

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2016
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.05 - 9.50 PM**

Members Present: Y Knight (Chairman), G Shiell (Vice-Chairman), R Baldwin, A Beales, G Chambers, L Girling, L Hughes, J Lea, A Mitchell, B Surtees and H Whitbread

Other members present: J M Whitehouse, S Stavrou and G Waller

Apologies for Absence: R Gadsby, S Jones, S Murray and B Rolfe

Officers Present A Hall (Director of Communities), L Swan (Assistant Director (Private Sector Housing & Communities Support)), R Wilson (Assistant Director (Housing Operations)), G Wallis (Community, Health & Wellbeing Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Officer)

12. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (MINUTE ITEM 39 - 23.7.02)

It was noted that Councillors G Chambers and J Lea were substituting for Councillors B Rolfe and S Jones respectively.

13. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Select Committee held on 27 June 2016 be agreed.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Pursuant to the Officer's Code of Conduct, R Wilson, Assistant Director – Housing Operations, declared an interest in the following items of the agenda by virtue of his children being on the District Council's Housing Register. The officer advised that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the discussion on these items and any voting or decision taken:

- (a) Item 8 Incentives for Tenants Downsizing Accommodation.
- (b) Item 9 Homeoption Choice Based Lettings Scheme – Progress Report.
- (c) Item 10 Annual Review of Protected Characteristics – Housing Applicants and Lettings.

15. TERMS OF REFERENCE/WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The Select Committee's Terms of Reference were noted.

(b) Work Programme

The Director of Communities advised that in November 2016 the Essex Police District Commander for the area would be attending the Select Committee meeting. Further advice would be issued closer to the time.

16. PRESENTATION OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

The Select Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director – Private Sector Housing and Communities Support regarding Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs).

DFGs were a statutory provision available to private home owners and private tenants with disabilities enabling them to remain independent at home.

The following was noted:

Outline of DFGs

- (a) DFGs were means tested and could be paid up to a maximum of £30,000.
- (b) 12 straight lifts were installed a year at an average cost of £900.00 each.
- (c) 5 curved lifts at an average cost of £3,000 each.
- (d) 37 level access showers at an average cost of £7,000 each.
- (e) 1 extension a year at an average cost of £30,000 each.

DFG Process

- (i) DFGs were initiated by referrals from occupational therapists at Essex County Council.
- (ii) The householder made an application to the District Council.
- (iii) An initial means test was carried out.
- (iv) Information was gathered in support of the application.
- (v) The grant would be formally approved by the District Council.
- (vi) Work carried out.

The whole process from making the application to completion of works could take up to 18 months in complex cases.

Occupational Therapist referrals for DFGs had been rising from 43 in 2011/12 to 251 in 2015/16. In addition the total DFG expenditure had also risen from £302,000 in 2011-12 to £508,000 in 2015/16 and was set to rise further. The Government's contribution to the budget had also risen from £363,000 in 2015/16 to £665,000 in 2016/17.

There were estimated to be 7,000 (16.3%) privately occupied dwellings in the District where at least one resident had a long term illness or disability.

Based on the last Private Sector Stock Condition Survey, the estimated cost of the adaptations needed had been estimated to be £3.6 million. It was advised that the level of savings that could be made as a result of DFGs was as follows:

- Delaying into residential care would save approximately £26,000.
- Adaptations that reduced the need for daily visits paid for themselves within 3 years.
- A hip fracture cost the NHS between £4,000 and £7,000.

The Select Committee were informed that the occupational therapists were mostly self employed contractors working through a Hub and were paid per referral.

The Members thanked the Assistant Director – Private Sector Housing and Communities Support for the presentation and her answers to questions.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation regarding Disabled Facilities Grants be noted.

17. ANNUAL FEEDBACK ON CRUCIAL CREW EVENT AND PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

The Select Committee received a report from the Community, Health and Wellbeing Manager regarding the Crucial Crew Initiative.

