

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MINUTES

Committee: Council **Date:** 17 December 2020

Place: Virtual Meeting on Zoom **Time:** 7.00 - 9.30 pm

Members Present: Councillors H Kane (Chairman), J Share-Bernia (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, R Baldwin, R Bassett, N Bedford, P Bolton, H Brady, R Brookes, L Burrows, G Chambers, D Dorrell, I Hadley, S Heap, S Heather, R Jennings, S Jones, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, Y Knight, J Leppert, C McCredie, J McIvor, L Mead, G Mohindra, R Morgan, S Murray, S Neville, M Owen, J Philip, D Plummer, C P Pond, C C Pond, S Rackham, B Rolfe, M Sartin, P Stalker, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies: Councillors A Beales, J Jennings, A Lion, M McEwen, A Mitchell, A Patel, C Roberts, D Roberts and B Sandler

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), S Jevans (Strategic Director), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and S Kits (Lead Corporate Communications Officer - People)

41. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Services Manager reminded everyone present that the virtual meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Council Meeting held on 29 October 2020 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to page 4, Questions without Notice, (d) New Epping Sports Centre, it stated Councillor J H Whitehouse had asked a question to the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio when in fact it should have read Councillor J M Whitehouse.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

44. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (a) Announcements by the Chairman of Council

(i) Former Joint Chief Executive John Scott

It was with much sadness that the Chairman informed Members that former Joint Chief Executive John Scott had recently passed away.

John Scott joined Epping Forest District Council as a housing manager and rose to become joint Chief Executive. As District Health and Housing Officer, his signature appeared on countless tenancy documents and agreements. His name was synonymous with house and home for thousands of local families.

He was an 'old-school' public servant. Housing was his vocation. Sometimes seen as a gruff plain speaker, those closest to him knew him to be a sensitive man who cared deeply. Today, many thousands of people live in safe, warm, good quality housing thanks to John Scott's legacy.

When the council restarted its council house-building programme, John Scott Court in Waltham Abbey was named in his honour.

Members paid tribute to the memory of former Joint Chief Executive John Scott and a minutes silence was held in his honour.

(ii) Lighting of the Menorah in Epping

The Chairman advised that she was delighted to be invited to attend the switching on of the Menorah in Epping.

At sundown on Thursday 10 December 2020 a giant Menorah (candelabra) was lit on the green in Epping to mark the start of the Jewish Festival of Chanukah.

It was the first time the festival had been marked in this way in Epping and had been brought about by Rabbi Yossi Posen and his wife Rivka who direct a Jewish Community Centre, the Chabad Centre which served Epping and the wider areas of West Essex.

(iii) Julie Chandler

The Chairman informed Members that Julie Chandler, Service Director, Communities left EFDC on the 11 December 2020 after 42 years of dedicated service to Epping Forest District Council.

The Chairman advised Members that Julie was one of the most committed members of staff she had the privilege to work with in her capacity as Portfolio Holder for Leisure. Hours were spent discussing and monitoring the progress of the refurbishment of the Museum and the excitement of opening the Tenders for the New Leisure Contract.

Julie started her career at EFDC as a lifeguard and sports coach at Ongar leisure centre back in 1978 she was promoted to an assistant manager working from the Hemnall Street offices where at its peak the over 50's New Horizons programme had over 2000 taking part in physical and social activities every week.

Promotion again came and as an Assistant Sports Development Officer Julie was responsible for managing holiday playschemes across the district. Stepping up again she was appointed Leisure and Promotions Officer responsible for the new logo's and marketing materials of all the leisure centres and the museum.

Many other promotions followed until Julie was appointed Service Director for Communities and Partnerships.

It must be noted that in her time Julie and her teams have competitively secured around £10 million external investment in Council Services for the community and her services have been and continue to be models of best practice across Essex.

I am sure that I speak for all members that Julie was an outstanding member of staff and we thank her most sincerely for her commitment to sport and to the district.

Julie will be missed but we wish you well in your new appointment.

(iv) Civic Offices

The Chairman advised that the Civic Offices would be lit up in green from the 24-26 December 2020 sending a message of hope.

45. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The Council noted that there were no public questions under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

46. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

The Council noted that there were no questions by members under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

47. 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 Council

Councillor C Whitbread stated that it had been a busy time since the Council last met and a lot of the Council's efforts had revolved around the Covid-19 situation. Members were aware that the Covid figures have been rising and the UK were in the top ten for infection rates.

