

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 12 JUNE 2018
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.05 PM**

Members Present: H Whitbread (Chairman), , S Heap, S Heather, L Hughes, A Patel, C Roberts, D Roberts, D Stocker, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse and W Marshall (Tenants and Leaseholders Panel)

Other members present: S Kane

Apologies for Absence: J Lea, A Beales, A Mitchell and Youth Councillor A Whelan

Officers Present A Hall (Director of Communities), J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services)), R Wilson (Assistant Director (Housing Operations)), R Wallace (Housing Options Manager) and A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (MINUTE ITEM 39 - 23.7.02)

There were no substitutions made for the meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN.

In the absence of a Vice Chairman, Councillor Patel was appointed Vice Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Select Committee held on 13 March 2018 be agreed.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J H Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 6, Review of Homelessness Strategy, by virtue of being a trustee of Epping Forest Reuse and Epping Forest Food bank. She considered that her interest was not prejudicial and she would stay for the consideration of the item.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE/WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted their terms of reference and work programme.

6. REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Assistant Director Housing Operations, Roger Wilson took the Committee through the report reviewing the Council's Homelessness Strategy. He was accompanied by Russell Wallace the Housing Options Manager.

He apologised that he had inadvertently referred to the Committee as the Housing Select Committee and not the Communities Select Committee in the report. It was noted that under the Homelessness Act 2002, Local Authorities had a duty to review and publish their Homelessness Strategy on at least a 5 yearly basis. As this area of work regularly changes, it was agreed that the Council's Homelessness Strategy would be reviewed every three years.

The Strategy linked with the Council's Housing Strategy, Housing Allocations Scheme and Tenancy Policy. The Strategy set out achievements since 2015 and incorporated the needs and demands on the service and actions that need to be undertaken over the coming three years.

Importantly, following the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force on 3 April 2018, some major changes had been made under this review. The changes were briefly summarised as follows:

- The period that a person could be considered to be threatened with homelessness or it is likely that they will become homeless was extended from 28 days to 56 days;
- An applicant was threatened with homelessness at the point the Section 21 Notice (which was the standard notice period provided by private landlords to tenants and was recognised as the single biggest cause of homelessness), had been served as opposed to at the end of the notice period, also preventing councils to advise applicants to remain in occupation beyond expiry;
- Placing an emphasis on services preventing homelessness from occurring strengthening the duties on local authorities to provide advice, securing accommodation and other help available;
- Ensuring services met the needs of groups at particular risk to reflect their complex needs and vulnerabilities;
- A duty to carry out an assessment of an applicant's case notifying the applicant of the assessment in writing and the provision of a Personalised Housing Plan in order to provide effective support;
- The applicant's right to a Review of their Personalised Housing Plan;
- The ending of the homelessness duty if the applicant "was unreasonably refusing to co-operate";
- The requirement to secure accommodation (under the new "Relief Duty") for at least 6 months for all applicants who the authority was satisfied were eligible for assistance; and
- The right to a Review of ending either the Prevention, Relief Duties or as a result of failing to co-operate.

The Housing Select Committee was asked to consider the Draft Homelessness Strategy and report any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder. A consultation exercise on the draft Homelessness Strategy would be undertaken over an 8 week period with all Stakeholders with an interest in homelessness including Town and Parish Councils. The Housing Portfolio Holder will be asked to consider the outcome of the exercise and any resultant changes and to adopt the revised Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy would take effect from 1 September 2018.

The Committee proceeded to go through the draft strategy section by section commenting as they went along.

Councillor Sunger asked if an applicant moved out before a court order was made

were they considered as intentionally homeless. Mr Wilson said that each case must be judged on its merits and explained the problems of matching evidential statements on homeless decisions.

Councillor Heap asked about applicants who were considered not to be homeless. He was advised that these were people who actually had somewhere to live and this had been ascertained by officers during their investigations.

Councillor Patel asked about the ethnicity of homeless applicants and if they were residents of the district or had they moved into our area. He was advised that they had to meet the homelessness residency test. Mr Wallace added that we also met the needs of domestic violence victims who may not have had a connection with the district. The ethnicity of applicants is set out in the strategy.

