Epping Forest District Council

POLICY AND INFORMATION UPDATE

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Performance Improvement Unit

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www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/local_democracy/Performance

1. POLICY AND INFORMATION UPDATE

The Policy and Information Update is published on a regular basis, to highlight announcements, publications and consultation documents issued by the Government and other relevant agencies and public bodies, which directly affect the work of the Council. The Update is designed to ensure that relevant matters, which often have corporate as well as service specific implications, are drawn to the attention of the appropriate Portfolio Holders, Service Directors and other members and officers.

The Policy and Information Update provides a brief summary of new and emerging issues, and contains links to the full versions of publications and consultation documents etc. The update also provides details of forthcoming events of relevance to the Council's activities. Whilst Members, Directors and managers may already be aware of issues specific to particular services, functions, responsibilities or interests, the Policy and Information Update is intended to raise corporate awareness of relevant matters and to ensure that nothing of importance to the Council is overlooked.

If members or officers wish to discuss any of the items published in the Policy and Information Update, or require further information or reports on specific issues, they should contact the relevant Service Director in the first instance. Comments or suggestions in respect of the format and content of the Update can be made to the Performance Improvement Unit at performance@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

PART A - NEWS

2. OLYMPICS MINISTER JOINS LOCAL PUPILS TO TACKLE THE 2012 RAPIDS (7 JULY 2011)

Olympics Minister Bob Neill rafted the rapids at Lee Valley White Water Centre, as he visited the site to see how the centre is delivering a sporting legacy for London.

The only brand new London 2012 venue open to the public, the Centre brings white water rafting and canoeing to a huge new audience in London and the south east, with the Olympic Standard Course for the sporting elite and a smaller Legacy Loop to train and develop the next generation. The Minister tackled the waves as part of the Lee Valley White Water Centre Schools Festival, where 1500 school children across London, Essex and Hertfordshire were given the chance to experience the Olympic Standard Competition Course for free a year before the Games begin.

Of interest to:
Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder Olympic Champion

3. PRIME MINISTER SETS AMBITIOUS OPEN DATA AGENDA (7 JULY 2011)

The Prime Minister has committed to publishing key data on the National Health Service, schools, criminal courts and transport.

This commitment represents the most ambitious open data agenda of any government anywhere in the world. The new data will reveal clinical achievements and prescribing data by individual GP practices, the performance of hospital teams in treating lung cancer and other key healthcare conditions, the effectiveness of schools at teaching pupils across a range of subjects, criminal sentencing by each court, and data on rail timetables, rail service performance, roadworks, current road conditions, car parks and cycle routes in an open format for use by all. The new commitments aim to provide the public with more information about the performance of services they use every day, and to help to drive modern, personalised and sustainable public services. The new data are also expected to drive economic growth as they promote the creation of new services and applications.

Of interest to:
All Members

4. TOUGH ACTION TO TACKLE ROUGH SLEEPING (7 JULY 2011)

Housing Minister Grant Shapps has announced the Government's ambition to put an end to rough sleeping, by pledging to work with councils and the voluntary sector to ensure that nobody spends a second night sleeping rough on Britain's streets.

Mr. Shapps said that the national roll-out of the 'No Second Night Out' initiative to tackle rough sleeping showed that the Government would not let tough challenges get in the way of taking action to protect the most vulnerable in society. Mr. Shapps also announced a new £20 million Homelessness Transition Fund for the voluntary sector to help deliver the pledge. 'No Second Night Out' identifies new rough sleepers and helps them off the streets immediately so that they do not fall into a dangerous rough sleeping lifestyle. By identifying where they are coming from, it also helps to improve prevention and recovery services for those prone to ending up spending the night in a shop doorway or on a park bench. Currently operating as a pilot in London, 'No Second Night Out' has helped prevent 135 people from spending a second night on the streets since it was launched earlier this year with the Mayor as part of his wider strategy to end rough sleeping in the capital by 2012. The roll-out of the scheme is one of six commitments made in a report published by a cross-Whitehall Ministerial group tasked with preventing and tackling homelessness. The group was set up by Mr. Shapps in one of his first actions as Housing Minister, to look to address the underlying and often complex issues that cause people to sleep on the streets. Rather than dictate how 'No Second Night Out' should work in each area, in their areas, Ministers urge local authorities, who know their local circumstances best, to build on their ongoing work with local charities and hostels to adopt a gold standard approach to rough sleeping services that meet the key principles of the scheme.

