

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Thursday, 27 January 2022
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 9.55 pm
Members Present:	Councillors M Sartin (Chairman) R Jennings (Vice-Chairman) R Baldwin, P Bolton, J Lea, K Rizvi, P Stalker, J H Whitehouse, K Williamson and D Wixley		
Members Present virtually:	Councillor P Bhanot, S Heather, S Murray and S Rackham		
Other Councillors:	Councillors R Balcombe, N Bedford, L Burrows, S Kane, A Patel, D Stocker, C Whitbread and H Whitbread		
Other Councillors virtually:	D Sunger		
Apologies:	Councillors I Hadley, A Lion, T Matthews and D Plummer		
Officers Present:	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), M Hassall (ICT Manager (Corporate Services)), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), P Seager (Chairman's Officer), G Wallis (Community, Culture & Wellbeing Service Manager) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)		
By invitation:	Dr R Gerlis, P Wightman and I Tompkins – West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group		
By invitation virtually:	A Marshall-Smith – Abovo-Consult		

71. 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.

72. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that Councillor K Rizvi had been appointed as a substitute for Councillor I Hadley.

73. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

74. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor D Wixley declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan Year 4 2021/22 quarter 3 corporate performance reporting in relation to Roding Valley Recreation Ground under the Green Infrastructure Strategy corporate project, as he was chairman of Loughton Town Council's Recreation Committee.
- (b) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan Year 4 2021/22 quarter 3 corporate performance reporting in relation to Roding Valley Recreation Ground under the Green Infrastructure Strategy corporate project, as he was a member of Loughton Town Council's Recreation Committee.
- (c) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor K Rizvi declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item on Forthcoming changes to the delivery and organisation of health services and the associated role of the local authority, as he was a GP based in West Essex.

75. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

76. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

77. FORTHCOMING CHANGES TO THE DELIVERY AND ORGANISATION OF HEALTH SERVICES AND THE ASSOCIATED ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Councillor M Sartin (Chairman) introduced the West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group – Dr Rob Gerlis (Chairman), Peter Wightman (Managing Director) and Ian Tompkins (Corporate Services Director). The Committee was informed that the Health and Care Bill published July 2021, set out proposals to reform the delivery and organisation of health services in England. From 1 April 2022, Epping Forest District would become part of the Herts and West Essex Integrated Care System (ICS) along with other district and county authorities, all NHS Trusts in the area, the voluntary sector and Healthwatch. The ICS comprised two statutory parts – an Integrated Care Board, NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex, responsible for NHS functions and budgets; and the Integrated Care Partnership that brought together a wider set of system partners to develop a plan to address the broader health, public health and social care needs of the local population. The Hertfordshire and West Essex ICS would have three of these 'places' – two in Herts and one for West Essex. The West Essex 'place' was known as the One Health & Care Partnership. A detailed question and answer session followed.

Councillor K Rizvi asked about the ICS recruitment strategy and how it would cope with any workforce crisis, e.g. through Covid or stress? Also, what was in place across the ICS regarding its governance, accountability and transparency? Mr Wightman replied it was a challenge, but the vacancy rate was down to 5%,

so there had been some success on this, and advice was provided for those coming from abroad. There was a special workforce hub and lots of work had been done in the GP community with some work being taken over from GPs, such as back pain. Dr Gerlis added that prior to the Covid pandemic, changes had been made to the way the budget was delivered, for example, to first contact physiotherapists and opticians (for minor eye conditions), thus bypassing GPs. A balance and continuity were needed. People could be dealt with over the phone but for those that couldn't, a balance needed to be found.

There had been a low uptake of Covid vaccinations in Waltham Abbey, but Councillor J Lea remarked that the large, new GP practice near Tesco supermarket had not been providing Covid injections. Also, diabetes tests were held in Loughton but there were no bus service links and many elderly people did not drive, so could more services be provided at this new GP practice? Mr Wightman replied that health equity work was important because feedback was needed to organise provider needs, e.g. for diabetes screening, to see how people were accessing health issues and collectively think how this could be done. Mr Tompkins advised that, to access vaccinations in Waltham Abbey, there was a free taxi service. Therefore, qualitative research was important. Dr Gerlis said that some services did need to be centralised, and so ICS must talk with you to address problems such as transport issues. Councillor M Sartin added that there were some rural areas in the Epping Forest District where public transport was an issue.

