

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Date:	16 July 2020
Place:	Virtual Meeting on Zoom	Time:	7.00 - 10.10 pm
Members Present:	M Sartin (Chairman), R Jennings (Vice-Chairman), R Baldwin, P Bolton, L Burrows, D Dorrell, I Hadley, S Heather, J Lea, S Murray, D Plummer, S Rackham, P Stalker, D Sunger, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley		
Other Councillors:	N Avey, R Bassett, S Heap, S Kane, J McIvor, A Patel, J Philip, C Whitbread and H Whitbread		
Apologies:	D Stocker		
Officers Present:	G Blakemore (Chief Executive), N Dawe (Chief Operating Officer), Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services / Commercial & Regulatory)), V Gayton (Culture & Community Team Manager), D Gilson-Butler (Youth Engagement Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), S Kits (Social Media and Customer Services Officer), S Lewis (Customer Services Manager), P Maginnis (Service Director (Business Support Services)), A Small (Strategic Director), L Wade (Service Manager People & Performance), J Warwick (Service Manager (Contracts)) and G Woodhall (Democratic & Electoral Services Manager)		

13. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the virtual meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

14. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Committee noted that there had been no substitute Members appointed for this meeting.

15. MINUTES

Resolved:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2020 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

(a) Minute item 10, Overview & Scrutiny Select Committees – Membership 2020/21, Councillor J H Whitehouse supported the comments of Cllr S Murray, not Cllr J M Whitehouse.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Conduct.

17. PUBLIC QUESTIONS & REQUESTS TO ADDRESS THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that no public questions or requests to address the meeting had been received.

18. EXECUTIVE DECISIONS - CALL-IN

The Committee noted that no executive decisions had been called-in for consideration since the previous meeting.

19. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE EPPING FOREST YOUTH COUNCIL

The Committee received a presentation from V Gayton and 5 Youth Councillors reviewing the work of the Youth Council during 2019/20, and outlining their plans for 2020/21.

The presentation highlighted the following points:

- the 'We are safe' project;
- the updated and expanded Epping Forest Youth Activities map;
- the Health & Wellbeing Youth Conference;
- the undertaking of surveys in the District's schools on local youth issues;
- the Youth Council's social media activities;
- the external funding secured from the Jack Petchey Foundation, the Safer Communities Fund and the High Sherriff of Essex for youth projects;
- the receipt of a number of awards, certificates and letters of recognition;
- the production of a two-minute film in April on how Covid-19 had affected young people within the District; and
- the undertaking of a post-Covid-19 survey of young people on their mental health and wellbeing.

The Youth Councillors thanked the Committee for their continuing support throughout the year, and urged the Committee to view their short film in the days following the meeting.

The Chairman, Cllr M Sartin, thanked the Youth Council for their presentation to the Committee. Cllr S Murray commented that he continued to be impressed by the work of the Youth Council and felt that some of them could go on to become full Councillors in the future; Cllr M Sartin highlighted that two current District Councillors had been Youth Councillors in the past. Cllr D Plummer was highly impressed by the way that the Youth Council continued to engage young people in local issues, Cllr S Rackham felt that the Epping Forest Youth Council was the best in the country, and Cllr D Sunger praised the public speaking skills of the Youth Councillors who had given the presentation.

Cllr S Murray highlighted that young people were most likely to be affected by the pandemic and hoped that the results of the survey being undertaken by the Youth Council would be fed into the appropriate decision-making bodies. The Youth Councillors present gave an idea of how Covid-19 had affected them individually, which included missing seeing family, friends, even school, and that normal life had been taken for granted before, but also that the pandemic had shown they could cope and had become more independent. Cllr M Sartin felt that a lot of young people would have had a different experience as they would not have had the back-up

available to the Youth Councillors, and Cllr S Murray commented that low income families without access to information technology had found the experience of the pandemic difficult. The Young Persons Officer, D Butler, informed the Committee that the link to the survey had been sent to all of the schools within the District to be sent on to all pupils, and so far 328 replies to the survey had been received.

Members of the Committee enquired if the Youth Council was undertaking any work on issues involving Black & Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME), or Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual & Tran-gender groups (LGBT)? The Youth Councillors present were clear that no discrimination on any factor was tolerated, and the Youth Council would support any young person in respect of BAME issues. In addition, the Youth Council logo had been adapted to include a rainbow during 'Pride' month, and a recent meeting of the Youth Council had included a sexual health education session. It was reiterated that all Youth Councillors were accepted, no matter who or what they were.