Resources had been received from Essex County Council and the Government as businesses in the district had been hit very hard and he thanked the Officers for all their hard work and effort to help in getting the grants out to businesses across the district. There was also help for the residents who were self-isolating and encouraging those that should be. The message to all residents was about personal responsibility and hope that over the Christmas period people keep their travelling down to a minimum and to keep themselves as much as they can to stay within their own homes, so enjoy Christmas make the best of it but keep in mind all the people around us and let's try and get this virus beaten. It was encouraging to know that a vaccination has been found and the roll out of that had now started and we can all look forward to a better 2021.

The Council have signed and completed on a lease with HMRC for a customs facility at North Weald Airfield, which had been achieved within Government timescales and will become effective on the 1 January 2021 when Great Britain leaves the European Union and Members will be kept updated at this progresses.

Good progress was being made on the refurbishment of the Civic Offices and would be finished on schedule, by the fourth quarter of this municipal year and it will be good to get back to face to face meetings. It was encouraging to see that the apprenticeship scheme was continuing with a new intake of apprentices.

The recovery was high on the Councils agenda and there has been some brilliant work done by Members and Officers and a number of reports that have come forward to Cabinet and then onto Council in recent times and again my thanks go out to Officers for all that they were doing to help and aid that recovery. This will be really important when we come through the post-Covid period that we have an economic strategy that works as we move forward.

(b) Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder

Apprentices

Councillor H Whitbread advised that she had recently met six of the new housing apprentices and that she was really impressed how they had all gotten involved so quickly within the few months they had been working particularly during the pandemic.

Stay Well this Winter

Councillor H Whitbread stated that senior residents in the district were being encouraged to 'Stay Well this Winter', an even more important message this year given the challenges of the pandemic. I recently gave out a pack to one of my elderly neighbours. The packs contain useful information on how to stay well for the winter, hand sanitiser and a torch. These packs have been given out to all elderly residents across the Epping Forest district and was a very useful resource particularly at this time.

MiLife C19 Project – The Youth Council

Councillor H Whitbread advised Members that Cabinet had agreed funding for the Youth Council who continued to do brilliant work and had been working on a MiLife C19 project. This project was an online virtual programme with information about Covid-19 and resources, tips and coping mechanisms to encourage and support young people who were struggling with mental health issues.

(c) Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor N Avey advised in his report he had mentioned the new Highways Ranger service, which was a good news story for 2020. This service was working very well and we should thank the Officers involved for getting this service up and running so successfully.

48. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Chairman thanked Members for giving notification of intentions to ask questions without notice.

(a) Essex County Council's for the vulnerable during the Christmas period.

Councillor L Burrows asked the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder if she would like to comment on Essex County Council's support for the vulnerable through the Holiday Hunger and Welfare schemes.

Councillor H Whitbread replied that she was pleased when Essex County Council announced a Holiday Hunger programme, with the help of Government funding were able to roll out this programme. There were two specific programmes running in the district, one at Ongar Primary School run by the Red Balloon Foundation from the 21-23 December, there will be activities, arts and crafts for residents and children to get involved with as well as a healthy meal and a food parcel to take home. The second programme was at Oakwood Hill Community Centre in Loughton run by the Restored Church. In addition to this programme Voluntary Action Epping Forest and Essex Child and Family Wellbeing services were also providing food parcels and support to vulnerable families during this time.

(b) Demand responsive and regular services which were replacing bus route 87

Councillor C C Pond asked the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder what was being done with regard to linking in the Epping Forest Retail Shopping Park with Debden Broadway. He added that it seemed wrong that the Council should own a retail park and the only way to travel to the park was by car.

Councillor N Avey advised that he did not know the answer to the question but did agree with what Councillor Pond had said, he advised that he would speak to the officers concerned and reply back to Councillor Pond.

