

<b>Committee(s):</b> Epping Forest and Commons – For Decision	<b>Dated:</b> 15/06/2023
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest – Future Stakeholder Engagement Proposals (SEF 12/23)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	9, 10, 11 & 12
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Juliemma McLoughlin, Executive Director, Environment	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Paul Thomson, Natural Environment Assistant Director (Superintendent) Epping Forest	

### Summary

The Epping Forest and Commons Committee Governance arrangements for Epping Forest business has remained largely unchanged for the past 25 years. However, alongside the formal Committee governance process supported by six additional Local discussion meetings, there are a range of supplementary engagement processes including three Epping Forest Consultative Committee with seventeen stakeholder representatives since 2019; six annual Local Authority Liaison Meetings with the four relevant Local Authorities since 2008, Annual Review Reporting from 2020 and a stronger more formalised Departmental reporting commitment on matters ranging from Finance to Risk.

These additional responsibilities have placed a considerable additional burden on the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Members and Officers alike and this report proposes changes to the informal meeting arrangements that currently supplement the formal governance and reporting mechanisms designed to reduce the time commitments on individual Members, broaden chairing responsibilities and improve the overall effectiveness and scrutiny of the management and oversight of the Epping Forest Charitable Trust.

### Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the:

- a. Retention of Epping Forest & Commons Committee Meetings on a bimonthly basis holding six meetings each year, four for primarily Committee business and two meetings focused on strategy and policy development.

- b. Endorse the revision of Director and Assistant Director reporting to Trustees from narrative-based reporting to business reporting focused on key business indicators and project progress timetables.
- c. Endorse the provision of early drafts of new decision or policy items to EF&CC prior to being considered by EFCG, to allow Trustees the benefit of an early contribution to policy and topic issues.
- d. Retention of Epping Forest Local Meetings on a bimonthly basis but without the Chairman and Deputy Chairman operating instead as a 'surgery' directly with the Epping Forest Senior Management Team led by the Assistant Director (Superintendent)
- e. Retention of Local Authority Liaison Meetings, supported by microsites, on a regular basis, but again without the Chairman and Deputy Chairman operating instead as a 'surgery' with the Epping Forest Senior Management Team led by the Assistant Director (Superintendent)
- f. Changing the arrangements of the Epping Forest Consultative Group as follows
  - Operate the Group on an area basis according to North and South Forest Parishes
  - EF&CC to appoint a Verderer to Chair the area meetings on a trial basis.
  - Reducing each area meeting from three to two per year
  - Retaining the hybrid format of virtual and physical representation
  - Replacement of minutes with action recording
  - Planning to improve the diversity and inclusion within the group.
  - Conduct a skills audit of group members.
- g. Note that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee Management Plan Sub-Committee and the Land Registration Working Group was abolished for the time being by the Court of Common Council in December 2021.
- h. Note that the Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee was abolished for the time being by the Court of Common Council in December 2021.
- i. Regularise community liaison for project management around time limited 'Task and Finish Groups'
- j. Continue with arrangements for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC) Mitigation Joint Steering Group meetings agreed by Committee in November 2019.

## **Background**

1. The management of Open Spaces saved for the benefit of Londoners through funding provided by the Metage on Grain (Port of London) Act 1872 has always been guided by a dedicated City Corporation Committee. This work was originally led by the Coal, Corn and Finance Committee 1886-1966, taking its title from the enabling Metage Act, with the Committee being responsible.

for open spaces largely acquired through the Epping Forest Acts 1878 & 1880, City of London (various Powers) Act 1878 and Highgate & Open Spaces Act 1886.

2. Following a reorganisation in 1966, the Epping Forest and Open Spaces Committee (EFOS) superseded the Coal, Corn and Finance Committee. On the acquisition of Hampstead Heath from the London Residuary Body in 1989, The Local Government Reorganisation (Hampstead Heath) Order 1989 saw Committee arrangements adapted to form the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park Committee (HHC), with responsibility for Highgate Wood and Queens Park moving from EFOS to the new HHC. A new Epping Forest and Commons Committee (EF&CC) was formed to manage Epping Forest, Epping Forest Buffer Land and Commons.
3. Over 2020 and 2021, the Lord Lisvane was commissioned to conduct a review of all City Corporation committees and, following extensive Member consultation, the final recommendations were agreed by the Court in December 2021. With regard to open spaces, including Epping Forest, the impact involved the deletion of several defunct working parties, and the devolution of administration of the various Consultative Committees from the Governance and Member Services Team to the relevant local service department(s).