Cllr S Murray pointed out that virtually every single group listed on the Youth Activities map was run by volunteers, and it would be better if some of the professionally run groups were also included. Cllr M Sartin also highlighted that only one of the villages in the District appeared on the map, and that surely there were also such groups available in the other villages. D Butler reassured the Committee that the map had been sent to Essex County Council to enable their projects to be included in the future.

Cllr D Plummer asked if the Youth Council had any projects planned to reduce the parking around schools or encourage more people to not drive their children to school in the first place? The Youth Councillors responded that the issue of parking around schools was regularly raised at their meetings, and it was highly likely that a project on this topic would be undertaken in the future following completion of the current key project concerning the health and wellbeing of young people during the Covid-19 recovery phase and beyond.

The Leader of Council, Cllr C Whitbread, thanked the Youth Councillors for giving a voice to young people in the District, especially during this difficult time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Leader felt that the Youth Council was performing a valuable task in examining the views of young people on Covid-19, and requested the Youth Council to share the results of the survey with the Cabinet at a future meeting and also present on how the future of the District should be shaped.

The Portfolio Holder for Commercial & Regulatory Services, Cllr A Patel, reminded the Committee that the work of the Youth Council had been reviewed in 2015, and it had been difficult to both secure and increase the budget for the Youth Council to enable it to focus on topics that mattered to young people. The subsequent awards indicated not just how good the Youth Council was, but also that the right decision had been made then by the Council. The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the local Clinical Commissioning Group was also engaging with the Youth Council to understand better the services which should be provided to young people, and that the Communities teams in the Paternoster and Shelley wards would welcome the involvement from the Youth Councillors for those areas in their engagement work. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that special thanks should be extended to the Officers that supported the Youth Council – particularly D Butler – and exhorted the Youth Council to continue their excellent work.

The Youth Councillors present also gave their thanks to the Officers who had assisted and supported them, and also thanked the Committee for their continuing support in funding the Youth Council's projects. Cllr M Sartin concluded that the

Youth Council was considered a huge success, and thanked them once again for their presentation to the Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the annual progress presentation given by the Youth Council on the projects undertaken during 2019/20, supported by the Council's Community, Culture & Wellbeing Service, be noted; and
- (2) That the youth Council be requested to give a further presentation to a future meeting of the Cabinet on:
 - (a) the results of the survey into young people's mental health and wellbeing post Covid-19 pandemic; and
 - (b) how the future of the District should be shaped from a young person's perspective.

20. PEOPLE STRATEGY

The Service Director for Business Services, P Maginnis, gave a short presentation on the new People Strategy for the Council.

The Service Director highlighted the road map for the candidate journey from the video, with its seven steps: Pre-attraction; recruitment; onboarding; learning; performance & talent management; communication; and leaving the organisation. The Ambition of the Strategy was to have the right people with the right skills who were highly motivated and high performing, and to transform the service provided by the People Team. The Strategy would build on the work undertaken during the life of the previous People Strategy, and had six main themes:

- (i) attracting & retaining our best candidates;
- (ii) developing our Leaders;
- (iii) supporting the Council to evolve and embrace change;
- (iv) developing the skills and behaviours of our employees to make EFDC a great place to work;
- (v) creating a culture of engagement and wellbeing; and
- (vi) creating a culture of collaboration, innovation & creativity to enable our employees to fulfil their potential.

P Maginnis highlighted that feedback from external organisations had recognised the health & wellbeing work undertaken by the Council, and the Council had a target of 10% of staff being mental health aware and first-aid trained by 2021. Finally, P Maginnis apologised if the link to the People Strategy video did not work; this would be repaired and re-distributed to Members in the days following this meeting.

Cllr S Murray commented that he had watched the video and was very impressed by the candidate journey with its seven steps. The Councillor noted that the proposed new People Strategy would introduce significant change to the Council, and this suggested the current practices had not been particularly effective. Cllr S Murray also enquired if the link to the video had been sent to the members of the Stronger Council Select Committee prior to the meeting when it was considered?

P Maginnis responded that the previous People Strategy had also greatly changed the Council with the management re-organisation, the common operating model and the adoption of local pay. This new Strategy would build upon that work, but with

more emphasis this time on softer aspects such as mental health and wellbeing. The link to the video had been sent to members of the Select Committee on either the day of the meeting or the day after.

