

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, **Time:** 7.00 - 7.45 pm
High Street, Epping

Members Present: Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Patel, J Philip, D Sunger and H Whitbread

Members Present (Virtually):

Other Councillors: Councillors S Heap, D Stocker and J M Whitehouse

Other Councillors (Virtual): Councillors C McCredie, C C Pond, Caroline Pond, B Vaz and D Wixley

Apologies: L Burrows

Officers Present: A Buckley (Higher Level Apprentice (Internal Communications)), G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), J Gould (Service Director (Community & Wellbeing)), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer)

Officers Present (Virtually): M Anil (Projects Officer), S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), S Lloyd-Jones (Sustainable Transport Officer) and S Rutter (Development Director, Qualis Commercial)

109. Webcasting Introduction

The Leader of Council made a short address to remind everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

110. Declarations of Interest

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

111. Minutes

Decision:

That the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 25 January and 7 February 2022 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

112. Reports of Portfolio Holders

The Leader of the Council made a short statement on the Ukraine crisis. He said it was heartening to see the local community come together in support of the Ukraine

and their donations to the Collections Hub. He particularly thanked the staff who had given their time and their effort in helping out. He also thanked the Youth Councillors for giving their help and time and all the residents of Epping Forest who made contributions, this had been really appreciated.

The Community and Regulatory Portfolio Holder, Councillor Patel gave an update on PCM North, which consisted of groups of GP practices who had commissioned Community Culture and Wellbeing to host two posts for a 'social prescriber' and a 'health and wellbeing' coach, the total funding that would be awarded would be £84,152. With this arrangement we would be able to deploy the postholders from the community hub in Epping and other council locations.

The Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor Philip, noted that that we were into the fourth month since the final accounts of 2020/21 should have been signed by our auditor. These were likely to remain unsigned for many more months. The reason for the delay lies with the auditors themselves. This was not a unique situation as the same thing was happening up and down the country and replicated in all the professional accountancy firms due to a shortage of specialist staff; the government was aware. Delays are likely for the next few years, increasing pressure on our finance team and increasing our costs. He will keep the Cabinet informed.

113. Public Questions and Requests to Address the Cabinet

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

114. Overview and Scrutiny

There was no update from Overview and Scrutiny as they had yet to meet.

115. Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee - 13 December 2021

Decision:

That the minutes of the Council Housebuilding Cabinet Committee held on 13th December 2021 be noted.

116. EFDC Sustainability Guidance Volume 3 (Extension & Refurbishments)

The Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Cllr Bedford introduced the report. He noted that the Council's emerging Local Plan set out policies in relation to sustainable and high quality design and construction of developments. On 19 September 2019 the Council declared a Climate Emergency, including a resolution to do everything within the Council's power to make Epping Forest District carbon neutral by 2030. To support these policies and this declaration, the Council produced Sustainability Guidance and Checklist documents for use across the District.

The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) also produced a Sustainability Guidance document that applied to new developments within HGGT sites. All three documents went through a public consultation process and following updates were approved by Cabinet as material planning considerations in March 2021.

The Council also prepared the draft Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Refurbishment and Extensions, which was presented to Cabinet at the same meeting as an update on progress, with a summary of the aims, objectives and purpose of the

document. This document would provide householders with practical and technical guidance on how any extension or refurbishment work proposed to existing homes across the District could contribute to the Council's sustainability ambitions. It was proposed that the Volume 3 guidance be taken to public consultation following the publication of the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) Retrofit Guidance (industry best practice). Further to updates to align the Volume 3 with LETI guidance, the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Sustainability was given delegated authority to approve the final draft of Volume 3 for public consultation.

Councillor Heap welcomed the report but had concerns about implementation, as recently a refurbished building in Buckhurst Hill which had replacement windows which in turn had led to condensation problems; yet the report recommends that all trickle ventilation be phased out. You need to be very careful about how these were retrofitted, particularly to council buildings. M Anil replied that his comments were noted and that they approached refurbishments as a holistic project and the whole home had to be taken into consideration. In the report there was also best practice on how to set up a refurbishment plan before embarking on the work to avoid these types of issues.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet noted the public consultation process and outcomes and endorsed the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Refurbishment and Extensions as a material planning consideration for pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes within the District.
- (2) The Cabinet agreed that the Planning Services Director, in consultation with the Planning and Sustainability Portfolio Holder be authorised to make minor amendments to the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Refurbishment and Extension.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Refurbishment and Extensions is afforded suitable planning weight by endorsing the document as a material consideration in the planning process. This would ensure that development proposals across the District contribute to the Council's sustainability ambitions, and that clear parameters were established for future pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree the EFDC Sustainability Guidance and Checklist Volume 3: Refurbishment and Extensions or endorse the document as a material consideration in the planning process, which would mean that there would be no guidance to support the delivery of sustainable extension and refurbishment of existing dwellings, and achieve the objectives set out in the Council's emerging Local Plan policies DM5, DM9, DM12, DM15, DM18-22.

