

EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	Thursday, 18 November 2021
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 8.50 pm
Members Present:	Councillors M Sartin (Chairman) R Jennings (Vice-Chairman) R Baldwin, P Bolton, S Heather, J Lea, A Lion, T Matthews, S Murray, S Rackham, J Share-Bernia, P Stalker, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley		
Other Councillors:	Councillors L Burrows, H Kane, S Kane, C McCredie, A Patel and H Whitbread		
Apologies:	Councillors P Bhanot, I Hadley and K Williamson		
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), C Graham (Project Team Manager (Performance)), I Braddick (Garden Town Liaison Lead), N Polaine (Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Director), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and A Buckley (Higher Level Apprentice (Internal Communications))		

51. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

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

52. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that Councillor J Share-Bernia had been appointed as a substitute for Councillor K Williamson.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

- Minute no 48 (a) Current work programme, (ii) New items (Unaffordable rents) – to replace ‘in respect of communities’ with ‘on behalf of a member unable to attend’ to read: “Councillor J H Whitehouse said this question was on behalf of a member unable to attend because she had been made aware...”

The Chairman, Councillor M Sartin, reminded members that the climate change action plan public consultation (Minute no 43) would close on 26 November 2021 at 17.00. It was hosted on the Council website home page along with the action plan document and frequently asked questions. At the Civic Offices Reception, there was also a leaflet available which explained how paper copies could be obtained, if

required. Comments could be emailed to climatechange@eppingforestdc.gov.uk or posted to the Civic Offices in Epping.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor D Wixley declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan Year 4 2021/22 quarter 2 corporate performance reporting in relation to Roding Valley Recreation Ground under the Green Infrastructure Strategy corporate project, as he was chairman of Loughton Town Council's Recreation Committee.

55. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

56. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Chairman advised the Committee that a call-in of Housing Services Portfolio Holder Decision PFH-004-2021/22 by Councillor C C Pond and four other councillors had led to an informal meeting being held on 1 November 2021, which had been productive. A follow-up meeting on 6 December 2021 would be reporting back on alternative tree planting sites.

57. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN YEAR 4 2021/22 - QUARTER 2 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTING

C Graham, Project Manager (Performance), introduced quarter 2 and reported on projects at red or amber status (exceptions). The KPI data now showed comparisons to the previous quarter. Performance project officers were relooking at the KPI data in its entirety to understand the processes behind them and she would share any information on this at a future meeting.

The Committee scrutinised the following areas.

(1) Status and Progress Report: Key Corporate Projects

(a) Community Health and Wellbeing service area

Waltham Abbey Community and Cultural Hub

Why was the project on hold? A Small, Strategic Director and 151 Officer, replied this was in relation to cost of project queries.

(b) Planning Policy and Implementation service area

Green Infrastructure Strategy

On the draft paper that had been developed for the implementation of the Roding Valley Recreation Ground and Theydon Bois to Loughton/Debden Public Rights of Way Network, there was no reference to working with Loughton Town Council that held the land under a 125-year lease. C Graham noted the information. The project came under the Planning Services Director, N Richardson. N Dawe, Chief Operating Officer, replied that as a site visit was imminent with EFDC officers and other interested parties, he would ensure this information was passed on, so the Town Council could also be informed of the planned site visit.

(2) Quarterly KPI Reporting**(a) Community Health and Wellbeing service area****Number of families in B&B accommodation for 6 weeks+**

How difficult was it for the Council to meet this legal requirement? Councillor H Whitbread, Housing Services Portfolio Holder, replied that the people needing temporary accommodation were being housed in our housing stock and the good news was that Norway House was under occupied largely because of the work around homeless prevention.

If the Council was meeting the requirement by housing the homeless from its own stock, had that increased waiting times for other people and was Norway House's future under question? Councillor H Whitbread replied that there was a wait of up to two years for larger accommodation and we had to make sure the right stock was being provided; this was being looked at under the Council housebuilding programme. Regarding plans over Norway House's future, there were no immediate plans to close it but it was being looked at as part of a wider project on temporary accommodation. Norway House was a good facility, well run and ingrained in the North Weald community, although it was not the most modern accommodation. She encouraged members to engage in the Housing public consultations, as member feedback was useful.

