, but after 25 years I think people have forgotten how the area should look. Perhaps local maps should be amended to depict a small pond, rather than a highway. I predict serious injury will result sooner rather than later.

My question to the Council, pertaining to the above is how much longer can you ignore this significant hazard to motorists? I have been told for 25 years it is not the Council's responsibility, however, are you really going to refuse an issue which is all Epping DC resident's responsibility, as it relates to reporting a significant health and safety hazard. In tandem to the latter, after 25 years of trying, should I, Mr Hansen, simply give up trying to resolve?"

The Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, agreed that this was a problem, and was causing traffic safety issues. The location was not within his County Council Division but was aware that the County Councillor for the Division had raised this issue with Essex Highways in the past. This was clearly a multi-partner issue with both the Highways authority and Water company involved, and Cllr C Whitbread reassured the resident that he would take the matter up with Essex Highways the following day and attempt to get a Highways Officer to visit the site for an inspection.

35 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

The Council had received the following question by a Member under notice from Cllr T Bromwich for Cllr H Whitbread, Portfolio Holder for Finance & Economic Development:

“As the Cabinet Member responsible for promoting business locally, is she aware of any animals being sold as prizes across the District at any local fairs or as part of any small-business prize giving, and if so, whether she will work with me to end the practice?”

Cllr H Whitbread stated that the Council was unaware of any instances locally where pets were being sold as prizes. Under current legislation, it was illegal to give pets as prizes in fairgrounds and if Cllr Bromwich felt that there were any gaps or loopholes in this policy area then he should contact his local Member of Parliament – Alex Burghart – directly to discuss this matter. If the Council was aware of any such instances occurring within the District then the Council would condemn the practice and bring it to the attention of the Police.

36 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Council received written reports from Portfolio Holders. The Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide an oral report and the opportunity for other members of the Cabinet to give updates on matters concerning their relevant portfolios.

(a) Leader of the Council

The Leader reported that he had meetings with Parish and Town Councils, plus other authorities in North Essex, to discuss ways to co-operate further in the future. The Leader had also visited the construction site for the new Sports Centre in Epping. Excellent progress was being made; the project was on time and on budget.

The Council was informed the Council that the Chief Executive Officer had been absent since July due to sickness, and it was hoped that she would be back at work soon. The Leader extended his thanks to the Council's Strategic Directors A Small and J Gould who had been covering the Chief Executive Officer's absence during this period.

The report of the Leader of the Council was noted.

(b) Housing & HGGT Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder informed the Council that the Latton Design Code and Latton Priory consultation documents were now publicly available for consultation. Responses to the consultation will be received up to 1 November 2024; this period might be extended throughout the duration of the application as there was late notification to some residents in the local area.

The report of the Housing & HGGT Portfolio Holder was noted.

(c) Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder

The report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder was noted.

(d) Shaping Our District Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder added that the public consultation on the St John's Conservation Area in Buckhurst Hill had been extended to 18 November 2024.

The report of the Shaping Our District Portfolio Holder was noted.

(e) Commercial & Estates Portfolio Holder

The report of the Commercial & Estates Portfolio Holder was noted.

(f) Transformation Portfolio Holder

The report of the Transformation Portfolio Holder was noted.

(g) Contracts Delivery Portfolio Holder

The report of the Contracts Delivery Portfolio Holder was noted.

(h) Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder

The report of the Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder was noted.

(i) Regulatory, Technical & Community Safety Services Portfolio Holder

The report of the Regulatory, Technical & Community Safety Portfolio Holder was noted.

37 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

Question asked by:	Question asked to:	Subject of the Question:
Cllr H Whitbread	Cllr K Williamson	A forthcoming application to grant permission to fell an historic Redwood Tree in Epping.
Cllr S Murray	Cllr T Matthews	The departure of the Chief Executive Officer for Qualis Commercial not being reported to Councillors but highlighted in the local media.
Cllr J Parsons	Cllr R Balcombe	A smooth transition for the implementation of the new Waste Management Service in three weeks' time.
Cllr H Kauffman	Cllr K Williamson Cllr N Bedford	The planning services being offered by the Council, the change of the Planning Committee structure, and the requirement for Members to receive specialist training.
Cllr J Lea	Cllr H Whitbread	Update on the performance of the District Museum following its conversion to a charitable trust.
Cllr C Pond	Cllr H Whitbread	What are the proposed uses for the capital receipt received from Google in the longer term.
Cllr J McIvor	Cllr N Bedford	Concerns expressed by Essex County Council with the designated clean air

		zones in the Council's Local Plan.
Cllr J McIvor	Cllr K Williamson	Some of the allocated sites within the Local Plan do not appear to have safe access, and how can this issue be resolved.
Cllr J M Whitehouse	Cllr K Rizvi	Possible changes to the discretionary funding available from the Council.
Cllr T Matthews	Cllr C Whitbread	The reporting of traffic issues in Waltham Abbey to Essex County Council.

38 REPORT OF THE CABINET - CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27

The Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, presented a report from the Cabinet requesting adoption of the Council's revised Corporate Plan 2023-27, following some amendments to reflect the Fit for the Future themes agreed by the Cabinet, and to specific objectives for Housing, Planning and Finance.

In response to questions from Councillors, the Leader gave further information on the scope of the newly established 'Place Fund', and acknowledged the points made by Cllr M Morris in respect of reducing the carbon footprint of the Council and its residents.

Resolved:

- (1) That the amendments to the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-27 recommended by the Cabinet and detailed in Appendix A of the report be adopted.

