

EPPING FOREST CENTRE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

FRIDAY 20 APRIL 2012

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EPPING FOREST CENTRE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT EPPING FOREST FIELD CENTRE, PAUL'S NURSERY ROAD, HIGH BEACH, LOUGHTON, ESSEX, IG10 4A, ON FRIDAY, 20 APRIL 2012 AT 11:30AM.

Present

Members:

Mr Kington (Chairman)	Field Studies Council
Mr Brown	Field Studies Council
Mr Chapman	Field Studies Council
Mr Thomas	Field Studies Council
Barbara Newman	City of London Corporation
Verderer Peter Adams	City of London Corporation

Officers:

Edward Foale	- Town Clerk's Department
Allison Elam	- Chamberlain's Department
Rita Bacheta	- Epping Forest Estate Office
Tony Fenwick	- Epping Forest Estate Office
Steve Bunce	- Field Studies Council
Mark Bolland	- Field Studies Council
Richard Walker	- Field Studies Council

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alderman Gordon Haines and Verderer Richard Morris.

The Committee also noted apologies from the Superintendent of Epping Forest.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF PERSONAL OR PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS IN RESPECT OF ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THIS MEETING

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The public minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2011 were agreed as a correct record.

4. HEAD OF CENTRE'S REPORT ON ACTIVITY IN 2011

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Centre regarding progress at Epping Forest Field Centre in 2011.

The Head of Centre advised that the Centre recognised the benefits of social media use and was currently experimenting with both Twitter and Facebook, on which a Member of the team had recently attended a training course. Members noted that the Centre's Facebook site had received 760 visitors in the past week. Twitter was being used to communicate directly with schools.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Centre confirmed that volunteers frequently supported tutors in "outdoor classrooms." The number of volunteer days had reduced from 500 in 2010 to 389 in 2011 because two volunteers, who had worked a large number of the volunteer days in 2010, had recently left the Centre. This had affected the number of office volunteer days more than the number of grounds volunteer days. It was anticipated that there would be a larger number of volunteers later in 2012.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Centre confirmed that the tutors preferred to teach on site in Epping Forest and make full use of "outdoor classrooms." However, because many schools' budgets had recently been cut, tutors were increasingly teaching classes in schools. Although tutors and volunteers were encouraged to use bikes where possible, many of the routes to schools were unsafe. Public transport or cars were usually used.

The Head of Centre drew attention to the outstanding feedback received from visiting teachers.

In response to a question from the Chamberlain, the Director of Finance advised that the Centre had isolated all 40th anniversary celebration costs from the operational income and expenditure in order to present comparable year-on-year statistics. It was unlikely that an event similar to the anniversary celebrations would take place in the near future. However, an invoice for the anniversary had been paid from the "food" account heading in error. This accounted for the overspend within this category.

The Head of Centre clarified that the Discovering Epping Forest funding had been placed under the "restricted fund" account heading.

Members noted that the Centre had provided 23,000 learning experiences in 2011, which was the highest ever achieved by the Centre. Members noted that this had been in the context of budget cuts, and commended the Centre's performance in 2011 as outlined within the report.

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5. HEAD OF CENTRE'S REPORT ON PROGRESS IN 2012

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Centre, which updated Members on progress at the Epping Forest Field Centre in 2012.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Centre confirmed that the report noted progress up until the end of March 2012. Members noted that 100% of completed visitors' forms indicated that visitors' learning experience expectations had been either met or exceeded. The Head of Centre

advised that in 2012 the challenge would be to address the rise in learner experiences whilst simultaneously cutting costs. The Head of Centre tabled biodiversity diagrams completed by children. Members noted a significantly higher level of demonstrable knowledge that children had after, as compared with prior to, their learning experience.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Centre advised that since 2010 the most senior officer at the Centre below himself had left.

The Head of Centre noted that the Centre was working on a number of projects to generate income. It was not currently possible to confirm how much revenue these projects would generate.

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6. HEAD OF CENTRE'S REPORT ON DISCOVERING EPPING FOREST (DEF)

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Centre, which informed Members of the exit strategy and legacy of the DEF Project.

The Head of Centre advised that, via the DEF project, links had been created between the Learning Providers and 32 different schools. The Centre was keen to maintain contacts with the schools where possible.

Members noted that the final project evaluation report would outline what was achieved, assess what the benefits of partnerships were and outline a format under which to progress. The Centre, under consultation with other parties, would draft the report.

The Visitor Services Manager, Epping Forest Estate Office, advised that the seven schools who left the scheme did so due to their own internal issues such as receiving very poor OFSTED scores or dealing with staff resignations, rather than because of any shortcomings in the Discovering Epping Forest scheme.

The Head of Centre believed that the final workshop with the schools would also be the first meeting of a new phase, and would generate a sensible way forward with which all parties would be content.

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7. EPPING FOREST FIELD STUDY CENTRE – OUTCOME OF BUILDING CONDITION SURVEY

The Committee considered a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest which informed Members of a Building Condition Survey of the Epping Forest Field Study Centre, which was undertaken by the City Surveyor in October 2009. The report also summarised progress since 2009.

The Business Manager, Epping Forest Estate Office, advised that the buildings had been found to be in relatively good condition. The FSC welcomed the production of the schedule of works and recognised the City's investment in this area.

The Head of Centre assured Members that the mould growth referenced in the report had been kept under control via maintenance work and changing the practice of tenants to improve ventilation.

The Head of Centre welcomed the plan to install a fire alarm in the timber hut and indicated that he believed this was a very desirable improvement to safety.

In response to a Member's query, the Chamberlain confirmed that the Corporate Asset Sub Committee had approved the overall programme.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Head of Centre agreed that it would be useful to produce a schedule of works in order to progress with improvements and have relevant departments take responsibility for particular areas or tasks. The Director of Operations undertook to meet with the Superintendent to explore pursuing the production of this schedule.

A Member expressed discomfort in the wording used in the "property implications" paragraph of the report. The Business Manager assured Members that the City had not intended to cause any discomfort to the Centre, and pointed out that the nature of the partnership was explained in paragraphs 31 and 32 of the report. Members recognised that the City had acknowledged that the charity was delivering a service on behalf of the City rather than a commercial occupation.

The Financial Director of the Centre advised that, although residential employees had not been asked to sign the Service Occupancy Agreement, a similar agreement existed between the Centre and the residential employees.

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8. EPPING FOREST VISITOR SERVICES ACTIVITIES

The Committee considered a report of the Superintendent of Epping Forest that outlined the visitor services programme for 2012-13.

Members noted that the change in Visitor Services staffing structure, as outlined in the appendix to the report, would result in the creation of several new posts.

The Visitor Services Manager reported a 30% month-on-month increase in the number of website visitors. It was likely that this would increase further when the website was re-launched in June.

The Head of Centre advised that he would be interested in progressing collaboration between the Centre and Visitor Services in use of or provision of learning services in Chingford.

Members noted that once the new visitor centre had opened the existing visitor centre building, which was in close proximity to the Centre, would undergo a tender process. This would likely commence in July or August.

9. QUESTIONS

There were no questions.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of further business.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee would be held at 11.30am on 26 October 2012 in Guildhall.

The meeting closed at 1:05pm.

CHAIRMAN

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