(c) How Covid had affected the District in 2020

Councillor G Chambers stated that 2020 had been a very difficult year and asked the Leader of Council if he could sum up how Covid had affected the district in 2020 and how the Council had performed during this period.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed that it had been a difficult year but it had shown the importance of Local Government, how good the officer teams were, how well that everyone, Councillors and Officers, had pulled together through the pandemic. There had been some brilliant examples in the way the Government grants were quickly turned around and sent out to businesses, Epping Forest was one of the fastest to get these grants paid in Essex. The work done around the welfare section and the ability to help high streets become socially distanced and doing the job as normal against the most difficult times. Learning to work from home, being flexible and doing all those extra things that make Epping Forest a special place to live and work in. As we move into 2021 there will be some hard times ahead and he had every confidence that Epping Forest would weather the storm and move forward.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that this was Councillor G Chambers last meeting as a District Councillor as he was stepping down to further his career and would like to take this opportunity on behalf of himself and all members to wish him well wherever the future took him.

(d) Civic Offices Accommodation Project

Councillor J M Whitehouse asked the Leader of Council if discussions had taken place with Essex County Council regarding the library and whether it would be occupying any of the space in the Civic Offices.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that there were ongoing discussions with ECC, negotiations were going well and hopefully by the next Full Council there will be some positive news to report.

(e) Qualis Staff Salaries

Councillor S Heap asked the Leader of Council how many employees had come from EFDC to Qualis and were Qualis paying their salaries.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that there had been staff transferred from the Council to Qualis and these staff were paid for by Qualis.

(f) Response from the MP about moving into Tier 3

Councillor S Murray asked the Leader of Council given that we had recently moved into Tier 3, does the Leader think the response from our MP was woefully inadequate in the sense that her only public quote was "I know this is disappointing news for the constituents and businesses". Therefore will the Leader use his good efforts to make sure that himself and our MP can go knocking on the Government's door and make sure that the businesses that were suffering got the support and were fully compensated, especially those in the hospitality sector.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that he did not have to comment or defend anyone's actions but would like Councillors to know that he was with the MP, Dame Eleanor Laing on Friday 11 December as she was preparing a letter to the Health Minister arguing most strongly for Essex to stay in Tier 2 and in particular Epping Forest. He stated that he knew how difficult moving into Tier 3 was for businesses, it was devastating for them, not only for the hospitality industry, it was devastating to all the feeder businesses, self-employed people who had not got three years of accounts and families. It was hard but the Government had to make tough decisions at this time and the Government were doing their best to get funding to businesses.

The job of the District Council was to get that funding to the businesses as quickly as possible and he advised that he had every confidence that the team at EFDC were working on that now. This Pandemic was ongoing and until it was under control there would be tough times ahead.

(g) Qualis – Social Housing

Councillor D Plummer asked the Housing and Community Services Portfolio Holder why council housebuilding under the Council's House Building Programme was subject to affordable rents rather than social rents. Affordable rents were a misnomer in that they would charge 80% or the market rate which was far from affordable for many families and also new council homes were subject to Right to Buy. Will the District Council commit to setting up a social housing association as part of the Qualis Group or could reasons be given as why this was not feasible.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that Qualis were committed to following the Council's Local Plan and delivering 40% affordable housing and the District Council continues with its Council Housebuilding Programme. With certain projects the Council look at different kinds of tenancies for example, St John's Road, a project looking to be delivered in Epping, those properties would not be the subject of a Right to Buy the Council and Qualis did look at different tenancies and different models of local housing were looked at with every site.

(h) The Landmark Building, The Broadway, Loughton

Councillor D Wixley asked the Leader of Council, in the absence of the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder, for several weeks there had been scaffolding up at the Landmark Building and it looked like there was work being done on the cladding, therefore concern had arisen whether the cladding was safe from a fire point of view and if there was an issue and would the Council have to bear the cost of any such remedial work or would it be down to the company that built the building.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that the Landmark was modern and Building Regulations had improved immensely and therefore the materials used would have been safe from a fire point of view. He would advise Councillor Patel to look into what was had been going on at the Landmark building and who would bear the costs and would ask him to report back to you.

(i) United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Councillor J Leppert asked the Leader of Council on behalf of a resident in his ward if he could clarify, in the light of a recent well-publicised Standards Committee case, whether he and the Council did or did not support and endorse Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stated that everyone had the right to freedom of opinion and expression which included freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek to impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Councillor C Whitbread replied that everyone had a right to an opinion and everyone had a right to be responsible with their opinions, unfortunately some people aren't responsible with their opinions and unfortunately Councillor Leppert you found yourself in that position.