117. Covid 19 Development Plan - Travel Local Demand Responsive (DRT) Trial

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Technical Services, Councillor N Avey introduced the report. He noted that the DaRT87 was launched January 2021 as an

emergency 'hybrid' Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) following the cessation of subsidy by Essex County Council (ECC) of Arriva's 87 bus service. The Arriva 87 saw a 60%+ drop in passengers during 2020 and was costing EFDC £100k per year in subsidy alongside ECC. A decision was taken to run a twelve-month, low cost DRT trial @£85k, minus returned fare revenue, using Epping Forest Community Transport minibuses.

There were very difficult trading conditions in 2021/22 due to: Lockdowns and slow recovery of bus usage; lack of confidence in buses among concessionary pass holders; major reduction in 5 day per week tube commuting; school/college disruptions; marketing reach. Recovery of fare revenue had been low at 2-3% of costs. Whilst reasonable level of interest was achieved (1000+ views of website leading to 184 online registrations of interest (year to date)), conversion to actual usage had been very low due to prevailing conditions.

Nevertheless, an important corridor type service had been delivered adopting some aspects of DRT (pre-booked journeys online or by phone, fully contactless fares) and in a lower carbon way than running empty conventional buses. A further year's funding would enable a chance to prove something closer to financial viability and to justify ECC's return to supporting journeys in this corridor. This may also unlock ECC funding from any successful 'Rural DRT' bid they make to DfT's 'Bus Back Better' programme, given the clear demand from Epping Green residents.

Councillor Philip noted that Theydon Bois did not have good connectivity in the district contrary to what the report stated. He then asked if there had been any progress on getting a financial contribution from Harlow. He was told that there had been no conclusion as yet from Harlow Council.

Councillor S Kane said that if agreed, this would be an integral part of our carbon zero aspirations and should be strongly supported by our PR department so that as many people get to know about this as possible.

Councillor Chris Pond repeated the question to Councillor Avey he put at the Council meeting about having electric buses services in Loughton in a shopping trial in the Broadway. He was told that the Council had procured a hired vehicle for a month, but this did not prove to be fit for purpose. Then as officers were trying to procure a better vehicle, Omicron hit, so they paused the trial and would revisit the 'shopper shuttle' which had good resident feedback.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse noted that these were bad circumstance to launch a bus service and it was worth having a fair trial. The report had no statistics on passenger journeys, it would also be useful to know about the number of registrations of interest and how many were actually using the service. By extending this, were we extending the existing service or looking to make the improvements recommended in the report, such as making the registration process more user friendly and making it closer to a real demand responsive type service. He had received feedback on this that the steps involved in using the services were too many and one of the reasons why it was not getting people from the interested state to becoming users. We should be looking to improve the user experience. He was told that they were looking to do this and that the two stage process may have lost us some users. However, there was an app function and it was possible to track the vehicle using this. However, the percentage of those registering to use it was low, which was perhaps a function of marketing the service along with the unfortunate timing of starting the service.

Councillor Patel asked where we were going to go with this, what was the long term aspirations of this project. Councillor Avey replied that the objective was to have a

service across the district and this was a step in that direction, a proof of concept. This may also bring back ECC to the table if we proved this. He agreed that it was important that we got the communication right and let people know about the service.

Decision:

- 1) The Cabinet agreed to continue the service in its current form and cost, adding a trial of EV vehicles and accepting that better opportunities may arise to deliver a full DRT app-based zonal service elsewhere;
- (2) The Cabinet noted that the Council had delivered an important 'service of last resort' in 21/22 for key workers, some regular commuters/users and a rural community otherwise left with almost no bus service; and
- (3) That further funding merited due to extreme challenges posed by Covid-19 conditions – as one third of interest had been from Harlow residents, Harlow's (and ECC's) financial support should also be sought in 22/23.

