

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 8 November 2018

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Offices

Time: 7.00 - 7.18 pm

Members Present: C Whitbread (Chairman), S Stavrou (Vice-Chairman), N Avey, A Grigg, H Kane, A Lion, J Philip, G Mohindra and S Kane

Other

Councillors: R Baldwin, N Bedford, R Brookes, J Lea, M Sartin, D Stocker and H Whitbread

Apologies:

Officers Present: D Macnab (Acting Chief Executive), G Blakemore (Strategic Director), S Hill (Service Director (Governance & Member Services)), P Pledger (Service Director (Housing & Property Services)), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services)), P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), S Kits (Social Media and Customer Services Officer) and P Seager (Chairman's Secretary)

48. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Leader of Council 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.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

50. MINUTES

Decision:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18 October 2018, be taken as read and signed by the Leader as a correct record.

51. REPORTS OF PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

The Technology and Support Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor A Lion updated the Cabinet on a recent meeting he had attended with Nathalie Boateng, Head of Legal Services at Broxbourne Borough Council. EFDC were looking at a potential shared legal services with Broxbourne Borough Council and Simon Hill was working with Nathalie Boateng to prepare a Service Level Agreement.

Councillor Lion asked Members if they had anything in their Portfolio's that they would like considered from a legal aspect and to contact either Simon Hill or Councillor Lion.

52. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE CABINET

The Cabinet noted that no public questions or requests to address the Cabinet had been received for consideration at the meeting.

53. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was on the 29 October 2018 and that she had updated Council at its meeting on the 1 November 2018 she therefore had nothing further to add, only to remind Member's of the consultation still running regarding the possible re-alignment of the Select Committees going forward in the next municipal year and if Members had any comments could they please inform Democratic Services.

54. REINVESTMENT FOR IMPROVEMENTS AND ENVIRONMENTS IN COUNCIL CAR PARKS

The Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio Holder presented a report to the Cabinet advising that at its meeting on the 6 September 2018, the Cabinet agreed changes to the parking tariff. It was estimated that the revised tariff could result in additional income of up to £300,000 per year. It was considered that some of the income could be reinvested to improve and enhance the car parks. If agreed the investment would improve customer experience and help increase income.

The Council owned 20 car parks across the District with a total of 1763 parking spaces. Car parks were categorised as short or long stay with each attracting a separate set of parking tariffs.

The purpose of the report was to seek approval to reinvest some of the increased income that was likely to arise because of the recently agreed parking tariff review into enhancing and improving Council owned off street car parks. The additional investment would make Council car parks more welcoming, improve security, environmentally friendly and enhance the customer experience. An assessment of options to increase capacity could result in proposals to invest in expanding existing car parks.

Decision:

- (1) That the Cabinet agreed to reinvest some of the additional predicted income because of the tariff review and to recommend to Council the following Capital growth bids in the car parking budget for the 2019/20 financial year:
 - (a) £100,000 for environmental enhancement and improvement works;
 - (b) £60,000 for installation electric charging points subject to the outcome of the ongoing feasibility study;
 - (c) £23,000 for installation of new CCTV systems;
 - (d) £100,000 allocation for new LED lighting;
- (2) That the Cabinet agreed to recommend to the Council a DDF growth bid of £40,000 in 2019/20 for appointment of external consultants to carry out a feasibility assessment to increase car park capacity; and

- (3) That the Cabinet agreed that the ongoing costs of £10,000 from 2019/20 onwards arising from the recommendations in this report were to be funded from the additional income generated by the increase in parking charges already agreed.

Reasons for Decision:

At a meeting of the Cabinet on the 6 September 2018, it was agreed to receive a further report setting out the funding growth bid for environmental enhancement and improvement in the Council's off street car parks.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

Some or all of the recommendations in the report could be rejected with a varying degree of consequences, as listed in the risk management section of the report attached to the agenda.

55. GYMNASTIC CENTRE NORTH WEALD AIRFIELD

The Asset Management and Economic Development Portfolio Holder presented a report to the Cabinet she advised that the Epping Forest Gymnastics Centre at North Weald Airfield was established in 1986, for the purpose of providing a centre of excellence for gymnastics, catering for children and young people from the district and surrounding area. It had always been leased at a peppercorn rent, although the tenant was responsible for all internal repairs and maintenance of the apparatus. During the first twelve years of operation, the centre was very well run and maintained to a high standard, with regular investment into the equipment, coaching and internal elements of the building.

However, following a change of management it was taken over by a local gymnastics Trust who over recent years have provided very little investment in the centre and its infrastructure which has led to the centre being in a poor state of repair externally and internally and investment would be needed to undertake essential building works and replace the ageing equipment.

The current lease for the facility was due for renewal on 31 December 2018. Due to the lack of investment and commitment to developing gymnastics by the current leaseholder, the tenant had been given notice to vacate the building at this time.

However, gymnastics continues to have a very high profile, due to the great success of the British Gymnasts in the World Olympic and Commonwealth Games. The current facilities for gymnastics across the Epping Forest District cannot accommodate the number of children and young people wishing to participate in the sport.

This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to invest £240,000 in the Council owned purpose built gymnastics centre at North Weald Airfield, to cover the costs of essential building works and repairs, and the purchase of new gymnastics apparatus. This investment would be in order to enable the facility to be fully utilised as a beginner through to development level centre of excellence.

Councillor H Kane, Leisure and Community Portfolio Holder stated that she fully supported the report as she had been approached by successful clubs who would be willing to take over.

