

## Select Committee Agenda



### ***Stronger Communities Select Committee Thursday, 14th January, 2021***

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Stronger Communities Select Committee**, which will be held at:

**Virtual Meeting on Zoom**  
on **Thursday, 14th January, 2021**  
at **7.00 pm** .

**Georgina Blakemore**  
Chief Executive

**Democratic Services  
Officer**

R Perrin - 01992 564532  
Email: [democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

#### **Members:**

Councillors D Sunger (Chairman), J McIvor (Vice-Chairman), A Beales, I Hadley, J Lea, A Mitchell, D Plummer, S Rackham, J Share-Bernia, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

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**SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE: 6.00PM**

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#### **WEBCASTING NOTICE (VIRTUAL)**

**Please note: this meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site - at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed.**

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**In the event that technical difficulties interrupt the virtual meeting that cannot be overcome, the Chairman may need to adjourn the meeting.**

**If you have any queries regarding this, please contact the Corporate Communications Manager on 01992 564039.**

**1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

This virtual meeting is to be webcast. Members are reminded of the need to unmute before speaking.

The Chairman will read the following announcement:

“I would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be broadcast live to the internet (or filmed) and will be capable of repeated viewing (or another use by such third parties). Thereby by participating in this virtual meeting, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should ensure that their video setting throughout the virtual meeting is turned off and set to audio only.

Please also be aware that if technical difficulties interrupt the meeting that cannot be overcome, I may need to adjourn the meeting.”

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To be reported verbally at the meeting.

**3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To declare interests in any item on the agenda.

**5. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Pages 5 - 10)**

To agree the notes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Select Committee held on 15 September 2020.

**6. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 11 - 16)**

(Chairman/Lead Officer) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed the Terms of Reference and work programme for this Select Committee. Members are invited at each meeting to review both documents.

**7. OPERATIONAL CHANGES AT BROADWAY HOUSING OFFICE (Pages 17 - 20)**

To consider the attached report recommending operational changes at the Broadway Housing Office, that will ensure best use of resources and delivery of a customer centric service.

**8. ROUGH SLEEPING UPDATE (Pages 21 - 24)**

To consider the attached report and to note the update with regards to the Council's response to rough sleeping throughout the pandemic; the additional funding secured from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); the

robust prevention and relief services that have subsequently been developed and the outcomes to date of that service delivery.

**9. HEALTH AND WELLBEING - WHIPPS CROSS HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Chairman, Councillor D Sunger, attended a meeting of the Whipps Cross Hospital Development Programme and will give a verbal report at the meeting.

**10. DIGITAL INCLUSION UPDATE (Pages 25 - 28)**

To consider the attached report noting the work taking place around Digital Inclusion and the future direction of further projects.

**11. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE (Pages 29 - 32)**

To consider the attached report noting the update on 'what our customers are telling us' plus an update on the Council's Customer strategy.

**12. NEXT MEETING**

To note that the next meeting of the Select Committee will be held at 7.00pm on 30 March 2021.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE  
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2020  
IN VIRTUAL MEETING ON ZOOM  
AT 7.00 - 8.05 PM**

<b>Members Present:</b>	D Sunger (Chairman), J McIvor (Vice-Chairman), A Beales, D Plummer, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley
<b>Other members present:</b>	N Bedford, R Brookes, S Kane, S Murray, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	I Hadley and J Lea
<b>Officers Present</b>	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer), L Wade (Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)), C Wiggins (Community Resilience Service Manager) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

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## 11. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind everyone present that this virtual meeting would be broadcast live to the internet, and would be capable of repeated viewing, which could infringe their human and data protection rights.

## 12. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that no substitute Members had been appointed for this meeting.

## 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were declared pursuant to the Council's Member Code of Conduct.

## 14. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

### **Resolved:**

- (1) That the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 July 2020 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

## 15. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and Work Programme.

In response to a question from Cllr J H Whitehouse, the Committee was informed that it was the Housing & Community Services, and Customer & Support Services Portfolio Holders that primarily reported to this Select Committee.

The Chairman, Cllr D Sunger, commented that he would like to add the issue of Rough Sleepers within the District to the Select Committee's work programme. The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Community Services, Cllr H Whitbread, reported that

the Council had been proactive in assisting the rough sleepers within the District. The Portfolio Holder felt that this was a good subject for the Select Committee to consider and would be happy to give an update at the next meeting.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the issue of Rough Sleepers throughout the District be added to the Select Committee's Work Programme.

**16. SIX-MONTH REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL-FUNDED POLICE OFFICERS**

The Service Manager for Community Resilience, C Wiggins, presented a report on the work of the Council-funded Police Officers. This report was originally due to be considered at the previous meeting of the Committee but had been deferred until this meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Service Manager reported that the Council continued to fund the employment of an additional Police Sergeant and 2 Police Constables to supplement existing local policing resources. The team was incepted in July 2018 with an initial 3-year contract, which had now been extended for a further two years. The team was tasked with District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities which were identified through the Annual Strategic Assessment and aligned with the priorities set by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). As well as working to those priorities, the team could be requested, via a tasking process, to support any Council department where there was an identified threat, harm or risk to staff. A service level agreement was in place to prevent abstraction of the officers except in extreme cases or high priority incidents. This also covered staff sickness and extended training periods through credit to the Council from Essex Police.

