

Minutes of the Meeting of the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 24 June 2025

PRESENT -

Councillor Liz Frost (Chair); Councillor Alan Williamson (Vice-Chair); Councillors Arthur Abdulin, Steve Bridger, Christine Cleveland, Julian Freeman, Julie Morris and Kim Spickett (as nominated substitute for Councillor Graham Jones)

Absent: Councillor Graham Jones

Officers present: Justin Turvey (Head of Place Development), Jon Sharpe (Interim Assistant Head of Service and Transport & Waste Services Manager), Richard Chevalier (Parking Manager), Sarah Clift (Senior Countryside Officer) (Items 1-7 only), Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Vanessa Newton (Senior Accountant) and Dan Clackson (Democratic Services Officer)

1 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions or statements from members of the public were received.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 March 2025 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Allotment Working Group

Councillor Christine Cleveland, Other Interest: In the interest of openness and transparency, Councillor Christine Cleveland declared that she was an allotment holder in the Borough. She stated that it was a non-prejudicial interest.

Councillor Julie Morris, Other Interest: In the interest of openness and transparency, Councillor Julie Morris declared that she was an allotment holder in the Borough. She stated that it was a non-prejudicial interest.

Five year review and update to Epsom & Ewell's Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30

Councillor Kim Spickett, Other Interest: In the interest of openness and transparency, Councillor Kim Spickett declared that she was a member of some of the conservation organisations mentioned within the report.

4 ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY WORKING GROUP

The Committee received a report recommending the continuation of a councillor Working Group for 2025/26 to oversee the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan, and proposing terms of reference for the group for approval.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Consideration for CWG.** It was suggested that in future the Constitution Working Group could explore the possibility of substitution for Members on the Environment and Sustainability Working Group, along with other working groups.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Agree the continuation of the Environment and Sustainability Working Group.**

Resolved (7 for, 1 against) to:

- (2) Approve the terms of reference for the Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**

Unanimously resolved to:

- (3) Agree to appoint members to the working group as set out at section 3.1 of the report.**
- (4) To authorise the Vice Chair of the Environment Committee (Chair of ESWG) and in their absence the Chair of the Environment Committee to invite, councillors, stakeholders and officers to the Environment and Sustainability Working Group as required.**

5 ALLOTMENT WORKING GROUP

The Committee received a report seeking agreement to the continuation of the Allotment Working Group for 2025/26 and proposing agreement of the draft Terms of Reference.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Allotment Management.** A Member expressed their view that the management of Council managed allotments had seen great success under the Allotment Working Group.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

(1) Approve the continuation of the Allotment Working Group

Resolved (7 for, 1 against) to:

(2) Approve the Terms of Reference for the Allotment Working Group as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

Unanimously resolved to:

(3) Agree to appoint members to the working group as set out at section 3.1 of the report.

(4) To authorise the Vice Chair of the Environment Committee (Chair of AWG) and in their absence the Chair of the Environment Committee to invite, councillors, stakeholders and officers to the Allotment Working Group as required.

6 CAR PARK WORKING GROUP

The Committee received a report seeking agreement on continuation of the car park working group for 2025/26 and seeking agreement on the terms of reference for the group.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Car Park Strategy.** In response to a concern from a Member, the Chair and the Parking Manager explained that a Car Park Strategy report was in development and intended to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

(1) Agree to the continuation of a Car Parking Working Group

Resolved (7 for, 1 against) to:

(2) Approve the Terms of Reference for the Car Park Working Group as set out in Appendix 1

Unanimously resolved to:

(3) Agree to appoint members to the working group as set out at section 4.1 below.

(4) To authorise the Chair of the Environment Committee (Chair of CPWG) and in their absence the Vice Chair of the Environment Committee to invite councillors, stakeholders and officers to the car park working group as required.

