

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MINUTES

Committee: Council **Date:** 29 July 2021

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices **Time:** 7.00 - 9.17 pm

Members Present: Councillors H Kane (Chairman), R Balcombe, P Bhanot, P Bolton, R Brookes, L Burrows, I Hadley, S Heap, S Heather, R Jennings, J Jogia, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Leppert, A Lion, T Matthews, C McCredie, J McIvor, L Mead, R Morgan, S Murray, C Nweke, M Owen, A Patel, J Philip, C P Pond, C C Pond, S Rackham, B Rolfe, M Sartin, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson and D Wixley

Apologies: Councillors J Share-Bernia (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, R Baldwin, R Bassett, N Bedford, D Dorrell, J Jennings, S Jones, Y Knight, J Lea, S Neville, D Plummer, K Rizvi, C Roberts and P Stalker

Officers Present: G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), P Seager (Chairman's Officer), A Buckley (Communications Officer), P Hewitt (Qualis Group Operations Director), B Johnson (Managing Director Qualis Management) and S Rutter (Development Director, Qualis Commercial)

16. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager 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.

17. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members and new Members back to the Council Chamber for the first Council meeting to be held there in 15 months.

18. FORMER COUNCILLORS M BOATMAN AND P BURNS

The Chairman informed members that former Councillors M Boatman and P Burns had recently passed away.

Maureen Boatman had represented the Loughton Roding Ward of the District as a Labour Councillor from 1996 to 2006. She had also served on many of the Council's committees, working groups and outside bodies during this time.

Peter Burns had represented the Epping Hemnall Ward of the District as a Conservative Councillor from 1992-1996. He also served on many of the Council's committees and working groups during this time.

Members paid tribute to the memory of former Councillors Maureen Boatman and Peter Burns and a minute's silence was held in their honour.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

20. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 29 April 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following announcement made by the Chairman informing Members that the attendance on the minutes when published was incorrect but this had now been updated and was correct on the Council's website.
- (b) That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 May 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.
- (c) That the minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 24 June 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following:

Councillor S Heap advised that under Item 14. Declarations of Interest the declaration that was recorded was not correct, his declaration was as below:

Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct Councillor S Heap declared a prejudicial interest in item 4 – EPF/2503/19, Land North of Dowding Way, Waltham Abbey. He advised that a complaint had been made against him by unknown voices but he did not think that he had predetermined the application. A letter sent in by Mr O'Rourke to Legal Services concluded that he had only predisposed himself but there was a risk that he might vote against the application and therefore fail the public perception test and for that reason, he would withdraw from the meeting and the voting thereon.

21. ANNOUNCEMENTS**(a) Chairman's Announcements**

(i) The Chairman was pleased to announce that she had at last been able to attend community events and had recently opened a community garden. She had also given out certificates to volunteers that had worked throughout the Covid pandemic and had met with some very remarkable people. She stated that after the last 15 months she was very pleased to be able to attend these events personally.

(ii) Pétanque, 31 July 2021

If any members were available on Saturday 31 July at 3pm a Pétanque game had been arranged between Epping Town Council and Epping Forest District Council at the Jack Silley Pavilion. All members were invited to join the Chairman and her team to support and help the District win the cup.

22. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The Council noted that there were no public questions under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

23. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

The Council noted that there were no questions by members under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

24. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Council received written reports from Portfolio Holders. The Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide an oral report and the opportunity for other members of the Cabinet to give updates on matters concerning their relevant portfolios.

(a) Leader of Council

The Leader stated that he would like to make a short announcement regarding a change of committee placements for the Conservative Group, he advised that he had checked this out with Democratic Services before the change was made.

Councillor T Matthews was the Vice-Chairman of the Stronger Council Select Committee and was also a member of the Audit and Governance Committee, therefore he would remain as Vice-Chairman of the Stronger Council Select Committee and stand down from the Audit and Governance Committee. He advised that he was pleased to announce that Councillor R Morgan would be replacing Councillor T Matthews on the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Leader reported that he had numerous meetings in recent weeks including those with the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town Board, the new Leader of Harlow Council, Councillor Andrew Johnson and the Leader of the East Herts District Council and reported that good progress was being made with the plans for this area.

Boundary Commission Review

He advised that he had recently met with the Boundary Commission who advised that Epping Forest District were overdue a review as the last review was carried out in 1998. The review will commence in the Autumn, along with five other Districts across Essex, the process is a review of council size and warding pattern and not a review of boundaries. The process will culminate with all elections in May 2024. Information will be distributed shortly to all members and there will be a briefing for all members by the Boundary Commission in September 2021. He stated he would instigate a Portfolio Holder Group and look for representation from all parties and independent members to be on that group to progress with the Boundary Commissions work.

