

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 4 FEBRUARY 2020
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 9.56 PM**

Members Present: Y Knight (Chairman), J Share-Bernia (Vice-Chairman), A Beales, I Hadley, J Lea, J McIvor, A Mitchell, D Plummer, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

Other members present: R Brookes, S Kane, J Philip, C Whitbread and H Whitbread

Apologies for Absence:

Officers Present R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services)), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), P Arnold (Senior Community Engagement Officer), V Gayton (Culture & Community Team Manager), C Wiggins (Safer Communities Manager), C Hammond (Museums, Heritage & Culture Specialist), A O'Connor (Museums, Heritage & Culture Specialist), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer) and A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

22. 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.

23. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.07.02)

There were no substitute members reported at the meeting.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor J H Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 9 and 13 by virtue of being a Trustee of Epping Forest Reuse.

25. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of previous meeting of the Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 1 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

26. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman asked if members had any questions or comments regarding the Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

(a) Terms of Reference

Councillor J H Whitehouse stated that at the last meeting she had asked for a list of the policy review and development and relevant projects that were already taking place so that Members knew what topics were encompassed by this Select Committee and could decide if there was anything that the Select Committee members would like to know more about.

The Customer Services Director, R Pavey advised that this was in hand and would come to the next meeting.

(b) Work Programme

The Chairman advised that 'A review on Sheltered Housing' which was due to come to the next Stronger Communities Select Committee meeting had now been taken off of the work programme as the Stronger Place Select Committee had already covered this at their last meeting in December 2019.

Councillor Wixley advised that at the last meeting he had suggested that a Loughton based group called GROW Community Garden, who bring people together in a safe and supportive environment, could attend a meeting of the Select Committee to give a presentation of what they do. He had now been in contact with the leader of the project and she was very enthusiastic about presenting at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a list of the policy review and development and relevant projects would come to the next meeting of the Stronger Communities Select Committee;
- (2) That GROW Community Garden give a presentation at the next meeting of the Stronger Community Select Committee; and
- (3) That the Select Committee noted the Terms of Reference and updates to the Work Programme.

27. CHANGE OF AGENDA ORDER

The Chairman advised the Select Committee that there would be a change of order on the agenda.

Agenda Item 10, Community Safety Partnership Annual Report and Strategic Assessment would move up the agenda to Agenda Item 8 as this report followed on from the presentation from the Essex Police District Commander.

28. PRESENTATION FROM THE ESSEX POLICE DISTRICT COMMANDER

The Essex Police's District Commander for Brentwood and Epping Forest, Chief Inspector Lewis Basford attended the Select Committee to update Member's on the current policing and crime issues in the District.

The Chief Inspector advised that he would like to discuss some of the local trends that have happened over the last year and where progress had been made since his last update to the Select Committee. Some issues were still prevalent and went hand

in hand with the Safety Community Partnership work and he would like to discuss some of the significant work that had been going on.

Looking at crime as a total in the Epping Forest district, there had been a 6% increase in crime over the last 12 months, that compared to an increase for the force of Essex as a whole of 16.8%, therefore there was a 10.8% difference between the force increase against the district increase. Just to put a bit of a health warning around that increase, a lot of that increase would be down to better crime recording. You will see from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that the recent report on Essex Police's crime recording standards only put Essex, as one of the two forces out of the 42 forces, that have been looked at so far as excellent as part of that review by the HMICFRS in terms of our crime recording, in essence what was coming through was being recorded correctly. There were very robust procedures in place to ensure every crime was correctly recorded.

In previous years and part of that evaluation there would be multiple crimes within one incident, where in the past we would have created one crime per phone call but now every crime involved in an incident was now reported therefore one call could include two or three crimes and this in turn saw an increase in crime statistics.

One of the most challenging elements that still continued to be around the district and was one of my biggest concerns, was the public perception of policing. Slight increases have been received in the last 12 months based on our data in terms about what the public think in Epping Forest around the policing in terms of do we understand what the public want to see around our priorities and what visibility do the public want to see around policing the district.

Although we have seen slight increases in the public perception, which was good news, but we were still not at the levels of other districts in Essex who have seen significantly greater signs of public satisfaction in policing and visibility.

One of the biggest problems to tackle was that for every one negative comment about crime in the district and from reports that we have seen, you have to back that up with five pieces of good work to contradict that one piece of negative work.

A lot of the work for the next 12 months will go into how the police look and work with local parishes, local volunteer groups and third-party sectors around getting the perception of Essex police right and about getting the right messages out to the public.

The Chief Inspector stated that in the last week he had chaired two meetings around engagement, one was a forum looking at how Essex police actually started to engage with what the public were asking to see and the second meeting was with the faith leaders across Epping Forest. At this meeting one of the comments was 'if you looked at certain public websites, you would think that Epping Forest was at war'. I sat back and thought yes it sounds like we were at war and that nicely gets me into the figures around the perception of how safe Epping Forest was compared to other parts of the district in Essex and our surrounding borders with the Metropolitan Police.

Burglaries and Robberies

Over the last 12 months Epping Forest had 396 less burglaries than in the previous 12 months. There was currently a 6.3% reduction in robberies against the force

average of a 3.6% increase and when you look at some of the districts that border Epping Forest such as Harlow who saw a 25% increase in robberies in the last 12 months. The metropolitan area of Redbridge had also seen a significant increase.

Motor Vehicle Theft

In relation to the theft of motor vehicles when you look at some of the trends in motor theft the Epping Forest district had increased by 3%.

Sexual Offences

Following the release of the annual report some of questions that have been asked were around sexual offences and we have seen a 3.8% increase in reporting sexual offences in the last 12 months and that's against a force increase of 21.5%.

