

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON TUESDAY, 2 JULY 2019  
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES  
AT 7.00 - 9.15 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	Y Knight (Chairman), J Share-Bernia (Vice-Chairman), I Hadley, J Lea, A Mitchell, D Plummer, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse, D Wixley, R Brookes and D Stocker
<b>Other members present:</b>	N Bedford, S Kane and A Patel
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	A Beales and J McIvor
<b>Officers Present</b>	R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), P Pledger (Service Director (Housing & Property Services)), G Wallis (Service Manager (Community & Partnerships)), P Gardener (Community Safety Officer), N Ross (Police Officer), J Warwick (Assistant Manager, Community, Health & Wellbeing), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer) and A Rose (Marketing & Digital Content Officer)

**1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

The Chairman 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.

**2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.07.02)**

The following substitutions were reported:

That Councillor D Stocker was substituting for Councillor J McIvor; and

That Councillor R Brookes was substituting for Councillor A Beales.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**4. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman, Councillor Y Knight advised that the Terms of Reference and Work Programme for the Select Committee had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 16 April 2019.

(a) Terms of Reference

The Committee were informed that the Terms of Reference set out the core areas of responsibility and the scrutiny role of the Stronger Communities Select Committee.

The Select Committee noted the Terms of Reference

(2) Work Programme

The 2019/20 work programme would be updated following each meeting to reflect the ongoing progress. The items on the current work programme had been assigned deadline dates for when the Committee would consider these items throughout the year and it would evolve to include suggestions from the Committee.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

**5. UNIVERSAL CREDIT IMPACT WORKING GROUP**

R Pavey, Service Director (Customer Services), introduced a report to the Select Committee regarding the Universal Credit Impact Working Group.

He advised that Universal Credit (UC) was a consolidation of a number of individual benefits into a single payment for claimants. The roll-out of UC to all Job Centres in the District was completed in December 2018. UC will ultimately affect the majority of working-age benefit claimants which make up around 50% of EFDC's Housing Benefit caseload. As from 5 December 2018 any new Housing Benefit claimants of working age were now referred to the Job Centre to apply for Universal Credit which would incorporate the Housing element of their Benefit entitlement. There was a phased migration of existing Housing Benefit claimants onto Universal Credit which the Government had now extended to 2023.

UC was administered by the Department of Work and Pensions and a formal arrangement existed with Citizens Advice to provide advice and help with claims. The Council therefore had no official role in the UC claim process. It had been made well known that there have been problems with its roll-out nationally which affected the Council's residents and impacted on our services. Most of the issues have arisen out of the 5-week delay for claimants receiving their first UC payment although the timeframe has often been longer. These problems have been recognised by the Secretary of State who is currently reviewing elements of the UC process.

The current issues affecting residents was growing debt, vulnerable claimants and the claim process, the digital-by-default process and safeguarding concerns. This would inevitable impact on the demands and performance of the Council's services, due to people having problems paying their bills, such as rent and Council Tax which could lead to homelessness concerns.

The Working Group consisted of Council departments (Customer Services, Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Safeguarding and Community Services) DWP, Epping Forest Food Bank, Peabody Trust, Citizens Advice, Churches Together and Epping Re-use. Other organisations have been approached and invited, dependent upon the issues discussed.

The aim of the Working Group was to establish a programme and provide support networks for claimants. There have been several meetings of the Group and key issues were identified:

- Initial 5-week period before the first payment is made;
- Handling claimants with mental health issues;
- Debt;
- Work assessments;
- Awareness of alternative payment arrangements;

- Temporary accommodation of residents with specific issues such as learning difficulties;
- Publicity and awareness of services available for both claimants and organisations; and
- Digital inclusion concerns as the process is digital by default.

The work of the group represented a way in which the Council could work with its partners to provide better outcomes for the residents and would reduce the potential impacts on demands for services. There were a number of areas yet to be explored and future findings would be reported to the Select Committee at a later date.

