

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Stronger Place Select Committee	Date:	Thursday, 13 January 2022
Place:	Council Chamber - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 9.10 pm
Members Present:	Councillors A Lion (Chairman), R Morgan (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, I Hadley, M Owen and C McCredie		
Members Present Virtually	Councillors R Bassett, S Heather, S Heap, J Jennings and J Share-Bernia		
Other Members Present	Councillors N Bedford, C Whitbread, H Whitbread and L Burrows		
Other Members Present Virtually	Councillors N Avey, S Kane A Patel, D Sunger R Brookes M Sartin and J H Whitehouse		
Apologies for absence:	None		
Officers Present	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), L Kirman (Democratic Services Officer), and P Seager (Chairman's Officer)		
Officers Present Virtually:	S Devine (Service Manager (Regulatory)), J Houston (Specialist Partnerships & Economic Development), D Marsh (Waste Management Team Manager), A Marx (Development Manager Service Manager (Planning)), P Messenger (Town Centres Project Manager), V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer) N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)),P Smith (Building Control and Asset Manager), M Thompson (Service Manager (Technical)) and J Warwick (Acting Service Director (Contracts))		

27. Webcasting Introduction

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

28. Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members at the meeting.

29. Declarations of Interest

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

30. Notes of Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. Terms of Reference & Work Programme

The Select Committee noted their terms of reference and work programme.

32. Town Centre Report

The Town Centre report was introduced by John Houston, Specialist Partnerships & Economic Development, who highlighted that the district was performing strongly. Paul Messenger, Town Centre Programme Manager gave a detailed presentation to the Committee, which provided context around changing high streets, how EFDC high streets were performing, the town centre action plan, completed works, current initiatives and the importance of, and approach to, partnerships for the future of town centres and high streets.

The Committee:

- Queried the outcomes of the initiatives and what success would look like. They were advised that the programme had been linked to promoting the high streets, this included matched funding for Christmas lights and events, and supporting businesses through the pandemic. The outcomes of the initiatives had not been measured but the outputs included: the administration of over £450,000 of Essex business adaption grants which allowed business to trade safely through the Covid Pandemic and £232,0000 'welcome back' government funding to keep high streets safe, vibrant and active. 90 businesses had sign up to 'loyal free' and 'click it local' had 230 businesses. Success could be measured through: vacancy rates, which were well below national average in EFDC; churn, which was high for start-ups; footfall, which would be measured in the near future; and attractiveness of the high street.
- Suggested that smaller rural parades of shops should not be forgotten and stressed the importance and value of independent local shops.
- Suggested that short term lets for start-ups or pop ups to nurture innovation and new businesses could be beneficial.

Clarification was provided on the following points:

- The parklet in Waltham Abbey was part of a government funded programme for a temporary space with planting and benches for use in the Market Square.
- A market policy was being developed for high streets and town centres as this was required for licensing purposes.
- That funds allocated from Covid grants had specific criteria for spend.
- Many banks and national chains were rationalising their presence on the high streets. Cllr H Whitbread advised the Committee that Chief Executive of Next had informed her that Epping Next had closed in line with their business model and move towards larger stores, she had raised the community aspects of smaller stores which could act as an anchor on the high street.
- There was a need to work in partnership and ensure communication with Town and Parish Councils, town partnerships and businesses.
- The Town Centre programme had been reactive through the pandemic and services had been delivered by a wide range of services across the council.
- The next steps would involve a longer term plan for the district based around several strategic aims.

Resolved:

That the Committee considered and commented on the Town Centre Report.

33. Enforcement Review

Cllr Burrows introduced the Enforcement Review, thanked officers for their input. He highlighted the potential costs of £250,000 for the implementation of a system for environmental health and technical enforcement, and developing enforcement of parking at key junctions, footpaths and areas outside school in partnership with NEPP and ECC as key aspects. Nick Dawe (Chief Operating Officer) advised the Committee that planning enforcement was outside the remit of this review. The focus was on actions that were, in the main, immediate and low cost, and included outline plans for improved technology which could be brought forward in two stages. He reminded the Committee that there were many aspects to enforcement activity and recourse to legal action was the last resort.

