

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Tuesday, 24 July 2018
Place:	Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping	Time:	7.30 - 9.10 pm
Members Present:	Councillors M Sartin (Chairman) R Jennings (Vice-Chairman) R Baldwin, P Bolton, L Burrows, D Dorrell, S Heap, S Heather, J Lea, S Murray, A Patel, P Stalker, H Whitbread, J M Whitehouse and D Wixley		
Other Councillors:	Councillors N Avey, R Brookes, A Grigg, H Kane, S Kane, G Mohindra, S Stavrou, D Stocker, B Vaz and C Whitbread		
Apologies:	Councillors N Bedford, A Mitchell, S Neville and J H Whitehouse		
Officers Present:	D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer) and G Gold (Assistant Community Health & Wellbeing Manager)		
By Invitation:	N Anyanwu (Citizens Advice Epping Forest), P Gordon (Citizen Advice Epping Forest) and J Wells (Citizen's Advice Epping Forest)		

19. 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.

20. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillor Jon Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor Janet Whitehouse and that Councillor S Heap was substituting for Councillor S Neville.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 4th June 2018 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to replacing the word 'County' with 'Country' in the first line of the 9th paragraph in minute item 6 and that the word 'Acting' replace the word 'Assistant' in the 3rd paragraph of minute item 16.

Matters Arising

Councillor Patel would like the questions he posed at the last meeting answered; they were about:

- 1) How was the aspects of DIZ to be fitted into our corporate plan (page 9 of the agenda, minute item 6);
- 2) The report on Customer Satisfaction closure report, where he asked how the sample was chosen (page 14 of the agenda, minute item 15); and

- 3) On the transformation programme – project dossier item, he had asked if an anticipated progress column could be added for these reports (page 15 of the agenda minute item 16).

Mr Macnab said that he would endeavour to get responses to these questions.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda by virtue of seeking to become a trustee of Citizen's Advice Epping Forest.

- Agenda item 6 - Scrutiny of External organisation – Citizen's Advice Epping Forest District.

23. CITIZENS ADVICE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT - SCRUTINY OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATION

The Chairman was very pleased to welcome three officers from the local Citizen's Advice - Epping Forest District. The officers were Nnenna Anyanwu, the Chief Executive; Peter Gordon a Trustee; and Jean Wells a Trustee.

A copy of their presentation is attached for information.

Ms Anyanwu reviewed the work that the Citizen's Advice Epping Forest (CAEF) did in the district, saying that they were an independent charity that provided specialist and general advice within the EFDC area. They had 3 offices in Loughton Library, Waltham Abbey Town Hall and Hemnall Street, Epping. They also had 2 outreaches, one in Limes Farm and one in the Ongar Library.

They provided free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to people so that they did not suffer from lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

Their core areas of advice and expertise were in benefits, debt management, housing, employment, relationships, legal matters and financial services.

They provided advice to local residents on a face to face basis and by telephone. They also run an evening pro bono solicitors rota and a family solicitor's rota once a week.

They also campaigned for better policies and practices which affected people's lives.

Last year they saw nearly 2000 people and advised them on 7,409 different issues. So far this year they have dealt with around 800 clients most with multiple issues. They have 44 volunteers and solve the problems of 2 in every 3 clients with an 88% satisfaction rate. In the first quarter of this year (April to June 2018) they had maintained £5,720 worth of benefits and tax credits and had written off £134,980 of debts for their clients.

Their strategic objectives were:

- 1) To make it easier to get good quality advice;
- 2) Be more influential;
- 3) Become more sustainable and effective in the community; and
- 4) Be a stronger equality champion.

They have also faced the following challenges:

- **Funding** – this as always was a challenge. The EFDC grant had stayed the same for a number of years, but costs have gone up and they were having to do the same amount or more with the same money which amounted to a cut in funding. They were trying to diversify the funding base but it was a challenge.
- **EFDC geographical environment** – rural settlements were widely spread and the transport system was not very good. They tended to see a lot of elderly clients and also clients with mental health issues and they had difficulty in travelling in to attend their offices. However, reaching out to rural areas costs money.
- **Volunteering recruitment and training** – they have lost a few of their volunteers due to retirement recently and they needed to train up new people, which was expensive and time consuming.
- **Staff shortages** – again this was linked to funding. They needed to recruit more people to fill in the gaps and they were working towards raising money to fund more positions.
- **Building partnerships relationships** – again this was something that took time to arrange. They were currently talking to MIND and to Epping Forest College.
- **EFDC Objectives** – a lot of these objectives were not part of their core work and without additional funding it did take away from their fundamental work that they did. The objectives such as going into schools to speak about handling their finances was not part of what they normally did and not achievable without extra funding.