Councillor J H Whitehouse remarked on what an excellent initiative that the working group were achieving and has brought the Council some very favourable comments from the groups that have been invited to come to the meetings. Councillor Whitehouse asked, out of interest, which Churches were involved in the Churches Together Group. R Pavey replied that the Churches Together Group were in Loughton. Councillor Whitehouse asked if the Churches Together Group from Epping could also be invited. R Pavey replied that it was not an exclusive group and the more groups that could get involved the more help and information the residents of the district would be able to access.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked about the mapping exercise that had been done and asked if that exercise could be shared with Members as residents contact Members with issues, Members would know where to look to help resolve the residents issue. R Pavey advised that talks were in progress to create an online hub which would be hosted at the Council and would be a portal for organisations and would give claimants access to all the groups that could help.

Councillor D Wixley asked if 'digital by default' referred to in the report could be explained. R Pavey replied that digital by default meant that was how you initially applied for the benefit. DWP and Citizens Advice offer face to face support and help claimants to understand how to claim. This had not been widely advertised and the Council were seeking to get this publicity out into the community through the relevant agencies.

Councillor D Wixley stated that he had heard nationally about Universal Credit and the biggest problem seemed to be that claimants had to wait 5 weeks before they got paid, people could get a loan to carry them over the 5 week period and they had 16 weeks to pay it back. He asked why people were paid in arrears and how many people in the Epping Forest District were affected by Universal Credit. R Pavey advised that the 5 week delay was the primary cause of debt accruing with claimants. These problems had been recognised by the Secretary of State who was currently reviewing elements of the UC process.

R Pavey advised that he had recently spoken to the Epping Forest foodbank and they had stated that the demand on the foodbank had greatly increased due to the 5 week delay with the UC system.

Councillor S Rackham asked as a district how many people were there on Universal Credit and how would we get the message of these help groups out there to the hard to reach residents. R Pavey advised that there were approximately 2,000 people claiming UC and reaching the residents was an evolving process as the Group was in the early stages of looking at these matters. He advised that he would be in a position to give an update at the next meeting.

Councillor R Brookes asked how many people were having issues with paying their Council Tax and rent. R Pavey stated that he saw the figures monthly for Council Tax and there was no impact. Regarding rent these figures were only accessible quarterly and we had now reached quarter 1 of the financial year he advised that he would look at the figures to assess the situation and report back at the next meeting.

The Chairman asked if work had been done in the past with regards to young carers.

The Community Culture and Wellbeing Manager, G Wallis stated that young carers were a priority group for all agencies, the issue with young carers was that they didn't recognise themselves as young carers and therefore didn't ask for any help.

Councillor D Plummer advised that he had claimed UC. He felt there were many difficulties around UC, having to wait for 5 weeks to be paid and although you could get a loan it had to be paid back within a certain time. He also highlighted that it cost him £5 return to get from Waltham Abbey to the Job Centre and many claimants did not know that you could claim the fare or part of the fare back from the Job Centre. He did not feel that it was very widely publicised. There should be posters put in communal places, blocks of council flat noticeboards, doctors, libraries urging people to find out if they are claiming all that they are entitled to. R Pavey advised that the Working Group were looking at publicity and getting the message out there to the residents.

The Chairman stated that maybe publicity could be looked at in the Select Committee Work Programme.

Councillor A Patel asked about residents who were supported with mental health conditions, had they already been diagnosed by a GP with mental health conditions or was it such that residents who come forward have been undiagnosed.

R Pavey stated if someone had been diagnosed as having mental health conditions they are then signposted to the Council and are they advised of the benefits that are available to them.

R Pavey advised that within the DWP there were specialised people who were trained to give specialist advice and help people with diagnosed mental health conditions. At the Council we are recognising mental health as an issue and our frontline staff will be trained to recognise people with mental health and therefore be able to direct them to the correct department for specialist help.

Councillor S Kane stated that although the Council had no official role in the UC claims process and arrangements had been made with Citizens Advice to provide advice and help with claims, under a formal arrangement with DWP, the Council should still spread the word and get guidance out to as many claimants as possible. A multi-agency centre was being set up in the Job Centre in Loughton but the Council should try and get a multi-agency approach across the district in libraries and through the Church community. It was important to get those up and running as soon as was possible and to make sure that those multi-agency networks advise of the correct information.

The Chairman stated that out of fairness of inclusion more money goes into towns than into villages and villages needed to have the same access to information as the towns did.

Councillor Bedford advised that he would be meeting with some groups soon and he would pass this information on and would report back through the Member's Bulletin the outcome.