Decision:

1. That Cabinet sought a bid from the 2019/20 budget for a Capital Allocation of £240,000 to invest in the Gymnastics Centre at North Weald Airfield, to enable essential building works to be undertaken and to equip the facility with a complete set of new gymnastics apparatus;
2. That expressions of interest were sought from suitably qualified gymnastics clubs to enter into a lease in order to provide opportunities for local children and young people of all abilities to participate in recreational and competitive gymnastics; and
3. That delegated authority was granted to the Service Director Commercial and Regulatory Services in liaison with the Asset Management and Economic Development Portfolio Holder to agree the final terms of the lease.

Reasons for Decision:

The Epping Forest Gymnastics Centre had received minimal investment by the current tenant over the last 25 years and was now in need of significant repair and improvement to enable its use to be maximised. Other Epping Forest facilities providing gymnastics in the area cannot cater for the level of interest and hence, several hundred children were on waiting lists to participate in gymnastics.

By improving the purpose built facility at North Weald Airfield and purchasing new apparatus, the Council can meet the demand for gymnastics. This would not only increase participation by young people in sport, but also was in accordance with the Council's policy to invest capital to generate a revenue return. The lease income would be significantly greater than current interest rates achieved in the Council's investment portfolio.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

1. To demolish the centre, although, if this option was taken, gymnasts who currently use the centre will need to be accommodated elsewhere if the facility was closed permanently. There was already a lack of availability in the district.
2. To ensure only essential health and safety work was undertaken and continued to lease the centre at a peppercorn rate. However, some external works were essential which would require significant future Capital investment and a complete set of new apparatus was needed to operate the centre safely in the longer term. This option would not realise a revenue return for the Council.

56. EXTENDING THE FUNDING OF 2 EPPING FOREST CAB DEBT ADVISORS

The Housing Portfolio Holder presented a report to the Cabinet advising that the Council currently funded, and had done so for around 3 years, the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) to provide two Debt Advisors to assist residents in the district with their personal budgeting. However, the Cabinet needed to consider whether it wished to extend this grant funding for a further year. The funding added up to £42,000 per annum, shared between the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund.

Such advice was very valuable to residents, but also to the Council, as it helped both, keeping rent arrears low and preventing homelessness.

For every person that was prevented from becoming homeless as a result of this debt advice, the charge made to single homeless people accommodated in B&B hotels, that were eligible for housing benefit, was equivalent to around £15,920 per annum. The Council's Housing Benefit Service was only able to recover the equivalent of around £7,640 per person per annum from the Government. This was because the Government wanted to penalise local authorities who accommodated homeless households in B&B hotels. Therefore, the resultant average cost to the General Fund, through the loss of the B&B subsidy, was around £8,280 per person per annum.

Under the present agreement, the CAB were required to have one Debt Advisor based at the Limes Centre, Chigwell for one half day each week. However, the CAB have extended this service to 2 half days each week, since 37% of the clients they assisted were first seen at the Limes Centre.

Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the CAB on the use and outcomes of all the grant funding that they received from the Council, where they learned that in the first 5 months of this year, the CAB Advisors managed debts of around £444,000 and assisted 286 clients. In addition, there were 246 drop-in clients who had face-to-face interviews with the Debt Advisors. Around 41% of the clients were Council or Housing Association tenants and 18% of all clients were either threatened with homelessness or homeless. The CAB had reported that 308 debt issues were addressed with a total of 1,340 activities being conducted on behalf of their clients.

Based on the risks and benefits above, it was therefore recommended that the Cabinet seek a bid for the 2019/20 budget to fund the Epping Forest CAB for the two full-time Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2019 and funding be split as follows:

- (a) £8,400 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and
- (b) £33,600 from the General Fund District Development Fund (DDF).

Councillor Mohindra stated that the Council had always been very supportive of the CAB by granting funding to them but he wanted to highlight to Members that 80% of the funding source would come from the General Fund and therefore to be mindful that this would be competing with other requirements.

Councillor Stavrou stated that the split was weighted that way as to prevent homelessness and homelessness responsibility was a statutory obligation on behalf of local authorities.

Mr Pledger advised that the HRA was ring fenced so that only Council tenants could benefit from HRA funding. Based on the statistics that the CAB have been able to provide to us they were saying that 41% of the clients were Council or Housing Association. Based on the evidence that they had collected they could not advise of the exact split between Council and Housing Association but going forward they would now start to collect this information. Therefore on this occasion we have had to assume that of the 41%, 20% were HRA and 21% General Fund.

Councillor Mohindra stressed that it be made clear to the CAB that future funding would be linked to required statistics. Mr Pledger advised that this had already been made clear to the CAB.

Councillor H Whitbread queried whether the CAB were situated only at the Limes Centre in Chigwell. Mr Pledger advised that they were based in other locations and would cover the whole of the district.

Decision:

That the Cabinet sought a bid from the 2019/20 budget for the funding of the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) for two existing full-time Debt Advisors for a further year to be agreed from 1 April 2019 and funded as follows:

- (a) £8,400 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and
- (b) £33,600 from the General Fund District Development Fund (DDF).

Reasons for Decision:

To agree to extend the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2019, in order to provide support to residents with personal budgeting and debt advice which will assist the Council in controlling rent arrears and preventing homelessness.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

The main alternative options appear to be:

1. Not to agree to extend the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2019.
2. To only extend the funding for one CAB Debt Advisor.
3. To provide funding for more than two CAB Debt Advisors.

57. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no other urgent business for consideration by the Cabinet.

CHAIRMAN