

# EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Committee:** Council **Date:** Tuesday, 28 February 2023

**Place:** Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 9.00 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors M Sartin (Chairman), D Sunger (Vice-Chairman), I Allgood, C Amos, N Avey, R Balcombe, D Barlow, R Baldwin, N Bedford, P Bolton, H Brady, R Brookes, L Burrows, E Gabbett, S Heap, S Heather, J Jogia, H Kane, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Lea, J Leppert, J Lucas, T Matthews, C McCredie, J McIvor, L Mead, R Morgan, S Murray, C Nweke, J Parsons, A Patel, J Philip, Caroline Pond, C C Pond, R Pugsley, S Rackham, K Rizvi, P Stalker, D Stocker, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell

**Apologies:** R Bassett, P Bhanot, I Hadley, R Jennings, J Jennings, A Lion and M Owen

**Officers Present:** G Blakemore (Chief Executive), A Small (Section 151 Officer), J Gould (Interim Strategic Director), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), C Hartgrove (Interim Chief Financial Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager) and P Seager (Chairman's Officer)

**Officers Present (Virtually):** L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer)

## 60. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager 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.

## 61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

## 62. MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 December 2022 and 17 January 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## 63. ANNOUNCEMENTS

### (a) Announcements by the Chairman of the Council

#### Councillor Brian Rolfe

It was with much sadness that the Chairman informed the Council of the death of Councillor Brian Rolfe.

Councillor Brian Rolfe had been a District Councillor since 2007, representing the Lambourne Ward of the District as a Conservative Councillor. He had served on the Cabinet as the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder for the 2010/11 municipal year and had been Chairman of Council for the 2012/13 municipal year. During his time on the Council, he had served on many of the Council's member bodies.

Members stood for a minute's silence then paid tribute to the memory of Councillor Brian Rolfe.

**64. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)**

The Council noted that no public questions had been received for consideration at the meeting.

**65. 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.

**66. 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 advised that he had been busy attending meetings covering a range of issues. He advised he had attended a meeting in Westminster regarding East of England Leaders followed by an all-party group meeting looking at levelling up and thereby making sure that the Epping Forest District was being heard in all the right places.

He stated that he had also been actively engaged in discussions around devolution. This decision was mainly for the upper tier authorities who had to agree any devolution ask of government, he believed it was a way of getting more for the County and the Districts and was keeping Epping Forest actively engaged in the discussions.

It was now known that the Inspector had found the Epping Forest District Local Plan to be sound and an important part of the Local Plan was the Harlow and Gilston Garden town communities, to which he advised that he had also been attending regular meetings on behalf of the Council, making sure that he was looking after the interests of Epping Forest first and foremost.

He stated that there were a lot of meetings going on at this time which would shape the future and it was important that Epping Forest District Council was heard at every level.

**67. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE**

The Chairman informed members that as this was the budget meeting and would like to give emphasis to the budget she would therefore allow only 30 minutes for questions.

(a) Dangerous Structures

Councillor R Brookes referred to the Technical Services Portfolio Holders report and asked under the heading 'Dangerous Structures' why the Chigwell Lane to Torrington Drive path had been closed for over a year and could he give an update as to the way forward and when this path might be opened again.

**Action:** Councillor K Williamson advised that he could not give any further updates this evening and that he would speak to officers and report back to Councillor Brookes.

(b) Council Housebuilding and Regeneration Programme

Councillor J Parsons asked if there were any updates to the Council Housebuilding and regeneration programme around the district.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that members would be aware from previous Cabinet meetings that they were reviewing the Councils Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan to meet the present climate. We were facing new challenges in terms of the cost of living crisis and the cost of building, as a result of inflation, due to the war in the Ukraine.

She went on to assure members that the Council was committed to both Council house building and regeneration in the district. Recently, Harveyfields in Waltham Abbey, had £114,000 investment into regenerating that estate which included, also work was being undertaken in Limes Farm, Chigwell and Shelley in Ongar.

(c) Progress update on the waste management collections

Councillor J McIvor asked if the Leader of Council could give an update on the disruption to the waste management collections and to thank the residents of the district for their patience.

Councillor C Whitbread apologised to the residents of the district for the disruption that had been experienced over the winter months. Council officers and members have had constructive discussions with Biffa, and improvements were being introduced. He took this opportunity to pay tribute to the Council officers who had been instrumental in the discussions and had put in a lot of hard work into getting these issues addressed as quickly as possible. He also thanked the call centre staff have been inundated with complaints during this time and had put so much effort into trying to resolve issues for residents.