The Chairman asked if it would be possible for this Committee to invite someone from the DWP to explain about the UC process. R Pavey said he would take it back to the Working Group and report back at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report of the Universal Credit Impact Working Group be noted.

**6. PRESENTATION ON THE SWITCH DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT**

The Customer Services Director, R Pavey gave a presentation to the Select Committee regarding Citizens Online, Epping Forest Switch Project.

Citizens Online – Digital Inclusion was a registered charity established in 2000 and had worked with over 50 communities around the UK. Since 2015, Citizens Online had been involved in the One Digital programme to improve basic digital skills across the UK. The One Digital programme was delivered by a partnership comprising of Age UK, Clarion Housing Group, SCVO and Digital Unite.

With budgets being cut savings must be made to deliver high quality services. Enabling residents to access services online delivers savings and also customer satisfaction. There were a significant percentage of the population that lacked digital skills. It was imperative that they weren't left behind and that the Council supported those who were able to develop better digital skills. Therefore, the more people accessing online services allowed more time to support those who would always need support.

Data from the 2018 Labour Force Survey conducted by ONS about Internet Users was not collected at the granular enough level to provide an estimate for Epping Forest, but suggested that across the Essex County Council area there are around 133,000 people who had never used the internet or last used it over three months ago.

Approximately 34,000 people in the West Essex area (Epping Forest and Uttlesford) were expected to be in this group. The 2011 Census recorded 124,659 people as usual residents of Epping Forest and 79,443 of Uttlesford. Assuming the proportion who were not recent internet users was equivalent, this would equate to around 13,000 adults in Uttlesford and 21,000 adults who had not used the internet recently or ever in Epping Forest.

It was estimated that around 1,000 Housing Benefit claims are made from people with low or no digital capabilities these mainly live in Waltham Abbey and Loughton. This was a significant number and ultimately all Housing Benefit claimants will be required to switch to the digital-by-default Universal Credit system. Working with Citizens Advice in other areas a claim for a single person took an average of 1 hour to complete and 1 hour 15 minutes for a couple. Once the claim was completed the claimants required continued support to complete online jobseeking diaries.

How could the Council help towards a solution:

- (a) Evidence – Target resources effectively to help towards age, disability and low income.
- (b) Partnership – The problem was too great for any single organisation to tackle alone. Those claimants that did not have the facility to go online were the most difficult to reach and an hour in the library would not be enough support. The Council were engaging with local organisations to form a partnership to help and support claimants in this district.
- (c) Digital Champions – These were people with the time and confidence to help others with digital skills. The network would have a mix of embedded Digital Champions, some of which are working at EFDC as well as volunteers.
- (d) Digital Leadership – With digital transformation, digital inclusion must sit at the heart, there was no point in having brilliant online services if people could not use them. Many organisations need support to embrace new ways of working that were more efficient and better for staff morale and development. Digital Leadership workshops would be run to increase knowledge in digital leadership principles.

Recommendations:

- Form a local Digital Inclusion Network;
- Launch a Digital Champions programme;
- Create a pan Epping Forest Signposting and Triage system;
- Centralise all Digital Inclusion information;
- Focus on Waltham Abbey and the ‘South West Corridor’;
- Higher areas of Pension Credit in Epping Town;
- Supporting Universal Credit migration
- Disability benefits claimants;
- Loneliness and isolation; and
- Connectivity.

A report would come to the next meeting with a plan on how the Council would tackle the above recommendations.

G Wallis stated that this was a huge priority for everyone involved and the Council should be proactive in reaching out to the people in the community.

## **7. ESSEX PRISONER PROTOCOL**

The Housing and Property Service Director, P Pledger presented a report to the Select Committee regarding the Essex Prisoner Protocol.

The Essex Prisoner Protocol, Agenda Item 8, appendix 1, was initiated by the Essex Community Rehabilitation Company, an organisation that worked with people serving their sentence in prison and the community. Their purpose was to reduce offending, the risk of harm, and to improve the quality of life of those under their supervision and care.

The intention of the Protocol was to reduce the number of Essex Adult Offenders who left custody without suitable accommodation to move into and to reduce the number of offenders who had to sleep rough.