(j) Qualis Fleet of Vehicles

Councillor J H Whitehouse referred to the report of the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder where it stated that a fleet of 24 vehicles had been provided to Qualis by the Council and wondered if the Council had already given millions of pounds to Qualis why therefore were the Council providing the vehicles to Qualis.

Councillor N Avey replied that he did not know the answer to the question and that he would get back to her. If he found there to be an issue he would publicise it to the rest of the Council.

(k) Government Business Grants during Tier 3 of the Pandemic

Councillor D Sunger stated that as the District had now moved into Tier 3 could the Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder confirm that the grants from the Government for businesses that needed support have now been distributed by the District Council and how many grants had been given out so far in this tranche.

Councillor S Kane replied that he was very conscious of the problems facing local businesses in the recent months due to the Pandemic and in particular the hospitality sector. The Government had made available to businesses a wide range of grants for businesses to provide some financial assistance which was then administered by the Council as the Local Authority. There were a number of different grants and the movement of our District by lockdown and different tiers had created an enormous complexity in the process. Businesses first had to apply for us to administer the

grants. He therefore assured Members and businesses that officers were doing the absolute best to make the application process as easy as possible, whilst maintaining the integrity of the award process which was required by Government. Officers had a target of paying all verified business applications by the Christmas break.

If businesses were contacting Members they should be referred to the EFDC website which was being reviewed and constantly updated in line with the most recent changes and ongoing circumstances.

(l) Qualis buying Commercial Property

Councillor M Owen stated that his question was to the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder and in his absence hoped that someone else could answer his question. He advised that he had some concerns with Qualis buying commercial businesses as this time, outside of the District, when a lot of businesses were reporting that their workforce would now be working from home and they would be reducing the headcount in their offices. Should Qualis still be going down this commercial property route or should they be re-assessing.

Councillor H Kauffman, Qualis Board Director advised that he was Chairman of the Risk Committee and Qualis had bought two assets, one was a Wickes DIY store in Malden and the other was an office building in Leatherhead. The blended yield was around 7%, if you look at interest rates, banking wise, the rate was down at zero and therefore you would be in negative interest rate territory very soon. Over the next two or three years money will go down in value and assets will go up, assets over the long term always go up therefore we had to buy carefully. He stated that he had been in this kind of business since 1977 and had also been to see the assets, he knew the quality of the assets, they were robust and not over rented. The office building in Leatherhead was rented by Hyundai and Zoetis, they were both multi-national multi-billion pound businesses and the rents they were paying were approximately £28 per square foot, which was very good value for a fully refurbished building. The office block has a ten year income stream and both properties were producing a gross income stream to Qualis of just under £1.4 million a year.

The Council had lent Qualis the money at an interest rate so Qualis was already paying a premium price for the money and getting a significantly surplus yield as we were receiving 7% blended on secure assets.

(m) Mitigation Strategy

Councillor D Dorrell stated that he welcomed the decision of Natural England to accept the Mitigation Strategy asked the Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder if he could give some indication to those whose business lives were being held up by the delay of nearly 2 years and what the next steps were and what actions were being put in place to expedite this problem matter.

Councillor N Bedford stated that he was please to announce that the Air Quality Mitigation Strategy had finally been agreed with Natural England. Officers from the Council at the highest level and those of Natural England to work tirelessly to get this Mitigation Strategy agreed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dame Eleanor Laing for intervening which helped drive this forward without her assistance The Council would still be without a policy that had been agreed.

At earlier Council meetings it was reiterated to Members how important this document was for business and builders who had no work and their businesses were failing, if we did not get this policy approved it would affect everyone in this district. The strategy affects everyone in the district from those that want to build a granny annex to the local small time builder who was building two or three houses where originally there was just one property.

The Conservative party have pushed this policy to the limit, it has been scrutinised over and over and the best minds in the Country had looked at it so much that Natural England were going to use the EFDC strategy as an exemplar to producing Air Mitigation Strategies.

I hope that Members would be able to support this interim strategy, without calling it in, to enable the Council's Planning department to start releasing the backlog of applications that they hold.

(n) Sites in Epping for development

Councillor C McCredie asked the Leader of Council with regard to the five sites in Epping to be developed by Qualis and would like to be assured that the green initiatives for these sites were not just a token gesture but would be planned and managed in a sustainable way.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed and replied that it went without saying.