Of interest to:
Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

5. REFORMS WILL LEAD TO FIRST CUT IN WAITING LISTS FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS (7 JULY 2011)

Housing Minister Grant Shapps has pledged that the Government's package of reforms will lead to the first substantial reduction in social housing waiting lists for twenty-two years.

The Minister argued that measures the Government is taking, including delivering 150,000 new affordable homes over the Spending Review, and greater flexibility for councils to manage their own waiting lists, will reduce the numbers of people waiting for years for a council home. Mr. Shapps said that he wants to return to the central principle of social homes being available to help those who need it most, for as long as they need it, to tackle the deepening sense of unfairness about how the country's social housing stock is used. The Minister said that social housing in England has for too long helped too few, and has needlessly applied the brakes on tenant's aspirations and halted their ambitions. He argued that the social housing of the future must become more flexible and go beyond just putting a roof over people's heads.

Mr. Shapps also said that he wants to see a return to the premise of social housing being a springboard to success. Therefore, tenants will be supported in forming tenant panels and will have new opportunities to have a say over how their services are provided and to take over some of the responsibilities currently held by landlords, such as carrying out small repairs to their property, to allow them to build up their skills. By giving landlords the option of offering flexible tenancies, as well as continuing to offer lifetime security where it is needed, better use can be made of the country's social housing to ensure more people benefit. Mr. Shapps said that successive Governments had promised to make social housing a top priority for decades, but that only now was the most radical shake up of social housing for fifty years being introduced to truly turn it into a springboard to help people make a better life for themselves and for their communities.

Of interest to:
Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

6. CHEATS WARNED OF BENEFIT FRAUD BLITZ (8 JULY 2011)

Benefit cheats are being warned that a new Mobile Regional Taskforce to combat fraud will be visiting their area.

The new team will target all high risk postcodes across the country, re-examining claims for benefits and Tax Credits. The Taskforce is the latest crack-down on

benefit fraud by the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC alongside local authorities, and cheats are being urged to admit their crimes and pay back the money before they get a knock on the door. People who tell the Department about a change in their circumstances before they are found out by the Taskforce will have to repay the money they owe, and, depending on the seriousness of their action, may face an additional punishment. Anyone who doesn't take this opportunity and is found by the Taskforce to be committing welfare fraud could be prosecuted and fined or imprisoned. The Taskforce will start on 25 July in areas of Birmingham, and supports other measures in the fraud and error strategy announced at the end of last year by DWP and HMRC that will reduce annual welfare fraud and error overpayments by one quarter (£1.4 billion) by March 2015.

Of interest to:
Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Finance and ICT

7. ARMCHAIR AUDITORS ARE HERE TO STAY (8 JULY 2011)

Greater local financial control must go hand in hand with greater willingness to open accounts to local scrutiny, Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has said.

Speaking to an audience of Local Government finance professionals, Mr Pickles emphasised the essential role financial transparency has played in eliminating waste and inefficiency to deliver value for money to the taxpayer and help protect services. Mr Pickles signalled the next wave of Government transparency would be for councils to publish details of all contracts and tenders over £500 online. This follows the publication of spending over £500 online. The Secretary of State said a new wave of local scrutiny by citizen journalists, microbloggers and armchair auditors was a triumph, and encouraged councils to welcome them into the world of local government finance. He reminded councils that he intends to publish a list of when all council ledgers are opened to the public. Under law councils are required to hold a financial open day.

Of interest to:
Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Finance and ICT

8. AFFORDABLE HOMES PROGRAMME SET TO EXCEED EXPECTATIONS (14 JULY 2011)

Housing Minister Grant Shapps has hailed the progress of Government plans to build thousands of new affordable homes over the next four years.