Violence and Domestic Violence

In relation to violence against a person the force saw a 23.3% increase. In Epping Forest district there was a 29% increase, therefore above the average of the force. Around 50% of these crimes reported were domestic violence and the other 50% were out in the public domain. When those figures were broken down, the highest proportion were for victim known offenders, where known victims were assaulted by known offenders and not randomly attacked by an unknown offender.

Antisocial Behaviour

In relation to antisocial behaviour we have seen a 14.2% reduction in incident reported that was 455 less incidents reported we now have them in our community safety teams which have doubled over the last 12 months and they were on call 24/7. That consists of teams of one sergeant and 8 police constables on every day and on some days double lapping so that we will have up to 18 officers on duty every day. Also being increased in the local policing team, which I will reference as the 999-policing team, the average shift size had gone up by three officers per shift over the last 12 months.

The Service Manager Community Resilience, Caroline Wiggins, stated that in the 13 years that she had worked for Epping Forest District Council, it was very rare that she had sat at a meeting where reductions in crime were reported. It was a really great success that burglaries have reduced by 396 in the district. Burglary was so intrusive and people found it very hard to recover from.

In this district car theft was on the increase and this was a concern, the trends most targeted was Land Rovers, Ford Fiestas and transit vehicles. It was important to get the message out to motorists to use a faraday bag and being extra vigilant. Unfortunately, the business venues in the district such as hotels, were being targeted. In the next year going forward work needed to be done with the hotels as they should be doing more to combat car theft.

I was pleased to see the increase in domestic abuse calls because that meant the work we do in the partnership around signposting and awareness raising was working and people in the district were contacting the police earlier so they were coming out as a standard risk and not being reported at the end making it high risk. I would like to offer members some J9 training and I am happy to organise that training.

The Community Safety Hub and the imbedded police officers were really making a difference that increased the community policing team. The work they have done with Epping Forest College and the young students and some of the public engagement work they had been doing over the last few months, we were now starting to build some really strong foundations.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from members.

Councillor S Rackham stated that public perception was a big thing and asked if there were police panels held at the Council on a monthly basis, where members of the public could come in and talk with the police about local issues. I know this has worked in other districts and I think it might be something very useful that residents would engage with.

The Chief Inspector stated that an engagement forum was recently held and at a meeting earlier today analysing the data and feedback that had been received the police would go back to local engagement in terms of panels, Parish and residents groups and intrinsically align them to the daily patrol, for example mapping every single meeting Council, Parish as well as the coffee mornings, church meetings, community groups third party groups, support groups. Residents have advised us that they want local forums with local officer and have contact details of their local officers. Hopefully we will be able to start delivering back on developments and the local officers will then start using the third-party sectors and volunteer groups to start getting the key messages back to local residents.

Councillor S Rackham stated that she noticed in the report, something that concerned her and other Councillors regarding car accidents, she asked if she was correct in thinking that the Epping Forest district was quite high up the scale and what was to be done to prevent some of these accidents going forward.

The Chief Inspector advised that victims of crashes actually did not come from the Epping Forest District, they occurred in the Epping Forest District but that was due to the M25 and the M11 being in part of the district. As part of the precept increase for the last financial year there will be a doubling up of the road policing team for Essex and the two bases that the teams will be stationed at were Stanway and Chigwell, therefore there will be a lot more visibility and enforcement on the roads and the road policing team will be up to the numbers there were in 2011.

Councillor D Plummer stated that the last meeting of the Coffee with Cops in Waltham Abbey had quite a large turnout and asked if there was any way to get feedback to the Town and Parish Councils from those meetings.

The Chief Inspector stated that what came out of the Coffee with Cops events was that we have got a lot better at listening and through the network of key groups we will be feeding back information to these groups to get out the messages to residents of the district.

Councillor D Plummer stated that if you looked at the social media websites you would think that nothing was happening in the area but we were under constant assault and he asked if there was any particular reason why the police presence wasn't more visible in Waltham Abbey town centre. What was happening with County Lines was it having much impact on a particular issue around Waltham Abbey.

The Chief Inspector replied in terms of County Lines in the district was lower than the surrounding districts of Southend, Chelmsford, Basildon Harlow and Colchester were

significantly higher than this District. Last year there was a 6-month operation that demolished a lot of the County Lines but others will come in their place.

Councillor J H Whitehouse stated that fewer incidents were being reported as residents felt that it was not worth reporting a crime as nothing was done about it, especially if it was not that serious as there was a very low investigation rate or success rate.

The Chief Inspector agreed with Councillor Whitehouse that there would be a cross section that would not report a crime and people should know better especially larger companies as we have introduced the town teams into Waltham Abbey and Loughton and we were actively going to those companies and saying please report any crimes however small. Our staffing and resources were based on the crime figures. Crimes were investigated on viability for example if your car was broken into, you should always report it, but were we likely to catch the criminal, no not likely.

Councillor J McIvor stated that he represented North Weald and there was a big issue in the area with vehicle theft. There was a lack of apathy reporting these crimes as people tended to report it on social media asking for the public to look out for the vehicles. When a vehicle theft crime was reported, was there any work that went on afterwards in contacting neighbours or intelligence sharing with other neighbouring roads and informing residents of what to do to keep their vehicles safe.

