

Select Committee Agenda



Stronger Communities Select Committee Tuesday, 21st September, 2021

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

Council Chamber - Civic Offices
on **Tuesday, 21st September, 2021**
at **7.00 pm**

G Blakemore
Chief Executive

**Democratic Services
Officer**

Email: democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors J Lea (Chairman), R Balcombe (Vice-Chairman), H Brady, I Hadley, S Murray, C Nweke, D Plummer, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse, K Williamson and D Wixley

SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE:

6:00 pm

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

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).

Therefore, by entering the Council Chamber and using the seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.”

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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 - 20)

To agree the notes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 15 June 2021.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 21 - 26)

(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. COMMUNITY SAFETY TEAM EFDC FUNDED POLICE OFFICERS 6 MONTHLY UPDATE. (Pages 27 - 28)

(C Wiggins/STG Neil Ross) To consider the attached report on the work and range of operations of the Council-Funded Police Officers over the last six months.

Please note that SGT Neil Ross will only be able to respond to questions concerning the performance of EFDC Funded Officers at the meeting, rather than respond to general policing questions.

8. MUSEUM COLLECTIONS PROJECT - RATIONALISATION (Pages 29 - 34)

(F Pellegrino) To consider the attached report regarding the Museum Collections Project rationalisation and progress.

9. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE (Pages 35 - 38)

(Susan Lewis) To consider the attached report regarding an update on the Customer Strategy and 'What our customers are telling us'.

10. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY (Pages 39 - 46)

(J. Gould) To consider the attached report regarding the review of the Housing Allocation Policy.

11. REVIEW OF THE TENANCY POLICY (Pages 47 - 50)

(J Gould) To consider the attached report regarding the review of the Tenancy Policy.

12. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY REVIEW (Pages 51 - 54)

(J Gould) To consider the attached report regarding a review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

13. OVERARCHING HOUSING STRATEGY REVIEW

Report to follow.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To note that the next meeting of the Select Committee will be held at 7.00pm on 11 January 2022.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 2021
IN CONFERENCE SUITE - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 9.00 PM**

Members Present:	J Lea (Chairman), R Balcombe (Vice-Chairman), I Hadley, S Murray, C Nweke, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse, D Wixley, J McIvor and R Morgan
Co-opted Member:	W Marsh (Chairman of the Tenants and Resident Association)
Other members present:	S Kane, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread
Apologies for Absence:	H Brady, D Plummer and K Williamson
Officers Present	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), J Gould (Service Director (Community & Wellbeing)), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor), R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer) and M Turnbull (Project Manager - Housing)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that this meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor R Morgan and Councillor J McIvor had been appointed as substitute for Councillor K Williamson and Councillor H Brady respectively.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary, non-prejudicial interest at this meeting as a Trustee for the Citizen Advice Bureau.

(b) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor J H Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary, non-prejudicial interest at this meeting as she was a Trustee of the Epping Reuse Centre.

4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the meetings held on 30 March 2021 and 22 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to the additional of Mr W Marsh to the attendance list on 22 April 2021.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee requested that the Terms of Reference were reviewed to reflect the Council's Corporate Aims and Key Objectives.

The Chief Operating Officer advised that this issue would be discussed at the next Joint meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of O&S and Select Committee's on 22 July 2021, as similar issues had been raised for the other Select Committees. The Terms of Reference would then be presented the O&S Committee for approval.

The Committee considered the work programme and requested the Allocation Policy, Tenancy Policy and Housing Strategy were added, to ensure that they were scrutinised before the proposed Cabinet decisions were made in 2022.

The Community and Wellbeing Service Director advised that the timeline for the policies was currently being discussed with the Housing Services Portfolio Holder and would be put into the work programme.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee's Terms of Reference would be reviewed by the Joint meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of O&S and Select Committee on 22 July 2021 to ensure that they reflected the Corporate Aims and Key Objectives; and
2. That the following items would be added to the Committee's Work Programme;
 - Allocation Policy;
 - Tenancy Policy; and
 - Housing Strategy.

6. THE SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Housing and Property Director presented a report on the actions which would need to be undertaken to meet the requirements of Social Housing White Paper or "The Charter for Social Housing Residents" which had been published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government on 17 November 2020.

The white paper set out wide ranging and compulsory changes to how social housing organisations operated and included themes from the green paper "A New Deal for Social Housing". This had been re-drafted and expanded into seven themes with specific policies, measures and an enhanced role for The Regulator for Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman.

The seven themes were;

1. To be safe in your home;
2. To know how your landlord was performing;
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly;
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator for tenants;
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord;
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in; and
7. To be supported to take your first steps to ownership.

The Housing and Property Director advised that the implications of the Social Housing white paper had set out new requirements for resident engagement and complaints. The changes were expected to deliver proactive oversight of consumer standards, which would provide the regulator with greater oversight of the performance of local authorities' landlord function. There was also a greater emphasis on safety, resident voice, performance monitoring, home ownership with non-compliance and a new consumer standard resulting in unlimited fines, and reputational damage.

The timescales for implementation of the proposals in the Charter were not yet known, however driving up levels of satisfaction in the areas of Neighbourhoods and Communications would continue to be a key priority for the Council over the coming months and it had been proposed that a review be carried out against the paper and subsequent action be created.

The Committee asked the following questions;

- Was data available on the residents' feedback? The Housing and Property Director advised a summary would be included in the minutes or sent to members directly.
- Would Officers agreed that the legislation could still differ somewhat compared to the white paper and therefore it would be wise to not concentrate too finally on the detail? The Housing and Property Director commented that the Council had two people who fed into the forums which included the Tenant and Leaseholder Federation Chairman, Mr W Marsh and the Head Asset and Facilities, Mr D Epton, so they felt well informed.
- Did officers respond to the green paper, and if so, did they feel that their comments had been addressed in the white paper? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Council had responded to the green paper and there had been no surprises.
- Could the data collected on landlords be used to rank them or highlight potential issues; and how did the Council measure the outcomes of complaints against landlords? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Council's was proposing to compare their Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) with other similar sized organisations to ensure consistency. In regard to complaints, there was a Complaints Policy for tenants and the number of complaints upheld or dismissed was monitored. On a wider point, estate improvements were being carried out and the before and after satisfaction results were being monitored to determine the return on investments.
- Did the white paper cover Councils' and Housing Associations'? Yes.
- Did the White Paper cover private landlords? No.
- Who was the regulator mention in the report and were self-referral realistic? The Housing and Property Director advised that regulator was called the Social Housing Regulator and a report would be brought forward to give the Committee a more detailed overview on this area. Regarding self-referral, she stated that organisations did self-refer, due to serious consequences if found not complying.
- Mr W Marsh advised that he sat on the Housing Ombudsman Residents Panel and both the Ombudsman and Regulator frequently attended their meetings. Regarding complaints, it was noted that the Ombudsman published details of the authorities that had not complied in addition to the fines imposed.

It was noted that the Regulator for social housing was an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

- What would be the cost of implementation? The Housing and Property Director advised that although they were not aware of the costs at the moment, they would be able to surmise from the gap analysis and review work. It was noted that the costs would be assumed within the HRA budget.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee noted the summary of the Social Housing White Paper and the potential impact on EFDC going forward; and
2. That an update highlighting the findings of a gap analysis and required actions to meet the standards would be proved at the next meeting.

7. OUR NEW APPROACH TO RESIDENTS INVOLVEMENT

The Housing and Property Director gave a short presentation regarding the changes that had occurred to resident involvement in estate and land management. (A copy of has been attached to the minutes).