Ministers revealed that their original aspiration to deliver 150,000 new homes by 2015 will not only be met, but exceeded. Appetite for the Affordable Homes Programme has surpassed expectations, with 146 providers sharing almost £1.8 billion to build 80,000 homes under the programme, putting the Government on track

to deliver up to 170,000 new homes by 2015, and safeguarding some 80,000 jobs in construction and related trades. The programme allows social housing providers to charge a rent of up to 80% of the local market level, and use the additional income to support delivery of more affordable homes. Providers may also offer flexible tenancies to new tenants. Demand from affordable housing providers to be involved in the programme has been huge, and Mr. Shapps' announcement confirms every part of England will benefit. The new homes will be delivered in both rural and urban communities, and will include family homes.

Mr Shapps said that funding for the scheme, which is part of a £4.5 billion Government investment in affordable housing, will provide a major boost to people on housing waiting lists, and give a shot in the arm to the construction industry. Subject to contract, these landlords will now be able to start developing much-needed new affordable homes. This is one of a number of efforts being made to move away from the 'one size fits all' system of social housing to one where a range of options are available to meet local housing needs. Ministers believe that for years millions of people have been on waiting lists with little hope of ever getting a home. That's why the Government has pledged to do things differently, radically reforming social housing in order to give councils and housing associations more control to better meet the needs of local people and build more homes.

Of interest to:
Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

9. COMPETITION TO CREATE BIGGER AND BETTER LOCAL WILDLIFE AREAS (15 JULY 2011)

Local communities are being urged to speak up for their favourite nature areas or suggest where new ones could be created, in return for a share of £7.5 million to help improve them.

Defra has launched a new grant scheme to establish Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs). The £7.5m programme is being administered by Natural England. NIAs are large, discrete areas that will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The partnership will plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action. The Nature Improvement Areas Pilot Programme was announced in the Natural Environment White Paper last month and is based on proposals contained in an independent review of England's wildlife sites, 'Making Space for Nature'. The programme was established to help address ecological restoration as part of a series of actions at a landscape scale to improve biodiversity, ecosystems and our connections with the natural environment.

The grant scheme is being administered by Natural England on behalf of a consortium of partners, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Environment Agency, the

Forestry Commission and Natural England. It is anticipated that partnerships of NGO's, land managers, local government agencies, business and community organisations will apply for the grants. To be successful a partnership will need to identify an area of between 10,000 and 50,000 hectares (by comparison the area of the Isle of Wight is 38,000 hectares) and demonstrate how a step change can be achieved in the success of nature conservation within the area. The first twelve pilot NIAs are due to be up and running by April 2012.

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/default.aspx

Of interest to:
Safer, Greener and Highways Portfolio Holder Director of Planning and Economic Development

10. £11 MILLION SAVED AS ELECTORS DATABASE PLAN ABANDONED (18 JULY 2011)

Plans to create an expensive database of electors are to be abandoned, saving taxpayers more than £11m, the Government has announced.

The Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) was legislated for in 2006 by the Electoral Administration Act, and intended to make it easier for political parties to verify the legitimacy of their donors. However, the provisions were never commenced and the legislation will now be repealed. The database, which would have been administered by a new independent public body, would have cost an estimated £11.4 million to build and £2.7 million per annum to run. The CORE was intended to provide a single source of electoral registration information, principally to help political parties who are required to provide information on the current status of a potential donor's entry in the electoral register. Under the current system, Electoral Registration Officers are already required to supply a revised version of the electoral register to political parties on request and this will remain in place. The Government will work with the Electoral Commission and others to consider other, less costly, ways to improve the provision of electoral registration information.

