

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 13 June 2019

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 7.29 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), N Avey, N Bedford, A Lion, A Patel, J Philip, S Kane and H Whitbread

Other Councillors: S Heather, J Lea, C McCredie, S Neville, M Sartin, D Stocker and J H Whitehouse

Apologies: S Stavrou

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), A Blom-Cooper (Interim Assistant Director (Planning Policy)), J Nolan (Service Director (Commercial & Regulatory Services)), M Warr (Economic Development Officer), K Pabani (Chief Estates Officer), A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Manager) and S Kits (Social Media and Customer Services Officer)

1. 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.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11th April 2019 be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

4. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Planning Services Portfolio Holder reported that the Local Plan hearings had recently reached an end and the inspector had closed the proceedings with a closing statement that would go up on the Council's website, pointing out that the next stage of the examination would be for the Council to prepare a schedule of main modifications to make the plan sound. The Council will have to consult on these main modifications for a period of six weeks and then after that was done the inspector would be able to finalise her report for the Council having regard to consultation responses and other relevant matters. She would be writing to us by 12th July with her initial advice about whether further changes were required and whether any further work was needed to support them without prejudice to any of her final

conclusions. She was complementary to us at the end of the examination and he would like his thanks noted to Alison Blom-Cooper and the rest of the Planning Team and to Mark Beard our Barrister for all the work they had put in, representing us at the hearings. It had been a long and thankless task and he was pleased we came through it so well. He also thanked the webcast team who had made it available in real time to our residents. He concluded that this was not the end, but they had made significant progress, but there was still more work to be done.

The Leader also added his thanks to officers noting how professionally run the hearings had been.

5. 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.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that the following items of business had been considered at its meeting held on 4 June 2019:

(a) they had noted the Council's priorities for 2019/20 as set out by the Leader of the Council;

(b) the Committee's work programme for the year was reviewed and one item relating to the transformation programme was deleted with a possibility of bringing forward a topic on the Local High Streets. It was also agreed that the item on adult social care be moved from the reserve programme into the main work programme for the current year;

(c) the Committee also appointed members, chairmen and vice-chairmen to the three new select committees; and

(d) the Committee also agreed to set up a Task and Finish Panel to look into waste recycling.

7. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Planning Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the draft statement of community involvement. He noted that the preparation of an SCI was a legal requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (section 18) as amended by the Planning Act 2008, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. The legislation required the Council to prepare a statement setting out how it would notify and consult the community and other stakeholders in the preparation and review of planning policy which included: the Local Plan; supplementary planning documents; neighbourhood plans; policy such as that contained in master-plans; and in the consideration of planning applications. This report set out the proposed updated Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which needed to be published for a period of public consultation. It explains its purpose.

Decision:

That the Draft Statement of Community Involvement attached as Appendix A of the report be approved for publication for a six week period of consultation.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To comply with the statutory requirement to review the SCI every five years and to update the SCI to include recent changes in legislation and practice.

Other Options for Action:

Not to consult on a new SCI. This would mean that the Council was not meeting the legislative requirements and was not seeking an up to date, fit for purpose, statement regarding the engagement of stakeholders and the public in the planning service and system.

8. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the asset management strategy. He noted that the proposed Asset Management Strategy (AMS) set out the rationale for existing and future asset management initiatives. The AMS would assist EFDC in achieving its corporate objectives as guided by the Council's Core Principles and identified links with other key council strategies.

Councillor Philip stated that in relation to a local trading company and a local housing company, it was right to be looking at these as options, however we should be aware how unsuccessful other councils have been with these and that a risk assessment was needed before we took this forward. But in general, it was sensible to have an asset management strategy, we just needed a proper assessment of risk. The Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder replied to say that a number of options will be coming forward and that a further report will be coming to the next Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse commented that there appeared to be no real focus in the report on social impact and the wellbeing on the community. There were a lot of small charities and volunteer groups who found it hard to find suitable and affordable premises. She would like the council to consider if they should offer help to the private sector by providing an information hub where charities and small businesses could come for information on affordable accommodation, or the council could provide a range of affordable accommodation. The Service Director, Commercial and Regulatory, replied that officers would always bring these sorts of things to members so that they could consider accommodating some organisations not covered by the general tenant of the strategy. Mr Pabani added that they often received requests from local charities and organisations and they did look for accommodation for them when they could. They had a long history of partnering up with local organisations and had found them accommodation in the past. Councillor C Whitbread commented that it was a good thing that we helped out like this and he also noted that we were very generous with our grants offered to local community-based projects.

Councillor Lion agreed that this strategy was the right thing to do in order to maximise our opportunities and Councillor Kane added that this was a good direction of travel for the council. He asked what the timeframe was to get the LHC up and running; and also we need to ensure that due consideration was given to the planning process, if we went down the housing company route. The Service Director, Commercial and Regulatory, replied that there would be a further report coming to the next cabinet meeting outlining the structure envisaged and the timelines.

