

Minutes of the Meeting of the COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 16 January 2025

PRESENT -

Councillor Clive Woodbridge (Chair); Councillor Bernice Froud (Vice-Chair); Councillors Rob Geleit, Graham Jones, Alison Kelly, Rachel King, Humphrey Reynolds and Kim Spickett

In Attendance: Councillor Steven McCormick

Officers present: Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community), Ian Dyer (Head of Operational Services) (items 16 - 23 only), Linda Scott (Interim Assistant Head of Service - Venues) (items 16 - 23 only), Mark Shephard (Head of Property and Regeneration), Richard Appiah-Ampofo (Senior Accountant), Rachel Epton (Community Development Manager), Serena Powis (Community Development Officer), Arjan de Jong (Strategic Housing Manager) (items 16 - 24 only), and Dan Clackson (Democratic Services Officer)

16 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Committee received no questions or statements from members of the Public at the meeting.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Fees and Charges 2025/26

Councillor Graham Jones, Other Interest: Councillor Graham Jones wished to declare that he was a concert promoter and had been involved in future events scheduled at Epsom Playhouse.

Councillor Kim Spickett, Other Interest: Councillor Kim Spickett wished to declare that she had been involved in a future production scheduled at Epsom Playhouse.

Voluntary Sector Funding 2025-2026

Councillor Alison Kelly, Other Interest: Councillor Alison Kelly wished to declare as a non-registerable interest that she was a volunteer for Age Concern and Citizens Advice.

18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the public Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 October 2024 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

19 ARMED FORCES COUNCILLOR CHAMPION ANNUAL STATEMENT 2024/25

The committee received a report providing the annual statement of the Armed Forces councillor champion.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Champion's Aspirations for the Future.** The Armed Forces Champion expressed their aspiration for Epsom & Ewell to achieve silver status for the Armed Forces Covenant Awards Scheme.
- b) **Champion's Views on Potential Areas for Development.** In response to a question from a Member, the Armed Forces Champion expressed their view that Epsom & Ewell Council's engagement, with respect to the Armed Forces sector, had room for further development in matters such as engagement with medical practices, to increase their awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant, and with voluntary organisations who support the Armed Forces community.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Receive and note the annual statement of the Armed Forces councillor champion.**

20 MENTAL HEALTH COUNCILLOR CHAMPION ANNUAL STATEMENT 2024/25

The committee received a report providing the annual statement of the Mental Health councillor champion.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Impact on the Armed Forces Community.** A Member advised that mental health organisations, such as Love Me Love My Mind, have a great impact on the Armed Forces community, and expressed their view on the importance of communication between the Council and mental health organisations to provide support to the Armed Forces community.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Receive and note the annual statement of the Mental Health councillor champion.**

21 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26

The Committee received a report summarising the proposed 2025/26 capital programme and a provisional programme for 2026/27 to 2029/30. The Committee's approval was sought for the programme to be submitted to Council in February 2025.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Update to the Disabled Facilities Grant Figure at Section 3 of the Report.** The Senior Accountant explained to the Committee that since the publication of the agenda there had been an update to the Disabled Facilities Grant figure, listed at section 3 of the report, on account of the recent announcement of additional funding. Section 3, as written in the report, put the figure at £785,000 – however, the figure had since been updated to £974,000. The Senior Accountant asked the Committee to note that, should the Committee agree to recommendation 1 of the report, the capital programme for 2025/26 submitted to Council for approval on 11 February 2025 would include the updated Disabled Facilities Grant figure of £974,000. The update was noted by the Committee.
- b) **Carry-Over and Spend of Disabled Facilities Grant Funding.** In response to a question from a Member, the Strategic Housing Manager explained that, historically, unspent funding from the disabled facilities grant had been carried over to subsequent years. He went to explain, however, that in October 2023 the Committee had agreed provisions to facilitate increased flexibility in the utilisation of the funding, and it was anticipated that the full funding for 25/26 would be spent.
- c) **Utilisation of Disabled Facilities Grant Funding.** In response to questions from Members, the Head of Housing and Community explained that the Disabled Facilities Grant is statutory funding, and is ringfenced with the intention of being utilised to provide those who qualify with the means to remain living in their homes and to reduce their fuel costs through physical adaptations and repairs to their home, such as stairlifts and boiler repairs, etc.
- d) **Playhouse Lighting.** In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Head of Service (Venues) explained that the Playhouse lighting required updating to more economical and environmentally friendly LED lighting to replace the original mercury and halogen-based lighting put in place when the Playhouse was built, with the intention to complete the works in c. August 2025.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Submit the capital programme for 2025/26 as identified in section 3 of the report, updated as minuted above, to the Council for approval on 11 February 2025;**

- (2) **Note the provisional forecast of schemes for the capital programme for 2026/27 to 2029/30;**
- (3) **Note that schemes subject to external funding from Disabled Facilities Grants will only proceed once funding has been received.**