C Wiggins stated that 2020 continued to be a challenging period, with the Community Resilience Team temporarily relocated at Ongar Police Station while the Civic Offices were being refurbished. The report highlighted the variety of tasks that had been undertaken by the Officers, which included: high visibility patrols in North Weald following a spate of burglaries; joint working with the Housing Department regarding a problem property in Waltham Abbey linked to drug use and supply; Operation Moonstone to combat a series of thefts of high value vehicles; and operations in support of closure orders for venues in Roydon and Chigwell linked to 'Mansion Parties'.

C Wiggins stated that a Community Safety Engagement Officer had been embedded with the Community Resilience Team, to build public trust and confidence in the Police through engagement and collaboration with partners and the public. There were currently a number of issues relating to visitors to the Bell Hotel in Epping, which was being used by the Home Office to temporarily house asylum seekers. In addition, the Council's Police Officers would be undertaking visits to the District's High Streets during September in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, and making plans to combat any potential issues during the Halloween period.

Cllr McIvor thanked the Community Resilience team for their work, particularly in relation to the increased patrols in North Weald and Operation Moonstone. Cllr Plummer welcomed the meeting that had been held regarding the arson events in Meridian Park, where the Police gave a full explanation for what was currently happening.

In response to questions from the Committee, C Wiggins stated that the Council's Police Officers would not be used to enforce the 'Rule of Six' during the Covid-19 pandemic, although they intended to visit the School in Epping where Covid-19 related behaviour issues had arisen. Cllr S Murray reminded the Select Committee that pupils were expected to wear face masks when moving from one classroom to another, and when they were in communal areas. C Wiggins also highlighted that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) was used to great effect throughout the District to identify vehicles involved in offences.

C Wiggins also explained that improved intelligence was being received from the Metropolitan Police concerning unplanned music events, and emphasised that it was important for different teams across the Council to communicate with each other to ensure that one such instance did not lead to multiple offences being committed. It was also expected that there would be an increase in instances of anti-social behaviour from the reporting of blatant breaches of the rules in place for the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Housing & Community Services Portfolio Holder, Cllr H Whitbread, felt that the value of the Council's Police Officers had been illustrated at the current time during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Council also enjoyed excellent relations with the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex. The Portfolio Holder also added her thanks to the Community Resilience Team for the excellent work that they had undertaken.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, Cllr D Sunger, was reassured that funding for the Council's Police Officers had been secured for a further two years beyond the original three-year term, and requested that the Select Committee agree to extend an invitation to the District Police Commander to attend the next meeting.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the report on the work and range of operations of the Council-funded Police Officers during the preceding six months be noted; and
- (2) That an invitation be extended to the District Police Commander to attend the next meeting of the Select Committee on 14 January 2021.

**17. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY - Q2**

The Service Manager for Customer Services, S Lewis, presented an update report on Customer Services throughout the Council during the second quarter of 2020/21.

S Lewis stated that, in respect of what our residents were telling us, there was frustration that changes in services had not been communicated to them, and service areas had been reminded of the need to do this. 35% of residents had indicated that they preferred to pay cash and did not wish to switch to alternative payment methods. As a result, the cash office at the Broadway had been reopened for two days a week, and had taken payments totalling £68,000 during the first two weeks. However, a longer term solution would be developed. On a positive note, the special waste collection service had been well received and residents considered it good value. Finally, the reporting of potholes and requests for pavement maintenance were popular topics via the Council's social media channels, even though they were the responsibility of the County Council.

S Lewis then proceeded to give an update on the Council's Customer Strategy, and reminded the Select Committee that it had not been launched as planned to external customers due to the Covid-19 pandemic; a decision would need to be taken as to when this would happen. Phase I of the Strategy was to 'fix the basics' which included a customer services health check to be undertaken by service areas. It was felt that this should be mandatory for service areas to complete. Phase II was 'customer shoes'. A training pilot with Impact Factory would be launched next month to deliver customer services training to staff. Phase III was to embrace new technology and priorities were being reviewed by ICT.

Finally, S Lewis highlighted that National Customer Service week began on 5 October 2020, for which a number of events were planned, and there were a number of key messages to be communicated to staff over the coming months.

Cllr D Wixley commented that he had used the Member Contact system and found it helpful. However, he had recently received an email from an experienced member of staff indicating that there had been a change of policy and that he should use the customer contact section of the Council's website instead. Cllr S Murray stated that he had also received a similar email. Cllr S Kane, the Portfolio Holder for Customer & Corporate Support Services, confirmed that the Member Contact system was the correct channel for Members to use, as it would be augmented in the future with the development of the Member Portal. S Lewis apologised for the misleading information that was given and reassured the Councillors that the member of staff concerned would be advised of the arrangements for Members. Cllr D Wixley suggested that an item should be placed in the Council Bulletin clarifying the correct policy, and Cllr S Kane confirmed that this would happen.

Cllr S Murray commented that the Impact Factory website looked fascinating and innovative, and had good customer feedback. However, the Councillor enquired whether the Council still undertook any 'mystery shopper' exercises? S Lewis responded that none were being undertaken at the current time, but it could be an option for the future when the refurbishment of the Civic Offices were complete and the new reception area had opened. Cllr R Brookes felt that the customer services staff had performed very well during the pandemic, but highlighted that she had used the main switchboard number last week and had to listen to over a minutes-worth of messages on different topics before being able to speak to a member of staff in the contact centre. Cllr D Plummer had also experienced this and added a plea for the use of plain English rather than terminology. S Lewis undertook to investigate this and noted the request for plain English.

