

Supplementary Committee Agenda



Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel Monday, 30th January, 2006

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Room: Committee Room 1

Time: 7.00 pm

Committee Secretary: S G Hill - Senior Democratic Services Officer
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4.a Council Plan 2003-07 (Pages 3 - 20)

The attached schedule shows progress against Plan items – Hard copies of this document will be available at the meeting.

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COUNCIL PLAN 2003-2007

PROGRESS AGAINST ACTIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

(1) To improve the appearance of our towns and villages, with particular attention to environmental cleaning, refuse services, the maintenance of street furniture, footways and street cleansing

Progress

The appearance of the district has improved as can be seen through performance against BV199(a). Parts of the district (e.g. Theydon Bois and Paternoster, Waltham Abbey) now have dedicated local street cleansing teams. The maintenance of most street furniture and all footways has reverted to Essex County Council, but this Council maintains and replaces local street furniture such as road signs, litter bins etc.

(2) To move forward on Local Agenda 21 and sustainability issues

Progress

Progress on Local Agenda 21 and sustainability issues has been very slow due to difficulties in recruiting to the vacant Environmental Coordinator post. This post has now been filled and progress is now possible on those issues that are statutorily required of the Council.

(3) To support and implement local strategies which will help to reduce the emissions to carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses

Progress

See (2) above. The Council has continued with programmes of energy management in its buildings and is part of an energy purchasing consortia to reduce costs. The latest Air Quality Strategy has been accepted by DeFRA, and no management areas are required. There remain however some local 'hotspots' of poor air quality associated in the main with the M25 and main road network.

(4) To work in partnership with the Council's waste management service provider in the provision of the key services of refuse collection, street cleansing, trade waste collection and recycling (meeting statutory targets for recycling of 28% in 2003/04 and 36% 2005/06)

Progress

Good progress has been made towards the introduction of a revised waste management service, with the first implementation of wheeled bins and alternate weekly collections being introduced in November 2005. Plastic bottles are an additional recyclable material now collected from the kerbside. The statutory target of 28% for 2003/04 was not achieved, and the revised statutory target of 30% for 2005/06 may not be achievable. It remains the goal to achieve 36% over the next 3 to 4 years as the new system is fully implemented across the district.

(5) To increase public awareness of environmental issues within the district

Progress

See (2) above.

(6) To continue the Council's membership of the Countrywide Waste Management Board and to play a full role in the development of the county waste disposal strategy

Progress

Good progress has been made in the development of the countywide waste management strategy. Joint Area Committees have been established for West Essex, East Essex and the Thames Gateway areas. It is intended to complete the procurement strategy by the end of 2005, probably based upon a two-area disposal and a three area collection contract strategy.

(7) To undertake all enforcement and regulatory activities in accordance with the Cabinet Office Enforcement Concordat and the Council's enforcement policy

Progress

Whilst no changes have been made to the Council's overall enforcement policies, these remain in force and are generally adhered to.

(8) To undertake inspections, enforcement and advisory activities to enable the protection and enhancement of the environment

Progress

All routine programmed and reactionary work continues in accordance with service plans. Performance targets for customer response and inspection levels have been attained.

(47) To undertake all enforcement and regulatory activities in accordance with the Cabinet Office Enforcement Concordat and the Council's enforcement policy

Progress

See (7) above.

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(9) To manage our rural open spaces with the support of local communities and other stakeholders, ensuring a balance between the natural environment and recreational use

Progress

The management of rural open spaces in the district has continued. Specific actions are detailed in the Countrycare Annual Report.

(10) To promote countryside management through joint working with the Conservators of Epping Forest and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, and through Countrycare projects and parish tree strategies in conjunction with local communities

Progress

Joint countryside management and working has continued. Specific projects are detailed in the Countrycare Annual Report.

(11) To seek to undertake a study to facilitate the production of a Bio-Diversity Plan for the district in order to protect the widest range of plant and animal species, if resources can be made available

Progress

Jointly with other agencies, the Council has provided funding for three years to facilitate the production of a Bio-Diversity Plan.

(12) To seek to influence emerging strategic planning guidance and update the Local Development Plan for the district as soon as possible

Progress

The Council continues to be involved in the refinement of emerging Regional Planning Guidance. The Examination in Public on the East of England Regional Plan commenced in November 2005 and processes to update the existing Local Plan are continuing.