The Committee asked the following questions;

- How did the Council engage with 'hard to reach' tenants? The Housing and Property Director advised that the officers had recognised that tenants needed a variety of options, rather than just meetings at the Civic Offices. Therefore they had expanded communication through estate meetings, virtual meetings, surveys, in local schools and webinars.
- What was the process for a virtual inspections?; what issues were being raised and how were they dealt with? The Housing and Property Director informed members that officer used mobile devices when out on estates and the issues would then be recorded through a workflow system and actioned accordingly.
- Did 'Housing News' still exist and if so, how was it disseminated? The Housing and Property Director advised that it was still produced in a digital format.
- How were the costs of the improvements to housing estates distributed across housing estates of mixed tenure? The Housing and Property Director advised that leaseholder paid a service charge, and where legally required, a Section 20 would be served. Further investigation would be required to determine if costs could be split costs across the HRA and General fund, on mixed tenure estates.
- How were costs associated with communal areas attributed to Leaseholders? The Housing and Property Director advised that a dedicated team worked out the costs, which were based on the rateable value of the property.
- Would a Debden Tenants Association resume? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Estate and Land Management Manager, R Smith would contact Councillor Wixley regarding creating a new Debden Tenants Panel.
- How many tenants or residents attended the webinars? It was noted that the webinar figures would be included in the minutes of the meeting.

*Figures supplied following the meeting

Webcast title	Live date	All views ↑
Housing service webinar	2021-01-20 14:40:00	154
Housing service webinar	2021-04-30 12:30:00	93

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee noted the new approach to resident's involvement; and
2. The Housing News would be distributed to Members.

8. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager gave an update on the Council's Customer Service in the following areas;

- What the residents were telling us;
- Complaints;
- Recycling Outlets;
- What had worked well; and
- The Customer Strategy.

She informed the Committee that significant changes had been made to the website customer satisfaction survey, which had enabled residents and the Council to respond more easily. In regards to the complaints, the majority of these had been in relation to business grants which had not been upheld. From the data it appeared that the complaints were not process driven but regarding the outcome. Furthermore, residents had now familiarised themselves with other recycling sack outlets in the District which could remove the need for residents visiting the Civic Office only for recycling sacks.

The re-opening of the Broadway Cash Office had received positive customer feedback and in the first month the Cash Office had taken almost £210,000 in total of which £109,000 was cash. The kiosks at the Civic would open once the building was Covid safe for external customers. The long term solutions for cash paying customers had been looked at and a report on this would follow in September.

Customer Strategy

It was noted that the new welcome lounge and partnership hub at the Civic offices had been progressing and partners included Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody. It was envisaged that services and partners would be aligned and available on the same days/times, to provide a one stop multi agency approach for residents.

There had been 'Customer Shoes' behavioural training session for staff, which had provided coaching for difficult and challenging customer conversations and a holistic view of customer behavioural training was being considered across all service areas.

The Corporate Communications had invested extensive support in the delivery of the recent County, District Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and Town and Parish elections and results of the elections had been posted via the website and social media. The election count centre at North Weald Airfield had featured extensively in the local TV news coverage broadcast by BBC London and the team had also supported the webcasting for virtual and face-to-face meetings in the Civic Office.

New and re-elected Members had attended the Civic Offices for their induction session and further work continued into Members technology and reviewing Members contact with officers.

The Committee asked the following questions;

- What was meant by 'long term solutions for cash payments' in relation to the Broadway cash office? The Customer Services Manager advised that the cash office at the Broadway would not be removed, although consideration was being given to what other options could be provided for cash paying residents across the District.
- What type of new queries had been received over the pandemic period; and what provisions were in place for staff following a difficult call? The Customer Services Manager advised that queries were mainly to do with what support the Council was offering and business grants. The Call centre staff were supplied with Frequently Asked Question(FAQ) crib sheet; received additional training and were supported by other service areas. If they received a particular difficult call, they had the use of virtual Teams or could call a colleague directly in addition to relevant training that they had received.
- Could Members receive the 'In Customer Shoes' training? Yes, the next session had scheduled for September and information about this course would be distributed in the Members Bulletin.
- How would the partnership hub work in practice? The Customer Service Manager advised that the hub would not be a drop-in centre but a appointments based service dependent on when the partners were available. It was envisioned that around 80% appointments would be booked and 20% would be allowed for other urgent cases.
- How would the partnership hub be advertised? The Service Manager advised that a communication plan would be developed to look at the options in conjunction with the partners advertising the hub as well.
- What was the service level performance for customer service? The Customer Service Manager advised that the quarter 1 period had not ended, so she was unable to provide the Committee with this information. Although it was noted that first point resolution for calls was currently at 54%.
- Why were there so many complaints in relation to business grants? The Finance, Qualis Client & Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised that there was numerous and complex criteria for the business grants, which were followed and had resulted in complaints on the success of applications, which differed from complaints concerning the process.
- What was IVR? The Customer Service Manager advised that it was the voice recognition system used to assist the call centre staff, if a FAQ was asked and IVR stood for Interactive Voice Recognition.

It was noted that some Members were experiencing frustration with the technology supplied to access reports, submit issues and contact the relevant officers. The Customer Services Manager advised that a daily report was being produced, which aimed to create a data of issues and resolution which would hopefully reduce the issues over time.

- In relation to KPI reporting, was the pentana system still used? The Customer Service Manager advised that the system had originally been used to manage projects and was not now used, although a review of project governance was being completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the update on 'what our residents were telling us' and the Customer Strategy.

9. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

<u>Agenda Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Exempt Information Paragraph Number</u>
11	Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Hub	3

10. WALTHAM ABBEY COMMUNITY & CULTURAL HUB

The Community and Wellbeing Services Director presented a business case for the creation of a Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey.

The Committee discussed the proposals and reasons set out by the Council in partnership with Essex County Council. The hub was aimed to support the economic and social regeneration of Waltham Abbey Town Centre.

RESOLVED:

The Committee supported the initial proposals for a Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting was 21 September 2021.

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Resident Involvement update

Estate and Land Management

Creating Great Places Where People Want to Live

Current model of resident involvement not fit for purpose



continually improve the way we engage and communicate with our residents



review our current model of resident involvement



to research best of breed resident involvement models



to recommend a new model of resident involvement which better meets the needs & wants of our customers, and which best suits the business.



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Position 14 months ago

- Face to face meetings with our strategic Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and Residents Groups
- Ad hoc consultation letters
- Digital newsletters
- Surveys

The image shows a Zoom meeting interface. On the left, a grid of 15 video thumbnails is displayed. The thumbnails are arranged in three rows of five. The top row shows participants: Rabe.dd, Stefan Kuehn (highlighted with a yellow border), Conny, Erfurth, and Mike. The middle row shows: albrecht, RonGames, Rote4132, Z thomas, and derbrauni. The bottom row shows: a blurred thumbnail with 'Page 18' text, Ailura, Roderich, Wikiwal, and another blurred thumbnail. On the right side, there is a 'Participants (22)' list. At the top of the list is a search bar 'Find a participant'. Below it, 11 participants are listed with their names and icons for mute, video, and chat. The participants listed are: SK Stefan Kuehn (Me), Team Ideenförderung (Host), R Rote4132, A Ailura, A albrecht, A Altsprachenfreund, C Conny, and D derbrauni. The interface also shows 'Speaker View' and a lock icon at the top.

Short Term

- We moved as many of our face to face meetings onto digital platforms
- Estate-based virtual coffee mornings
- Inspections via What's App and Facetime
- Housing Webinars



What else?