Cllr J McIvor opined that it was important for staff to put themselves in the shoes of customers, and that National Customer Service week was a great initiative. The Councillor also felt staff should consider colleagues as customers as well, not just residents. Cllr S Kane reiterated that the focus initially would be on communications with residents, to improve the way that the Council disseminated information. This would include improvements to the Council's website to improve accessibility, and the re-opening of the Council's customer contact centres when it was safe to do so. Cllr N Bedford suggested that the Council could work with Town and Parish Councils to provide temporary customer contact centres throughout the District. S Lewis stated that the Corporate Communications Team were working hard to improve the accessibility of the Council's website.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the update report on the Council's Customer Services during the



second quarter of 2020/21 be noted.

#### 18. PROGRAMME DELIVERY - STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

The Director for Strategy, Delivery & Performance, L Wade, presented a report illustrating the alignment between the Select Committee and the Council's corporate programmes.

L Wade explained that an Officer structure had been established to focus on the delivery of the corporate programmes in line with the Council's Stronger Ambitions objectives. This Select Committee had three of the Council's corporate programmes aligned to it:

- (i) Community Health & Wellbeing Programme;
- (ii) Customer Excellence Programme; and
- (iii) Community Data / Insights Programme.

L Wade highlighted that the Council's focus was also on the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as its corporate programmes. As the Council's recovery planning and response evolved, so would the projects involved evolve and there were interdependencies across the corporate programmes. Cllr S Kane, Portfolio Holder for Customer & Support Services, provided the Select Committee with some further insight into the Community Data / Insights Programme, and commented that it would be an interesting programme.

#### **Resolved:**

- (1) That the internal governance established to manage and deliver the programmes of work aligned to the Stronger Communities ambitions in 2020/21 be noted; and
- (2) That no additional areas for scrutiny be identified and included within the work programme delivery.

#### 19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Select Committee noted that meetings were currently scheduled for 14 January 2021 and 30 March 2021; both meetings would commence at 7.00pm.

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## **STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE 2019/20**

#### **Core Areas of Responsibility**

- (1) To provide scrutiny for the following corporate projects:
  - Customer Excellence - Delivering services that put the customer at the heart of everything we do;
  - Behaviours and Insights - Future-proofing the Council's service provision by understanding customer needs and expectations over the next ten years and beyond; and
  - Partnerships - Working with public, private and third sector partners to deliver and develop services to our community, businesses and visitors to the district including shared and cross-border working.
- (2) To monitor levels of customer satisfaction and provide scrutiny of services that are not performing to standard and develop proposals for their improvement. This will also include matters of concern that are identified by the Stronger Council Select Committee in its review of Corporate Key Performance Indicators.

#### **Scrutiny Role of the Select Committee**

- (1) To engage in policy review and development, with a focus on improvement and how this can be best achieved;
- (2) To develop a work programme each year that effectively scrutinises the areas of responsibility outlined above;
- (3) To consider any matter referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder and to make recommendations as appropriate;
- (4) To look outwards and show community leadership;
- (5) To consider the effect of Government actions or initiatives that affect the Select Committees areas of responsibility and the impact on customers, residents, businesses and visitors to our district, and to respond to consultation activities as appropriate;
- (6) To establish working groups and task and finish panels to undertake any activity within these terms of reference;
- (7) To undertake pre-scrutiny through the review of specific proposals of the Council and its partner organisations or other local service providers to help develop policy;
- (8) To monitor and review relevant projects and associated closure and benefits reports; and
- (9) To engage with the community and encourage community engagement.

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**Stronger Communities Select Committee  
Work Programme 2020/21  
Chairman: Councillor D Sunger**

No.	Item	Meeting Date	Progress and Comments	Programme of Meetings
1.	Presentation from the Loughton based group GROW Community Garden who help people who are socially isolated	<del>21 July 2020</del>	Organised by Cllr D Wixley  <b>Completed</b>	<del>21 July 2020</del> <del>15 September 2020</del> 14 January 2021 30 March 2021
2.	Impact of Covid-19 on EFDC's Housing Communities	<del>21 July 2020</del>	Deborah Fenton  <b>Completed</b>	
3.	"What are our customers telling us?"	<del>Q1 - 21 July 2020</del> Q2 - 14 January 2021 Q3 - 30 March 2021 Q4 - 2021/22	Quarterly report of customer satisfaction and feedback <b>Q1 – Completed</b> Rob Pavey	
4	Health and Wellbeing Strategy – To consider outcomes for the district	<del>21 July 2020</del>	Fabrizio Ferrari / Gill Wallis  <b>Completed</b>	
5.	Universal Credit and its impact on our customers and services	<del>15 September 2020</del> 30 March 2021	Initial findings and recommended actions from the officer working group 6 monthly report  Rob Pavey	
6.	Customer Service Strategy	<del>15 September 2020</del> 30 March 2021	Update on Key objectives 6 monthly report Rob Pavey	

