EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Stronger Council Select Committee   **Date:** Thursday, 21 July 2022

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices   **Time:** 7.00 - 8.00 pm

Members Present: Councillors J McIvor (Chairman), S Patel (Vice-Chairman), R Balcombe, I Hadley, R Morgan and J M Whitehouse

Members Present (Virtually): Councillors R Bassett and R Brookes

Other Councillors: Councillors S Kane, A Lion and J Philip

Other Councillors (Virtual): Councillors

Apologies: S Heather and S Rackham

Officers Present: A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), G Blakemore (Chief Executive), C Hartgrove (Interim Chief Financial Officer), S Jennings (Team Manager - Infrastructure and Security), P Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)) and P Seager (Chairman's Officer)

Officers Present (Virtually): V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer)

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1.   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.

2.   Substitute Members (Council Minute 39 - 23.7.02)

The Committee noted that Councillor R Balcombe would substitute for Councillor S Heather for the duration of this meeting.

3.   Declarations of Interest

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

4.   Notes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the notes of the meeting held 28 April 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

5.   Terms of Reference & Work Programme

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

The Chairman proposed that the Committee consider the participation of officers on Zoom at the various meeting, as the Council gets back to holding more normal meetings after the Pandemic. The Committee would especially like to look at officers appearing on Zoom at Planning meetings as the sound quality deterred complete participation. This was agreed by the Committee.

Councillor S Kane reminded the meeting that there was a project at present, looking at the sound system and acoustics in the Council Chamber.

ACTION: To put a form of wording in the work programme to capture the action needed to progress this.

6.   People Strategy

P Maginnis (Service Director- Corporate Services) introduced the People Strategy report, updating the meeting on the new strategy which runs until March 2023. The new Strategy was in draft and being reviewed at present.

She went on to provide some highlights from this detailed report.

Councillor Brookes asked about the vacancies that the Council was were experiencing at present and were we experiencing higher levels of turnover for this time of year. She was told that we were not; turnover was comparable with other organisations.

Councillor Bassett asked if we had many applications for the Resourcing Apprentices. He was told that officers were not sure at present but would find out and put in the minutes. He then asked what were HRBP Power Hours? He was told that it stood for HR Business Partners who led these sessions, taking managers and staff through various issues.

ACTION: To find out the number of applicants for the Resourcing Apprentices scheme.

Councillor Bassett noted that there was a review on 'creating our tomorrows'; should this go out to Councillors a well as they would be heavily involved. He was told that this survey was focused on Hybrid and agile ways of working and how officers wanted to work. This would not have suited members.

Councillor Bassett noted that there was not a lot on Member interaction in this, and it could get quite confusing on what was happening. Could we have some sort of presentation on the buzzwords going around so we had some sort of comprehension on them. P Maginnis said that they could put together a glossary of terms for the minutes.

ACTION: To put in a glossary of terms used by the Council in the next set of minutes (Attached).

The Chairman added that would be very useful and asked if there was a need to scrutinise any areas that were finding it hard to recruit to, it may be that we could look into it.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked how many vacancies we were carrying at present and how many temporary staff were there and were there any vacancies that we would not fill. He was told that currently going through such an exercise to identify vacancies and if we did need to fill them; we can bring back information on vacancies and temporary staff along with some comments on why we had them.

ACTION: To provide information on number of vacancies and temporary staff currently in place with a short explanatory comment.

Councillor Hadley asked how many people were in the People team. He was told there were 8 people. He then asked if they had used 'Agile Approach' before for project work, as opposed to normal task to timescale approach. He was told that they had in the organisation; it's the difference between a 'waterfall' approach as opposed to an 'Agile' one based on building the project, on feedback, and continuous review. Councillor Hadley replied that it could be said that an Agile Approach was making it up as you went along. He hoped that was not the case, but he shall keep an eye out. P Maginnis said that it suited the project they were working on.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked about the new legal team and their structure. He was told that four posts had gone out to advert; they are of a senior level backed with market comparable salaries, so we were hoping we would get a good response. Among the posts were a litigation lawyer, planning lawyer and support for housing – within these roles there will be a deputy monitoring officer and a deputy data protection officer to provide more resilience for the council.

Councillor Whitehouse asked how we could ensure that governance and legal issues were fully taken into account. He was told by P Maginnis, that the head of legal (and also the monitoring officer) has unfettered access to all senior managers and also sits in on the corporate governance meetings. Although the role reports directly to her she has that autonomy to attend meetings to ensure her role as monitoring officer was fulfilled. The Chief Executive clarified that what mattered was the persons skills and expertise they brought to the table and not their rank they sit at.