Cllr S Rackham welcomed the proposed improvements in the mental health care of employees, but asked what the Council was doing to support older adults? P Maginnis acknowledged that the age profile of the Council's workforce was towards the older end of the spectrum, but the Council supported all of its employees with learning and development opportunities. However, the Council was always open to considering if there were any other areas that it needed to concentrate upon.

Resolved:

- (1) That the presentation giving a short overview of the new People Strategy for 2020/21 be noted.

21. CUSTOMER SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

The Service Manager for Customer Services, S Lewis, presented the Annual Report for the Customer Services Programme.

S Lewis provided the Committee with an update on the following topics within the Programme:

- the Customer Service Strategy;
- customer satisfaction;
- the corporate Contact Centre;
- the Digital Inclusion Programme;
- Members;
- partnership working;
- digital payments; and
- communications & public relations.

S Lewis outlined the conclusions from the Annual Report, these being that Customer Services had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the priority had always been to support residents. The launch of the Customer Service Strategy had been delayed slightly by the pandemic, but it did provide a clear plan for the rest of the year. However, the Strategy was just the start of the process to put the Council's customers at the heart of everything we did, and it would evolve in the future to meet the changing needs of the Council's customers. The required staffing resources was in place to deliver the Strategy, the Council just needed to finish their training.

Cllr S Rackham highlighted that, in respect of digital inclusion, many older residents did not like to, or want to, use computers, so how did the Council plan to overcome this and change the minds of these residents? Cllr M Sartin also highlighted that the ability of some people to use technology also declined as they got older. S Lewis responded that every customer had different needs. The Digital Inclusion Programme had made an excellent start in building networks, but their Manager would soon be going on secondment in another section of the Council. It was accepted that some customers would not want to use technology, and Officers were considering how it could be possible to open a cash office to accommodate these customers. The Council would not be able to channel shift every one of its customers to digital contact.

Cllr J H Whitehouse enquired about the further improvements identified for the Council's website to increase its accessibility. S Lewis stated that the Corporate Communications Team were progressing this work at the moment, and agreed to

follow up on this question and report back to the Members, but added that any changes to the Council's website would be shaped by user groups. Cllr S Heap commented that the current arrangements be retained as an option for residents. In response to a question from Cllr D Wixley regarding the Out-of-Hours service, S Lewis informed the Committee that the option to bring the service back in-house was discussed by Officers but the costs were far higher. The number of calls received by the Service currently were very low, and the current contractor – Mears – were happy to continue to provide the service. S Lewis also highlighted that the mechanism was not in place to record the overall customer satisfaction in the first quarter of 2019/20, hence there was no figure in the table.

Cllr D Plummer expressed some concerns about the continual use of the term 'customers' rather than 'residents' or 'taxpayers'. The use of the term 'customer' gave the impression that residents could go to another provider for our public services but in reality, they could not. Cllr Plummer stated that the Council was not a business, and therefore our residents were service users or taxpayers – not customers! The District was comprised of residents, businesses and communities. Cllr S Heap agreed with Cllr Plummer, and felt that the use of the term 'residents' would represent better use of terminology as our residents did not have an option on using the services that the Council provided.

S Lewis stated that her definition of a customer was someone that she helped and provided a service to. Cllr S Kane, the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Corporate Services, expressed some sympathy for the views of Cllrs Plummer and Heap, but felt that 'customer' was a useful umbrella term to cover all of the users of the services which the Council provided. In relation to Digital Inclusion, Cllr Kane reassured the Committee that the Council would not close its doors and become a digital only service. It was accepted that many people did not want to channel shift to digital contact and the Council would always maintain offices and telephone numbers for contact.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress with the Customer Service Programme in 2019/20, and its future direction in 2020/21, be noted; and
- (2) That further information be provided to the members of the Committee regarding the further improvements for the Council's website to increase its accessibility.

22. CORPORATE PLAN KEY ACTION PLAN 2019/20 - QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE

The Service Manager for Strategy, Delivery & Performance, L Wade, presented a report on the Council's performance during quarter 4 of the Corporate Plan Key Action Plan for 2019/20.

L Wade reminded the Committee that the Action Plan for the Corporate Plan 2018-23 provided a mechanism for reporting on the Council's Key Performance Indicators and key Programmes of work, and highlighted the Council's overall performance against the agreed Corporate Objectives.

