

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 16 September 2014

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.35 pm

Members Present: Councillors R Morgan (Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee) (Chairman) K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman) K Chana, T Church, D Dorrell, L Girling, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Knapman, Mrs J Lea, A Mitchell MBE, S Murray, Mrs M Sartin, Ms G Shiell, B Surtees, A Watts and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors C Whitbread, R Bassett, Mrs A Grigg, D Stallan and G Waller

Apologies: Councillors G Chambers and B Rolfe

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods), S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant), D Butler (Young Persons Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer) and J Leither (Democratic Services Assistant)

12. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman 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.

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14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

In addition to the apologies noted above, the following apologies from the Cabinet were noted at the meeting:

- (a) Councillor S Stavrou – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance;
- (b) Councillor H Kane – Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Community Services; and
- (c) Councillor J Philip – Portfolio Holder for Governance and Development Management.

15. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillors J Knapman and H Kauffman were substituting for Councillors G Chambers and K Angold-Stephens respectively.

16. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the last meeting of the committee, held on 1 July 2014, be agreed, subject to the following amendment:

Minute Item 6 Review of Cabinet Forward Plan which referred to “Charlie Moules Footbridge” and that Loughton Town Council had “held up repairs.” It was advised that this was incorrect.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member’s Code of Conduct.

18. CORPORATE PLAN KEY OBJECTIVES 2014-15 - QUARTER 1 PROGRESS

The Committee received the Corporate Plan Key Objectives 2014-15 Quarter 1 Progress Report from the Democratic Services Manager.

The Corporate Plan was the Council’s key strategic planning document, setting out priorities over the four year period 2011/12 to 2014/15. Updates were published annually and were not intended to reflect everything that the Council did, but focus on national priorities set by the Government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the district. A range of key objectives for 2014/15 was adopted by the Cabinet in April 2014, progress in regard to individual actions and deliverables was reviewed by the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly and outturn basis.

At the end of the first quarter of the year 37 (68%) of the individual deliverables or actions supporting key objectives had either been completed or achieved, or were due for completion. Some 6 (11%) deliverables or actions were anticipated for completion in accordance with revised targets and 8 (15%) were unlikely to be completed by year’s end. A further 3 (5.5%) were currently on hold.

The current Corporate Plan came to an end in March 2015, Management Board had agreed to hold an externally facilitated session with Cabinet members for developing a new iteration of the plan for the next four years.

Members raised the following issues:

(a) Councillor J Knapman queried Item 4 (l) of the Key Objectives, Development of Council’s Waste Strategy, what would be reviewed here? It was advised that this item concerned the relationship between the collection authority and the companies. The Deputy Chief Executive would respond directly to Councillor J Knapman.

(b) Officers confirmed that Item 6 (a) provision of services to meet health and wellbeing needs was likely to be adopted in November 2014.

(c) Members queried Item 7 (g) Conversion of difficult-to-let bedsits into self contained flats and (h) Extension and refurbishment of Epping Forest District Museum as the dates of April 2015 for both did not match the dates set out in the same document under “Progress.” The Democratic Services

Manager advised he would clarify this with the Director of Communities.

(d) The Committee requested greater emphasis of the Council's commitment to achieving 0% Council Tax increase be made in the Corporate Plan in the future.

19. REVIEW OF CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Cabinet's Forward Plan for August 2014. They were asked if there was anything which needed raising.

Members requested that as with the Corporate Plan Key Objectives greater significance should be given to the Council's commitment on achieving a 0% Council Tax increase.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted; and
- (2) That greater significance be given to the Council's commitment to achieve 0% Council Tax increase within the Cabinet's Forward Plan.

20. LOCAL ELECTIONS - 22 MAY 2014

The Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding the Local Elections on 22 May 2014.

The following elections were held on 22 May 2014:

- (a) Election of 7 Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region of the UK;
- (b) 19 District Council Wards; and
- (c) 1 Parish Council by-election for Buckhurst Hill West.

Voter turnout at the various elections ranged between 44% in the Buckhurst Hill East Ward and 28% in Waltham Abbey Paternoster Ward. Turnout for the European Parliamentary Election, within the district, was 35.58% compared with a turnout of 35.90% across the region.

It was noted that there were few issues with the election, generally all practices were completed successfully. Members were advised of the following:

- (i) A total of 8,309 postal votes were issued, only 8 packs failed to reach electors and were re-issued;
- (ii) 73% of postal votes were returned, which equated well with previous elections;
- (iii) One nomination paper delivered on 24 April 2014 did not have the necessary consent to include a political party logo on the ballot paper. The agent had insufficient time to rectify this error, before the submission deadline;

(iv) Project planning and a Risk Register for the elections were prepared in December 2013 and reviewed regularly;

(v) There were 80 polling stations in 64 buildings with 72 presiding officers and 125 poll clerks;

(vi) All of the polling stations were opened on time, however at Murray Hall, Loughton, with two polling stations, there was some confusion for voters. Consideration would be given to improving directions for electors when using such buildings;