Increased grants for recognised residents' groups

New video conferencing licence grant

New literature.

Rebranding : GET INVOLVED

Social media presence

More Thank Bricks and Mortar Estate Enhancement Scheme / growing projects

Digitizing key services



Medium to long term

- Research
- Pilots
- Customer satisfaction survey
- Co-create group – residents / Officers / Members
- Capsticks



In the Pipeline

- Qtr 3 recommendations to Select Committee
- Implementation
- Microsite
- Open Reach super-fast broadband across District
- New Housing IT system
- Support existing and future resident groups
- Provided training

Questions



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 2021/22

Chairman: Cllr J Lea

Stronger Communities Corporate Programme Alignment focuses on People living longer, healthier and independent lives; Adult and Children were supported in times of need; and People and Communities achieve their potential.

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No.	Item	Deadline	Progress and Comments	Owner (Officer)	Programme of Meetings
1.	The Social Housing White Paper	15 June 2021	COMPLETED	D Fenton	15 June 21 21 Sept 21 11 Jan 22 1 Mar 22* (meeting solely for Ch/Inp Annual reports) 22 Mar 22
2.	Our new approach to resident's involvement	15 June 2021	COMPLETED	D. Fenton	
3.	Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Hub (Feasibility on Epping Forest culture and community hub)	15 June 2021	COMPLETED Detailed proposal to be considered	J. Gould	
4.	"What are our customers telling us?"	15 June 2021	Quarter 1 Report – Committee was updated. The figures for Q1 would not be available until 30 June.	S. Lewis/ R. Pavey	
		21 Sept 2021	Quarter 2 Report		
			Quarter 3 Report		
			Quarter 4 Report		
5.	Six-month report on the work of the Council-funded Police Officers	21 Sept 2021		C. Wiggins	

6.	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Review	21 Sept 21 22 March 22	EFDC's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy reaches end of life in March 2022. A revised strategy will need to be taken through governance structure ahead of formal adoption in March 2022.	J Gould	
7.	Allocations Scheme Review	21 Sept 21 1 March 22	Current allocations policy due to expire March 2022. A revised Policy will need to be drafted, consulted on and be taken through governance structure ahead of agreement by Cabinet ready for implementation of new policy in April 2022.	J Gould	
8.	Tenancy Policy Review	21 Sept 21 1 March 22	Current tenancy policy due to expire March 2022. A revised Policy will need to be drafted, consulted on and be taken through governance structure ahead of agreement by Cabinet ready for implementation of new policy in April 2022.	J. Gould	
9.	Housing Strategy Review	21 Sept 21 22 March 22	EFDC's current Housing Strategy reaches end of life in March 2022. A revised strategy will need to be taken through governance structure ahead of formal adoption in March 2022.	J. Gould/ D. Fenton	
10.	Domestic Abuse Act	11 Jan 22	A briefing to members on the Act and the Strategy and impact on EFDC.	J. Gould/ C. Wiggins	
11.	Presentation from the District Police Commander	1 March 2022	Annual Report	C. Wiggins	
12.	Community Safety Partnership annual report and review of the district Strategic Intelligence Assessment	1 March 2022	Annual Report	C. Wiggins	
13.	Housing Associations	TBC	To consider how the Council could scrutinise housing associations. Requested O&S 3.06.21 Supported by the Committee 15.06.21	J. Gould	
14.	EFDC Museum Collections	21 Sept 21	To consider the high-level action Plan for the programme of work over 3 years, sent out in the Corporate performance Reporting Q3 and requested at O&S on 19.11.20.	F. Pellegrino/ J. Gould	

15.	Data insight led review of customer service outlets	TBC	Options and recommendations for short, medium and long-term options		
16.	Customer Service Strategy	TBC	Key Objectives 6 Monthly Report	R. Pavey	
17.	Digital Inclusion	TBC		S Lewis	

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Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Community & Regulatory Services Portfolio

SCRUTINY



Subject: Community Safety Team EFDC Funded Police Officers 6 monthly update

Officer contact for further information: Caroline Wiggins Directorate Specialist

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564532)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Communities Select Committee receives a six-month report on the work and range of operations of the Council's funded Police team.

Report:

The Council's funded Police Officers became officially operational on 20 July 2018 and continue to make a real impact to the reduction in crime within the Epping Forest District.

The team are tasked according to the District Community Safety Partnership priorities which are identified through the Annual Strategic Assessment. These are aligned to the priorities set by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's (PFCC) Policing Plan. Aside from these priorities the team are occasionally deployed to support EFDC staff in carrying out their work where there is an identified threat, harm or risk to staff. Close management of the tasking process has ensured that our police team are deployed efficiently and effectively.

The team have accepted 20 tasking requests in 2021 to date (2019 = 52, 2020 = 50)

The most significant work in 2021 is the partnership work that has taken place in response to the problem of county lines drugs supply in Waltham Abbey. A separate briefing has been prepared and will be presented to members.

Highlights of other work completed include:

- Supporting council officers with joint visits at licenced and business premises highlighted to be committing COVID legislation breaches.
- Support Environmental Health with the initial site visit at a House in Multiple Occupancy (HMO) where there was potential threat, harm and risk to staff. The visit was conducted without incident and the EHO was able to secure sufficient evidence.
- Site visit with Planning Enforcement and Community Resilience at a venue where the occupant presents risk to staff.
- Site visits and representation at professionals meeting in relation to high-risk homeless person. Team also conduct the arrest of the same subject for breach of Criminal Behaviour Order.
- Plan and prepare community policing resources for the local election process. Also provide police cover throughout the two additional count days.
- Targeted patrols and activity around three specific locations which were subject to anti-social behaviour and required a medium to long-term problem solving approach. These taskings are still ongoing but have resulted in arrests, seizures of nuisance vehicles, stop/searches, service of Community Protection Warnings and enforcement of any EFDC-lead orders.

- March: following reports of a fraud in progress (elderly victim, bank cards reported stolen and police send a taxi to collect). The team identified the subject vehicle and tracked it via ANPR to the M11. Appropriate tactics were put in place to prevent a pursuit and the funded officers arrested the offender. The investigation is still ongoing but this was a significant and rare arrest to catch an offender at a live fraud such as this.
- April: Two arrests following a pursuit with cloned vehicle which was found decamped in Buckhurst Hill. Two men who were linked to organised crime were stopped nearby. Police dog located car key and illegal cloning equipment nearby.
- May: Following an attempted burglary in Loughton the subject made off in a van which then made off from officers. The funded team officers located the offender hiding in bushes and arrested him. He was charged and remanded for burglary offences.
- July: Following a series of distraction thefts in the district whereby victims had their Rolex watches stolen, the team reviewed CCTV and identified the offender's vehicle. By chance they sighted two suspects that matched the description parked on Epping High Street paying close attention to pedestrians. The team made the arrest of both suspects, who remain under investigation at time of writing.

Together with the above within the last six months EFDC funded officers together with the Community Resilience and Neighbourhoods Teams have focused their efforts on Op Synapse targeting issues within Waltham Abbey. A presentation will be delivered

Reason for decision: N/A

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Consultation undertaken: N/A

Resource implications: N/A

Legal and Governance Implications: N/A

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: N/A

Background Papers: N/A



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Community and Regulatory Services

Subject: Museum Collections Project - Rationalisation

Officer contact for further information: Francesca Pellegrino (01992 564996)

Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin (01992 564243)

SCRUTINY



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Epping Forest District Museum is currently undertaking a review of its collections to ensure material held remains relevant, accessible and safe for public and staff. This is a procedure recommended to be undertaken by all museums, and follows guidelines and ethics laid out by the Museums Association. This report outlines the process and reasons for this project as well as providing an update on project status.