Crucial Crew was an annual initiative which was facilitated and delivered by the Council's Community, Health and Wellbeing Team in collaboration with the Community Safety Team. It was intended for educating primary school pupils aged 10 (Year 6) in a range of personal safety, health and wellbeing topics. With schools reporting their curriculum time increasingly tightly programmed, Crucial Crew was seen as a vital mechanism for pupils.

Crucial Crew had existed in the district for over 11 years and delivered to primary school pupils over a two week period in June each year. Every Year 6 primary school pupil in the district attended the half day event and this year 1,358 Epping Forest pupils participated. In addition 17 schools from the Brentwood area paid to attend Crucial Crew bringing a further 429 children into the project reaching a total of 1,787.

Pupils participated in 10 interactive scenarios delivered by a range of agencies, each of which lasted 10 minutes. Scenarios were reviewed and modified on an annual basis ensuring that the themes were relevant and appropriate and took into consideration emerging trends or issues.

In 2016, the scenarios delivered were:

- (a) Online safety, cyber bullying and child exploitation – Essex Police.
- (b) Alcohol and drug awareness – AlcoHelp.
- (c) Bullying and Peer Pressure – Red Balloon.

- (d) Healthy eating and physical activity – ACE (NHS).
- (e) Smoking awareness – Provide (NHS).
- (f) Anti-Social Behaviour and Environmental responsibility – EFDC.
- (g) Road safety awareness – Essex County Council.
- (h) Fire safety – Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.
- (i) Safety around construction sites – Mears.
- (j) Safety around large vehicles – Sainsburys.

The Select Committee was advised that for the first time, in 2016, Crucial Crew was staged at Debden House, Loughton. Prior to this, for 9 years, the project had been delivered from the Gilwell Park Scouting Headquarters in High Beech. The decision to relocate was taken following notification that there would be an increase in hire costs for Gilwell Park, the cost and availability of alternative venues was always reviewed annually, Debden House had proved to be an excellent alternative venue offering flexible room space and an inspiring setting for delivering educational scenarios. It was advised that local schools would need to assist in making provision for transportation to Crucial Crew venues in future as the District Council had experienced difficulties in finding a suitable coach contractor for this task.

The Cabinet Members present advised that the Crucial Crew events they had attended worked “terrifically well,” they thought that Select Committee Members should be invited to attend next summer’s event. The Leader acknowledged the help received already from the private sector with Crucial Crew. They provided a valuable resource.

It was thought that the Epping Forest Youth Council were a good resource for the authority and in participating in these events as were the local authority’s apprentices. The select committee noted the issue of self harming among young people and other mental health problems. It was important to de-stigmatise this situation and facilitate a process for greater awareness.

The Community Health and Wellbeing Manager also explained the proposals for a change in approach for 2017 onwards, to overcome some of the difficulties experienced in recent years and to improve the effectiveness of the initiative further, which were supported by the Select Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made by Crucial Crew in 2016 be noted and that the proposed changes to the initiative from 2017 onwards be supported in principle.

18. INCENTIVES FOR TENANTS DOWNSIZING ACCOMMODATION

The Select Committee received a report regarding the marketing of incentives for tenants downsizing accommodation from the Assistant Director Housing Operations.

At its meeting on 27 June 2016, the Select Committee considered the Annual Report on Performance against Housing Service Standards 2015/16. Under the section relating to the Housing Register and Allocations, members had asked for details of the current incentives offered to existing tenants who were under-occupying Council accommodation to encourage them to move to any Council property with less bedrooms than their current property and the approach taken to marketing the incentives.

The Council's Housing Allocations Scheme had been reviewed in 2015 with the revised scheme coming into force on 27 July 2015. When considering the recommendations of the then Housing Select Committee, the Cabinet agreed that the financial incentives offered to tenants moving to any Council property with less bedrooms than their current property would be increased. The financial incentives offered for releasing any bedroom had been doubled from £500 to £1,000 under the current scheme with a maximum payment of £4,000 being made, an additional payment of £500 made to cover decoration costs over and above the Council's standard decorations allowance plus £500 to meet removal expenses. There were a range of other non financial incentives offered as well.