Other Options for Action:Shorter Route

Most demand has come between Harlow (SW), Epping Green and Epping. Focusing mainly on this section including the station, would increase efficiency of operation and allow more runs with a semi-set timetable once post-pandemic demand is understood. The sections between Debden and Epping are covered by reasonably frequent buses and the Central Line. Any trips south of Epping could be pre-booked by-demand only. There was little evidence of demand for trips to EF Shopping Park but that is caveated by the fact that elderly and other concessionary bus pass holders have simply not been travelling much in 21/22.

Trial EV minibuses

Viable EV minibuses adapted to the needs of Community Transport operators have become available. Within current cost, we can accommodate up to three months' trial use to cover different weather conditions and to test real world operation. 100% EV operation could be a good marketing message, but we would need full confidence in performance first.

118. Allocations Policy

The Housing Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report. She noted that the Cabinet were being asked to agree that the recommendations set out in this report were included in the revised Housing Allocations Scheme for 2022- 2027.

As a Local Housing Authority, Epping Forest District Council had a statutory duty to publish a Housing Allocations Scheme for determining priorities - and the procedure to be followed - when selecting a household to be offered a tenancy of Council owned accommodation or to be nominated for an offer of housing from another registered provider with stock in the district.

The Council was required to review the scheme at least once every five years.

The current scheme became effective in July 2018 and is due for renewal by April 2022 along with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Tenancy Policy and the overarching Housing Strategy.

A review of all four strategies and policies commenced in May 2021 including a co-ordinated 2-stage statutory consultation exercise.

Councillor Philip was happy with the report but proposed a change to recommendation 4 and would like the policy to be reviewed in the Council year leading up to 2027, as it makes more administrative sense. Councillor H Whitbread agreed that this was a sensible recommendation and was happy to agree it if other members agreed. The amendment was agreed by the Cabinet.

Councillor S Kane said he would like to discuss the likelihood of the influx of refugees in the near future. Councillor H Whitbread said that they were mindful of this and were awaiting the government to approach them.

Councillor Sunger thanked the officers for putting this together and speaking to tenants about the potential to downsize; Councillor H Whitbread also thanked the officers and the tenants who had considered doing this, as it was a major challenge. It was an important piece of work, coupled with our sheltered housing regeneration scheme. We were looking at this with our council house building programme. It was an important thing we were doing but it was not an easy thing.

Councillor Heap welcome the changes, but we needed flexibility when we were assessing cases as he had a medical case he was looking into that seemed to fall in between bands. Council H Whitbread noted they were introducing flexibility into the medical bands to help in cases like this. If he would let her know the details she would investigate this for him.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet considered and agreed the 5 major changes and 11 minor changes to the current Allocations Scheme contained within this report;
- (2) The Cabinet approved the publication of the proposed revised Housing Allocations Scheme for 2022 – 2027, at Appendix 1 of the report, on 4 April 2022 with an effective date of 12 September 2022
- (3) The Cabinet considered the outcome and approved the publication of the Stage 2 Public Consultation Report on the Allocations Scheme; and
- (4) Agreed that the Allocations Scheme for 2022 -2027 be reviewed in the Council year leading up to 2027.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To enable the Council to publish and implement the Allocations Scheme 2022-2027 and associated material.

Other Options for Action:

- (i) Not to agree the recommended changes to the draft Housing Allocations Scheme;
- (ii) To make alternative changes to the draft Housing Allocations Scheme (subject to further consultation where appropriate).

119. Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Housing Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor H Whitbread, introduced the report. She noted that the Cabinet was being asked to accept the recommendations set out in this report and approve the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2022 - 2027 and the evidence base that supports the Strategy including the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review and the Stage 2 Consultation Report.

The current strategy was published in August 2018 and was due for renewal in April 2022 as is the Housing Allocations Scheme, the Tenancy Policy and the overarching Housing Strategy.

A review of all four strategies and policies commenced in May 2021 the draft Strategy was being presented to Cabinet along with the draft Allocations Scheme and draft Tenancy Policy for the same 5-year period.

Councillor Sunger commented that we should be as helpful as we could when taking a person through the application process and not let anyone fall through the gaps. He was told that this was part of the report.

Councillor Patel said we needed a larger amount of partnership work to make this successful. He thanked the officers taking this forward.

Councillor Philip proposed the same change to recommendation 5 as he had proposed for recommendation 4 for the Allocations policy report; that he would like the policy to be reviewed in the Council year leading up to 2027, as it makes more administrative sense. This was agreed.