Councillor S Patel asked about the employee survey with 57% feedback. Was that normal or was it lower or higher than normal. She was told that it was a fair result, they would normally be looking for a 65 to70% return. But this continues to improve each time we did it. We did regular short 'workbuzz' surveys every quarter and then we have an annual survey.

Resolved:

The Committee considered the report as information on the continuing People Strategy for 2022.

7.   **Azure Move to the Cloud**

The report author, S Jennings introduced the report on the future strategy for IT for EFDC, based on recommendations to our Corporate Strategy and Government Strategies for IT within public bodies. The report outlined where we were at present and the cost for the replacement hardware for the Council. At present we have a data centre housed in the Civic offices and this was now coming up to its 5-year renewal,

and there will be costs for the replacement of hardware and cooling system. Epping Forest District Council digitisation strategic plan includes standardising its infrastructure and services to a cloud first strategy. As such this project will create a cloud platform that supports the longer-term digital ambitions of the council.

The Government advice was to move where we could to the Cloud and not have a single point of failure, i.e. if our data centre was destroyed by fire then the council would be completely without any IT structure. Better to have it in the cloud. This would be for our core services and not for the Housing or Planning systems. The report went into detail on how we would carry out this process and included the costings for the project.

Councillor Hadley said there did not seem to be any end user training with this new system. He was told that the move would not change anything for users, they would remain the same.

Councillor Hadley said that some apps were not very good in the cloud such as Excel or graphic packages. It was also dependent on the internet connection. These things need to be taken into account. He was told that the core applications such as Microsoft office and email will remail on corporate devices as there could be a lag. The core office suite would remain on a device. The benefits would be managing a device from the cloud as opposed to from a data centre. It was much more beneficial than from a data centre. Also, as we have the majority of people working from home now, we are almost in a cloud environment anyway. A lot of the applications that we will be moving to were designed to be used in the cloud and minimised as much as possible the effect of the internet, so there should not be a major issue with performance. Councillor Hadley noted that the potential risks did not fully come over in the report.

Councillor S Kane said that what was changing was where the data was stored and how it was delivered and not the end use. Councillor Philip said that there seemed to be a degree of confusion between hosting the servers in the cloud and the software. Everything else would be the same.

Councillor S Patel noticed the project plan has a phased waterfall approach; was there a reason this was chosen over an agile one. S Jennings did not know quite what the Councillor wanted to know. The Chairman noted that a written answer could be given and perhaps the question be clarified outside the meeting.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked how they could make sure that they could support all the business-as-usual stuff as they migrated to the cloud while having enough resources to manage both strands. He was told that a large proportion of work would be carried out by our preferred partner (Agilisys) assisted by some of our IT officers. Initially the services would remain in our data centre but will be copied across to the Azure environment and tested as a parallel system to minimise any risks.

RESOLVED:

The Select Committee noted and commented on the Azure Business Case and to awarding a contract to Agilisys for the procurement and provision of Azure – Move to the Cloud.

8.   **Quarter 4 Budget Monitoring 20221/22 (Outturn)**

The report was introduced by C Hartgrove, the interim chief finance officer. He noted that the report set out the 2021/22 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account positions for both revenue and capital, as at 31st March 2022, which represented the Quarter 4 (Outturn) for the 2021/22 financial year.

The figures included within the report were still subject to external audit and so should still be considered provisional at this stage.

In terms of General Fund revenue expenditure – at the Quarter 4 (Outturn) stage – a budget underspend of £0.992 million had been recorded, with net expenditure of £15.877 million against an overall budget provision of £16.869 million.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue position was presented in Section 3 of the report. Although there were some pressures in the year (most notably an overspend of £901,000 on Repairs and Maintenance), a planned surplus of £2.059 million was achieved and was to be applied to supporting the 2022/23 budget, which forms part of the strategy in the new HRA Business Plan.

The General Fund Capital position is covered in Section 4, showed underspending (Programme slippage) of £46.767 million from originally profiled spending of £72.443 million in 2021/22. The single largest factor is the slower than anticipated drawdown on Qualis loans (impact £41.767 million).

