

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 31 October 2019

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 9.21 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), S Stavrou (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, A Lion, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: R Bassett, P Bolton, R Brookes, S Heap, H Kauffman, C McCredie, R Morgan, S Murray, S Neville, C C Pond, C P Pond, M Sartin, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley

Apologies: N Bedford

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Interim Strategic Director & Chief Financial Officer), S Jevans (Interim Strategic Director), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services)), P Freeman (Service Manager (Revenues & Benefits)), T Carne (Team Manager (Corporate Communications)), Stuart Mitchell (Service Manager (Property Maintenance)), A Petty (CCTV Operations Manager), H Thorpe (Housing Assets Manager), C Wiggins (Safer Communities Manager), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and P Seager (Chairman's Officer)

40. 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.

The Leader of the Council also indicated that he would be making changes to the running order of the agenda and also that the budget report that was presently to be held in private session would now be considered in public session. He also indicated that he would like to keep as much of the accommodation project discussion in public session as possible.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

42. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 5th September 2019 be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

43. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Councillor Patel, the Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder updated the meeting on the progress of the Group Company Structure, agreed at the July 2019 Cabinet meeting. This structure was set up to deliver the following companies: a Service Company for repairs to the Council's Housing Stock; a Development Company to undertake development activity for the Council and an Investment Company to hold assets for long term rentals. A member-officer steering group had also been established to oversee the setup of the company structure. This group consisted of Councillors Stavrou, Patel, and H Whitbread along with the Chief Executive and Interim Strategic Director, S Jevens. The group meets fortnightly and has so far agreed their terms of reference and appointed consultants to provide legal and tax advice. They have also appointed consultants to set up the service company and an outline five-year business plan had been prepared. They have also appointed consultants to provide design advice and had appointed a development director to undertake the feasibility of possible sites to be transferred into the development company.

He noted that any transfer of land into the new company would be a Cabinet decision and that all appointments of consultants were undertaken in accordance with the Council's procurement policies.

44. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet heard from Mr A Fricker, who made representations regarding the potential re-location of Epping Library.

Mr Fricker felt that since the strong public rejection of the proposals to close Epping Library by Essex County Council, there has been continued negative presentation on use of our libraries which he contended was due to the neglect and reduction of the service rather than the loss of interest from the public. FOI requests shows that over the last decade libraries have been stripped of their books and their opening hours reduced substantially.

As this was a tier 2 library he asked if this was a strategic relocation. After all it was further away from the centre. He then asked if this was a better space; no doubt it was a smaller space and seemed to lack any separation for the differing needs for children and adults and no space for any staff. The building seemed to have more space for coffee sales that it did for the library. It mattered that shared services were good for the environment and a library was good for the community and he hoped that it would provide a bright future for libraries through proper accommodation.

The Leader thanked him for his observations and that they had noted his comments. He also noted that the accommodation project would be debated later on in the agenda.

45. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that no meetings had been held since the Cabinet's last meeting. However, at their November meeting they would have VAEF there to give a short presentation and answer any questions.

She noted that Whipps Cross Hospital had given a presentation, on their development plans, to Waltham Forest Borough Council and were looking for them to do the same for us in the near future.

For future meetings they were also looking for the local adult social services to give them a presentation as well as the local mental health services.

Councillor Patel endorsed having a presentation for Whipps Cross Hospital noting that about 40% of their patients were from Epping Forest and Redbridge. He noted that they had also been to Loughton Town Council and his concern was that they would use this as a tick box exercise to say they had consulted with our district.

Councillor H Whitbread noted that TFL had recently decided to change the service at peak times, by reducing the service by two trains and putting in a shuttle service on the loop. She had started a petition two days ago and it was already over the 5000 mark. She asked if O&S could consider this as well. Councillor Sartin said she would take this back and see if they could fit it into their agenda. She was conscious that this was quite time limited. The Chief Executive said that they would pursue this with TFL. Councillor H Whitbread added that the changes were due to come in by 26 January 2020 and noted that Redbridge were attempting to call this in.

Councillor Murray noted that Loughton TC had a presentation from Whipps Cross last night and he endorsed having this presentation and also having TFL come. He also commented that Overview and Scrutiny had not scrutinised some of the major decisions made by the Cabinet in recent months, especially around accommodation and the arm's length companies that had been set up.

Councillor Lion also noted that Whipps Cross Hospital had also given a presentation to Chigwell Parish Council recently. He also noted that on the TFL side the loop would be seriously impacted by their proposals and it was important that we looked at that.