7.	Digital Inclusion	14 January 2021	Report on project progress and future strategy	
8.	Rough Sleepers	14 January 2021	Progress report on how the Council has been helping those individuals sleeping rough within the District.	
9.	Loughton Broadway Report	14 January 2021	R Smith / D Fenton	
10.	Health and Wellbeing	14 January 2021	Chairman Councillor D Sunger Verbal report – Update on the Whipps Cross Hospital Development Programme (Meeting attended on behalf of EFDC)	
11.	Presentation from the District Police Commander	30 March 2021	Annual Report Caroline Wiggins	
12.	Community Safety Partnership annual report and review of the district Strategic Intelligence Assessment	30 March 2021	Annual Report  Caroline Wiggins	
13.	Social Recovery	30 March 2021	Jennifer Gould	
14.	Six-month report on the work of the Council-funded Police Officers	<del>15 September 2020</del> 30 March 2021	Caroline Wiggins	

15.	Data insight led review of customer service outlets	<b>Deferred to 2021/22</b>	<b>Report to deferred until the next municipal year.</b> Options and recommendations for short, medium and long-term options	
16.	Service reviews as a result of performance concerns	<b>TBC</b>		

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## **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 14 January 2021**

**Portfolio: Housing and Community Services  
Councillor H Whitbread**

**Subject: Operational Changes at Broadway Housing Office**

**Officer contact for further information:** Rachel Smith – Team Manager (Estate and Land Management)

**Democratic Services Officer:** R Perrin (01992 564532)

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

That the Communities Select Committee recommends operational changes at the Broadway Housing Office, that will ensure best use of resources and delivery of a customer centric service.

1. To retain the Broadway Satellite Office to enable customers to access the Council's cash desk.
2. To reduce the hours that the Broadway Housing advice counter is open from 5 days a week to 2 days a week.
3. To repurpose the Broadway Housing Office, by bringing together a range of internal and external partners to provide a range of services on the days that the office is open.

### **Report:**

#### **Background**

1. Historically, Housing Management services have been delivered generically from three Council Offices; the Civic Offices, the Limes Farm Centre and the Broadway Housing Office.
2. During the Council's recent restructure, with effect from 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020 Housing Management was split into three specialist teams; Income Recovery, Neighbourhoods and Estate & Land Management.
  - a. **Income recovery Income team.** Supported by a Team Manager, the team comprises 5.5 full time equivalent staff, a Lead Officer and Housing Support Officer who focus on maximising income to the Housing Revenue Account.
  - b. **Neighbourhoods.** Supported by a Team Manager, the team comprises 4 full time equivalent staff, responsible for tenancy management, tenancy enforcement and anti-social behaviour.
  - c. **Estate and Land Management.** Supported by a Team Manager, the team comprises 4 full time equivalent Estate and Land Officers, 1 Resident Involvement Officer and 1 Housing Support Officer. The team is responsible for the day to day management of, regularisation and some enforcement actions relating to the use and / or misuse of the councils housing land (land acquired under Housing Act powers), as well as resident involvement. The team ensure that housing estates are regularly inspected to help sustain attractive, clean, safe, open spaces and communal areas. From April 2021,

Officers will also undertake a programme of tenancy audits to support the work of the wider service area, with a focus on tenancy sustainment, property condition & repair, identifying hoarding, safeguarding concerns and the detection & prevention of fraud.

3. Following the restructure, Income Recovery has been based at the Civic Offices, Neighbourhoods at the Limes Centre, and Estate & Land Management at Broadway Housing Office. The Broadway Housing Office also accommodates the Council's last remaining cash desk.
4. Historically, each office has routinely accommodated unannounced "drop ins" from customers seeking housing management advice and assistance. However, despite being a Housing Office, run by Housing Management staff, the Broadway and Limes Farm satellite offices have tended to be used by customers seeking access to advice and assistance on a range of other Council business matters unrelated to Housing Management.
5. In 2019, the Council's Property & Housing Service commissioned Acuity, to facilitate its tenant satisfaction survey. The survey, which was conducted between February - March 2020, found high levels of satisfaction from Tenants across the Service, however there were emerging themes of dissatisfaction. Whilst the findings show satisfaction with the neighbourhood is high at 87%, just 59% of respondents felt that the Housing Service makes a positive contribution to the neighbourhood. Responses show that the neighbourhood environment is important to our tenants.
6. It was apparent that during the Housing Management review, Officers were finding it increasingly difficult to find time to leave the Office to get out onto our housing estates and into our customers' homes. One key reason cited were the restrictions placed on Officers to maintain an Office presence to support the housing advice desks. This was particularly compounded in the Broadway Housing Office whose team was small and where at least two members of Housing Staff must be in the Office at any one time for security reasons, chiefly on account of the Office accommodating the cash desk.
7. Between September 2019 – March 2020, Housing Management began a process of implementing a 'visiting by default' approach to housing management services. To facilitate this, housing management customers visiting the 3 main offices were requested to arrange an appointment to see their Housing Management Officer in advance. Customers who turned up expecting to see a Housing Officer immediately were advised that an Officer would contact them within 24 hours to offer a home or office appointment. Since Officers could undertake some preliminary work before calling the customer back and / or before the meeting, Officers found that they were able to facilitate a more thorough and satisfactory meeting once was convened.
8. The Housing Management Service received few complaints and the operational adjustments enabled the service to reach out into the community and increase home visiting. On the few urgent occasions where customers presented themselves and it was not possible to rearrange the visit, the teams accommodated these individuals.

### **Current Position**

9. In April 2020, in response to Government direction relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, all staff were required to work from home with immediate effect and all three of the offices closed to the public. The Civic Offices and Limes Farm remain closed.