L Wade reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had had an adverse effect on the following corporate objectives:

- (i) Providing Culture & Leisure;

- (ii) Improving the District Housing Offer;
- (iii) Enhancing Skills & Flexibility of our workforce; and
- (iv) Improving performance through innovation and new technology.

In addition, L Wade reported that the following Corporate Objectives had not been met in the fourth quarter of 2019/20:

- (i) Engaging with the changing needs of our customers;
- (ii) Supporting healthy lifestyles;
- (iii) Planning development priorities;
- (iv) Ensuring infrastructure supports growth;
- (v) People develop skills to maximise their potential;
- (vi) Promoting retail, tourism & the visitor economy; and
- (vii) Efficient use of our financial resources, buildings & assets.

L Wade apologised for a couple of typographic errors in the report, as well as an incorrect figure quoted for the Key Performance Indicator – Increase cultural activity attendance – and reassured the Committee that the corrections would be emailed out after the meeting.

In response to questions from the Committee, L Wade stated that the Council had continued to recruit new starters to its workforce throughout the pandemic, some of whom would be joining shortly; and that if the Council had been collecting more recyclable materials since the start of the pandemic then this would be reflected in the figures for the next quarter. Cllr S Murray stated that the increase in the collection of waste throughout the District during the pandemic had been reported at meetings of the Group Leaders, and was satisfied that this would be reflected in the figures for the next quarter.

Resolved:

- (1) That the performance in quarter 4 of 2019/20 in relation to the Key Performance Indicators and Work Programmes within the Corporate Plan be noted;
- (2) That the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the following Corporate Objectives be noted:
 - (a) Provide Culture & Leisure;
 - (b) Improving the District Housing Offer;
 - (c) Enhancing Skills & Flexibility of our workforce; and
 - (d) Improving performance through innovation and new technology; and
- (3) That the following Corporate Objectives were not met in quarter 4 of

2019/20 be noted:

- (a) Engaging with the changing needs of our customers;
- (b) Supporting healthy lifestyles;
- (c) Planning development priorities;
- (d) Ensuring infrastructure supports growth;
- (e) People develop skills to maximise their potential;
- (f) Promoting retail, tourism & the visitor economy; and
- (g) Efficient use of our financial resources, buildings & assets.

23. Q1 SERVICE PLAN OBJECTIVES PROGRESS

L Wade, the Service Manager for Strategy, Delivery & Performance, presented a report on progress with the Service Plan objectives for the first quarter of 2020/21.

The Service Manager reminded the Committee that each Service Area had set objectives that they wanted to achieve in 2020/21. However, whilst services had been maintained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of the Pandemic had resulted in an adverse effect on progress with achieving Service Plan objectives. Therefore, there would be a need to further review the Service Plans, to ensure momentum was maintained on the transformation of internal processes and digitalisation within the Council. This would provide the authority with clarity and purpose during a challenging period, which in turn would contribute to the maintenance of the Council's strong financial position.

L Wade highlighted that the pandemic had delayed the promotion of the 'Tuck In' programme by the Council's Environmental Health Officers, and Health & Safety projects had been re-focused to deal with the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The usefulness of the provision of an update on the individual Services themselves in comparison with the Service Planning undertaken was also emphasised.

Cllr S Murray was concerned that when the furlough and mortgage protection schemes ended, the result would be greater pressure on the Council's housing and homelessness services. L Wade commented that Officers were undertaking a risk assessment exercise on this topic as part of the Covid-19 recovery work. Cllr H Whitbread, Portfolio Holder for Communities & Partnerships, added that she was aware of the pressures outlined by Cllr S Murray which might occur in the future, and more information on this would be presented to Members in due course.

Cllr J H Whitehouse welcomed the style of this report and enquired if the Ombudsman complaint cases were still on hold? S Lewis, the Service Manager for Customer Services, stated that the Ombudsman had originally put these complaint cases on hold, but they were now being processed again.

Resolved:

- (1) That progress with the achievement of the Service Plan objectives during the first quarter of 2020/21 be noted; and

- (2) That the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Covid-19 Recovery Plan to require Services to review their priorities and objectives within their Service Plans and with their Portfolio Holders be acknowledged.

24. WASTE MANAGEMENT TASK & FINISH PANEL REVIEW

The Chairman of the Panel, Cllr L Burrows, presented the final report of the Waste Management Task & Finish Panel review of the Council's Waste Management Service.