On average the Council's Homeless Team dealt with 6 cases a year that left custody with no accommodation. With each of these cases, attempts would be made to access accommodation that was suitable for their needs. Arrangements would also be made to reintegrate offenders to areas where they have no connection with the Epping Forest District. Additionally, Senior Homeless staff Members already attend the Multi Agency Protection Panel Arrangements (MAPPA) where identified high risk offenders are discussed well in advance of their release date. The Council also worked closely with Churches Homeless Emergency Support Scheme (CHESS) who provide outreach support for identified rough sleepers.

The Council's duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 required that it provided an open approach to all referrals to the Homeless Service. The Council has open referral arrangements in place under the Duty to Refer provisions. Adopting this protocol will improve referrals and ensure that all identified prisoners leaving custody without accommodation could be dealt with. Additionally, offenders sleeping rough or occupying unsuitable accommodation would also receive the same level of service.

The Essex Housing Officer Group, as well as other partner Agencies have been consulted and were equally seeking to adopt this Protocol.

Councillor J Lea asked when a prisoner was released, they moved to a different area And continued to offend would it be picked up that they were already an offender and had been in prison. If so why would we rehouse people that continually reoffend. P Pledger advised that Homeless Prevention Legislation meant that we have an obligation to rehouse offenders. The protocol provided many more agencies that would also be involved.

Councillor S Rackham asked what was the process when ex-offenders left prison. P Pledger advised that he would report back as this was not his area of expertise and he would have to get advice.

Councillor Bedford stated that they would be closely monitored by the probation service and reoffenders would be sent back to prison.

The Chairman advised that page 1 of the report, paragraph 3, 4<sup>th</sup> line, the word 'reconnect' should read 'reintegrate'.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Committee considered and recommended to the Housing Portfolio Holder to adopt the Essex Prisoner Protocol, attached at Agenda Item 8, appendix 1, in partnership with other Essex Councils and other Key Agencies.

#### **8. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF EFDC FUNDED POLICE OFFICERS**

The Chairman welcomed Sergeant Neil Ross from the Community Safety Team to the meeting who was attending to give an updated on the work of the EFDC Funded Police Officers. Sergeant Ross advised that the Council's funded Police Officers became officially operational on 20 July 2018 and continued to make a real impact to the reduction in crime within the Epping Forest District.

The team were tasked according to the District Community Safety Partnership priorities which were identified through the Annual Strategic Assessment. These are aligned to the priorities set by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) Policing Plan. Aside from these priorities the team were occasionally deployed to

support EFDC staff in carrying out their work where there was an identified threat, harm or risk to staff. Close management of the tasking process has ensured that the police team were deployed efficiently and effectively.

A problem profile, commissioned by the Community Safety Partnership, showed that crime in general had reduced across the district since June 2018.

The team have completed over 55 specific tasking requests over the last twelve months and have been active in every ward in the district. A few examples of work they have undertaken between January 2019 to date are detailed below:

- Supported EFDC and Police Licensing teams with serving notices on high-risk licensed premises.
- Responded to priority tasking in Loughton and arrested two suspects for drugs supply offences.
- Deployed to firearms incident in Waltham Abbey whereby resident was threatening neighbours with a machete. Team led the incident and successfully detained and arrested the suspect as well as recovering the weapon.
- During targeted patrols following a series of knife-point robberies in the district the team intercepted the target vehicle. A lengthy pursuit ensued but was discontinued when the vehicle went into London. Recovered following RTC and suspects linked through forensics have since been charged.
- Assist Housing with lock change at premises occupied by high-risk subject
- Identified and intercepted a recovery truck carrying a stolen vehicle and arrested two suspects. Further enquiries resulted in the recovery of 6 further stolen vehicles.
- Tasked to rural patrols re: increase in rural crime. Intercepted a known-burglar who was wanted for failing to appear at court.
- Ran an operation at Epping Forest College with a screening arch and provided engagement to students. There were 4500 pass-throughs with no positive searches.
- Traced subject vehicle linked to burglary series in Theydon Bois. Arrested two suspects, one of whom was wanted by multiple forces across the South-East.
- Intercepted a stolen vehicle in Theydon Bois that had been committing burglaries across the district. Suspect decamped and has not been traced but vehicle recovered with an arsenal of house-breaking tools inside
- Identified suspects for high value burglary in Chigwell and working with Metropolitan Police arrested well-known burglar in Ilford who was also wanted for multiple burglary offence across the district. Charged and currently awaiting trial.
- Recovered a large number of stolen vehicles discovered whilst on patrol around the district, activated ANPR or linked to ongoing crime series.
- Planning and execution of a search warrant to trace a vehicle linked to high value vehicle thefts. Number of stolen vehicles recovered and evidence linking the suspect to multiple offences. Suspect is currently 'Most Wanted' in West Essex and continues to be targeted by the team.
- Located vehicle in Roydon paying attention to houses. Pursuit ensued and vehicle recovered, found to be stolen on false plates, linked to multiple theft offences around Roydon and Nazeing.
- Supported the local election process through visiting polling stations and providing cover for the count.