10. From 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020, the Broadway cash facility has reopened on Mondays and Tuesdays each week between the hours of 10am and 2pm. The Cashiers have been supported by members of the Income Recovery Team on those days for health and safety reasons, but the counter service has remained closed. Income Recovery Officers have benefited from this arrangement, as they have been able to carry out pre-arranged office interviews with some of their customers within the screened interview room which is Covid-19 compliant. The Estate and Land Team continue to control the office on Wednesdays to Fridays when it remains completely closed to the public.

### **Proposal**

11. It is proposed that following the Civic Office refurbishment, the Income Recovery Team repositions itself alongside the Estate and Land Team at Debden Broadway and that the Broadway Office is reinvented as a drop in hub on Mondays and Tuesdays alongside the cash office, offering both a cash office and the opportunity for residents to engage with a range of services such as the Rehousing Team, Housing Benefit, Council Tax, Citizens Advice Bureau and Peabody Trust. In addition, there is potential for the drop in hub to be used to provide digital upskilling by Digital Buddies to our 21,000 residents who currently do not use social media. In this way, the Council would continue to support the High Street, offer a cash collection service which enjoys enduring popularity amongst residents and offer a wider range of services on the two days the office is open to the public. However, to provide the requisite flexibility for Officers to have an active presence on our estates, that the Office remain closed to the public on the remainder of the week.

### **Reason for decision:**

To enable the Housing Management function to continue to increase its presence within the Community both on estates and within our residents' homes, whilst diversifying the offer of the range of services available to residents from the Broadway Office, achieved within existing resource.

### **Options considered and rejected:**

To permanently close the Debden Broadway Office to the public.

### **Consultation undertaken:**

The Tenant and Leaseholder Panel have been consulted and comments received were broadly supportive of the changes proposed, one of which stated that the new operational model appeared to offer a reasonable compromise of time and staff allocation.

### **Background Papers: N/A**

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## **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Date of meeting: 14 January 2021**

**Portfolio: Housing and Community Services  
Councillor H Whitbread**

**Subject: Rough Sleeping Update**

**Responsible Officer: Jennifer Gould (01992 564703)**

**Democratic Services: R Perrin (01992 564532)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To note the update with regards to the Council's response to rough sleeping throughout the pandemic; the additional funding secured from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG); the robust prevention and relief services that have subsequently been developed and the outcomes to date of that service delivery.**

### **Report:**

1. At the start of the pandemic in March 2020 government introduced several policy changes within the homelessness arena to support national lockdown. These policy changes included:
  - Everyone In: accommodating all verified rough sleepers on a temporary basis for the lockdown duration; and
  - Measures to abate activities that lead to homelessness with a moratorium on evictions initially until June and latterly extended until September 2020.
2. Tenants received further protection through the Coronavirus Act 2020 which meant that from 29<sup>th</sup> August, with the exception of the most serious cases<sup>1</sup>, landlords are not able to start possession proceedings unless they have given their tenant six months' notice.
3. While these measures eased the threat of homelessness for many renters, EFDC, like other districts across the County, experienced an increase in clients presenting as rough sleepers.
4. Traditionally, EFDC has only reported very small numbers of rough sleepers<sup>2</sup> but between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, a total of **27** clients presented as rough sleepers<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Serious cases include those in relation to anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, false statement and where a tenant has accrued rent arrears to the value of over six months' rent.

<sup>2</sup> Traditionally EFDC has reported just 1 rough sleeper in the annual estimate.

<sup>3</sup> The figure of 27 will include both those verified as rough sleepers and those who, following enquiries, we are satisfied are at risk of rough sleeping.

5. Although pinpointing the exact cause of this increase is difficult, we can reasonably confidently attribute this increase in rough sleeper presentations to increased unavailability of places to stay for entrenched sofa surfers as households were prevented from mixing during pandemic restrictions. The barriers to sofa surfing, together with the temporary change in local authority responsibility to accommodate all rough sleepers (regardless of priority need) via the Everyone In directive and the widespread communication of this responsibility would go some way to explaining this increase in rough sleeper presentations.
6. Of the **27** rough sleepers who presented between April and 23<sup>rd</sup> December, **3** were found to have a priority need and have been accommodated in line with our responsibilities under Part VII Housing Act 1996 (as amended); **4** were made offers of accommodation but failed to engage and so contact was lost and the remaining **20** were accommodated in emergency, nightly paid accommodation.
7. Of the **20** accommodated, **15** clients were accommodated in response to the Everyone In directive, the remaining **5** have been accommodated post October via the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) which saw EFDC secure additional funding from MHCLG for the purposes of accommodating rough sleepers.
8. The gross cost of accommodating **15** clients through Everyone In totals **£64,868** to 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020. This is the figure we have returned to government as part of EFDC's additional Covid-19 spending strain.
9. Of those **15**, **8** have been moved on to long-term, affordable accommodation in the private rented sector, **4** have been reconnected with friends/family and **1** received a custodial sentence for a prior conviction leaving just **2** in nightly paid emergency accommodation.
10. The **5** clients accommodated post October through NSAP are still in emergency, nightly paid accommodation albeit a long-term housing solution for those clients is progressing at pace.

## **Funding**

### **Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant (RSIG)**

11. As part of a consortium led by Essex County Council **£460,459** rough sleeper initiative grant funding was secured for 2020/21. This funding is shared between Braintree, Maldon, Rochford and Epping Forest District Councils and Chelmsford City Council.