(b) Stronger Place KPIs**Contracts waste – recycling**

In the new waste collection leaflet, it stated that cardboard waste should be put into recycling bags to be collected or loose card taken to a recycling centre but information on where these centres were had not been provided. Did this mean that if residents put out cardboard on its own, it would no longer be collected? If this was the case, why had there been a policy change? N Dawe replied the volume of card had increased since the lockdowns and there was more pressure on the waste collection service, but further information would be provided after the meeting.

(Post meeting update: J Warwick, Acting Service Director (Contracts), advised there had been no changes made to cardboard refuse collection, any proposed changes to policies and collections would need to be signed off by the Waste Management Partnership Board and/or Cabinet. Members might have misunderstood the comments of Councillor N Avey, Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder, when he advised members that it was better if cardboard packaging was placed in recycling sacks if possible but did not say there was a prohibition on large cardboard packaging being collected. Cardboard placed loose outside of any waste containers was still being collected and there were no plans to stop this at present.

Housing Management – rent arrears

Should this KPI come under Stronger Communities rather than Stronger Place? C Graham noted this comment and would investigate it further.

Electric vehicle charging points

Following a presentation on EVC points at the recent Stronger Place Select Committee, a new trial was taking place in Oakwood Hill East car park in Loughton that would also assist air quality. Would there be a KPI for EVC points? N Dawe advised C Graham to contact S Lloyd-Jones who was in charge of this project, initially for commercial vehicles, and to contact N Liniham for broader issues on air quality.

(c) Stronger Council KPIs**People – Diversity and Inclusion – % of workforce by ethnicity**

There was a high rate of ethnicity not being declared by staff and could this be investigated? C Graham replied that she had fed this back when it was raised at the Committee's last meeting. The People Team was trying to improve the process to encourage more feedback, but this data was given voluntarily by staff.

People – Sickness Absence – average number of days per employee

It was noted that there had been an increase in mental health sickness that was being managed by team managers.

RESOLVED:

That the committee reviewed quarter 2 Corporate Performance.

58. ENDORSEMENT OF THE HARLOW AND GILSTON GARDEN TOWN TRANSPORT STRATEGY

N Polaine (HGGT Director) and I Braddick (HGGT Lead) were in attendance. I Braddick introduced the report with a short presentation outlining the reasons and ambitions crucial to the endorsement of the HGGT Transport Strategy. It had been developed to meet the ambitions for sustainable movement set out within the HGGT vision, against the backdrop of the challenges of future travel demand linked to planned growth as set out in the Council's emerging Local Plan. The Council had declared a climate emergency in 2019. With transport now the largest contributor to UK greenhouse gas emissions, the HGGT transport strategy supported the highest commitment across the Garden Town Authorities to become carbon-neutral by 2030. Key to this was making it easier to choose to travel sustainably, by providing reliable and high quality sustainable and active travel routes, and by creating connected communities and safe, enjoyable streets that offered local facilities and travel options for everyday activities. Members were also advised that the decision would now be taken by Cabinet on 25 January 2022.

Questions raised by members during the meeting were summarised below.

How would communities be constructed to reduce travelling and promote sustainable transport and growth? I Braddick replied it was fundamental that people's needs had to be met locally and hub set-ups were one of the first things to look at in masterplanning. The transport strategy was built into reducing travel, so the ability to work, live, play and visit locally was key. N Polaine remarked a modal shift of 60% of all trips starting and/or ending in the new garden communities of the HGGT should be by active and sustainable travel modes.

Not everyone was able to use bikes, buses or walk, some people might not work in the area and would the results from the 2021 Census in relation to zero emission vehicles be used to amend this data? I Braddick replied the transport strategy enabled a genuine alternative for short journeys but if people needed to use a car then it was not stopping these. Promoting a shift to public transport and 60% active travel was key, as sustainable modes must be in a transport strategy. The results from the Census were expected in 2023, but it was recognised that such vehicles played a large part in tackling zero emissions and the transport strategy would allow for updates to be done. M Polaine commented that 60% modal shift left 40% for other ways to travel, but this could include collective car ownership, car sharing etc. Zero emission cars could still cause congestion. The transport strategy would put in place sustainable travel for the next 20 to 30 years.

