

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 10 February 2015

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 8.36 pm

Members Present: Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) D Dorrell, L Girling, P Keska, Mrs J Lea, A Mitchell MBE, S Murray, Mrs C P Pond, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, Ms G Shiell, B Surtees and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors R Bassett, Mrs A Grigg, Ms H Kane, A Lion, J Philip, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou, G Waller and C Whitbread

Apologies: Councillors K Angold-Stephens, G Chambers, T Church and A Watts

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods), S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), B Copson (Performance Improvement Officer), I White (Forward Planning Manager), G. Nicholas (National Management Trainee), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

51. 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.

52. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Caroline Pond was substituting for Councillor K Angold-Stephens.

53. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2015 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors M Sartin, and S Stavrou declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 – Lea Valley Regional Park Authority Park Development Consultation, by virtue of being council appointed members of the LVRPA. They advised that they would remain in the meeting for the duration of the item.

Councillors R Bassett declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 – Lea Valley Regional Park Authority Park Development Consultation, by virtue of being the Chairman of the Lea Valley Food Task Force. He advised that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the item.

55. CORPORATE PLAN 2015/16 - 2020/21

The Senior Performance Improvement Officer, Ms Copson, introduced the draft Corporate Plan for 2015 to 2020. The Committee noted that the current Corporate Plan ends on 31 March 2015 and this new Corporate Plan had been developed to take the authority forward over the next five years.

The Council's main areas of focus for the five year lifetime of the new Plan had been captured in a new set of corporate aims. In addition a new set of Key Objectives had been developed to support the aims.

Three strategic aims had been identified and these would have objectives to support them. The aims were:

- (1) to ensure that the Council had appropriate resources, on an ongoing basis to fund its statutory duties and appropriate discretionary services whilst continuing to keep the Council Tax low.
- (2) To ensure that the Council had a sound and approved Local Plan and commences its delivery.
- (3) To ensure that the Council adopts a modern approach to the delivery of its services and that they are efficient, effective and fit for purpose.

The aims and objectives would be supported by an action plan that would be updated yearly. This would be published on the Council's website. The Action Plan would be closely monitored and performance would be reported quarterly to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The new Corporate Plan was a forward looking document, shorter than the existing plan, was written in plain English and would be more easily understandable to members of the public.

The new Corporate Plan would be considered by the Cabinet in March 2015 before submission to Council for formal adoption in April 2015.

Councillor Stallan welcomed the plan but had concerns about the target dates on the action plan; they may not be achievable and he would like to see a caveat that they could be subject to change. Mr Macnab said that the covering report did say that the dates were subject to change and updating.

Councillor Wixley asked if this would only be available via the website; what about the people that did not have access to the internet, for example could it be put in the Forester. Mr Macnab noted that the primary source would be electronic but we could supply some hardcopies to libraries and Town Councils etc.

Councillor Philip added that it had been agreed that the Forester had finished. Mr Carne said that as well this document being on our website they would also issue a press release to draw attention to it.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted and agreed the proposed new Corporate Plan for 2015 to 2020 and the Key Action Plan for 2015-16.

**56. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL FRAMEWORK REVIEW -
RECOMMENDATIONS OF TASK & FINISH PANEL**

In the absence of the Chairman of the Task and Finish Panel the Vice Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel Review Task and Finish Panel, Councillor Sartin introduced their final report and recommendations.

The Committee noted that they had been established in July 2014 to review the Council's existing Scrutiny Panel framework. They had met on four occasions since then and had held a workshop to explore their alternatives.

With the revision of the Council management structure in December 2013, reducing the service directorates down to four, the Panel considered the creation of a four panel structure to align with the new directorates. This proposal arose in part, due to the existing arrangements, where not all service areas were subject to scrutiny by any particular Panel.

Part of the Panel's research involved having a scrutiny workshop held on Saturday 22 November. All members were invited. They covered Panel structure issues and ongoing scrutiny training needs. At another session they invited Panel Chairmen and Vice Chairmen to discuss what they felt worked well and what did not. They also carried out stakeholder interviews with senior officers to gain further insight.

The Panel also considered the possible combination of the Audit and Governance Committee with the Standards Committee as part of a new select committee framework. On consideration the Panel agreed that the possible combination of the Audit and Governance Committee and the Standards Committee should be omitted from its recommendations as to the future structure of the Overview and Scrutiny framework.