Councillor Sartin commented that a report on the group company structure would be coming to a future meeting of the O&S Committee. She also noted that it was for the members of scrutiny to bring these items to the attention of the scrutiny committees. The Leader of the council said it was right more scrutiny should be carried out and he knew that the accommodation project would be going to a future meeting.

Councillor Neville noted that the hospital had also visited Buckhurst Hill Parish Council; as for TFL they caused similar problems in the past and had promised better consultation. Councillor McCredie added that the hospital had also been to Epping Town Council.

Councillor Chris Pond commented that regarding Whipps Cross they were proposing to put 1700 dwellings near to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As for the Central line, we were getting in rather late for this; he had warned Councillors Mohindra and Knapman last year on what was likely to happen to the service, and it should have been questioned 9 months ago, but agreed that it should be scrutinised.

Councillor Philip responded that it was not only Whipps Cross talking about building near the SAC but also Waltham Forest.

46. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT CABINET COMMITTEE 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

RESOLVED:

The Cabinet noted and agreed the minutes of the Finance and Performance Cabinet Committee's meeting of 26 September 2019 and agreed the updated Corporate Risk Register.

47. ACCEPTANCE OF TENDERS - CONTRACT 290, RENEWAL OF THE TILED ROOF COVERING AND RESPONSIVE REPAIR WORKS 2019-2024

The Housing and Property Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report for the tender for the planned renewal of the Tiled Roof Covering and Responsive Repair works.

In order to undertake the Planned Renewal of the Tiled Roof Covering and Responsive Repair Works 2019-24 to Council-owned properties during the financial year 2019-20 and over the following 4-year period it was necessary to undertake a procurement exercise based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) taking cost and quality into account to satisfy the Council's Procurement Rules.

DECISION:

- (1) That, M & J Services Ltd be awarded the 1-year contract renewable annually for up to a maximum of 4-further years, for the renewal of the tiled roof covering and responsive tiled roof repairs to Council-owned properties in the sum of £74,561.09 with an overall weighted price and quality score of 83.5%; and
- (2) That GC Roofing UK Ltd be selected as the Council's Reserve Tenderer and that, should it not be possible to enter into contract with M & J Services Ltd for some reason, GC Roofing UK Ltd be awarded the 1-year contract renewable annually for up to a maximum of 4-further years, for the renewal of the tiled roof covering and responsive tiled roof repairs to Council-owned properties, being the second most economically advantageous tender received, with a Tender Sum of £77,210.53 with an overall weighted price and quality score of 74.7%; and
- (3) That, the overall value of the works be capped to the sums included in the Capital Programme identified for Tiled Roof replacements on an annual basis; and
- (4) That, this contract be designated as a serial contract to facilitate the annual adjustment to the tendered rates in accordance with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) BCIS ALLCOS Resource Cost Index of All Construction: All Repair and Maintenance Work #7419.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The existing tiled roof covering installed in some Council owned properties were in a poor condition and in need of replacement. Under the Decent Homes Standard roof structure and covering were listed as a "Key Building Component" and it was recognised that further deterioration could have an immediate impact on the integrity of the building and cause further deterioration in other building components. If the tiled roof covering components deteriorate further, they could cause adverse safety and security implications.

A 5-year contract was required for the Planned Renewal of the Tiled Roof Covering and Responsive Repair Works 2019-24, to Council-owned properties to ensure the Council's housing stock remained in a decent condition.

The undertaking of a procurement exercise for works of this value was not only a requirement of the Council's Procurement Rules but was also a requirement of Section 20 of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 when tiled roof

covering renewal works were undertaken on Council owned and managed blocks of flats.

Other Options for Action:

The main alternative options considered were:

(1) To re-tender the contract on an annual basis. However, this would be time consuming and inefficient. Re-tendering would not guarantee more competitive tenders.

(2) To re-tender the works based on price alone. However, this would not necessarily return a more competitive tender and would not identify or quantify a quality commitment from the lowest tenderer.

(3) To seek quotations on an individual basis for every planned tiled roof covering replacement project and for every tiled roof covering repair HRP Works Order issued. However, this was very time consuming and was not cost effective and given the volume of planned tiled roof covering replacement projects and tiled roof covering repair HRP Works Order issued carried out per annum, this would breach the Council's Procurement Rules C2 (9) with the works exceeding £25,000 in value during one financial year.