### **Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)**

12. Across England approximately 15,000 people who were sleeping rough, in unsafe communal settings or at imminent risk of rough sleeping were placed into emergency accommodation as part of the Everyone In initiative. Government subsequently made available the financial resources to prevent these people from returning to the streets through NSAP.
13. EFDC was successful in securing **£121,190** of NSAP funding broken down as follows:
  - 6 emergency bed spaces for 15 weeks                    £23,190<sup>4</sup>
  - 6 bed spaces for additional winter provision       £34,000<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Based on our estimate of need

<sup>5</sup> This money will be drawn down if needed. There may be an opportunity to re-purpose at a later date if unused for this purpose

- 0.5 FTE post (homelessness team resource) £16,000<sup>6</sup>
- 1 FTE Epping Forest Rough Sleeper Lead £48,000<sup>7</sup>

### **Rough Sleeper Service Delivery and Housing Solutions (EFDC)**

14. A specialist link worker with particular expertise in assisting rough sleepers has been established in the homelessness team and acts as the specific point of contact for all agencies and, in particular our commissioned rough sleeper service, supporting rough sleepers in the Epping Forest District. This enables a faster and more comprehensive response and strengthens the value of our partnership work.
15. Progress is currently being made to secure a dedicated mental health specialist to work alongside the homelessness team supporting all clients that present with mental health issues. Mental health issues are particularly prevalent within the rough sleeping community.
16. A six-bed house of multiple occupation has been secured at affordable local housing allowance rent with a private landlord to provide long-term accommodation for single homeless clients on an assured shorthold tenancy basis.
17. A unit of EFDC's own housing stock is being leased to Chess (our commissioned rough sleeper service) to provide next step, supported accommodation to rough sleepers. Chess will support residents with a range of skills ready for them to move on into independent accommodation at an appropriate time. This provision will support clients who have multiple needs and complex problems ensuring that when a long-term housing solution is secured they will be able to manage it successfully.

### **Future**

18. Government has made a commitment to continue Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant funding into 2021/22, details of which are to be made available at the beginning of 2021. We will continue to work as part of our current partnership to secure a share of this funding stream.
19. Government have also announced a further funding stream in relation to rough sleeping – Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme – for 2021/22. Details of which are to follow. This funding stream will align with the Rough Sleeper Initiative Grant and we will work to secure a share so that we can build on the longer-term housing solutions we have already started to put in place for this cohort of clients.

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

To note the update in regard to rough sleeping and the Council's response in the Epping Forest District and, particularly, within the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>6</sup> We are currently exploring the potential of a specialist mental health worker embed within the homelessness team – 1 year funding only

<sup>7</sup> This post will sit with Chess, our commissioned rough sleeper service, and is funded for a period of 3 years

**Resource Implications:**

None – all activity to be completed within existing budgets together with ringfenced additional RSIG and NSAP funding

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Due regard is given to all relevant legislation including (but not limited to) Housing Act 1996 (as amended); Homelessness Reduction Act 2017; Coronavirus Act 2020.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The Council has a statutory responsibility to prevent and relieve homelessness latterly strengthened by the additional funding received as part of NSAP. EFDC's response to rough sleeping will continue to be robust to minimise any further/ongoing risk to public health.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

Ongoing consultation is undertaken with the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder.

**Background Papers:**

None

**Risk Management:**

Risk is managed through a risk register and updated quarterly or at any other appropriate time.





## SCRUTINY



### **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 14 January 2021**

**Portfolio: Customer and Corporate Support Services  
Councillor S Kane**

**Subject: Digital Inclusion Update**

**Officer contact for further information: Rob Pavey**

**Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564532)**

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#### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

To note the work taking place around Digital Inclusion and the future direction of further projects.

#### **Report**

1 Covid-19 has provided a real challenge to reduce digital exclusion, particularly with the difficulty of face to face services. Whilst there has still been activity there are plans to re-energise aspects of the work which is expanding to incorporate different strands incorporating the wider community and partners. The details below highlight the work undertaken and planned by the Council and other partners within our Digital Inclusion Network.

#### **2 Internal Digital Buddies**

We have re-energised our digital buddy network and have twenty-nine buddies who are willing to give their time to support our residents. Working in collaboration with other service areas and external partners some initial activities which have started to progress are as follows;

- Digital buddy support to residents who via the Community, Culture & Wellbeing doorstep visits fed back they would like some digital support and coaching. This will be either via phone or face to face following social distancing measures and will commence in the New Year.
- Support line for residents in sheltered accommodation – residents will receive a flyer with a number to call to request support from our digital buddies, this line also provides access to a befriending scheme.
- In conjunction with Voluntary Action Epping Forest drop-in sessions are being arranged to help residents complete the Digital Census 2021 – locations to be arranged by end of January 2021.
- Citizens Online are launching a national freephone number which anyone can call for digital support, residents within our district calling this number will be referred to EFDC, our work supporting care home residents will be a good pilot to identify how this can work.