As they were in a strategic partnership with EFDC, they would like to set out joint objectives with the council so that it matched more of their core work and to develop a quality service together.

They would also like better quality monitoring, at present monitoring was restricted to the 5 objectives but did not really touch on their core work.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for her presentation and for the overview of the work that they undertook on a daily basis and opened the item out for questions from members present.

Councillor Baldwin thanks them for their informative presentation and commented that he valued the work that they did. He asked about Universal Credit, which was due to be introduced soon. This had problems as it was a complete change to the benefits system. What had they done to prepare. He was told that they had started training their staff and had put up information on their website. But a lot was still unclear. They were trying to get access to DWP for more information and they hoped to champion individuals with problems to get them reassessed by DWP.

Councillor Baldwin went on to ask about the GDPR regulations that came in recently, this must affect them as they kept a lot of information on their clients. Could they share this data with the DWP or EFDC if it was needed? Ms Anyanwu said that all their staff had been trained and they had amended their forms and processes. They had already had a high level of security for their data. The DWP required all information that was shared to be encrypted and they needed their clients consent.

Councillor Murray said that he had looked at their last annual report for 2016/17. It had said that their case load was 35% on benefits and tax credit cases. How much more did they expect for Universal Credit cases? Ms Anyanwu said that they had no real idea, but were worried. They had heard that tenants went into debt immediately Universal Credit came in due to the long period before the computer caught up with

them. This also could end up in evictions in the private sector. This was very worrying.

Councillor Murray said that in the annual report they spoke of the strategic agreement with EFDC, which had kept its grant at the same level over the years. How many years and how did the objectives line up with their core work? Peter Gordon (CAB Trustee) said that he was grateful for the Council's grant money but it was something like 10 years since it had been increased; and with inflation that had meant a real decrease, while their other costs increased. As for the objectives, there were 5 that were set with the service level agreement one of which was to run a gateway advice session at Ongar, which fitted in with their objectives. Another one was to find additional external funding; this was difficult to do, they had asked other organisations, but these tended to be linked with certain projects and were for a limited time; they had also asked the Parish Councils but that amounted to only a few hundred pounds extra. The two most difficult objectives were that they delivered financial knowledge to pupils in the districts schools. This was not something that they did normally and schools have shown no enthusiasm for this. The other objective was to deliver advice session to Norway House, this was proving difficult from their angle as they needed to train people to give advice in those circumstances. It would be nice to reach some mutually accepted objectives and not have them imposed on us.

Councillor Sartin noted that EFDC was not the only funder, Essex County Council also gave you a grant, as do three of the Town Council's, just what was the percentage from Essex and was it earmarked for specific areas. She was told that it was a relatively small amount as compared to this council. They also got support from Epping Town Council, Loughton Town Council and Waltham Abbey Town Council and some smaller amounts from parish Councils. Councillor Sartin then asked if they received any funding from their national body. She was told that they did not. The parent body did receive money from Central Government but used it on administration and campaigning on various issues. They get no funding and in fact had to pay them a fee to be affiliated with them.

Councillor Lea asked if they did any fund raising events. She was told that they did run some events where they raised a few thousand pounds; but a lot of people thought that they were a government service and that was not the case.

Councillor Helen Kane clarified that the reason why the Council had not cut the funding was because they respected the CAB and thought they were doing a very good job. But the tax payer in the form of EFDC was paying 89% of their funding, and she had always encouraged them to seek external funding. Not because EFDC were going to lower or cut the funding but it was good to reduce the ratio to the Epping tax payer. The other thing was that the tax paying residents lived all over the district not just in Epping, Loughton or Waltham Abbey. And these more rural based residents also need access to them. We needed their presence in our rural areas.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse commenting on the schools side of things noted that there was at least one specialist charity specialising in giving financial education to pupils. Also on the Service Level Agreement we have with them, he noticed that it was reviewed annually when there was a chance to change the objectives if circumstance change over time. Had there been any amendments to the SLA over the past three years? Mr Gordon was unsure on this. It was a three year rolling agreement, and the three years expires this year, so we would be starting from scratch then. But the main provisions in the agreement have not been altered much.

