

Committee(s): Epping Forest and Commons – For Decision	Dated: 13/07/2023
Subject: Stakeholder Engagement & Lead Member Proposals	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	9, 10, 11 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N
Report of: Environment Executive Director	For Decision
Report author: Paul Thomson, Natural Environment Assistant Director, Epping Forest Geoff Sinclair, Natural Environment Assistant Director, The Commons	

Summary

The Epping Forest and Commons Committee (EF&CC) governance arrangements have remained largely unchanged for the past 25 years. In addition to six formal Committee meetings each year and four site visits, a number of further meetings take place to help prepare and progress Committee business and update and engage local stakeholders.

For the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, this includes bi-weekly meetings with the Executive Director, bi-weekly meetings with the Director, six briefings with the Assistant Directors, six agenda planning sessions, six Committee call-over meetings and annual bilateral reviews with the Chairman of Policy and Resources and Chairman of Finance.

In addition, a series of informal stakeholder consultation meetings take place, that currently supplement formal governance and reporting mechanisms. These annual meetings include six Epping Forest Local Authority Liaison Meetings with the four relevant Local Authorities, three Epping Forest Consultative Group meetings, three Coulsdon Commons and West Wickham and Spring Park Consultative Group meetings, three Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common Consultative Group meetings and three Ashted Common Consultative Group meetings.

The Epping Forest charity also introduced Annual Review reporting from 2020, with the four Commons charities due to follow suit this year and a stronger, more formalised, departmental reporting commitment on matters ranging from Finance to Risk has begun.

These responsibilities place a considerable burden on Members and Officers and this report is necessary to propose changes to the current stakeholder engagement and reporting mechanisms, designed to reduce the time commitments on individual Members, delegate chairing responsibilities based on the output of the 2023 Member skills audit and improve the overall effectiveness and scrutiny of the management and oversight of each charitable trust.

One of the outcomes of the Corporate Governance Review process was endorsement for the principle of a greater use of Lead Members (or ‘rapporteurs’) to help spread the burden of office placed upon the Chairman amongst the wider committee, whilst also making best use of talent available on the Committee.

Whilst action has been taken to consolidate or discontinue some meetings over the past year to mitigate resourcing implications from TOM Phase II, further action is proposed, as discussed at the Epping Forest & Commons Committee Away Day in February 2023.

Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the:

1. Retention of Epping Forest & Commons Committee (EF&CC) meetings on a bimonthly basis, holding six meetings each year, four quarterly meetings for primarily Committee business with updates from control and logistics functions, and two additional meetings focused on strategy and policy development, potentially also aligning to site visits.
2. Endorse the revision of Director and Assistant Director reporting to Members from narrative-based reporting to reporting focused on key performance indicators and project progress timetables which drive strategic priorities.
3. Endorse the provision of early drafts of business requiring decision or policy proposals to EF&CC prior to being considered by consultative groups, to allow Members to set the framework for consultation and ensure responses are fully considered prior to decision making.
4. Introduction of an Epping Forest bimonthly ‘surgery’ led by the Assistant Director (Superintendent) for Verderers to discuss issues raised by Commoners.
5. Endorse the retention of Epping Forest Local Authority Liaison Meetings, on a bi-annual basis, to allow local councillors to work together as one group to support each charity. These meetings will be Chaired by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman. Reflecting the dispersed character of The Commons arrangements will continue to embed Councillors into the relevant Charity Consultative Groups.
6. Change to arrangements of the Epping Forest Consultative Group as follows.
 - a. The Chairman to appoint a Verderer to Chair the meetings on a trial basis. The Chair will rotate between the Verderers.
 - b. Reduction from three meetings each year, to two subject to a Charity Review recommendation to introduce an annual review meeting to bring the total number of consultative meetings back to a total of 3).
 - c. Retaining the hybrid format of virtual and physical representation

