

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COUNCIL MINUTES

Committee:	Council	Date:	16 December 2021
Place:	Conference Suite - Civic Offices	Time:	7.00 - 7.40 pm
Members Present:	Councillors H Kane (Chairman), N Avey, R Bassett, P Bhanot, P Bolton, H Brady, R Brookes, L Burrows, D Dorrell, S Heather, S Kane, P Keska, J Leppert, A Lion, T Matthews, C McCredie, J McIvor, R Morgan, S Murray, J Philip, K Rizvi, M Sartin, P Stalker, D Sunger, B Vaz, C Whitbread, J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson and D Wixley		
Members Virtual Attendance:	Councillors R Balcombe, R Baldwin, S Heap, B Jennings, J Jennings, S Jones, H Kauffman, L Mead, S Neville, C Nweke, C C Pond, C P Pond, J Share-Bernia and H Whitbread		
Apologies:	Councillors N Bedford, J Jogia, A Mitchell, M Owen, A Patel, S Rackham, C Roberts and B Rolfe		
Officers Present:	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor), A Kang (Consultant) and R Perrin (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer)		

54. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman advised Members that with the new variant of Covid, Omicron, which was spreading really fast, this meeting of Council will deal with the urgent business on the agenda which could not be delayed, Agenda item 11, Local Government Council Size and Boundary Review on pages 117-126 and Agenda item 14, Appointment of External Auditor. The Council needed to vote on these items and therefore it was not appropriate for this meeting to take place virtually due to the current Government legislation, Members had to be present to vote.

The Chairman greeted the Members that had attended by Zoom and informed them that they were welcome to participate in the meeting but they would not be able to vote.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager 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.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

56. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 28 October 2021 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to comments from Councillor D Wixley.

- Page 12, (c) Corporate Services Portfolio Holder, there was a spelling mistake 'covert' should read 'cohort'.
- Page 23, (b) Premier Nature Reserve should read 'Roding Valley Meadows Nature Reserve'.

Councillor C McCredie advised that on page 7 of the agenda under 'Members Virtual Attendance:' Councillor McCredie was listed as S McCredie and this should have been C McCredie.

57. APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR**Mover: Councillor J Philip, Finance, Qualis Client and Economic Development Portfolio Holder**

Councillor J Philip advised that at the last meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee they considered the options for appointing an external Auditor and decided that the Council should remain with the national procurement process and asked the Council for delegated authority to the Council's Section 151 officer to formally give notice of the Council's intention to opt into the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA).

Councillor S Heap agreed that the Council should opt into the PSAA but wanted to make members aware that the cost would go up as they were previously undercharging.

Councillor J Philip thanked Councillor Heap for highlighting this and advised that the Council knew that the audit team needed to be paid adequately for the amount of work they needed to do and the original procurement process probably didn't adequately work out how much work needed to be done. The Council believe that they will still spend less with this process than going out on their own, therefore this was the best way to keep the costs down.

Report as first moved ADOPTED**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Council continued to participate in the national procurement process led by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) for the appointment of external auditors.
- (2) Subject to recommendation (1) above, delegated authority be granted to the Section 151 officer to formally give notice of the Council's intention to opt into the PSAA procurement agreement.

58. LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL SIZE AND BOUNDARY WARD REVIEW

Mover: Councillor C Whitbread, Leader of the Council.

Councillor C Whitbread stated that this was the first time since 1998 that the Council had undertaken a boundary review. The last time the Council ended up losing one seat and remained with elections by thirds. Most members would have taken the opportunity to read the report before them this evening and many were at the presentation recently received on the potential for boundary reviews.

The option before the Council this evening was to continue with “thirds”, which had produced stable local government for Epping Forest over many years or to commence to a public consultation on moving to a “4 yearly” all out election cycle. He advised that he had looked at the pros and cons for both options and preferred to stay with “thirds” even though it meant going to the Boundary Commission with a three seat warding arrangement. The Boundary Commission had made it clear to the Council that they could make arguments for areas such as the Rodings and High Ongar in order to make variations to that. Over the years “thirds” have worked successfully from the point of view of engaging with the public in the election process and was much more successful than “4 year” all out elections.

All-out elections meant that you could have a very flexible make-up of the Council's warding arrangements however, whichever system that was chosen to proceed with, it had to be said, that no change was not an option. Warding arrangements will change and we have to bear in mind that this was a boundary review that would take the Council up to 2028, by which time there will be adjustments in some communities, some areas will see growth, some areas will see no growth and that meant there would be a shift of warding and a shift of where members would be sitting. He stated that he was personally recommending that Epping Forest District Council remained as “thirds” and would amend the recommendations accordingly.

Amendment moved by Councillor C Whitbread and seconded by Councillor J Philip

Recommendation 2. be amended to read ‘That the Council resolved to continue with elections by “thirds” as it's election cycle’.

Carried

Report as amended Adopted

RESOLVED:

1. That the report of the Leader be noted; and
2. That the Council resolved to continue with elections by “thirds” as it's election cycle.

59. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman wished everyone Happy Holidays and closed the meeting.

CHAIRMAN

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