

## **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES**

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet	<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, 20 December 2022
<b>Place:</b>	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	<b>Time:</b>	4.30 - 5.25 pm
<b>Members Present:</b>	Councillors C Whitbread (Chairman), N Bedford (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, L Burrows, S Kane, A Lion, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread		
<b>Members Present (Virtually):</b>	Councillors		
<b>Other Councillors:</b>	Councillors R Balcombe, R Brookes, H Kane, J Parsons and J M Whitehouse		
<b>Other Councillors (Virtual):</b>	Councillors S Heap, C McCredie, S Murray and D Wixley		
<b>Apologies:</b>	K Williamson		
<b>Officers Present:</b>	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), A Small (Section 151 Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), C Ferrigi (Service Manager (ICT & Business Support)), C Hartgrove (Interim Chief Financial Officer), D Marsh (Waste Management Team Manager), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor) and J Warwick (Interim Acting Service Director (Contracts))		
<b>Officers Present (Virtually):</b>	J Gould (Interim Strategic Director), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), D Pegler (Older Persons Services Team Manager) and P Wharfe (Interim Service Director (Housing Revenue Account))		

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### **64. 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.

### **65. Declarations of Interest**

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

### **66. Minutes**

#### **Decision:**

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7 November 2022 be taken as read and would be signed by the Leader as a correct record.

**67. Reports of Portfolio Holders**

The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder congratulated Di Butler who had won a Jack Petchey award in recognition of her work done over many years.

The Finance Portfolio Holder reported that the Council had been awarded £1 million by the UK Government as part of the UK shared prosperity Fund.

The Customer Portfolio Holder reported that a new Chat Bot has been introduced to help take some of the pressure of the waste management team and the contact centre. It had been offered free of charge to Epping Forest DC and was looking very promising for waste management and other parts of the council.

The Place Portfolio Holder reported on the Local Plan. He had been informed that all the documentation had now been uploaded to the portal for the inspector and we were now just waiting for the inspector to come back to us.

**68. Public Questions and Requests to Address the Cabinet**

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

**69. Overview and Scrutiny**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that at their meeting of 17 November, the Committee scrutinised the Corporate Performance report for quarter 2. Members especially questioned officers on the waste contract and the missed collections.

They agreed that at a future meeting they will have the Qualis Group Managing Director to speak to and answer questions on Qualis.

**70. New Support Model - Sheltered Housing**

The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the New Support Model on Sheltered Housing.

She noted that having listened to our residents and those considering a move to sheltered housing, we realised that the service we provided at present, which was a daily welfare check had become out of date. Residents wanted a more flexible service but more importantly they wanted peace of mind knowing that if/when they need support it would be available to them. To achieve this within our sheltered schemes, officers had drafted a new model of support, one that was flexible, and needs led, allowing us to spend quality time with those residents that have genuine support needs.

The term "sheltered housing" inferred people need looking after. Residents living in our sheltered housing schemes were independent and so the term independent living would be more appropriate with staff having the title Independent Living Officer.

Councillor Philip said that he was happy to have the 7.4% rise as indicated in recommendation 5 of the report. This was to enable us to cover all our costs. It was the right thing to do.

Councillor Lion commented that a broadband strategy was needed here. The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder agreed that this was important, and a new way forward was being sought.

**Decision:**

- (1) The Cabinet approved the proposal to introduce a “needs led” support service to residents in sheltered housing.
- (2) The Cabinet agreed to Sheltered Housing Officers working from a hub to ensure work was evenly distributed among the team.
- (3) The Cabinet approved the re-branding of the Council’s sheltered housing schemes to Independent Living and change of job title for sheltered Housing Officers to Independent Living Officers.
- (4) The Cabinet agreed to the new “needs led” support model being reviewed on a regular basis to take account of new digital technology.
- (5) The Cabinet agreed that to ensure full cost recovery for the Support Service, an increase of 7.4% from 1st April 2023 was recommended.

**Reason for decision:**

The current support model was no longer fit for purpose. Residents living in sheltered housing wanted a more flexible, “needs led” support service.

**Options considered and rejected:**

The option to continue with the current daily welfare checks was considered and rejected as it serves little purpose. Residents want a more up to date support service that is flexible, sustainable and one that gives residents choice.

**71. Review of Housing Strategy - 2023 - 2027**

The Housing and Community Portfolio Holder introduced the report noting that the current Housing Strategy (2018-2022) was due for renewal.