- d. Replacement of detailed minutes with action logs, which would be made transparent to EF&CC
 - e. Commence work planning to improve the diversity and inclusion within the group.
 - f. Conduct a skills audit of group members to allow the experience and skills of individual members and organisations to be fully leveraged by the charity.
7. Changing the arrangements of The Commons Consultative Group as follows:
 - a. Reducing each area meeting from three to two per year
 - b. The Chairman to appoint a Member to Chair the meetings on a trial basis.
 - c. Retaining the hybrid format of virtual and physical representation
 - d. Replacement of minutes with action recording, which would be made transparent to EF&CC
 - e. Commence work planning to improve the diversity and inclusion within the group.
 - f. Conduct a skills audit of group members to allow the experience and skills of individual members and organisations to be fully leveraged by each charity.
8. Refer consideration of an Annual Review Meeting, known under former Forest Law as a Regard, to the forthcoming Charity Review.
9. Explore the best platform to house action logs and other relevant information for each charity consultative group, which is accessible to external members.
10. Note that the Epping Forest and Commons Committee Management Plan Sub-Committee and the Land Registration Working Group (LRWG) was abolished by the Court of Common Council in December 2021. A final report on unresolved encroachments considered by the LRWG will be brought to EF&CC.
11. Note that the Epping Forest Joint Consultative Committee was abolished by the Court of Common Council in December 2021. The Joint Agreement with the Field Studies Council will be amended to reflect this decision while scrutiny and budget setting of the licence will be added to the work of EF&CC.
12. Regularise community liaison for major project management around time limited 'Task and Finish Groups', predominantly led by Officers to ensure continuous communication and improved stakeholder partnership.
13. Continue with arrangements for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC) Mitigation Joint Steering Group meetings agreed by your Committee in November 2019.
14. Creation of Lead Members, as proposed below aimed at helping spread the burden of office placed upon the Chairman amongst the wider committee, and also making best use of talent available on the Committee. . Proposals are made following the output of the Member Skills Audit in May 2023 and taking the same approach as the Policy and Resources Committee (September 2022) Lead Members will act as a point of contact or 'sounding board' for relevant officers, whilst ensuring that the boundary between governance (Members) and operational management (staff) remains clear.

Special Projects	Lead Member(s)
Charities Review	Chairman / Dep Chairman
Asset Review	Chairman / Dep Chairman
TOM, HR, Recruitment & Culture	Chairman / Dep Chairman
Visits, Events & Hospitality	Jaspreet Hodgson
Financial Performance & Efficiency (including charity budgets, Capital & Cyclical Works Programme settlements & central cost allocations)	Gregory Lawrence
Wanstead Park Waterscapes	Nicholas Munday

Strategy / Policy Areas	Lead Member
Conservation & Nature Recovery	Paul Morris
Charity Income & Governance	Philip Woodhouse Vincent Keaveny
Heritage and Culture	Michael Chapman
Visitors, Sports & Leisure	William Kennedy
Communications (incl. authorised spokesperson)	Chairman / Dep Chairman
Education & Learning	Caroline Haines
Risk, Health & Safety	George Abrahams
Deer Management Oversight & Animal Welfare	Nicholas Munday
Volunteer Strategy	Paul Morris
Digital Strategy	Graeme Doshi-Smith
Buffer Land Strategy	Nicholas Munday
Charity Compliance & Annual Reporting	Lead Member
Epping Forest – Charity # 232990	George Abrahams
Burnham Beeches & Stoke Common - Charity # 232987	Paul Morris
Ashtead Common - Charity # 1051510	Ben Murphy
West Wickham Common & Spring Park Wood – Charity # 232988	Caroline Haines
Coulsdon & Other Commons – Charity # 232989 Kenley Common, Farthing Downs & Riddlesdown	Andrew McMurtrie

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 goods levied by 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 HHC. Consequently, a new Epping Forest and Commons Committee (EF&CC) was formed to manage Epping Forest, Epping Forest Buffer Land and The 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 of Common Council 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 the administration of various Consultative Committees from the Governance and Members Services Team to the relevant local service Department(s).

Current Position

4. In addition to the formal Service Committee arrangements a series of supplementary engagement meeting arrangements have developed to enable greater consultation and make the best use of individuals and their expertise ahead of matters being reported to the formal Committee:

Epping Forest Consultation & Stakeholder Engagement Groups

- a. **Local Meetings:** The previous EFOS Committee met on a monthly basis between 1966 and 1989, and recognising the concerns of the Verderers Epping Forest business was discussed, but not determined, at six 'shadow' meetings on alternate months to Service Committee meetings. These meetings have traditionally been chaired by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of EF&CC. The legacy of COVID-19 Lockdown arrangements and Target Operating Model (TOM) pressures on remaining Officer time has prevented the reestablishment of these meetings.
- b. **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.
- c. **Epping Forest Management Plan Sub-Committee:** A dedicated 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.
- d. **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 is awaiting a final report, which is being considered by the Comptroller & City Solicitor on determining encroachments before ceasing its activity.