(13) To meet longer-term requirements for housing, economic development, community facilities and transport in the most sustainable way, whilst maintaining the overall special character of the district

Progress

The Council continues to question some of the rational for the emerging Regional Planning Guidance, in particular whether it is the most sustainable approach, whilst also seeking to update its own policies to reflect these issues in our amended Local Plan.

(14) To review the future of North Weald Airfield

Progress

See (13) above. The future of North Weald Airfield is dependent on regional level decisions in relation to the final proposals of the East of England Regional Plan.

(15) To enhance accessibility to key destinations by a choice of transport and reduce car dependency wherever possible, through planning and car parking control policies

Progress

The location of development relative to public transport, and the amount of on site parking, are much more heavily influenced by such policies. Progress is limited by factors outside the Council's control, such as decisions of public transport providers to change or remove routes.

(16) To encourage development of community transport and shared transport schemes in conjunction with our partners

Progress

The Council has reviewed its support for such schemes following a detailed assessment.

(48) To promote business investment locally and ensure adequate long-term supply of business sites and premises

Progress

In the absence of a specific Economic Development Officer post, and clarity from the East of England Regional Plan, the Council has had limited impact in achieving this aim. However, the Council's website is directly linked to that for Business Link for Essex.

(49) To help small enterprises meet accommodation and operational needs

Progress

See (48) above

(50) To establish Town Centre Manager posts for Loughton (High Road and Broadway) and Buckhurst Hill

Progress

The Town Centre Manager commenced employment in June 2004.

(51) To assist the rural economy and support the vitality of rural communities

Progress

In the absence of an Economic Development Officer post, there are limits to what the Council can do proactively to achieve this aim.

(52) To promote tourism within the district

Progress

See (48) above

(53) To review options for the continued provision of business advice and support

Progress

This aim has not been formally achieved. Other agencies have been more active in combining into a West Essex grouping.

HOUSING

(21) To increase the number of affordable homes for rent within the district, through partnership working with housing associations

Progress

A comprehensive Housing Needs Survey was undertaken in 2003 which identified that, taking into account anticipated re-lets of existing Council and housing association properties, a total of 665 new affordable homes per annum are required if the current and anticipated housing needs of the District are to be met.

96 homes for rent and 18 homes for shared ownership were completed by housing associations in 2004/5, supported by the Council. 52 homes for rent and 4 homes for shared ownership will be completed by housing associations during 2005/6, together with a further 24 homes that will initially be

let to the Council's Housing Register applicants at market rents, until such time as funding can be obtained from the Housing Corporation to enable the rents to be reduced to affordable levels. The proposed Alterations to the Local Plan, which are the subject of a Public Inquiry, include the following provisions to increase the amount of affordable housing:

- a reduction in the threshold above which affordable housing is sought on development sites in urban areas, from 1 ha or 25 dwellings to 0.5 ha or 15 dwellings; and
- where social housing grant is available, an increase from 30% to 40% in the amount of affordable housing expected on development sites in urban areas;

The Council has introduced two new Key Performance Indicators for affordable housing, one of which is to monitor the number of affordable homes completed and ready for occupation during the year.

The Council has formed the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership and introduced a Scheme of Preferred RSL Partnering and Joint Commissioning to enable the Council to work closely with its five selected Preferred RSL Partners to co-ordinate the effective and economic development of affordable housing within the District.

(22) To provide grants and free Council land to housing associations in return for nomination rights

Progress

The Council gave grants totalling £1.1m to housing associations for the development of 78 homes with affordable rents completed in 2004/5 at Meridian Park, Waltham Abbey; and Ongar Campus and Cripsey Avenue, Ongar. In addition, the 5 affordable homes at Cripsey Avenue, Ongar in 2004/5 were built by a housing association on land provided by the Council free of charge. The Council gave free land to a housing association for a further 6 affordable homes to be provided at Cripsey Avenue, Ongar, which commenced in 2005/6

The Council has agreed in principle to provide free land to housing associations at Mason Way, Waltham Abbey and at 8 small Council-owned housing sites throughout the District to provide 44 new affordable rented homes. The Council has agreed to provide Estuary Housing Association a Social Housing Grant of £1m to develop the 8 small Council-owned housing sites.

(23) To require all new large housing developments to provide 30% of the homes as affordable housing for rent through Section 106 Agreements

Progress

The Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing sets out its intention to seek at least 30% affordable housing on large sites, which has generally been successfully negotiated. The main exception to this is for the proposed development at St John's School, Epping, where members agreed that only 10% affordable housing should be provided.