Cllr L Burrows highlighted the seven recommendations of the Panel, which included the possibility of a third wheeled bin for households within the District, the future collection of food and garden waste, the provision of the Street Cleansing service, new high street refuse bins, and the possibility of further changes to the Service as a result of the Environment Bill 2020 and further Resource and Waste Strategy consultations undertaken by the Government. It was stressed that the further Government consultations planned during 2020 could result in new legislation affecting local authorities by 2023. Finally, Cllr L Burrows thanked the members of the Panel for their efforts during the review.

In respect of the proposal for a third wheeled bin to be reviewed as part of the extension or re-tender of the existing Waste Management Contract, Cllr D Plummer commented that many homes within the District did not have sufficient space for the two wheeled bins that they already had, and a third wheeled bin was simply not feasible. Cllr S Heap suggested that the status quo of clear recycling sacks should be retained instead of replacing them with a third wheeled bin. Cllr D Wixley, who had served on the Panel, commented that the Panel had accepted that not all residences within the District would have space to store a third wheeled bin, and perhaps this had not been reflected in the report.

Cllr J H Whitehouse enquired who would be involved in the review for a possible third wheeled bin, and would there be a public consultation on this matter as well? The Service Director for Contracts & Technical Services, Q Durrani, explained that the current Waste Management Contract would end in November 2024, but the Council was always looking to improve its service to residents. The Panel had considered a number of different options for the collection of recyclables and had decided that now was not the right time to implement a third wheeled bin. Any proposed service change would be the subject of a wide-ranging public consultation before the Cabinet made a decision, and external experts would be appointed by the Council to assist in this process.

Cllr S Murray offered his thanks to the Biffa operatives for continuing to collect waste throughout the District during the Pandemic, and also welcomed the proposal to implement high street bins that allowed for the segregation of waste and recyclables. In respect of the review of the Street Cleansing service, the Councillor hoped for an improvement in the service as shopping areas and high streets were kept clean but residential streets were not covered so well by it currently. Finally, the Councillor emphasised the need to consult with residents whenever a major change to the Waste Management service was proposed as to many residents, the Council's primary purpose was to collect the bins. The implementation of a third wheeled bin would be a major change to the Service, and potential costs of the different options should also be given when consulting with the public. Q Durrani reiterated that an extensive public consultation would be undertaken before any major change to the service, but also warned that a future Government Bill could mandate the use of a third wheeled bin for the collection of recyclables.

Cllr S Rackham also thought that segregated bins in the high streets would be a good idea, but pointed out that this placed faith in the public to sort their waste before depositing it in the bin and once contaminated recyclable waste was no longer recyclable. Q Durrani stated that recyclables collected in the District were treated as mixed recyclables, and that segregated bins were known to work, even if 20% of the recyclables were contaminated. The behaviour of the public was changing and they were questioning why the Council did not provide these types of bins in the high streets. Cllr D Wixley added that these bins also had separate sections for cigarette ends and chewing gum.

Cllr D Plummer commented that local 'Litter Pick' groups knew which areas had the most litter on a regular basis, and suggested that Officers should liaise with these groups to provide equipment. J Warwick stated that Officers would make contact with the local 'Litter Pick' groups to identify those areas which required extra attention and run public promotional campaigns.

Cllr J M Whitehouse enquired whether the emphasis for the Street Cleansing Service had shifted from the state of a particular area to how often that area was cleaned, and how could the quality of the recyclables collected by the Council improve given the loss of the market in China and it was purity which determined the price obtained for recycled materials.

Q Durrani reported that the Council followed the Litter Code of Practice as defined in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and different Officers visited different parts of the District to inspect and measure the level of littering in that area. It was accepted that littering was an emotive subject, but this process was fair and the results were reported to the Waste Management Partnership Board. The Council's standards for littering were fairly high and the seven major centres within the District had static teams for street cleansing. The gateway areas into the District attracted considerable litter, predominantly fast food related, but education and enforcement would be equally important in the future to counteract littering.

In respect of the quality of the recyclable material collected, Q Durrani stated that the Council currently collected all recyclable materials together for sifting at Biffa's Recycling Centre, which had been upgraded after the collapse of the Chinese market for recyclables. The contamination levels of the materials collected was currently low, but the only way to prevent contamination was to collect all of the different materials separately – which had advantages and disadvantages. The feedback from external assessors was that the recycling collections were of a high quality within the District. Food and garden waste were collected together and went through a more expensive process to separate; costs would reduce if food and garden waste were collected separately.