Flash Flooding

On Sunday 25 July 2021 the rain was exceptionally heavy, an Amber Weather Warning was issued for the area, there was cause for concern as parts of the District were affected by flooding to which I am sure members will raise during the meeting.

Civic Offices

Officers have been working hard to get the Civic Offices open again as the Covid-19 restrictions had now been lifted. Precautions should still be adhered to and it was advisable to take a lateral flow test before coming into the Civic Offices as we have a duty to keep each other safe. The Covid-19 numbers are increasing so encourage people to have their vaccines and stay safe over the summer, the last thing anyone of us would want was another lockdown.

(b) Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor A Patel advised that the Community Resilience Team recently took part in the UK's first ever anti-social behaviour awareness week. The theme was making communities safer and Epping Forest Districts Community Partnership co-ordinated a week of engaging with residents, providing information and action from Council services and partner agencies to highlight the issues of anti-social behaviour and how to report and deal with them. Three multi-agency events were held that week at Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, Bricklamps Path, The Broadway, Loughton and Blenheim Square in North Weald. Police Officers were in attendance to listen to any concerns, to provide policing updates and to give crime prevention advice. Activities included proactive anti-social behaviour and noise patrols by the Community Resilience team, doorstep visits by the Neighbourhoods team offering advice on how to report anti-social behaviour, proactive visits to housing estates by the Land and Estates team engaging with residents' associations and the community, getting them involved in reporting any concerns they had to the officers attending.

The Community, Culture and Wellbeing team promoted their work in bringing communities together whilst the Highway Rangers proactively cleared graffiti and litter.

(c) Corporate Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor D Sunger advised that a pilot scheme the Council and other local authorities had been involved in would be rolled out in October/November 2021. The scheme was to do with local authority searches, training had been given by the HM Land Registry and local authority searches would now be reduced to 5 days online.

He also advised that the Council may be entitled to an award up to the value of £75,000 and although not confirmed he hoped that the Council would secure some of this sum.

(d) Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder

Councillor J Philip referred to his report, page 82 of the agenda and advised where he had highlighted the Civic Offices accommodation, for members that did not attend Cabinet or watch the webcast and haven't yet seen the decision. The decision notice had been published and a decision was made to lease out the second floor of the building excluding the public gallery of the Council chamber to a franchisee named Regis for a 10-year lease. This was a very good deal for the Council covering both rental and service charges and was a significant income coming into the Council. He reminded members that the second floor of the Civic Offices was never intended to be a money-making exercise when the refurbishment was planned and started but due to the increased flexibility in working, a significant contribution could now go towards the Council's accounts.

(e) Housing Services Portfolio Holder

Councillor H Whitbread stated that there were four big policy consultations which the Housing department are currently undergoing:

- The Overarching Housing Strategy;
- The Allocations Scheme;
- The Tenancy Policy; and
- The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

She advised that this was included in her report but that there was a simple online survey and she asked if all members could encourage their residents to take part in this really important piece of policy and strategy survey.

Following the last Stronger Council meeting and the subject around temporary accommodation a discussion arose around one of the KPI's about a future change of temporary accommodation provision in the district. She clarified that this was a very long-term strategic view that the Council were looking at in providing temporary accommodation and there were no plans at present but were obviously always looking at the most modern and best approach possible. She stated that at present there were no people in bed and breakfast accommodation therefore there was no pressure on the general fund and it was better to have people in Council accommodation which EFDC owned and was in the HRA. Special thanks to Jennifer Gould and the Homelessness team for the work they have done around the prevention of homelessness.

25. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Chairman thanked Members for giving notification of their intention to ask a question without notice.

(a) Qualis Community Limited

Councillor S Heap stated that his question was to the Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder and asked what the connection was between Qualis Community Limited and Primera Voluntary Limited. He stated that Primera Voluntary Limited was incorporated on the 10 March 2021, between the 10 and 23 March they were known as Qualis CIC, on the 12 March all directors of Qualis were appointed as directors of Primera, between 15 and 22 March all Quails directors resigned or were terminated. On the 21 March, Qualis Community was Incorporated and EFDC were recognised as a person with significant interest, on the 22 March all of the Qualis directors were appointed to Qualis Community CIC and Mr Casey ceased to be a person with significant interest. On the 24 March Qualis became Qualis Community. Could the Portfolio Holder explain what this was about and did this have an easy explanation also did it account for the £10,000.00 of other expenses that were mentioned in the report.

Councillor J Philip advised that he recognised the Community Interest company as part of Qualis which members were made aware of. In terms of the directors of the Community Interest company it was correct that they should also be the directors of the over arching Qualis Group. Until Councillor Heap mentioned the other company, he stated that as far as he was aware it did not have any relationship to the Qualis Community Interest company and nor would it have going forward.

