

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 7 March 2013 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.13 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

Members Present:

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): B Rolfe (Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, Mrs M Sartin, Mrs P Smith and Mrs E Webster

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s):

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): V Metcalfe and C Pond

Representing Local Councils:

Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish Council), Councillor E Borton (Nazeing Parish Council), J Brown (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), G Castle (Nazeing Parish Council), G Chambers (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), Mrs C Pond (Loughton Town Council), Mrs S De Luca (North Weald Parish Council), Mrs S Jackman (Ongar Town Council), R Jackson (Stanford Rivers Parish Council), Councillor B Miller (Epping Upland Parish Council), R Morgan (Matching Parish Council), R E Russell (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), B Surtees (Ongar Town Council), Mrs E K Walsh (Loughton Town Council), S Watson (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council) and Cllr S Weston (Loughton TC)

Apologies: **Epping Forest District Council –**

Councillor(s): B Sandler

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s):

Parish/Town Councils: -

Mrs K Richmond (Waltham Abbey Town Council), Mrs V Evans (Epping Upland Parish Council), R Alvin (Chigwell Parish Council) and A Tadjrishi (Epping Town Council)

Officers Present:

G Chipp (Chief Executive), D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), M Tipping (Assistant Director (Facilities Management & Emergency Planning)), I White (Forward Planning Manager), K Tuckey (Senior Licensing Officer), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant) and J Leither (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation: G Herbert, Senior External Stakeholder Manager, Post Office Ltd

16. 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.

17. MINUTES**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 8 November 2012 be agreed.

18. PRESENTATION BY GARY HERBERT, SENIOR EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER MANAGER, POST OFFICE LTD

The Committee received a presentation from Mr G Herbert, Senior External Stakeholder Manager, Post Office Ltd, regarding the future of the Post Office.

- (a) The Post Office had 1,800 branches
- (b) post offices served 8 million customers per week.
- (c) 97.7% of the public lived within 3 miles of a Post Office
- (d) There was a programme of modernizing with £1.4 billion being invested.
- (e) no closures were envisaged, there was currently the lowest percentage rate of closures for 25 years.

The committee was informed that in the next three years 6,000 branches would become main or local post offices. A main post office would resemble a commercial or retail establishment situated in a major thoroughfare. The main branches would number 4,000 and adopt an open plan layout with hours of business the same as retails, 7 days a week, 8.00a.m. to 10.00p.m.

The local post offices would number 2,000 – 3,000 and would have similar business hours but were to lose their cubicles being replaced by a serving till in an open plan environment. All sub post office masters were being invited to volunteer for one of these models.

The committee were advised that there was a trial run currently involving 300 post offices. It was found that 22% of existing customers were using these post offices outside of core hours. The retail element had risen by 9%, takings were up by 4% with an overall satisfaction of over 9%.

It was planned to have 1,200 post offices converted by April 2013 and 6,000 by 2015.

Members were concerned about security in open plan post offices with large financial transactions taking place. Mr G Herbert advised that security was better, it was also felt that this led to tensions with customers. Security screens added extra costs with crime rates dropping overall.

Members asked if public libraries could become venues for post offices. Mr G Herbert said that they could consider this, but it had to have equal consideration with other projects.

The committee asked what effect would there be on the Business Plans for Sub Post Office Masters. Mr G Herbert replied that Post Office Ltd were sometimes investing between £70,000-£80,000 in a branch to modernize it. Business had dropped overall, with the main effect having been changes to the benefits system whereby Post Office Ltd had lost a tender bid. They had won the DVLA contract.

RESOLVED:

That the Presentation by Mr G Herbert, Senior External Stakeholder Manager, Post Office Ltd, be noted.

19. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

(a) Local Plan Update

The Committee received a presentation from Mr I White, Forward Planning Manager, regarding an update of the Local Plan.

Members had raised this issue for discussion as they felt that the recent Local Plan workshops had not been as helpful, or constructive, as they could have been. They felt that consideration should be given for the Forward Planning Team to work closely with Parish and Town Councils to host public feedback sessions as an integral part of the next consultation phase of the Local Plan.