**Forthcoming Hub Activity in 2019**

The team were currently working with Hainault Police to deliver education packages to local schools identified to be at risk from cross-border gangs/exploitation. This formed part of Operation Rose which was the county lines operation in late 2018. Both forces were seeking to plug the gap and prevent a resurgence of county line activity in the district. The police and Council team continue to meet regularly with Met Police and BTP to share intelligence.

The team would be also leading on a number of operations for Operation Sceptre which was the national campaign tackling knife crime and associated offences. These operations will focus on targeting vehicles linked to crime using key routes in and out of the district.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked about the District Community Safety Partnership, she stated that the team was tasked with priorities which were identified through the annual strategic assessment and are aligned with the Police and Crime Commissioner priorities and asked how the document was put together and who was involved.

The Safer Communities Office, P Gardener advised that it was a requirement of the Council to provide a strategic intelligence assessment with regard to crime and disorder. The assessment would be done in conjunction with a Police analyst and we would look at the shape it produces in relation to demand, crime types, violence and vulnerability. From the information gathered the Safer Communities team were required to produce an annual partnership plan which should reflect the priorities of the need of the district.

Councillor J Lea stated that she had received a number of complaints regarding vans pulling up in a quiet cul-de-sac and they would transfer goods from one van to another in the early hours of the morning. P Gardener advised Councillor Lea to speak to him after the meeting and he would be able to pass this over to the correct team.

Councillor D Wixley highlighted that last summer there were problems in Loughton with youth coming from out of the district and attacking and robbing people in the district and asked if there were any plans to combat this problem.

Sgt N Ross advised that plans were in place for this summer but that he could not go into any detail.

Councillor A Patel stated that if the Council were funding the Police Officers then a Police Officer should be available to go into schools with the Crucial Crew to educate children of school age about the risks and dangers there were to children in the district. G Wallis advised that Essex Police resources were stretched and the Council were aware that the strategy was for the Police to use Special Constables to support wider community initiatives where possible. However, the Council were very keen for Essex Police to contribute to the education programmes which the Council facilitated, including projects like Crucial Crew and school based delivery.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked why the Police had to support the local election process through visiting polling stations and providing cover for the count. Councillor N Bedford advised that this was an essential part of the election process as there was a heightened risk of person turning up to cause trouble especially late at night. He also added that it was reassuring for the polling stations to know that the Police

were on call and that everyone was treated the same. It was also a Government requirement.

The Chairman stated it was imperative that staff at the polling stations and staff and Members at the count felt safe, she knew of incidents where people were verbally threatened outside polling stations and she had also experienced being threatened at the count.

The Chairman referred to the resource implications where the Council had agreed funding for three years for the Police Officer at a cost of £555,000 and asked if the Committee could have a breakdown of where the funds were going. Councillor S Kane stated that the amount of £555,000 was a contractual obligation and the three funded Police Officers provided a service across the whole district.

Councillor S Rackham stated that EFDC should be commended for taking the initiative to fund 3 Police Officers for the district.

Councillor N Bedford advised that he had attended the Police and Crime Commissioner meeting and was impressed with the figures that were coming through that 350 new Police Officers had been recruited in Essex. He also stated that Essex had the highest number of Special Constables and other authorities were using this Council's model as an example.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Stronger Communities Select Committee agreed to receive a six monthly report on the work and range of operations of the Council's Funded Police Team.