(b) Loughton Library

Councillor S Murray advised his question was to the Leader of Council and asked if he could help the residents of Loughton to save the Library as he was a leading member of Essex County Council. He stated the Library should be allowed to stay as it was and not be moved to a much smaller community space and urged the Leader to help the many hundreds of residents of Loughton to save their library.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that this was an issue that was already under consultation and did not think it would be right or proper for him to state either way what he thought about the consultation. He did however state that the best way to save a library was to reinvest in a library and that was what the consultation would achieve, you need modern buildings and modern libraries. The Loughton Library was a Local Plan site and members should be careful when they object to planning applications of sites that are within the Local Plan as they weaken their own position. He therefore advised that members of the public should respond to the public consultation.

(c) Spraying regime for the extreme pavement and road weed growth

Councillor D Wixley advised his question was to the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder but due to his absence he would ask the Leader if he was able to answer on his behalf. The Leader, Councillor C Whitbread advised he was happy to take the question but if he could not satisfactorily answer the question a written answer would be provided at a later date.

Councillor D Wixley advised the Leader that he was receiving a lot of complaints and comments from residents in Loughton about the weeds that were growing in the pavements and the road gullies. This year the weeds seem quite exceptional and he wondered if something had happened regarding the spraying regime as the roots of these weeds could damage and weaken the under surface of the pavements and during the winter with the rain and ice the weeds can help to break up the structure of the pavement. Some of the weeds have taken up the appearance of a hedgerow and he asked what the way forward was.

Councillor C Whitbread thanked Councillor Wixley for his question and informed him that as Councillor Avey had prior knowledge of the question he had been working on an answer to give at Council, but was, from today self-isolating. He stated this year there seemed to be an epidemic of weeds growing in between pavement blocks and along roadsides all over the district. The growth of the weeds was caused by a lot of sunshine followed by a fair amount of rain. The Council undertook weed spraying on behalf of Essex County Council and they had a set number of sprays each year, he believed that they were in the process of spraying at the present time. He advised that he would get a full answer and come back to Councillor Wixley with details of the spraying regime but did agree that there were more and more weeds this year due to the weather conditions that the district has had. The Council were aware of this problem and many Councillors were also receiving the same complaint from residents.

(d) Disability Discrimination Act Accessibility and Compliance – Transport for London

Councillor C C Pond advised his question was also for the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder but maybe another member of the Cabinet would be able to answer his question. He asked if any discussions had been held with Transport for London about making further facilities at their tube stations in Epping Forest for a Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Accessibility and Compliance. I am aware that there were discussions regarding this some years ago. The Central Line

was a vital resource to get from one end of the district to the other and around the loop. Many of the stations are simply relics from a previous time with absolutely no disabled access. Therefore, if no such discussions had recently taken place with TfL were any planned in the near future.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that this came under the remit of the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Avey and that he would speak to him to find out if any discussions had taken place. He suggested that this could go to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and invite Transport for London to attend.

(e) Flooding in the District

Councillor M Sartin referred to the flooding that had recently taken place in the district and advised that Roydon had been one of the areas that was badly hit and asked if the Leader would join her in expressing his concern for the residents of Roydon and also Nazeing, who were affected by the flooding that occurred on Sunday 25 July, which was the result of exceptionally heavy rainfall but did cause problems for quite a number of residents. Could the Leader also assure the residents in those areas that were affected that a full multi-agency investigation would be carried out to establish the real issues around the various drainage systems in the district and find resolutions for these problems. This was not the first time that concerns had been raised regarding the drainage systems but on this occasion a number of residents experienced flood water entering their properties and causing serious damage to their homes. Could I also ask the Leader along with the relevant officers to meet with me as soon as possible, in Roydon, to highlight some of the problem areas and to get a better understanding of why and what happened on Sunday.

Councillor C Whitbread stated that no member of Epping Forest District Council could not have been more shocked and saddened to see the damage done to properties in the district in particular Roydon and Nazeing and had much empathy for the residents of those properties that were so badly affected.

He advised that on Sunday 25 July 2021 the rain was exceptionally heavy an Amber Weather Warning was issued for the area, which was extremely rare. Officers responded to several flooding calls in the area but did not receive calls from the out of hours service at Mears regarding the properties reported to Members.

EFDC were not the Lead Local Flood Authority for this area, the responsibility remained with Essex County Council. The mechanisms for flooding can be complex and involve agencies including the sewerage undertaker and the highway authority whose systems all take surface water.

EFDC provide an out of hours flood response service and will provide sandbags and assistance to the most vulnerable residents with staff and a contractor (Pearls). 1000 sandbags are stored by our contractor (Pearls) at their site in Bobbingworth as part of a wider watercourse maintenance contract on our behalf.

An officer from the Environmental Protection and Drainage Team was on-call 24/7, 365 days per year to advise and respond to incidents of flooding affecting residents.

