

# EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEETING MINUTES

Monday 15 July 2024, 7.00 pm - 8.03 pm

**Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping**

<b>Members Present:</b>	Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, P Keska, T Matthews, K Rizvi, H Whitbread and K Williamson
<b>Other Councillors:</b>	Councillors R Brookes, M Morris, S Murray and J M Whitehouse
<b>Other Councillors (Virtually):</b>	Councillors R Baldwin
<b>Apologies:</b>	Councillor S Patel
<b>Officers In Attendance:</b>	Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Andrew Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer), Louise Baker (Internal Communications Assistant), Paula Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), Vivienne Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), John Taphouse (Interim Service Manager (Assets Strategy)) and James Warwick (Service Director (Contracts, Partnerships and Procurement))
<b>Officers In Attendance (Virtually):</b>	Georgina Blakemore (Chief Executive) and Laura Kirman (Democratic Services Officer)
<b>Also In Attendance:</b>	S Jevans (Qualis Group Managing Director), Andy Howarth (Qualis Group Finance Director) and Simon Rutter Qualis Commercial Managing Director)

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## [A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

### **15 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.

### **16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor C Whitbread declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 11, Terre Verde Services (TVS) Business Plan, as he was a Board Member of TVS, and that he would remain in the meeting for its consideration.

Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Jon Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 15, Joint Venture, as he lived close to the site and that he would remain in the meeting for its consideration.

**17 MINUTES****Decision:**

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 28 May 2024 be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

**18 REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS****(a) Finance & Economic Development**

Women in business event – Councillor H Whitbread had attended this well supported event organised by Essex County Council and the Federation of Small Businesses in Buckhurst Hill a few weeks ago. Councillor S Patel had promoted and attended the event as the Portfolio Holder and Councillor R Brookes had also been there along with women entrepreneurs and business people from across the district.

Rural England Prosperity Fund – Councillor H Whitbread announced that funding had been awarded to Nazeing Parish Council to help refurbish a play area at Bumbles Green and that aligned with EFDC's investment in rural infrastructure.

**19 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.

**20 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The new Chairman, Councillor R Baldwin, reported that at the first meeting on 4 June 2024, members had agreed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, as well as those for the Communities and Place Scrutiny Committees and their Terms of Reference. The Leader had presented the Council's Corporate priorities, and he thanked Cabinet members who had attended, as the Cabinet Forward Plan was scrutinised at each meeting. In January 2025, the Committee was scheduled to monitor progress and improvement in development management following the Planning Advisory Service recommendations. It was also proposed that there would be single dedicated meetings during the year for the Youth Council, Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Community Safety and sustainable transport issues.

**21 PRODUCTIVITY PLAN 2024**

The Leader, Councillor C Whitbread, introduced the report which detailed the proposed approach for the Council's Productivity Plan for 2024/25 and was a requirement of the Local Government Finance Settlement published in late 2023.

Councillor S Murray welcomed the introduction of a community lottery but enquired where the decision had been made as he had raised this at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Leader replied he understood it had been with the Portfolio Holder at that time, but he would report this back to scrutiny. Councillor H Whitbread (Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder) clarified that it had been part of the budget process and conversations had at that time about grant allocations.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse commented on the burden placed by the Government on councils to supply/advertise reports, plans and data that are required under legislation. The Leader acknowledged this, but the Productivity Plan was useful and produced with the best intentions in these financially challenged times, as the Council was working to the highest productivity possible.

Councillor M Morris asked about ICT and shared services. The Leader was pleased to report that good progress was being made with Colchester City Council on shared ICT services and that we had a Joint ICT PMO & Transformation Service Director. Also, the North Essex Councils were building on their strengths.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

**Decision:**

That the Cabinet approved the Productivity Plan (Appendix A of agenda item 8).

## 22 REGENERATION AND PLACE INVESTMENT FUND

The Commercial & Estates Portfolio Holder, Councillor T Matthews, outlined that £1.2 million had been ringfenced from the Fit for the Future Reserve. This would enable the Council to create investment to deliver its first tranche of place-based initiatives promoting employment and work opportunities. The beginning of the journey was to progress feasibility, viability and achieve planning permission in Centric Parade Loughton and Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey. Viability would be assessed at every stage.

The Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder remarked it was a sensible and measured approach to take, and she supported these place-based initiatives.

Councillor R Brookes was interested in the regeneration of The Broadway and when this would commence. The Leader advised that an all-member briefing would be held on this, which members would be informed about when this had been organised.

Councillor S Murray agreed the Council must meet housing needs but remarked the existing businesses needed to be safeguarded and had the Council tried to let empty shop premises? The Portfolio Holder acknowledged it was important to protect the existing local businesses and although Centric Parade was at an early stage, the monies ensured the processes of the project would be worked through.