He advised, going forward, the Council were looking at finding a place to park the waste lorries with a view to making plans for the future.

(d) New Chairman of Qualis

Councillor S Heap stated that at a recent meeting of Overview and Scrutiny he requested that the new chairman of Qualis be invited to the next Full Council meeting and asked when this would happen.

Councillor J Philip advised that he was not in charge of Overview and Scrutiny and therefore not the correct person to ask. There was a procedure to get things onto the Overview and Scrutiny agenda, by filling in a pick form and Councillor Heap should follow that process.

## (e) Ulez Charge

Councillor K Rizvi asked in the Leader of Council agree with him that the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan's Ulez charge was a tax without accountability on the residents of Epping Forest.

Councillor C Whitbread stated that he was opposed to the Ulez charges that were being proposed and wanted it noted that Essex will have no Ulez signage on any Essex owned highway land. It was a positive stand to take and he would also take that stand in Epping Forest.

## (f) Structural refurbishment of the shops and flats in Loughton Broadway

Councillor Chris Pond asked for an update regarding the structural refurbishment of the shops and flats in Loughton Broadway, how was it going and what was the likely timescale. He also asked for an update on the state of the commercial lettings both in Loughton Broadway and the western side of Loughton High Road.

**Action:** Councillor H Whitbread advised that Loughton Broadway and Limes Farm were two key projects being looked at and that she would put an update in the Members Bulletin.

**Action:** Councillor J Philip advised that he did not have those details to hand and this question could of have had some prior notice. He would put an update in the Members Bulletin.

## (g) Reviews and Efficiency Portfolio

Councillor J Whitehouse asked Councillor L Burrows to update her on the projects that he was involved in and could he advise why he did not provide a report to Council, like the other portfolio holders did.

Councillor L Burrows advised that he was involved with various projects, the museum and grants therefore there wasn't much to report back to Council because it was ongoing.

Councillor C Whitbread added that much of what Councillor Burrows did was across all of the other Portfolio Holders reports and that information was therefore integrated into their reports.

## (h) DaRT 87 Demand Responsive Transport Bus Service

Councillor C Amos asked in the DaRT 87 bus service could be more widely publicised as he hadn't seen much advertisement of this service. There were a number of community groups in Theydon Bois and this bus service should be brought to their attention.

Councillor N Bedford advised that in his report on page 39 of the agenda there was an update. This service was widely used during the pandemic when people had to go to the hospital but only six people at a time were allowed on. A new £2 flat fare was recently introduced for a limited time and he was happy to announce some improvements in the service. There had been 400 extra passenger trips between April and December 2022 which had been detailed in his report.

## (i) Refuse lorries parking at North Weald

Councillor H Brady asked if the proposed depot for the refuse trucks in North Weald was only for parking of the refuse trucks or would there be any rubbish sorting on site.

Councillor N Avey stated that he had recently had a meeting with North Weald Parish Council to discuss the same issue. The official title of the site was a 'Waste Depot' but in reality, it was going to be used only as a vehicle park and there would be no waste stored at that site, it was purely for the parking of waste vehicles and an administration function that went with it.

The depot would be important for our procurement process in attracting a new waste contractor as we have been advised that otherwise the Council would be at a disadvantage and would unlikely to get any bidders in the procurement exercise.

(j) Ownership of the Refuse Vehicles

Councillor D Wixley thought the refuse lorries used by Biffa were owned by the Council but in the Portfolio Holders report on page 55 of the agenda it stated that Biffa were continuing to make progress on replacing and repairing their waste vehicles'. Could the Portfolio Holder advise on who owned the vehicles.

Councillor N Avey advised that all of the refuse lorries were owned by Biffa and they were responsible for replacing and repairing them. The problems which have occurred are finding people to repair the vehicles and obtaining the spare parts.

## 68. MOTIONS

The Chairman reported that there were no motions to be considered at the meeting.

## 69. REPORT OF THE CABINET - COUNCIL BUDGET 2023/24

**Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance Portfolio Holder**

Councillor J Philip presented a report of the Budget for 2023/24 (including Medium-Term Financial Plan, Capital Programme and Fees and Charges). He thanked Mr A Small, Strategic Director and S151 Officer and Mr C Hartgrove, Interim Chief Financial Officer for an excellent budget and for their sound financial advice. He also thanked members of the Audit and Governance Committee.

There voted for the recommendations (42) namely: Councillors I Allgood, N Avey, R Balcombe, R Baldwin, N Bedford, P Bolton, H Brady, L Burrows, E Gabbett, S Heap, S Heather, J Jogia, H Kane, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Lea, J Leppert, J Lucas, T Matthews, J McIvor, L Mead, R Morgan, C Nweke, J Parsons, A Patel, J Philip, C C Pond, C P Pond, R Pugsley, S Rackham, K Rizvi, M Sartin, P Stalker, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell.