Since the revised Housing Allocations Scheme came into force on 27 July 2015, 34 downsizing payments had been made in the sum of £77,000 releasing 43 bedrooms. This included £17,000 in removal expenses with a total of £14,530 being credited to rent accounts due to arrears. All tenants downsizing were granted Band A priority. There were currently 139 applicants in Band A, 97 of whom were wanting to downsize accommodation. Since the time the revised Housing Allocations Scheme had come into force 87 lettings had been made to Band A applicants 34 of which were to downsize.

It was noted that there were already 97 tenants in Band A wishing to transfer to smaller accommodation. If incentives were increased and more tenants joined the list it would result in larger numbers waiting for smaller accommodation. Although a bigger pool of tenants would increase the likelihood of any available smaller properties being accepted, due to the current high number waiting to downsize and 43 bedrooms already released it was not considered beneficial to either increase the financial incentives nor invest in promotional campaigns. The Select Committee was advised that officers were not convinced that the financial incentives actually tempted tenants to downsize, as many were not aware of the financial benefits until they had applied.

It was noted that the availability of all types of accommodation was reducing. Furthermore, when the Housing Allocations Scheme was last reviewed members had agreed that homelessness applicants would only be made direct offers on flatted accommodation when discharging the Council's homelessness duty, in order to give applicants on the Housing Register the opportunity for bidding on houses. In addition, existing tenants on the Housing Register living in 2 or 3 bedroom flatted accommodation were granted Band B priority and could make expressions of interest on houses that met their housing needs. This recognised that any tenant already living in a flat should be given the opportunity to bid on a house, freeing up further flatted accommodation for homeless applicants.

It was important that smaller accommodation was made available for this purpose as well as for those downsizing. There were currently 526 applicants in Band B, 187 of whom were actively bidding for houses under this category. Smaller accommodation was also desperately needed for single applicants on the Housing Register.

Members suggested increasing the residency criteria by which local people were prioritised for council homes. However, officers advised that there could be a legal challenge if the Allocations Scheme did not address fairness and need, irrespective of other local priorities.

Re-Housing Support Officer

It was explained that the Council employed a Re-Housing Support Officer who offered support to tenants who were downsizing accommodation in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme.

RECOMMENDED:

That the report regarding the marketing of incentives for tenants downsizing accommodation be noted and that no recommendations for any changes be made to the Housing Portfolio Holder.

19. HOME OPTION CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME - PROGRESS REPORT

The Select Committee received a report from the Assistant Director – Housing Operations regarding the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The Choice Based Lettings Scheme was introduced in November 2007 and was necessary in meeting the requirements of Government. The scheme was put in place by 2010. The scheme was administered by the external Choice Based Lettings agency Locata Housing Services (LHS). Under the scheme, all vacant social rented properties were advertised to applicants in a two weekly Property List and on the website giving relevant details was produced. Applicants applied for a property by expressing an interest in up to a maximum of three properties in each cycle for which they have an assessed need.

At the end of the two weekly cycle, the Council analysed the expressions of interest received and allocated each property following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with its own scheme. The property was offered to the applicant in the highest band who had been registered the longest and who had expressed an interest for the specific vacancy. The results of the expressions of interest were then published on the website and the next periodic Property List, setting out the number received on each property as well as the Band and registration date of the successful applicant.

The Select Committee analysed the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Information Bulletin for the period 27 July 2015 to 27 July 2016.

There were 259 properties allocated to Home Seekers on the Housing Register during the period. A further 22 properties were allocated direct to homeless applicants and an additional 10 properties allocated to applicants leaving supported housing, representing around 12% on all Housing Register lets. 21 properties were let to homeless applicants under non-secure tenancies on a temporary basis whilst investigations were on-going. There were currently 61 homeless applicants to whom the Council had accepted a full duty who were awaiting direct offers of accommodation.