Councillor J H Whitehouse talked about the importance of local knowledge and that councillors attended meetings, such as Councillor A Patel (Community and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder), who was on the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board. Mr Tompkins replied it was important to work together and open channels with communities, parish councils and constituents, so the ICS could feedback information.

Councillor D Wixley asked if there was a strategy for dealing with health behaviours like [nitrous oxide] gas cannisters, which seemed to be (mostly) used by younger people. It was a dangerous and worrying health issue, and empty cannisters caused a litter problem. Dr Gerlis replied there was a greater risk of substance abuse from cigarettes but alcohol in particular. Alcohol abuse caused a big issue in hospitals. Mr Tompkins said substance abuse was not always in deprived communities or someone else's problem and the ICS needed to be more creative and get closer to the root causes of substance abuse. Mr Wightman added that in relation to lifestyle services, partnering with leisure services could help people make a difference to their health, and help prevent type 2 diabetes. Also, how far would the new Herts and West Essex ICS reach be? Mr Tompkins replied that health care boundaries were a bit false, as people tended to go to a hospital that was closest to them. Mr Wightman continued that on the primary healthcare boundaries for Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Chigwell, GPs had an important and closer relationship with Whipps Cross Hospital and Barts Health Care Trust.

Councillor R Baldwin asked if there would be an increased use of artificial intelligence in diagnostics and remote access. Dr Gerlis replied that balance and continuity were required, not just spot intervention. In terms of people's lifestyles, a lot of GP time was taken up by a minority of patients, for example, with diabetes. Making lifestyle changes was about prevention but should involve everyone, and pacemakers could be monitored remotely. Some AI diagnostic tools were good for repeatable / routine tasks and this was the direction technology was moving. Fewer people would need to go to hospitals if digital access could be used by communities at District hubs.

Councillor S Murray asked why the ICS approach would be more successful in improving socioeconomic inequalities, e.g. on access to adequate housing, as he could not see how there would be real change until it was addressed by national policy. Mr Wightman replied that it was hard to change socioeconomic inequalities, but the ICS needed to start with the health problems and what was being done on these, then investigate what could be done differently. By bringing GPs together and looking outwards at these health issues and what was most achievable, the ICS could make a difference.

Councillor D Sunger referred to Chigwell and that greater use of pharmacies there could help to promote wider access to health services. Dr Gerlis supported locating more health services on high streets, but pharmacies should have a separate consultation room where, for example, flu jabs and vaccinations were carried out. Opticians could also provide services direct to the public and likewise access to hearing aids, rather than through general practice. Also, in answer to what could councillors do to help, Mr Tomkins replied that information needed to be simplified and that information could then be shared through community networks.

Councillor S Rackham asked how Section 106 monies were being utilised? Mr Wightman advised that two staff were working on S106 monies, which contributed to primary care expansions and was a good process. Dr Gerlis added that more affordable housing was needed for the health and social care sector particularly in West Essex. There was also a very strong Anchor network across Essex.

Councillor A Patel asked what the funding opportunities would be for district councils going forwards? What would be the role of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board in the One Care Partnership? What assurances would there be that GPs would come on board and work with us as the primary care networks had struggled to engage? And how would Epping Forest residents' health concerns be addressed? Mr Tompkins replied the ICS was hopeful of funding from NHS England for a scheme called 'community connectors' for district councils at grassroots level connecting community networks. The Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board was essential going forwards and, where there was a will and determination, could start to make changes as the opportunities would be there. The ICS was committed to protecting the interests of West Essex and also did a lot of work with greater Essex as well as Hertfordshire. Mr Wightman added that the Integrated Care Partnership and councils would be represented at that Board level and the One Care Partnership would become the public face of accountability. GP surgery budgets would be larger to help provide wider services through healthcare partnerships, but it was also about setting realistic objectives.

Councillor M Sartin thanked Dr Gerlis, Mr Wightman and Mr Tompkins for giving up their time to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and answering the many questions raised. Members had been able to gain a valuable insight into what the changes would mean for the delivery and organisation of the health services in the District within the new Herts and West Essex ICS.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee was informed about the changes to the delivery of health services in Epping Forest from 1 April 2022 and the associated role of the District Council.