(o) Work on the Civic Offices

Councillor P Stalker stated that he was pleased to learn that the work on the Civic Offices was progressing well and was looking to see the new facility and what it had to offer. He asked the Leader of Council for an update on when the Civic Offices would be completed and what services would it include.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that the Civic Offices would be completed by quarter 4 and was making good progress he added that when it was finished it would be amazing and will have multiple uses. The ground floor would hopefully house a library and negotiations were currently ongoing with ECC and a number of other partners and will bring forward an exciting future for the Council.

It was not just about the Civic Offices in Epping because we were a District that covered five major centres, rural and urban areas and it was about trying to reach out to those areas as well. The important thing to come out of this was the Civic Offices would be an office fit for the 21st century.

49. MOTIONS

(a) Voluntary and Charitable Organisations

Moved by Councillor S Murray and seconded by Councillor S Neville

“That Epping Forest District Council:

(1) Notes, recognises and celebrates the contribution and hard work of the voluntary sector and the many community groups working throughout the Epping Forest District;

(2) Puts on record Member's thanks to the many volunteers for their many hours of service to our local community; and

(3) Resolves to continue to support the voluntary sector and as many community groups as possible throughout 2021 and beyond."

Carried

Motion as first proposed ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

That Epping Forest District Council:

(1) Notes, recognises and celebrates the contribution and hard work of the voluntary sector and the many community groups working throughout the Epping Forest District;

(2) Puts on record Member's thanks to the many volunteers for their many hours of service to our local community; and

(3) Resolves to continue to support the voluntary sector and as many community groups as possible throughout 2021 and beyond.

50. QUALIS BUSINESS PLAN

Mover: Councillor A Patel, Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder

In the absence of Councillor A Patel, Councillor C Whitbread presented a report regarding the Qualis Business Plan 2020/21. He advised that Cabinet had considered the Qualis 2020/21 Business Plan Report at its meeting on 3 December 2020 and had Recommended the Plan to Council to be approved.

The Governance framework for Qualis, as agreed by Cabinet on 6 February 2020, set out the requirement that Qualis should seek agreement from its sole Shareholder (Epping Forest District Council - Cabinet and Council) for its proposed activities in the forthcoming year.

Under the terms of the Shareholder agreement between Qualis and the Council, Qualis were required each year to bring forward an annual and a 4-year Business Plan for agreement. The Business Plan set out the detailed activities for Qualis in the forthcoming year and once agreed by the Council, Qualis could deliver these activities without further recourse to the Council. Approval of the Business Plan represented the Council's main mechanism for annually influencing and controlling the activities of Qualis. During the year Qualis must only seek Shareholder approval if an action or activity sat outside of the approved Business Plan.

The Business Plan submitted by Qualis, attached to the agenda (pages 51-52), met the requirements to produce a 1 year Plan, setting out their immediate priorities. However, Qualis had asked for more time to produce their 4 year Strategic Plan as the permanent Board membership was only confirmed by Council on 29 October 2020. This would then give the new Board sufficient time to properly consider direction, longer term plans and strategy. Cabinet agreed that more time to properly undertake the development of a 4 year Plan was appropriate.

Councillor H Kauffman advised that in terms of complete transparency to all Members, he would like to propose a Full Members briefing to take place towards the end of January 2021 on the Qualis Investment Strategy, the two properties that have been bought, the one that was under negotiation and a discussion around the rationale behind those properties and their risk profile. If a presentation from an economist could also come to the meeting to give a strategy for the goals Qualis are trying to achieve, to assemble a institutional portfolio with limited risk that would stand Qualis and the Council in good stead for the long term.

Proposed by Councillor H Kauffman and seconded by Councillor S Kane.

Report as first moved: **ADOPTED**

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Qualis 2020/21 Business Plan be agreed; and
- (2) That an All Member Briefing be held towards the end of January 2021 on the Qualis Investment Strategy.

51. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22

Mover: Councillor S Kane, Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor S Kane presented a report regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/22, which had remained unchanged from 2020/21.

Report as first moved ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

That the revised Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/22 be approved.

52. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council received a written report from Councillor M Sartin, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the meeting that was held on the 19 November 2020. She advised that there was an amendment on page 75 of the Agenda in paragraph 1. where it referred to Dr John McGill this should in fact be Mr John McGill.