Cabinet was being asked to accept the recommendations set out in the report and approve the draft Housing Strategy for 2023-2027 for formatting along with the draft Public Consultation Report, and the draft Equalities Impact Assessment for publication of the final reports in January 2023.

Although the Housing Strategy was not a statutory requirement it provided a cohesive direction of travel for cross-cutting housing related services. The aim was to reflect and facilitate the co-ordination of activities for those services that directly impact on current and projected supply of and need for affordable housing in the District.

A report on the proposals for the vision priorities aims and objectives for the review of the Housing Strategy, and the outcome of the public consultation was presented to Stronger Communities Select Committee on 12 July 2022 for scrutiny. It was resolved that the report be recommended to Cabinet for approval with no changes.

Councillor Philip commented on the resource implications, where it said that any additional burdens associated with the introduction of the new regulatory framework were being addressed by the interim Director of Housing through the usual business planning process. It was important to highlight that if it did involve change to the HRA Business Plan it should be brought back for any budget implications.

Councillor Wixley referred to priority 3 in the report regarding housing adaptations for people with disabilities; as we worked in conjunction with Essex County Council on this, should this be included in the strategy? He was told that it would be a good thing to add, and the Portfolio Holder would be happy to add a line if the Cabinet could delegate authority for this. This was agreed by the Cabinet.

#### **Decision:**

1. That Cabinet approved the draft Housing Strategy 2023-2027 for formatting and publication by 9 January 2023;
2. That Cabinet approved the draft Housing Strategy: Public Consultation Report and the Equalities Impact Assessment for publication in conjunction with the Housing Strategy 2023-2027 in January 2023;
3. That Cabinet delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community to consider and approve the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan for 2023-2024 in January 2023 and the annual Housing Strategy Delivery Plan update thereafter for the lifetime of the Strategy and make any minor alterations as considered necessary; and
4. That Cabinet approved the recommendation that the Housing Strategy for 2023-2027 be reviewed and updated no later than 2027 subject to the usual democratic process.

#### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To enable the Council to publish the Housing Strategy 2023-2027 and associated documents.

#### **Other Options for Action:**

Not to agree the recommendations contained within this report.

## **72. Outsourcing of the Concierge Service**

The Internal Resources Report Holder introduced the report on the outsourcing of the concierge service. He noted that the Concierge service at the Civic Offices was not a traditional Concierge service, the team had numerous responsibilities including the opening and closing of the building, managing and maintaining our bookable spaces, monitoring the employee car park, issuing security cards, monitoring CCTV and much more. The existing service was structured to be made up of the equivalent of four full time posts (FTE) covering 6:30-22:00 Monday to Friday, with out of hours, on

site security being provided by a contractor between 22:00-6:30 on weekdays and across the whole weekend.

Due to various operational and resource challenges, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) agreed to explore the outsourcing of the Concierge Service at the Civic Offices, by formally going out to tender, to then review bids and make a decision as to whether the Council proceeds to the formal stages of outsourcing.

Out of four contractors that showed an interest, only one of them, PCS Group, put forward a bid. The bid was a strong, tailored and detailed response, scoring 96.5/100 during the evaluation process.

Based on a three year contract, the costs for year 1 and 2 were lower than our current operating costs and year 3 was higher. The savings made in the first 2 years offset the increase in the third year. If the service remains in house, it was likely that by year 3 it would be more costly than outsourcing, as salaries and existing contracts will increase year on year.

Councillor Brookes asked why we had only one bidder in the end. She was told that the other companies that showed an interest were mainly based on the security side and were not suitable for general concierge services.

Councillor Brookes then asked if the new service would also cover reception. She was told that they would at first only cover the concierge duties, but officers would keep this under review on a yearly basis.

**Decision:**

- (1) The Cabinet agreed that the Concierge Service at the Civic Offices be outsourced; and
- (2) The Cabinet agreed that the contract be awarded to PCS Group for a period of three years.

**Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

The decision to outsource the Concierge Service was a solution to some operational challenges that the Council had been facing for the past year, particularly around resourcing the service.

The benefits to outsourcing the service are

- Increased resilience as we will be working with a company that can be scalable to our needs and ensure we always have appropriately trained staff available to cover the shift requirements.
- The Council has an opportunity to work with a service provider and shape what we want the service to look like, which will improve customer service. This will be measured against feedback that we regularly, informally receive.
- The Council would have SIA Security trained Concierge on site at all times to support the Welcome Desk Team and the Incident Manager should the need arise.
- This option provided consistent, stable costs during uncertain times and removes the risk of unforeseen, avoidable, additional costs to the Council.