Report:

1. Background to the project

Epping Forest District Museum's (EFDM) collections cover the breadth of local community history. Continuing to protect, collect and provide access to the district's local heritage is a fundamental part of supporting Epping Forest District Council's objectives in building a stronger place and communities.

Over the years, a broad collecting policy combined with limited documentation has led to much collecting of material, some of which is either not relevant or suitable for the museum and its audiences. The collection now totals over 100,000 objects held across 4 storage locations.

Like many museums, the collections have begun to exceed the space available for storage and this presents a risk to their future care, management and access. The main stores which are on site benefitted from a major Lottery funded capital redevelopment in 2016. Improvements included an environmentally controlled store and a 'public viewing' store. Whilst this is a major improvement, the redevelopment project did not address the collection documentation problems or the growing collections here onsite and in off-site storage. All are now at full capacity. In addition, the three off-site stores do not provide a sound environment for the collections held there. Some of the objects are stored very high up on shelves, boxes are collapsing, and there are objects obstructing aisles, making it increasingly difficult for staff and volunteers to access them properly and safely. This full capacity means that there is no expansion space to address gaps in the collection with material highlighted in the Collections Development Policy, to help ensure we continue to document the past and present for future generations.

The museum inherited extensive and poorly documented collections at its formation and historically lacked the resources to address the issue. Further collecting has added to the backlog leading to a situation where collections have grown without full records being created. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to provide a full or accurate public service.

Documentation and storage issues have meant that objects have been acquired which fall outside of the Museum's collecting policy or within the Epping Forest District. These issues

have also led to duplicate material being collected, some of which may not have any local stories or provenance linked to them.

Public and staff safety is also a concern. Packed, full collection stores combined with out-of-date or sub-standard documentation has meant that material exists within the stores which should be handled with safety and care, and up to date risk assessments should be in place. For example, the museum holds objects classed as hazardous such as asbestos, arsenic, firearms and controlled drugs. The Council must ensure it has thoroughly audited its collection and documentation in order to comply with Health & Safety regulations to ensure the Council knows exactly what is held, and that material is recorded and handled with due care. This project will enable these key issues to be addressed.

It should be noted that a process of historic over-collecting and issues with documentation is present in all museums, but the team at Epping Forest District Museum recognise the importance of addressing this pressing issue now by embarking upon a realistic rationalisation project across its collections, so that it remains relevant to the District's residents and visitors and engages and inspires generations across communities.

2. Guiding Principles

For this project the following guiding principles have been agreed and adopted:

1. The Museum abides by the Museums Association's Code of Ethics and disposals guidance which are the guiding principles for all museums. As an accredited museum, a regular audit and review of all process and procedures is undertaken to comply with industry standards.
2. The collection is owned by the district's residents, representing the generosity of past, and current donors, to tell the story of place and communities for the benefit of future generations.
3. The collection is established for the long term and each generation has responsibility to the next to ensure public collections remain sustainable.
4. It is imperative collections are used and developed in response to the needs of society and that they evolve. Museum collections should provide full opportunity for public **use** and **engagement**.
5. Disposal is an integral part of responsible collections management and will ensure that museums are fit for future generations.

3. Professional Project Support

The Museum has appointed Museum Consultant, Helen Giles, to develop plans for this project, provide support and undertake an evaluation report on completion. The Museum is in constant contact with the Essex Museum Development Officer, SHARE Museums East and The Museum Association to ensure every step of the project is undertaken correctly. Specialists are consulted on a regular basis when particular collections or types of items are being reviewed to ensure appropriate information is gathered.

Volunteers have been recruited and fully trained to support the project.

4. Project Process and Museum Association Guidelines



- Full audit of the collections.
- Gathers all documentation associated with the object and tracks key important information such as provenance, condition, historical importance, societal importance etc.
- Volunteers undertake research as part of this phase.



- A strict scoring regime is used.
- Consideration is taken as to items on loan, items may relate to other localities in the UK or items whose condition may pose a health and safety risk.
- Consultation takes place with specialists, other museums, wider team, local groups and donors.
- Once the items have been scored, the list goes to a steering committee (Cllr Mary Sartin, local groups, museum staff, specialists and volunteers) for discussion and sign off.
- The list is signed off by the Portfolio Holder and is opened up to other councillors.



- This phase follows the Museum Association strict code of ethics which is the governing body for museums.
- To ensure ethical removal there is a strict step by step process that must be followed. The core aim is that items remain in the public domain.
- **Process 1: DISPOSE OF MATERIAL HAZARDOUS/DAMAGED**
- **Process 2: RETURN OF LOANS TO DONORS**
- **Process 3: OFFER TO ACCREDITED MUSEUMS (2months)**
- **Process 4: OFFER TO NON ACCREDITED MUSEUMS/ PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS (1 month minimum)**
- **Process 5: FINAL DISPOSAL / DESTRUCTION (return to original owner, sale as scrap or gift to charity, or destruction as final resort)**

5. Project to date

North Weald Storage Location

- All items at the North Weald storage location (54) have been through phase 1 and phase 2.
- 47 of these items have been identified for removal from the collection because they do not meet the Collections Development Policy and have been signed off by the Steering Committee and via a formal Portfolio Holder Decision.
- 16 of these items have been removed due to being hazardous and posing a serious risk to health and safety. These items contained high levels of asbestos and guidance from the Museum Associated made it clear this is what was needed.
- 10 of these items have been transferred to the Community Culture and Wellbeing Team's community allotment projects.
- The remaining items are awaiting transfer to other museums or community groups, such as Copped Hall, who the Council is currently in contact with.

Store One at the Museum

- All items (1717 – this does not include archaeological items which are being reviewed separately) have been through phase 1 and 2 of the process.
- So far 123 of those items have been put forward and signed off by the Steering Committee and completed the Portfolio Holder decision process.
- These items are now going through phase 3 and are being advertised to museums – with direct contact made with relevant museums for specific items. For example, the Museum of Computing for the computers that have been identified.
- Further groups of items from store one will come forward to Steering Committee once the panel have finalised the scoring of these items.

Store Two at the museum

- Approximately 700 items have been through phase 1 of the process.

Store Three at the museum

- Approximately 150 items have been through phase 1 of the process.

Cr@te Storage Location

- Approximately 150 items have been through phase 1 of the process.

6. Project Success to Date

- The Museum is currently being recognised across the industry as undertaking a fully ethical and high standard project.
- Articles on the project have been featured in industry magazines, online web resources and the team has been asked to speak at various conferences.
- The team has uncovered some fantastic stories in the collection which would not have been discovered if the project was not undertaken.
- By undertaking the project the objects are already being stored and cared for better, the documentation and information about each object has improved which also, in turn, supports the current work to improve the Museum's documentation database and allows the collections to be made accessible online.
- The project has the full support of key groups including the Waltham Abbey Historical Society who supported the setup of the Museum in the first place.
- The audit has also highlighted objects and collections that require further work and support. So far a bid for £120,000 from Arts Council England has been made, to support work on the Museum's Ethnographic Collection – this project will help gather a better understanding of the collection and its important history, enable increased public engagement with the collection, support co-curation and projects with the communities

from which these objects originate and support the Museum to address issues around decolonisation. A further external funding bid will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support a partnership project with the Lea Valley Regional Park and Historic England on material relating to the Abbey Church.

- So far 10 new volunteers have been recruited for the project with a total of 19 volunteers currently supporting this project. To date, collections volunteers have contributed 556 hours working on this specific project, equating to nearly £5,500 investment into the district.