Mr I White acknowledged that the second workshop had been more successful than the first and advised that members should feedback if they thought anything was wrong. The third workshop was scheduled for 9 March and would deal with settlements and rural areas, the outcomes of which would be reported to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee on 25 March. The fourth workshop would discuss population and household projections, and would take place in late May or early June 2013.

There would be a report submitted to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee in early July agreeing population and housing numbers up to 2033 and narrowing down the strategic distribution options, taking into account the outcomes of the latest study on the future of North Weald Airfield, and feedback on the Essex County Council Consultation on Junction 7A on the M11, if available.

Following the fifth member workshop to discuss outcomes, there would be a report to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee to determine "Preferred Option" version of plan for next round of public consultation. It was anticipated that consultation would commence in late autumn.

Members thanked the Forward Planning Team for working exceptionally hard on the Local Plan.

Mr I White advised that some elements of the Local Plan needed to be in place as soon as possible as old policies ceased to have an effect from the end of March 2013. He added that neighbourhood planning resources were reasonably limited and these plans had to make room for as much development as the Local Plan.

(b) District Licensing Applications

The branch members felt that parish and town councils should be informed of, and given opportunity to comment on licence applications in their locality. Although it was acknowledged that there was no statutory duty to consult with local councils, it was hoped that arrangements should be made with the Council's licensing section to allow for timely consideration of comments from parishes and towns.

In attendance on behalf of the licensing section was the Senior Licensing Officer, she advised that the Licensing Act 2003 stated that going beyond its legal parameters could assist the applicant with an appeal. The District Council did display all licensing applications on its website and they ensured that notification was published in the local press with officers also checking newspaper circulation as well. The Chief Executive recognised this as a legal anomaly which the Council could not change.

(c) Local Council Tax Support Grant

Local councils paid thanks to the District Council for the arrangements made to ensure that they were not left disadvantaged by the Localising Council Tax Scheme (LCTS) for the financial year 2013/14. However it was felt that their precept setting process had been significantly disrupted, being difficult to understand in some cases.

With the tax base setting process changed, local councils could now be reliant on an annual grant to meet any income shortfall from a decreased precept. Safeguards should be made to ensure the sustainability of town and parish councils and support the budget setting process. It was noted that town and parish councils had been exempt from the requirement for a local referendum to veto excessive council tax increases this year. Should the exemption be removed, and the grant allowance reduced, it was likely that many local councils would find approved of future budgets subject to referendum. It was advised that the Director of Finance could advise on this in the future.

20. WEEKLY LIST OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Planning and Economic Development produced a weekly list of planning and other applications. The Forward Planning Manager advised that the information available on the list was more wide ranging than it had once been and local councils were encouraged to check the new material which was included after the list of new applications (alphabetically by parish).

21. LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL

The Chairman of the Local Highways Panel, County Councillor G McEwen advised that the panel had agreed a list of highways projects for 2012/13 with a similar sum allocated for next year. He added that Members should be thinking about future projects.

It was noted that excellent work had been undertaken in Stanford Rivers regarding a Speed Watch, the equipment used could be lent to other councils. Members complained of the problems they and their constituents had experienced with the Highways Call Centre. It was advised that the call centre was designed to protect highways officers from a high volume of calls for example there were thousands of calls on pot holes.

Councillor G McEwen advised that he wasn't standing as a councillor in May, and Councillor J Knapman, if re-elected, would chair the Panel. Members paid tribute to County Councillor G McEwen for his dedication to the Local Council's Liaison Committee.

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Assistant Director, Corporate Support Services (Facilities Management) was in attendance. He advised that there was an initiative to support Emergency Planning, with the backing of the Cabinet office, to build a network of local volunteers, they would be a resource in emergency situations and could probably undertake other roles such as, in severe weather, clearing snow and ice. It was noted that these volunteers would work with Essex Fire and Rescue Service and receive training. It was noted that the volunteers would not self activate but rather be tasked by Essex Fire and Rescue.

23. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following meeting dates of the committee were noted:

- (a) Thursday 4 July 2013 at 7.30p.m.;
- (b) Thursday 7 November at 7.30p.m.; and
- (c) Thursday 6 March 2014 at 7.30p.m.

CHAIRMAN

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