

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny 1 **Date:** 29 March 2005

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices,
High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.27 p.m.

Members Present: Councillors Mrs J H Whitehouse (Chairman), M Colling (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stevens, Mrs P Brooks, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs A Haigh, A Lee, Mrs S Perry, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan, K Wright

Other Councillors: M Heavens, C Whitbread

Apologies: Councillors Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs M McEwen, Mrs C Pond

Officers Present: J Scott (Deputy Chief Executive (Community Services)), L MacNeill, A Clear (Leisure Services), A Hall (Head of Housing Services), C Overend, S Hill, Z Folley (Research and Democratic Services)

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2005 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that there had been no substitute members appointed to attend the meeting.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor K Wright declared a personal interest in agenda item 7 (Epping Forest District Council Voluntary Transport and Community Transport Schemes) by virtue of being an Ongar Parish Councillor and a Council representative on the Community Transport Scheme. He had determined that his interest was not prejudicial and advised that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of any discussion and voting on that item.

41. MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman informed the Committee that there were no matters arising for consideration.

42. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was reported that there was no urgent business for consideration at the meeting.

43. EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL VOLUNTARY TRANSPORT AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES

Members were reminded that, at its meeting on 12 February 2004, the Committee had reaffirmed its in principle support for a merger between the Epping Forest District Council Voluntary Transport and the Community Transport Schemes. The Committee noted that, since that decision, ongoing discussions had taken place between the Chairman of the Committee, Voluntary Action Epping Forest, Ongar Parish Council, Waltham Abbey Rotary Club and officers of the District Council to consider the proposed scheme. The consultation exercise had identified support for the concept of the voluntary transport minibuses being retained locally for use by local groups with preference given wherever possible to community groups from the areas in which the buses were based. The Committee agreed that, in view of these responses, the transfer of the voluntary transport minibuses to the Community Transport Scheme should not go ahead, but that in accordance with the views expressed, the Ongar based and Waltham Abbey based vehicles be retained by their owners, with the revised procedures required to come into effect from 23 June 2005.

It was noted that the bookings for the Waltham Abbey based buses were currently undertaken through the District Council Information Offices. This arrangement would cease but only after a suitable alternative was found. Members also noted that Ongar Parish Council and Waltham Abbey Rotary would be taking on overall responsibility for all arrangements (servicing, maintenance, repairs etc) of the vehicles. They could also participate in the Community Transport Brokerage Scheme through which they would have the potential to benefit from income arising.

The Committee also proposed that the Loughton based vehicle, in view of its age, should be sold, with the proceeds of the sale being added to the Welfare Transport Budget. It was agreed that the sale should take place as soon as possible once alternative arrangements had been made in respect of committed bookings. It was noted that this could be provided through the Community Transport Scheme and that current user groups of the Loughton based bus would be offered the use of this facility.

The Joint Chief Executive (Community) reported that the Council had contributed significantly to the Voluntary and Community Transport Schemes over the years. He drew attention to the Council's 2005/6 Welfare Transport Budget and the amount set aside for the provision of community transport itself. Members considered this and proposed that the amount left over within the budget, following changes being put into place, should be used to meet the annual costs of funding a Community Transport driver, estimated at £15,000, with the residue to go towards the operational costs of the scheme. Members also recommended that, from 2006/07 onwards, the Council's contribution to the budget should be limited to meeting the annual costs of a driver for the scheme.

RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET

- (1) That the proposed retention of the Ongar-based and Waltham Abbey-based Voluntary Transport vehicles by the respective owners and the sale of the Loughton based bus be approved;
- (2) That the proposal not to proceed with the transfer of the Voluntary Transport minibuses to the Community Transport Scheme also be approved;
- (3) That the balance of funds within the Welfare Transport Budget for 2004/5 be used to meet the annual cost of funding a Community Transport driver, estimated at £15,000, with any residual amount to be used as a contribution towards the operational costs of the Community Transport Scheme;
- (4) That in future years the Council's contribution be limited to meeting the annual costs of one Community Transport driver.

44. SIX MONTH PROGRESS REPORT ON KEY ACTION PLANS - HOUSING STRATEGY 2004 - 2007

The Housing Portfolio Holder presented a report, which detailed the progress made with the key action plans contained within the Housing Strategy 2004 - 2007. He reminded members that the Council's Housing Strategy had previously been approved by the Council and assessed as fit for purpose by the Government. He advised that important sections of the Strategy were the key action plans which set out the proposed action that the Council would take to address housing needs within the District over the next one to three years. The Committee were asked to consider the progress made with these stated actions.

