

## Minutes of the Meeting of the LICENSING AND PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 22 January 2026

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### PRESENT -

Councillor Peter O'Donovan (Chair); Councillor Neil Dallen (Vice-Chair); Councillors Liz Frost (as nominated substitute for Councillor Steve Bridger), Alex Coley, Julian Freeman, Rob Geleit, Lucie McIntyre (as nominated substitute for Councillor Shanice Goldman), Phil Neale, Humphrey Reynolds and Clive Woodbridge

Absent: Councillor Steve Bridger and Councillor Shanice Goldman

Officers present: Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Anna Clements (Senior Accountant) and Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer)

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### 21 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

One question was received from a Member of the Public. An answer was provided prior to the Committee Meeting and published on the Council's website.

The Member of the Public asked a supplementary question. The Chair agreed to provide a written response following the meeting.

### 22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or other registrable or non-registrable interests were made by Members with respect to any items to be considered at the meeting.

### 23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 25 November 2025 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

### 24 FEES AND CHARGES 2026/27

The Committee received a report recommending the fees and charges for which they are responsible, with the new charges being effective from 1 April 2026.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Report Correction.** The Senior Accountant explained that there was an error on page 3 of the development fees and charges. The error is under

Major Development pre-application advice fees for Major (100+ dwellings, 5000sqm+)- With Follow Up Meeting/Letter (within 3 months). All three lines state the same unit narrative, the first line should say 'Letter only', the second line should say 'Add meeting' and the third line should say 'With Follow Up Meeting/Letter (within 3 months)'. The Senior Accountant noted that the fees and charges document will be updated before it comes into effect.

- b) **Retrospective Planning Applications.** A Member of the Committee asked if there is a possibility to include an additional charge on retrospective planning applications. The Senior Accountant agreed to follow up this query with the Head of Place Development.
- c) **Fee increase.** A Member of the Committee asked for clarification as to why discretionary place development charges are being increased by 4.8%, noting that this is considerably above the current inflation rate. The Chief Accountant explained that the 4.8% increase was set by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, which stated that the fees and charges should increase by CPI plus 1%. The CPI used for 2026/27 is from September 2025, which is readily available online, and was 3.8%. The Chief Accountant informed the Committee that the increases to staff salaries, the government changes to National Insurance payments, and inflation across various areas, has placed additional costs on the Council, meaning the 4.8% increase in fees and charges is quite reasonable and reflective of the current financial situation.
- d) **Tree Officer rate.** A Member of the Committee asked if the hourly rate of £133 for a Tree Officer means an 8-hour day rate of £1064 is what is charged for a day of the Tree Officer's time. The Chief Accountant explained that staff are contracted to 7.2 hours per day over a 36-hour work week. The Chief Accountant confirmed that if 8 hours of the Tree Officer's time was needed, it would cost £1064. The Vice Chair informed the Committee that the Tree Officer is charged out hourly, not on a full-day basis. The Chief Accountant explained that the rate also takes into account the fact that there might be travel time and costs associated for the Officer carrying out the required work. The Member raised that the borough is no more than 2 miles across from any point. The Member asked if currently the Tree Officer's daily rate is just shy of £900. The Chief Accountant confirmed that if the Tree Officer was contracted to spend 7 hours at one particular site, then the charge indicated by the Member is correct.
- e) **Tree-planting.** A Member of the Committee raised that the Council charges £550 for tree planting. The Member said that is £50 for the tree and £500 for the Tree Officer. The Member continued to say that cost equates to 3 ½ hours for the Tree Officer to travel, fill out forms, and watch them implant the tree. The Chief Accountant agreed to take the query away and follow up with the Head of Service and the Tree Officer.

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- f) **Officer Day-rates.** A Member of the Committee raised that the day rates for Head of Planning Policy and Head of Place Development are higher than top cybersecurity people in London. The Member highlighted that the charges are not set by Central Government but are set by the Council.
- g) **Comparative prices.** A Member of the Committee asked if the charges have been compared to other local councils and are similar. The Senior Accountant confirmed that the charges have been compared with other local councils. The service managers had raised that it is difficult to compare some services as each local council offers slightly different discretionary services. Another Member stated that Planning is a regulated activity in this country, as well as the NPPF. The Member stated that it is a quasi-judicial activity that local authorities take. The Member asked if the Senior Accountant was saying that the Head of Planning in Elmbridge is doing something different to the Head of Planning in Epsom. The Senior Accountant explained that each council will provide slightly different services, be it meetings, written responses, additional meetings, specialist comments and advice, hence why EEBC prices might differ from other local councils. The Senior Accountant explained that at other authorities, they may provide a service for an advice meeting with a follow up letter, with other councils offering that as two separate services, or offering longer meetings. The Chair invited the Member to put a question in writing to the Head of Place Development. The Member responded to say that all the fees and charges show is a job title and a rate, it does not show a breakdown of the service or a comparison with neighbouring councils and therefore, it is not possible to determine if these are reasonable costs for residents. The Chief Accountant explained that the fees and charges set out in appendix 1, are not for statutory planning applications, they are added value, discretionary services, which a resident or developer could procure from a private company or business. The Chief Accountant explained that the fees will include VAT and will be comparative to private sector companies who offer similar or the same services.
- h) **Tree Advisory Board.** A Member of the Committee asked if when the founder of the Epsom and Ewell Tree Advisory Board passed away and the group wished plant a memorial tree, could they have gone elsewhere for that service. The Chief Accountant explained that they had been referring to officer rates when mentioning that some services could be procured by using a private company. Another Member explained that there is a lot more work involved in tree-planting than is listed in appendix 1 and encouraged members to look at the papers that went to Environment Committee to find out more.
- i) **Use of particular services.** A Member of the Committee raised that it would be helpful for a future Committee Meeting to see how regularly the services listed in the fees and charges are used.

- j) **Primates.** A Member of the Committee asked why new primate licences have been introduced. The Senior Accountant agreed to take the query away and circulate the response to Committee Members following the meeting.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 2 abstentions to:

- (1) Agree the fees and charges for 2026/27 as set out at Appendices 1 and 2.**

## 25 REVENUE BUDGET 2026/27

The Committee received a report setting out budget estimates for income and expenditure for Licensing and Planning Policy services in 2026/27.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Local Plan Cost.** A Member of the Committee asked about the cost of the development of the Local Plan, as referenced in paragraph 4.4. The Member asked if there is not sufficient funding already allocated to the development of the Local Plan, would a request need to be sent to Strategy and Resources Committee to ask for more funding. The Senior Accountant confirmed that if further funding was required, a request would need to go to S&R Committee.
- b) **Taxi Licensing.** A Member of the Committee asked about the risk of key licensees not renewing with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, as set out in the table on page 26. The Member asked if a comparison has been done with other areas to determine if we are unnecessarily high which could contribute to the decision of key licensees to not renew with EEBC. The Senior Accountant informed the Committee that there is always a risk when it comes to increasing fees and charges. The Senior Accountant explained that we do not have control over taxi operators and whether they choose to remain licensed with EEBC or go elsewhere. The Senior Accountant highlighted that there has been a stable income when it comes to taxi licensing and both the licensing and finance teams are confident that this will continue over the next year.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 2 abstentions to:

- (1) Recommend the 2026/27 service estimates for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2026.**

*The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.03 pm*

COUNCILLOR PETER O'DONOVAN (CHAIR)