Councillor Whitehouse commented that she did not receive Housing News anymore. Mr Hall said that it is issued electronically although members should be receiving a hard copy twice a year, he would check this out.

Councillor Patel noted that there was a movement to become paperless, but a high number of residents did not have the facility and we should not forget them. He was advised that residents were given the choice of paperless or hardcopy for Housing News. Generally trying to keep it as paperless as possible.

Councillor Sunger asked about benefit claims that were stopped or reviewed, what sort of turn around time was there on this? Mr Wallace replied that Housing Benefits turnaround was 3 to 4 weeks. Officers were working with the 'Peabody Charity' who helped applicants apply; officers also offered assistance to help any urgent cases. Mr Wilson added that Housing Benefits also granted discretionary housing payments in appropriate cases. As for Council tenants in arrears we consider it a failure if we got to the eviction stage, by then we would have tried everything.

Councillor Heap noted that Housing Benefit was going and Universal Credit was taking over. This was causing a lot of problems and took a long time to start up. People had to manage their own finances. Could you help tenants who were in this bind and were waiting for their Universal Credit payments to start? Mr Wilson said that there were discretionary housing payments and a recently re-introduced preventing repossession fund which could assist people and prevent homelessness. Mr Wallace said that there were national problems with Universal Credit. The waiting time was 6 weeks and had now been reduced to 5 weeks. In September, Universal Credit would be rolled out in our district; although now payment could be paid directly to the Council from the Universal Credit payments for those with vulnerabilities.

From October 2018, certain public authorities in England will be required to notify the Council of any service users they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days. The Council was now obliged to provide a personalised housing plan to provide a framework for the Council and the applicant to work together in a positive and collaborative way.

Councillor Heap asked how the homeless person kept any paperwork if they were homeless. He was told that officers could print up the paperwork and/or store it on their system for the applicant.

Mr Wilson noted that the Council was very successful at homelessness prevention. Councillor Hughes asked what 'Crisis Intervention' was? She was advised that this would be for example, someone with a mental health condition.

Councillor Stocker asked about the repayment of loans that we gave applicants under homelessness prevention. He was advised that the Council received government grants for this and that we gave the applicants interest free loans that could be paid back over 3 years. This money was then recycled and given out again as loans to other applicants.

Councillor Patel asked, after our initial intervention, what support did we provide. Mr Wilson said that we used Family Mosaic, the Trailblazers scheme and also had expert staff to act as advisors.

Under the Relief of Duty section, Mr Wilson added some extra wording to add to paragraph 1.1.

Councillor Heap asked why the Modular Accommodation was taking so long to progress. He was advised that we were waiting for Planning Permission and also a lot of underground services needed to be put in – all this was taking longer than first thought.

Councillor Whitehouse asked for more information on the revised housing allocations scheme and the 2 year fixed tenancies for homeless applicants. Mr Wilson explained that 2 year fixed term tenancies would be granted to homeless applicants in order to give them time to resolve their housing situation. This is in the same way as discharging and duty in the Private Rented Sector which is the practice of many authorities. This will ensure the best use of our housing stock and assist more applicants.

Councillor Hughes asked how long could the 2 year fixed term tenancy go on for. Mr Wilson said that they could not generalise, the council would always have a legal duty to help, provide advice and help people move on and if necessary provide a further tenancy.

Councillor Patel asked if we could use the same format for the action plan as was used by the transformation team. He was told that this was not just for internal consumption and was for the public to see. So it had to be in a different format to the transformation tables etc.

Councillor Patel then asked who looked at the target dates that were not reached. Mr Hall replied that these would come under the project dossier that the Committee could look at and consider later.

The Chairman asked about having a breakdown by age as it would be interesting to see the numbers of people under 25. She was told that the table on page 39 and 40 of the agenda were looking at key age groups.

She then asked if there was any data going back before 2015. She was advised that each strategy was for 3 years so the data was there if needed, but a three year picture was considered good enough for comparison purposes. She then asked if there had been any real changes over the years and was told that the statistics stayed pretty static. Mr Marshall said that if you sent too far back you would not be comparing like with like.