Councillor S Murray expressed concerns regarding the release of the restrictive covenants to Epping Forest College (New City College). He thanked the Members and Officers involved with the call-in to safeguard the land and the proposed new wellness centre for the community; and to resolve the future of the remaining open space and its protection for the community in perpetuity.

The sports hall that was built with public subscription for ordinary working class people to use which then got transferred to the college without any compensation to the local community. The College then proceeded to knock it down and sold the land for millions of pounds and an old peoples home was built on that land. New City College have campuses all over the country so what guarantee do the Council have that the money will be spent on the college in Loughton.

Councillor S Murray then went onto comment about the appointment of the new Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Stronger Place Select Committee and thought it was unfair that none of the minority groups were considered for these positions.

He asked the Leader if in 2021/22 he would be prepared to accept nominations for any chairman and vice-chairman for the Council and the Select Committees from a non-Conservative group.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that his group would be meeting regularly and would discuss Councillor Murrays question and would in time let the other groups know what they decide. It had been a very difficult year and next year would be no easier therefore, we all had to focus going forward to do the best that we can for the Epping Forest district.

Councillor M Sartin stated this was an outline report of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on the 19 November 2020 and the minutes of that meeting will be published shortly and they were very detailed minutes going in depth on a lot of these items. The call-in for the release of the restrictive covenants to Epping Forest College (New City College) did get referred back to Cabinet on 3 December 2020 and it was Cabinet who made the decision.

Councillor C C Pond stated that the fact the call in was referred back to Cabinet for further consideration, he advised he was looking to the Leader of Council to find a way of protecting in perpetuity the remaining open space which will be left in the so-called wellness centre so that at 5, 10 or 15 years down the line we do not have to have the same argument again and that it should be protected for the use of the people of the district in general and Loughton in particular.

Councillor C Whitbread replied that we all know how important green spaces were especially now in the light of the pandemic. In the new year I will arrange a meeting with the Chief Executive, Councillor Pond and myself to see if there was any way we could take forward some form of method of more protection for that area.

RESOLVED:

That the Overview and Scrutiny report for the meeting held on the 19 November 2020 be noted.

53. STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

Mover: Councillor R Morgan, Chairman of the Licensing Committee

Councillor R Morgan advised that on 30 November 2020, the Licensing Committee considered a report on renewing the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy.

The Licensing Authority had a statutory duty to review its licensing policy and as such, a consultation was carried out, beginning 22 September 2020 to 16 November 2020.

The new Policy updated the existing, to align with current internal council decision making; informing on current guidance and other publications and updating details of consultees. There was also a section that covered Exchange of Information, not included in the previous Policy document, which recognised the Council's responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulations. The Policy document would be reviewed again no later than 2025 or such earlier time if deemed necessary.

Report as first moved: **ADOPTED**

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations from the Licensing Committee be adopted.

54. CALL-IN AND URGENCY - ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT POLICY

The Chairman of Council, Councillor H Kane advised that in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Rule 53 (Special Urgency) of the Constitution she was satisfied that the following decision of the Cabinet was reasonable in all circumstances and should be treated as a matter of urgency as any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's interests, as it would substantially lessen the time to get grant payments to struggling businesses.

The Government has made available a range of grants for businesses during the Covid period. One of the grants related to those businesses that can remain open during the latest Covid lockdown but were severely affected by its impact, as an example there will be businesses that supply the hospitality business and remain open yet their income has been severely affected. The grant was referred to as the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) and it was for each local authority to determine their own policy in relation to this in accordance with Government guidelines.

Decision:

- (1) That the Additional Restrictions Grant policy be approved; and
- (2) That the Chairman of Council be requested to waive the call-in requirements for this decision due to it being considered urgent and any delay caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the public interest.

55. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

(a) Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF)

The Council received a verbal report regarding VAEF from Councillor B Rolfe, he advised that he had now attended the AGM and a meeting of the Trustees. He stated that he did not see any minutes from the VAEF as these were private meetings and he thought he should be party to those minutes.

The next meeting was on the 25 January 2021 and he stated he intended to bring a report to the next Council meeting.

Councillor S Murray thanked Councillor Rolfe for his report and stated that VAEF had a private element where other members were not invited, this was normal practice amongst most organisations.

Councillor D Plummer advised that VAEF sent out regular email updates to members and he found these to be very informative.

CHAIRMAN

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