Cllr M Sartin suggested that the Panel could reconvene later in the year to consider any further information which became available from the Government following the planned further Resource and Waste Strategy consultations, and this was agreed by the Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the following recommendations from the Waste Management Task & Finish Panel be approved:

(a) that the proposal for a third wheelie bin to replace clear recycling sacks be reviewed as part of the appraisal options for the extension or re-tender of the waste management contract;

- (b) that the Officers continue to discuss the future collection of food and garden waste in separate containers with Biffa. Officers will keep informed of further Government guidance to help inform a decision on the future collection of garden and food waste separately. Any future changes to service delivery will be presented to Cabinet for approval;
 - (c) that Officers assess the option of not collecting garden waste in certain months of the year once the Government had conducted further consultation and determined whether the collection of food and garden waste must be done separately;
 - (d) that, through the Waste Management Partnership Board, Officers will keep informed of any changes to the recycling market, and of any financial implications to the waste collection contract;
 - (e) that further work on the street cleansing schedule be done to monitor and measure the impact. It is also recommended that any changes to the street cleansing schedule would need to be approved by Cabinet before being implemented;
 - (f) that high street bins be replaced with a new style bin that allows for the segregation of waste and recycling materials; and
 - (g) that Officers keep Members informed of any potential changes and impact on service delivery as a result of the Environment Bill and any new legislation that Government introduce as a result of Government's Resource and Waste Strategy consultations; and
- (2) That the Waste Management Task & Finish Panel be reconvened later in the municipal year to consider any new information arising from the Environment Bill and any new legislation introduced by the Government.

25. CABINET BUSINESS

The Committee considered the Executive's current programme of Key Decisions.

Leader of the Council

Cllr J H Whitehouse enquired about the proposed informal workshop to discuss the Epping development sites? The Leader of Council, Cllr C Whitbread, stated that the sites had been transferred to Qualis for development and Members would be informed of details regarding the proposed workshop shortly.

Cllr D Wixley enquired about the status of the Pyrles Lane site in Loughton and whether it had already been sold? The Chief Executive, G Blakemore, confirmed that the site had not been sold and it was on a list of potential sites for Qualis to consider.

Cllr S Murray was concerned about the public accountability of Qualis. When the Company was originally set up, Councillors were informed that there would be quarterly public meetings of the Qualis Board, but Qualis had been in existence for six months now and no public Board meetings had been held. The Councillor wanted an assurance that this would happen and to be informed of the date of the next Board meeting for Qualis.

Cllr C Whitbread assured the Committee that there was no secrecy with the activities of Qualis. The Interim Board was coming to the end of its life and would be replaced before the end of the year by a permanent Board of Directors. There would be quarterly financial monitoring reports for Qualis submitted to the Cabinet, and the next report was expected at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for September. Cllr S Murray commented that he understood the quarterly meetings of the Qualis Board would be held in public, as it would be discussing issues which would have been discussed at public committee meetings in the past.

Cllr S Heap expressed further concerns regarding the decision-making process involved with Qualis, as currently there were a small number of Councillors from one political group making the decisions, and the Councillor felt that the process needed to be more open. Cllr C Whitbread replied that the interim Board of Directors for Qualis did have representation from the second largest political group, and there would be regular reports from Qualis to the Council as well. However, Qualis had to have the ability to react quickly to progress projects and give it a commercial edge.

Cllr S Heap agreed that Qualis needed to react in a quick and decisive manner, but it also needed an alternative point of view. Cllr C Whitbread reassured the Committee that this facility had been incorporated in the governance arrangements for Qualis. G Blakemore acknowledged the concerns expressed about the lack of visibility for the Qualis Board meetings, and stated that the new meeting schedule for the Qualis Board was currently being devised and would be published to give transparency; the next Board meeting was scheduled for 23 July 2020.

Environment & Technical Services

Cllr J H Whitehouse enquired about the proposed contract variation with Places Leisure, in particular what service would be provided in the future and whether the proposals would be examined by a Scrutiny Committee? The Portfolio Holder for Environmental & Technical Services, Cllr N Avey, responded that there were still some details to be worked through, but the issue would be considered by the Council's Scrutiny function if it was appropriate.

Cllr S Murray observed that it was not the decision of the Cabinet Member to decide if it was appropriate for an issue to be examined by a Scrutiny Committee, and the Chairman, Cllr M Sartin, agreed that any Scrutiny Committee could request that an item be considered at one of their meetings.