Councillor Whitehouse asked how the consultation on this strategy would be carried out. Mr Wilson pointed out that this was on page 70 of the agenda. We would be

consulting partner agencies, this Select Committee and Town and Parish councils. Also our partner agencies and other agencies with an interest in homelessness; but not the general public as it was not a public consultation.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Housing Select Committee considered and commented on the Draft Homelessness Strategy;

(2) That it was noted that a consultation exercise would be undertaken for a period of 8 weeks with all Stakeholders with an interest in homelessness including Town and Parish Councils, with the outcome of the exercise and any proposed changes being reported to the Housing Portfolio Holder for consideration when adopting the revised Homelessness Strategy; and

(3) That it was noted that the revised Homelessness Strategy would become effective on 1 September 2018.

7. HOUSING SERVICE STANDARDS - PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017/18 AND REVIEW

The Director of Communities, Alan Hall introduced the Housing Service Standards, Performance report for 2017/18. He noted that any changes were set out in bold italics in the second column of the table attached to the report.

The Committee noted that since 2007, the Council has had a range of Housing Service Standards, covering all of the Housing Service's main areas of activity, formulated in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel.

The Standards, and the Housing Service's performance against them, were considered each year by the Communities Select Committee to determine whether or not any changes to the Service Standards should be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

It was noted that all references to the Private Housing Standards (Technology) Team be removed as they were now covered under a separate standard.

He noted that the Appendix to the report provided details of the current Housing Service Standards and – where measurable and appropriate – the Housing Service's performance in meeting the standards in 2017/18. As a comparison, the Appendix also provided details on performance in 2016/17 and 2015/16.

The Tenants and Leaseholders Panel Federation would be consulted on the Service Standards and the Performance Schedule at its meeting on 4th September 2018, and their comments and recommendations would be passed to the Housing Portfolio Holder at the same time as the Select Committee.

The Committee went on to consider standards as laid out in the appendix to the report.

G2 – generally satisfy at least 80% of our tenants with overall housing service provided – Councillor Heap asked how many responses were there from how many residents on the survey undertaken. He was told that this was done every 2 years. They had a very approximate 30% response rate with an approximate 20% of residents being surveyed.

HM2 – *provide you with the following options to pay your rent ...* - Councillor Heap noted that nothing was measured but the target was achieved. Mr Hall said that the report was erroneous to say that it was not measured, which he would change.

HM10 – *remove clearly abandoned and potentially dangerous vehicles from housing estates within 5 working days of receiving a complaint* – Councillor Heap asked how many had been cleared up. Mr Hall said that he did not know the exact number.

S9 – *repair 90% of faults to telecare equipment within 2 working days and 100% within 4 working days* – Councillor Patel asked why the target had not been achieved. He was told that the target of 90% was a much higher standard than the industry standard of 15 days and we had achieved 75% of the target. Councillor Patel asked what sort of support we gave to people when their equipment was not working. He was told that the majority took just over two days to fix but we also provided them with alternative equipment until the system was fixed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That performance against the previously-agreed Housing Service Standards in 2017/18 (where measured) and that the 80% achievement of all measurable and measured targets associated with the Service Standards be noted;
- (2) That, subject to the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel, the changes shown in bold italics in the second column of the Appendix be recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder for the forthcoming year - including the removal of all the private housing standards under the responsibility of the Technical Team, which were now covered by the separate *“Enforcement and Service Standards: Private Housing”* recently agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder; and
- (3) That the Housing Service Standards, and performance against the Service Standards in 2018/19, be reviewed again in June 2019.

8. 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGEING POPULATION STUDY ACTION PLAN

The Assistant Director Community Services and Safety, Julie Chandler introduced the six monthly progress report on the implementation of the ageing population action plan.

The Committee noted that in 2015/16 the Council carried out a comprehensive study into the impact of an ageing population in the Epping Forest District, which generated over 40 recommendations for the Council and a range of statutory and voluntary sector partners, to progress. These were translated into a detailed action plan, which has been in progress since October 2016 and it was agreed that the Communities Select Committee would be provided with six monthly updates on the progress and successful implementation of key areas of work.

The study suggested that the district was already home to 52,000 people aged 50 and over, of which nearly 2000 residents were living with dementia, and it was predicted that by 2025, these numbers would increase to 58,000 people aged over 50, and 3,500 people with dementia.