The Chief Inspector advised that vehicle motor theft, as of this year, had been an Essex Police Strategic priority, because of the numbers, the value and the shift towards motor theft in the last 12 months. We were trying to work out the numbers around how the vehicles were being stolen. There were two different types of theft and a faraday bag helped 50% of vehicles stolen as a relay was used to transmit the signal from the key to open and start the vehicle. The other way was the old fashioned method by entering the vehicle because someone hadn't locked the vehicle properly, it takes about 8 seconds to get into the system to be able to drive that vehicle away. Every vehicle reported as stolen would be looked at through ANPR across Essex to see if the camera had picked it up and what route it had taken. There were two simple techniques, which would prevent around 50% of motor vehicle theft, one was a crook lock and the other a bollard on your driveway.

Councillor D Wixley stated he had heard the Government were employing 20,000 more police officers on the beat and wondered how many were coming into this district.

The Chief Inspector advised that in the first release from the Government there were approximately 135 that were coming to Essex Police. The Chief Officer Group and the PFCC would decide the breakdown and how many would come to this district.

Councillor D Wixley asked if the police still did police speed checks as he hadn't seen any around for quite some time. He asked who the Essex Road Safety Partnership were as they also set up speed checks and asked if this group had anything to do with the police, where they contracted by the police to carry out speed checks.

The Chief Inspector advised that the Road Safety Partnership were funded through Essex County Council and were made up of police officers and special police constables who dealt with all road safety aspects. They would target roads that were evidence based through crashes and serious injury. Locally around 8-12 speed checks, in terms of monitoring were carried out during the year.

Councillor J Lea stated that her niece's car was stolen from outside where she worked in Hertfordshire although she lived in Waltham Abbey and asked which police force would deal with the crime.

The Chief Inspector advised the police force in the area where the crime took place would be the force dealing with the crime. You could report the crime in Essex, but the details would be passed on the Hertfordshire Police to deal with.

Councillor I Hadley said earlier you mentioned the recording of crime was changing where one phone call could now record multiple crimes and asked was this just for Essex or across the whole force.

The Chief Inspector replied that this was across the whole force.

Councillor R Brookes stated recently it had been reported that there had been a switch from drink driving to drug driving how could we get this across to society that you shouldn't drive if under the influence of drugs.

The Chief Inspector replied that over the Christmas period there were more drug drivers caught than there were drink drivers. There had been a big shift, but we were now able to deal with it more accurately by a swipe of the tongue and putting it into a machine at the roadside. When people truly understand the new kits, because they were relatively still new, it will plateau out like drink driving has over the years.

The Chairman said at the beginning of your report you stated that the crime for the force of Essex was 16.8% and the crime for the Epping Forest district was 6% and asked if that was down to the new standards of reporting. Have those standards been rolled out nationally, was that a national incentive and if so had there been a national increase in crime in line with what we have seen in the district and throughout Essex.

The Chief Inspector advised that it was a national roll out under the Home Office. We always compare ourselves to other forces and I also have a demographic of other districts in different forces that were seen as an equivalent to Epping Forest. In 12-18 months' time I will have a better picture to understand the figures. In terms of Essex, the only element we have seen a increase in, which was disproportionate to any other force was violent crime and a high proportion of violent crime was around county lines.

The Chairman asked if she would be right in saying that 16-22 year olds were a very difficult age for police officers to deal with, especially with that age group committing crimes and how were you going about reaching out to that age group.

The Chief Inspector stated that as a force we have failed by the removal of school officers, so when we talk about age 16-22 years olds a high proportionate of those would have gone through the period where we disengaged, so there was a lack of visibility in terms of how we engaged with schools. From March 2020 school officers will be going back into schools. We have visited every secondary school and every primary school will have been visited by the end of March 2020, we have even visited some nursery schools. We were now engaging with the Epping Forest College on a weekly basis and it was now what we could do going forward.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Basford for his attendance and presentation to the Select Committee. She stated that if there was one thing she was going to take away from this evening it was 'no matter how small the crime was, report it'.

29. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT AND STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The Service Manager Community Resilience, Caroline Wiggins, introduced the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) over the last year. The annual report outlined the highlights and gave a flavour of what the Community Safety Team had accomplished during the year. It demonstrated the Council's commitment to the CSP and the work of Essex Police, whose area encompassed both Epping Forest and Brentwood.

The Service Manager stated that both reports were on the Agenda and she would be happy to take any questions.

Councillor D Wixley stated that anti-social behaviour was a big problem in the district and asked if anything could be done to combat the nitrous oxide silver canisters from being littered all over the district, in some areas the problem was more prevalent than in others.

The Service Manager advised that they would be looking into the nitrous oxide debris but needed residents to inform them if they see anyone disposing of the cannisters in the public places. She stressed that it was a littering offence and any intelligence would be fed through to the Customer Service Centre.

The Chairman asked if there were plans to drug test for nitrogen oxide users and were there any drug testing kits available.

The Chief Inspector advised that nitrous oxide would be difficult to test for as it was a quick hit and was not an offence to supply or take, the only offence would be for littering when the cannisters were disposed of in a public place.

Councillor D Wixley stated that on page 79/80 of the agenda the population statistics did not make sense. Page 79 said there were 123,900 people living in the district and page 80 said there were 76,386, he asked for clarification on the exact number of people living in the district.

The Service Manager advised that the figures were collated by an analyst and that she would have to go back to the analyst for some clarification and would report back through the Members' Bulletin.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Report of the Community Safety Partnership be noted.

30. COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS PROJECT

The Senior Community Engagement Officer, Patrick Arnold gave a presentation to the Select Committee, Annual review of work undertaken by the Community, Culture and Wellbeing Team in developing the Epping Forest Community Champions project.

The Community Champions programme formed part of the Council's Corporate Plan to further enhance partnership working with the voluntary sector in order to help build community capacity and resilience across the district, enabling communities to support themselves.