48. CCTV STRATEGY 2020-2025

In the absence of Councillor Bedford, the Leader of the Council introduced the report on the CCTV strategy.

The CCTV work programme 2015 – 2019 would conclude in March 2020 and a review of the CCTV repairs/replacement programme had been carried out to identify estimated costs and works required for the period 2020-2025.

A new CCTV Strategy 2019 – 2025 had been produced to reflect future requirements and this included a review of the Capital and Revenue budget programme and estimated budget requirements through to 2025.

All expenditure identified for CCTV works stated within the new strategy was held within budgets of the respective Directorates and planned for within the budget setting process. However, CCTV requirements for the Civic Offices have not been included within this report and CCTV Strategy as they were subject to the Council's Accommodation Review.

It should also be noted, that subject to the Council's aspirations within its' Corporate Digital Strategy, it is possible that this strategy will require a review before 2025, as part of a wider digital infrastructure plan for the district.

Councillor Avey asked about the CCTV coverage around the former Club 195 premises. The CCTV operations officer confirmed that they were increasing the CCTV coverage by 3 cameras by Cottis Lane. Asked if they could recoup the costs from the club, officers advised that they would have to look at the legislation.

Councillor Lion commented that this was good report highlighting the advantages of CCTV. He noted that the strategy document noted that there was insufficient revenue to maintain both the council's current CTCV systems and the new installations being rolled out and those planned for 2020, what was the context to this. He then asked about the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems, would this also go

into the strategy. He was told that over the last five years they had worked hard to get a good balance between capital and revenue and had a good maintenance contract, so they were not too worried about revenue and currently had no concerns. As for ANPR systems we did have them in Limes Avenue, but they were a specific piece of equipment which went with expensive interrogation software. We can pick up number plates with our existing cameras but cannot interrogate the system. However, they do look at ANPR for the future where possible.

Councillor Philip noted that on page 12 of the strategy (page 54 of the agenda) the numbers on capital expenditure did not seem to add up. Officers said they would go back to their capital accountants and get a correction.

Councillor Murray wanted to see some progress listed on some specific problem areas, but they were not listed. The Leader noted that this was just a strategy document. Officers said that they had not received any complaints so far about these areas, but they would keep them under review.

Councillor Patel commented that there had been a serious incident in Buckhurst Hill recently and there was a request for some cameras to be installed, his concern was if the criteria was too stringent for the use of temporary CCTV and should this be looked at. The Leader again noted that this was a strategy document if he wanted to get into detail for a specific case then he should speak to the officers directly.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked about the proposed decommissioning of the CCTV in Coopersale shopping area. She was told that they had received very few calls from this area and under the code of practice they had to ask if it was worth replacing them and spending the money.

DECISION:

That the Cabinet agreed the revised CCTV Strategy 2019-2025 and related capital programme expenditure which was contained within respective Directorate budgets.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The current CCTV Strategy was nearing completion and Cabinet agreement was required for the future CCTV Capital and Revenue Programme 2020 to 2025.

Other Options for Action:

Not to agree to fund the CCTV Strategy. However, this would have a significant and negative impact on the Council's ability to provide video coverage of EFDC buildings, car parks and crime hotspots and related criminal evidence for Essex Police.

49. CHARGING FOR INSPECTION AND SAMPLING OF PRIVATE WATER SUPPLIES

The Portfolio Holder for Contracts and Technical Services introduced the report on charging for risk assessments and sampling of private water supplies.

He noted that the Council had a statutory duty to inspect, risk assess, sample and regulate private water supplies used for domestic purposes in our district. Private water supplies were non-mains water supplies such as a well or spring or onward supply of mains water to other properties. The Council had a duty to protect public

health and was legally entitled to recover costs for carrying out this work from private supply owners. To date, these services had all been provided free of charge whilst the initial legislation was implemented. This situation was unique amongst local authorities who invariably recovered their costs.

Private water supplies were often in rural areas and feature across the large horticulture sector in the district which have many migrant workers living in caravans on site. The Council had 92 recorded private water supplies within the district. 23 of the larger supplies must be sampled every year for three years according to private water supply legislation, the cost of which is circa £700 in laboratory analysis that the Council can recharge to recover this cost. In 2015 the Council was behind schedule for completing initial risk assessments and was criticised by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Since then the Council had risk assessed and improved the majority of large supplies; 20 former private water supplies on the Council register had been replaced by connecting to the mains supply. Roughly 85% of the remaining larger supplies within the district had been risk assessed. 3 of these sites currently had applications to connect to the mains supply. Many more of these supplies have been significantly improved whilst these services were provided without charge.