The study therefore enabled the Council to increase its understanding of the future resident population and provided the opportunity for the Council to consult their existing older residents, on their expectations and service needed as they aged, providing an insight into preferences and choices that they would ultimately make, in respect of their future lives in the Epping Forest District.

All statutory and voluntary sector partners involved in the study were delighted with the work undertaken, as the findings had been used to improve and develop their own services to the public.

The Committee noted that:

- Work was progressing well in the development of Dementia Friendly Communities across the district including Dementia Friendly businesses, with a business recognition scheme currently being launched;
- Projects to reduce social isolation were being rolled out as a pilot in Buckhurst Hill;
- Five strength and balance classes had been set up in Buckhurst Hill, Debden, Epping, Ongar and Waltham Abbey, as a collaborative approach to health improvement, through Public Health funding;
- An Active Living programme for inactive adults was being expanded to five locations across the district;
- Four 'Stay Well' events for older people would be taking place throughout November 2018;
- Officers were looking to develop more work with Public Houses across the district to offer free meals to older people. It was noted that this service was currently being provided in Fyfield and Buckhurst Hill;
- As part of the Council's Customer Services transformation, Officers were looking at providing paperless and hardcopy ways to communicate with older people;
- The Council was at an early stage in developing a new corporate website and would be implementing online platforms for older people to access services; and
- The Council was also working with NHS colleagues to develop digital support initiatives, to enable people to live in their homes for longer.

Councillor Whitehouse asked what were the Community Champions as mentioned in the action plan. She was told that these champions would be volunteers, who would initially work with the Council to identify gaps in services in local wards areas and latterly to help signpost those in communities who suffer from loneliness and isolation. Unlike Community Agents that work with people who had been referred to them.

Councillor Patel noticed that there had been a disconnect between ECC and the District, but they now seemed to be working together more.

Councillor Whitbread noted that local businesses were being made dementia friendly, how were they made aware? Ms Chandler replied that they had to start from scratch and visit each business and train them. Councillor Patel added that once a business had been trained it would roll this out to other businesses.

Councillor Whitbread asked if there had been engagement with schools on this. She was told the Youth Council had had training on 'Dementia Friends'.

RESOLVED:

That the Communities Select Committee noted the progress report on the implementation of the Impact of An Ageing Population Action Plan.

9. HOUSING STRATEGY: 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Communities introduced the six month progress report on the Housing Strategy. The Strategy also included a Key Action Plan, which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the first year of the Housing Strategy. New Key Action Plans will then be produced annually from October each year for the remaining period of the Housing Strategy.

When the Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy, it asked the Communities Select Committee to review progress with the Key Action Plans on a 6-monthly basis.

The Committee went through the action plan page by page.

Councillor Heap noted item 4 on Affordable Housing (development of additional affordable housing) and commented that the Council had to speed the development of additional affordable housing up. Mr Hall agreed and noted that the new Local Plan Submission Version, with sites with 11 or more units, requires 40% would have to be affordable.

Councillor Chris Roberts noted that item 11 on Council Housebuilding (51 new affordable homes, Burton Road, Loughton) the completion date had slipped and now said September 2018 - was this date when they were to be let or when the building works were to be completed. Mr Hall said the latest information he had was that it was due to be completed by the end of October 2018. Once completed we would hand over the site, so by November it should be occupied.

Councillor Patel noted item 9 on Affordable Housing relating to the Government's proposed introduction of a High Value Voids Levy and that this was pending action, what did this mean. Mr Hall said that the Government was proposing to require councils by law to pay a levy to it and the only practical way to meet this cost would be to sell high value empty properties. But recently the Government had gone quiet on this and has not asked for this in the past few years. Officers did not know whether or not this was going in the longer term.

Councillor Heap asked if item 13 on Council Housebuilding was to be completed by October 2019 as indicated. He was told that as of now, it was scheduled to be completed by October 2019.

RESOLVED:

That the 6-Month Progress Report on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2017/18, be noted by the Communities Select Committee.

10. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN 2017/18 - QUARTER 4 (OUTTURN) POSITION

The Director of Communities introduced the quarter 4 outturn report on the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan for 2017/18. The Corporate Plan was the Council's key

strategic planning document, setting out its priorities over the five-year period from 2015/16 to 2019/20. The priorities or Corporate Aims were supported by Key Objectives, which provided a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for these five years.