Aims and Objectives

The vision of the programme was:

- To build on the skills and knowledge of local people to create happy, friendly and healthy communities.

The aim of the programme aim was:

- To bring together like minded people from across the district to share ideas and experiences from their communities to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.
- To recruit Community Champions from across the district.

What do Champions do?

- Make contact with people living in the community. This could be through friends and family or through attending meetings of local groups and clubs;
- Listen to people to find out their needs, this could include topics such as Loneliness and Social isolation, physical activity, mental health and emotional wellbeing;
- Outreach to the community to promote uptake of services within the local area;
- Gently encourage people to take up healthier lifestyles;
- Signpost people to services and make referrals e.g. exercise classes, employment services, local events, transport links etc.; and
- Undertake campaigns/projects to promote health awareness and collect findings on specific health issues affecting the area.

Recruitment

The Epping Forest Community Champions programme aimed to build on the skills and knowledge of local people to create happy, friendly and healthy communities.

People who were:

- Passionate about the area they lived in;
- Able to build strong community connections;
- Happy to support fun days and community events;
- Willing to share information about local services in the area;
- Able to promote useful health improvement information within their community.

The aim of the Culture and Wellbeing Team was to recruit 18 Champions, one from each area of the Epping Forest District.

Our Achievements

To date 17 Champions had been recruited from:

- Buckhurst Hill;
- Chigwell;
- Epping;
- Loughton
- Nazeing;
- Ongar;
- Theydon Bois; and

- Waltham Abbey.

Community Champions had connected with over 1000 people in the community since the beginning of the project. they had promoted and played a key role in the delivery of the district's Stay Well This Winter and Senior Safety Day Events.

Community Champions had attended EFDC workshops and partner focus groups, a number had attended the EFDC Digital Buddies training and would support future digital inclusion projects. They have promoted the Essex County 'United in Kind' social media campaign and assisted with the development of the Social Isolation and loneliness awareness sessions.

Champions have also attended local clubs and meetings to deliver presentations to raise awareness of CHW activities and signpost people to services in the district.

Training and Support

Training

- The Community Champions have attended the relevant EFDC courses in Safeguarding and Dementia Friends.
- They have attended External/Partner training such as Voluntary Sector, Frontline, Community Transport and J9.
- In-house accredited training by the Royal Society of Public Health.

Support

- Regular Group meetings with Community Champions;
- 1-2-1 support and supervision;
- Regular communication via email or phone; and
- A Community Champions social media group.

The Senior Community Engagement Officer introduced two members of the Community Champions Group and asked them to give a brief overview of what they do for their community.

Community Champions

Sue was a Community Champion from Theydon Bois, she advised that she had lived in the District for 30 years, 9 years in Epping and 21 in Theydon Bois. She had previously been on the Theydon Bois Parish Council for 4 years. She had seen a poster recruiting Community Champions and had now been involved with the Group for 18 months.

Sue advised that she had attended many of the training courses, one she had attended was bereavement café at St Clare Hospice. She had now set up a monthly bereavement café in Theydon Bois which had become popular, it enabled people to talk about their own loss and helped others that were recently bereaved.

Sue had been involved in fundraising for the village and had helped raise £1,000 for a defibrillator, which had saved a life of a man who was having a heart attack, in January this year. She had also been involved in setting up:

- Christmas Wreath Making;

- Soup making;
- Regular awareness sessions;
- Life walks; and
- Cycling.

This was just a small amount of the activities Sue was involved in.

The Community Champions regularly socialised together and shared ideas and experiences with each other.

Eve was a Community Champion in Loughton. She had been involved for just under a year by way of noticing recruitment leaflets in her local library. Eve worked part time for the DWP and was able to give her spare time to being involved with the community.

Eve stated at that time she had been on a quest to set up community drop off points throughout the Epping Forest district, with the help and support of the community to assist her by donating specific products as and when they could, for a project she had set up. The project was called the Red Box Project Epping Forest to which had now been renamed the First Stop Project. She then read the leaflet that she had picked up about becoming a Community Champion and how a Community Champion could support their community in a health perspective and in other ways, this is what she had been trying to set up. Eve decided to ring the contact person on the leaflet, to which she received a very positive and warm welcome and this made a difference to how she engaged and became involved as a Community Champion.

Once of the first projects Eve engaged on was setting up collection and delivery of sanitary and hygiene products to take into schools and distribute.

Eve had become involved with the Rainbow Trust, a charity who support families who had a child with a life threatening or terminal illness.

She attended regular workshops and attended Community Champion meetings to socialise with other CC sharing ideas, suggestions and information with each other.

Future Development

The Senior Community Engagement Officer highlighted areas of future development that the team would be working on:

- Continue campaign to recruit champions from all areas of the Epping Forest District targeting areas with no Community Champion representation;
- Work with Community Champions to develop community initiatives within their areas by listening to community needs;
- Apply for funding to initiate community lead projects;
- Continue with the training programme and support for Champions to enable them to successfully fulfil their role within the community;
- Promote the Champions and what they can offer within their local areas via social media/websites, posters, local clubs and events, local council/ partnership meetings and networks; and
- Continue to measure the impact of the Community Champions.

Members Involvement / Support

The Senior Community Engagement Officer asked Members to promote the work of the Community Champions by:

- Raising awareness of the Community Champions project and its positive impact in helping and supporting the community;
- To help identify any local people who could be a Community Champion; and
- To contact Members when a Community Champion was recruited in their area to build stronger community links.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from members.