Ms Anyanwu added that she had contacted all the schools and only one was interested. So if an objective says that we should deliver this to all seven schools and only one was interested (who wanted something specific and tailor made), then they were never going to meet that objective.

Councillor Wixley noted that they offered help to people with mental health issues; he presumed that this was help for their financial problems. Could they elaborate? Ms Anyanwu gave an example of a client who came in for financial/benefit advice and the advisor may realise by the end of the session that they did not really understand the advice given to them and that they needed additional support. There was also the question, was their problems causing the mental health issues or was it the other way around.

Councillor Holly Whitbread asked if they had a breakdown of the ages of the people who used their services. Did they get a lot of young people and did they use new technologies to communicate the more basic information. She was told that they did not have any figures broken down into age groups but could say that younger people tended to engage more on line, by telephone or by webchat. Councillor Whitbread then asked if they had an outreach programme to make more young people aware of their services. She was told that they did go into colleges and to tried and engage in community events etc.

Councillor Murray noted that from their last annual report the CAB received 70% of their funding from EFDC, 15% from the three Town Councils mentioned and from Essex County and 7% from a local charity. Also it was all very well to ask for financial education in schools but it had to be done well and it would be better to use the specialist charities that did this. He also noted that a lot of the PHSE stuff had been squeezed out of schools now and the only things left were the GCSE measurable subjects we were not producing well rounded 6th formers any more.

They were raising money for themselves; according to the annual report they had raised £5,000 and engage 44 volunteers; no other organisations can do this. It would be difficult to then ask these volunteers to spend more of their time in fund raising.

The feedback they got from clients was very good; they were doing a really good job and he thanked them for it.

Councillor Mohindra asked how much did we give them a year and how did they ensure that their clients were EFDC residents. Mr Gordon said that they received about £110,000 pa from EFDC and they always asked where their clients were from and were aware that they should not be advising people from outside of this area. Certainly a very high percentage of them were from this area.

Councillor Sarin asked if the £110,000 included the funding for the two debt advisors and was told that it did not, that was another £40,000 for that project.

Councillor Brookes asked, apart from finance, what could councillors do to make their job easier. She was told that they needed to get together to agree better objectives and let them know of any common themes or complaints that they may need to address, and where they may need to develop their services in this area.

Councillor Brookes then asked if they got a lot of repeat visits and was told that these were mainly from people with mental health issues and people with debt issues.

Councillor Wixley noted that he had in the past been provided with a breakdown by ward of the number of people that had visited the CAB. This would be quite

interesting to ward councillors. Mr Gordon said that this information was available, a breakdown of numbers by ward and they could provide it if wanted. Councillor Sartin said that would be interesting to see, not only for people from the towns but for the rural wards. Mr Gordon agreed to provide these figures. He reiterated that to do more outreach they needed more staff and more funding.

Councillor Helen Kane commented that as a council we did not impose the objectives, they were discussed and agreed mutually.

Councillor Chris Whitbread noted that the clear message that came across this evening was the council clearly supported the work done by the CAB in this district. However, he would like to know who used the CAB as the majority of their funding came from the residents of the district. If there were people from other authorities using the service then maybe we should recharge that authority. He was told that this figure was probably at 1% or less of users from other areas and if wanted figures, they could be provided.

Councillor Patel spoke about the outreach work and partnership working; could they have use of their premises or just have your partners advertise your services or signpost residents back to you. Ms Anyanwu said that this would take time to build up. They were presently looking at GP surgeries and hoping to build something there. We do use the Ongar Library but have to pay rent for that use.

Councillor Patel asked if their partners supported them by advertising their services. He was told that they did and they also asked supermarkets and shops to help publicise them.

Councillor Sartin noted that she had great respect for the volunteers that worked for the CAB. Forty Four volunteers did not seem a large number for a district of our size. Please pass on our thanks to them. Thank you for coming along tonight and giving us an overview of your work and answering the questions put to you. We look forward to receiving the information you have promised us this evening.

24. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

It was noted that there were no public questions or requests to address the committee.

25. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

There were no call-ins of decisions to be considered.

26. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - REVIEW

The Committee reviewed the council's programme of key decisions for 2018/19.