Councillor Surtees said that he was impressed with the workshop but asked if the new committees would have a flexible way of working and how could the workload of the proposed four committees be balanced fairly. Also, would the new structure be subject to a review period. Councillor Sartin replied that a review period had been discussed but did not find its way into the recommendations. Mr Hill added that it was thought inadvisable to do this too quickly after the start, it would need at least an 18 month period for the new system to bed down. In the end it was thought that a review would not be necessary in the short term. As for flexible working, officers are looking at this and considering various training courses. There was nothing in the rules to preclude different ways of working. 'Flexibility in the system' was part of the report.

Councillor Murray agreed with the report and all its recommendations. It was an excellent job. He thanked the Panel for inviting the Scrutiny Panel Chairmen to put their views forward at the start of the process.

Councillor Sartin said that the workshop had proved very successful and there were plans to hold workshops along similar lines in the future. She encouraged members to attend. She thanked all the officers and members who had participated in this review and for responding to the consultations.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a new Overview and Scrutiny framework, based on a structure of four 'select committees', be established with effect from the commencement of the 2015/16 municipal year;

- (2) That the titles and general responsibilities of each select committee be as set out in the appendix to the report (attached);
- (3) That, at the present time, no increase be made in the number of members appointed to each select committee, and that this remain at eleven councillors in accordance with pro-rata provisions;
- (4) That the Director of Governance report to the Council to seek the re-establishment of the existing Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel as a new 'Constitution Working Group' from 2015/16, as a result of the implementation of the new scrutiny panel framework;
- (5) That, to ensure continuity during its on-going review of the Council's constitution, the Council be recommended to reappoint the existing members of the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel to the Constitution Working Group (wherever possible) and that no variation be made in the number of members appointed to the Working Group;
- (6) That the report of the Director of Governance recommend that the Constitution Working Group report directly to the Council in connection with its work programme, rather than the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (7) That, subject to the concurrence of the Remuneration Panel, a Special Responsibility Allowance be awarded to the Chairman of the Constitution Working Group, as a result of the disbanding of the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel;
- (8) That no action be taken at the present time with regard to any possible combination of the Audit and Governance Committee and the Standards Committee but that, if necessary, a further Task and Finish Panel be established in future to consider such combination in light of new legislative audit requirements;
- (9) That focused and achievable work programmes be developed for each select committee each year, drawing on Portfolio Holder and service delivery aims and objectives, and relevant community priorities;
- (10) That the current induction and on-going training arrangements for members in respect of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function, be reviewed and enhanced as appropriate;
- (11) That the select committees be encouraged to use a variety of appropriate techniques and methodologies as set out in the report, in the undertaking of future scrutiny and service review activity; and
- (12) That, subject to the agreement of the above recommendations, the Council formally be advised of the proposals of the Task and Finish Panel, in view of the likely wider member interest in the establishment of a new Overview and Scrutiny framework.

57. LEA VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY - PARK DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CONSULTATION

The Forward Planning Manager, Mr White introduced the consultation report from the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) on its Park Development Framework. While it was not a planning authority, there was a duty to prepare plans for the management and development of the park.

The most recent Park Plan was adopted in 2000 and this Park Development Framework was intended to replace it. For the purpose of the consultation the park had been split into 8 areas. We were concerned with areas 6, 7 and 8. This was the last of the consultations for this plan.

The proposals in the consultation document were generally in line with the statutory duties of the Park Authority. Subject to the detail of individual projects, the Council should be supportive of these proposals, as they were in line with the original purposes of the Park and relevant policies of the current Local Plan and Alterations and the National Planning Policy Framework.

However, there were two matters within the proposals which were of concern. Firstly, a significant number of new buildings were being suggested to support implementation of the proposals, particularly in Area 6 and a lot of these were in the green belt. The consultation document generally acknowledges the need to take account of Green Belt location for most of these suggestions, but the proposals could still amount to a significant amount of development with implications for the openness of the Green Belt.

Secondly, there was the casual reference to the use of Compulsory Purchase Powers for large areas of glasshouses etc. The document also indicates that it was likely that the Authority would resist major redevelopment or expansion of new large-scale glasshouse uses.

Members noted that recently the Council had formed the Lea Valley Food Task Force. This was established about two years ago to consider the future of the glasshouse industry and to work with adjoining authorities (including the Park Authority), commercial growers, their umbrella organisations including the Lea Valley Growers Association, to consider new policy approaches for supporting and encouraging the industry, taking into account factors such as food security and food miles. The intention was to develop a standard policy approach in new Local Plans, supportive of the glasshouse industry, across local authority boundaries as an example of positive co-operation.