The cost of providing sample analysis to all sites required in legislation would be circa £16,000 per annum for the next three years and then it could be expected to reduce as more data was available. If the regime proposed in the Resources section was implemented this value can be expected to be recovered per year with appropriate officer time for the next three years, and this would reduce for future years.

If a supply fails to meet the required standard the Council must serve Statutory Notices under the Regulations to require site owners to improve their private water supplies to protect human health and comply with statutory requirements. The Council had successfully prosecuted non-compliant supply owners.

Councillor Philip suggested an amendment to the last recommendation to add that the council was looking to recoup at least the £10,000 per annum so this was not a budget increase that was asked for but balanced with revenue generated. This was agreed by the meeting.

DECISION:

- 1) That the Cabinet noted that strong progress had been made to improve private water supplies in the district to protect human health and vulnerable communities. The initial risk assessment, sampling and enforcement of majority of high-risk supplies in the district was now completed or improvements were in progress;
- 2) The Cabinet agreed that the Council begin charging for risk assessment and sampling of private supplies now that most immediate health risks are mitigated for the majority of supplies and that on-going sampling and risk assessment costs could be recovered;
- 3) The Cabinet agreed that the Council begin charging for officer time and mileage as permitted in legislation; and
- 4) The Cabinet decided that an additional CSB budget allocation of £10,000 per annum be agreed to meet the sampling costs, to be subsequently recovered from property owners, with the Council looking to recover at least that same amount per annum.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council had a statutory duty to risk assess, inspect, sample and enforce private water supplies within the district. The reason for the proposed charging regime was because the cost of carrying out this work to the Council was significant and the Council was permitted to reclaim reasonable costs. The Regulations that were amended in 2018 required an additional duty to sample large suppliers for a wide range of parameters for three years to gather baseline data. To collect three years of sampling data was expected to cost circa £16,000 per year in laboratory analysis fees. These duties protect human health and some communities including children who may be put at risk by consuming contaminated water.

Other Options for Action:

The Council had a Statutory duty to undertake these services, the below options were considered and rejected:

1. The Council could continue to provide these services free of charge however this was considered unsustainable in financially challenging times that all local authorities are facing.
2. The Council could consider charging the full amount of analysis costs incurred only which would return partial costs incurred but not account for officer time or mileage. This would mean costs would be incurred by the Council but to a lesser extent than providing all services free.
3. The Council could choose not to fully undertake these Statutory Duties and be open to the risk to human health and public criticism from Central Government agencies such as the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI). This is not considered an acceptable solution as many of the supplies in the district could pose a significant risk to human health if unregulated.

50. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2020/21

The Business Support Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The meeting noted that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) replaced Council Tax Benefit in 2013 and that each local authority must review its scheme annually. The Government brought in regulations to ensure that pensioners continue to receive the same level of assistance as they would have done if the Council Tax Benefit scheme was still in place. The Council could therefore only make amendments to the scheme for people of working age. The Council had approved the general principle that the Local Council Tax Support scheme should be cost neutral. In legislative terms the scheme needed to be approved by 11th March each year so for 2020/21 approval needed to be made at Full Council on 17th December 2019.

As there were no proposed changes to the 2019/20 scheme there was no legal requirement to consult residents of the district.

DECISION:

- 1) That the Cabinet agreed that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20 continue unchanged for 2020/21; and

- 2) The Cabinet recommended that Full Council note that the Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20 continues unchanged for 2020/21.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Full Council needs to approve the 2020/21 Local Council Support Scheme on 17th December 2019.

Other Options for Action:

To make amendments to the Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2020/21, which would require public consultation.

51. OFF STREET PARKING PROGRAMME ON HOUSING ESTATES

The Housing and Property Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the off-street parking programme on Housing Estates.

The Cabinet had, up to now, been monitoring its off-street parking programme annually and assessing schemes to be constructed subject to feasibility, resident consultation and planning permission. This programme has been funded from both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. A cost neutral policy for future off-street parking had been agreed by the Cabinet in 2016, with two schemes built under that policy proving that the payback did not offer value for money. Therefore, against the backdrop of the need to make savings across all the Council's budgets, this report recommended ending the current programme and instead makes use of Traffic Regulation Orders instead to control parking on its housing estates.