Planning and Governance

Councillor Murray asked who did they gain approval from for an electoral review. Councillor Chris Whitbread said that this was part of the Transformation agenda, but until we had a Local Plan in place how could we do a boundary review. It was something for the long term that we needed to look at.

Environment

Councillor Murray asked about the waste management review – was the dry recycling bags a cost to the authority or the residents. Councillor Avey said that this was a cost to the authority but was under review at present.

Housing

Councillor Murray commented that Loughton Town Council was very impressed by the Homelessness strategy. Councillor Stavrou said she would pass this on to the officers concerned.

Assets and Economic Development

Councillor Sartin commenting on the Epping Forest Shopping Park said that she now understood that all the units had been let. Councillor Grigg concurred, confirming that they had now been let.

Councillor Murray asked if 'Homebargins' had any impact on the Broadway. Councillor Grigg said that she was not in a position to assess what the impact would be. They would have to wait for the impact study to take place.

27. TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - PROJECT DOSSIER

The Acting Chief Executive introduced the Transformation Programme – project dossier report. The Committee were asked to consider and review the list of active High and Medium complexity projects, known formally as the Project Dossier.

He noted that the five projects listed were all progressing well but P145 the Customer Reception project was now delayed because of the review and listing of the building.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Project Dossier for the Transformation Programme – Office of the Chief Executive be noted.

28. RESOURCES SELECT COMMITTEE 2018/19 - MEMBERSHIP

It was noted that members appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee could not also belong to any scrutiny committee that had responsibility for reviewing the Council's finances or financial procedures, in this case this would mean the Resources Select Committee.

Inadvertently two Councillors had been appointed to both to both committees, Councillors A Patel and Jon Whitehouse.

Councillor Patel has since indicated that he wished to stay on the Resources Select Committee and had therefore resigned his position on the Audit and Governance Committee.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse had indicated that he wished to stay on the Audit and Governance Committee and come off the Resources Select Committee. He had nominated Councillor Janet Whitehouse to replace him on this Select Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were in favour of this arrangement.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Jon Whitehouse be replaced by Councillor Janet Whitehouse on the Resources Select Committee with immediate effect.

29. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES 2018/19 - REVIEW

The Committee reviewed their work programme for the rest of the year.

It was noted that item 2 of the work programme 'Corporate Priorities 2018/19' would now be going to the October meeting.

They noted that the Manchester Airport Group had been approached to attend the next O&S Committee meeting in October 2018. Members would be asked for topics that would like covered via the Council Bulletin.

If it turned out that any external organisations could not attend, then the item on the 'People Strategy' in the reserve programme would be substituted.

The Committee was advised that it was still hoped that representatives of ECC Passenger Transport would be able to attend a future meeting. The chairman indicated that she would be writing to the relevant Portfolio Holder of Essex County Council in this regard. Councillor Mohindra also noted that for the School Transport Provisions he had spoken to the relevant member at County Hall and that he would be more amenable to a private briefing with the members this committee rather than a standard O&S meeting.

Councillor R Jennings suggested that at a future date the Committee invite the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to give a presentation to this Committee. The South East LEP was the second largest in England comprising of Essex, Kent and East Sussex. When Government published its white paper on the industrial strategy it confirmed its intention to use those partnerships to produce local industrial strategies and of course this would apply to Epping Forest District; so we will need to start working with the LEP soon. He suggested that once this had settled down and they had clear guidance from the Government that we look at this and invite them sometime early next year. Councillor Mohindra agreed and said that ECC were would be leading this conservation but the Chairman and Managing Director should be happy to attend, but not in the near future.

The Committee agreed to add this to their work programme.

Councillor Dorrell would like to prioritise the 6th Form consortium item. Councillor Murray noted that all three schools had a new head teacher, and we should give them time to bed in. He would like to prioritise the review of the EF College now that the Principal had now gone. He noted that about 80% of young people do not go to the Epping Forest 6th Form consortium. In light of this it would be important to get someone here from the new college as he had real concerns of what they would be offering and for their long term future.

Mr Macnab noted that the Council's response to the College's consultation had been published in the Bulletin, resulting in a meeting between him and senior management from the college. A full written response was also published in the Member's Bulletin. He noted that it was the intention of the college to seek representation from this council on their local governing body and to invite 3 community representatives onto the local board. Now that the merger had occurred it was right to invite them back but not in the near future as they were still sorting themselves out.