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked about the £0.5 million savings which came from vacancies. Was this hampering the delivery of projects? And, recycling, was it volume or value that makes a difference, and would this continue into the current year? He was told that the salary savings was dominated by slippages in projects, so this was delaying recruitment to resource projects and not a case of not delivering services. Waste management spending had been identified later in the financial year. One of the regular payments got out of sync during the pandemic (with them owing the council some £225k), which has now been rectified. With regards to recycling income, he was not sure as to the finer points, other than quarter 3 projections were more pessimistic than actually turned out to be at year end.

Councillor Bassett thanked officers for their work over the past difficult year. He was concerned by the differences from the forecasts to the actuals. Were we more confident in this year's forecasts? Councillor Philip replied that we had poorer balances last year than we intended to have and as such we needed the ability to pull in £1.35 million from our reserves. In the end we significantly reduced our spending last year to bring us in under budget. He always said that our budget was a ceiling, and we should not go over that. Our budget was a target and to come in under budget was a good news story and the work we will be doing in the coming months will give us the ability to come in under budget once again this year. But this year's budget will be more difficult than last years. It will be more challenging this year.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked if officers could expand a bit more on the land and property changes, in particular the late cancellation of the rental invoices and the lower rental incomes. Was this because it was harder to fill the vacant properties or because rents have been coming in at lower levels than we expected. C Hartgrove did not have a detailed answer to this, but he knew that several invoices were cancelled towards the end of the year were incorrect. This emerged late in the financial year during the 4th quarter. Councillor Philip added that we have had challenges on several properties throughout the pandemic. We had no recourse to the courts in terms of people failing to pay. But the vast majority of our challenges have been with multi nationals rather than with our local businesses. We have also

had problems with our bad debts system which are currently being resolved. And we now have recourse to the court system once again.

The Chairman asked if the invoice errors were partly due to technological errors. He was told that there were a number of different things that worked together including some technological problems.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked when would we know if there would be a problem for this year. He was told that this was unknown at present, but it looks like the systems were working properly now. The Asset Management Team were working hard on this, and the right things were being done.

RESOLVED:

That the Select Committee noted and commented upon the Quarter 4 Budget Monitoring Report.

9.   Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted their future meeting dates.

                                                                                CHAIRMAN

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Agile Methodology	A method of project management which breaks up a project into several phases. Gathering on-going feedback making continuous improvements at every stage. The cycle takes a project through a cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation
Alpha version	The initial phase of validating whether a system, product etc will perform as expected
BAU	Business as usual
Baseline	Represents the costs and schedules approved at the start of the project. They use baselines as a basis for monitoring and evaluating performance.
Benefit Realisation	The process of identifying and measuring benefits which enables officers to ensure the project is delivering the right outputs
Beta version	A system or product is tested with users
BPHR	Business Partner Human Resources
Budget	The sum of money allocated for a project. The term may also refer to a comprehensive list of revenues and expenses
Business analysis	The practice of identifying and solving business problems. It focuses on creating and implementing solutions to business needs via organizational development, process reengineering, or any number of other methods.
Business case	A documentation of the potential outcomes of a new project, including benefits, cost, and effects. It shows the reasoning for starting the project.
Common Operation Model (COM)	It represents how the organisation will deliver its services via its structure
Change management plan	A Change management plan details the change control process. It is created to ensure all changes are managed according to procedure. Change management plans can be created for individual projects or for organizations undergoing transitions.
Client/Customer	The people who will directly benefit from a project. A team executes a project with specific attention to a client's requirements.
Closing phase	The final phase of the project management life cycle, in which all aspects of the project are officially completed and closed. This includes making sure that all deliverables have been given to the client, that the team notifies suppliers of completion, and that the team updates stakeholders regarding the end of the project and overall project performance.
Concept	The beginning phase of the project management life cycle. In the concept phase, the team presents the opportunity or problem (along with possible solutions) and examines the general feasibility of the project
Contingency plan	An alternative or additional course of action planned in anticipation of the occurrence of specific risks.
Deliverable	A final product or product component that must be provided to a client or stakeholder according to contractual stipulations.
Dependency	A logical relationship between project activities in a network diagram that determines when a dependent activity may begin.

