

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2022
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 8.25 PM**

Members Present: J Lucas (Chairman), , C Amos, R Balcombe, S Murray, C Nweke, R Pugsley and D Wixley

Co-opted Member: W Marshall

Other members present: A Lion and H Whitbread

Other members virtually: H Kane and S Kane

Apologies for Absence: I Hadley

Officers Present: R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)) and R Pavey (Service Director (Customer Services))

Officers present virtually: L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer)

By invitation virtually:

13. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that this meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

14. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that there were no substitute members.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

16. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

That the notes of the previous meeting held on 21 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to

- That W Marshall was present.
- (Minute 7 - Transfer of Service from Broadway Housing Office) – That the report contained with the agenda referred to expected income of £22,000 not savings.

- (Minute 11 - Review of Housing Strategy 2022-2027) - That the reference to 'More bricks and mortar' be replaced with 'It's more than bricks and mortar'.

17. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

18. BI-ANNUAL REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL-FUNDED POLICE OFFICERS

The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services, C Wiggins gave a six-month report on the work and range of operations of the Council's funded Police team, which had been contained within the agenda of the report.

The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following points.

- Can the police take enforcement action against drivers who obstruct pavements? The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that she would provide the written statement which she had received from the Brentwood and Epping Forest District Commander.

Written statement from Brentwood and Epping Forest District Commander, C/Insp Paul Ballard - In relation to the parking issues and enforcement you will be aware that previous criminal enforcement of parking offences by police officers and police traffic wardens ceased following the introduction of the Road Traffic Act 1991 where parking matters were decriminalised and became the responsibility of local authorities and councils to enforce. Police officers do not have any lawful powers to enforce parking infractions. Police officers of course do have lawful enforcement powers in relation to offences that are sometimes within the sphere of parking with the most prominent being Obstruction of the Highway.

Section 137 of the Highways Act 1980 makes it an offence to wilfully obstruct the highway.

137(1) If a person, without lawful authority or excuse, in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage along a highway he is guilty of an offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 51 weeks or a fine or both.

For us to prosecute we would need to be able to evidence that the parked vehicle meant that 'free passage', was obstructed, which would be at the discretion of the officer attending based on all of the circumstances of each individual instance and reliant on there being sufficient evidence to prosecute. Physical parking on a pavement is only illegal in the Greater London area with this not currently the case in Essex or elsewhere in England & Wales. This current distinction was outlined in the Highway Code which states:

Rule 244

You **must not** park partially or wholly on the pavement in London and **should not** do so elsewhere unless signs permit it. Parking on the pavement can obstruct and seriously inconvenience pedestrians, people in wheelchairs or with visual impairments and people with prams or pushchairs.

- Would there be ASB community engagement events held in other areas of the district? The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that the

team were keen to hold further ASB awareness events every couple of months across the district, which would include Loughton. Dates for these events would be provided to members.

- Could the Council's funded officers assist the community police officers with road safety projects? The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that she would pass on this request to the Community Policing Team Inspector.
- Residents has passed on information about ASB around the Oakwood Hill, Debden area and it was felt there was a lack of response from the police. The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that residents needed to report all incidents, whether directly to the police or through Crimestoppers, so that intelligence could be gathered. She would pass on the information to both the ASB Team and police and ask for the area to be included in the patrol area.
- Due to the increase in rural crime, could the local villages be included in the patrols? The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that a Rural Crime Strategy was currently be reviewed by the Essex Police Fire & Crime Commissioners office which could be brought to the committee. It was noted that there was a rural crime officer and GTRET team, and extra patrols could be requested.
- Could the community officer attend the Broadway Town Centre Partnership meetings? The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services would take the request back to the team.

The Directorate Specialist – Technical Services advised that officers from the Council's funded Police team would attend the next Member's Coffee morning with Officers.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the six-month report on the work and range of operations of the Council's funded Police team.

19. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Service Manager- Customer Services, S Lewis gave an update on the Customer Strategy and customer feedback which was contained within the agenda of the report.

The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following points.