Councillor Sartin suggested that this was something to keep a close eye on, but we would have a representative on their governing body who would report back.

Councillor Patel reiterated his request to have the local mental health services come to a future meeting. He would like to identify those who had sole responsibility for the services for the district and would like to invite them sooner rather than later. Mr Macnab said that he would endeavour to find out who was responsible and report back to the October meeting.

Councillor Mohindra said that the organisation responsible was called EPUT the 'Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust' and they were the ones that should be invited.

Select Committees

Communities Select Committee

Councillor H Whitbread noted that at their last meeting they had considered the review of the homeless strategy and agreed that it was good strategy and would now be going out for consultation with stakeholders, to be in place by 1st September.

They also considered the aging population study which was doing some really good work and also the housing strategy.

Governance Select Committee

It was noted that they had a short agenda for their first meeting.

Neighbourhoods Select Committee

Mr Macnab reported that at their first meeting they had received a presentation on environmental health and general enforcement activities which was well received.

Resources Select Committee

Councillor Patel had nothing further to report.

30. SCRUTINY OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS - REVIEW

The Committee noted their schedule of recent external scrutiny carried out over the past few years.

CHAIRMAN

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We help people to find a way forward



Epping Forest
District

About Citizens Advice Epping Forest District

- We are an independent charity.
- We provide specialist and generalist advice within the Epping Forest District area.
- We have 3 offices in Loughton Library, Waltham Abbey Town Hall and Hemnall Street off Epping High road. We have 2 outreaches in Limes Farm and Ongar library
- We provide free, confidential, independent and impartial advice to ensure people do not suffer from lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

Local residents seek our advice about virtually every aspect of their lives.

- **Our core areas of advice expertise** are benefits, debt, housing, employment, relationships, legal matters financial services, tax discrimination and consumer issues.

We provide advice to local residents face to face and by telephone. We also run an evening probono solicitors rota and a family solicitors rota during the day both are once a week.

- We also campaign for better policies and practices which affect peoples lives.

Our aims are:

1. To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
2. To improve the policies and practices that affect people lives

Key facts about Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice Epping Forest District 2017/18



7,409

advice issues dealt with directly



1,961

clients advised directly



44

volunteers



5

locations where we provide free and impartial advice across Epping Forest District



2 in every 3

clients have their problem solved



4 in 5

clients said advice improved their lives, including reducing stress and improving finances



88%

reported satisfaction with the overall service



90%

of our clients say they would recommend us

Key facts about Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice Epping Forest District 2018/19 (QTR 1 Apr-Jun)



2,336

advice issues dealt
with directly



833

clients advised
directly



44

volunteers



5

locations where we provide
free and impartial advice
across Epping Forest
District



2 in every 3

clients have their
problem solved



4 in 5

clients said advice
improved their lives,
including reducing stress
and improving finances



88%

reported
satisfaction with the
overall service



90%

of our clients say
they would
recommend us

Financial Outcomes achieved for clients

Qtr 1: April – Jun 2018

Financial Outcome Category	Outcome	Total value gain
Income gain	Benefit/tax credit gain – a new award or increase	£14520
	Benefit/tax credit gain – award or increase following revision	£14,892
	Benefit/tax credit gain – Money put back into payment	£950
	Money recovered/Other	£31,160
	Total Benefits Income Gain	£61,522
	Debt Income gain	£72,295
Other	Benefit/Tax credit maintained	£5,720
	Debts written off	£134,980



Epping Forest
District

OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES-

Future service plans

- **We'll make it easy to get good quality advice**
maintain high quality of advice, More outreaches, expand telephone & web advice & online referrals
- **We'll be more influential**
Strengthen strategic local partnerships, run more local campaigns
- **We'll become more sustainable and effective in the community**
Diversify funding base, recruit more diverse volunteers,
- **We'll be a stronger equality champion**
Engage more in the local community, improve access for people with disabilities, etc.

OUR CHALLENGES

- 1. Funding,**
- 2. EFDC geographical environment**
- 3. Volunteer recruitment and training**
- 4. Staff shortages**
- 5. Building partnership relationships**
- 6. EFDC objectives**



EFDC STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

What we want EFDC to do to support us

- **Jointly set objectives** - Review the objectives and make more of a match to our core work
- **Service updates** - Become more of a strategic partner to develop a quality service together
- **Better quality monitoring and support** which reviews the service and helps to overcome the challenges

- Any questions?

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