There voted against the recommendations (5) namely: Councillors C Amos, C McCredie, S Murray, J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse.

Abstentions (1) namely: Councillor R Brooks.

Report as first moved **ADOPTED**.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the draft General Fund Revenue and Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2023/24 as presented in *Attachment 1a*, be approved.
- (2) That the draft General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital programmes for 2023/24 to 2027/28 presented in *Attachment 1b*, be approved.
- (3) That the proposed Fees and Charges for 2023/24, including an average Housing Rent increase of 7.0% on Council Dwellings, presented in *Attachment 1c*, be approved.
- (4) That the updated General Fund Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2023/24 to 2027/28 presented in *Attachment 1d*, be approved.
- (5) That the Section 151 Officer's report – in accordance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 – on the robustness of the estimates for the purposes of the Council's 2023/24 budgets and the adequacy of the reserves, presented in *Attachment 2*, be noted.
- (6) That the Section 151 Officer's recommendation to maintain a minimum £4.0 million contingency balance in the Council's General Fund Reserve in the medium-term, including a contribution to the Reserve as part of the General Fund revenue budget proposals for 2023/24, be approved.
- (7) That the Treasury Management Outturn report 2021/22 considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 29th September 2022, presented in *Attachment 3*, be noted.
- (8) That the Treasury Management Mid-Year Update report 2022/23 considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 28th November 2022, presented in *Attachment 4*, be noted.
- (9) That the draft Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 13th February 2023 and recommended for Council approval, presented in *Attachment 5*, be approved; and
- (10) That the draft Capital Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26, considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 13th February 2023, presented in *Attachment 6*, be approved.

## 70. REPORT OF THE CABINET - COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2023/24

### **Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance Portfolio Holder**

Councillor J Philip submitted a report regarding the Council Tax Setting for 2023/24. he advised that the Cabinet had recommended a District Council Tax increase based on Band D properties of £4.69 (2.98%) a year. The report on page 225 of the agenda also included the Town and Parish precepts and the Essex precepts for Essex County Council, Essex Police and Crime Commissioner and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

It was noted that Appendix C on page 232 of the agenda was incorrect and a supplementary agenda with the correct Appendix C on page 10 had been published.

Report as first moved **ADOPTED**

**RESOLVED:**

That the revised Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 recommendations be approved.

- (1) To note that under delegated authority, the Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer, has calculated the Council Tax Base for 2023/24 for the whole Council area as 54,883.6 (Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended) and for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates as set out in Appendix A
- (2) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:
  - (a) £116,839,907 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils
  - (b) £103,758,904 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act
  - (c) £13,081,003 being the amount by which the aggregate at 2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act)
  - (d) £238.34 being the amount at 2(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (the amount at (1) above, the tax base), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts)
  - (e) £4,181,627 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act
  - (f) £162.15 being the amount at 2(c) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 2 (e) above by Item T (1) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates
  - (g) That it be noted that Essex County Council, Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and Essex Fire & Rescue Service have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each of the category of dwellings in the Council's area
  - (h) That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts in Appendix C as the amounts of Council Tax for 2023/24 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings; and
  - (i) That in accordance with section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council determines that the amount of Council Tax shown at 2 (f) of £162.15 for 2023/24, representing an increase

of £4.69 (2.98%) compared to 2022/23 is not excessive and therefore there is no requirement to hold a local referendum.

**71. REPORT OF THE CABINET - LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2023/24**

**Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance Portfolio Holder**

Councillor J Philip submitted a report regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24, which remained unchanged.

Report as first moved **ADOPTED**

**RESOLVED:**

That the revised Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 be approved.

**72. REPORT OF THE CABINET - PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24**

**Mover: Councillor S Kane, Internal Resources Portfolio Holder**

Councillor S Kane presented a report regarding the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24, which was required by Section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011 and set out details of the Council's current practices and policies. This specifically included the Council's approach to its highest and lowest paid employees.

Report as first moved **ADOPTED.**

**RESOLVED:**

That the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 be adopted.

**73. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor H Kane presented her progress report for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 31 January 2023. She advised members that this had been omitted, in error, from the Council agenda but was published as a supplementary document.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 31 January 2023 be noted.

**74. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

The Chairman noted that there were no verbal reports for this meeting.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse requested that members who served on outside bodies brought regular reports to Council to update members on the work that these organisations were doing.

**CHAIRMAN**