22 FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

The Committee received a report recommending fees and charges for which this Committee is responsible, with the new charges being effective from 1 April 2025.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Playhouse Facility Fee.** In response to a question from a Member, the Senior Accountant confirmed that the proposed facility fee had benchmarked against other local theatres. He stated that the facility fee would generate c.£80,000 yearly, which would be ringfenced for Playhouse maintenance and improvements. He stated that the introduction of the facility fee would be made clear and apparent on the Playhouse's website. The Chair stated that 2025/26 would be the first year that the Council would be charging a facility fee and would listen to feedback and be open to reviewing the charge if required. The Assistant Head of Service (Venues) explained that, if agreed, the facility fee would come into effect on 1 April 2025 and would only be applicable to bookings made from that date onwards.
- b) **Possibility of Future Loyalty Scheme.** In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Head of Service (Venues) stated that the possibility of introducing a Playhouse loyalty scheme was currently being explored.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Agree the fees and charges for the Community and Wellbeing Committee for 2025/26.**
- (2) **Nominate and authorise the Head of Operational Services and Assistant Head of Service (Venues) to issue discounts on the new facility fee for group bookings of over 25.**

23 REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26

The Committee received a report setting out estimates for income and expenditure on services in 2025/26.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Meals at Home Service.** In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Operational Services explained that whilst the Meals at Home service remained an economical service for those who wished to use it, the number of people using the service had decreased since the end of lockdown, hence why a reduction to the service's income budget was now being recommended.
- b) **Homelessness Budget.** In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Housing and Community stated that homelessness remained a significant challenge for the Council and that the Housing service experienced an enormous demand on a daily basis. He explained that the Government were monitoring performance nationally, with respect to homelessness, and that the Council would seek to pursue any additional funding opportunities from Government where appropriate.
- c) **Wellbeing Centre Services.** In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Operational Services stated that there had been an increase in anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the Wellbeing Centre since the end of lockdown, and it was suspected that this played a part in the reduction in the uptake of the Higher Needs services provided at the Centre. He explained that the Centre staff had formed a close relationship with local police who were working to address the issue. He explained that the Wellbeing Centre services were currently under review and that the Committee could expect to receive a report on the matter at a future meeting.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved (7 for, and 1 abstaining) to:

- (1) **Recommend the 2025/26 service estimates for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2025.**

24 HOUSING REVIEWS

The Committee received a report on the arrangements for performing statutory housing reviews of decisions relating to homelessness and the suitability of temporary accommodation.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Applicants' Right to Decision Review.** In response to a question from a Member, the Strategic Housing Manager explained that, under s166A(9) of the Housing Act 1996, applicants have a right to request a review of a decision made by the local housing authority, with respect to their eligibility for allocation to accommodation or their qualification as homeless.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Approve the award of a contract for the conduct of reviews of allocation and homelessness decisions to Residential Management**

Group (RMG) Ltd for a period of 1 year with an option to extend for a further period of 1 year and;

- (2) Nominate and authorise to RMG Ltd the Council's statutory functions pursuant to the provisions of s166A(9) and s202 of the Housing Act 1996 to perform reviews of decisions made either regarding the suitability of accommodation offered s166A(9) or as the result of a decision upon a request for assistance as homeless s202. And:**
- (3) Nominate and authorise to the Strategic Housing Manager the Council's statutory functions pursuant to the provisions of s166A(9) and s202 of the Housing Act 1996 to perform reviews of decisions made either regarding the suitability of accommodation offered s166A(9) or as the result of a decision upon a request for assistance as homeless s202.**
- (4) Nominate and authorise Housing Reviews Ltd to conclude all outstanding cases as per the previous committee report in October.**

25 HEALTH AND WELLBEING PRIORITIES 2025-2028

The Committee received a report setting out the Council's intended health and wellbeing priorities for 2025-2028.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Successful Projects.** Following a comment from a Member, the Community Development Manager stated that over the past few years the Community Development team had been involved in many successful projects, including work with the Good Company and Epsom Pantry, work with Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership, the delivery of the Skills Hub, the rollout of household support funds, and the arrangement of various bespoke community projects and events.
- b) **Support for Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse.** In response to a question from a Member, the Community Development Manager explained that the strategy focuses on supporting select groups, one of which is those whose health and wellbeing is disproportionately impacted by their life circumstances, with one such circumstance being experiencing/surviving domestic abuse/violence. She stated that this would also align with the objectives of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- c) **Monitoring the Success of the Strategy.** In response to a question from a Member, the Community Development Manager stated that Officers would be working to collect data via the monitoring of outcomes and the recording of feedback from those using the projects and services brought to fruition through the strategy in order to ascertain areas of success and opportunities for improvement.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Support the Council in developing its revised Health and Wellbeing Strategy based on the priorities set out in the report, and as included in Appendix 1 of the report.**

26 VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUNDING 2025-2026

The Committee received a report considering the continued support of voluntary sector organisations and setting out the proposed funding arrangements for 2025/2026.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Exclusion of the Press and Public.** Due to the financial sensitivity of the information contained within Appendix 3, the Committee considered that an exclusion of the press and public would be required in order to enable effective debate on the matter in question.

The Committee unanimously resolved to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the business involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended) and that pursuant to paragraph 10 of Part 2 of the said Schedule 12A the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

The summary of the Committee's debate during Part II of the meeting is recorded in a separate (not for publication) restricted minute.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved (7 for, and 1 against) to:

- (1) Agree to the financial support of the voluntary sector organisations in 2025-2026 as detailed in option 2 (section 3.10 of the report).**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.52 pm

COUNCILLOR CLIVE WOODBRIDGE (CHAIR)

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