(Post meeting update: Transport offer for Essex residents unable to get to Covid-19 booster appointments (re. Council Bulletin, 4 February 2022))

People living in Essex, who have no means of transport, can now get help to attend pre-booked appointments. People who are struggling to attend their booster jab appointment because of transport issues can now get help from Essex County Council.

[Essex Wellbeing Service](#) is now able to organise transport for Essex residents who are finding it difficult to organise a way to attend their vaccine appointment. Transport will be provided by taxi service. This service is free of charge and can also be used if you need transport to get to your first or second dose appointments.

Essex residents who would like help getting to their appointments can email provide.essexwellbeing@nhs.net or call 0300 303 9988. The phone line is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays. Callers' need will be verified, and they will be asked to provide their booking reference or a screenshot of their appointment confirmation).

78. HRA BUSINESS PLAN

The Committee agreed to bring forward the HRA Business Plan, ahead of Corporate Plan Key Action Plan Year 4 2021/2 – Quarter 3 Corporate Performance reporting.

D Fenton (HRA Project Director) introduced the HRA business plan that had been developed in partnership with the Council's retained consultant, A Marshall-Smith of Abovo-Consult. A bespoke HRA model was being used that enabled the Council to provide a reasonable cashflow projection over the next 30 years. It was based on evidential data from the Council's current systems and projections for economic assumptions in the social housing sector. Furthermore, the plan gave the Council the ability to stress test. This was vital given the key dynamic risks such as, the borrowing rate and changes in Government legislation regarding social housing. In early 2020, the Council's vision to 'create great places where people wanted to live' and the 'more than bricks and mortar' housing schemes were reflected in the HRA Business Plan. There was a clear link between poor housing and health. A new rent regime meant that the government had agreed the amount of rent that could be charged. The Council had a duty of care that its housing stock / properties were safe, dry and warm. Through good asset management and by undertaking regular maintenance and upgrades when these were needed, this helped to empower residents to feel proud of where they lived. Monies came from rents, high value property sales, sales of small parcels of land, obtaining planning permissions to develop smaller plots of land and licensing income. In addition, Housing officers were reviewing the Local Plan and working with Qualis.

A Marshall-Smith highlighted some key criteria of the HRA Business Plan:

- comparison of cash in, against cash spent
- ensure HRA reserve balance did not go negative
- loans were repaid when they were due
- interest on loans was affordable
- invest in stock
- careful monitoring of right to buy receipts
- there were adequate resources of a decent home standard
- staffing costs were in line with the establishment

Basic assumptions had been built into the HRA business plan for accuracy. On capital spend, the Council's current forecast was being used. The financial plan modelling aimed to balance all these criteria. The financial summary (page 61 of the

agenda report) summarised the position on the loans and the HRA surplus carried forwards over 30 years – but was sustainable.

Councillor R Balcombe addressed the Committee giving an overview of questions raised by members at Stronger Communities Select Committee on 11 January 2022. A list of FAQs on the HRA Business Plan had also been issued as a supplementary agenda to provide members with as much information as possible.

Councillor S Murray supported the HRA Business Plan and that it was very important that recommendation (2) of the report – to receive a yearly update that would include stringent stress testing – was reviewed by members, but queried if this would be undertaken by the select committee or Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor H Whitbread (Housing Services Portfolio Holder) replied that she had been asked to ensure that all points went to different levels of scrutiny and also, to Cabinet afterwards. She was proud of the Council's capital housebuilding programme works, which were leading the way in Essex and at national level. Councillor M Sartin advised the Committee that recommendation (2) should be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda Planning Group (APG) to decide which scrutiny committee should review these yearly updates, which was agreed.