Housing & Community

In respect of the Policy for Flexible Service Charges, Cllr J H Whitehouse commented that, as a general principle, all new policies enacted by the Council should be considered by a Scrutiny Committee first, to enable Councillors to put their point of view across. The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Community, Cllr H Whitbread, stated that the policy was part of a wider review of the Council's service charges – which was ongoing – and it would be considered by the Select Committee.

Cllr J H Whitehouse also expressed surprise that the review of Sheltered Housing Assets was considered by the Stronger Place Select Committee, not the Stronger Communities Select Committee. Cllr H Whitbread stated that the review was considered to be in relation to place-making and hence it was reviewed by that Select Committee.

Cllr S Murray enquired if the Committee could discuss issues on the published agenda for the Cabinet meeting the following week. Cllr M Sartin agreed that the

Committee's role was to hold the Cabinet to account and requested Cllr S Murray to raise his issue.

Cllr S Murray welcomed the report on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but was extremely surprised to see a proposal for the replacement of the Leisure Centre at Loughton. Cllr C Whitbread assured the Committee that the Council did not intend to replace the Leisure Centre in Loughton and that it was probably a misprint. The Council's Chief Operating Officer, N Dawe, added that that reference should have been edited out of the report before it was published and reiterated that there was no intention to replace the Leisure Centre.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Executive's current Programme of Key Decisions be noted.

26. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic & Electoral Services Manager, G Woodhall, presented the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21.

G Woodhall highlighted that the format of the Work Programme had been revamped for the new municipal year, with the ongoing standing items now appearing at the start of the Programme. All of the items listed for the previous meeting of the Committee had been dealt with, and four of the items listed for this meeting had been discussed already at the meeting.

In respect of the one item for this meeting that had yet to be discussed, Local High Streets – Viability & Regeneration, the Chairman, Cllr M Sartin, suggested that the Local High Streets Task & Finish Panel should not be lost but deferred for a couple of months as it would not be the best use of Officer time currently. The Committee was in general agreement with this course of action, agreeing that the Task & Finish Panel was still important but that a short delay to allow the Covid-19 Recovery Portfolio Holder Advisory Group to finish its work would be beneficial. Cllr M Sartin emphasised that the Task & Finish Panel would remain on the Committee's Work Programme to avoid being overlooked.

Cllr R Jennings stated that residents' parking schemes were becoming more popular in Loughton, and suggested that the North Essex Parking Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee. Given the reduced level of external scrutiny on the Work Programme this year, the Committee felt that this was a sensible suggestion.

Resolved:

- (1) That the external scrutiny of the North Essex Parking Partnership be added to the Work Programme; and
- (2) That, revised as above, the current Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21 be noted.

27. SELECT COMMITTEES - WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the current Work Programmes for the three Select Committees.

Stronger Communities Select Committee

The Chairman of the Stronger Communities Select Committee, Cllr D Sunger, informed the Committee that their first meeting of the municipal year was scheduled for 21 July 2020, and the focus would be on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's housing communities.

Cllr D Wixley praised the sterling efforts of Democratic Services Officer, J Leither, in organising the presentation by the Loughton GROW Community Garden group at the meeting next week.

Stronger Council Select Committee

The Chairman of the Stronger Council Select Committee, Cllr P Bolton, stated that the first meeting of the municipal year had taken place on 14 July 2020.

Cllr S Murray, who had attended the meeting, highlighted the concerns expressed by the Select Committee on learning that the contract for refurbishing the Civic Offices had been let on the basis of only one tender being received. The Councillor felt that this should not happen again in the future for any contract. The Leader of Council, Cllr C Whitbread, reassured the Committee that more than one tender should be considered in normal circumstances; however, the Council undertook a full procurement process for this contract which had produced only one tender.

Stronger Place Select Committee

The Chairman of the Stronger Place Select Committee, Cllr R Bassett, reported that the first meeting of the municipal year had been held on 9 July 2020. It had been a lively meeting, but the Councillor felt that there had been too many verbal reports. The Select Committee had considered an early version of the updated Local Plan, considered climate change, and discovered that the Epping Forest had many veteran trees.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Work Programmes for the three Select Committees be noted.

28. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Committee noted that there was no business which necessitated the exclusion of the public and press from the meeting.

CHAIRMAN