

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 20 February 2024, 7.00 pm – 9.05pm
Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Members Present:	Councillors D Sunger (Chairman) L Burrows (Vice-Chairman), I Allgood, C Amos, R Balcombe, N Bedford, P Bolton, R Brookes, E Gabbett, A Green, S Heap, S Heather, H Kane, S Kane, H Kauffman, J Lea, A Lion, J Lucas, M Markham, T Matthews, C McCann, C McCredie, L Mead, L Morgan, R Morgan, S Murray, C Nweke, M Owen, L Paine, J Parsons, A Patel, J Philip, K Rizvi, R Sharif, D Stocker, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell
Apologies:	Councillor(s) R Baldwin, R Bassett, P Bhanot, H Brady, I Hadley, R Jennings, J Jennings, J Jogia, P Keska, J Mclvor, S Patel, Caroline Pond, C C Pond and R Pugsley
Officers In Attendance:	Andrew Small (Strategic Director, Corporate and Section 151 Officer), Jennifer Gould (Strategic Director and Chief Operating Officer), Nathalie Boateng (Service Manager / Solicitor - Legal Services (Shared Services)), Gary Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), Tom Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager) and Steven Mitchell (PR Website Editor)
Officers In Attendance (Virtually):	Georgina Blakemore (Chief Executive) and Vivienne Messenger (Democratic Services Officer)

A [RECORDING](#) OF THIS MEETING IS AVAILABLE FOR REPEATED VIEWING

59 WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Team Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services 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.

60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Cllr S Murray declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda, by virtue of being a trustee of the Epping Forest Citizen's Advice Bureau. The Councillor had determined that he would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the item, and voting thereon:

- Report of the Cabinet – Final Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25.

(b) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Cllr D Wixley declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda, by virtue of being a member of the Epping Forest Citizen's Advice Bureau. The Councillor had determined that he would remain in the meeting for the consideration of the item, and voting thereon:

- Report of the Cabinet – Final Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25.

61 MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 December 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

62 ANNOUNCEMENTS**(a) Announcements by the Chairman of the Council**

The Chairman invited Councillors to share in his best wishes to King Charles III for his recovery from his cancer diagnosis.

The Chairman stated that he had been Chairman of the Council for nine months now, and that it had been a pleasure to attend so many events around the District. Since the last Council meeting in December, he had hosted the Civic Carol Service at St Mary's Church in Chigwell, attended the opening of 22 housing units at Borders Lane in Loughton, and had also attended the Holocaust Memorial Day event in Loughton where this year's theme had been 'The fragility of freedom'.

The Chairman announced that the annual Civic Awards dinner would be held at the Marriot Hotel in Waltham Abbey. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the members of the judging panel for the various categories of award to be announced on 15 March 2024, and reminded Councillors to respond to their invitations.

63 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

The Council noted that no public questions had been received for consideration at the meeting.

64 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

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

65 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

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

(a) Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council reported that he had attended a Housing Summit in Colchester and had paid a visit to the Ninefields area in Waltham Abbey, which showed partnership working in action. Work on Devolution in Essex had been paused for the time being, but the Council was making significant progress on shared services with its North Essex council partners.

Finally, the Leader of Council announced that Cllr S Kane had formally stepped down from the Cabinet, and the Leader thanked Cllr S Kane for his endeavours during his time on the Cabinet.

The report of the Leader of the Council was noted.

(b) Place Portfolio Holder

The report of the Place Portfolio Holder was noted.

(c) Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder informed the Council that the 2020/21 Statutory Statement of Accounts had now been adopted, and the 2021/22 Statutory Statement of Accounts would be signed off before the end of the municipal year. The Portfolio Holder thanked the members of the Audit & Governance Committee for their work on this.

The report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder was noted.

(d) Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder

The report of the Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder was noted.

(e) Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder

The report of the Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder was noted.

(f) Contracts, Service Delivery & Improvement Portfolio Holder

The report of the Contracts, Service Delivery & Improvement Portfolio Holder was noted.

(g) Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder

The report of the Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder was noted.

