

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** Monday, 6 June 2022

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 7.26 pm

Members Present: Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford, N Avey, S Kane, A Patel, J Philip, H Whitbread and K Williamson

Members Present (Virtually): Councillors

Other Councillors: Councillors R Balcombe, R Bassett and H Kane

Other Councillors (Virtual): Councillors S Heap, S Murray and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: L Burrows and A Lion

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), A Small (Section 151 Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer)

Officers Present (Virtually): V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer)

1. 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.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct, Councillor R Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 10 – 'Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report – Q2 2021-22', by virtue of being a Non-Executive Director of the Qualis Board. The Councillor had determined that his interest was non-prejudicial and that he would stay in the meeting for the consideration of the item.

3. MINUTES

Decision:

That the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 11 April 2022 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

4. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder thanked the officers, partner organisations and participants for the recent Ride London event. She had heard a lot of positive comments about the event, and some not so positive. She particularly thanked the Communities Team for their work.

Councillor Murray asked if there would be a more formal overview exercise of the event. He was told that we could participate in a review being carried out by Essex County Council; and, if scrutiny wished to pick this up, they could. Also, the Economic Development team were to look at it and measure the footfall in the town centres during this time.

Councillor C Whitbread noted that there had been some strong positives and some negative impacts which needed to form part of the review.

5. 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.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Cabinet welcomed the new Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Helen Kane.

The Chairman of the Committee reported that there was nothing to report as there had been no recent meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee since their last meeting in March.

7. DIRECT AWARD OF THE PRINT TO POST CONTRACT

The new Portfolio Holder for this report announced that being new to this item he would like to discuss the report with officers and would be holding this report back until the next Cabinet meeting.

Decision:

This report was withdrawn for further advice from officers.

8. REPURCHASE OF LEASEHOLD PROPERTIES ON LIME ESTATE

The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder introduced the report.

Following a review of the capital programme, a decision was made to take an approach to improvements which would drive efficiency and drive-up impact for customers. It was well understood that properties had a finite life cycle. To maximise the life span of our blocks, we must carry out regular improvement works. The process of improving properties was worked out using life cycles; there was an industry average for all components for buildings.

The Council's residential assets were reaching the point where major investment was required. Choosing not to invest could lead to a situation where the asset could become dangerous and losses in income through voids increased. Furthermore, it would lead to a disintegration of the quality of life for residents.

Officers were keen to support Leaseholders regarding the affordability of their contribution to capital works. Therefore, this paper sought to get approval for the second of our support schemes, which was to buy back up to 5 non-traditional construction flats.

Councillor Bassett asked how much were we talking about for this process or was this an 'in principle' decision. He was told that £1million had been set aside reflecting the market values.

Councillor Heap asked if they would be looking at buy back options for properties in Buckhurst Hill. He was told by the Portfolio Holder that they could have a conversation about this after the meeting.

Councillor Murray asked if they were happy with looking at just 5 properties, and what happens if there were more than 5 requests for buyback. He was told that the decision would be taken on balance, looking at the number of flats and the area. There was also the other scheme looking at affordability to help leaseholders to afford this. Officers were also mindful of the HRA and mindful of the HRA account. They had carried out consultations on the estate and were aware of two leaseholders that would be interested in this. If there were more than 5 expressions of interest, officers would bring back another paper to Cabinet for consideration.

Decision:

The Cabinet agreed to the proposed repurchase of up to 5 flats on the Limes and Copperfield estate (non-trad construction) taking priority, using Capital from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Right to Buy Receipts (RTB).

Reason for decision:

There was a need to offer support to leaseholders to assist those that find themselves in financial difficulty when subject to capital costs.

Options considered and rejected:

The option was considered not to offer support; however, this was rejected.

9. QUALIS QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT - Q2 2021/22

The Finance Portfolio Holder introduced the report. This report presented the second Quarter's monitoring report for the Qualis trading year 2021/22 and covered the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022. Attached to the covering report was the Qualis Board monitoring report for Quarter 2.

Because of the fall of meeting dates this report was being considered by Cabinet before the Stronger Council Select Committee. If Stronger Council had any comments and he was not in attendance, then these would be relayed directly to him.

Whilst Quarter 2 of Year 3 showed a continuing loss, as previously reported this was primarily associated with delays in achieving planning consent for Roundhills. Once planning consent was obtained this cost would be removed from the Profit and Loss account. Issues with finding suitable regeneration sites within the district were also contributing to the position. The Business Plan had assumed that rental income associated with new acquisitions would have been delivered prior to the end of Quarter 2. With these exceptions the position was broadly in line with the target.

Councillor S Kane asked if consent, for Roundhills, would have been achieved by the next quarter. He was told that they were working hard to ensure it came through at the right time, but it may come through in quarter 4 and not quarter 3.

Councillor Murray asked if there was an update on the empty properties in Loughton. He was told if he was referring to the ones the council owns in Centric Parade and the other ones, they have now been let and the fit out has now been started. Councillor Murray noted that this was the same as an answer given 6 months ago. Would this have happened in Chigwell or Epping. The Portfolio Holder said that he strongly disagreed with this statement. We needed the best value for these properties to bring in as much money for the Council as we could and also get a good mix of tenants for that part of the High Road. We also worked with members of the LRA to make sure we got appropriate businesses and were of benefit to the High Road.

Councillor Heap inquired about paragraph 3.6 of the report and asked why this was happening. He was told that this was due to constraints put upon the Council by the Public Works Loan Board, that loans must be used for regeneration and within the district. This meant that negotiations could take a lot of time. We were also looking to see that we got a proper return on the money we invested, and we can regenerate parts of our district.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the report and recommended its consideration by Council.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

CHAIRMAN