Councillor McIvor stated that he thought this was an excellent project and asked how much time a Community Champion would need to commit to. North Weald did not have a Community Champion and he would be happy to promote this project. The Senior Community Engagement Officer advised that they asked for a couple of hours a week, although some do a lot more.

Looking at areas with no Community Champions the team were working to put on some events around loneliness and social isolation and to encourage the work of the Community Champions to hopefully recruit Champions in those areas.

Councillor J M Whitehouse stated that other organisations do the same sort of work in the district and asked how they could be sure that there was no duplication in the same area. The Senior Community Engagement Officer advised that they worked with other organisations in the district to ensure that they did not duplicate work.

Councillor Wixley stressed how important it was to get the message out to the Town and Parish Councils. The Senior Community Engagement Officer stated that from the beginning information was sent out to all Town and Parish Councils in the district.

Councillor Rackham added that as many of the Councillors were also Town and Parish Councillors that they should distribute the leaflets and make them more aware of the Community Champions. The Senior Community Engagement Officer stated that he could distribute as much material as the Councillors wanted and that it would be very helpful for the Councillors to make the Parish and Town Councils aware of the roles of the Community Champions.

The Chairman asked if it was in the budget to advertise in the local press. The Senior Community Engagement Officer advised moving forward there was a possibility that there was a budget for advertising.

The Chairman asked what was the average age of a Community Champion and have you thought about going to nursery's and infant schools to advertise. The average age of the Community Champions was between 40-50 although we do have one who was 22. He also added that they had not approached schools to advertise but thought this was a good idea.

Vanessa Gayton, Team Manager, Culture and Community stated that there was so much scope with this programme, presently it was in the embryonic stage but there was money in the budget for advertising and publicity.

The Chairman thanked the officers and Community Champions for their presentation and for attending the Select Committee.

31. **WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS ARE TELLING US / CUSTOMER SERVICES STRATEGY**

The Customer Services Manager, Susan Lewis gave a presentation on the Customer Service Strategy Q3. She advised the Select Committee that the report provided an update on the Quarter 3 satisfaction performance and feedback on 'what our customers were telling us'.

Current Performance

Customer Satisfaction

Customers were asked to do a short customer satisfaction survey, the measure was based on the Gov Metric customer satisfaction survey, this was for phone calls, emails, letters and the website. There were no details for Q1 as the measure was changed from annually to quarterly. Q2 showed a 75% satisfaction rate which had increased in Q3 to 83%.

Number of Calls Received

The total number of calls received for Q1 – 31,167, Q2 – 31,674 and Q3 – 26,216. Q3 was slightly down due to the closure at Christmas of the Council.

First Point Resolution

The first point resolution was the percentage of calls which the Contact Centre agents could resolve at that first point of contact, so that the customer was not then passed on to another officer at the Council. The Councils' target was 45% although presently we were underachieving this percentage, each quarter we could see an increase, Q1 – 37.31%, Q2 – 34.71% and Q3 – 40.17%. When this was broken down to monthly statistics, October 35.22%, November 41.15% and December 44.13% you could see month by month the percentages were increasing and in December were almost at the 45% target.

We have seen the transition of planning and parking coming over to the Contact Centre and the Contact Centre staff were being trained and have the knowledge to resolve the customer planning calls, unless they are technical. As more services transfer over to us that number will increase.

Call Causation Codes

We want to get better at understanding the reasons why our customers are calling us, in November 2019 call causation codes were implemented enabling us to identify why customers were calling, out of 16,861 calls received in November and December a causation code was only recorded for 5,000 calls. Officers have to manually enter that code and we have been carrying out some analysis as to why causation codes were not being recorded. We have been experiencing some system issues whereby a new phone system was installed and there were teething problems and there was also a high level of absence in the Contact Centre at the moment. We intend on doing better in the next quarter.

Why are Customers calling the Council

The service areas that received the highest number of calls in Q3 were:

Housing

A total of 1395 calls (not yet transitioned to the contact centre)
 Housing Repairs 686 calls – transferred for an appointment
 Housing Management 449 calls – transferred to the team.

Planning

A total of 934 calls (transitioned to contact centre)
 Application enquiries 400 calls dealt with the contact centre; the rest were technical.

Waste

A total of 1030 calls (transitioned to contact centre)
 Bin delivery requests equate for the highest volume of calls equating to 336, however all Waste calls were dealt with by contact centre – forms are now online so we are channel shifting customers to the website.

Compliments and Complaints Received

There was a spike in Q2 for compliments as The Community Health and Wellbeing Team held an external event which resulted in a higher number of compliments.

The complaints received in Q3 so far equate to 71 in comparison to 59 in Q2. There seemed to be no apparent reason why the complaints had increased for Q3.

The complaints that were received have been broken down into service areas as below:

Housing	18
Planning	14
Not Complaint	13
Council Tax	8
Waste	8
Benefits	3
Environmental Health	2
Car Parking	2
Building Control	2
Drainage	1

Of those complaints a majority of them were not upheld and we were looking at ways of training on how to manage customer expectations so that our agents can resolve more of the complaints.

What are Customers telling us

Planning

The Councils customers are unhappy that although they can see a Duty Planner - for which very positive feedback has been received – they are unhappy that they cannot

see their allocated Planner without an appointment – the Planning team are on the case and re-designing the service.

Customers paying by cheque

Customers were still paying by cheque, mainly due to an issue of habit and trust. We were promoting all available payment methods through as many communication channels as possible, staff are continuing to talk to customers and educating them to encourage channel shift.