### **Current Position**

4. In addition to the formal Epping Forest and Commons Committee arrangements, a series of supplementary engagement meeting arrangements have developed to enable greater consultation and make best use of individuals and their expertise, ahead of matters being reported to the formal Committee.
5. **Local Meetings:** The previous EFOS Committee met between 1966-89 on a bi-monthly basis (i.e. six meetings a year). Recognising the concerns of the Verderers, Epping Forest business was discussed, but not determined, at six additional 'shadow' meetings on alternate months to EF&CC meetings. These meetings have traditionally been chaired by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of EF&CC. COVID-19 Lockdown arrangements and Target Operating Model pressures on remaining Officer time has prevented the reestablishment of these meetings.
6. **Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee (EFJCC):** A joint Committee of the City of London Corporation and the Field Studies Council to administer the management of the High Beach Field Centre built in 1972. The City of London Corporation Governance Review – the 'Lisvane Report' - recommended that this Committee should be abolished with work ceded to EF&CC. This was agreed and implemented in December 2021 – April 2022.
7. **Epping Forest Management Plan Sub-Committee:** This was a dedicated Sub-Committee with responsibility for the content of the Epping Forest Management Plan. This Sub-Committee had not met since 2016 and as such, was abolished as part of the City of London Corporation Governance Review – 'the Lisvane Report' - with work ceded to EF&CC in 2021/2022.
8. **Epping Forest Land Registration Working Group:** Formed in 2013 to manage the registration of 1,400 deeds associated with the purchase of Epping Forest for public benefit. Essentially a 'Task and Finish Group' the Working Group of Members and Officers is awaiting a final report, which is being considered by the

Comptroller & City Solicitor on advising EF&CC on how to determine historic encroachments before ceasing its activity.

9. **Deer Management Working Group:** Inaugurated in 2022 to provide oversight of the management of deer in across the Epping Forest Buffer Land. Due to Target Operating Model pressures on remaining Officer time this meeting has yet to meet formally. This is an informal group resourced by the Environment Department and does not feature within the Corporation's formal committee structure. Any recommendations from the Working Group will be presented to EFCC for decision as required.
10. **Epping Forest Consultation Committee (EFCC):** Formed following the passage of the Open Spaces (City of London Corporation) Act 2018 to consult with various user groups on the management of Epping Forest. The City of London Corporation Governance Review – 'the Lisvane Report' - recommended that the Committee should be run local as a Consultation Group from 2021. The revised Terms of Reference are proposed in an associated report.
11. **Local Authority Liaison Meetings:** Given the need to work in partnership with Local Authorities within whose jurisdiction Epping Forest falls, since 2008 regular biannual meetings have been held between Ward or appointed Councillors from the London Local Authorities of Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, together with Epping Forest District Council with Members from EF&CC. The meetings are supported by Microsoft Teams microsites to update Councillors on work undertaken in their Wards by the Charity.
12. **Wanstead Park Working Party & Liaison Groups:** Given the complex management challenges at Wanstead Park regarding High Risk dams; flood risk from the River Roding; Heritage at Risk Register entries for the Registered Park, Conservation Area and The Grotto and pressure on future water abstraction a working party for the four Registered Park owners and Heritage England has been established to agree a joint Parkland Management Plan (PMP). The City of London Corporation Governance Review – 'the Lisvane Report' abolished this Group and an alternative negotiation will be required to complete this work. Uniquely, a Liaison Group chaired by Verderer has also been established to maintain discussions with the Friends Group, other key stakeholders and local Councillors with regard to Park maintenance matters.
13. **Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC) Mitigation Joint Steering Group:** Approved by your Committee of 18 November 2019 this joint Committee of six representatives of the nine Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) whose Zone of Influence (ZoI) impacts on the EFSAC will continue to monitor the impact of additional recreational visits from new housing constructed within the ZoI; assess the performance of Suitable Alternative natural Greenspaces (SANGs) and determine how dedicated 'passported' funds from section 111 Local Government Act 1972 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are invested at Epping Forest via the Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS).
14. These supplementary meetings place a considerable extra burden of responsibility and commitment for City of London Corporation Committee Members including local elected Verderers, especially the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

## **Proposals**

15. Wide-ranging Governance discussions at the Strategy Awayday of 17 February 2023 have been brought forward by the Chairman and Officers to provide the following improvements.

