

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 23 January 2024, 7.00 pm - 9.10 pm

Council Chamber - Civic Offices

Members Present: Councillors D Wixley (Chairman), J McIvor (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, I Hadley, S Heap, S Heather, H Kane, C McCann, S Murray, C Nweke, A Patel, J Parsons, J H Whitehouse, C Amos and T Matthews

Members Present (Virtually): Councillors R Pugsley

Other Councillors: Councillors I Allgood, R Balcombe, N Bedford, S Kane, J Philip, C Whitbread, H Whitbread and K Williamson

Other Councillors (Virtually): Councillors R Brookes

Apologies: Councillor(s) R Baldwin and M Markham

Officers In Attendance: Georgina Blakemore (Chief Executive), Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Andrew Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer), Laura Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), Tom Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), Steven Mitchell (PR Website Editor), Rebecca Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer) and Mandy Thompson (Service Director - Regulatory Services)

Officers In Attendance (Virtually): Charlotte Graham (Project Team Manager (Performance)), Paula Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), Vivienne Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), Nigel Richardson (Service Director (Planning Development)), Gill Wallis (Service Director Customer & Community) and James Warwick (Service Director (Contracts, Partnerships and Procurement))

[A RECORDING OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING](#)

51 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.

52 SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted the following substitutions reported at the meeting:

- (1) That Councillor Amos had been appointed as substitute to the vacant Liberal Democratic position on the Committee.
- (2) That Councillor Matthews had been appointed as substitute for Councillor Markham.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- (a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Bassett declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Non - Executive Director of Qualis
- (b) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Trustee of Epping Forest Citizens Advice

54 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November and 12 December 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

55 MATTERS ARISING AND OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

The Committee noted there were no matters arising or outstanding issues.

56 PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

57 EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

58 CORPORATE PLAN 2023-27 YEAR 1 - QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Committee reviewed the Quarter 3, September– December 2023, Corporate Performance Report.

The Committee received assurance in relation to

- CPP026 Waste Programme, the ordering of Vehicles was on track for February 2024.
- Overall customer satisfaction; the stock levels of bin containers had not been maintained and this had resulted in delays to delivery, missed collection performance had improved, and liaison on these issues with the contactor continued. The current contract contained penalties when needed and conditions in relation to the end of the contract and transfer to the new service.
- Contingency was included for the mobilisation of the new waste service.
- Homelessness approaches had increased and this was reflected in the number of households in temporary accommodation. Changes in the allocation policy had mitigated some of the impact and funding for rough sleeping was being used to look at root causes. Actions to address this issue included work with Strategic Health Partners, and a North Essex Council's collective housing summit.
- There had been an increase in sports club memberships in January 2024.

- Planning applications; the targets were statutory targets, minor and other applications were below target in part due to staff shortages. The Committee were advised that a new service manager, Graham Courtney, had been appointed and the Planning Advisory Services would be carrying out a review. This would be reported back in due course.
- Waste Data was not available from Essex County Council this would be circulated as soon as available.

Action 1 - Waste data to be circulated when available.

Resolved:

The Committee considered and commented on the Quarter 3 Performance Report.

59 QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

The Section 151 officer advised the committee that the Quarter 3 report was not available and this would be presented at the next Overview & scrutiny meeting .

60 DRAFT BUDGET 2024/25

Councillor J Philip, Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that 52 acres of land at North Weald Airfield had been sold to Google for the potential development of a new data centre campus. The impact on the budget had not been factored into the report and he reminded members of the Committee that the structural deficit would not be solved by selling assets.

A Small, Section 151 Officer and Corporate Director, provided detail on the budget report and advised the Committee that the views expressed at the joint meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on the 12 December 2023, had been reflected in whole, or in part, in the draft budget presented. The development of the budget had been challenging and £3.5m of savings had been identified to provide a provisional balanced revenue position.

Cabinet had considered the draft budget proposals for 2024/25 on 18 December 2023, and the full Cabinet report had been provided to the Committee as appendices to the report. This included the revenue and capital proposals for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, a schedule of suggested Fees and Charges and an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering the financial years 2024/25 through to 2028/29.

The Committee

- welcomed the news and opportunities that the sale of land in North Weald Airfield could bring to the district.
- agreed on the necessity to have a balanced budget.
- received confirmation that the housing benefit payment was paid to the Council directly from central government.
- raised concerns on the impact across the district of the 25% reduction in annual SLA with EF Citizens Advice and Voluntary Action Epping Forest and suggested as minimum the date of the saving could be reprofiled and delayed.
- suggested the reduction in the Youth Council project monies, could impact on their success.
- commented that previous decisions in relation to the instigation of Qualis, the commercial approach to rent review and the development of Epping Forest Shopping Park, had a positive impact on the current revenue position.

Councillor J Philip, Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder acknowledged the comments from the Overview & scrutiny Committee.

Action 2: A detailed breakdown of 'other contributions' in the 2024/25 General Fund Budget Evolution Table would be forwarded to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the Committee provided comments on the draft budget to Cabinet.

61 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

Resolved:

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

62 CHAIRMEN TO REPORT ON THEIR SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Cllr A Patel advised the Committee that at the meeting on 16 January 2024 the Communities Scrutiny Committee had considered and commented on several key items. The importance of The HRA Business Plan, The Draft Condensation Strategy, the Damp and Mould Policy and the the Home Ownership Strategy 2023/24 to 2028/29 was acknowledged, and all were recommended to Cabinet for approval. Qualis Property Solutions provided the 2023/4 end of year performance and business update. The work programme had progressed as planned. Members were reminded that the Communities Scrutiny Meeting on 19 March 2024 was dedicated to Community Safety Partnership.

Cllr H Kane advised the Committee there was no update, as the Place Scrutiny Committee schedule for 9 January 2024 had been cancelled.

63 CABINET BUSINESS

The Committee:

- were advised the Leader's report 'Fit for the Future' for Cabinet on 5 February 2024 was an outline of a transformation programme that would engage with members.
- noted and welcomed the pre- scrutiny of the items on the Forward Plan.
- were advised to contact the elections team to access information on polling districts in the new wards and the polling stations that would be used.

Resolved:

That the Committee reviewed the Executive's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

64 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press should be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on grounds that they will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

| Agenda Item No | Subject | Exempt Information Paragraph Number |
|---|--------------------------|--|
| Item 11 Appendices A (Annex 2) and Fii | Budget Proposals 2024/25 | 3 |

- a) The Committee commented on specific items as detailed in Appendices A (Annex 2) and Fii to Agenda item 11, Draft Budget 2024/25. Councillor J Philip (Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder) responded and advised the Committee that their comments would be given due consideration.

Resolved:

That the Committee considered and commented on the Draft Budget 2024/5.

CHAIRMAN