Call secure

Callsecure was a method whereby the customer calls us to make a payment, the call operator will transfer the customer to a system which would take the payment for them. Customers have fed back issues with the performance of Callsecure impacting usage and customer experience. The Councils Payment Team were reviewing and working on the improvements required to streamline this system.

Waste Collections

The Council's customers are unhappy that side waste was not being collected, additional rubbish left on top of or to the side of the waste bin. The Councils contract doesn't include collection of this side waste for budgetary reasons, each 'lift' costs £1.30.

Special collections for example, furniture, the Operatives cannot enter the customers house to collect items for Health & Safety and Insurance reasons. This causes issues with customers if they are elderly or disabled and they cannot lift and carry their items outside which results in complaints.

There were also complaints telling us that Biffa had not delivered bins, there were 28 reported in December 2019 and 42 reported in January 2020. The statistics show this to be the same trend as last year. This feedback has been fed to the Waste Management Partnership Board who were looking at solutions.

Essex County Council Issues

Customers were complaining to EFDC about issues which concerned Essex County Council for example street lighting and potholes. They contact EFDC and when they were told that it was the responsibility of Essex County Council, they then want us to complain on their behalf.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from members.

Councillor I Hadley asked how many abandoned calls did the Council receive. The Customer Services Manager replied that normally it was around 3%, but at the moment that figure was higher due to staffing problems and a new telephone system that the Council have installed. Looking at the past week it has been 6-7% therefore it was higher than we would like it to be and we are looking to resolve these issues.

Councillor J H Whitehouse stated that in the past with regard to the special collections of furniture there used to be an arrangement where people phoned in and they had reusable furniture their call would be redirected to Epping Forest Reuse, this might have been under the previous contract, but I don't believe that this happening now. The Reuse team have a large van for collections and they would go

into the residents house to remove the items, I could see this being a help for the elderly and disabled residents. Could this therefore be reinstated. The Service Manager said she would look into if and why this arrangement has stopped.

Councillor J McIvor stated that ultimately people who phone into the Council want to have a good positive experience whereby you are not rushed off the phone. My experience with phoning into the Council was that the operator tried to get you off of the phone as quick as possible. I spoke to three different operators on separate occasions who each gave conflicting information, He stated that there doesn't seem to be any consistency and he asked how often was the data analysed. The Service Manager advised that they did review the data weekly and added that she was very passionate about the customer experience but there was presently an issue with high levels of staff absences for a variety of reasons and the call centre staff were very stressed as they were trying to answer as many calls as they could.

Councillor I Hadley asked if the call centre staff level were determined by budget or demand. The Customer Services Manager advised that there was a budget, however if the call centre had the staff that they should have on headcount the department would function correctly. At the moment we have many of the call centre staff off due to a wide variety of reasons. This was not something we could have pre-empted or avoided and as our call centre staff deal with many departments across the Council they have a wide variety of knowledge so its not easy for anyone else to step in to answer the calls.

The Service Director added that as the contact centre had grown we are analysing weekly and we have based staffing on the operating model of the Council. When the demand increases the Council will manage the demand and employ more customer services staff.

Councillor D Wixley asked what was the full complement of staff in the customer services call centre. The Services Manager advised that there were usually 15 call centre staff but today there are 5 and 2 of those have to man the reception desk.

Customer Strategy Update

The Customer Services Manager advised that they were fixing the basics, creating a strong internal platform, addressing key customer complaints for both external and internal customers.

Phase One

- The launch of a new telephone/service area guide to which would be published in the Members' Bulletin
- Piloting our internal customer service health check which will provide a baseline on customer service standards and will challenge ourselves to deliver customer excellence
- New improved customer payments where the web pages are enhanced and there will be new customer kiosks for an improved customer experience
- A streamlined customer complaints process
- Unacceptable customer behaviour policy being launched in April 2020
- District Lines and all staff communication to support launch
- Members' bulletin communication
- Customer Champions working group engaging teams and gaining feedback on health check.

What's Next

Strategy launch

- External customer strategy creative and sign off
- Customer promise to be finalised and launched

Customer satisfaction and reporting

- Benchmark survey conducted by Institute of Customer Service
- New reporting and customer satisfaction measurement to be developed

One single contact centre

- Community, Health & Wellbeing, Revenue & Benefits and Housing customer contact to transition over

Embracing a customer culture

- Staff awareness campaigns & Service Superstar initiative

Councillor Portal Development on Firmstep

- Councillors can access everything in one place (working group to be set up) plus 'bring your own device' training.

Customer experience enhancement

- 'Tell us once' if moving in/out of district or reporting a death
- 'My Council' enter a postcode to access information on home or area
- Assisted and missed collections processes enhanced and simplified
- New reporting and customer satisfaction measurement to be developed

Customer experience enhancement

- Progression towards completion of the three micro sites – Museum, Airfield and Countrycare
- Digital solutions company selected to host and maintain our websites
- Test website being created after which the four buttons (Pay, Apply, Report, Book) can be developed
- Also supports integration and launch of microsites and our accessibility audit.

The Customer Services Manager advised that this was just a brief overview of the work that was ongoing further work was going on around the customer experience enhancement that the Council will be progressing.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their presentation and for attending the Select Committee.

32. EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CULTURAL STRATEGY (2020-2025)

The Museum Culture and Heritage Specialist, Tony O'Conner advised that he would be presenting a report on the Epping Forest District Council Cultural Strategy (2020-2025). He introduced his colleague Carly Hammond, Museum and Culture Heritage Specialist who shared the same role.

The driver for the creation of a cultural strategy for the district came about from recommendations from the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), it was the government organisation which recommended the establishment of these types of strategies for local authority areas and it was supported by some of the major

fundlers including Arts Council England who had laid out a lot of the support information in terms of what should consist of a cultural strategy.