39 REPORT OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2023/24

The Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee, Cllr J M Whitehouse, presented the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2023/24. The Annual Report detailed the Committee's work and achievements throughout the municipal year, and also demonstrated to residents and other stakeholders the vital role carried out by the Committee and its contribution to the Council's governance arrangements. In addition, the Committee was confident that a process was in place to identify and monitor risks, and ensure key Members and Officers were aware of them.

The Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Cllr H Whitbread, paid tribute to former Councillor P Bolton for his work as the Chairman of the Committee during 2023/24, and to the Finance Officers who supported the work of the Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2023/24 be approved.

40 REPORT OF THE APPOINTMENTS PANEL - OUTSTANDING NOMINATIONS FOR THE PLANNING COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

The Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, presented a report from the Appointments Panel regarding the outstanding appointments to Outside Bodies, and the formal approval of the

appointments to the two new Planning Committees.

At the extra-ordinary Council meeting held on 8 August 2024, it was agreed to replace the existing Planning Committees with two new Planning Committees, A and B. Each Committee would consist of nine Members, with five Members nominated by the Conservative group, two by the Loughton Residents Association, one by the Liberal Democrats and one Independent Member. Cllr C Whitbread reported that the Conservative group was proposing that Cllr R Bassett be appointed to Planning Committee A in place of Cllr R Pugsley. In addition, it was proposed and seconded that Cllr M Morris be the Independent Member for Planning Committee B. There were two nominations received for the Chairmanship of Planning Committee B, however Cllr W Kauffman stated that he would be happy to be the Vice-Chairman, so Cllr S Jones was appointed as the Chairman.

In response to a question from Cllr S Murray, Cllr K Willaimson stated that a training programme for the Officers and Members of the Planning Committees was currently being discussed and would be implemented. A list of the planned courses would be available once they had been agreed.

Following the withdrawal of Cllr P Keska as one of the nominations, there were four nominations from the District Council to the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel. Although the Panel had originally requested three nominations, the Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, reported that he would request the Panel to accept all four nominations from the District Council.

The outstanding nominations for the Epping Forest Local Liaison Group was considered. Cllr C Pond reported that the nomination for the Loughton Forest ward would be shared between Cllrs I Allgood and M Owen, but only one would attend any one meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That, as listed in Appendix 1, the Membership, Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship of Planning Committee A and B be approved;
- (2) That, as listed in Appendix 2, the appointments for the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel for the remainder of the municipal year be approved; and
- (3) That, as listed in Appendix 2, the appointments to the Epping Forest Local Liaison Group for the remainder of the municipal year be approved.

41 MOTIONS

The Council considered a motion regarding the Government's recent decision to restrict Winter Fuel Payments to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits, moved by Cllr H Whitbread and seconded by Cllr N Bedford.

There were no amendments proposed, so the motion as first moved was adopted.

Resolved:

This Council Notes:

- the Labour Government's recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves. This decision will affect over 22,000 pensioners in Epping Forest;

- the estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it;
- the significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of the Epping Forest District and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health;
- the criticism from Age UK, the Countryside Alliance and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change; and
- the additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.

This Council believes:

- that the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship;
- while some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across the Epping Forest District sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit and will now lose their allowance;
- the decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents; and
- the government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.

This Council resolves to:

- promote local awareness for those eligible for Pension Credits, to help residents access Winter Fuel Payments for those most in need;
- request that the Leader of Council write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty;
- commit the Council to publicly support the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all Members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves;
- encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through Council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in the Epping Forest are supported in claiming their entitlement; and
- work with partners including charities to provide support to the most vulnerable elderly people in our communities - including the provision of 'warm hubs' and continuing to promote the 'stay safe and well this winter' initiative.

42 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr R Baldwin, informed the Council that the Committee's last meeting had been on 30 July 2024, and the Committee had examined the quarterly Corporate performance reports and reviewed its own Work Programme. The next meeting would be on 29 October 2024, and would be a single issue meeting with representatives from Transport for London (TfL) in attendance. A wide range of questions had already been submitted by Members for the meeting, but there was still time to submit further pertinent questions. The next regular meeting of the Committee would be on 19 November 2024, and the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee which had been abandoned would reconvene on Tuesday 22 October 2024.

Cllr S Murray requested that the issue of the recent 33% increase in car park fees at TfL stations be included as a question for the meeting, and expressed concern about the scrutiny of an additional wheeled bin as part of the waste service after it had been trialled in Theydon Bois but there was no qualitative feedback in the report for the meeting next week.

The Council noted the report from the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

43 JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no updates received from Councillors who had been appointed to represent the Council on external organisations.

44 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Council noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

Appendix 1

Planning Committee 'A'

	Conservative	LRA	LibDem	Independent
Chairman	S Heather			
Vice-Chairman	A Lion			
Members	R Morgan	B Cohen	R Sharif	T Bromwich
	R Bassett	W Kauffman		
	S Heather			
	A Lion			
	T Matthews			

Planning Committee 'B'

	Conservative	LRA	LibDem	Independent
Chairman	S Jones			
Vice-Chairman		W Kauffman		
Members	K Williamson	A Ardakani	C Amos	M Morris
	M Dadd	W Kauffman		
	S Jones			
	J Lea			
	D Stocker			

Epping Forest Local Highways Panel

Epping Forest Local Highways Panel (3)	A Lion J Lea S Rackham J H Whitehouse
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Epping Forest Local Liaison Group

Epping Forest Local Liaison Group (specific ward representation only)	(BHW) (1) (EE) (1) (EWR) (1) (LFM) (1) (LFOR) (1) (LSJ) (1) (TBWP) (1) (WAN) (1) (WASR) (1)	K Williamson J M Whitehouse H Whitbread L Mead I Allgood / M Owen C Pond C Amos J Lea T Matthews
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