66 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

<u>Question asked by:</u>	<u>Question asked to:</u>	<u>Subject of the Question:</u>
Cllr L Mead	Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder, Cllr K Williamson	Arrangements to advertise and monitor the effectiveness of the new public protection order for dogs, which came into effect on 8 January 2024.
Cllr J M Whitehouse	Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder, Cllr K Williamson	The lack of public consultation so far by NEPP on their proposals to charge for parking in Hartland Road and Kendall Avenue in Epping.
Cllr A Green	Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Philip	Further information about the 'Meet the Buyer' event highlighted in his Portfolio Report to Council.
Cllr S Murray	Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread	Following the increase in the Band 'D' council tax from Essex County Council, will residents notice a marked improvement in the quality of roads and pavements this year.
Cllr L Paine	Regulatory Services	Issues with progressing a

	Portfolio Holder, Cllr K Williamson	deed of variation.
Cllr S Yerrell	Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder, Cllr H Whitbread	Update on the Safer Streets project in Ninefields, Waltham Abbey.
Cllr T Matthews	Contracts, Service Delivery & Improvement Portfolio Holder, Cllr R Balcombe	Arrangements for the proposed transition in Waste Management arrangements and transfer of the 'O' licence.
Cllr J Lucas	Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder, Cllr H Whitbread	Progress report on the projects completing in Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey & Buckhurst Hill as part of the Council House-Building Programme.
Cllr M Owen	Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Cllr J Philip	Concerns over the requested sinking funds on leasehold & commercial units in Loughton Broadway.

67 MOTIONS

The Chairman reported that there were no motions to be considered at the meeting.

68 REPORT OF THE CABINET - FINAL DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Economic Development, Cllr J Philip, presented the report of the Cabinet on the final draft budget proposals for 2024/25.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Council that the Medium Term Financial Plan in the Autumn had highlighted some issues with the Council's budget for the next few years. These issues required addressing as the Council had a legal obligation to set a balanced budget. The Budget before the Council had been submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for review on two separate occasions, before the final draft proposals had been considered by the Cabinet on 5 February 2024. The draft Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, and the draft Capital Strategy for 2024/25 to 2026/27 had been presented to the Audit & Governance Committee, who endorsed both Strategies.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Council that a late amendment had been made to the budget proposals, following the Cabinet meeting on 5 February 2024. It was now proposed to restore the Council's grant to the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau (EF CAB) to £152,400 and the Council's grant to Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) to £30,000 for 2024/25. This would be financed by a reduction to the 'Fit for the Future' (FFTF) fund from £2.152million to £1.954million. This fund was intended for the improvement of the Council's services to residents in the future. The Council's reserves was projected to be above the target of £4million.

The Portfolio Holder explained that, although the Council had very recently agreed to sell a parcel of land at North Weald Airfield, the capital receipt generated by this sale could not be utilised for the Council's revenue budgets; only the interest from it if the money was invested.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the members of the Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, the Audit & Governance Committee as well as the Council's Finance Team for

their efforts in preparing the budget, and the Portfolio Holder commended the proposed budget – as amended – to the Council for approval.

Members of the Council welcomed the restoration of the funding to the EF CAB and the VAEF, and the consultation with Members that had been undertaken during the drafting of the budget. Some concerns were raised about the Planning Service, the Homelessness service and the need to scrutinise the FFTF fund in the future.

Cllr J Philip highlighted the recent review of the Planning department by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), which should bring about improvements when their recommendations were implemented, and that the FFTF fund would have to deliver significant benefits for the Council in the future.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr C Whitbread, seconded the report on the draft budget proposals for 2024/25, and highlighted the retention of the Highways Rangers for another year, as well as the fact that the Council had the lowest Council Tax in Essex. The Leader commended the amended proposed budget to the Council for approval.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft General Fund Revenue and Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2024/25, as presented in Attachment 1a of the report, including the amendment in Attachment 1b of the report, be approved subject to the following further revisions:

- (a) the restoration of the Council's grant to Epping Forest Citizen's Advice Bureau to £152,400 for 2024/25;
- (b) the restoration of the Council's grant to Voluntary Action Epping Forest to £30,000 for 2024/25; and
- (c) the reduction of the contribution to the 'Fit for the Future' fund from £2.141million to £1.954million for 2024/25;

(2) That the draft General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital programmes for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as presented in Attachment 1c of the report, be approved;

(3) That the proposed Fees and Charges for 2024/25, including an average Housing Rent increase of 7.7% on Council Dwellings, as presented in Attachment 1d of the report, be approved;

(4) That the updated General Fund Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as presented in Attachment 1e of the report, be approved;

(5) That the Section 151 Officer's report – in accordance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 – on the robustness of the estimates for the purposes of the Council's 2024/25 budgets and the adequacy of the reserves, as presented in Attachment 2 of the report, be noted;

(6) That the Section 151 Officer's recommendation to maintain a minimum £4.0 million contingency balance in the Council's General Fund Reserve in the medium-term, including a contribution to the Reserve as part of the General Fund revenue budget proposals for 2024/25, be approved;

(7) That the draft Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 15th February 2024 and as presented in Attachment 3 of the report, be approved; and

(8) That the draft Capital Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27, considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 15th February 2024 and as presented in Attachment 4 of the report, be approved.