- e. **Deer Management Oversight Group:** Inaugurated in 2022 and focusing on the Deer Management Strategy Review to provide oversight of the management of deer in across the Epping Forest and Epping Forest Buffer Land. Due to Target Operating Model pressures on remaining Officer time this meeting has yet to meet formally. Any recommendations from the Working Group will be presented to EF&CC for decision as required.
- f. **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 locally as a Consultation Group from 2021. The revised Terms of Reference are proposed in an associated report.
- g. **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.
- h. **Wanstead Park Steering & 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. Uniquely, a Liaison Group chaired by a Verderer has also been established to maintain discussions with the Friends Group, other key stakeholders and local Councillors, which has since been abolished and consolidated by the Epping Forest Consultative Group.
- i. **Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (EFSAC) Mitigation Committee:** 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 (Zol) impacts on the EFSAC will continue to monitor the impact of additional recreational visits from new housing constructed within the Zol; 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).

5. In response to the 2016 Service-Based Review, consultative group meetings of each of the Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common and Ashted Common charities were reduced from three meetings to two per year. A further change in 2016 was that the consultative groups of the Coulsdon Commons and West Wickham and Spring Park charities were merged with two annual meetings. The City of London Governance Review – ‘the Lisvane Report – recommended that the consultative groups should be run as a Consultation Group from 2020. The agendas of these meetings focus on reporting on the past year’s activity, highlighting key site management works planned for the next year, and feedback and comments from stakeholders. In contrast to the EF Consultative Group, it is not standard for EF&CC papers to be consulted on as a matter of routine.
6. 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

7. Wide-ranging Governance discussions at the Strategy Awayday of 17 February 2023 have been brought forward by the Chairman and Officers to provide the improvements listed in Recommendations above.

Service Committee – Epping Forest & Commons Committee

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.

12. 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

13. 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

14. 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

15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.

Policy Implications

18. The Governance proposals are intended to improve the Corporate Plan commitment to **'Shape outstanding environments.'**
 1. We are digitally and physically well-connected and responsive.

2. We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.
3. We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.
4. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained.

Risk Implications

19. **Finance** – A reduction in the overall number of Committee meetings will save Member and Officer time. There may be new costs implications in hiring an external venue to support potential annual review meetings, subject to the Charity Review, which will be absorbed within Local Risk budgets.

20. **Human Resources** – The TOM Phase II 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.

Conclusion

21. Following City of London Corporation 2020 Governance Changes recommended by Lord Lisvane agreed by the Court of Common Council 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

- Appendix 1 – ‘Lead Member – Job Description’

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Lead Member – Job Description

Appointment

- Appointed annually by the Epping Forest and Commons Committee from amongst its membership. Appointments shall be considered on the basis of an annual skills audit and expressions of interest from amongst the Committee.

Overall Responsibilities

- To act as a policy lead for, and represent the views of, the Committee in respect of the relevant policy area for which they have been appointed Lead.

Main Tasks and Responsibilities

- To support the Chairman in the formation and delivery of the Committee and Corporation's policy goals (within the relevant policy area).
- To deputise for the Chairman at relevant engagements or hospitality events (in the absence of the Deputy Chairman).
- To act as a point of contact or "sounding board" for relevant officers, providing political steers in relaying the Committee's views, so as to inform implementation and prioritisation at the operational level.
- To act as the Member point of contact for colleagues interested in the policy area or project, assisting with information sharing and triaging of questions to relevant technical officers.
- To support and co-ordinate political decision making between relevant Committees across the Corporation.
- To lead on the collation of insight and expertise from Members across the wider Court with relevant knowledge or experience of the policy area.
- To work with colleagues outside of the formal meeting setting to share information / understanding, enabling Members to coalesce around the agreed policy decisions and implementation plans.

NB – these posts have no decision-making responsibility or powers and are purely advisory; post holders are expected to operate within the boundaries of the Member / Officer Protocol at all times and not be unduly involved in the operational aspects or delivery of the policy areas.