Councillor Chris Pond had no objections to the proposal but wondered if the TRO scheme would be enough. In his ward for instance there were housing estates built in the 1950s without parking spaces and nowadays many tenants and leaseholders had more cars than had been anticipated when they were built and nowhere to put them which may result in whole scale parking on the greens, which would be unacceptable. A TRO scheme was all well and good but perhaps the Portfolio Holder would also like to liaise with NEPP about installing relevant notices under the Essex Act 1987, otherwise we would get wholesale parking on the greens in the housing estates.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse was pleased to see the decision to use TROs for places where there were existing parking spaces. He would like to clarify, paragraph 14 of the report where it talked about the use of TROs on any sort of land, did this mean that the TRO would apply to grass verges and greens as referred to by Councillor Pond. He was less happy about the withdrawal of funds from off-street parking as a whole, it did not address the need for more spaces. This was initially set up to solve problems experienced by our residents.

The Service Director for Contracts and Technical Services, Mr Durrani explained that where TROs could be used was difficult to categorise both on and off-street parking. The £50k was asked for so they could look at and find a better ways of dealing with the off-street parking issues. The aim would be look at all our options to see the best way of doing this.

The Leader of the Council agreed with the aim of looking at the problems as they came up and finding appropriate solutions.

Councillor Murray agreed with Councillor Whitehouse and wanted to know how TROs could generate the extra spaces needed. Residents did not have enough spaces to park. Mr Durrani explained that there were just too many cars for the limited amount of space we had. Creating extra space was not cost effective. They had to look at how to get people to rely less on their cars. This was a complex issue with more parking space not the answer.

The Housing and Property Services Portfolio Holder reminded the meeting that only a few weeks ago the Council had declared a climate emergency and were looking to reduce vehicle use in the long term. The Leader added that the parking bays cost £5,000 each and had to be carved out from the green spaces, this was not cost effective and created as many problems as it solved.

Councillors Neville and Wixley agreed with the reduction of car usage but also that the use of TROs would not solve the current problems and asked what would be the way forward without creating more parking spaces. Councillor Wixley extended an invitation for the Portfolio Holder and Mr Durrani to come and have a look around his ward one evening to see the problems for themselves. The Contract and Technical Services Director agreed to take up Councillors Wixley's offer.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked the council to consider and investigate a car club scheme. Mr Durrani replied that officers were considering schemes such as these. As a council they were going to put in pool cars very soon.

Councillor Philip highlighted that it was not just master planning areas that they were looking at, there were other developments where they were looking for reduced parking and were asking developers to instigate car clubs. It should be remembered that the more car parking spaces they had, the more cars on the road.

DECISION:

(1) That the Cabinet noted and agreed that the Council no longer continues with its current Off-Street Parking Programme on Housing Estates, realising a saving of £848,000 to the General Capital Fund and £485,000 to the Housing Capital Account, the depreciation not incurred is in the order of £21,000 and £19,000 per annum respectively;

(2) The Cabinet agreed that Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) made under Parts I, II and IV of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended to control parking on its estates, be used instead to manage its roads on housing estates;

(3) The Cabinet agreed an initial budget of £50,000 (Pro-rata between the GF & the HRA) be included in 2020/21 budget, jointly funded from the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account on a pro-rata basis and reviewed annually thereafter;

(4) The Cabinet noted and agreed that a list of sites be identified and prioritised for TRO's in the same way as the current Off-street Parking Programme and agreed by the Cabinet each year; and

(5) The Cabinet agreed that consideration be given in forming the budget for 2020/21 for TROs, which was to be jointly funded from the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The Council has a duty to evaluate value for money across all of its programmes of work and where necessary offer alternative solutions. With high capital costs and long pay-back periods, the current programme was not considered value for money.

Other Options for Action:

- (a) To continue with the Off-Street Parking Programme and re-introduce free off-street parking to residents at future schemes;
- (b) To set a different set of charges for the parking spaces on HRA land other than those already established elsewhere in the District to reduce the pay-back periods.
- (c) Not to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders on housing estates.

52. BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Business Support Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Budget and medium term financial strategy. She emphasised that this was not a decision paper and was the second paper to assist in administration in informing the budget for 2020/21, and to understand the opportunities and risks in forming the budget. This paper sought a further Cabinet steer on the general assumptions that drive the budget and development proposals set out in the paper.

The paper had been put together illustrating two broad budget options that either require a 2.5% increase in council tax or a 0.00% increase in council tax.