EFDC officers were members of the ECC Flood Officers group and the Portfolio Holder was a member of the flood board where climate was a regular topic and discussion point.

He confirmed that EFDC have requested Essex County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority undertake a Section 19 flood investigation to help in determining the mechanism of the flooding. ECC Flood team have responded to the request and will be working with EFDC to investigate the issues.

EFDC will liaise and work with ECC and the various parties involved in the flooding e.g. highways, riparian owners, EFDC, Thames Water to reduce the impact of any further incidents. The out of hours process will be reviewed and any training needs will be addressed with the contractor.

The Leader advised that he was more than happy to meet with officers other agencies and residents in the coming week to discuss the recent flooding in the district.

(f) Social Lettings Register

Councillor R Brookes advised her question was to the Housing Services Portfolio Holder and stated that the report on the social lettings registers was an excellent and asked if the Portfolio Holder could clarify when looking at the number of active bidders, listed for the last five years, and looking at the number of active bidders from 2020 to 1 April 2021 it had gone up by almost 300, was there any reason for this increase.

Councillor H Whitbread thanked Councillor Brookes for her question and advised that although she was aware of an increase in active bidders, particularly during the Pandemic, she would have to liaise with officers and come back with a detailed response.

(g) Small Businesses in the District

Councillor P Bhanot advised that his question was to the Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder and stated that the high streets and shopping parades were the economic heartbeat of the communities across the district, notwithstanding the Governments support packages, the last 18 months had been particularly testing for small local businesses and asked what plans were there by EFDC to ensure small businesses in our district bounce back and recover from the financial hardship they face as Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed.

Councillor J Philip advised that the Cabinet passed town centre improvement plans for six town centres and he would be reporting on the progress of those various actions this was something that EFDC were a significant leader in but were not doing it alone, it involved working with other organisations including Parish and Town Councils. A good example that happened earlier this week was putting planters into Waltham Abbey, the Council were looking to supply the planters but the actual planting in the planters and the maintenance of them would fall to Waltham Abbey Town Council. Added to that two particular initiatives that the Council have put in place are Click It Local and a loyalty application for across the district called Loyal Free which will hopefully encourage people to shop within the district and be able to see some benefit in doing so.

Click It Local was launched but unfortunately local businesses are not proving very keen to sign up to it. As we lead up to Christmas time, which was clearly one of the major business events in the calendar, EFDC want to be able to support businesses as much as possible therefore the Click It Local initiative will carry on for the full 12 months. He added that if more local businesses did not sign up and people were not using the service to drive more revenue through the districts businesses, we would

have to consider next year whether investing the money in keeping going for the future was a wise investment or not. I would encourage members to read about Click It Local and encourage local businesses to sign up to this initiative

(h) UK Vaccination Programme

Councillor J McIvor advised his question was to the Community and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder and asked with the UK vaccination programme proving to be a huge success across our district, county and country, does the Portfolio Holder agree with his concerns, and indeed the concerns of National Government with the lack of take-up of the vaccination with the under 30's, which may be due to the amount of incorrect and inaccurate information which was shared online and people are putting their safety and the safety of others at risk. I would be interested to know what steps this Council would be taking to encourage all adult age groups, but in particular, the under 30's age group to get vaccinated so that we can very quickly go from pandemic to endemic.

Councillor A Patel advised that he first received an update from the person who was leading the rollout of the vaccinations across the Epping Forest district and the end of November 2020, it was a very ambitious programme that they were setting out and they were firstly targeting the elderly and most vulnerable adults first and then rolling out the vaccination to the younger adults. It was always part of the thought process, at that time, that it would be more difficult to get the younger age group to take up the vaccine. Some of the reasons and rationale around why it was proving to be difficult was that there are a lot of myths that are being circulated around having the vaccination. The NHS are trying to tackle these myths by putting statements on their website and there was information on the Essex County Council website and the Epping Forest District Council website all trying to tackle these myths. Some of the younger Councillors who have been vaccinated could help by doing a promotional video on why the younger adult should be vaccinated. Members would have also received an email from the Corporate Comms team about circulating messages of positivity amongst the residents in their wards and circulating this information especially around the areas where there are vaccination centres. The key to this vaccination rollout was working together as a partnership and spreading the positives especially to the younger adult.

(i) The Council's Social Recovery Plan

Councillor K Williamson asked the Community and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder to provide an update on the progress of the Council's social recovery plan.

