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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8.4.2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY, 8 APRIL 2021

COUNCILLORS

PRESENT Achilleas Georgiou, Edward Smith, Hass Yusuf, Birsen Demirel and Margaret Greer (Vice Chair)

ABSENT Susan Erbil, Lee David-Sanders and Elif Erbil

STATUTORY CO-OPTees: *1 vacancy (Church of England diocese representative), Mr Simon Goulden (other faiths/denominations representative), Mr Tony Murphy (Catholic diocese representative), Alicia Meniru & 1 vacancy (Parent Governor representative) - Italics Denotes absence*

OFFICERS: Sarah Cary (Executive Director Place), Mark Bradbury (Director of Property and Economy), Claire Johnson (Head of Governance, Scrutiny and Registration Services), Metin Halil (Governance and Scrutiny Officer), Andy Ellis (Governance and Scrutiny Officer).

Also Attending: Councillor Nesil Caliskan (Leader of the Council)
Councillor Joanne Laban (Call-In Lead)
Councillor Sinan Boztas (Substitute for Councillor Susan Erbil)
Councillor Mahym Bedekova (Substitute for Councillor Elif Erbil)
Cllr Jim Steven (Substitute for Councillor Lee David-Sanders)
25 attendees, viewing the meeting.

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WELCOME & APOLOGIES

In the absence of Cllr Susan Erbil, Cllr Margaret Greer chaired the meeting. All members of the Committee introduced themselves. Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Susan Erbil, Cllr Elif Erbil and Cllr Lee David-Sanders. Cllr Greer read a statement, reminding all Members of the requirements relating to the purdah period.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

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CALL-IN: WHITEWEBBS PARK GOLF COURSE

The Chair outlined the purpose and format of the call-in process and detailed the options available to the Committee. The Chair also reiterated that only questions relating to the reasons for call-in would be permitted from Committee Members. The Chair requested Cllr Laban, as the Call-in Lead, to provide reasons for call-in.

- 1) It was noted that Whitewebbs Park Golf Course has many supporters and a petition with over 3,000 signatures, against potential closure, was previously presented to Full Council.
- 2) There was a lack of consultation with the many interested stakeholders, including residents and Friends of Parks Groups. It was stated that there was a moral and professional duty to consult.
- 3) The finances in the original report were queried, with particular reference to depreciation, central costs and costs of re-opening.
- 4) The premature closure of the golf course has resulted in a loss of income for the Council, especially considering the surge in golf witnessed at the lifting of the first lockdown in summer 2020.
- 5) The 'pay and play' system used at Whitewebbs Golf Club allows for affordable sport as opposed to the fees charged by private golf courses. With obesity related to cases of COVID, we need to encourage exercise.
- 6) The passion exhibited by residents and stakeholders should be acknowledged.

The Chair thanked Cllr Laban and asked the Leader of the Council, Cllr Caliskan and Officers to respond.

- 7) It was noted the Council finances are used responsibly and there is a need to address poverty and other areas deemed necessary.
- 8) The call-in relates to a technical report on the closure of the golf course. There has been consultation, with much discussion going back to March 2019. To say there has been no engagement is misleading.
- 9) The report identifies a commitment to the site but acknowledges a year on year loss.
- 10) It is necessary to review provision on site, in order that tax-payers money is not used to subsidise the cost of maintaining the golf course.
- 11) Enfield is in a fortunate position of being very well served by alternative golf courses, offering a range of fees and charges.
- 12) The specification for potential bidders allows for future provision of golf to be considered.
- 13) The closure of the golf course now, allows for a reduction in cost pressures associated with the site.

The Chair opened the discussion to Members of the Committee for any comments or questions.

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- 14) In response to a question about future access to the land it was confirmed that the land would remain open to the public, to be used by walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. In response to the petition to Full Council, the specification criteria has been enhanced and all bidders informed.
- 15) It was confirmed that further consultation would be undertaken, however, this has been delayed as a result of COVID restrictions. The views of the local MP would also be considered. Both the Council and bidders have been focused on other areas during the pandemic, however further steps will be announced following the elections to be held in May.
- 16) It was noted that although there was an increase of 55% in the number of rounds of golf played following lockdown, this figure did subside after the initial surge.
- 17) The response to call-in doesn't refute that there was a lack of consultation, therefore it is important to have clarity on the type of consultation to be undertaken going forward. There was wide ranging consultation on the marketing of the site, which was amended following residents comments.
- 18) Clarity was provided on the use of positive and negative figures within the financial elements of the original report. Depreciation covers equipment over time and is recognised in the accounts for the facility.
- 19) Further detail was requested on why a decision to close the golf course was made when there was an opportunity to earn income. It was noted that in effect, the golf course had been moth-balled. The maintenance costs of the course increase in proportion to usage during the summer months. In addition, there are considerable internal recharges, for example, ground staff.
- 20) The inclusion within the report of the number of golf courses around the world was deemed unnecessary. More detail was requested on the number of municipal golf courses in Enfield and neighbouring boroughs as the costs and availability of private clubs is prohibitive to many residents. It was confirmed that Trent Park and Lea Valley both offer 'pay and play' facilities.
- 21) It was agreed that the 'Lets Talk' approach to consultation could be used in future decisions to be made on the golf course.

The Chair asked Cllr Laban, as Call-in Lead, to summarise.

- 22) Cllr Laban summarised the issues in relation to consultation, finances, closure and usage and requested that the golf course be re-opened.

The Chair confirmed that having heard the reasons for call-in and the responses to call-in, the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would now be asked to vote. The options available to Members were:

- i) Confirm the original decision.
- ii) Refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member/Decision Maker for further consideration.
- iii) Refer to Full Council

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23) Councillors Greer, Georgiou, Yusuf, Demirel, Boztas and Bedekova voted to confirm the original decision. Councillors Smith and Steven voted to refer the matter to Full Council. The original decision was confirmed and can therefore be implemented.

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DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings will be confirmed following Annual Council on 19th May 2021.

The Chair thanked Members, officers and members of the public for attending the meeting and wished everyone well.