The following points were made to assist the Cabinet in their deliberations, noting that the budget was built on strong foundations:

- At the end of September the authority was £3million underspent;
- The Capital was underspent and further progress on social housing construction was needed;
- The budget process continues to be developed;
- In October attention was focused on building the underlying budget and putting forward a list of proposed developments;
- Discussions have been held with directors and their manager which has been an inclusive process;
- Inflation to costs and income was assumed to rise by up to 3% in-line with Office of National Statistics estimates of inflation next year;
- Individual cost budgets have been increased by 2% with 1% assumed spent but is held as a contingency to address issues such as market forces increases (for some) above inflation;
- Income, fees and rentals also have a default increase of 3%, although rents are governed by central guidance and therefore an increase of 2.7% was currently being modelled;
- In November this report will be further refined; and
- A list of themes was set out in the report to reflect the inter connectivity between proposals.

Members were asked to note, comment and in some cases approve the recommendations.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse said that it did not contain a forward look over the next 4/5 years, would that be here for the next Cabinet. He was told that it was still a work in progress.

Councillor Chris Pond asked about a development in Waltham Abbey and the potential development of a Cultural Hub. The Chief Finance officer said that this was a proposal being worked up by Essex County Council and a bid to the National Lottery. Councillor Pond continued saying that Waltham Abbey had lost a great deal over the years, although the Town Council had done their best to reverse this. He thought that the removal of the current Library in Sun Street and its re-provision in the museum in a smaller space was a retrogressive step, and he would be surprised if it attracted much support from the Lottery Heritage fund. He thought that this was not a viable proposal. The Leader suggested that officers came back to Councillor Pond with more details on this proposal. Councillor Pond added that the museum was one of the jewels in the district and he would not want to see it impaired in any way.

Councillor Philip referenced the expansion of the motorcycle test facilities and the MOT centre, he had concerns about the viability of the centre as it was and would not want to spend additional money on the possibility of getting additional revenue from this, we may just break even. This was not our core business and he would not be keen to take this forward. The Business Support Services Portfolio Holder replied that this was being reviewed and she would take his comments on board.

Councillor S Kane was pleased to see the continued funding of the Police officers and us taking on the Highway Ranger service.

The Leader commented that regardless of whether the Council went for a 0% or a 2.5% increase we should be proud of the Police officers we fund. Councillor Kane added that we have seen a big drop (of 25%) in burglaries, robberies and anti-social behaviour, all due to the police we fund.

The Leader also noted that the Highways rangers were being brought back and we were now able to put some more funds behind this and get even more work done.

Councillor Philip commented that a 0.5% increase was comparatively low, he thought we should be striving to get that 0.5% of savings to allow them to look seriously at having a minimal increase in the Council Tax. It was something to strive for.

RESOLVED/DECISION:

1. The Cabinet noted the assumptions being used in formulating the core budget for 2020/21 as indicated, with detailed budgets being formulated for Cabinet consideration on the 11th December 2019.
2. The Cabinet noted that only 2% inflation would be added to operational budgets (other than waste and leisure contracts). They noted that having raised income and charges by 3% in line with the Office of National Statistics estimate of inflation, that the Authority would hold around 1% for specific in-year inflation and economic pressures.
3. The Cabinet commented on the proposed list of developments as shown in Section 3 of the report and further detailed in the appendices, noting that this list included revenue, capital and loan items.

4. The Cabinet considered whether any additional or substitute development proposals needed to be considered, particularly those that would address economic uncertainty or issues of economic and social exclusion.
5. The Cabinet noted that the companies set up and wholly owned by the Authority were due to generate income and to repay loans from 2020/21 and the significant financial benefit that resulted from this. They noted that from 2021/22 the options available to the Cabinet in terms of their development and fiscal (taxation) policies would significantly increase.
6. The Cabinet noted and commented on the intent to further review existing District Development Fund and Capital commitments for final verification of these items by the Cabinet on the 06th January 2020.
7. The Cabinet commented on the intent, to stimulate continuous service improvement and the release of funds for developments, that an efficiency savings target of between 0.25% and 0.5% should be set. The figure was comparatively low (compared to other Authorities) and a full list of schemes would be put before Cabinet on 06th January 2020.
8. Having taken account of views on the developments and how these could be funded, the Cabinet commented on the overall preferences to forming a final budget with or without a council tax increase as summarised in Section 5 of the report.
9. The Cabinet noted the outline workplan and issues outlined in Section 6 of the report.
10. The Cabinet noted and approved the opportunity that existed to drive forward with several schemes and incur expenditure this year, covering this expenditure by the use of District Development Funds. These projects were:
 - The North Weald Masterplan £140,000 (proposal 42);
 - Customer Service Notification System £25,000 (proposal 17);
 - Planning Approval backlog £40,000 (proposal 28); and
 - Additional working Capital for Devco with a maximum value of £975,650.