Regarding principle 1, which gave priority to reducing unnecessary travel, and action 5, maximising opportunities which meant exploring and introducing new and innovative transport technologies as they developed, what was the vision on this? People would use buses providing they were cheap, reliable and frequent. M Polaine replied an example was trips to schools and could we influence this. Cheap and frequent public transport was challenging. Behavioural changes were needed to encourage children and adults, and for people to be open to new innovations, such as hydrogen vehicles, and attract private investment. As this was being endorsed by the two highway authorities, Essex and Hertfordshire county councils, it should shape their work, as well as the five partnerships. It was acknowledged that schools should be built close to houses.

Hospitals also needed to be accessible and not out of the way? I Braddick advised there was much debate on hospitals being accessible by public transport and car. A large employment site was needed. The transport strategy tried to address this as trips must be safe, and to understand shift patterns when using demand responsive travel (DRT) to correlate with the working pattern.

It was difficult to impose restrictions on car ownership per household and controversial to block off certain roads to traffic using non-local traffic schemes (NLT) to encourage walking and cycling. As Harlow had cycle and walk lanes, would there be a cycling infrastructure in Latton Priory? I Braddick commented that these aspects needed to be built in at the masterplanning stage, so properties were being sold as healthy places to live and limits on car ownership linked into parking amenities at developments. It was about encouraging a behavioural change within the community. It was important that cycle and walkways connected up, so they did not stop at the end of a development and were safe to use.

Would there be the opportunity to scope the flow of traffic to stop the build-up of vehicle emissions through road infrastructure at junctions, 20 mph schemes and one-way systems? I Braddick said that correct signalling at junctions was key in junction design and the transport strategy was a hierarchy to uphold design. M Polaine added that this detailed design was with the highway authorities.

With the introduction of smaller shopping centres for local housing areas to reduce some of the travelling, it was noted that Harlow had been set-up like this already.

As commuters travelled to Epping to use the Oyster card on London Underground, could the scheme be extended to Harlow with cheaper fares? I Braddick replied this was not being pursued but within the transport strategy there was an understanding of price points and fare difference. It was noted that Greater Anglia had been lobbied by the local MP, but it had not come to fruition yet.

It seemed traffic was given priority and pedestrians low priority in Loughton regarding the hierarchy on the principles of use, in particular the Epping Forest Retail Park was difficult to walk to, so people had to drive.

I Braddick advised members' comments / feedback should be included, so the report would be rewritten for Cabinet's meeting in January 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee reviewed the report on the endorsement of the HGGT Transport Strategy.

59. CABINET BUSINESS

Councillor S Murray was concerned by the small number of Cabinet attending the meeting as in his opinion they should attend. Councillor M Sartin replied that hybrid meetings allowed other members to come in via Zoom. It was noted that Councillors C Whitbread, N Bedford and J Philips had given their apologies.

Councillor S Murray said that he had emailed a portfolio holder three months ago and had only received a holding reply, so what was the expectation of a reply? Councillor M Sartin commented that there was an expectation of a reply within a reasonable amount of time and if a Cabinet member did not have an immediate reply, to acknowledge the email. Councillor H Whitbread said that she did try to reply as soon as possible. Councillor S Kane was usually quick to respond.

Cabinet's Key Decision List (KDL) updated to the 1 November 2021 was scrutinised by the Committee and the following points were raised.

(a) Planning and Sustainability Portfolio

It was noted that under Implementation of the Local Plan, the Council had not received a reply from the Inspector yet.

(b) Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio

Under the description of the wording for the sale of the Pyrles Lane site item, it read, "to agree", but why not "to consider"? This was noted and the wording would be amended in next month's KDL.