Councillor A Patel advised that the Council were making very good progress on the social recovery, it was this time last year when the Council moved out of response to recovery and Councillor Philip and his team worked very hard on the economic recovery plan but the Communities team in particular have also worked very hard on the social recovery plan. We are now moving away from the term 'social recovery' thinking and it has been identified through working in partnerships with our health partners and the focus was on tackling health inequalities as a result of Covid and this was the key area of focus of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board. The work that they are delivering upon was through the three action groups that we have underneath the main board who are multi agency. The way in which we will achieve success again was working with our partners and in particular our health partners in delivering upon this. We as a District Council have very good representation in the health environment and our Chief Executive was on the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board, I am a member on the West Essex CCG Board, Gill Wallis from the Communities Directorate was chairing the West Essex Health Inequalities Board and

Jennifer Gould from Housing Services was on the One Health and Care Partnership. It was fair to say that the Council were supporting the direction of the Health and Wellbeing agenda across West Essex.

In order to answer this question fully I am happy for a report to go to the relevant Select Committee subject to the Chairman's agreement.

The Chairman agreed that a full report would be a good idea to go to the relevant Select Committee.

(j) Regulation Order for Measures in Epping High Street

Councillor J M Whitehouse stated that in December 2021 the traffic regulation order for measures in Epping High Street expires and asked the Community and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder if there was any update of when the consultation would take place.

Councillor A Patel advised that this question was not under the remit of his Portfolio and suggested that it might fall under the Environmental and Technical Service Portfolio.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed that it did fall under the remit of the Environmental and Technical Service Portfolio Holder, Councillor N Avey and in his absence he would be asked to give a written response.

(k) Council House Building Programme

Councillor R Morgan asked the Housing Services Portfolio Holder to provide an update on the Council House Building Programme and especially about the opening of Cyril Hawkins Close in North Weald.

Councillor H Whitbread advised she recently visited Cyril Hawkins Close for a sneak preview as Councillor McIvor, Councillor Burrows and Councillor Bolton joined her in visiting the community allotment opening which backs onto the programme. Cyril Hawkins Close had not yet officially opened but the official opening was next week and would be opened by the Chairman, Councillor Helen Kane with other members in attendance.

The development consisted of 12 family homes situated in the heart of North Weald on a previously used site which was once garages. In terms of the rest of the Council House Building Programme Phases 4.1 and 4.2 they were on site and that was going well, the only slight issue has been a delay in some the building material supplies which was an issue across the building trade. The Council's programme was still on schedule with a number of completion and hand overs coming up between September and November. She advised that she had recently had the opportunity to name some of the properties and with the Pick Hill development this has been named after her predecessor Syd Stavrou, which would be a good opportunity to remember Syd.

The Housing Strategy and Policy consultation was due soon and this would be a good opportunity to think about how our Council House Building Programme was going and whether the Council's stock was meeting the needs of local residents.

(l) Epping Forest Holocaust Education Trust

Councillor H Kauffman advised that he was the Chairman of the Epping Forest Holocaust Education Trust and we are going to bring forward a memorial in the district that we can all be proud of but a big part of that was about education. The Trust were planning and setting their heart on an element of the new library being available to us for a permanent school education facility and in the new plans, despite having discussed this with Essex County Council, they have not put in those plans even a small area for the Trust. I would therefore be really grateful, as Councillor C Whitbread has personally been very supportive of this initiative, if he could have a word in the right ear to provide the Trust with some space in the new library for this to go ahead.

I would also like to give a big shout out to Waltham Abbey Museum who are currently holding an exhibition, which was not being that well attended, it was available until the 4 September and it was about 30 survivors who came to Loughton and were cherished. It was a fabulous exhibition and well worth a trip to Waltham Abbey to see this exhibition.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that he certainly would have a word in the right ear and thought the memorial in Loughton was really important to this district. He was really pleased that this Council had been able to support the memorial and would continue to support it. Celebrating our heritage and remembering some of the worst atrocities that have happened in our history are so important to this district and country.

26. MOTIONS

(a) Litter in the District

Moved by Councillor H Whitbread and seconded by Councillor J Philip

“In light of the extent of littering in the District, which has increased during the current pandemic, the Council hereby declares that:

- (i) The Council will sponsor an annual competition named “Pride in Epping Forest District”, which aims to acknowledge the individual, group or local Parish Council which makes the greatest local contribution to the removal of litter from the District’s streets and countryside;
- (ii) The Council will join “Keep Britain Tidy” and become involved in “the Great British Spring Clean” and comparable initiatives. The Council will also reach out to other local organisations such as the Corporation of London (Epping Forest) and Transport for London to encourage joint initiatives to tackle littering;
- (iii) The Council will continue to promote and support locally organised litter picks and supply advice, equipment and support;
- (iv) The Council will examine ways in which by means of social media, postings on the Council’s website and other channels to promote residents’ awareness of littering and why this anti-social behaviour should be stopped. This may also involve reaching out to schools through the Youth Council;
- (v) The Council will survey the provision of bins across urban conurbations in the District, including main thoroughfares, to assess

whether more bins are needed to avoid littering. Advice will be sought from Parish Councils as part of this survey; and

- (vi) When available, the Council will evaluate the use of CCTV technology as an enforcement tool to identify rubbish discarded from vehicles primarily on main roads throughout the District.”