53. ACCOMMODATION PROJECT

The Interim Strategic Director, Sacha Jevans, gave a short presentation on the design and refurbishment of the Civic Offices to the Cabinet.

The meeting noted that the April 2019 Cabinet decision and subsequent additional requests from members for more detailed information (specifically greater guarantees on the cost benefit case of a new build) led to more detailed work across the four workstreams:

- (i) Refurbishment of Civic Offices;
- (ii) Sale of land at the back of Conder Building;
- (iii) Recruitment of partner/tenants for the civic offices;
- (iv) Construction of new building.

The agility and mobility of the EFDC workforce enabled by digital improvement and a cultural shift in ways of working has been significant and achieved at pace. The elements of the People Strategy that had greatest impact include the investment in the Common Operating model and the Decision Making and Accountability model

(DMA) implementation where restructures have focussed on Management and Leadership skills. Our people were working in ways that are more Customer Focussed, Effective and Efficient. A positive outcome of this work is the opportunity to evaluate the current organisation shape and working methods of our people and then revisit accommodation options before further decisions were made.

The further work undertaken on the four workstreams has led to a recommendation to reconsider the construction of a new office favouring the option to refurbish the Civic Offices as the main EFDC office.

The business case for the refurbishment of the Civic Offices for a mixed use of office letting and EFDC use was now complete. The new design plans demonstrated that if the building was refurbished to create more open plan space then all (required) EFDC staff can be accommodated on a 7:10 ratio in the Civic Offices without the need to move or build an alternative office. This decision would negate the cost of building a new office and reduce the operating cost of maintaining two buildings. Maximising the use of the Civic Offices through refurbishment would also expedite the vacation of the Conder building for redevelopment through the new Development Company.

Councillor S Kane had concerns about the proposed café, he asked how it would be run, could the space be better used, and would the proposed Conference facility be hired out, along perhaps with this chamber. He was told that work had been done on the potential for the rental of the café and work had proceeded on that basis, but his points were noted, and further work had to be carried out. As for the conference facility it would be for both our use and also to be hired out.

Councillor Patel asked if the conference facility had been market tested. He was told that it had been.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse liked the idea of having the conference space to use. However what advice would we give about parking. Also, what about the library and the floor space for that compared to what it has now, it looks like a smaller space; and how could we ensure it being identified as a library externally and not just be buried in the building. The Chief Executive replied that the spaces of the Library and the Café were interlinked. The café space was originally for the library, but we have since identified this new space with Essex CC. Part of the attraction was having the library with the café space. This space was intended for public use and for staff and partner use; the library people said that it was an attraction to have the café space that could be accessed in both ways through the building. The spaces were here tonight for comment also that interest had been expressed in having the café space run as a café/restaurant, as an evening venue. So, this would in effect lengthen the high street from here up to Tesco, taking in the St John's site. The floor space would depend on how the negotiations went and the requirements they would have.

Councillor Chris Pond noted that the attraction to Essex CC was that they could sell of the existing building. However, the space we would provide for a library does not look to be enough for a town the size of Epping. There were also enough coffee shops in Epping at present and he did not share the Chief Executive's view that this would elongate the high road and in any high road the shops at each end were the least successful.

Councillor Philip thought the idea of elongating the High Street was a good one, but it depended on what you had at each end. There was question on whether the size of the café and library was appropriate but having public spaces in those areas made a lot of sense, particularly if they were linked internally in the building. He asked if it

was the intention to use the new conference room area in place of Committee Room 1&2. He was told it was. He went on to say that part of the change would be to accelerate what we proposed to do with the Conder building and provide accommodation on this site more quickly.

Councillor Kaufman noted that there were problems with the layout of the ground floor, the café was oversized and looked more like a restaurant. It was good idea to have a mixed-use building, but he would like to have the library bigger and the café smaller. The Leader noted that the library size would be down to the Essex CC and their requirements. We were currently completely flexible on the size of the café. This would also go to Overview and Scrutiny in November and you will be able to see the latest progress we have made in our discussions.