The Peer Review in 2018 identified the production of a Cultural Strategy, which had been developed for the Epping Forest District to identify programmes of work which support the role culture played in the Council's corporate objectives of Stronger Communities, Stronger Place and Stronger Council as well as those of key external partners.

The Cultural Strategy fulfilled a role in supporting place making economic wellbeing health agendas across the Councils wider agenda, there was an extensive cultural offer across the district. Much of it was operated within the voluntary and other parts of the third sector, but one aspect which was really missing was the joining of all of those cultural offers together and really celebrating and promoting within the district and beyond.

In developing this strategy, consultation was undertaken with a representative range of cultural organisations and partners across the district, this included an online survey undertaken by residents and visitors to the district and face to face interviews with community, culture and wellbeing partners.

The key findings of this survey were:

- The core age group of respondents were from the BeWell target market (working age adult market set out within EFDC's Health & Wellbeing Strategy);
- 82% of respondents had visited a museum or art gallery in the last six months;
- Over half had also visited the library;
- Most people undertook cultural activities with family, friends or alone;
- Over 91% of respondents wanted to find out more about heritage based activities;
- 99% of those respondents thought that culture was important; and
- 98% thought culture played an important part in individual and community wellbeing.

Developing the Strategy drew upon all of those elements of consultation and advice from various bodies and the Strategy document, attached to the agenda, had six key outcome areas in order to focus on.

- (a) To ensure that Epping Forest District Council continued to celebrate and provide a sustainable strong cultural offer for current and future residents and visitors.

Action: To achieve the creation of a cultural hub in Waltham Abbey. In the Peer Review the Museum was recognised as more than just a Museum and the coming together of the cultural and health and wellbeing teams to make use of the venue in Waltham abbey had really enhanced the community value of that. The proximity of that building adjoining the library provided by Essex County Council also provided a unique experience to build on within the district and to recreate wider opportunities for the community. Across the rest of the district to encourage the growth of cultural clusters across there are a whole range of cultural groups, venues and sites around the district to get those to work more closely together. To ensure that cultural opportunities could be taken forward

by the Council's Local Plan and other development opportunities so that leisure activities were available for future residents.

- (b) To champion increased partnership working between the Council and external partners to increase culture participation and access

Action: To create a framework to bring together existing cultural providers across the district. Identify and Develop partnership funding to build capacity and pursue opportunities for investment into cultural programs to support community wellbeing and economic development. Epping Forest District Council will actively seek to develop partnership projects across the district to increase awareness and access to the cultural offer.

- (c) That cultural priorities were reflected in emerging plans and strategies.

Action: EFDC will identify funding opportunities and encourage a district wide strategic approach to maximize the role of culture in supporting community health and wellbeing and economic development.

- (d) That the cultural offer in the district was inclusive and was accessible to all ages, cultures, communities and abilities.

Action: To introduce a district wide cultural festival to be held biannually at the EFD Museum and other venues across the district. To identify, support and drive forward inclusive approaches to the cultural offer across the district.

The Museum in Waltham Abbey had been given the approval as an autism friendly venue by the Autism Society which again opens up a range of developments that we can offer at the Museum.

- (e) That the cultural offer was linked to education and well-being agendas.

Action: To expand the success of the Council's Health and Wellbeing networks by expanding and linking to cultural providers to maximize the role the local sector provides in supporting the district economy and community health and wellbeing. Develop the Epping Forest Creative Network to work with cultural education practitioners and providers to support access to a rounded and innovative cultural curriculum.

- (f) To support the economic prosperity of the district, including the visitor economy.

Action: Work to make the Epping Forest district more 'visible' regionally and nationally, trialing a branded district wide cultural festival weekend, which will combine heritage open days, exhibitions, art trail and advertised talks as a district package. Develop mechanisms to encourage and enable cultural groups to have a presence on the Visit Epping Forest website to promote their activities.

Much of this wasn't about creating new things but building what was already there and bring it together in a much more coherent and visible format.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from members.

Councillor I Hadley commented that only just over half the people surveyed had visited the library and asked if this was correct.

The Museum and Culture Heritage Specialist, Carly Hammond advised that what was reported from the online survey, we have met with Essex Libraries to explore opportunities to work with them more closely and what was interesting to find out that the focus on the libraries was much more about public engagement and social engagement and they replicated many of the activities that we do as a museum service next door. We will look to link our work together with the library to ensure that we are not duplicating the work.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that she had just spent some time in the city of culture in Hull and what they did really well was signposting. Hull had a lot of investment from Central Government and they were particularly good in marketing and promotion which was sponsored by local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce etc. She asked what the Council were doing in relation to bringing culture and activities to people's attention and also in terms of history. I know a lot of other Councils had blue pack programs

The Museum and Culture Heritage Specialist, Tony O'Connor advised that being a City of Culture was one of the great examples of where culture could play a huge role and it was helped with a massive amount of money from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It really took root within the local community and signposting was really important. We work with a range of partners across the district to promote and signpost the Museum where we can. We are very conscious that within the district it was very fragmented and that joined up publicity isn't really there at the moment.

Councillor D Wixley stated that he had visited the Ice Age exhibition before Christmas and although he found it very interesting. He stated that he realised that a lot of the ice age artifacts came from the Lowewood Museum and where would all the artefacts now go.