- Other miscellaneous costs of running a service in house were removed, such as recruitment costs.

**Other Options for Action:**

An alternative option would be to work with the People Team and Trade Unions to change the terms of employment for the current team, to include evening and weekend working as mandatory. The Council could upskill the existing team to secure their SIA Security Licences. We could attempt to recruit to the open role(s) by working with the People Team on a new recruitment campaign. This option has been discounted due to the challenges already faced recruiting to those roles. Additionally, whilst the role(s) remain vacant the Council would continue to pay a premium to a contractor for covering those shifts and we could end up back in the same position of being unable to fill those roles.

Another option is to go back out to tender ourselves, instead of using Everything FM, in the hope to reach alternative contractors. This option has also been discounted as Everything FM are specialists in this field, so it is doubtful that the Council would achieve a different result in terms of bids received and we would have only elongated the appointment process, costing ourselves more for a contractor to cover this interim period.

**73. Introduction of Charging for Additional/Replacement Waste Containers.**

The Contracts and Commissioning Portfolio Holder introduced the report. He noted that the current open-ended policy concerning waste containers had always created a constant demand for additional waste containers especially when there was no cost that affects the resident. The waste management team believe that current revenue costs could be reduced if the report's recommendations were introduced.

Councillor Philip welcomed the report but had a concern that we treated lost bins carefully if that loss happened at a time when collections were taking place as they can go missing as some bins sometimes do not go back outside the right property. Officers would need some discretion in sorting this out.

Councillor Lion agreed and pointed out that the contractors can also damage the bins when they collect the rubbish. He would not expect to be charged if the bin was damaged by the contractor. How would we manage this? the Portfolio Holder said that he would take this into consideration and officers would be give discretion on how they dealt with matters like this.

Councillor Murray asked about the rare occasion of when a person moves property and take the bins with them. Will the new owners get new bins? He was told that officers would use their discretion on matters like this.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse would like this commitment reflected in the recommendations. It was agreed by cabinet that this would be reflected in the recommendations.

**Decision:**

- (1) The Cabinet agreed to introduce charging residents for additional and replacement waste containers.

- (2) The Cabinet agreed that developers cover all the costs of providing all new bins and containers (Waste and Recycling) required by a new residential development.
- (3) The Cabinet agreed the following:
- a) That additional food and garden bins (AF&GB) were renamed 'garden waste bin'.
  - b) That residents were charged for the assessment, issuing and delivery of additional garden waste bins.
  - c) That residents that requested a larger refuse bin above the standard service offered to residents of a 180-litre bin to be charged for the assessment, issuing and delivery of the larger waste bin.
  - d) That if a bin was completely lost or a resident could not produce their bin, the replacement cost should be down to the resident; officers would be given discretion to consider any exceptions to this. However, where a bin could be repaired the repair would continue to be free of charge to residents.
  - e) Any refinements of the policy will be agreed between the Portfolio Holder and the officers.

#### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

Epping Forest District Council was facing financial challenges and was always striving to reduce costs of services and identify efficiencies. The cost of the Waste Management Contract continues to rise and present challenges, therefore a review of the options to reduce existing waste container costs has been undertaken. The review recommends that Epping Forest District Council introduces charges to residents for additional and replacement waste containers.

Officers had benchmarked with other Local Authorities and found that in line with the best practice elsewhere, many Local Authorities now charge residents for replacement containers when bins are reported lost or stolen. It was believed that residents look after the containers better and keep them off the streets between collections to avoid the replacement costs. This promotes the tidier streets which are so important to our residents.

#### **Other Options for Action:**

Do nothing and continue to supply additional and replacement waste containers free of charge. The costs of this will increase year and year and put a financial strain on the waste contract and Epping Forest District Council.

#### **74. Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23**

The Finance Portfolio Holder introduced the report. He noted that the report set out the 2022/23 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account positions, for both revenue and capital, as at 30th September 2022 ("Quarter 2").

In terms of General Fund revenue expenditure – at the Quarter 2 stage – a budget overspend of £1.259 million, with projected net expenditure of £16.890 million against an overall budget provision of £15.631 million, was forecast.