Councillor Sartin said that there were concerns raised about separating the Community Hub and really all members needed a briefing, perhaps as a stand-alone session. The Leader noted that there was an opportunity for members tonight as well as at Overview and Scrutiny in November. There were still ongoing discussions with the existing partners, and the big benefit was having new ways of working.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse said that she still did not have a picture of what the library would look like. The Leader replied that they were not down to that level of detail as yet. Councillor Neville said that they needed more library to café space.

Councillor Murray said that members should put pressure on the County Council to ask for the library to be enlarged.

The Interim Strategic Director went on to inform the meeting about the proposed changes to the first floor.

Councillor Chris Pond, speaking as a former Trade Union representative thought the second-floor changes did not provide a good working environment for the staff. Agile working did not have to be cramped working. The Leader said that in reality the layout did work really well. Councillor Pond replied that it would be nice for members to actually see the spaces as they did not know the layout of the building all that well. The Leader said there may be chance to do this before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked where the smaller meeting rooms would be. The Interim Strategic Director showed, on the diagrams where the proposed smaller meetings room would be.

Councillor S Kane asked that the proposed Chairman's and Leader's offices be suitably fitted out.

Councillor Kaufman commenting on the building design noted that in his opinion there were not enough toilets in the proposed design. There could not be this intensification in the building without increasing the number of toilets provided. The interim Strategic Director noted that the designers were working with the building control and experts to make sure it was compliant. Councillor Kaufman noted that he felt the basic standards were not good enough.

The Interim Strategic Director went on to inform the meeting about the proposed changes to the second floor.

Councillor Bassett ventured that with the taking down of the office partitions would generate a lot of background noise and the ability to overhear potentially private

conversations whether face to face or over the phone. He was told that the designers had investigated this and were using suitable furniture and there were also smaller meeting rooms.

Councillor Philip asked if there were any interview rooms that could be used to conduct interviews under caution. He was told that there would be two on the ground floor.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked about telephone calls that came in that were confidential the officer could not move to a private space then. She was told that some teams would have more use of confidential space and we would have appropriate areas for them.

Councillor Bassett asked where the storage areas were to be located. Departments such as elections, planning and building control needed these storage areas. The Leader answered that there would be lots of cupboards and there were also basement areas.

Councillor Sartin noted that there would be a 7 to 10 ratio for desks but on the presentation just now it said 6 to 10. Which was it. She was told that it was 6 to 10 for the fixed desks and 7 to 10 for all other staff. She then asked if members would have their own space. She was told that it would be on the second floor.

Councillor Heap asked how confident they were with the budget. The Leader said that they were confident that they had a budget available. But as they still had not pinned down what they wanted they could not set out the budget as yet.

Councillor Kaufman noted that there were some errors in the QS report. Such as the lifespan of the new building but we were not replacing the existing works, such as the heating and the electrics, will they last for 15 years. All this needs looking at. The Leader said that this was a good point and they would need to bottom this out for the future.

Councillor Neville asked where meetings would be held during the refurbishment period. He was told by the Leader that this would not happen until June; he would like to take the Cabinet out to various locations within the local community. There would be full decant strategy with consultation with members and staff.

Councillor Philip wanted it noted that listed building consent would be determined by Historic England not by ourselves as the planning authority.

DECISION:

- (1) Cabinet noted and approved the progression of the refurbishment of the Civic Offices as the main office for EFDC staff and partners; and
- (2) That the Cabinet approved the decision not to pursue the construction of a new build office on the North Weald Airfield.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The accommodation project and supports the overall aspirations of the Council Corporate Plan – Stronger Council, Stronger Communities, Stronger Place.

The cost benefit analysis demonstrates greater benefits for refurbishment of the Civic Offices as the main office for EFDC staff. This negates the need to incur the cost of building a new office.

Other Options for Action:

Take no interim action within the Civic building and wait for the new build to be constructed. This is considered a less favourable option as an expedited new build would be 2-3 years of no change. The People Strategy was delivering on time and the creation of the new 4-layer management spine was well progressed. The further work (as set out in the report) on the designs and costs demonstrate a key benefit to progressing with the refurbishment of the Civic Offices.

54. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

55. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chairman of the Cabinet noted that he would be taking agenda item 18, the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy in public session at this meeting and would not be treating it as a private document.

The Cabinet noted that there was no other business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press.

CHAIRMAN

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