#### **3 Community Based Digital Inclusion Programme**

Digital Inclusion has been identified as a key action by the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board to reduce health inequalities and aid social recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. An ongoing programme of projects are being developed and delivered by the

Community, Culture and Wellbeing team and partners. Currently the following projects have been initiated;

- The installation of Alcove phones to Epping Forest Residents identified as isolated or vulnerable in four phases;
  - Phase One – Epping Forest District Council Sheltered Housing Residents
  - Phase Two – Residents in the community with a sheltered housing officer
  - Phase Three – All Epping Forest Residents who meet the criteria
- Rainbow Services (Harlow) have been allocated funding from the NHS Charities Fund. The funding is to develop a West Essex wide digital inclusion project for residents that have become vulnerable as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In West Essex it has been identified that the majority of these residents are either from BAME communities or those experiencing mental ill health. This project will work with partners to provide both access to technology and data, as well as directed support to BAME and MH communities to enable them to benefit from virtual interventions and services.

Within this project we will carry out several diverse work-streams to enable success:

- Identify the individuals or families that might be in need (working cross-sector);
- Establish a process and facility for organisations to donate unwanted reusable equipment;
- Develop a data-matching process to match those in need to the equipment available;
- Develop a ground-breaking 'Databank' concept that would allow local residents to either donate funds towards the purchase of data packages or to donate unused data allowances from their monthly packages alongside agreeing with telecoms providers a range of subsidised connectivity packages that can be purchased for identified individuals and families and / or a mechanism through which people can donate their unused data allowances
- Work in conjunction with the Digital Buddies to support upskilling residents on using the technology
- Develop a single online platform through which all of the above can be processed.
- Employ a specialist Mental Health Engagement Worker who will promote, explain, and support people with mental health needs to engage with the project and benefit from digital interventions;
- Organise focused communications, events, and activities for BAME communities with key partners supporting these demographics, to highlight the services virtually available and support them to access them effectively.

## **4 Digital Inclusion Zone**

### **4.1 Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN)**

This DCMS funded project will see nineteen GP sites across Epping Forest district connected up to a new fibre broadband network being built across the DIZ geography, encompassing 77 sites in total. The project, which has recently seen the first site survey undertaken is due to see delivery completed by the end of March 2021, after which the focus will then shift to realising the potential benefits this investment could bring for residents and the delivery of digital healthcare across the area. The build represents an infrastructure investment in the district of over £330k, out of a total project investment of £1.7m and will see over 11,000 residential and business premises come within reach of future fibre broadband on demand.

### **4.2 Digital Inclusion Project**

The DIZ has led the development of a project to create a comprehensive web platform for digital inclusion. This project aims to address issues of device access, digital skills and data

connectivity and will initially be focused around a two-year pilot project in West Essex, including Epping Forest district. The project was recently successful in securing approx. £178k of funding from the NHS Charities Fund which will now see day to day responsibility for delivering the platform taken on by DIZ Community and Voluntary Sector partners, potentially through WECAN, which includes Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

#### **4.3 Digital Support for the High Street**

The DIZ has begun developing a number of initiatives to support the recovery of high street businesses and shops. As well as leading conversations with organisations such as Maybe\* (Social Media) and Enterprise Nation (Digital Skills for SMEs), the DIZ has begun work on a pilot project for Epping High Street which will look to utilise the existing CCTV system and repurpose it to provide footfall analysis of the high street. This analysis would then enable information to be shared with residents and businesses to allow informed decisions to be made about a safe return to shopping on the high street. The project is being delivered in conjunction with Newcastle City Council and the Urban Observatory and funded by MHCLG.

#### **4.4 Ultrafast Broadband**

The DIZ Programme Manager leads for Epping Forest DC on the delivery of ultrafast broadband in the district and work continues to support the latest phase of the Superfast Essex ultrafast broadband delivery. Works are being delivered which will provide gigabit capable broadband to around 1800 premises throughout Epping Forest District that currently do not have access to superfast connectivity. This is due to complete by December 2021 and is co-funded by the Council with BDUK, Essex CC and Gigaclear, a total infrastructure investment in the current phase of over £15m.

#### **4.5 DIZ Event Programme**

The DIZ is working up a skeleton programme of online events for 2021. The programme is being developed by the EFDC Higher Level Apprentice working out of Economic Development and directly supporting the DIZ. Potential themes for the event programme currently include digital careers and skills retraining; digital healthcare; digital inclusion; digital and the high street; digital tourism; early years and digital; funding innovation and 5G / IoT / future connectivity.

#### **4.6 MDU Fibre Broadband Project**

The DIZ Programme Manager is liaising with a national infrastructure provider and coordinating with Housing, Estates and Legal Service colleagues from Epping Forest DC to explore the potential to support a commercial broadband project to deliver fibre broadband to all of the EFDC-owned blocks of flats.

### **5 Conclusion**

The report shows the work being undertaken. EFDC on its own cannot resolve issues around digital inclusion and hence the development of our Digital Inclusion Network with partners last year. Digital inclusion is one of the key themes of our Customer Service Strategy and future updates around this theme will be provided within the wider Strategy update.

**Reason for decision: none**

**Options considered and rejected: none**

**Consultation undertaken: none**

**Resource implications: none**

**Legal and Governance Implications: none**

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: none**

**Consultation Undertaken: none**

**Background Papers: none**

**Impact Assessments: none**

***Risk Management: none***



## SCRUTINY



### **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 14 January 2021**

**Portfolio: Customer and Corporate Support Services  
Councillor Sam Kane**

**Subject: Customer Service Update**

**Officer contact for further information: Susan Lewis**

**Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564532)**

#### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

To note the update on 'what our customers are telling us' plus an update on our Customer strategy.