In reply to Councillor M Morris on Brooker Road, the Portfolio Holder replied that this site would follow the same process as the money was ring-fenced and viability would be assessed at every stage. The project nearby in Cartersfield Road was already going ahead and progressing very well.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

**Decision:**

- (1) That the Cabinet approved the creation of an Investment and Regeneration Reserve of £1,020,000, ring-fencing the funding from the Fit for the Future Reserve, and;
- (2) That the Cabinet approved the use of this funding to progress feasibility, viability and achieve planning permission for the first tranche of Place Based initiative schemes initially at both Centric Parade, Loughton and Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey.

## 23 APPROACH TO HOUSING ENERGY EFFICIENCY RETROFIT

The Housing & HGGT Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Bedford, reported that the Council was guided by Government legislation, as it had set a target for all social housing to meet an energy efficiency standard of SAP band C by 2030 (phase1). Also, the UK was legally required to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. EFDC currently had a retrofit project on site improving 132 homes. This was due to complete by March 2025. The agenda report set out the proposed approach for delivering the remainder of the energy efficiency retrofit programme.

The Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder thanked J Taphouse (Interim Head of Asset Management) for his work on this programme as it was saving tenants money on energy bills, which was a primary aim, and making our homes as energy efficient as possible.

Councillor S Murray observed that this had been effectively scrutinised by the Communities Scrutiny Committee. However, as the HRA business plan was supporting the £10 million cost of phase 1, he did not know what it was stopping us from doing when this £10 million could have been spend elsewhere. J Taphouse replied that the retrofit programme was being done in the most cost-effective way. The Leader commented that the scrutiny feedback had been really helpful, but the Council needed to prioritise its spend.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

### **Decision:**

That the Cabinet approved the proposed approach to the programme for improving the energy efficiency of EFDC's housing properties.

## 24 TERRA VERDE SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN

Councillor R Balcombe (Contracts Delivery Portfolio Holder) reported that waste collection was a vital service for residents. The business plan set out the strategic approach for EFDC's newly created Local Authority Trading Company. TVS would deliver two key environmental services, recycling and waste collections and street cleansing. The partnership would give greater flexibility and control to the Council.

Councillor S Murray observed that as residential street cleansing was the area most residents complained about, this needed to be improved. Also, would unions be recognised for the workforce? The Portfolio Holder acknowledged there had been some problems with street cleansing. J Warwick (Contracts, Partnerships & Procurement Service Director) continued that under TVS, street cleansing would be improved through supervision and include visiting the sites to check on progress as well as monitoring if it was not on target. The Leader added that the TVS Board was intending to prepare a statement on unions soon.

Councillor N Bedford commented that when Biffa workers left or dropped a refuse bag they would return and collect it when residents alerted the Council. The Portfolio Holder replied that all refuse trucks would have brooms, so this would be managed through monitoring. The Service Director advised that a set of service standards was being cleared by the Board, so crews would be fully aware of their spillage responsibilities.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked about customer care, agency costs to cover sickness absences and leave, and the 2020 Shareholder Agreement. The Service Director replied that residents would phone the Customer contact centre, as customer care would come under the Council. Agency costs were based on Biffa's financials, so it would cover staff sickness and holiday times, but EFDC did not know how many Biffa staff would move across to TVS.

The Leader added that the 2020 Shareholder Agreement would be put up. Waste collection was an important service in EFDC. He thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their work on this project and that this was an enormous task that needed to be completed before 11 November 2024.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

**Decision:**

That the Cabinet agreed, as Epping Forest District Council was the 100% shareholder of Terra Verde Services Ltd, to approve the adoption of the Terra Verde Services Ltd Business Plan (Appendix 1 of agenda item 11).

**25 QUALIS QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT - 6 MONTHS TRANSITIONAL PERIOD TO 31ST MARCH 2024**

The Commercial & Estates Portfolio Holder remarked that there were no surprises in the report and the figures were slightly better than budgeted for. The report detailed where the money had been spent and we were starting to see the benefits.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked when the quarterly monitoring reports would start to show house sales' figures. The Portfolio Holder stated that sales figures for property in Springwood Grove and Cartersfield Road would be reported in the second quarter.

When Councillor M Morris queried the monitoring actions, the Portfolio advised that monitoring was ongoing and on track, so no additional measures were required.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

**Decision:**

That the Cabinet noted the report particularly the ongoing monitoring actions, but no additional measures were required.

**26 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

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

**27 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was agreed that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

Agenda Item No	Subject	Exempt Information Paragraph Number
11b	Terra Verde Services Business Plan Appendix 2	3
15	Joint Venture	3

**28 JOINT VENTURE**

After the Commercial & Estates Portfolio Holder had introduced the report, members present at the meeting asked several questions which were answered by Qualis Management.

The report set out the options considered, if any, and the reasons for the recommendation and the decision.

**Decision:**

That the Cabinet agreed Qualis be given permission to enter the Joint Venture arrangement set out in the agenda report, subject to the final terms of the arrangement being agreed with the S151 Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Commercial and Estates.

**CHAIRMAN**