Councillor Neville noted that the paperwork talked about the housing to be provided; what percentage would be affordable housing and of the six sites mentioned were some of them commercial sites in use or had any of them residential properties. The Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder replied that it was too early to discuss this at this stage and that he should wait for the next report. Councillor Philip added that the Council would be bound by its Local Plan in any case.

Decision:

That the Cabinet approved the Asset Management Strategy.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

At present, the council's approach to its land and property assets is on a case by case basis or by reference to approaches taken in the past. These are not always fit for purpose in the current market and there exists no overall strategy which provides links to our Corporate Plan or Medium Term Financial Strategy. Adoption of an AMS will bring EFDC in line with other Local Authorities who have adopted similar strategies and will ensure EFDC is making the best use of its assets in a comprehensive, cohesive, economic and socially responsible way.

Adoption of the AMS will ensure the various Directorates in the council are approaching the acquisition and management of assets in a cohesive, complimentary and joined up way.

Other Options for Action:

This report addresses the absence of an AMS therefore the only options for action are to amend the proposed strategy in line with the wishes of Members or not to adopt the strategy at all.

9. CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT Q4, 2018/19

The Leader of the Council noted that this report had already been considered at various other meetings including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Decision:

The Cabinet noted the quarter 4 outturn of the Corporate Plan Progress for 2018/19.

Reasons for Proposed Decisions:

This combined report brings together the performance of the Council against the Corporate Plan and gives 'clear line of sight' for performance across the Council via the new benefits maps and performance indicator set. The benefits maps provide an opportunity for the Council to focus attention on how specific areas for improvement will be addressed, and how opportunities will be exploited, and better outcomes delivered. It was important that relevant performance management processes were in place to review and monitor performance against performance indicators to ensure their continued achievability and relevance, and to identify proposals for appropriate corrective action in areas of slippage or under performance.

Other Options for Action:

No other options were appropriate in this respect. Failure to monitor and review performance and to consider corrective action where necessary could have negative implications for judgements made about the Council's progress and might mean that opportunities for improvement were lost.

10. ENDORSEMENT OF ESSEX & HERTS DIGITAL INNOVATION ZONE 'DIGITAL INNOVATION STRATEGY'

The Strategic Projects Portfolio Holder introduced the report on the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ). He noted that with Epping Forest DC leading, the Essex & Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) comprised of five district council areas, (two in eastern Hertfordshire and three in Essex) and involved partners from various public bodies including the health economy, both tiers of local government, further and higher education, business and the voluntary and community sector.

The partnership had jointly commissioned a strategic long-term overarching strategy in conjunction with Arup. The strategy clearly set out long-term ambitions and an understanding of the area's current and future digital strengths and challenges. It did however also include a series of recommendations for immediate action at an operational level to improve digital performance and service levels.

The strategy was now complete and was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 April 2019. A copy of the strategy was included with papers for that meeting and can be found at:

<https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=395&MId=9717>. The strategy was now presented to Cabinet for consideration and endorsement.

Councillor H Whitbread asked about how this would engage with elderly persons. The Strategic Projects Portfolio Holder replied that this was fundamental to the strategy, an example would its focus on keeping people at home longer; the smart home approach using new technology such as the digital health strategy. Currently they had just signed up to a £2.1million project, and were now waiting for confirmation, this was a project for equipping 113 GP surgeries across the zone with our broadband services.

Councillor Patel said that he had been following the progress of 'DIZ' since it started. He would like to know what resources and investments had gone in and what the return was since the start. The Strategic Projects Portfolio Holder noted that the majority of the contributions had come from our partners, although we had put in a small amount of money. Our resource input came mostly from Mr Warr and Mr Houston in the form of their time. As for investments we had invested about £450k and had achieved £10.5million investment from the Government. Councillor Patel remarked that this was very impressive and put Epping Forest District Council at the forefront of this innovation and was sighted as a model for other local authorities. Councillor Lion agreed noting that we had been recognised by national government for this unique strategy. It was a good model to replicate.

Decision:

That the Cabinet endorsed the Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone 'Digital Innovation Strategy'.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The strategy was to be formally adopted and endorsed by the full range of partners represented on the DIZ Board. This will be the first time in the UK where partners from the various tiers of local government, primary and secondary health care, further and higher education, local businesses and the community and voluntary sector have come together to agree an over-arching combined digital plan.

Other Options for Action:

Cabinet could choose to not endorse the strategy. This would make it difficult to formally launch the strategy as a single unified partnership. It would also impact on the ability of the DIZ to bid for funding from central government who have previously recognised the make-up of the DIZ partnership and its unique nature as a key strength and reason to support.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

12. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Cabinet noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

CHAIRMAN