#### **What our customers are telling us**

##### **Overall customer satisfaction – KPI 80%**

Key customer frustration has been around missed waste collections and bin deliveries, which is being addressed plus feedback on ease of finding information on our website which will be addressed via our digital strategy. On a positive note, customers who have used our online forms have given good feedback on ease of self-serve.

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
69%	71%	71%	

##### **First point resolution – KPI 45%**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
49%	50%	47%	

Call causation codes were re-introduced 1/11/20 after a period of significant under resourcing in the Contact Centre. Call volumes since that date were 11,102 of which 673 calls were straight forward transfers to Qualis. If this significant volume continues, we will look at ways of improving. The next highest area for call transfers was Planning with customers requiring technical support.

##### **Complaints - KPI 85% within SLA**

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
88%	98%	89%	

Points to note;

A total of eighty-one complaints received. Some examples for complaints include noise issues taking longer to resolve as lack of access to resident houses to set up noise equipment. Qualis have seen a delay in parts supply causing some delays. Waste complaints related to crew behaviour and missed collection which is being addressed by the service area.

## Call volumes as at 11<sup>th</sup> December

Call volumes remain on track to be consistent with previous quarters by end of Q3.

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
27,556	28,169	21,506	

## Corporate Communications

Looking forward to 2021, the current Council chamber webcasting kit is to be upgraded for hybrid meetings allowing Members and other participants to integrate seamlessly whether attending a meeting in person or remotely. Options are being explored to develop a new online community news application. Options include combining news output with other statutory and voluntary partners into a community focused platform provisionally titled 'District Matters'.

## Customer Strategy

Note. The launch of the strategy to customers was delayed due to Covid-19 however this has now been launched via our website. Customers were invited to send feedback to [customerstrategy@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:customerstrategy@eppingforestdc.gov.uk) but as yet no feedback has been received.

Internal Audit have conducted an audit of our Customer Service transformation plans and provide substantial assurance over the performance management of customer services and delivery of our transformation plans. Key actions from the audit are for Managers who have not completed the internal customer service health check to get it completed and for a long-term solution to be found for the 35% of cash paying customers who do not wish to switch to an alternative method of payment

### 'Fix the Basic's

Starting in Q4 the Contact Centre will be looking at how we currently capture customer feedback and how this data insight can be used to improve our customer experience.

For complaints, our policy has been reviewed and updated based on recommendations received from the Housing Ombudsman's Self-Assessment recommendations. New Team Managers will be attending complaints management training and further work will take place on root cause analysis for contact centre calls to determine trends and improvements required.

To ensure we are meeting our residents needs we are developing a new scheduling and call demand tool which will analyse calls received outside of current opening hours and call volume trends throughout the day. Key findings from this work will be used to review our call centre operations. Early indications are showing a significant number of calls on a Monday between 8am and 9am, our call centre currently opens at 9am.

To streamline incoming customer emails and enable effective reporting we have removed our 'contact us' email account which means all email traffic now comes through the one route. We previously had two routes in via 'contact us' and 'general enquiries'. Customers can still click on the 'contact us' link on the first page of our website directing them to the general enquiries form, from here they either self-serve using an online form or complete a general form sending their query to the contact centre.

## **‘Customer Shoes’**

The pilot for this behavioural training has now been held, with eighteen staff from across all service areas attending two one day sessions. Feedback has been extremely positive the next stage is for training videos to be made enabling the content to be available for all staff, this will be developed and launched in quarter 4. There will be a particular focus on managing difficult customer conversations, particularly when we cannot meet customers needs due to legislation. The emphasis will be on the fact that it is now what we do but how we do it that makes the biggest difference to customers.

A ‘Customer Shoes’ knowledge hub is being set up on Teams for all staff access. This will include *‘all things customer’* with access to a wide range of information such as the internal customer service health check, phone guide by service area, complaints procedures/training for Managers, Digital Buddy information plus the Customer Shoes training once available.

Our ‘Service Superstars’ initiative proved very popular when launched during National Customer Service week and as a result will be run as a quarterly initiative via Perkbox.

## **Embracing New Technology**

A programme working group will be developed in the New Year to bring structure and clarity on roles, accountabilities and most importantly the outcomes we are striving to achieve as a Council in terms of our Digital Inclusion programme.

## **New welcome lounge at the Civic Office**

Our customer experience will be enhanced via a visitor management system enabling self-check in/out and ability to leave us customer feedback. In addition, once checked in Officers will be automatically notified their visitors have arrived for those who have booked appointments. For those customers arriving with general enquiries they will be greeted by a floor walker who will assist them via I Pads or coach them on using our online service via customer terminals.

## **Members Technology & Members Contact process review**

Feedback was captured from Members and Officers on the use of the Members Contact process. Short term the decision has been made that all new Members enquiries are to be raised via Members Contact. Once Members are in discussion with Officers the conversation will then continue on a one to one basis with confirmation back to Members Contact once a query has been resolved. Longer term this process will feed into the development of the Members Portal.

A review of Members technology requirements is also underway to ensure the tools provided are fit for purpose and meet Member’s needs. A working group has been set up and recommendations will be provided in due course.

**Reason for decision: none**

**Options considered and rejected: none**

**Consultation undertaken: none**

**Resource implications: none**

**Legal and Governance Implications: none**

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: none**

**Consultation Undertaken: none**

**Background Papers: none**

**Impact Assessments: none**

***Risk Management: none***