The Key Objectives are delivered by an annual action plan, with each year building upon the progress against the achievement of the Key Objectives for previous years.

There were 50 actions in the Key Action Plan 2017/18. At the end of the year:

- (a) 28 (56%) of the individual deliverables or actions supporting the key objectives had been achieved;
- (b) 15 (30%) of the deliverables were expected to achieve target in the next 6 months;
- (c) 6 (12%) of the deliverables or actions were not completed by year-end albeit significant progress had been made. Details of the progress made were set out in the comments against the individual deliverables or actions; and
- (d) 1 (2%) action was pending and could not currently be fully completed.

20 actions fell within the areas of responsibility of the Communities Select Committee. At the end of the year:

- 10 (50%) of these actions had been achieved at year end;
- 1 (5%) of the deliverables or actions were not completed by year-end albeit significant progress had been made. Details of the progress made were set out in the comments against the individual deliverables or actions;
- 8 (40%) of these actions were expected to achieve target in the next 6 months
- 1 (5%) action was pending and could not currently be fully completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the outturn position of the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan for 2017/18 in relation to its areas of responsibility.

11. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2017/18 - QUARTER 4 (OUTTURN) PERFORMANCE

The Director of Communities introduced the quarter 4 outturn report on the performance of the Key Performance Indicators for 2017/18 within its area of responsibility.

The Local Government Act 1999 required that the Council made arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions and services were exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

As part of the duty to secure continuous improvement, a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) relevant to the Council's services and key objectives, were adopted each year by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee.

Performance against the KPIs was monitored on a quarterly basis by Management Board and Overview and Scrutiny to drive improvement in performance and ensure corrective action is taken where necessary.

All indicators - The overall position for all 32 KPIs at the end of the year was as follows:

- (a) 21 (66%) indicators achieved target;
- (b) 11 (34%) indicators did not achieve target; although
- (c) 5 (16%) of these KPIs performed within its tolerated amber margin.

Communities Select Committee indicators - Nine (9) of the Key Performance Indicators fell within the Communities Select Committee's areas of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at the end of the year for these indicators, was as follows:

- (a) 7 (78%) indicators achieved target;
- (b) 2 (22%) indicators did not achieve target; and
- (c) 0 (0%) indicators performed within their tolerated amber margin.

RESOLVED:

That the Select Committee noted the performance against the Key Performance Indicators within its areas of responsibility for 2017/18.

12. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - PROJECT DOSSIER

The Director of Communities introduced the report reviewing the updated Project Dossier for the Transformation programme for the Communities Directorate, on behalf of the Head of Transformation. He noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested the progress of projects and programmes within the Transformation Programme – known as the Project Dossier – be reported to regular meetings of the Committee for review.

The Committee considered and reviewed the list of active High and Medium complexity projects, known formally as the Project Dossier.

Councillor Whitehouse commented that she felt these were impenetrable reports, for instance what did 'behavioural insight' mean? She was told that this was sometimes known as 'nudge theory' a way to encourage a resident to behave in a particular way.

Councillor Whitehouse said that she would like a few words added on each project in the dossier to explain the project. Mr Hall said that he would feedback this view to the Head of Transformation.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the updated Project Dossier for the Transformation Programme affecting the Communities Directorate.

13. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - PROJECT CHARTERS

The Director of Communities introduced the report on the Project Charters from the Transformation Programme, on behalf of the Head of Transformation. He explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested that Project Charter(s) from the Transformation Programme were submitted to the relevant select committees for their information.

The committee noted that a project starts its life as a Charter, which laid out the basic definition of the project and its scope. Alongside the charter the project manager and sponsor complete a Risk Potential Assessment (RPA) in order to assess the complexity of the project. The approval of Medium and High complexity projects by the Programme Management Office and Transformation Programme Board gives the project the mandate to move into the discovery phase. This process was facilitated by the link officer assigned to the project from the Transformation Programme Management Office.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the Project Charter on the Oakwood Hill Footpaths.

14. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman noted that she would report back on the Homelessness Strategy, the Aging Population progress report and the Housing Strategy progress report.

15. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of their future meetings.