Amendment moved by Councillor C McCredie and seconded by Councillor J Philip

To amend section (iv) to include dog waste:

- (iv) The Council will examine ways in which by means of social media, postings on the Council’s website and other channels to promote residents’ awareness of littering and the health dangers of badly handled dog waste and the need for it to be cleared up in a responsible manner and why this anti-social behaviour should be stopped. This may also involve reaching out to schools through the Youth Council;

Carried

Motion as amended ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Council will sponsor an annual competition named “Pride in Epping Forest District”, which would aim to acknowledge the individual, group or local Parish Council which makes the greatest local contribution to the removal of litter from the District’s streets and countryside;
- (ii) That the Council will join “Keep Britain Tidy” and become involved in “the Great British Spring Clean” and comparable initiatives. The Council will also reach out to other local organisations such as the Corporation of London (Epping Forest) and Transport for London to encourage joint initiatives to tackle littering;
- (iii) That the Council will continue to promote and support locally organised litter picks and supply advice, equipment and support;
- (iv) The Council will examine ways in which by means of social media, postings on the Council’s website and other channels to promote residents’ awareness of littering and the health dangers of badly handled dog waste and the need for it to be cleared up in a responsible manner and why this anti-social behaviour should be stopped. This may also involve reaching out to schools through the Youth Council;
- (v) That the Council will examine ways in which by means of social media, postings on the Council’s website and other channels to promote residents’ awareness of littering and why this anti-social behaviour should be stopped. This may also involve reaching out to schools through the Youth Council;
- (vi) That the Council will survey the provision of bins across urban conurbations in the District, including main thoroughfares, to assess

whether more bins were needed to avoid littering. Advice will be sought from Parish Councils as part of this survey; and

- (vii) That when available, the Council will evaluate the use of CCTV technology as an enforcement tool to identify rubbish discarded from vehicles primarily on main roads throughout the District.

27. QUALIS 4 YEAR BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2025

The Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip introduced the 4 Year Qualis Business Plan. He noted that this had also been keenly debated at the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and Cabinet on the 12 July and no amendments had been considered necessary.

He emphasised that nowhere in the 4 Year Business Plan was there any mention of handing over the Council's housing stock to Qualis as this was not part of the 4 Year Business Plan and should be made clear to members.

This report presented the 4 Year Qualis Business Plan and sought the Council's permission to approve this as its direction and focus. As a four year business plan it would inevitably change every year according to circumstances but there would be a one year interim plan submitted each year.

The Council were asking Qualis to look at potentially regenerating areas of the district, to do this, they would require an additional loan potentially up to £35 million and that led to the recommendation (2). To vary the Council's Capital Programme which was brought forward in February 2021 to include the £35 million loan. The loan was not expected to be taken as one tranche and would not necessarily be taken all in this municipal year. The Audit and Governance Committee are requested to review the operational boundaries and the approved limits in the Treasury Management and Investment Strategies and to give approval to these being increased up to the requested £35 million, if they consider it necessary.

He stated that he was happy to take questions but as it had been thoroughly debated at Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet he would therefore ask members to support the recommendations.

Councillor S Murray stated that he had three points:

- (a) Could Councillor Philip give assurance that no other service of this Council will be transferred to Qualis without proper scrutiny;
- (b) Did Councillor Philip have any comment on the news that broke on Everything Epping Forest on 26 July regarding the confirmation of the third property acquisition of an office space by Qualis in Coventry for £9 million. Did Councillor Philip know about that prior to the purchase or was that not how it worked at Qualis, as an independent organisation; and
- (c) Regarding the 4 Year Business Plan one of the issues I have with Qualis is their day to day influence on particular services that used to be with the Council that have now been transferred to Qualis, what was the mechanism of accountability for these services to be transferred. I received an email from an unhappy tenant who said 'they would be interested to know who the Qualis repair team answered to as they felt they needed a bit of retraining'. Normally, as

a Councillor, I would have been able to answer that but on this occasion, I had to reply that I did not know and would have to find out. Councillors need to be made aware of where and who that accountability lies with so that we are able to answer our residents.

Councillor J Philip reassured Councillor Murray on service transfer and referred to page 141 of the agenda where there was a Service Review Framework which would be the approach that would be taken to look at any proposals that the Council want Qualis to be taking on for the Council. Essentially what the Council were looking at was a service that could be done better by Qualis than the Council could do not necessarily better than the Council are doing. The Council are in no different situation now than when Mears was running the housing repair service, it was the same responsibility within the Council, the Council had a responsibility for the repairs and maintenance, the actual carrying out of that service was contracted out to Qualis which would be exactly the same approach as if we had continued contracting out to Mears. There was still the scrutiny within the Council and the Council still had the responsibility for the service. Therefore, you could still go through the Housing Team or the Housing Portfolio Holder.