Reason for decision: To confirm, outline and update on the museum collection rationalisation project.

Options considered and rejected: Options include to retain all items currently held in the collections as current.

Resource implications: Within existing budget and staff resourcing.

Legal and Governance Implications: The Museum Association guidelines and Code of Ethics provide the industry standard for ensuring this project complies with procedures.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: Through this project the resource and environmental impacts of managing collections across 4 different locations will be improved. Once complete the product will ensure safer access to collections for staff and the public. The project will also see a number of local groups and the community to benefit. Not only through better access to the collection itself but objects that are not reallocated to other museums will be offered to the community and local groups to support their work and projects.

Consultation Undertaken: A strict scoring process has been followed under the guidelines that are produced by the Museum Association. The list of items has been reviewed by a steering committee who have agreed the proposed decision. The Steering Committee consists of staff members who are not undertaking the project itself, Councillor Mary Sartin, a freelance museum consultant and where appropriate subject specialists, volunteers and community groups. Where appropriate, the person or persons who donated the items has been contacted and the Waltham Abbey Historical Society which provided a number of items for the collection has also been consulted. Once the list has been signed off by the steering committee the object and report undergo the Portfolio Holder Decision Process and allows wider councillors to review the decision. If the recommendation is approved – following Museum Association guidelines the items will first be offered to other accredited museums then follow the process of reallocation which includes a number of steps to ensure the items stay in the public domain – these steps are outlined in the above diagram.

Background Papers: Previous Portfolio Holder Decisions (February 2021 and June 2021)

Impact Assessments: Previous EIAs for Portfolio Holder Decisions (February 2021 and June 2021)

Risk Management: This project has been assessed as one of the council's high priority projects and a risk assessment has been undertaken. The key risks which have been assessed are:

- Not following the Museum Association guidelines for correct procedures for Rationalisation. This could lead to reputational damage; and
- Not undertaking proper consultation – this could also risk reputational damage.

These two risks have been properly assessed and all plans and guidelines for this project ensure that the risk has been mitigated. The project team are following a guided process to ensure the two risks above have been accounted for.

Equality: The project will enable the museum to ensure it represents diverse audiences and the district through time through its collection by uncovering stories about the objects currently in the collection but also making space to add to the collection and ensure the whole community, past, present and future, can be represented through the collections.



SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Customer & Partnerships Services

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.

1 What our customers are telling us

A small percentage of customers fed back concerns regarding broken links on our website. These links have been fixed and customer feedback will be monitored. Social media continues to grow as an interactive communications resource as customers report day to day issues such as flytipping and littering. The website continues to provide one of the most effective and efficient means of accessing Council information, making payments and requesting services. In the year to 31 August there were 1,038,956 visits and 3,196,021 page-views. Highest page views were recorded in April (411,120) corresponding with the usual increase associated with the elections. Over the same period webcasting achieved 33,935 views. The largest single webcast was Full Council on 8 February 2021 – 775 live views.

2 Complaints

Quarter 1 saw a total of 65 complaints which is a reduction from 97 received in the previous quarter, there are no particular trends to report. We received thirteen waste complaints for street cleaning potentially due to people out and about more and thirteen for Revenue & Benefits for delays with grant payments and Council Tax related.

3 Customer Satisfaction & Complaints Performance

Quarter 1 – KPI's

- Overall customer satisfaction 66% (target 80%)
- Complaints resolved within SLA 89% (target 85%)
- First point resolution 49% (target 45%)

Service levels have been severely impacted by resourcing issues in the customer contact centre due to long term staff absences. The knock-on effect means increased pressure on the remaining staff who have shown great resilience however increased wait times for phone calls are inevitable.

4 What's worked well

The Welcome Lounge opened on 19th July, after a slow start we are seeing an average footfall of 45 visitors a week (in comparison to an average of 300 pre Covid). Visits were mainly for Housing and Revenue & Benefits. Visitors requesting recycling sacks have been more than happy when advised of all the local outlets around the District to collect sacks.

Our Community Hub opens 13th September following recent familiarisation tours for Partners. A press release was issued w/c 6th September including a video to support the launch. As a reminder partners joining us include Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody.

We are in discussion with further partners who have expressed an interest in joining. The aligning service areas will be in attendance in the Hub on the same days/times as partners providing a one stop multi agency approach for our residents.

The Broadway Cash Office continues to see strong usage since reopening on 12th April, with over a thousand unique customers and £660,000 income, of which nearly £320,000 has been cash. The kiosk at Waltham abbey has taken £182,000 in total of which £100,000 was cash. The kiosks at Epping Civic offices reopened on 21 July, taking £34,000 total of which 16,000 was cash.

At the beginning of June we launched a touch tone telephone payment service to replace our end of life voice recognition system. This replacement has resulted in a significant increase in the number of successful automated payments, with far fewer customers struggling to use the system and requests for additional officer support down by approximately 70%.

With regards to the paper on the future options for cash paying customers, final analysis is being completed prior to the publication of this report. This is expected by the end of September/early October.

5 Customer Strategy Update

5.1 'Customer Shoes' behavioural training

The last planned seminar will be held on 13th September when again thirty colleagues will be attending the training session to be run by the training provider the Impact Factory.

In response to delegates feedback we have several experienced Officers & Managers attending to experience share how they deal with very difficult and challenge customer conversations. The session will be recorded and shared with all colleagues.

We now have three modules in place to support colleagues with challenging conversations and this is module one. Module two focusses on telephone aggression and module three conflict management. At the last Select Committee some Members expressed an interest in receiving this training. The content of the session has been refined and developed up until this stage, now it's in the final format a conversation will take place with Democratic Services with regards to potential budget to accommodate next year.

5.2 Multi-Channel Digital Platform

At the last select committee we reported that we are investigating potential suppliers for a multi-channel customer engagement platform in the Contact Centre. Due to severe resourcing issues this project was put on hold. A detailed business case outlining the expected outcomes and benefits will be produced shortly.

5.3 Corporate External Communications

Extensive digital and social media output continues across a wide variety of Council services. Corporate Communications continues to prove support for Covid recovery. A campaign in coordination with West Essex CCG and Essex County Council targeted specific areas of low vaccine uptake within the district. Further pan-Essex coordination included communications responses to the Afghan resettlement programme.

The introduction of hybrid webcasting technology to the Council Chamber has successfully facilitated the inclusion of remote participants such as planning applicants and objectors via Zoom. Government legislation prohibits the participation of members remotely but feedback from other participants suggests the technology works well, with reduction in the requirement for physical attendance also contributing to the Council's climate change aspirations.

Plans are in progress at time of writing for the launch of a news app – provisionally titled District Matters. Following a soft launch in September, the app will provide a digital platform for the Council to share its own and third party news content from partners and other relevant stakeholders such as Essex Police, Essex County Council and Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau.

5.4 Members Technology & Members Contact process review

Recruitment is underway for a new Team Manager but we are yet to find the right candidate therefore the recruitment campaign continues.

Our aim is always to ensure you have ease of access to the information you need. In the absence of a full Members Portal at this stage, we are in the process of developing an interim single access point via the website. Going live in early September, all the main links that Members need should be included in this one location including access to Members Contact.

5.5 Digital Inclusion

Our aim of providing coaching and accessibility to technology is shared by partners throughout our District and we recently held a workshop with several Partners as well as Cllr Lion to discuss how we can work together in a collaborative manner. It was a really positive session with some great examples shared of how our residents have been receiving digital support via coaching sessions. Everyone agreed that a working group going forwards is a good idea. Once the new Team Manager is on board this work will progress.