Councillor R Baldwin had noticed a lower cap on HRA borrowing in the 2018 budget and queried the cap in this business plan that showed a limit on borrowing of 70% of the value of the HRA. A Marshall-Smith replied councils had always had a much lower cap until 2018. This was an internal policy that was comparable with the cap banks would limit their borrowing to, for housing associations. Councillor Baldwin remarked that it was expensive to phase out gas boilers and upgrade heating systems, so had the Council made a decision on this yet? D Fenton replied that the Council did not have a solution yet for older properties but did for new properties. The Council had put in a bid to E.ON Energy to retrofit fifty houses and to look at a number of solutions to see what the best option was for the Council and another pilot scheme was for solar power. This was a big problem, but research aligned with taking families out of fuel poverty.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee considered the safe and prudent HRA business plan, and recommended it to Cabinet, for approval;
- (2) That a yearly performance update, to include stringent stress testing, be received, and it was agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny APG decide which scrutiny committee this should go to;
- (3) That the Committee considered that the business plan included all assumed costs but not all income streams, and noted appendix B, which was an alternative plan including some potential income; and
- (4) That the Committee considered the opportunity to improve our estates, which would improve the life span of the Council's assets, and feed into its ongoing work to 'create great places where people want to live'.

79. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN YEAR 4 2021/22 - QUARTER 3 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTING

M Hassall (ICT Manager) introduced quarter 3 and reported on projects at red or amber status (exceptions). The full report had been reviewed by Stronger Council Select Committee on 18 January 2022. There were eight projects at amber status but

none at red status. Seventeen projects had been closed and there were sixteen projects on green status. The KPI data showed comparisons to the previous quarter and this showed that there were eight at green status, two at amber and four at red. Strategy, Delivery and Performance was looking at refreshing the KPIs probably in the same cycle when officers would be looking at the Corporate Plan going forward.

(a) Project CPP093 Green Infrastructure Strategy

Councillor S Murray stated that he was the Roding ward member and a Loughton Town councillor, and reminded members of his earlier declaration of interest. EFDC had written to the inspector on 21 December 2021 looking for the Roding Valley Recreation Ground (RVRG) to be included in the Local Plan as a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) but he had not been aware of this previously. Loughton Town Council had a 125-year lease on the recreation ground and managed it but, in his opinion, had been marginalised by the whole process. Councillor N Bedford stated he had written to Councillor Murray and reiterated details of this at the meeting. Officers of Natural England had visited the site and it was particularly important the RVRG acted as a further SANG as identified in the Green Infrastructure Strategy. It would also provide sufficient green space for some 520 houses within the Local Plan, which residents would be able to walk to. Councillor D Wixley added that he was the chairman of the Town Council's Recreation Committee but it was unfortunate there had not been a consultation as this could have provided more information because the route of a footpath encroached on areas of the Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

(b) Project CPP096 Local Plan

Councillor N Bedford reported that this seemed to be progressing well and the Inspector's Final Report was expected to be available during 1st quarter of 2022.

(c) Stronger Communities KPIs – Contracts: % change of leisure centre attendees from previous years quarter, gym visits

Councillor J H Whitehouse commented that Epping Sports Centre was showing a significant decrease in memberships. Although her own membership had finished, she had been surprised that she had not been contacted to renew it. The Leader, Councillor C Whitbread, replied that he would take this up with the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Avey, but the District's leisure centres were being used a lot more now. Councillor S Murray added that school staff had been offered a very good deal on leisure centre memberships.

(d) Stronger Places KPIs – Contracts Waste: reduction in household waste

Members expressed thanks to the Council's Waste Management Team over the recent collection of household waste, as well as Biffa whose workforce had experienced staff shortages. It was a hard, physical job and the weather had not been that good, but collections had continued.

RESOLVED:

That the committee reviewed the FY21-22 quarter 3 Performance report.

80. CABINET BUSINESS

Cabinet's Key Decision List (KDL) updated to 4 January 2022 was scrutinised by the Committee and the following points were raised.

(a) Environmental and Technical Services

Transfer of Services to Qualis – Councillor S Murray queried these items but Councillor C Whitbread and A Small (Strategic Director and 151 Officer) confirmed they would be going to a scrutiny committee before going to Cabinet for a decision.

(b) Housing Services

Improving Payment Options for Leaseholders – Councillor D Wixley queried which scrutiny committee this item would go to. Councillor H Whitbread and D Fenton confirmed that this item would be scrutinised by Stronger Place Select Committee, as it was do with the physical side of housing.

Councillor S Murray commended J Gould (Community and Wellbeing Project Director) for the handling of the consultations on the four Housing policies / strategies in a model way, which had provided members with a real opportunity to influence their outcomes.