Recorded Vote:

For the recommendation as amended (43):

Cllrs I Allgood, C Amos, R Balcombe, N Bedford, P Bolton, R Brookes, L Burrows, E Gabbett, A Green, S Heap, S Heather, H Kane, S Kane, H Kauffman, J Lea, A Lion, J Lucas, M Markham, T Matthews, C McCann, C McCredie, L Mead, L Morgan, R Morgan, S Murray, C Nweke, M Owen, L Paine, J Parsons, A Patel, J Philip, K Rizvi, R Sharif, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell.

Against the recommendation as amended (0).

Abstentions (0).

69 REPORT OF THE CABINET - COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Economic Development, Cllr J Philip, presented a report from the Cabinet regarding the Council Tax Setting for 2024/25. Cllr J Philip advised that the Cabinet had recommended a District Council Tax increase based on Band D properties of £4.85 or 2.99% for the year. The report on page 144 of the agenda also detailed the average Town and Parish Council precept (as these varied between Parishes) and the Essex precepts for Essex County Council, Essex Police and Crime Commissioner and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. Overall, the average Council Tax for residents in a band 'D' property in the District would rise by £98.42 or 4.92% in 2024/25.

Resolved:

(1) That the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 by the Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer under delegated authority for the whole Council area as 55,617.6 (item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended) and for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept related as set out in Appendix A of the report be noted;

(2) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:

(a) £121,642,398 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimated for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act considering all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils;

(b) £107,788,193 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimated for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act;

(c) £13,854,205 being the amount by which the aggregate at 2(a) above exceeded the aggregate at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act);

- (d) £249.10 being the amount at 2(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (the amount at (1) above, the tax base), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts);
- (e) £4,566,066 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act;
- (f) £167.00 being the amount at 2(c) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 2 (e) above by Item T (1) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept related;
- (g) that the issuing of precepts to the Council by Essex County Council, Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and Essex Fire & Rescue Service in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each of the category of dwellings in the Council's area be noted;
- (h) that the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby had set the aggregate amounts in Appendix C as the amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings; and
- (i) that in accordance with section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council had determined that the amount of Council Tax shown at 2(f) of £167.00 for 2024/25, which represented an increase of £4.85 (2.99%) compared to 2023/24, was not excessive and therefore there was no requirement to hold a local referendum.

Recorded Vote:

For the recommendation (42):

Cllrs I Allgood, C Amos, R Balcombe, N Bedford, P Bolton, R Brookes, L Burrows, E Gabbett, A Green, S Heap, S Heather, H Kane, S Kane, J Lea, A Lion, J Lucas, M Markham, T Matthews, C McCann, C McCredie, L Mead, L Morgan, R Morgan, S Murray, C Nweke, M Owen, L Paine, J Parsons, A Patel, J Philip, K Rizvi, R Sharif, D Stocker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell.

Against the recommendation (0).

Abstentions (0).

Non-Voting (1):

Cllr H Kauffman, who had left the Chamber.

70 REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICE - CONSTITUTIONAL UPDATE

The Chairman of the Constitution Working Group, Cllr A Lion, presented a report detailing a minor change to the Scheme of Delegation within the Constitution, arising from the introduction of new powers through the Building Safety Act 2022 enabling Building Control to serve Compliance and Stop Notices.

This amendment had been agreed by the Monitoring Officer under their delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Constitution and would be included in the next scheduled update to the Constitution.

Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed revision to the Council's Scheme of Delegation (Delegation of Executive Functions) be noted.

71 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Cllr D Wixley, informed the Council that at the Committee's last meeting on 23 January 2024, it had considered the draft budget proposals for 2024/25. Cllr D Wixley welcomed the restoration of funding for the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau and Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

At the next meeting, the Committee would be receiving its annual presentation from the Youth Council, and considering its draft Annual Report for 2023/24.

72 JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

Cllr J H Whitehouse requested that some of the Council's appointed representatives on outside bodies report back at the next meeting.

73 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

CHAIRMAN