As with Quarter 1, the Quarter 2 position was dominated by a range of substantial spending pressures, most notably:

- Inflation/Staff Budgets – a sharp increase in UK inflation since the budget was set is driving higher pay demands across both the public and private sectors. The Pay Settlement for 2022/23 was finalised in November 2022 with staff receiving an uplift of £1,925 at all pay grades, which equates to an average pay award in the region of 5.0% rather than the 2.0% award assumed in the budget. However, this is still being offset – to a large extent – by salary savings due to vacant posts. Senior officers are trying to contain net spending on staff salaries within budgeted cash limits for 2022/23, although it is a pressure that will have to be addressed in setting the budget for 2023/24; and
- Local Plan – the continued delay in finalising the Local Plan was causing a major shortfall in income received from Planning Applications. It was also a major factor in the delayed drawdown of Qualis loans due to planning delays on key development sites in the district; this is leading to a shortfall in income that the Council assumed from loan margins in the budget.

The current economic difficulties were also creating a range of other problems with inflation impacting on energy and contract costs, with rising interest rates also working against the Council.

#### **Decision:**

1. The Cabinet noted the General Fund revenue position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2022) for 2022/23, including actions being undertaken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, (including Appendix A of the report).
2. The Cabinet noted the General Fund capital position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2022) for 2022/23 (including Appendix B of the report).
3. The Cabinet noted the Housing Revenue Account revenue position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2022) for 2022/23, including actions proposed to ameliorate the position, where significant variances have been identified; and
4. The Cabinet noted the Housing Revenue Account capital position at the end of Quarter 2 (30th September 2022) for 2022/23 (including Appendix C of the report).

#### **Reason for Decision:**

This report facilitates the scrutiny of the Council's financial position for 2022/23.

The comments made at this Committee, where relevant, will be reported to Cabinet for consideration at their meeting on 12th December 2022.

#### **Other Options:**

There are no matters for decision in this report. The Committee is asked to note the contents but may choose to take further action depending on the matters reported.

**75. Any Other Business: Draft Budget 2023/24 (including General Fund & HRA revenue & capital, Fees & Charges and an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan)**

The Finance Portfolio Holder introduced the draft budget report. The Cabinet approved an updated Financial Planning Framework (FPF) 2023/24 to 2027/28 at its meeting on 30th September 2022, which was the first step in preparing the 2023/24 budget.

The first major milestone in the FPF was reached on 10th October 2022, with Cabinet receiving and considering an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2023/24 to 2027/28. The MTFP revealed a projected deficit of £4.126 million for 2023/24 on the General Fund; it is a deficit that requires eliminating in full if the Council is to fulfil its legal obligation to set a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year.

This draft budget paper was a balanced budget. As yet we did not know how much of a government grant, we would get. This draft budget would still be in flux until the February Council meeting. This draft will also be going to the Stronger Council Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.

He noted that the HRA was not looking too bad in the short term, it was in a balanced position.

Councillor Lion asked how strong was this budget in terms of going forward for the coming year, was there any way we could reduce our commitments or risks. He was told that it was a known unknown. We had to use what was in front of us and if any significant changes occurred then we would have to reconsider as we went along.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked for a clarification of the reduction of £200k in parking income for Bakers Lane, Epping. He was told that when the Bakers Lane car park when it transfers would not be part of the Council's estate. We had sold Cottis Lane to Qualis and when Bakers Lane shuts down for construction of the new sports centre it will not have any cars parking there. We will not own those two car parks in Epping.

The Leader thanked the Portfolio Holder, all cabinet colleagues, and all officers connected with this. this has been the most tense budget period he has known.

**Decision:**

- 1) The Cabinet considered the draft General Fund revenue budget proposals for 2023/24.
- 2) The Cabinet considered the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue budget proposals for 2023/24.
- 3) The Cabinet considered the draft General Fund and HRA capital proposals for 2023/24 through to 2027/28.
- 4) The Cabinet considered the draft Fees and Charges proposals for 2023/24.

5) The Cabinet considered and approved the updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (General Fund and HRA); and

6) The Cabinet requested that the Stronger Council Select Committee consider the draft budget proposals for 2023/24 (Appendix A of the report) – including the savings proposed to balance the budget – and associated documents (Appendices B to E of the report) and make comments for consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 6th February 2023.

**Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To provide Cabinet with an initial draft Budget for 2023/24 for consideration (alongside comments from the Stronger Council Select Committee held on 24th November 2022) ahead of the forthcoming Budget scrutiny process in January 2023; and for Cabinet to provide Finance officers with any direction required to further refine the Budget.

**Other Options:**

N/A

**76. Any other Business: Museum Trust**

**Decision:**

The Cabinet agreed to the appointment of the following councillors as trustee to the Museum. They will be – Councillors Helen Kane and Holly Whitbread.

**CHAIRMAN**