### **Service Committee – Epping Forest & Commons Committee**

16. The frequency of EF&CC meetings should be retained at a bi-monthly arrangement of six meetings per annum previously based on January; March; May; July; September & November.
17. In future four meetings should be based around regular Committee business with the recently established Directors Report and the long-established Assistant Director (Superintendents) Report revised away from the current narrative and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) basis to provide Members with more formal metrics and aligned commentary on a quarterly basis, aligned with traditional quarter days, reporting where possible alongside quarterly internal data reporting periods.
18. The remaining two meetings would be split at six-monthly intervals to allow the Committee to have 'deep dives' into more strategic topic areas. These meetings can still be used for urgent issues requiring approval or debate, however, the new dashboard updates from control functions will not be included.
19. Members have also requested that early drafts of new decision or policy items are placed before EF&CC before being considered by EFCG, to allow Members the benefit of improved awareness and an early contribution to policy and topic issues.
20. The Epping Forest and Commons Committee meetings will be supplemented by an annual Strategy Away Day meeting. A specific action should be taken to create a plan to improve diversity and inclusion within the consultative groups.

### **Director & Assistant Directors Reports**

21. The Director / ADs reports should be replaced by the charity level dashboards with trend commentary overlaid, alongside the charity level management plan commitments for the quarter (with RAG rating of completed or overdue, with commentary on overdue items) and what work is due to be completed over the next quarter. Any new items to be added to management plans should also be highlighted.

### **Risk Reporting**

22. Standard Committee reporting should also include any proposed changes to each charity's risk register and each charity's financial report. The Town Clerk's Department will continue to retain the master copy of the action log which the Environment Department will routinely update to supplement the Committee minutes.

### **Epping Forest Consultative Group**

23. EF&CC Consultative Group (EFCG) meetings should become more flexible in terms of membership, dependent upon the items being consulted upon. Meetings should remain in hybrid format, with a mix of virtual and physical participation to accommodate the widest possible audience. Minutes should no longer be taken

for any consultative group meetings, replaced instead by action recording, which will also be reflected in the action log of the EF&CC.

24. The process of initially consulting the EFCG on new and policy change reports will be continued but only following initial EF&CC consideration of draft reports. Specific feedback on items being consulted upon should be fed back to the Town Clerk and will form part of the Committee Report for decision, to ensure our key stakeholder voices are being considered. A specific action should be taken to create a plan to improve diversity and inclusion within the consultative groups.
25. It may be beneficial to perform a skills audit of consultative group members to understand where pockets of expertise exist and can support the charity in its work. Consultative group meetings should move from a cycle of three annual meetings to a cycle of two times each, however, agendas should be proactively communicated to consultative group members four times per year to allow for contributions to EF&CC meetings.
26. To align the Epping Forest consultative group to the original Forest Parish Structure of North and South Parishes, the EFCG should be split into a north and south meeting format, better aligning with the Verderer roles. The Chairmanship of these meetings should be delegated to Verderers on a trial basis.

### **Wanstead Park Steering & Liaison Groups**

27. It is proposed to maintain the Steering Group of Registered Park landowners until the PMP has been finally adopted by all organisations. Given the wider 'federated' structure of Epping Forest, a single Liaison Group for Wanstead Park is anomalous, and it is proposed to move this work to become part of the regular peripatetic liaison work undertaken as 'Task & Finish Groups' by the new role of Keeper Team Managers and the Ponds Project Officer as work on the dam improvements is inaugurated.

### **Epping Forest Annual Public Meeting**

28. The Natural Environment Division Charities Review will consider the opportunity to increase public engagement through an annual forum meeting to report on activities across the year and to answer public questions.

### **Policy Implications**

29. The proposals related to meetings are intended to improve the Corporate Plan commitment to '**Shape outstanding environments**'.
  - a) We are digitally and physically well-connected and responsive.
  - b) We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.
  - c) We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.
  - d) Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained.

### **Risk Implications**

30. **Finance** – A reduction in the overall number of Committee meetings will save Member and Officer time.
31. **Human Resources** – The TOM proposals include provision for a Stakeholder Engagement Officer to support the administration of the new governance

arrangements beyond the work of the EF&CC which will continue to be managed by the Town Clerks Department.

### **Charity implications**

32. Charity implications – Epping Forest is a registered charity (number 232990). Charity Law obliges Members to ensure that the decisions they take in relation to the Charity must be taken in the best interests of the Charity.

### **Conclusion**

33. Following City of London Corporation Governance Changes agreed by the Court in 2021, the Committee reporting and business arrangements for the Epping Forest and Commons Committee and associated consultative and liaison activity have been reviewed recommending changes that will enable Members to better monitor activity and progress, while providing stakeholders and beneficiaries greater opportunities to engage with the charity and its many beneficiaries.

### **Appendices**

'None'

### **Paul Thomson**

Assistant Director (Superintendent)

Environment Department, Natural Environment Division

T: 020 8532 1010

E: [paul.thomson@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:paul.thomson@cityoflondon.gov.uk)