One of the Council's two new Key Performance Indicators introduced for affordable housing relates to the amount of affordable housing required through Section 106 Agreements signed during the year, for all large residential development sites, expressed as a percentage of the total number.

(24) To prevent homelessness and respond to homelessness applications in accordance with statutory requirements efficiently, effectively

and fairly, whilst accommodating homeless applicants in suitable housing

Progress

The Council produced its first statutory Homelessness Strategy in 2003. A £1.5m improvement scheme for the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel at Norway House, North Weald was completed in 2004/05, and nine additional units of temporary accommodation for homeless families were provided at Hernall House, Epping in 2004/05.

The Housing Allocations Scheme was reviewed in 2004/05, which increased the number of allocation bands, in order to give additional priority to homeless families in temporary accommodation. The Council introduced the Fresh START Scheme with East Thames Housing Group in 2003/04, whereby East Thames lease 10 privately rented properties and let them to Council nominees, in return for a modest Management Fee. The Cabinet reviewed the scheme in September 2005, and agreed that East Thames should lease a further 10 properties.

A Homelessness Prevention Service has been introduced, comprising two Homelessness Prevention Officers, funded mainly by a grant from the ODPM. The first women's refuge in the district for women becoming homeless due to domestic violence, comprising 5 flats, was completed in 2004/05, in partnership with East Thames Housing Group. A further Homelessness Officer post has been created, to investigate homelessness applications. As a result, 66% of homelessness decisions were made within 33 days in 2004/05 (from 50% in 2003/04) and, for the first quarter of 2005/6, 80% of decisions were made within 33 days - the average decision period being 21 days.

A planning application has been submitted for the redevelopment of Leader Lodge at North Weald to provide additional accommodation for homeless families, and four separate bids have been made to ODPM to fund the following projects to increase homelessness prevention:

- *Provision of an additional homeless prevention officer to work specifically with young people (particularly 16/18 year olds);*
- *Extension of the Fresh START Scheme, to increase the number of properties in the private sector let to homeless people through a housing association to whom the Council pays a management fee (referred to above);*
- *Provision of a private sector rent deposit scheme by East Thames to complement the existing voluntary one operated by Epping Forest Housing Aid. The scheme would also offer housing management support to people most at risk of becoming homeless again; and*
- *The provision of a 'floating support' scheme by MACRO Community Enterprises to assist formerly homeless households placed in Council housing, to reduce the risk of repeat homelessness.*

(25) To reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to emergency situations and cases under investigation, by April 2004

Progress

Since December 2003, no homeless families (with children) have been accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation, except on very rare occasions. As at 1 January 2006, there were 30 single homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation.

See (24) above for details of initiatives to increase homelessness prevention and provision, to avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

(26) To attract and retain key public sector workers through the provision of affordable housing

Progress

The Council has introduced a Key Worker Housing Scheme, in being for over two years, whereby up to 5 key workers per annum from the PCT, Essex County Council and Essex Police will be offered Council accommodation. The Council has introduced a separate Recruitment and Retention Housing Scheme for its own staff, whereby up to 5 Council employees can be accommodated in Council accommodation for a temporary period of up to 3 years at any one time. The Council works with Moat Housing Group, the designated 'zone agent' for the Government's Key Worker Living Scheme in Essex, to identify eligible key workers for financial assistance under the scheme.

(27) To increase the amount of affordable housing in rural areas

Progress

The Council has been working with Hastoe Housing Association and Matching Parish Council to develop a rural housing scheme at Matching Tye specifically to meet the local housing needs of residents in housing need, as an exception to the Council's usual policy of not allowing development in the Green Belt. A suitable site has been identified, and Hastoe are currently producing a design to submit for planning permission. The Council has also been working with Hastoe Housing Association and Fyfield Parish Council to develop a second rural housing scheme in Fyfield, under the Council's rural exceptions policy. However, although Hastoe has successfully been allocated funding from the Housing Corporation, it has not been possible to identify a suitable site. The Council has been working with the Rural Housing Trust, Hastoe Housing Association, Willingale Parish Council and Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council to develop a joint rural housing scheme for the two parishes. However, a suitable site has not yet been identified.