Of interest to:
Support Services Portfolio Holder Assistant to the Chief Executive

11. CRIME STATISTICS TO BECOME INDEPENDENT (18 JULY 2011)

The government has announced that crime statistics will in future be published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The government has laid a written ministerial statement in Parliament to respond to the national statistician's review of crime statistics that was published in June 2011. The Home Secretary commissioned an independent review of crime statistics in January 2011 and asked the national statistician 'to decide which independent body

should have future responsibility for the publication of crime statistics' and to look at how crime statistics are measured, collated and published. The review recommended that ONS should assume responsibility for the independent reporting and publication of crime statistics.

Of interest to:
Safer, Greener and Highways Portfolio Holder Director of Environment and Street Scene

12. SOUTHEND AIRPORT EXPANSION BRINGS NEW CONNECTIONS TO THAMES GATEWAY (19 JULY 2011)

Thames Gateway Minister Bob Neill saw how Southend Airport is playing a crucial role in expanding the connectivity of the Thames Gateway, as he officially opened the airport's new, state-of-the-art control tower.

The new tower is part of Southend Airport's huge expansion process, which will see it receiving another 800,000 passengers through new partners Easyjet next year, aiming for two million passengers per year in the long run. Mr Neill was shown around the control tower, which commands an impressive view of the Thames Gateway, by members of the air traffic control team and heard how the airport was creating around 500 new jobs and training opportunities. On his departure, Mr Neill emphasised the importance Stratford Airport would play as a transport hub for the Thames Gateway, marking the first day of National Express' train service to the new dedicated airport train station by catching one of the fifty-minute services direct to London Liverpool Street.

Of interest to:
Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Planning and Economic Development

13. £14 MILLION TO EMPOWER COMMUNITIES AND BUILD SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS (20 JULY 2011)

Two new funds totalling £14 million are being made available to the voluntary sector to empower communities to take action against crime and antisocial behaviour, Crime Prevention Minister Baroness Browning has announced.

As part of the government’s ambition to drive up community activism and build safer neighbourhoods, organisations from the voluntary sector across England and Wales are being invited to apply for a share of two new funds to support local areas in tackling the issues that matter most to them. The funds are:

- a £5 million ‘Community Action Against Crime: Innovation Fund’, to bring together active citizens and encourage new and creative ways of working within communities to tackle crime, with a further £5 million set aside for 2012-13; and

- a £4 million 'Choices Fund', to support the development of innovative local solutions to reduce substance misuse and offending by young people.

The purpose of the Innovation Fund is to stimulate creative new approaches to tackling crime. It will do so by empowering local groups to develop innovative projects to tackle local community safety problems. The government is particularly keen for the fund to be made available to grass roots community activists who are not traditional recipients of government grants. The funding is also intended to encourage the voluntary sector to work more closely with local Community Safety Partnerships, and other statutory agencies that impact on community safety, to drive co-design and co-delivery of services. The Innovation Fund will be worth £5 million in 2011/12 with a further £5 million set aside for 2012/13. Applications will be invited from voluntary and community sector organisations, and full details of the application process for 2011/12 will be made available on the Home Office website shortly.

Of interest to:
Safer, Greener and Highways Portfolio Holder Director of Environment and Street Scene

PART B - PUBLICATIONS

14. OPEN PUBLIC SERVICES (11 JULY 2011)

This Cabinet Office white paper sets out the government's approach to public services.

By putting choice and control in the hands of individuals and neighbourhoods, public services will become more responsive to peoples' needs. The White Paper sets out the government's approach to public services by applying five key principles:

- Choice – wherever possible, increasing choice;
- Decentralisation – decentralised to the lowest appropriate level;
- Diversity – public services should be open to a range of providers;
- Fairness – ensuring fair access to public services; and
- Accountability – public services should be accountable to users and taxpayers.

The White Paper will be followed over the summer by a wide-ranging discussion with individuals, communities, public sector staff, providers and others with an interest in how public services are delivered. The government wants to hear from the views of everyone working in and using public services about how it can turn its vision for high quality, efficient and modern public services into reality.