The proposed use of compulsory purchase powers came as a surprise to both the Council and the Lea Valley Growers Association and when questioned the LVRPA gave some unsatisfactory answers. As a result, the Lea Valley Growers Association and the chairman of the Food Task Force have both formally asked for the consultation to be withdrawn. The Park Authority has declined these requests but had advised that, once the current consultation process had been completed, the draft proposals would be reviewed, taking on board the comments of the industry and all other stakeholders. A second round of consultation would be held in the summer of this year.

The Authority had also advised that it is not its intention to use compulsory purchase powers to undermine existing businesses. The powers would be used to prevent areas which may become redundant from being lost to inappropriate built development within the Park. While this may be the case, the words used in the consultation were not clear on this point.

Councillor Girling commented that there was no mention of the Traveller Community in the document. Did the LVRPA have to provide sites for them? Mr White replied that this was not one of their statutory duties.

Councillor Keska asked if there was any indication how the compulsory purchases were to be funded? Mr White did not know but added that the growers had asked where they would find approximately £100million to buy up the economically active glasshouse sites.

Councillor Murray said that the recommendations were very sound, recommendation (3) objecting to the proposed compulsory purchase powers as currently worded seemed like the right thing to do.

Councillor Bassett said that as the Chairman of the Food Task Force they were very disappointed about this. When they asked about this they were assured that what was written was not what was meant. The LVRPA had sought a judicial review of a permission for significant glasshouse expansion at a nursery in Paynes Lane, Nazeing. This will be considered at the High Court in late March this year. The glasshouses had been there for 150 years and was the source of a lot of employment in the surrounding area. It was right to express our views on our disappointment about this proposal. But they have now said that they would re-consult on this.

Councillor Rolfe asked what they meant by compulsory purchase and had we taken this as far as we can go. Mr White said that it was to buy up areas that are derelict or not compatible.

Councillor Sartin said she was told that it was an unfortunate use of words by officers of the LVRPA . Hopefully they would not compulsory purchase thriving businesses only derelict places.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the overall approach of the proposals in the context of the statutory functions of the Park Authority, ie in relation to sport and recreation, leisure, education and landscape, heritage and nature conservation be supported;
- (2) That concern be expressed about the possible extent of new building being proposed in the Green Belt, especially in Area 6;
- (3) To object to proposals, as currently worded, concerning the use of compulsory purchase powers in relation to a number of glasshouse sites and other long-standing commercial uses within the Park;
- (4) That the Park Authority be encouraged to work more closely with the Lea Valley Growers Association and individual growers to advance schemes for land swaps to benefit both the Park and the glasshouse industry; and
- (5) To encourage the Park Authority to reconsider its attitude towards the glasshouse industry in the light of the National Planning Policy Framework, the on-going work of the Lea Valley Food Task Force, the Authority's stated support for continued agricultural use of land, and the potential educational and heritage resource which the industry could represent within the Park.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted their work programme to date.

- (a) They noted that the Mental Health Services would be going to their March meeting and that NEPP would be going to their April meeting.

Scrutiny Panels

Housing Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman of the Housing Scrutiny Panel noted that they had met the night before and had a presentation on the landlord accreditation scheme. They also had a detailed look at the Council's proposed rent and 'Careline' increases; they also considered the housing improvement fund and their KPI figures for that quarter.

Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman of this Panel indicated that they had not met since the last meeting of this Committee but will be meeting next week.

Safer Cleaner Greener Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman of this Panel noted that they not met since the last meeting of this Committee. At their next meeting they would be considering a presentation on drainage and flooding and also a report on air quality.

Planning Services Scrutiny Panel

There was nothing new to report for this Panel.

Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel

It was noted that their last meeting was with the Finance Cabinet Committee to consider the draft budget for 2015/16.

Task and Finish Panels

Scrutiny Panels Review Task and Finish Panel

The final report from this Panel was on the agenda for this meeting. This Task and Finish Panel had now completed their assigned work.

Grant Aid Task and Finish Panel

This had its first meeting in January 2015. Councillor Caroline Pond had been appointed as Chairman and when they had agreed the Panel's Terms of Reference. Three more meetings had been scheduled.