Almost 97% of Homeseekers expressing an interest in properties did so over the Internet. The remaining 3% either telephoned, received help from staff to use the terminal in the Civic Options Reception or used text. Around 84% of all applicants

registered on the Housing Register had participated in the scheme during the last year.

As at 27 July 2016 there were 1,374 homeseekers on the Housing Register. Under the scheme there was a Supplementary Waiting List enabling applicants over 60 years of age who did not meet with the residency criteria, or have a housing need who could bid on properties in sheltered accommodation only. There were 164 applicants on this list.

RECOMMENDED:

That the progress report on the HomeOption Choice Based Lettings Scheme for the period 27 July 2015 to 27 July 2016 be noted.

20. ANNUAL REVIEW OF PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS - HOUSING APPLICANTS AND LETTINGS

The Select Committee received a report from the Assistant Director – Housing Operations regarding the Annual Review of Protected Characteristics – Homeseekers and Lettings.

Following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Equality Duty in 2011, public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day to day work, shaping policy and delivering services. Under the Act there were nine “Protected Characteristics.” Due to the requirements of the Act the Select Committee undertook an annual review of the characteristics relating to homeseekers on the Housing Register compared to the protected characteristics of those allocated accommodation. It was noted that statistics confirmed that the protected characteristics of homeseekers housed in Council accommodation was similar to those on the Housing Register.

RECOMMENDED:

That no recommendations be made concerning the Council’s Housing Allocations Scheme due to there being no significant disparity between the Protected Characteristics of homeseekers on the Housing Register and those allocated accommodation through the register.

21. CORPORATE PLAN ACTION PLAN PROGRESS - QUARTER 1

The Select Committee received a report from the Director of Communities regarding the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2016/17 – Quarter 1.

The Corporate Plan was the Council’s key strategic planning document setting out its priorities over the five year period from 2015/16 to 2019/20. The priorities or Corporate Aims were supported by key objectives, which provided a clear statement of the Council’s overall intentions for these five years.

The Corporate Plan Key Action Plan for 2016/17 had been agreed by the Cabinet in March 2016, progress in relation to all actions and deliverables was reviewed by the Cabinet, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the appropriate select committees on a quarterly basis.

The Key Action Plan 2016/17 was populated with actions or deliverables designed to secure progress against each of the key objectives during this period. The annual

action plans were working documents and subject to change and development to ensure that the actions remained relevant and appropriate. Progress against the Key Action Plan was reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure the timely identification and implementation of appropriate further initiatives or corrective action.

There were 49 actions in total for which progress updates for Quarter 1 were as follows:

- (a) 32 (65%) of these actions had been achieved or were on target.
- (b) 7 (14%) of these actions were under control.
- (c) 2 (4%) were behind schedule.
- (d) 8 (16%) were pending.

The 16 actions that fell within the areas of responsibility of this Select Committee at the end of Q1 were:

- (i) 8 (50%) of these actions had been achieved or were on target.
- (ii) 3 (19%) of these actions were under control.
- (iii) 5 (31%) of these actions were pending.
- (iv) 0 (0%) of these actions were behind schedule.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in regard to the Corporate Plan Action Plan – Quarter 1 be noted.

22. COMMUNITIES HOUSING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI) - QUARTER 1

The Select Committee received a report from the Director of Communities regarding Key Performance Indicators 2016/17 – Quarter 1 Performance.

The Local Government Act 1999 required that the Council made arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions and services were exercised. As part of the duty to secure continuous improvement, a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relevant to the Council's services and key objectives were adopted each year by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee. Performance against the KPIs was monitored on a quarterly basis by the Management Board and the select committees.