The Committee:

- Sought clarity on the quantification of costs associated with the development of the IT system and were advised that the interim stage had been fully costed and was included in the budget, the wider system which would integrate with planning and the HRA was unknown, and the business case for this could be brought to this Select Committee
- Queried the provision of legal resources and the technical ability of officers in compiling suitable evidence for prosecution. All officers were aware of PACE and operated to the relevant regulations, some work was required in relation to legal service provision.
- Suggested that the lack of feedback to the complainant, who then engaged members and the feedback loop to members was a key issue. Members needed to be given access to information and progress on specific cases. They were cognisant of the confidentiality aspects of enforcement cases which could be critical to a successful outcome. The Committee were advised that the key aspect of the proposal was that enforcement activity was coordinated and fed back to members.
- Questioned the increase in 'rat runs' through the enforcement at junctions, parking obstructing footpaths and schools. A comprehensive approach was needed to be taken, to avoid increasing the speed and amount of traffic through the cleared areas, and to ensure that air quality was considered.
- Queried the system for ensuring planning conditions were met, Andrew Marx confirmed, it was not practical for them to be actively monitored, due to the large numbers and advised that there was a 10 year period when breaches could be dealt with, there was a clear link on the website to report alleged breaches. Consultees were advised that the decision notice and conditions would be available on the website, and the service received regular allegations of breaches of conditions. In addition solicitors often wanted confirmation that conditions had been adhered to. He reminded members to contact him directly if they had any specific queries.
- Asked about costs incurred and recovered. They were advised that the same costs would be incurred for some actions, but the process should become more efficient. In general terms the enforcement costs would be sought from those at fault. For planning when direct action was taken, the costs could be charged back to the transgressor and this was explicit in the new enforcement plan.
- The Committee were advised that site visits were restricted at the height of the pandemic and a standardised risk assessment, based on the LABC template, was now in place to ensure Covid safety and reduce any impact on site visits.

Due to technical difficulties Cllr Whitehouse would be provided with a written response to her queries in relation to the meaning of DDA, and the requirement for two members of staff to provide reports to members.

The Committee suggested that the scope and all activity should be included in further iterations of the report

The Committee would welcome a future report on the costs and benefits associated with the integrated IT system, with an implementation programme and the delivery of outcomes.

Resolved:

That the Committee considered and commented on the Enforcement Review.

34. Additional Waste Container Costs

James Warwick (Acting Service Director) advised the Committee that this proposal had been referred to this Committee by the Waste Management Partnership Board, and further to the recommendations of this Committee would be submitted to Cabinet for approval. The paper outlined the proposal that residents were charged for: the assessment, issuing and delivery of additional garden waste bins; the assessment, issuing and delivery of larger waste bins; replacement bin cost when the bin had been lost; and noted that repairs to bins would be the preferential option and remain free of charge. These proposals would reduce costs and increase efficiencies, as there was a constant demand for additional waste containers. The paper also addressed a misnomer and suggested that the additional food and garden bins (AF&GB) were renamed 'garden waste bin'.

The Committee received confirmation that the charges for residents were in relation to additional bins only, and requested clarity on a number of aspects of the report:-

- Only bins embossed with the Council logo would be collected by the contractor. Alternative bins sourced by individuals were often substandard and could easily fracture, they could also impact and damage the lifting mechanisms on refuse vehicles.
- Costs detailed were based on the recharge of bin costs, the charge of delivery and time for the officer assessment.
- There was no charge for additional bins required for medical waste, incontinence pads were classified as non-hazardous medical waste, and this was covered under the current medical waste policy.
- Nappies were not classified as medical waste and were included in the household refuse collection, an assessment was made after a request for a larger bins in an attempt to drive recyclable materials in to the appropriate waste stream.
- Broken bins would be stripped for parts and the broken element would be recycled.
- Number stickers could be provided or numbers painted onto bins for ease of identification.
- Operatives should ensure bins were return to where they were taken from avoid bins going missing.

The Committee

- Raised concerns raised about charges for larger bins for families and discussed if there should be some discretion in the policy.
- Suggested that a move to real nappies, could reduce the total amount of waste and detailed that Love Essex had a real nappy initiative.
- Requested that replacement bins should be cleaned before being reissued.
- Acknowledged the good service from Biffa.
- Requested a tour of the Biffa facility for members and discussed the potential of a virtual recorded tour, but agreed that an in person tour would be more beneficial to members.
- Suggested additional clarity on financial aspects associated with proposal, including proportion of new bins to replacement bins, costs of administration and management of the repair service.

Resolved:

That the Committee considered and commented on the proposal for the introduction of charging for additional and replacement waste containers to be presented to a future Cabinet meeting.

35. Dates of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting was noted as 15 March 2022 at 7:00pm

CHAIRMAN