(vii) A complaint received about a candidate for Nazeing was referred to the police. The Returning Officer received some complaints about imprints on election literature which were also passed on;

(viii) The issue of postal votes went smoothly. Initially problems were experienced with software and scanners used for checking personal identifiers, but this was resolved remotely. 196 postal votes were rejected for various reasons, over 60 of which did not contain a ballot paper or postal voting statement. It was advised that new legislation required the Electoral Registration Officer to inform electors, after a poll, that their postal vote identifiers had been rejected;

(ix) No in-house printing problems were experienced, however the logo for one group was not reproduced as agreed following the 2013 elections. A proof had currently been accepted with this group's agent before the forthcoming election. As per usual, manual checks were undertaken on each printed ballot paper;

(x) The verification and counting of ballot papers took place at Theydon Bois Village Hall on 23 and 25 May. The count went smoothly; and

(xi) Police liaison was adequate during the whole process.

Members thanked officers for their work on a well run election and count.

RESOLVED:

That the report regarding the Local Elections held on 22 May 2014 be agreed.

21. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Panel received a report from the Returning Officer regarding Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 made it compulsory for this authority to carry out a review of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places within 16 months, starting from 1 October 2013, with further reviews starting on 1 October of every fifth subsequent year. It was necessary for the Council to consider polling districts and places in the Epping Forest Parliamentary constituency and those parts of the Brentwood and Ongar and Harlow situated within the district.

A polling district was a geographical area created by the sub division of a UK Parliamentary Constituency for the purposes of an election. A polling place was the building or area in which polling stations would be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station was the room or area within the polling place where voting took place.

Notice of a review together with details of the existing polling districts, polling places and polling stations were given on 24 March 2014. The consultation period ran from 24 March to 30 May 2014.

Results of the Consultation Exercise

(a) Epping Town Council advised that Homefield Close, Epping was split between two polling districts with electors occupying numbers 1-6 voting in one place and those at 7-19 voting elsewhere. It was recommended that house numbers 7-19 be transferred to the United Reformed Church.

(b) Parking difficulties at Allnutts Institute, Epping polling station could not be resolved as there was no suitable alternative within the polling place. However recently the District Council had funded works at the Institute for making the entrance safer and more user friendly.

(c) The Returning Officer had purchased a portable ramp for Hastingwood Village Hall polling station to facilitate easier access for wheelchair users.

(d) The Community Governance Review, in 2012, for Matching Green Village had changed the boundaries for parish, district and county council elections but there had been no opportunity for changing the Parliamentary constituency boundaries. As a result the parliamentary election in 2015 would involve some voters in Brentwood and Ongar using a polling station in Harlow, the situation could be managed with careful publicity stressing that there would be two polling stations at Matching Village Hall.

No representations were received from the public in respect of the Returning Officer's representations and none were received by the Returning Officers for the Brentwood and Ongar and Harlow constituencies. The following comments and views were also received:

(i) District Councillor G Chambers requested a different venue for the polling station for Buckhurst Hill West district ward, suggesting the library in Queens Road. There were two polling stations serving that ward currently, however the Library Service felt that polling day being a Thursday was their busiest day and therefore would be unwilling to close. They added that the public area was quite limited and it was impossible to open both the library and a polling station at the same time.

(ii) The re-development works proposed for buildings adjacent to the polling station at St. Mary's Parish Centre, High Road, Loughton could disrupt access for electors advised Loughton Town Council. They requested an alternative location.

(iii) Moreton, Bobbingworth and the Lavers Parish Council requested that polling stations for the High Laver East and Little Laver polling districts should be changed from Matching Village Hall to Magdalen Lower Village Hall.

(iv) An elector living at The Windsors, Buckhurst Hill who currently voted at the Woollard Centre advised that she previously had voted at the Church Hall, Lower Queen's Road, which was more convenient, particularly for elderly electors. It was advised that the Woollard Centre had been the polling station for many years, with the Church Hall only used when the Woollard Centre was being renovated.

A new polling station would be needed at Chigwell Row as the current one was being demolished.

Members were advised of problems experienced by residents of Breach Barns, Waltham Abbey North East Ward, who currently voted at the polling station at Waltham Abbey town Hall. This was considered to be too far away for some voters, and it was suggested that residents of Breach Barns should vote at the Community Centre in Saxon Way instead. The Committee voted to recommend that the town Hall no longer be used as a polling station for the Waltham Abbey North East ward.

RECOMMENDED:

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending the following:

- (a) That, following a review, the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Epping Forest District as set out in Appendix 1 as amended to this report and the reasons therefore set out in Appendix 2 to this report be approved;
- (b) That the proposals be published and copies made available for public inspection at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each Parliamentary Constituency covering the Epping Forest District and on the Council's website;
- (c) That the intention of the Electoral Registration Officer to reflect in the revised electoral register to be published on 1 December 2014 any alterations required as a result of the review be noted; and
- (d) That the Returning Officer, when determining the location of Polling Stations for future elections, take account of the comments made about Polling Stations during the consultation period.