Members were reminded that the six-monthly action plan included details of the Council's services in relation to homelessness provision, supported housing and special needs groups, public sector housing and energy efficiency initiatives. The report also monitored the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Tenant and Leaseholder Participation arrangements. The Committee focused on several parts of the progress report. In relation to its commitment to undertake a survey of caravan sites within the District, a Member asked whether this action referred to Mobile Home sites and suggested that this needed to be clarified. The Portfolio Holder for Housing Services stated that he would ask the Head of Environmental Services to circulate figures on the number of empty homes within the District. He stated that this information would be placed within the Members' Bulletin. A member asked about the housing provisions available for large families. The Head of Housing Services stated that a housing association scheme was currently being planned that would provide some four bedroom properties. Another involves the provision of three bedroom houses on the proposed development of small garage sites in the District. A report on this particular scheme would be submitted to the next Cabinet meeting. It was also noted that the post of Environmental Co-ordinator had not yet been filled.

RESOLVED:

That the Six-monthly Progress Report for the Key Action Plans contained within the Housing Strategy 2004 - 2007 be noted.

45. BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW HOUSING SERVICES SIX MONTHLY PROGRESS REPORT ON SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor D Stallan declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of a family relative being an occupant of the Council sheltered accommodation. He had determined that his interests were not prejudicial and would advised that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of any discussion and voting for that item.

The Committee considered the second six-monthly progress report on the Housing Service Development Plan. In response to particular actions in the plan the Portfolio Holder stated that he would be considering a report from the Head of Housing Services on the delivery of the housing management service at the Waltham Abbey Housing "Surgery" in the near future. He drew attention to the national definition of a Key Worker and stated that the definition had been considered by the Local Strategic Partnership who had determined a separate, local definition. Members were reminded that a leaflet offering advice on anti-social behaviour was currently being produced and would be circulated to members. A member asked about the decision not to incorporate the Building Maintenance Section into Housing Services. The Head of Housing Services stated that Management Board had resolved that in view of the introduction of a Corporate Contact Centre these two services should be kept separate.

RESOLVED

That the second six-monthly progress report on the Housing Services Development Plan be noted.

46. EPPING FOREST LOCAL SUPPORTING PEOPLE'S STRATEGY 2005 - 2009

The Housing Portfolio Holder asked the Committee to consider the draft Local Supporting People's Strategy 2005 - 2009 and recommend its adoption to the Cabinet. He stated that the document set out for the future the means of planning and delivering local high quality housing-related support services to vulnerable people. The Council produced its first Local Strategy in 2002 which had been reviewed by this Committee and adopted by the Cabinet annually. Local providers and user representatives involved in supporting housing had been consulted on the draft of the latest four-year strategy. Comments from the consultations had been incorporated within the final version before members.

The Committee noted the existing provisions and new proposals for young parents within the Strategy. The Head of Housing Services stated that officers from this Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council were in the early stages of investigating the possibility of the introduction of a cross boundary young parent scheme to provide accommodation and support for young parents in all three districts. No decision had yet been made regarding where the accommodation would be located, although it was likely to be in Epping Forest since, geographically, this was preferable. Funding for the provision would be sought through Supporting People, the Housing Corporation and possibly Essex Social Services. The Committee noted that research has been undertaken into the need for the establishment of a Foyer Scheme in the District to help provide accommodation for young people. The Committee noted the scale of the proposed provision and that it

would be run by the YMCA with close links with the SAFE Project. A member asked if more detailed information on the number of young people leaving care for the District could be provided, instead of for the whole of West Essex. The Head of Housing Services stated he would take up this matter with Essex County Council Social Services to try to ascertain the information.

RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET

That the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Strategy 2005-2009, circulated separately to Cabinet members, be adopted.

47. BEST VALUE AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2004/05

The Committee considered the Council's Best Value and Local Performance Indicators for the third quarter of 2004/05 in relation to the Community Wellbeing Housing and Leisure Portfolios.

- **Housing Services**

The percentage change in the average number of families, which include dependant children or pregnant women placed in temporary accommodation under the Homelessness legislation compared with the average from the previous year (BV203).

It was noted that this was a new indicator for 2004/05. Next year the indicator would be reviewed and a new target set in light of this year's performance.

- **Leisure Services**

The number of visits/usages of museums per thousand population (BV170A).

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services reported that usages included website visits. He stated that for this quarter there have been fewer visits to the museum than anticipated, however the Outreach Programme, which included Internet visits, external school usage and museum presence at events had increased overall service usage. These activities had not been included within the figures. He stated that the figures for the number of visitors to the museum could be provided.

Number of individuals on low income who benefit from special concessionary prices (LPI5).

For this quarter this indicator had not achieved the targets set for the indicator. This was partly because Community Leisure after school clubs had been cancelled due to a shortage of suitably qualified staff and the cost of hiring schools, which had proved prohibitive.

Number of events staged at airfield (LPI15).

The Portfolio Holder advised that the indicator for the third quarter 2004/05 should read 99 not 33 as stated within the schedule. The new figure included boot sales and meant that the cumulative total for the year so far was now 130.

48. LAST MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The Chairman reported that this was the last ever meeting of the Committee. She thanked members and officers for their participation and attendance at meetings and asked the Committee to forward topics for next year's Overview and Scrutiny programme.

CHAIRMAN