

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2020
IN VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM
AT 7.00 - 8.05 PM

Members Present:	D Sunger (Chairman), J McIvor (Vice-Chairman), A Beales, D Plummer, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley
Other members present:	N Bedford, R Brookes, S Kane, S Murray, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread
Apologies for Absence:	I Hadley and J Lea
Officers Present	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer), L Wade (Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)), C Wiggins (Community Resilience Service Manager) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

11. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind everyone present that this virtual meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

12. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that no substitute Members had been appointed for this meeting.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were declared pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct.

14. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:

- (1) That the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 July 2020 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

In response to a question from Cllr J H Whitehouse, the Committee was informed that it was the Housing & Community Services, and Customer & Support Services Portfolio Holders that primarily reported to this Select Committee.

The Chairman, Cllr D Sunger, commented that he would like to add the issue of Rough Sleepers within the District to the Select Committee's work programme. The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Community Services, Cllr H Whitbread, reported that

the Council had been proactive in assisting the rough sleepers within the District. The Portfolio Holder felt that this was a good subject for the Select Committee to consider and would be happy to give an update at the next meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the issue of Rough Sleepers throughout the District be added to the Select Committee's Work Programme.

16. SIX-MONTH REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL-FUNDED POLICE OFFICERS

The Service Manager for Community Resilience, C Wiggins, presented a report on the work of the Council-funded Police Officers. This report was originally due to be considered at the previous meeting of the Committee but had been deferred until this meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Service Manager reported that the Council continued to fund the employment of an additional Police Sergeant and 2 Police Constables to supplement existing local policing resources. The team was inceptioned in July 2018 with an initial 3-year contract, which had now been extended for a further two years. The team was tasked with District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities which were identified through the Annual Strategic Assessment and aligned with the priorities set by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). As well as working to those priorities, the team could be requested, via a tasking process, to support any Council department where there was an identified threat, harm or risk to staff. A service level agreement was in place to prevent abstraction of the officers except in extreme cases or high priority incidents. This also covered staff sickness and extended training periods through credit to the Council from Essex Police.

C Wiggins stated that 2020 continued to be a challenging period, with the Community Resilience Team temporarily relocated at Ongar Police Station while the Civic Offices were being refurbished. The report highlighted the variety of tasks that had been undertaken by the Officers, which included: high visibility patrols in North Weald following a spate of burglaries; joint working with the Housing Department regarding a problem property in Waltham Abbey linked to drug use and supply; Operation Moonstone to combat a series of thefts of high value vehicles; and operations in support of closure orders for venues in Roydon and Chigwell linked to 'Mansion Parties'.

C Wiggins stated that a Community Safety Engagement Officer had been embedded with the Community Resilience Team, to build public trust and confidence in the Police through engagement and collaboration with partners and the public. There were currently a number of issues relating to visitors to the Bell Hotel in Epping, which was being used by the Home Office to temporarily house asylum seekers. In addition, the Council's Police Officers would be undertaking visits to the District's High Streets during September in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, and making plans to combat any potential issues during the Halloween period.

Cllr McIvor thanked the Community Resilience team for their work, particularly in relation to the increased patrols in North Weald and Operation Moonstone. Cllr Plummer welcomed the meeting that had been held regarding the arson events in Meridian Park, where the Police gave a full explanation for what was currently happening.

In response to questions from the Committee, C Wiggins stated that the Council's Police Officers would not be used to enforce the 'Rule of Six' during the Covid-19 pandemic, although they intended to visit the School in Epping where Covid-19 related behaviour issues had arisen. Cllr S Murray reminded the Select Committee that pupils were expected to wear face masks when moving from one classroom to another, and when they were in communal areas. C Wiggins also highlighted that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) was used to great effect throughout the District to identify vehicles involved in offences.

C Wiggins also explained that improved intelligence was being received from the Metropolitan Police concerning unplanned music events, and emphasised that it was important for different teams across the Council to communicate with each other to ensure that one such instance did not lead to multiple offences being committed. It was also expected that there would be an increase in instances of anti-social behaviour from the reporting of blatant breeches of the rules in place for the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Housing & Community Services Portfolio Holder, Cllr H Whitbread, felt that the value of the Council's Police Officers had been illustrated at the current time during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Council also enjoyed excellent relations with the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex. The Portfolio Holder also added her thanks to the Community Resilience Team for the excellent work that they had undertaken.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, Cllr D Sunger, was reassured that funding for the Council's Police Officers had been secured for a further two years beyond the original three-year term, and requested that the Select Committee agree to extend an invitation to the District Police Commander to attend the next meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report on the work and range of operations of the Council-funded Police Officers during the preceding six months be noted; and
- (2) That an invitation be extended to the District Police Commander to attend the next meeting of the Select Committee on 14 January 2021.

17. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY - Q2

The Service Manager for Customer Services, S Lewis, presented an update report on Customer Services throughout the Council during the second quarter of 2020/21.

S Lewis stated that, in respect of what our residents were telling us, there was frustration that changes in services had not been communicated to them, and service areas had been reminded of the need to do this. 35% of residents had indicated that they preferred to pay cash and did not wish to switch to alternative payment methods. As a result, the cash office at the Broadway had been reopened for two days a week, and had taken payments totalling £68,000 during the first two weeks. However, a longer term solution would be developed. On a positive note, the special waste collection service had been well received and residents considered it good value. Finally, the reporting of potholes and requests for pavement maintenance were popular topics via the Council's social media channels, even though they were the responsibility of the County Council.

S Lewis then proceeded to give an update on the Council's Customer Strategy, and reminded the Select Committee that it had not been launched as planned to external customers due to the Covid-19 pandemic; a decision would need to be taken as to when this would happen. Phase I of the Strategy was to 'fix the basics' which included a customer services health check to be undertaken by service areas. It was felt that this should be mandatory for service areas to complete. Phase II was 'customer shoes'. A training pilot with Impact Factory would be launched next month to deliver customer services training to staff. Phase III was to embrace new technology and priorities were being reviewed by ICT.

Finally, S Lewis highlighted that National Customer Service week began on 5 October 2020, for which a number of events were planned, and there were a number of key messages to be communicated to staff over the coming months.

Cllr D Wixley commented that he had used the Member Contact system and found it helpful. However, he had recently received an email from an experienced member of staff indicating that there had been a change of policy and that he should use the customer contact section of the Council's website instead. Cllr S Murray stated that he had also received a similar email. Cllr S Kane, the Portfolio Holder for Customer & Corporate Support Services, confirmed that the Member Contact system was the correct channel for Members to use, as it would be augmented in the future with the development of the Member Portal. S Lewis apologised for the misleading information that was given and reassured the Councillors that the member of staff concerned would be advised of the arrangements for Members. Cllr D Wixley suggested that an item should be placed in the Council Bulletin clarifying the correct policy, and Cllr S Kane confirmed that this would happen.

Cllr S Murray commented that the Impact Factory website looked fascinating and innovative, and had good customer feedback. However, the Councillor enquired whether the Council still undertook any 'mystery shopper' exercises? S Lewis responded that none were being undertaken at the current time, but it could be an option for the future when the refurbishment of the Civic Offices were complete and the new reception area had opened. Cllr R Brookes felt that the customer services staff had performed very well during the pandemic, but highlighted that she had used the main switchboard number last week and had to listen to over a minutes-worth of messages on different topics before being able to speak to a member of staff in the contact centre. Cllr D Plummer had also experienced this and added a plea for the use of plain English rather than terminology. S Lewis undertook to investigate this and noted the request for plain English.

Cllr J McIvor opined that it was important for staff to put themselves in the shoes of customers, and that National Customer Service week was a great initiative. The Councillor also felt staff should consider colleagues as customers as well, not just residents. Cllr S Kane reiterated that the focus initially would be on communications with residents, to improve the way that the Council disseminated information. This would include improvements to the Council's website to improve accessibility, and the re-opening of the Council's customer contact centres when it was safe to do so. Cllr N Bedford suggested that the Council could work with Town and Parish Councils to provide temporary customer contact centres throughout the District. S Lewis stated that the Corporate Communications Team were working hard to improve the accessibility of the Council's website.

Resolved:

- (1) That the update report on the Council's Customer Services during the

second quarter of 2020/21 be noted.

18. PROGRAMME DELIVERY - STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

The Director for Strategy, Delivery & Performance, L Wade, presented a report illustrating the alignment between the Select Committee and the Council's corporate programmes.

L Wade explained that an Officer structure had been established to focus on the delivery of the corporate programmes in line with the Council's Stronger Ambitions objectives. This Select Committee had three of the Council's corporate programmes aligned to it:

- (i) Community Health & Wellbeing Programme;
- (ii) Customer Excellence Programme; and
- (iii) Community Data / Insights Programme.

L Wade highlighted that the Council's focus was also on the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as its corporate programmes. As the Council's recovery planning and response evolved, so would the projects involved evolve and there were interdependencies across the corporate programmes. Cllr S Kane, Portfolio Holder for Customer & Support Services, provided the Select Committee with some further insight into the Community Data / Insights Programme, and commented that it would be an interesting programme.

Resolved:

- (1) That the internal governance established to manage and deliver the programmes of work aligned to the Stronger Communities ambitions in 2020/21 be noted; and
- (2) That no additional areas for scrutiny be identified and included within the work programme delivery.

19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Select Committee noted that meetings were currently scheduled for 14 January 2021 and 30 March 2021; both meetings would commence at 7.00pm.

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