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Duration	The amount of time taken to complete an activity or task from start to finish.
Effort management	The most efficient allocation of time and resources to project activities.
Fallback plan	A predetermined alternative course of action adopted if a risk occurs, and a contingency plan proves unsuccessful in avoiding the risk's impact.
Fast tracking	A schedule compression technique or duration compression technique in which the duration of a critical path is shortened by performing sections of some critical path activities concurrently instead of consecutively.
Feasibility study	An evaluation of how likely a project is to be completed effectively, or how practical it is, taking resources and requirements into consideration.
Fishbone diagram	A fishbone diagram is used in project management to identify and categorize the possible causes of an effect
Flowchart	A diagram that lays out the complete sequence of steps in a process or procedure.
Forecast	A prediction or estimation of future project status based on available information.
Gantt chart	A Gantt chart is a type of bar chart that shows all the tasks constituting a project. Tasks are listed vertically, with the horizontal axis marking time. The lengths of task bars are to scale with tasks' durations.
Go/No go	A point in a project at which it is decided whether to continue with the work.
Goal	An objective set by an individual or an organization. It is a desired endpoint reached by setting and working towards targets.
Handover	In the project life cycle, a handover is the point at which deliverables are given to users.
High-Level requirements	The high-level requirements explain the major requirements and characteristics of the final product, including its purpose as a product and within the company. (See also product description)
Initiation phase	The formal start of a new project. It involves receiving proper authorization and creating a clear definition for the project.
Internet	is a worldwide system of computer networks which enables access to a range of information
Intranet	is an organisations' private network which shares information
ILM	Institute of Leadership and Management – a qualification body
Kick-off meeting	The first meeting between a project team and stakeholders. It serves to review project expectations and to build enthusiasm for a project.
Key performance indicator (KPI)	A Key performance indicator is a metric for measuring project success. Key performance indicators are established before project execution begins
Lead/Lead time	The amount of time an activity can be brought forward with respect to the activity it is dependent upon.

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Lessons learned	The sum of knowledge gained from project work, which can be used as references and points of interest for future projects.
Life cycle	The entire process used to build its deliverables. Life cycles are divided into a number of phases. A variety of life cycle models are in use in project management.
Milestone	Milestones indicate specific progress points or events in project timelines. They mark progress needed to complete projects successfully.
Objective	A clear, concise statement about what an activity is meant to accomplish. Objectives are written to be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. A successful project meets all its stated objectives.
Off-Boarding	Employee exit process
On-Boarding	Employee induction process
Output	In project management, an output is the (usually physical) end product of a process.
People Days	An opportunity for our employees to engage with their teams or colleagues across the Council and are hosted by the People Team
Percent complete	The percent complete indicates the amount of work completed on an activity as a percentage of the total amount of work required.
Performance reporting	Performance reporting is formally informing stakeholders about a project's current performance and future performance forecasts. The aspects of performance to be reported are typically laid out in a communications management plan.
Perkbox	An employee benefits and rewards platform, giving access to employees to discounts and benefits, wellness sessions, ability to recognise colleagues and healthcare
Phase	A distinct stage in a project life cycle.
Planning	The development of a course of action to pursue goals or objectives.
Planning phase	In project management, planning refers specifically to a phase of the life cycle that involves creating plans for management, control, and execution, as well as for what a project is meant to accomplish.
PM	Project Manager, the person tasked with initiating, planning, executing, and closing a project, and with managing all aspects of project performance through these phases. The term is typically used for a project management professional. Project managers are able to use organizational resources for projects. They serve as contact points for sponsors, program managers, and other stakeholders.
PS	Project sponsor is a person or group who owns the project and provides resources and support for the project, program or portfolio in order to enable its success. Every project has at least one project sponsor. They are the reason for the project.
PMO	Project Management Office
Portfolio	A collectively managed set of programs and projects