Councillor Bedford noted that in the report (under urgent housing need) that 258 household had lost their homes. Have we done any work to find out why they had lost their home and if there was trend, to help us plan? He postulated that part of this, going forward, would be cost of fuel, and could we advise them on how they could best proceed to save money. Councillor H Whitbread said that this was an important point he made. There were many causes of homelessness and fuel poverty was just one of the reasons.

Decision:

(1) The Cabinet considered and agreed the five proposed priorities and associated themes within the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027 at Appendix 1 of the report.

(2) The Cabinet considered the findings and approved the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2020/21 at Appendix 2 of the report.

(3) The Cabinet considered the findings and approved the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Stage 2 Consultation Report at Appendix 3 of the report.

(4) The Cabinet delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services to consider and approve the annual update of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan.

(5) The Cabinet agreed that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2022-2027 be reviewed in the Council year leading up to 2027.

Reasons for proposed decision:

To enable the Council to publish the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 -2027, along with the review and the consultation report.

Other options for action:

- (i) Not to agree the recommendations for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027;
- (ii) To make alternative recommendations for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 (subject to further consultation where appropriate);
- (iii) Not to approve the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review;
- (iv) Not to approve the publication of the Public Consultation Outcome Report.

120. Tenancy Policy

The Housing Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Tenancy Policy. She noted that as a stockholding Local Housing Authority, Epping Forest District Council had a statutory duty to publish both a Tenancy Strategy or framework (setting out the matters to which the registered providers of social housing within its district are to have regard when formulating their tenancy policies), and a Tenancy Policy with regards to its own stock.

The current Tenancy Policy is due for review by July 2022; the same calendar year as the Housing Allocations Scheme, the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy, and the overarching Housing Strategy.

A review of all four strategies and policies commenced in May 2021. The draft Tenancy Policy was being presented to Cabinet with two proposed amendments to take account of legislative changes along with the draft Allocations Scheme and draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for the same 5-year period.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet considered the review of the current Tenancy Policy;
- (2) The Cabinet approved the proposal for two material changes to be made to the terms of the current policy that reflect the Council's statutory obligations;
- (3) The Cabinet agreed to renew the Tenancy Policy for the period 2022-2027; and
- (4) The Cabinet approved the publication of the draft refreshed Tenancy Policy 2022 -2027 at Appendix 1 of the report.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To enable the Council to publish the refreshed Tenancy Policy 2022-2027

Other Options for Action:

- (i) Not to approve the recommendation to renew the Tenancy Policy without making any amendments.

- (ii) To make other changes to the draft Tenancy Policy (subject to further consultation where appropriate).

121. Proposed Site Disposals to Qualis for Redevelopment

The Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip, introduced the report. He noted that officers had been working with Qualis to evaluate redevelopment opportunities that exist within its land and property portfolio ahead of consideration as to whether the Council might wish to transfer all of its non-operational assets to Qualis. Initially two opportunities had been identified that would benefit from immediate disposal to Qualis at book value.

This report presented the two proposals put forward by Qualis for Cabinet consideration and decision.

Pyrles Lane, Loughton - This site was the former Council plant nursery in Pyrles Lane, Loughton. It was identified as a potential development site and an option for transfer to Qualis for housing redevelopment at the time the Council created Qualis.

The site has several conditions that make this harder to develop, principally the topography but also limited access to the site. It had previously been offered to the market and sale terms agreed but the potential buyer had withdrawn their interest because of the difficulty in developing this site.

Units 50, 51-52, 60 and Unit 10 Cartersfield Road, Waltham Abbey - The second site proposed for sale to Qualis was one that the Council had previously identified for redevelopment amongst its commercial property holdings.

Units 50, 51-52, 60 and Unit 10 were industrial warehouse units located at Brooker Road Industrial Estate, Waltham Abbey. They formed part of the long-term commercial property investment holdings of the Council.

Decision:

- (1) The Cabinet agreed to the disposals of Pyrles Lane to Qualis for £900,000 and;
- (2) The Cabinet agreed to the disposal of Units 50, 51-52, 60 and Unit 10 Cartersfield Road, Waltham Abbey to Qualis for £2,930,000.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

As part of its agreement of the 4 year Business Plan the Council agreed to lend Qualis a further £35 million in order that it could acquire and progress redevelopment opportunities within the District. The site at Pyrles Lane was identified as one of the potential opportunities which would be funded from this sum. The Cartersfield site is a new acquisition but has planning permission and meets the Council's ambition of Qualis bringing forward stalled redevelopments and capturing the developer profits associated with it.

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree the above recommendations.

122. Any Other Business

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

CHAIRMAN