- Did the Contact centre have a recommended acceptable wait time to answer calls? The Service Manager- Customer Services advised that there was not a set time, although recently the wait time had been increased due to issues with the waste collections service. The Service Director – Customer Services advised that the current wait times were 5 minutes 30 seconds. Furthermore, that the Council was working both on the technical issues as well as the council response to customers.
- What information had been given to residents about the waste collections issues? The Service Manager- Customer Services advised that Biffa gave daily updates to the Council who then passed this information onto the contact centre.

- Had a record been kept of where the user of the Epping Community hub had travelled from? The Service Manager- Customer Services advised that all users were asked to complete a survey which collect this information.
- The Council should remember that not all residents had access or wanted to use digital methods to contact the Council. The Customer Services Portfolio Holder advised that the Council aimed to get 80% of the digitally able residents using the online methods so that officers could focus on the other 20% of residents.
- Could the council claim back the costs associated with the waste issue from the provider? The Service Director – Customer Services advised that this had been raised in discussion with the provider.
- Had the process changed for the way members report issues? The Service Manager- Customer Services advised that she was not aware of any changes although a Members Portal had been created. This could be found on the Council's website and provided members with useful information all in one place.
- It was requested that if the Council had any major issues such as the waste collection problems, members should be briefed so that they were able to advise residents, if contacted directly.
- Could clarity be provided on the number of visitors in August to the Epping Community Hub. The Service Director - Customer Services advised that the Community Hub provided several services which had been brought together to create a flexible response for tenants and he would ensure more detailed data would be provided to members at the next meeting.
- Members to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) – It should be noted that not all devices were compatible with the council's systems, which would need to be resolved before this was rolled out to members.
- That response emails should be automatically provided to residents when they had completed a form, to prevent residents reporting the issues again. The Service Manager- Customer Services advised that officers were working towards an automated response for all contact forms. This would be part of the back office customer journey mapping.
- The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder advised that the idea would be to recreate the Community Hub in other areas in the district in a similar form or as pop ups across the district, but the Council needed to be sure what services were required and when and where they would be of most use.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee noted the update on the Customer Service Strategy and feedback from residents.
2. That the Customer Service Manager would raise the problems that Members were experiencing with their own and/or council devices being compatible with the Council's systems.

20. IMPACT OF MINOR ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS CARRIED OUT AT HARVEYFIELDS, WALTHAM ABBEY

The HRA Project Director, D Fenton reported on the work undertaken at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey and the positive impact that the minor estate improvements had played, which had been detailed within the agenda.

The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following points.

- Did the Homes Fit for Human Habitation Act 2018 (as amended) apply to both social and private rented properties? The HRA Project Director advised that it applied to both.
- What did HSSR stand for? It was noted that it should have been HHSRS, which stood for Housing Health and Safety Rating System.
- Would these types of works be undertaken across the district? The HRA Project Director advised that a list of areas had been produced and she would distribute this to members.
- The ward member advised that she had been consulted throughout the process and that both her comments and the residents had been taken into account.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the work undertaken at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey.

21. NEW SUPPORT MODEL - SHELTERED HOUSING

The HRA Project Director, D Fenton requested that the Committee consider the new support model for sheltered housing, which had been detailed within the agenda.

The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following points.

- If residents did not trigger a reassessment when they were annually reviewed, could they request or be reassessed in between these periods? The HRA Project Director advised that assessment would be taken as and when required.
- The Housing & Community Portfolio Holder advised that these changes were about attracting residents to sheltered housing and modernised the service.
- How many Sheltered Housing Officers did the Council employ? The HRA Project Director advised there were eleven full time equivalent officers.
- Would WIFI be provided in these types of properties? The HRA Project Director advised that it was not cost effective and under a recent survey at High Mead House, residents had advised that they had install their own individual WIFI service and would prefer other services.
- It was noted that the Housing and Community Portfolio Holder had requested that officers begin to create a Strategy for Older Persons Housing, which should begin to address issues with the housing waiting list for both the older and younger generations.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee had considered the new “needs led” support service for residents in sheltered housing.
2. That Sheltered Housing Officers would work from a hub, to allow an even distribution of work across the team.
3. That Sheltered Housing would be rebranded as Independent Living.
4. That the job titles of Sheltered Housing Officers would be changed to Independent Living Officers and
5. That the Committee had no additional comments prior to the report being submitted to Cabinet.

22. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting would be 15 November 2022.