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

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SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Housing Services

Subject: Review of the Housing Allocations Policy

Officer contact for further information: Jennifer Gould, Director Community and Wellbeing

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin (01992 564532)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note the outcome of the stage 1 initial consultation on the review of the Allocations Policy, which is due for renewal in April 2022; and
2. To consider and give in principle approval to take the proposed major changes to the Allocations Policy 2022 – 2027 recommended within this report to stage 2 consultation between October 2021 and December 2021.

Report:

1. As a Local Housing Authority Epping Forest District Council has a statutory duty to publish a Housing Allocations Policy for determining priorities - and the procedure to be followed - when selecting a household to be offered the tenancy of Council owned accommodation, or to be nominated for an offer of housing from another registered provider with stock in the district.
2. The current Housing Allocations Policy was published in 2018 and offers choice-based lettings for most applicants on the housing register. Qualifying eligible applicants are placed in one of three bands A, B or C depending on their assessed need. The applicants' bands and registration dates are used to prioritise expressions of interest, or 'bids' for vacant properties that are advertised on a weekly basis. The purpose of a choice based letting scheme is to enable applicants to exercise some degree of choice as to where they live (albeit entirely limited by supply and demand).
3. Under the current scheme some households are unable to bid for properties that are advertised and receive a direct offer of accommodation. These households include but are not limited to:
 - homeless single people and families to whom the Council has accepted a main housing duty under part 7 of the Housing Act 1996
 - existing social housing tenants who qualify for a priority transfer
 - applicants living in supported housing
4. The Social Housing Annual Lettings Report 2020 –2021 highlights that the demand for affordable rented housing in Epping Forest District continues to outweigh the supply of suitable accommodation.
5. The private rented sector is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many low to middle

income families and single people who would have previously been able to secure their own accommodation without approaching the Council for help. This is largely in keeping with the national trend. Covid 19 has brought into sharp focus the need for key workers to ensure the local economy and local services continue to function. Many key workers have families with young children or are single people, often on low incomes, at the start of their career or are returning to work and need affordable local housing to sustain employment and deliver essential services.

6. Studies have consistently found that housing, health, wellbeing and life-chances are inextricably linked. A comprehensive, fair, transparent and flexible allocations policy enables the Council to manage expectations, make the best use of current housing stock and plan for future housing supply across all tenures to meet the needs and aspirations of its current and future residents.

7. The full review of the Housing Allocations Policy began in May 2021 along with simultaneous reviews of the Tenancy Policy, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the overarching Housing Strategy which are all due for renewal in 2022.

8. A series of consultation events took place between July 2021 and August 2021 including bitesize briefing sessions with Members of the Council, residents, professional partners, other statutory services and staff, desktop research by in-house technical experts, statistical analysis of national and local data and an on-line survey which closed on 30 August 2021.

9. The review has highlighted the following evidence-based issues and opportunities and proposed recommendations for inclusion in the Housing Allocations Policy 2022- 2027

Defining the Priority Bands

At present there are three priority bands. Band A band B and band C.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to attribute a clearly identifiable needs level to each band and review the criteria for each band in accordance with the following guiding principles:

Band A Emergency Need – Band A will be awarded where an imminent move to alternative suitable accommodation is required to mitigate a serious and immediate risk to an applicant's life or a serious and immediate risk of a lifechanging detrimental effect on their mental or physical wellbeing or that of a member of their household.

The applicant will usually be offered a direct allocation as soon as something suitable becomes available, although the applicant can still bid for accommodation should an appropriate property be advertised in advance of the direct allocation.

It is anticipated that very few households will be awarded Band A, and those who do will have their applications reviewed most frequently to ensure this band is only reserved for emergencies and does not become silted.

Band B Urgent Need – Band B will be awarded where an applicant is living in unsuitable accommodation that is having or is likely to have a detrimental and long-term impact on their mental or physical wellbeing or that of a member of their household, and there are insufficient grounds to warrant an emergency move ahead of other applicants with an urgent need to move. Or where it is in the Council's interest to move the household.

The applicant will usually be expected to secure an offer by bidding for advertised properties. Automated bidding or a direct allocation may be made if the applicant fails to bid and/or secure an offer within a given timescale.

Band C Moderate Need – Band C will be awarded where an applicant is living in undesirable accommodation, but they do not have an urgent need to move.

The applicant will be expected to pursue an offer by bidding for advertised properties and advised to maximise their limited prospects of securing an offer by considering the widest possible choice of suitable properties.

Priority Date

Point 18.5 At present when applicants bid for advertised properties the household in the highest band who has been on the housing register the longest will be considered first regardless of how long they have been in that priority band. This means that they will be housed ahead of other households that may have been waiting in the higher band (due to having a with a greater need to move) for longer.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to prioritise bids for accommodation based on the applicant's band and then in the date order that they joined that band, rather than the date they joined the Housing Register.

Medical Categories

Appendix 1 Page 17 of the current scheme details the approach to determining medical priority. At present there are two categories 'urgent medical need' which places an applicant in band A or 'moderate medical need' which places an applicant in band C.

These two categories do not account for those households with serious and/or progressive long-term medical conditions that are being exacerbated by their living conditions or would improve or stabilise by moving to more suitable accommodation, but do not require emergency rehousing.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to have three medical categories that accord with the three priority bands. i.e. band A - emergency medical need, band B - urgent medical need, band C - moderate medical need.

Domestic Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a duty on the Local Authority to provide support to victims and children in safe accommodation and award all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse a priority need for housing.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to incorporate the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 into the Housing Allocations Scheme; to provide support to victims and children in safe accommodation, and to award all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse a priority band for housing.

Homeless Households

Where the Council has accepted a duty to provide settled accommodation to a homeless household under part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 it is required to give reasonable preference to their application for housing.

Appendix 4 point 1.2 of the current scheme sets out the policy for housing homeless applicants. However; it is silent on the reasonable preference that the Council gives to homeless households and this cohort is not listed under any of the priority bands. They receive a direct offer of accommodation and cannot currently bid for properties that are advertised. This may encourage the applicant to remain dependant on the council rather than be pro-active and maximise the opportunity to move out of temporary accommodation.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to award priority band B to homeless households that the Council has accepted a duty to rehouse under part 7 of the

Housing Act 1996.

Recommendation 6

It is further recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to afford homeless households the opportunity to bid for suitable properties in accordance with their priority banding, on the understanding that they will be made a direct offer to enable the Council to discharge its duty if they fail to bid or secure an offer via choice based lettings within a reasonable timescale.

Under-occupation

Point 18.9 of the current scheme addresses the refusal policy for under-occupation. If a household is living in a Council property that has more bedrooms than they need they can join the housing register in priority band A and bid for smaller accommodation as it becomes available. If the applicant successfully bids for then refuses an offer on four occasions they are automatically suspended and are prevented from bidding for any further properties for 12 months.

This penalty may well be counterproductive as it is in the Council's interest to promote and support downsizing, and reasonable to expect a tenant who is downsizing through choice to be selective about where they decide to move to.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to remove the penalty of suspending an under occupier from bidding if they refuse 4 offers and replace this with a discretionary decision to suspend an applicant who repeatedly bids for then refuses a property where it is evident that they have no intention of moving.