A range of 37 Key Performance Indicators for 2016/17 was adopted by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee in March 2016. The KPIs were important to the improvement of the Council's services and the achievement of its key objectives. The overall position for all 37 KPIs at the end of Quarter 1 was as follows:

- (a) 25 (68%) indicators achieved the target.
- (b) 12 (32%) indicators did not achieve target.

- (c) 3 (8%) of these indicators performed within the agreed tolerance for the indicator.
- (d) 28 (76%) of indicators were currently anticipated to achieve year end target and a further 2 (5%) were uncertain whether they would achieve year end target.

Ten of the KPIs fell within this Select Committee's areas of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at Q1 for these indicators was as follows:

- (i) 7 (70%) indicators achieved target.
- (ii) 3 (30%) indicators did not achieve target.
- (iii) 0 (0%) of these KPIs performed within the agreed tolerance for the indicator.
- (iv) 8 (80%) of indicators were currently anticipated to achieve the year end target and a further 1 (10%) was uncertain whether it would achieve year end target.

RESOLVED:

That the Key Performance Indicators 2016/17 – Quarter 1 Performance be noted.

23. ATTENDANCE BY ESSEX POLICE DISTRICT COMMANDER AT NEXT MEETING - DISCUSSION ON ISSUES TO RAISE

The Select Committee received a report from the Director of Communities regarding Attendance by Essex Police District Commander at the next Select Committee meeting to discuss issues.

At its last meeting, members considered its draft Work Programme 2016/17. When agreeing to receive and discuss the Annual Report of the Community Safety Partnership at the meeting on 8 November 2016, the Select Committee also wanted to invite Essex Police's District Commander, Chief Inspector Denise Morrissey, who had subsequently the invitation, to attend the same meeting to give a presentation on current local policing issues and answer questions from the Select Committee. The Select Committee supported the proposed presentation theme being "The policing of the Epping Forest District and current local policing issues and concerns."

It was suggested that members give consideration in advance of the meeting of what they would like the guest to cover in her presentation and the areas of activity for scrutiny. It was agreed that the following areas should be raised with the District Commander to comment on:

- (a) The effects of the recent closure of police stations and public counters in the district.
- (b) Plans for the future use of closed police stations in the district.
- (c) The effectiveness locally of Essex Police's facility for reporting non-urgent crime online.

- (d) The effects of the reduced numbers of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in Brentwood and Epping Forest and how PCSOs were tasked to make the best use of their reduced numbers.
- (e) The benefits and success of the “Virtual Community Safety Hubs” in this policing district.
- (f) The level of co-operation received from the District Council’s officers to work in partnership for preventing, combating and reducing crime.
- (g) The Police’s approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour at different levels of importance.
- (h) The Police’s views on the Council’s CCTV Strategy and its management.
- (i) The numbers of police officers working in the district and their shift patterns?
- (j) The apparent lack of a Police presence in the area.
- (k) Communications difficulties with the Police.
- (l) Increasing the awareness needed of local Police success stories in the District.
- (m) The prevalence of drug dealing in the District and concerns around the use of laughing gas by young people.
- (n) Apparent confusion by the public on police areas of responsibility and the most appropriate ways of reporting crimes.
- (o) Concerns about Police response times to calls and the apparent lack of the required staffing resources.
- (p) The level of cross county/border co-operation.
- (q) The possibility of parish/town councils funding the employment of PCSOs to help police their local area?
- (r) How the Police can assist with the problem of obstructive parking on housing estates?
- (s) How the Police could assist in dealing with motorbikes being ridden on private land with and without the landowner’s permission.

RESOLVED:

That the areas for discussion highlighted above be provided to the Essex Police District Commander in advance her attendance at the Select Committee meeting on 8 November 2016.

24. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chairman confirmed that she would make a brief summary of the meeting’s progress to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

25. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the select committee would be held on Tuesday 8 November 2016 at 7.00p.m. in Committee Room 1.