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/open-public-services-white-paper.pdf

Of interest to:
All Members Al Officers

15. HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY NEWS (20 JULY 2011)

This is the 20 July 2011 edition of the newsletter from the Homes and Communities Agency.

http://info.homesandcommunities.co.uk/newsletter?jaction=getNewsletterHTML&cookie=0AD3CFBE6BCA06C793D76ED8C9C1C9A7&session.manager=&cam_id=2228&session.application=

Of interest to:
Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Housing

PART C - CONSULTATIONS

16. DEALING WITH SQUATTERS (13 JULY 2011)

This Ministry of Justice consultation seeks views on whether existing criminal and civil mechanisms should be strengthened to deal with squatters. It also aims to gather more information about the extent of problems caused by squatters, and is aimed at anyone affected by squatters and those with experience of using the current law or procedures to get squatters evicted. The deadline for response to the consultation is 5 October 2011.

http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/consultations/options-dealing-with-squatting.pdf

Of interest to:
Leader Housing Portfolio Holder Director of Corporate Support Services Director of Housing

17. LOCAL PLANNING REGULATIONS (15 JULY 2011)

This Department for Communities and Local Government consultation seeks views on the revised regulations that govern the process by which local councils prepare their development plans. The proposed regulations are in response to reforms in the Localism Bill. The consultation aims to establish whether the proposals are fit for purpose. The deadline for response to the consultation is 7 October 2011.

http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/localplansconsultation.pdf

Of interest to:
Planning and Technology Portfolio Holder Director of Planning and Economic Development

18. COUNCILS FREED FROM 'BEGGING BOWL' PUT ON PATH TO GROWTH (18 JULY 2011)

Councils will get to keep their own business rates under new local government financing proposals that will be fair and benefit those that grow financially, Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles has announced.

The Government has published proposals to allow the local retention of business rates by councils and to let them borrow against future rate income. Legislation will be set out later this year so changes start as soon as possible. A consultation document has been issued on the outcome of a review into local government funding that sought to repatriate rates; create a financial incentive for councils to promote local growth; reduce dependency upon central Government grant; and maintain protections for business and vulnerable areas. The proposals will fundamentally shift councils away from their dependence on Government grant, where pleas of poverty earned a bigger share. Any council that grows it's business base would see increased business rates that they would keep. Importantly, there will be no change to the way business pays the tax, who is eligible for discount, or the way it is set nationally. A system of new 'tariffs' or 'top ups' would be put in place to ensure a fair starting point for all councils, by balancing out those with business rates income above a baseline funding level and those with income falling below it. A safety net levy on disproportionate gain will also provide extra protection where needed. The detailed mechanism will be set out later this year following consultation.

Ministers believe a new system is needed to end a long-standing problem where councils have no direct growth incentive, to build stronger relationships with business and to put councils in charge of their own financial circumstances. A plain English guide to the rates retention consultation document has also been published, and the deadline for response to the consultation is 24 October 2011.

http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1947200.pdf

http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1947119.pdf

Of interest to:
Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Finance and ICT

19. HOUSING BENEFIT REFORM - SUPPORTED HOUSING (19 JULY 2011)

This Department for Work and Pensions consultation seeks views on the government's proposals to change the way Housing Benefit helps those living in supported housing with their rent. It covers the social and voluntary sector and is aimed primarily at those involved in the commissioning, funding and providing of

supported housing. Comments are also welcomed from those needing support to live independently, such as vulnerable older and disabled people, and those who represent their views. The deadline for response to the consultation is 9 October 2011.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/consult-supported-housing.pdf

Of interest to:
Housing Portfolio Holder Finance and Economic Development Portfolio Holder Director of Housing Director of Finance and ICT

PART D - EVENTS

20. LGA ANNUAL SAFER COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE - 'COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS, CHANGE AND RENEWAL'

The fourth annual LGA Safer Communities Conference will be held on 8 November 2011. The Conference will look at what the considerable changes in government policy around crime and community safety will mean for councils and community safety partnerships and beyond that, at how other councils and partnerships are addressing the key challenges they face.

http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/events/display-event.do?id=19325905

Of interest to:
Safer, Greener and Highways Portfolio Holder Director of Environment and Street Scene