### **9. AGEING POPULATION REVIEW**

The Community, Culture and Wellbeing Manager, Gill Wallis presented a report to the Select Committee regarding an annual review of the work undertaken to address the needs of the ageing population.

In 2015/16 the Council undertook a comprehensive study into the impact of an ageing population in the Epping Forest district. At this time, a number of recommendations were generated for the Council, along with key statutory and voluntary sector partners, to progress.

In March 2018 the multi-agency Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board formally adopted and launched the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018-28. The health and wellbeing of older residents formed a key part of the Strategy and it was agreed, therefore, that the future focus for the delivery of projects and initiatives relating to the ageing population would sit with the associated multi-agency Age Well Action Group.

Under the Health & Wellbeing Board there were three Action Groups which were age specific:

- Start Well Action Group – Looked at pre-birth to 19 years old;
- Be Well Action Group – Looked at working age adults; and
- Age Well Action Group – Looked at initiatives around older people.

Through partner consensus, a review of the original Ageing Population Study Action

Plan was undertaken and a revised Age Well Action Plan was developed and adopted. The key priorities agreed by all partners were as follows:

- Increasing physical activity
- Reducing social isolation and loneliness
- Keeping older residents safe and independent at home

The current Action Plan attached to the Agenda, Item 10, provided an overview of the areas of work being undertaken to address the needs of the district's ageing population.

The Assistant Manager, Community, Health & Wellbeing, J Warwick advised the Select Committee that the Age Well Action Group plan was split into three priority areas:

### **1. Increasing Physical Activity**

A numbers of successful sports have been developed around walking sports:

- Walking Football weekly in Waltham Abbey which has approximately 18 people attending;
- Nordic Walking weekly in Epping; and
- Walking Netball.

These sports increased physical activity and reduced inactivity by a targeted approach to groups most likely to be inactive & underrepresented in a physical activity and sport.

### **Strength and Balance Pilot in Care Homes**

Five care homes were identified for the pilot and working closely with a qualified instructor who would deliver a number of strength and balance sessions to improve physical activity and mobility. The Activity Co-Ordinator's from the Care Homes would then be invited to attend two 2 hour training sessions which we deliver to give them the skills to deliver the sessions back in the Care Homes to ensure that the pilot was sustainable. We also provide the Care Homes with some equipment, exercise bands and balls.

This has been a really successful pilot that it was likely to be rolled out across West Essex to get more Care Homes involved.

West Essex CCG, EFDC, ECC Provide, Community Agents and Frontline to work together more proactively in respect of older people helping them in being more physically active and leaving 're-ablement' care. To be able to extend and sustain improvement work with individuals through referrals to activities such as the Lifewalks, Strength and Balance, Active Living, Cycling for Health programmes. We also have access to a GPs newsletter each month where we can signpost the services and raise awareness and profile of the work.

### **2. Social Isolation and Loneliness**

A project group was put together which included EFDC, West Essex CCG, Community Agents, Councillor A Patel, Community Matrons, EPUT, VAEF, the Parish Council and WECAN to name a few, to focus on a bespoke piece of work

around Buckhurst Hill. A number of activities had been introduced including beginners yoga, floral workshops and crochet workshops we were also finalising a toolkit to find out what activities were working and what activities were not working. An awareness information session along the lines of Dementia Friends sessions was also being arranged so that we could roll this out across the district to raise the profile and equip people with the tools to help them identify social isolation and loneliness.

To date we have recruited 14 Community Champions across the district, the target was to recruit one Community Champion in every Town and Parish Council area over a five year period. They work with the voluntary sector and have supported the Council attending various events. They have organised tea and chat sessions, bereavement cafes and were involved in the Great British spring clean-up organised at Limes Farm.

### **3. Safe and Independent at Home**

This was a Multi-agency engagement and events were to be provided for older people such as 'Stay Well This Winter' and 'Senior Safety' days, on an annual basis. These to include representation from health services, local pharmacies, opticians and the Council, and to include availability of flu vaccinations, benefits advice and tips for health and safety in the home.

Councillor A Mitchell asked about loneliness and isolation, when elderly people have no family to help when they move home. I recently came across an elderly lady who had just moved into a bungalow and she was sitting in the middle of the room with all her possessions around her. She stated that she had no family and didn't know what to do. Councillor Mitchell then helped arrange her utility bills and to set up. Councillor Mitchell stated that she found the situation this lady to be in very worrying as these issues did not seem to be addressed.

