

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 2021
IN CONFERENCE SUITE - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 9.00 PM**

Members Present:	J Lea (Chairman), R Balcombe (Vice-Chairman), I Hadley, S Murray, C Nweke, S Rackham, J H Whitehouse, D Wixley, J Mclvor and R Morgan
Co-opted Member:	W Marsh (Chairman of the Tenants and Resident Association)
Other members present:	S Kane, A Patel, J Philip and H Whitbread
Apologies for Absence:	H Brady, D Plummer and K Williamson
Officers Present	N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), D Fenton (Service Director (Housing Revenue Account)), J Gould (Service Director (Community & Wellbeing)), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor), R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer) and M Turnbull (Project Manager - Housing)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that this 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

It was noted that Councillor R Morgan and Councillor J Mclvor had been appointed as substitute for Councillor K Williamson and Councillor H Brady respectively.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a non-pecuniary, non-prejudicial interest at this meeting as a Trustee for the Citizen Advice Bureau.

(b) Pursuant to the Council's Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor J H Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary, non-prejudicial interest at this meeting as she was a Trustee of the Epping Reuse Centre.

4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the meetings held on 30 March 2021 and 22 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record subject to the additional of Mr W Marsh to the attendance list on 22 April 2021.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee requested that the Terms of Reference were reviewed to reflect the Council's Corporate Aims and Key Objectives.

The Chief Operating Officer advised that this issue would be discussed at the next Joint meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of O&S and Select Committee's on 22 July 2021, as similar issues had been raised for the other Select Committees. The Terms of Reference would then be presented the O&S Committee for approval.

The Committee considered the work programme and requested the Allocation Policy, Tenancy Policy and Housing Strategy were added, to ensure that they were scrutinised before the proposed Cabinet decisions were made in 2022.

The Community and Wellbeing Service Director advised that the timeline for the policies was currently being discussed with the Housing Services Portfolio Holder and would be put into the work programme.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee's Terms of Reference would be reviewed by the Joint meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of O&S and Select Committee on 22 July 2021 to ensure that they reflected the Corporate Aims and Key Objectives; and
2. That the following items would be added to the Committee's Work Programme;
 - Allocation Policy;
 - Tenancy Policy; and
 - Housing Strategy.

6. THE SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Housing and Property Director presented a report on the actions which would need to be undertaken to meet the requirements of Social Housing White Paper or "The Charter for Social Housing Residents" which had been published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government on 17 November 2020.

The white paper set out wide ranging and compulsory changes to how social housing organisations operated and included themes from the green paper "A New Deal for Social Housing". This had been re-drafted and expanded into seven themes with specific policies, measures and an enhanced role for The Regulator for Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman.

The seven themes were;

1. To be safe in your home;
2. To know how your landlord was performing;
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly;
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator for tenants;
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord;
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in; and
7. To be supported to take your first steps to ownership.

The Housing and Property Director advised that the implications of the Social Housing white paper had set out new requirements for resident engagement and complaints. The changes were expected to deliver proactive oversight of consumer standards, which would provide the regulator with greater oversight of the performance of local authorities' landlord function. There was also a greater emphasis on safety, resident voice, performance monitoring, home ownership with non-compliance and a new consumer standard resulting in unlimited fines, and reputational damage.

The timescales for implementation of the proposals in the Charter were not yet known, however driving up levels of satisfaction in the areas of Neighbourhoods and Communications would continue to be a key priority for the Council over the coming months and it had been proposed that a review be carried out against the paper and subsequent action be created.

The Committee asked the following questions;

- Was data available on the residents' feedback? The Housing and Property Director advised a summary would be included in the minutes or sent to members directly.
- Would Officers agreed that the legislation could still differ somewhat compared to the white paper and therefore it would be wise to not concentrate too finally on the detail? The Housing and Property Director commented that the Council had two people who fed into the forums which included the Tenant and Leaseholder Federation Chairman, Mr W Marsh and the Head Asset and Facilities, Mr D Epton, so they felt well informed.
- Did officers respond to the green paper, and if so, did they feel that their comments had been addressed in the white paper? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Council had responded to the green paper and there had been no surprises.
- Could the data collected on landlords be used to rank them or highlight potential issues; and how did the Council measure the outcomes of complaints against landlords? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Council's was proposing to compare their Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) with other similar sized organisations to ensure consistency. In regard to complaints, there was a Complaints Policy for tenants and the number of complaints upheld or dismissed was monitored. On a wider point, estate improvements were being carried out and the before and after satisfaction results were being monitored to determine the return on investments.
- Did the white paper cover Councils' and Housing Associations'? Yes.
- Did the White Paper cover private landlords? No.
- Who was the regulator mention in the report and were self-referral realistic? The Housing and Property Director advised that regulator was called the Social Housing Regulator and a report would be brought forward to give the Committee a more detailed overview on this area. Regarding self-referral, she stated that organisations did self-refer, due to serious consequences if found not complying.
- Mr W Marsh advised that he sat on the Housing Ombudsman Residents Panel and both the Ombudsman and Regulator frequently attended their meetings. Regarding complaints, it was noted that the Ombudsman published details of the authorities that had not complied in addition to the fines imposed.