Households that are under occupying family sized accommodation can only bid for properties that are the right size and type for their assessed need, regardless of the number of bedrooms they are giving up. This policy could also be counter-productive as it may discourage under-occupiers of larger properties (for example a 4-bedroom parlour house which rarely become available) from downsizing if they would like to move to a smaller property but want to retain a spare bedroom for relatives or visitors to stay overnight.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to allow under-occupiers wishing to downsize from a house to a flat where they are giving up one or more bedrooms, to be considered for a flat with a spare bedroom (i.e. a couple or single person can move from a 3-bed house to a 2-bed flat or a 1-bed flat) with or without a garden.

Under-occupiers wishing to downsize from a 4-bed house who are giving up 2 or more bedrooms can be considered for a flat or a house with a spare bedroom with or without a garden (i.e. a couple or single person can move from a 4-bed house to a 2-bed house or flat or a 1-bed house or flat) with or without a garden.

Serious Unacceptable Behaviour including Rent Arrears

Point 14.12 of the current scheme stipulates that "any person or member of their household who within the past 7 years has been guilty of serious unacceptable behaviour...that would give sufficient grounds to issue possession proceedings if they were a secure, assured or fixed term tenant" will not qualify.

The 7-year rule at point 14.12 of the current policy also applies to serious rent arrears (including housing benefit and court cost arrears).

The 7 year rule does not take account of the cause of the arrears, which may have been an isolated incident, and/or through no fault of the individual and/or has since been resolved, and may be counterproductive relative to the negative consequences of preventing a household in need access to the housing register.

This measure is now subject to challenge as it has largely been superseded by recent legislation to protect vulnerable individuals from homelessness. Examples include but are not limited to the recognition of economic abuse as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; and mental or physical ill health, redundancy and addiction which could potentially trigger a Mental Health Crisis Breathing Space or Standard Breathing Space introduced by the Debt Respite Scheme Regulations 2020.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to replace the 7-year rule for all unacceptable behaviour with a prescribed risk-based approach to determining whether a history of unacceptable behaviour is serious enough to warrant exclusion from the Housing Register. This will look at patterns and severity of behaviour, cause and effect, recent history and support mechanisms that the applicant has to prevent reoccurrence.

Allocation of Accommodation – rent arrears in excess of 4 weeks rent

18.4 of the current policy stipulates that an offer of accommodation will not be made to any home seeker who has rent arrears in excess of 4 weeks rent. This can be counter-productive if the household has particular needs and they lose the opportunity to secure a property that rarely becomes available, particularly if the applicant has a payment plan in place that is being maintained

Recommendation 9

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on replacing the blanket 4-week arrears rule with a discretionary prescribed risk based approach to determine whether an offer can be made to an applicant with rent arrears based on the cause of the arrears, and repayment plan.

Local Lettings Plans and Key Worker Housing

The Housing Act 1996 enables Housing Authorities to agree local plans to allocate particular accommodation to people of a particular description which may differ from the overall allocations policy.

This is specifically to promote mixed communities and address crime hot-spots, economic regeneration and local skills shortages an example may be prioritising medical staff, blue light emergency officers or teachers on low incomes for affordable housing that is close to a new or understaffed medical centres, police, ambulance or fire stations or schools, or not allocating properties to vulnerable applicants in areas where there is a significant risk of being targeted by drug dealers seeking to take over their flat to supply drugs, otherwise known as Cuckooing.

Recommendation 9

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to include the use of local lettings plans where appropriate to do so in accordance with the requirements of the Housing Act 1996.

Priority Transfers and Management Transfers

Appendix 3 to the current scheme introduces the umbrella term “Priority Transfers” to capture a range of unrelated reasons that a household may need to move from one Council property to another. Grounds include medical need, disability, antisocial behaviour, hate crime major repairs and demolition although there is limited detail about the offer policy that applies to each ground (i.e. like-for like, direct offer or bidding, single or multiple offers etc) and the policy is silent on transfers due to social overcrowding.

Recommendation 10

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to replace Appendix 3 Priority Transfers with relevant sections in the main body of the Allocations Scheme that define the offer policies for management transfers, temporary or permanent decants, overcrowding and welfare grounds (as well as medical grounds which have already been addressed earlier in the report).

Pre- Transfer Property Inspections and Recharge Policy

The current scheme is silent on pre-transfer inspections to evaluate the condition of the property, and recharge policy for properties that are left in an unsuitable condition

Recommendation 11

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to introduce 'ready to go' inspections for tenants who are pursuing a transfer, to ensure they leave the property in a suitable condition, and to have the ability to suspend applicants from bidding until they bring their property up to the required standard.

It is further recommended for anyone who does leave a property in a poor condition (for example it was fine during the 'ready to go' inspection but damage has been done since) to be recharged for the cost of bringing the property back up to a standard that is suitable to relet it.

Reason for decision: To enable EFDC to progress to stage 2 of the consultation exercise, thereby fulfilling its statutory obligation to consult prescribed stakeholders on any major change to the Allocations Scheme and the associated policies and strategies; before presenting the outcome of the reviews and respective recommendations to Cabinet for consideration and approval in Spring 2022.

Consultation undertaken:

Invitations to participate in live bitesize briefings or view pre-recorded briefings and complete an online survey were sent to:

- Council tenants and leaseholders
- Partner agencies and community groups with an interest in housing in the district
- Private registered providers of social housing in the district
- District, borough and city councils in the county
- EFDC staff
- Members of the Council
- Clerks of parish and town councils to forward to their respective elected members.

The survey and associated information was also published on the Council website and the intranet.

The generic survey ensured every participant was asked the same set of questions. At the time of writing this report 71 participants completed the survey. The results of the survey have been analysed and will be reproduced as a report for circulation and publication as part of the review.

Resource implications: None

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: None

Background Papers:

Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England 2012
Epping Forest District Council Housing Allocations Policy 2018-2022

Social Housing Lettings Annual Report 2020-2021

The Big 4 Initial Consultation – Findings (Draft) September 2021

Risk Management: N/A

Equality: An indicative Impact Assessment is being maintained and updated as the review progresses to conclusion.

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SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

Portfolio: Housing Services

Subject: Review of the Tenancy Policy

Officer contact for further information: Jennifer Gould Director Community and Wellbeing

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note the outcome of the stage 1 initial consultation on the review of the Tenancy Policy 2015- 2022 which is due for renewal in April 2022; and
2. To approve the recommendation to consult with stakeholders over the proposal not to make any material changes to the terms of the current Tenancy Policy when publishing the draft Tenancy Policy 2022-2027 for stage 2 formal consultation between October-December 2021.

Report:

1. As a stockholding Local Housing Authority Epping Forest District Council has a statutory duty to publish both a Tenancy Strategy or framework (setting out the matters to which the registered providers of social housing within its district are to have regard when formulating their tenancy policies), and a Tenancy Policy with regards to its own stock.
2. The Tenancy Policy must incorporate:
 - a. the kind of tenancies that will be granted
 - b. the circumstances in which a tenancy of a particular kind will be granted
 - c. where tenancies are granted for fixed terms, the lengths of the terms
 - d. the circumstances in which a further tenancy will be granted upon expiry of the existing tenancy.
3. EFDC adopted the West Essex Tenancy Strategy on 22 October 2012 and published Version 1 of the current Tenancy Policy on 27 July 2015. The Tenancy Policy was originally due for review in July 2020.
4. In July 2020 the Portfolio holder for Housing agreed minor changes to the Tenancy Policy including the extension of 2-year tenancies to 10-year tenancies, and to postpone the full periodic review of the policy by two years to July 2022 (to take account of the impact of Covid 19 on the consultation process).
5. The full review of the Tenancy Policy began in May 2021 along with simultaneous reviews of the Housing Allocations Policy, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and the overarching Housing Strategy (as there are a number of interdependencies and they are all due for renewal in 2022). A series of consultation events took place between July 2021 and August 2021 including bitesize briefing sessions with Members of the Council, residents, professional partners, other statutory services and staff, and an on-line survey which closed on 30 August 2021.