22. CONSULTATION - LONDON INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY PLAN

The Committee received a report regarding the London Infrastructure Delivery Plan consultation from the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods.

The London Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) had been published by the Mayor of London for consultation making the case for better infrastructure provision in London.

The Committee noted that the London Infrastructure Delivery Plan did not set out how policies would be delivered, implemented and monitored. Instead, it

made a business case for London to control its own finances through fiscal devolution. The Committee supported the prioritization of transport schemes, such as four tracking the West Anglia Lines along the whole of the Upper Lee Valley and the Central Line because of:

- (a) Predicted job growth in Central London;
- (b) The Central Line's importance in delivering commuters to this area; and
- (c) Its particular importance to the lower end of the London-Stansed-Cambridge corridor.

Members were particularly concerned about providing car parking facilities around train stations as there was currently a congestion problem there.

Members supported the Mayor's approach to London's growth by keeping it within current boundaries and not encroaching on the Green Belt, at least until the full London Plan Review undertaken in 2015. However, the IDP also included increasing densities across London to meet housing and transport requirements. It was important that the Mayor of London engaged fully and effectively with cross boundary partnerships in the medium to longer term. Any longer term trends for high population growth were likely to be seen in the context of improving public transport accessibility.

Members agreed the response to the consultation which would be returned to the Mayor of London's office by the consultation deadline of 31 October 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the agreed response to the London Infrastructure Delivery Plan consultation be sent to the Mayor of London's office.

23. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(i) Item 4 Epping Forest College

The Principal of the college had addressed the last committee meeting, however members requested that the Principal be invited back to the Committee per annum.

RESOLVED:

That the Principal of Epping Forest College be invited to the Committee per annum and that an item be added to the Work Programme.

(b) Housing Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman had no comments to add.

(c) Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel

It was advised that Item 3 regarding the Joint Consultative Committee would be processed through another Panel route. Item 4 Review of the Council's Constitution was a major piece of work and was expected to take two years to complete.

(d) Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny Panel

The Panel Chairman advised that work was being undertaken to discuss local flooding problems and the poor communications with water companies.

Members asked about the yearly liaison with the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio Holder advised that the commissioner had altered his methods of meeting the public, concentrating less on formal meetings and forums. However, it was felt that Local Council's Liaison Committee could be an appropriate place for the commissioner to be invited.

(e) Planning Services Scrutiny Panel

The Panel's current Work Programme was noted.

(f) Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel

(i) Item 14 Call response/handling performance indicator

This item would be discussed at the next Panel meeting in November.

(g) PICK Forms Received

(i) Review of speaking arrangements and deadlines for submission of material to planning sub-committees plus terms of reference of the Planning/District Development Control Committee

This item was submitted to the Committee from Councillor B Sandler and was supported by Councillor J Knapman.

Members agreed to refer this issue to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the PICK form request regarding a review of Planning Sub-Committees and District Development Control Committee be referred to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel for discussion.

(ii) Review of Council's Grant Aid Scheme

This item was submitted to the Committee by the Assistant Director of Communities and supported by Councillor H Kane.

Members agreed to set up a Task and Finish Panel to discuss this item and report back to the Committee. They felt that membership of the panel should be between 5 and 7. Officers would ask for nominations through the Council's Bulletin.

RESOLVED:

(1) That a Task and Finish Panel be established to Review the Council's Grant Aid Scheme; and

- (2) That nominations to the Task and Finish Panel be sought through the Council's Bulletin.

24. CONSTITUTION AND MEMBER SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL - NOMINATION

At the Committee's last meeting there was a vacancy in the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel for a Member, not of the Conservative, Liberal Democrats or LRA Group. Councillor D Dorrell had indicated that he wanted to sit on this Panel. The Committee agreed for Councillor D Dorrell to be nominated to the Panel.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor D Dorrell be nominated to the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel.

25. PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL - REPLACEMENT CONSERVATIVE MEMBER

The Committee were informed that Conservative Councillor S Watson had stepped down from the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel. Members agreed that Councillor J Knapman be nominated as the replacement Conservative member to this panel.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor J Knapman be nominated to the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel.

26. AMENDMENT OF TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

The Committee received a report regarding an amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel. At their meeting on 16 July 2014, the Panel noted that the Terms of Reference needed updating to include new responsibilities for scrutinising KPIs, a proposal made by the Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the amendments updating the Terms of Reference for the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel be agreed.

27. AMENDMENTS TO THE PLANNING SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received a report regarding amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel. At the Panel meeting on 8 July 2014, the Panel supported amending the Terms of Reference which needed updating. Three items from the Work Programme were transferred which concerned responding to planning related consultations, receiving feedback from the Chair and Vice-Chair of Development Control meetings and Review of Business Plans regarding Development Management and Forward Planning.

Members asked about scrutinising Building Control, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that Development Management covered part of this area.

RESOLVED:

That the amendments updating the Terms of Reference for the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel be agreed.

CHAIRMAN