It was noted that the Regulator for social housing was an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

- What would be the cost of implementation? The Housing and Property Director advised that although they were not aware of the costs at the moment, they would be able to surmise from the gap analysis and review work. It was noted that the costs would be assumed within the HRA budget.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee noted the summary of the Social Housing White Paper and the potential impact on EFDC going forward; and
2. That an update highlighting the findings of a gap analysis and required actions to meet the standards would be proved at the next meeting.

7. OUR NEW APPROACH TO RESIDENTS INVOLVEMENT

The Housing and Property Director gave a short presentation regarding the changes that had occurred to resident involvement in estate and land management. (A copy of has been attached to the minutes).

The Committee asked the following questions;

- How did the Council engage with 'hard to reach' tenants? The Housing and Property Director advised that the officers had recognised that tenants needed a variety of options, rather than just meetings at the Civic Offices. Therefore they had expanded communication through estate meetings, virtual meetings, surveys, in local schools and webinars.
- What was the process for a virtual inspections?; what issues were being raised and how were they dealt with? The Housing and Property Director informed members that officer used mobile devices when out on estates and the issues would then be recorded through a workflow system and actioned accordingly.
- Did 'Housing News' still exist and if so, how was it disseminated? The Housing and Property Director advised that it was still produced in a digital format.
- How were the costs of the improvements to housing estates distributed across housing estates of mixed tenure? The Housing and Property Director advised that leaseholder paid a service charge, and where legally required, a Section 20 would be served. Further investigation would be required to determine if costs could be split costs across the HRA and General fund, on mixed tenure estates.
- How were costs associated with communal areas attributed to Leaseholders? The Housing and Property Director advised that a dedicated team worked out the costs, which were based on the rateable value of the property.
- Would a Debden Tenants Association resume? The Housing and Property Director advised that the Estate and Land Management Manager, R Smith would contact Councillor Wixley regarding creating a new Debden Tenants Panel.
- How many tenants or residents attended the webinars? It was noted that the webinar figures would be included in the minutes of the meeting.

*Figures supplied following the meeting

Webcast title	Live date	All views ↑
Housing service webinar	2021-01-20 14:40:00	154
Housing service webinar	2021-04-30 12:30:00	93

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee noted the new approach to resident's involvement; and
2. The Housing News would be distributed to Members.

8. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE

The Customer Services Manager gave an update on the Council's Customer Service in the following areas;

- What the residents were telling us;
- Complaints;
- Recycling Outlets;
- What had worked well; and
- The Customer Strategy.

She informed the Committee that significant changes had been made to the website customer satisfaction survey, which had enabled residents and the Council to respond more easily. In regards to the complaints, the majority of these had been in relation to business grants which had not been upheld. From the data it appeared that the complaints were not process driven but regarding the outcome. Furthermore, residents had now familiarised themselves with other recycling sack outlets in the District which could remove the need for residents visiting the Civic Office only for recycling sacks.

The re-opening of the Broadway Cash Office had received positive customer feedback and in the first month the Cash Office had taken almost £210,000 in total of which £109,000 was cash. The kiosks at the Civic would open once the building was Covid safe for external customers. The long term solutions for cash paying customers had been looked at and a report on this would follow in September.

Customer Strategy

It was noted that the new welcome lounge and partnership hub at the Civic offices had been progressing and partners included Food Bank, Phoenix Futures, Nacro, VAEF, ECC Family Solutions, DWP, CAB, CHESS Homeless, Changing Pathways and Peabody. It was envisaged that services and partners would be aligned and available on the same days/times, to provide a one stop multi agency approach for residents.

There had been 'Customer Shoes' behavioural training session for staff, which had provided coaching for difficult and challenging customer conversations and a holistic view of customer behavioural training was being considered across all service areas.