With regard to the third property acquisition I was aware that there was a new acquisition, but that he did not have any details and did not know it had completed. The Managing Director of Qualis was currently on annual leave so my regular Thursday meeting with her this week was cancelled.

Councillor M Owen referred to page 118 of the agenda and stated that on the balance sheet of Qualis the debt was going up by quite a lot and it looked like they were just sitting on the money going up to £126 million and then up to £132 million. Therefore, my question was, why do they need the £35 million loan if they already have so much money that they are sitting on.

Councillor Philip advised that the loans were what was generating the money and was also to do with the status of the work and when it goes from being pre-planning to going into work in progress and you can change things on the account sheet by that point.

Mr N Dawe, Chief Operating Officer stated that in the paperwork an illustration was done in that some more of the loan was aid off rather than reapplied the money to the projects that would then be in subsequent years, so there was an understanding that it did show that but what we would do with the cash bounce was either reinvest it on further projects or paying down the loans, that decision has yet to be made.

Councillor J M Whitehouse stated that it was clear that this report was created some time ago as it had been around for some time, things do change so were there any other post-publication events that members should be aware of which would potentially have an impact on the business plan. The crux of the recommendations includes the £35 million additional loan and what conditions would be attached to the loan in the terms of how that money was spent and ensuring that money was spent in line with the overall objectives and aspirations of the Council. Also the service transfer issue to Qualis, there were some quite big assumptions in the 4 Year Business Plan both about what might happen and the benefits as seen by Qualis of how that would happen. Members would need very clear evidence to justify and understand any transfer proposals. It was important that members had a lot of clarity on those issues.

Councillor J Philip advised in terms of the £35 million loan it had been covered before at Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet. The Council would be looking for a sensible

proposal coming from Qualis as to what they intend to do with the money, given that the Council would be funding through the Public Works Loan and can clearly only be allocated if it was to do with regeneration and the Council would want to see clear evidence that what was being proposed was for regeneration policies within the district. In terms of the service transfer at Overview and Scrutiny one of the things that was looked at was the asset management side of the Council and a proper view of what could be done and what could be improved if it were to transfer to Qualis and that is the reason why the Council are doing a secondment before any form of transfer and hopefully a very strong business case would show the benefits to the Council of transferring the service to Qualis.

Councillor S Heap highlighted that the report stated that all profits are to be retained for 4 to 5 years to build equity and asked when EFDC could expect to see any return on these loans.

Councillor Philip advised that EFDC were getting a return at the moment because they were providing the loan at a commercial rate which is a higher interest rate than the Council were borrowing at. Also discussed at Overview and Scrutiny there was a balance between at what point EFDC start taking dividend money out of Qualis rather than allowing them to reinvest the money to improve the profitability of the company. That is something that has not yet been decided this was an indication of where we are going over the next 4 years. The important thing to remember was that EFDC were the sole owners of Qualis and therefore whether the money is put into the general account or whether it stays within Qualis, the money still belongs to EFDC and it has to be decided year on year where that money goes.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Qualis 2021/22 to 2024/25 4 Year Business Plan be approved;
- (2) That a variation to its approved Capital Programme so as to include £35 million for a regeneration loan as requested by Qualis in 2021/22 be approved; and
- (3) That as requested the Audit and Governance Committee review both the Operational Boundary and the Approved Limit contained within the Treasury Management and Investment Strategies and approve these to being increased by up to the requested £35 million if the Committee considers this necessary.

28. AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20

Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder

Councillor J Philip presented the Audited Statement of Accounts for 2019/20. He thanked the Auditors and the Finance Department for all the work they had put in preparing the accounts to which had been a challenge this year due to the Pandemic restrictions. He also thanked the Audit and Governance Committee for the scrutiny that they gave to the accounts at their meeting on 15 July 2021.

The external auditors gave an “unqualified” audit opinion on the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 and also acknowledged a significant improvement in the 2019/20 Statements and supporting records compared to 2018/19. An issue had been found with the 2018/19 accounts which had a roll forward issue into the 2019/20 accounts

and would have impacted on the 2020/21 accounts. Page 151 of the agenda, section 1.3 advises of the recommendations from the Section 151 officer of the changes that need to be made.

The Audit and Governance Committee recommended to Council that the Statement of Accounts for 2019/20 be approved including the adjustment recommendation made by the Section 151 officer.

There was a significant challenge going forward in terms of getting the accounts completed and approved by the official date, which was 30 September 2021. Therefore, Council were encouraged to ask the Constitution Working Group to look at whether the Audit and Governance Committee could, in future, approve the annual Statement of Accounts instead of bringing them back to Council.