The Museum and Culture Heritage Specialist, Tony O'Connor advised that situation with Lowewood that we will be ending our service level agreement at the end of June 2020. After that Broxbourne Borough Council have indicated that they are to close the museum after us stepping away. We have been advising Broxbourne Borough Council as to their responsibilities as an accredited museum is closed and the collections are to be disposed of. Firstly Broxbourne Borough Council would need to contact the donors of the artefacts to see if they would like them returned and try to identify accredited museums to ask them if they would like to take on any of their collections.

There were a number of items we would like to take over especially the River Lea fossil collection and the prehistoric related material.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for presenting their report to the Select Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the Museum, Heritage and Culture LGA Peer Challenge be noted by the Select Committee.

33. DIGITAL INCLUSION PROJECT - UPDATE

The Service Director (Customer Services), R Pavey updated the Select Committee regarding the Digital Inclusion Project. At the last meeting the recommendations were laid out in the report and this report was a quarterly update on those recommendations.

Digital Buddies Programme

The Digital Buddies programme had been rolled out internally and currently 61 Digital Buddies had signed up to the programme. That helps the Council's frontline staff to support customers coming into the Council offices and on the phone. There have been a series of bespoke training sessions to enable the Digital Buddies to gain confidence in the digital world.

Digital Inclusion Network

The Digital Inclusion Network was an external network with organisations across the district, to collaborate and coordinate activities, to increase digital inclusion which would maximise our community reach by using those partners in their delivery. We would be the community hub for this project in terms of being an essential resource for signposting and calendars for signpost training, We have signed up for bespoke training and that would be available to those organisations to use.

The list of organisations that had already signed up were:

Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Essex Libraries
Carers first
The Salvation Army
Citizens Online
CVSU
Superfast Essex
The First Stop project
Epping Reuse
Citizen Advice Bureau

Other organisations who have expressed an interest in the network were:

Alzheimer's Society
Age UK
NHS
Leonard Cheshire
DWP
United in Kind
Peabody
Upskill Digital

The main geographic area that had been identified from the Citizens Online report was Waltham Abbey. The risk of digital inclusion in this area was aligned with the barriers of age and affordability with Pension Credit and UC take-up used as proxies. Allied with work undertaken relating to assessing the impacts of UC a multi-agency centre (MAC) has been established in Waltham Abbey at the Epping Forest District Museum with the intention of this MAC running every two weeks. As part of the services available which are tailored to helping the most vulnerable, there was a

dedicated resource at the MAC to assist with Digital Inclusion. The success of this inclusion work and the MAC more generally will be monitored to see if bespoke roll-outs can be done in other areas of the district.

There were no questions from Members.

RESOLVED:

That the updated report on the Digital Inclusion Project be noted by the Select Committee.

34. UNIVERSAL CREDIT IMPACT - WALTHAM ABBEY MULTI-AGENCY CENTRE

The Service Director (Customer Services), R Pavey presented a report to the Select Committee regarding the Universal Credit Impact and the establishment of a new Waltham Abbey Multi-Agency Centre based at the Epping Forest District Museum.

This was an exciting opportunity for the Council to look at a different delivery model and how the Council engaged with our communities at a local level and not the traditional way, but seeing how we can engage with partners to look at the customer journey from end to end, we are only one part of that journey, the welfare reform and how people in need to access services was not solely with Epping Forest District Council it was also with a number of other different agencies.

The Universal Credit (UC) Impact Working Group had identified a number of impacts that the Council has sought to mitigate against, within that group there was the DWP, Epping Forest Foodbank, Peabody and Citizens Advice amongst others.

The DWP in Loughton have operated a monthly Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) involving a number of partners to support claimants. The UC Impact Working Group decided that the Loughton model be built on and developed for Waltham Abbey.

The key difference with the Waltham Abbey MAC was that it was to be run by EFDC with the ultimate aim of focussing the services offered to be based on the needs of the residents of Waltham Abbey and its locality with an increased focus on the district's own services.

There was also the opportunity at this MAC to further support one of the key recommendations of the Citizens Online report which focussed on Waltham Abbey as a geographic area with a potentially higher risk of digital exclusion.

The Council have looked for a location within Waltham Abbey to do this and I can confirm that the Waltham Abbey Museum came out as a preferred venue for this new service. The Museum was in Sun Street, which is central to Waltham Abbey. The Museum was closed on Thursdays and this was a good opportunity to utilise the premises. The first MAC will be on Thursday 13 February 2020 from 1 to 3pm and will open on alternate Thursdays at the same time.

There would be a range of services provided by Epping Forest District Council such as:

- Benefits;
- Debt Recovery;
- Housing and Homelessness;

- Digital Inclusion and Assistance; and
- Active Living.

Associated organisations would provide advice:

- Citizens Advice – UC applications and general advice;
- DWP – UC applications and benefits;
- Changing Pathways – Community Safety;
- Peabody – Care and Support Services;
- Epping Forest Foodbank – Available to issue vouchers and direct to the Foodbank, Waltham Abbey;
- MIND – Mental Health Charity; and
- Provide – Essex Lifestyle Service.

It had been arranged that the Foodbank in Waltham Abbey would open at times to coincide with the MAC, therefore any residents directed to them with a food voucher provided by the MAC would be able to gain access to much needed provisions.

Officers will report back on the outcomes achieved from the MAC. This new service offered and its use. Officers will also provide insight into the demands from the residents of Waltham Abbey to help inform future service delivery plans.

The meeting was then opened up to questions from members.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked if the list of associated organisations was complete as Epping Forest Reuse did not appear to be listed. The Service Director said he was sure the Reuse centre had been contacted but he would check why they didn't appear on the associated organisations list.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the Universal Credit Impact be noted by the Select Committee.

35. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Select Committee would be held on 21 April 2020 at 7.00pm.

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