(c) Community and Regulatory Services

It was noted that the review of the Market Policy would be coming to this Committee for scrutiny on 31 March 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee reviewed the Executive's current programme of Key Decision of 4 January 2022.

81. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME**(a) Current work programme**

G Woodhall stated that the draft Market Policy would go to 31 March meeting along with the Epping Forest Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM), as decisions by Cabinet were due on 11 April. Epping Forest Youth Council's annual report and the People Team induction process were also scheduled for the next meeting. The Committee noted that the Elections Planning Progress Report had been reviewed by Stronger Council Select Committee and the Enforcement Policy scrutinised by Stronger Place Select Committee, instead of this Committee. Scrutiny of the transfer of services to Qualis and environmental information requests (EIRs) had yet to be confirmed. The external scrutiny item on the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Management Strategy and Business Plan 2020-2030 had been deferred to the work programme for the next municipal year.

The Committee noted Councillor J H Whitehouse's concern that members would not be able to influence the SAMM Strategy, as the gap between scrutiny on 31 March and the decision by Cabinet on 11 April was too close together. Also, work programme item (2), Group Company Structure, was an 'ongoing' item for the Committee to review at each meeting, but this did not happen.

(b) Reserve work programme

Thames Water – there was support for external scrutiny of the water company. Councillor S Murray explained Thames Water's repair works in Loughton last summer had caused chaos for Loughton residents. Councillor M Sartin replied that

Thames Water had also been raised by the Joint Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen on 20 January 2022 and would be followed up by G Woodhall.

Housing associations – Councillor J Lea was interested in more in-depth scrutiny. It was noted that Councillor B Jennings had also raised this at the same joint meeting, and G Woodhall would be liaising with D Fenton on this.

Members were asked to apprise G Woodhall of any other organisations they wished to nominate for external scrutiny, as soon as possible, for the Committee to consider at its first meeting in the new municipal year on 16 June 2022.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed its current work programme and reserve programme; and
- (2) That members apprise G Woodhall of any organisations they wished to nominate for external scrutiny, as soon as possible, for the Committee to consider at its first meeting in the new municipal year on 16 June 2022.

(Post meeting update: For information, the minutes of the Joint Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen on 20 January 2020 could be viewed on the Council's Intranet/Extranet at this weblink:

<https://eppingforestintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=770&MId=10892&Ver=4>)

82. SELECT COMMITTEES - WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Stronger Communities Select Committee

As Councillor R Balcombe had reported the select committee's scrutiny of the HRA Business Plan earlier in the meeting, Councillor J Lea (Chairman) added that she would be liaising with D Fenton over housing scrutiny as residents seemed to have many complaints.

(b) Stronger Council Select Committee

Councillor P Bolton, Chairman, commented that at the last meeting on 18 January, seven of the Cabinet had attended which was useful as they were able to answer members' questions directly. As some of the business was repetitive and cyclical, as with Corporate Performance reporting of the KPIs, he would not report on these. With the Council's move towards members using digital communication, there was a discussion on digital versus telephone. However, some members were having difficulties with this and found it easier to telephone. Members also discussed why there were hardly any planning applications coming before Area Plans West Committee. The select committee had reviewed the quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report and the draft budget for 2022/23 but there were no major problems highlighted, although it was noted that inflation was one of the greatest threats.

Councillor S Murray commented that in regard to work programme item (11), he understood Voter ID legislation was still going through Parliament, but remarked that it would have major implications for the Council and would be quite costly to introduce.

Councillor J Lea asked if planning delegations had changed for applications coming before planning committees, as many Area Plans West meetings had been cancelled. G Woodhall replied that he thought they had been updated two years ago, but he would look this up in the Constitution and let Councillor Lea know.

(c) Stronger Place Select Committee

Councillor M Sartin advised that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman had both given their apologies for this meeting. Councillor S Murray remarked that he had not been able to attend the last meeting on 13 January but had been concerned by the agenda report on the "Introduction of charging for additional/replacement waste containers". Councillor M Sartin replied she had asked this question at the meeting and her comments had been noted, so these would be published in the minutes in due course.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the progress of the three select committees against their work programmes.

83. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

CHAIRMAN