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Portfolio management	The collective management of portfolios and their components in line with concepts of organizational project management.
Power Hour Sessions	HR Business Partners take employees through key HR policies, processes and systems and answer questions
PRINCE2	PRINCE2 is an acronym for projects in controlled environments, version 2. It is a project management methodology that emphasizes business justifications for projects. PRINCE2 management is based on clear organization of project roles and responsibilities and managing, when necessary, rather than by obligation. It involves planning and executing projects in a series of stages, with stipulated requirements for each work package
Problem statement	A problem statement concisely states and describes an issue that needs to be solved. It is used to focus and direct problem-solving efforts.
Process	A process is a repeatable sequence of activities with known inputs and outputs. Processes consume energy.
Process management	The act of planning, coordinating, and overseeing processes with a view to improving outputs, reducing inputs and energy costs, and maintaining and improving efficiency and efficacy.
Program	A collectively managed set of projects.
Program charter	An approved document that authorizes the use of resources for a program and connects its management with organizational objectives
Program management	The collective management of programs and their components in line with concepts of organizational project management.
Program manager	A program manager has formal authority to manage a program and is responsible for meeting its objectives as part of organizational project management methods. They oversee, at a high level, all projects within a program.
Project	A temporary, goal-driven effort to create a unique output. A project has clearly defined phases, and its success is measured by whether it meets its stated objectives.
Project baseline	Comprises the budget and schedule allocations set during the initiation and planning phases of a project. Assuming the scope of the project remains unchanged, it may be used to determine variance from budget or schedule.
Project charter	Document that details the scope, organization, and objectives of a project. It is typically created by a project manager and formally approved by the sponsor. A project charter authorizes the project manager's use of organizational resources for the project and is understood to be an agreement between the sponsor, stakeholders, and project manager. (See also project)
Project definition	A project definition or project charter is a document created by a project manager and approved by a project sponsor that details the scope, organization, and objectives of a project. It authorizes a project manager's use of resources for a project and constitutes an agreement between the sponsor, stakeholders, and project manager.

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Project management software	Project management software is a family of tools typically used in the management of complex projects. They provide the ability to: calculate estimates; create and manage schedules and budgets; track and oversee project activities and progress; assign and allocate resources; optimize decision making; and communicate and collaborate with members of a project team.
Project phase	A distinct stage in a project management life cycle. Each phase comprises a set of project-related activities.
Project plan	A document formally approved by the project manager, sponsor, and other stakeholders which states the approved cost, schedule, and scope baselines. It guides project execution, control, and quality and performance assessment. The project plan also forms the basis for communication between parties involved in a project. Project plans can vary in their levels of detail.
Project stakeholders	Broadly, stakeholder is any party which may be affected by a project. In project management, the term usually refers to parties with an interest in the successful completion of a project.
Project team	A project team is responsible for leading and collectively managing a project and its related activities through the project's life cycle. Project teams may contain members from several different functional groups within an organization. Depending on the nature of the project, a project team may be disbanded upon completion of a project.
Pulse Survey	An employee engagement tool which asks a small and regular set of questions to continuously gain their insight in subjects such as the work environment, leadership, communications
Quality assurance	A set of practices designed to monitor processes and provide confidence that result in deliverables meeting quality expectations. It may involve quality audits and the stipulated use of best practices.
RAID log	RAID is an acronym for risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies. The RAID log is a project management tool that records developments in these four aspects of project work for the stakeholders' benefit and for an end-of-project review.
RC1	Release Candidate 1. This is a further cycle when developing an IT system which will be close to the finished product.
Resource allocation	The assigning and scheduling of resources for project-related activities, ideally in the most efficient manner possible. Resource allocation is typically handled by a project manager, though they may be overridden by a program manager if resources are to be shared between multiple projects.
Resources	The elements needed for a project to successfully meet its objectives. Examples of resources include equipment, staff, locations, facilities, and money.
Return on investment (ROI)	The expected financial gain of a project expressed as a percentage of total project investment. It is used to assess the overall profitability of a project.

People Strategy and Project Management Office Glossary

Risk	The probability of occurrence of a specific event that affects the pursuit of objectives. Risks are not negative by definition. In project management, opportunities are also considered risks.
Risk acceptance	Risk acceptance involves acknowledging a risk and not taking pre-emptive action against it.
Risk assessment	An activity that involves identifying possible risks to a project and examining how these risks, if they occur, would affect objectives.
Risk avoidance	Risk avoidance focuses on avoiding threats that can harm an organization, its projects, or assets. Unlike risk management, which is geared toward mitigating the impact of a negative event, risk avoidance seeks to address vulnerabilities and make sure those events do not occur.
Risk efficiency	A concept based on the idea of maximizing the return-to-risk ratio. It can do this in two ways: by minimizing exposure to risk for a given level of expected return or by seeking the highest possible expected return for a given level of risk.
Risk management	A subset of management strategies that deals with identifying and assessing risks and acting to reduce the likelihood or impact of negative risks. Risk managers seek to ensure that negative risks do not affect organizational or project objectives.
Root cause	The primary reason an event occurs.
SD	Service Directors
SM	Service Managers
TM	Team Managers
Waterfall	A linear approach to project management which relies on careful planning, documentation, and a chronological implementation
WorkBuzz	The name of the platform the Council uses to carry out its pulse surveys and provides the insight back to the Council