(c) Housing Services Portfolio

A draft of the new trees policy had been scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 June 2021, but it had not been to Cabinet yet even though the KDL was showing a decision date of 21 June 2021 and would a final draft come before this Committee? Councillor H Whitbread replied that she would check on the timings so the KDL could be updated.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed the Executive's current programme of Key Decisions of 1 November 2021;
- (2) That the description of the wording for the sale of Pyrles Lane site be amended to, "To consider the sale of the site to Qualis for development" in the next KDL; and
- (3) That the Cabinet decision date for the new policy (trees) item be updated on the next KDL.

60. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME**(a) Current work programme**

G Woodhall, Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager advised that two representatives, M Meredith and J Hogan, from the Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust had accepted the invite to attend the Committee's next meeting on 7 December 2021. Members were asked to forward their questions to G Woodhall so he could

brief them ahead of the meeting. The only other item going to this extra meeting would be a review of the Council's Epping Forest District Markets Policy.

Councillor S Murray remarked that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had visited the hospital in the summer and that members should read the report that had been published on the CQC website.

Councillor D Wixley said the Conservators of Epping Forest had published a Management and Strategy Business Plan for 2020 to 2030 at the beginning of the year and it might be worth inviting the Superintendent to a future meeting, which members agreed to pursue in the new year.

(b) Reserve work programme

The Committee noted this.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee reviewed its current work programme and reserve programme;
- (2) That G Woodhall would collate members questions for the PAH external scrutiny item and apprise their representatives before the meeting on 7 December 2021;
- (3) That the Committee would review the Council's Epping Forest District Markets Policy at this December meeting; and
- (4) That the Conservators of Epping Forest would be invited to attend a future meeting in relation to its Management and Strategy Business Plan 2020 to 2030.

61. SELECT COMMITTEES - WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Stronger Communities Select Committee

It was noted that the last meeting had been held on 21 September when progress had been reported to the Committee at the meeting on 12 October 2021. The next meeting was due to be held on 11 January 2022.

Councillor J H Whitehouse queried if twice a year updates of the Customer Services Strategy would be more appropriate rather than quarterly. Councillor M Sartin advised that select committee members had the opportunity to discuss their work programme at each meeting.

(b) Stronger Council Select Committee

Councillor P Bolton, Select Committee Chairman, reported on the meeting of 16 November 2021 when the select committee reviewed the quarter 2 corporate performance reporting, the updated Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27, Capital Programme Update 2022/23 to 2026/27 and quarter 2 Budget Monitoring Report. There would be cost pressures next year, but the Council had no plans for specific cuts. Members also discussed the closure report for the Accommodation Project, but what happened when projects were completed and there would be no further feedback? It had been agreed that if members wished to pursue an outcome there could be a further update.

On the Cabinet's KDL, customer satisfaction was a corporate aim aligned to Stronger Council, so it was requested that this be discussed at the next joint meeting in January 2022 as to where this sat, as it was related to how the Council worked. The Committee noted this action for the next joint meeting.

Councillor S Murray asked about item 11, report on new election legislation on Voter ID and any financial implications for the Council, was that waiting to be confirmed because it was dependent on national legislation? G Woodhall agreed this was the case.

(c) Stronger Place Select Committee

Councillor A Lion, Select Committee Chairman, reported on the extra meeting held on 4 November 2021. He noticed that Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust representatives would now be attending Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 December. Members had received an Essex Highways update from County Councillor L Scott mainly on its generic policy, for instance, looking at potholes. The select committee reviewed the off street parking tariffs and electric vehicle charging points at the Oakwood Hill East car park. It also considered a report on improving payment options for leaseholders. The Council had gone some way to help mitigate this for leaseholders and come up with a payment plan. Scrutiny training, which was outstanding for this year, would be welcomed especially by new members. The select committee also reviewed the waste and recycling collection / street cleansing contract, which although a confidential item, was an indication of where the waste management contract would be going, so more was to be discussed on this. The work programme was considerably enhanced, so some items would be carried forward to the next municipal year.

Councillor M Sartin advised that G Woodham had sourced two trainers for scrutiny member training, but the dates were yet to be confirmed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the progress of the three select committees against their work programmes; and
- (2) That the next joint meeting consider alignment of the select committees' Terms of Reference with the Council's corporate aims as detailed in the Cabinet's forward plan.

62. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

CHAIRMAN