The Corporate Communications had invested extensive support in the delivery of the recent County, District Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and Town and Parish elections and results of the elections had been posted via the website and social media. The election count centre at North Weald Airfield had featured extensively in the local TV news coverage broadcast by BBC London and the team had also supported the webcasting for virtual and face-to-face meetings in the Civic Office.

New and re-elected Members had attended the Civic Offices for their induction session and further work continued into Members technology and reviewing Members contact with officers.

The Committee asked the following questions;

- What was meant by 'long term solutions for cash payments' in relation to the Broadway cash office? The Customer Services Manager advised that the cash office at the Broadway would not be removed, although consideration was being given to what other options could be provided for cash paying residents across the District.
- What type of new queries had been received over the pandemic period; and what provisions were in place for staff following a difficult call? The Customer Services Manager advised that queries were mainly to do with what support the Council was offering and business grants. The Call centre staff were supplied with Frequently Asked Question(FAQ) crib sheet; received additional training and were supported by other service areas. If they received a particular difficult call, they had the use of virtual Teams or could call a colleague directly in addition to relevant training that they had received.
- Could Members receive the 'In Customer Shoes' training? Yes, the next session had scheduled for September and information about this course would be distributed in the Members Bulletin.
- How would the partnership hub work in practice? The Customer Service Manager advised that the hub would not be a drop-in centre but a appointments based service dependent on when the partners were available. It was envisioned that around 80% appointments would be booked and 20% would be allowed for other urgent cases.
- How would the partnership hub be advertised? The Service Manager advised that a communication plan would be developed to look at the options in conjunction with the partners advertising the hub as well.
- What was the service level performance for customer service? The Customer Service Manager advised that the quarter 1 period had not ended, so she was unable to provide the Committee with this information. Although it was noted that first point resolution for calls was currently at 54%.
- Why were there so many complaints in relation to business grants? The Finance, Qualis Client & Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised that there was numerous and complex criteria for the business grants, which were followed and had resulted in complaints on the success of applications, which differed from complaints concerning the process.
- What was IVR? The Customer Service Manager advised that it was the voice recognition system used to assist the call centre staff, if a FAQ was asked and IVR stood for Interactive Voice Recognition.

It was noted that some Members were experiencing frustration with the technology supplied to access reports, submit issues and contact the relevant officers. The Customer Services Manager advised that a daily report was being produced, which aimed to create a data of issues and resolution which would hopefully reduce the issues over time.

- In relation to KPI reporting, was the pentana system still used? The Customer Service Manager advised that the system had originally been used to manage projects and was not now used, although a review of project governance was being completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the update on ‘what our residents were telling us’ and the Customer Strategy.

9. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on the grounds that they would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

<u>Agenda Item No</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Exempt Information Paragraph Number</u>
11	Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Hub	3

10. WALTHAM ABBEY COMMUNITY & CULTURAL HUB

The Community and Wellbeing Services Director presented a business case for the creation of a Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey.

The Committee discussed the proposals and reasons set out by the Council in partnership with Essex County Council. The hub was aimed to support the economic and social regeneration of Waltham Abbey Town Centre.

RESOLVED:

The Committee supported the initial proposals for a Community and Cultural Hub in Waltham Abbey.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted that the date of the next meeting was 21 September 2021.

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Resident Involvement update

Estate and Land Management

Creating Great Places Where People Want to Live

Current model of resident involvement not fit for purpose



continually improve the way we engage and communicate with our residents



review our current model of resident involvement



to research best of breed resident involvement models



to recommend a new model of resident involvement which better meets the needs & wants of our customers, and which best suits the business.

Position 14 months ago

- Face to face meetings with our strategic Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, Sheltered Housing Forum and Residents Groups
- Ad hoc consultation letters
- Digital newsletters
- Surveys



Short Term

- We moved as many of our face to face meetings onto digital platforms
- Estate-based virtual coffee mornings
- Inspections via What's App and Facetime
- Housing Webinars



What else?

Increased grants for recognised residents' groups

New video conferencing licence grant

New literature.

Rebranding : GET INVOLVED

Social media presence

More Thank Bricks and Mortar Estate Enhancement Scheme / growing projects

Digitizing key services



Medium to long term

- Research
- Pilots
- Customer satisfaction survey
- Co-create group – residents / Officers / Members
- Capsticks



In the Pipeline

- Qtr 3 recommendations to Select Committee
- Implementation
- Microsite
- Open Reach super-fast broadband across District
- New Housing IT system
- Support existing and future resident groups
- Provided training

Questions

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