Report as first moved ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Audited Statement of Accounts 2019/20, as recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee, be approved and adopted; and
- (2) That the Constitution Working Group be requested to consider the proposal for the Audit and Governance Committee to be given delegated authority to approve the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts in future years.

29. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-22

Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder

Councillor J Philip presented a report on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy. He advised that the Audit and Governance Committee considered these strategies at their meeting on the 22 March 2021 and recommended that the Council approve and adopt them.

Report as first moved ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

That the Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2021/22 be adopted.

30. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODY - WHIPPS CROSS JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Mover: Councillor C Whitbread, Chairman of the Appointments Panel and Leader of the Council.

Councillor C Whitbread presented a report to members advising that the London Borough of Waltham Forest had extended an invitation to Epping Forest District Council to appoint a non-voting member from the Council to their new Whipps Cross Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC).

He advised that there were two nominations for this position, Councillor A Patel and an LRA Member. Councillor C P Pond advised that the LRA Member nomination had been withdrawn.

Councillor C C Pond stated that under the primary legislation Executive Members were debarred from serving on Joint HOSC's but as this was an observer position clarification would need to be sought as to whether Councillor A Patel, being an Executive Member would be able to take up this position.

Councillor C Whitbread advised that he would seek clarification before a member was appointed to this position.

RESOLVED:

That clarification would be sought as to whether an Executive Member could be appointed as a non-voting representative to the JHOSC.

31. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Annual report

The Council received the sixteenth Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, its Select Committees and Task and Finish Panels for 2020/21, to be approved, by the Chairman of the Committee Councillor M Sartin.

Councillor S Murray asked for it to be put on record the excellent way in which Councillor M Sartin chaired the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He then advised that he would abstain from approving the report due to the way in which the report covered call-in requests as he didn't feel the understanding of the importance of the decisions and the heat of the debate on some of the issues raised.

He then went on to point out on pages 282, 283 and 284 of the agenda, External Scrutiny, that there were three really positive pieces of scrutiny that were done during the year, Epping Forest Youth Council, Local Mental Health Services and Young People's Mental Health Services.

Councillor Murray stated that the Stronger Communities Select Committee, at their first meeting in July 2020, had an excellent presentation from the Grow Community Garden which was documented on page 288 of the agenda to which he would like to bring to the Council's attention.

Lastly he highlighted that the Stronger Council Select Committee scrutinised the Council's Accommodation review as reported on page 297 of the agenda and asked where it was documented the breakdown of the £5 million spent on the refurbishment of the Civic Offices and was it possible to have one list detailing where and how the money was spent.

Councillor M Sartin thanked Councillor Murray for drawing to members attention some of the areas on the report, it was quite a full report that did cover and show the work that was carried out over the last year by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and also by the three Select Committees.

Councillor C Whitbread thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in particular Councillor M Sartin and Councillor B Jennings for all of the hard work that had gone into this committee over the last year and also gave thanks to the three Select Committees as they all did essential work for the Council. He was pleased to

report that a lot of new policies were emerging, particularly around housing, which were now going to the correct committees and being scrutinised efficiently before they came to Council.

With regard to the Civic Offices refurbishment, the second floor of the Civic Offices had now been let out and this income will not only be to the benefit of the Council but to the benefit of local residents. The project was very heavily documented through its many phases to which the Pandemic played a great part in changes and the new ways of working for Council staff.

The refurbishment had been on time and in budget and a final report with all the costings will go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Stronger Council Select Committee at a later date.

The Council are one of the leaders at the forefront of technology and once the Civic Offices were fully functioning it would be a great asset to the whole community of Epping Forest and will deliver fundamental savings and a greener working environment for Epping Forest.

Councillor J H Whitehouse asked if the report could include how decisions were made and how they were changed. Before the consultation closed I attended many of the briefings and were shown things like working pods to be included which are now not in the offices and the building was somewhat different to what members were led to expect, therefore it would be interesting to know how this all changed along the way and why.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed that it had changed as things had moved on as the building was developed. Originally all three floors were going to be used by the Council, apart from part of the ground floor, which was hoped to be used as a community hub. Where possible members have been kept informed but obviously some things had to move very quickly. He pointed out that there were various pods situated throughout the first and second floors of the building. The refurbishment work was not fully completed as another entrance was hoped to be opened up for access to the café area and where it was hoped the library would also go.

The Civic Offices was an old building and with all the new refurbishment works it was now a building for the 21st century.

(b) Report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Council received a report from Councillor M Sartin, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the three meetings held in June and July 2021 and the business that was discussed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Council approved the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- (b) That the report of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held in June and July 2021 be noted.

32. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- a) There were no updates from council representatives on any other business of joint arrangements and external organisations; and

- b) There were no requests made for written reports by representatives on joint arrangements and external organisations for the next meeting.

CHAIRMAN