7 FIVE YEAR REVIEW AND UPDATE TO EPSOM & EWELL'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2020-30

The Committee received a report seeking to update the Borough's current Biodiversity Action Plan following the Environment Act 2021 bringing in changes affecting the management of Biodiversity in Epsom & Ewell.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Local Nature Reserves Management Plans.** In response to a question from a Member, the Senior Countryside Officer explained that the 100-year management plans for the Epsom Common, Hogsmill, and Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserves were not directly affected by the changes to legislation, and stated that said changes to legislation and the resulting updates to the Biodiversity Action Plan would go towards further supporting the work of managing those sites.
- b) **Importance of Biodiversity.** Members considered the importance of biodiversity and the quality-of-life and social benefits that open and biodiverse spaces within the Borough provide for residents.
- c) **Monitoring Biodiversity Net Gain ('BNG').** In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Place Development stated that, since its introduction, fewer developments within the Borough than expected had been subject to BNG, with many being exempt. He explained that the Government provide grant funding to assist Councils in monitoring and enforcing BNG, and that clauses are included within legal agreements for larger developments to ensure BNG compliance.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Consider and note the progress made to date in respect of the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30.**
- (2) **Approve the Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-30 (2025 update), as attached at appendix 1 to the report.**
- (3) **Approve delegated authority for the Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair of the Environment committee, to make factual updates to the Action Plan 2020-2030 as a result of legislative changes.**

8 ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The Committee received a report reviewing the financial and other implications of acquiring electric vehicles (EVs) to replace a portion of the Council's vehicle fleet starting mid-2027.

In accordance with Appendix 5, CPR 3.7 of the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Constitution, and section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the

Chair was of the opinion that this item required consideration at the meeting as a matter of urgency, by reason of special circumstances, as follows – she stated that, should the Environment Committee decide that a portion of the Council's fleet should be replaced with EVs where possible, then funding would need to be identified by S&R at its July meeting, owing to the need to start the lengthy process for the acquisition of the EVs as soon as possible.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Driving Licence Considerations.** The Interim Assistant Head of Service and Transport & Waste Services Manager explained that many electric vehicles are substantially heavier than their non-electric counterparts, requiring an HGV licence to be driven where their non-electric counterpart require only a car licence. It was acknowledged that many of the Council's vehicle operators currently held car licences and would require training in order to qualify for HGV operation.
- b) **Renting vs Leasing.** A Member enquired as to why the Council's vehicles are leased rather than rented. The Interim Assistant Head of Service and Transport & Waste Services Manager stated that renting vehicles is substantially more expensive than leasing and comes with significant additional complexities in respect of vehicle maintenance.
- c) **Financial Considerations.** It was considered that significant charging infrastructure would be required in order to successfully accommodate EVs within the Council's fleet. It was noted that hybrid vehicles would not require the same infrastructure to support them as they would not require charging points in order to operated. The Chief Accountant explained that replacing the Council's fleet on a like-for-like basis was factored into the setting of the budget. She stated that, should the Committee support the introduction of EVs and the necessary charging points, the funding would come from capital investment. She stated that finding the funding for the capital investment for the EVs, or for any additional costs above and beyond replacing the fleet like-for-like, would require further exploration. The Interim Assistant Head of Service and Transport & Waste Services Manager stated that, in terms of revenue costs, leasing EVs would be more expensive than non-electric vehicles, but the higher cost would be partially mitigated by the reduction in fuel expenses.
- d) **Carbon Neutral 2035 Target.** Members considered that, should the Committee opt in favour of replacing a portion of the Council's fleet with hybrid engine-vehicles, as opposed to EVs, the decision would not have an adverse effect on the Councils trajectory towards reaching its carbon neutral target for the year 2035.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved (7 Members voting in favour of recommendation (1)a), and 1 Member voting in favour of recommendation (1)b)):

(1) That in the context of the issues and timings outlined in the report, the Council should:

a) Replace all of its transport fleet vehicles with diesel-engined or, where available, hybrid-engined vehicles.

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.47 pm

COUNCILLOR LIZ FROST (CHAIR)