- (b) **New Work**

The Committee considered the PICK form submitted by Councillor Kane concerning the Youth Council. She was asking that a Task and Finish Panel be set up to review potential options for the best use of the existing budgets for youth engagement for the future. Also, it would be helpful to co-opt two youth councillors to sit on this panel and give their input.

Councillor Murray said that if this Task and Finish Panel was set up he would like to be a member of it.

RESOLVED:

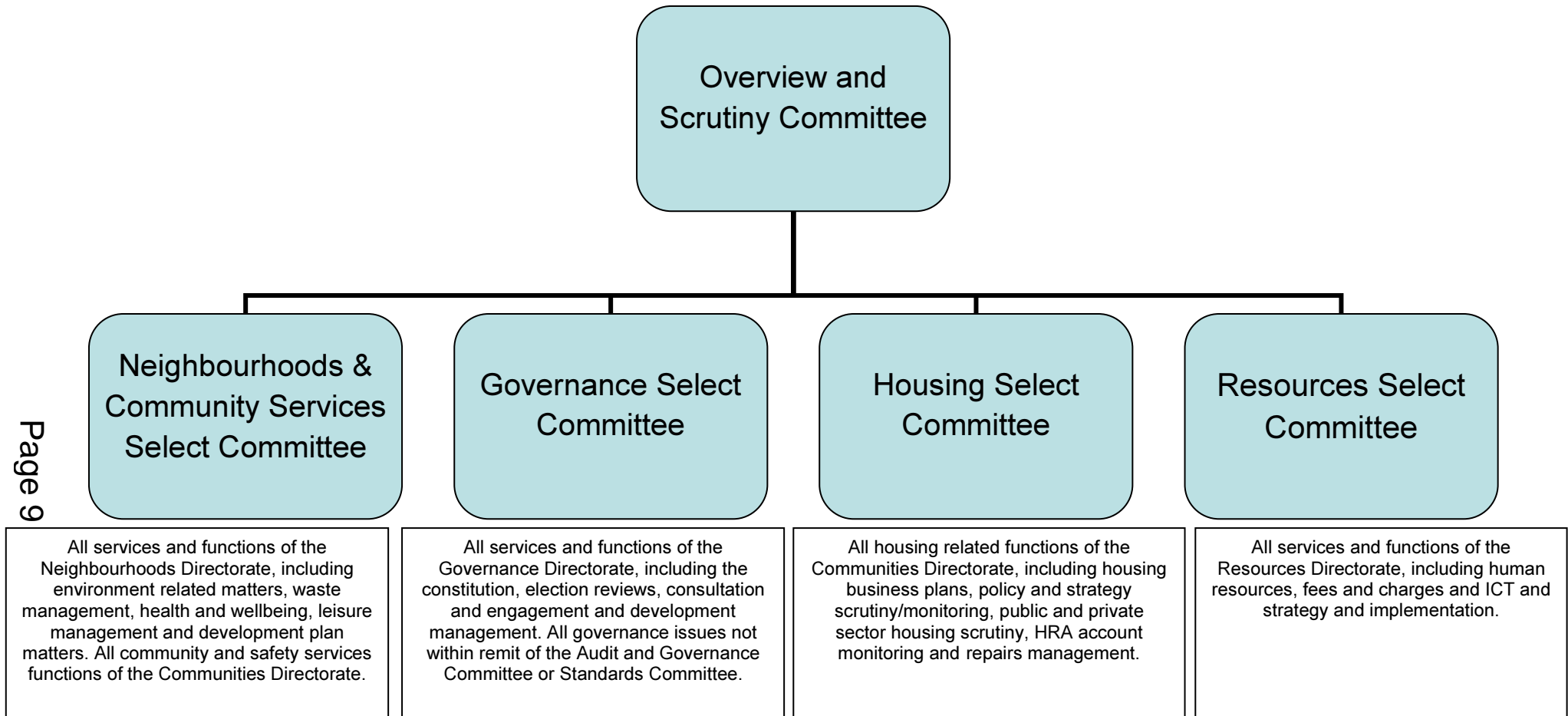
- (1) That a new Task and Finish Panel be set up as indicated on the PICK form from Councillor Kane;
- (2) That two members of the Youth Council be op-opted to sit on this Panel; and
- (3) That group leaders be asked to nominate members to sit on this Panel.

59. REVIEW OF CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the Cabinet's Forward Plan for January 2015. They had no specific items that they wanted to consider.

CHAIRMAN

Proposed Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee Framework



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