J Warwick stated that social isolation and loneliness was a key priority for the Group. A West Essex Social Isolation and Loneliness Prevention Partnership has just been formed and they are meeting this week. They had funding in place and had employed three Community Enablers, one for each district so Epping Forest will have a dedicated Community Enabler who will work across the district to identify socially isolated and lonely people and signpost them to services so they can obtain the help they need.

Councillor Wixley referred to increasing physical activity in care homes and asked if the intention was to contact all care homes in the district to offer this service. J Warwick advised that it all came down to resources. If we could evidence that it was making a difference then we would be able to get resources.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Stronger Communities Select Committee agreed to receive an annual progress report on the work undertaken to address the needs of the ageing population.

### **10. WHAT ARE OUR CUSTOMERS TELLING US**

R Pavey, Service Director (Customer Services), gave an overview on Customer Services and what our Customers were telling us.

One of the key corporate work programmes that this Committee was responsible for scrutinising was customer excellence which was putting customers at the heart of everything we do and on where the Council met customer needs, recognising positive feedback where it was received and acknowledging there were opportunities for improvements. The Council would be developing its customer engagement process as part of a new Customer Service Strategy would be reported at a future meeting.

There were elements of engagement across the authority on-going which needed to be pulled together to provide a holistic view. This process will increasingly inform the content of future reports and will provide a key resource to enable the Council to design its services around its customers.

The report provided feedback received by customers since 1 April 2019 and related to the Govmetric feedback which was received via contacts through telephone, email and the website. The feedback was only possible via Govmetric for the customer contacts that were handled via the Customer Contact centre and Revenues, which have the appropriate systems in place. The more services that moved into the contact centre the more comprehensive this type of feedback would be. The feedback provided both negative and positive feedback from customers as below:

#### Telephone

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Number of respondents	999	38	8
Percentage of respondents	96%	4%	1%
Overall Rating - Good			

#### Web

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Number of respondents	84	41	259
Percentage of respondents	22%	11%	67%
Overall Rating - Average			

#### Email

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Number of respondents	185	12	67
Percentage of respondents	70%	5%	25%
Overall Rating - Average			

The Web feedback remained the area where there were 259 instances of negative feedback but it needed to be seen in the context of over 300,000 website visits since 1 April 2019 which therefore represented approximately 1% dissatisfaction. Officers had noted that as the website matured the amount of negative feedback had fallen substantially. The current feedback identified issues such as problems around paying rent or finding out how to report or apply for items. This had been recognised and work was ongoing to solve these issues.

In April and May 2019 there had been 25 complaints submitted to the Council, 23 had been resolved and 2 have progressed to stage 2, which related to Council Tax and Planning.

Whilst no particular area of concern or opportunity could be specifically identified from the report, the customer engagement process would be brought together corporately and evolve in the future to bring customer need closer to the heart of future design. This work will be brought back to the next Select Committee for Members to scrutinise and make recommendations accordingly.

R Pavey added that Members were also customers of this service and that he would engage with all Members in the consultation process to make sure Members were happy with the service.

The Chairman commented on the figures for the telephone contact and stated that out of 999 calls only 8 complained that they were unhappy and thought this was remarkable. She also stated that customers wanted interaction with staff and not use the website or email.

R Pavey stated that the Govmetric system was used by over 100 other Councils around the Country and those figures put this Council in the top 10.

Councillor Bedford commented on the 18 compliments that the Council had received and expressed that this was an achievement and deserved to be mentioned.

Councillor Brookes stated that she had attended a meeting last year where the Officer advised how many people accessed the website on a mobile device and she wondered if Mr Pavey had that information to hand or could he provide it at the next meeting.

R Pavey advised that although he did not have that information to hand, he would be able to provide that information at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Select Committee noted the report;
- (2) That an update of 'What are our Customers Telling Us' would be reported at the next meeting; and
- (3) That figures would be provided at the next meeting of how many people accessed the website on a mobile device.

**11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that future meetings of the Select Committee would be held at 7.00pm on:

- 01 October 2019;
- 21 January 2020; and
- 21 April 2020.