6. The initial stage 1 consultation found the majority of respondents thought that EFDC should continue to issue 10-year fixed term tenancies for general needs applicants. Half of the respondents said some tenancies should be longer or shorter than 10 years depending on the household circumstances. Typically suggesting longer or lifetime tenancies for elderly or vulnerable people, and shorter tenancies for families who may eventually be able to afford to buy or downsize as their children move out.

7. A Government Equalities Impact Assessment in 2016 found that nationwide far fewer councils and housing associations had introduced fixed term tenancies than had been anticipated. A recent desk-top analysis of councils in Essex found that of the other stockholding councils Castlepoint, Colchester, Basildon and Harlow are issuing lifetime tenancies rather than flexible tenancies. And whilst Rochford is not a stockholder it has reported that many of the Registered Providers operating in the area have ceased issuing flexible tenancies because of the disproportionate burden of the review process on their resources.

8. To date none of the 10-year fixed term tenancies in EFDC have reached the point of review.

Reason for decision: To enable EFDC to progress to stage 2 of this consultation exercise, thereby fulfilling its statutory obligation to consult prescribed stakeholders on any major change to the Tenancy Policy and the associated policies and strategies; before presenting the outcome of the reviews respective recommendations to Cabinet for approval in Spring 2022.

Options considered and rejected: Issuing shorter fixed term tenancies for some or all applicants, issuing longer fixed term tenancies for some or all applicants and reverting to issuing lifetime tenancies for all applicants.

Consultation undertaken:

Invitations to participate in live bitesize briefings or view pre-recorded briefings and complete an online survey were sent to:

- Council tenants and leaseholders
- Partner agencies and community groups with an interest in housing in the district
- Private registered providers of social housing in the district
- District, borough and city councils in the county
- Members of the Council
- Clerks of parish and town councils to forward to their respective elected members.

The survey and associated information was also published on the Council website and the intranet.

The generic survey ensured every participant was asked the same set of questions. 71 participants completed the survey. The results of the survey have been analysed and will be reproduced as a report for circulation and publication as part of the review.

Resource implications: None

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: None

Background Papers:

West Essex Tenancy Strategy 2012

Tenancy Policy 2015-2022

The Big 4 Initial Consultation – Findings (Draft) September 2021

Impact Assessments: n/a

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Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 21 September 2021

SCRUTINY



Portfolio: Housing Services

Subject: Review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Officer contact for further information: Jennifer Gould, Director Community and Wellbeing

Democratic Services Officer: R Perrin

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note the outcome of the initial consultation on the review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy which is due for renewal in April 2022; and
2. To consider and approve taking the proposed recommendations within this report to stage 2 consultation between October 2021 and December 2021 to inform the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027 that will be presented to Cabinet in Spring 2022 for approval.

Report:

1. Under section 1(3), (4) of the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have a duty to review and publish their Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy on at least a 5-yearly basis. This review is being carried out in accordance with The Homelessness Code of Guidance February 2018.
2. The current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy was published in 2018. It set out the achievements since 2015/16, incorporated the needs and demands on the service and an action plan to address these needs. The Strategy included a significant level of detail regarding the new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came in to force on 3 April 2018.
3. The full review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy began in May 2021 along with simultaneous reviews of the Allocations Policy, the Tenancy Policy and the overarching Housing Strategy which are all due for renewal in 2022.
4. A series of initial consultation events took place between July 2021 and August 2021 including bitesize briefing sessions with Members of the Council, residents, professional partners, other statutory services and staff, desktop research by in-house technical experts, statistical analysis of national and local data and an on-line survey which closed on 30 August 2021.
5. The detailed review is currently in draft format and will be published along-side a summary of the outcome of the stage 1 and stage 2 consultation to form the evidence base for the final strategy. The report will include:
 - Achievements and outcomes to date
 - Causes of homelessness
 - Profile of applicants
 - Current demand

- Current supply
- Pipeline supply
- Anticipated demand
- Shortfall / resources

6. The review has highlighted the following evidence-based issues and opportunities and proposed recommendations for inclusion in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022- 2027.

Streamlining the strategy

The current strategy includes a lot of content about the detail and requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which had just been introduced at the time of publication and was therefore relevant to that document.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the strategy for 2022 – 2027 is a far more streamlined easy to read publication, and the associated policy and procedures for preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping are produced as separate stand-alone documents.

Five Strategic Priorities

The initial consultation and associated research identified five key themes that could form the basis of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2027 and associated action plan.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that stakeholders are consulted on the proposal to formulate the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy as a set of 5 strategic priorities within the framework of the national context, the local context, and Epping Forest District Council's Corporate Objectives.

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy - Strategic Priorities

1. Working together
2. Preventing homelessness
3. Building resilience
4. Access to suitable accommodation and support
5. Ending rough sleeping

Priority 1: Working together

This will detail partners' schemes and funding streams, opportunities for cross cutting services and pooled resources identifying clear outcomes and targets.

Priority 2: Preventing homelessness

This will detail early intervention advice and information, publicity, self-service, the duty to refer, and landlord incentives and will include details of outcomes and targets.

Priority 3: Building resilience

This will focus on the support services, Personal Housing Plans, health and wellbeing, community initiatives that are available to enable homeless households or those threatened with homelessness to improve their overall life-chances and avoid the 'revolving door' of repeat homelessness.

Priority 4: Access to suitable housing and support

This will address how to make the best use of housing and housing related support including; temporary accommodation, the private rented sector, the housing register, specialist/supported housing, empty homes, disabled facilities grant and access to affordable home ownership.

Priority 5: Ending rough sleeping – proportionate prevention, intervention, recovery

This will set out the Council's plans for achieving the Government's prescribed objective to end rough sleeping by 2024.

Consistent format with the Overarching Housing Strategy

The critical part of the strategy will be the associated action plan as it sets out how the objectives and intended outcomes are to be delivered and measured. If a consistent style and approach is taken to the formulation of the Overarching Housing Strategy, then the objectives contained therein can be delivered and measured in the same way.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that an Action Plan with SMART targets is produced that follows the same style and format as the proposals for the Overarching Housing Strategy so that they can both then feed into service plans, team plans and individual one-to ones.

Reason for decision: To enable EFDC to progress to stage 2 of the consultation exercise, thereby fulfilling its statutory obligation to consult prescribed stakeholders on any major change to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022- 2027; before presenting the outcome of the reviews and respective recommendations to Cabinet for consideration and approval in Spring 2022.

Consultation undertaken:

Invitations to participate in live bitesize briefings or view pre-recorded briefings and complete an online survey were sent to:

- Council tenants and leaseholders
- Partner agencies and community groups with an interest in housing in the district
- Private registered providers of social housing in the district
- District, borough and city councils in the county
- EFDC staff
- Members of the Council
- Clerks of parish and town councils to forward to their respective elected members.

The survey and associated information was also published on the Council website and the intranet.

The generic survey ensured every participant was asked the same set of questions. At the time of writing this report 71 participants completed the survey. The results of the survey have been analysed and will be reproduced as a report for circulation and publication as part of the review.

Resource implications: None

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: None

Background Papers:

Epping Forest District Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018-2022

The Big 4 Initial Consultation – Findings (Draft) September 2021

Risk Management: NA

Equality: An indicative Impact Assessment is being maintained and updated as the review progresses to conclusion.

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