The proposed Alterations to the Local Plan include the following provisions to increase the amount of affordable housing in rural areas, where the population is less than 3,000:

- Affordable housing will be sought where planning applications are made for either two or more dwellings on a greenfield site or for three or more dwellings on a previously developed site; and
- Where these thresholds apply, 50% affordable housing will be sought on Greenfield sites and either 33% or 50% affordable housing will be sought on previously developed sites, where an application is made for three or four or more properties respectively.

(28) To review our policies relating to private sector housing in the light of the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Act 2002

Progress

The Cabinet has agreed to maintain existing arrangements ahead of a private sector house condition survey, which has been commissioned and is now underway. A review of the Council's existing private sector housing policies will be undertaken in 2006 following the analysis of the results condition survey.

(29) To ensure that all the Council's homes meet the Government's Decent Home Standard by 2010 and that the number of non-decent homes is reduced to 14 % by April 2004

Progress

The Council met the Government's target to reduce the number of non-decent homes by 1/3 between 2001 and 2004, one year early, and reduced the number of non-decent homes from 22% in April 2002, to 15% in April 2004 and to 7.3% in April 2005, which is in the top quartile of all district councils.

Programmes of work have been developed to ensure that no non-decent homes remain by 2010.

(30) To maintain the Council's housing stock effectively through an ongoing five-year Housing Maintenance programme, based on accurate stock condition information and undertaking responsive repairs

Progress

Housing Services have an ongoing Five-Year Maintenance Programme, which is reviewed annually as part of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, which is particularly geared to meeting the Decent Homes Standard. In 2004/5, improvements to the Council's housing stock included the following:

- *Upgrading of heating systems to 109 properties;*
- *Installation of PVCu double glazing in 460 properties;*
- *Re-roofing of 134 properties, and the major overhaul of the large roof at Norway House*
- *Installation of new kitchens and/or bathrooms in 95 properties; and*
- *Rewiring of 264 properties.*

(31) To work with other statutory and voluntary agencies to enable people with supported housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support

Progress

The Council is a member of (and chairs) the Epping Forest Local Supporting People Core Strategy Group, comprising representatives of the main agencies involved in supported housing in the District. Uniquely, the Core Strategy Group produces a Local Supporting People Strategy annually, following consultation with an 'Inclusive Forum' of providers, service users and service user representatives.

(32) To increase the provision of supported housing schemes for people with special needs

Progress

A 20-bed extension to Cunningham House, North Weald has been completed for people with Alzheimer's Disease and dementia, supported by the Council and on land previously provided free by the Council, and the construction of six flats and the provision of 24-hour support for people with learning disabilities has commenced at Cripsey Avenue, Ongar.

The Council has investigated with Brentwood Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council, and the formed a Project Team, to develop a cross-boundary young parent scheme, comprising 8-10 self-contained flats together with associated support, with a capital bid submitted to the Housing Corporation in October 2005, and a guarantee of revenue funding from the Essex Supporting People Team. Eight 'lifetime homes' have been developed in the grounds of Chigwell House, Chigwell for people with mild physical disabilities.

(33) To enable disabled people to remain in their own homes by undertaking disabled adaptations to Council properties and providing disabled facilities grants to private occupiers

Progress

Following the Best Value Service Review of Housing Services, the budget for disabled adaptations to the Council's housing stock was doubled from £150,000 in 2003/04 to £300,000 per annum from 2004/05. In addition, a further £100,000 was spent on disabled adaptations in 2004/05 to reduce the backlog. A total of 126 major adaptations to Council homes were undertaken in 2004/05.

(34) To undertake a fundamental review of the Epping Forest Care and Repair Agency and its contribution to services for the elderly and the disadvantaged, in light of the withdrawal of funding support by Circle 33 Housing Trust, the Government's review of care agencies and the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Act 2002

Progress

This review was completed and the Cabinet agreed that the CARE Agency should revert to in-house and be managed directly by the Council. This has been completed and the Agency continues to provide for its core target groups. Funding is received from the County Council via 'Supporting People'. Specific policies to be reviewed after private sector house condition survey is complete.

(35) To provide sheltered housing that meets modern standards for elderly tenants in need of support but able to live independent lives, and an emergency service to elderly people in need

Progress

The Council's sheltered housing scheme at Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois has been transferred to Warden Housing to undertake a £2m extension and conversion scheme, and the Council has agreed in principle to undertake a stock transfer of its sheltered housing scheme at Wickfields, Chigwell, following a feasibility study.

New lifts have been installed in the Council's sheltered housing schemes at Wickfields, Chigwell and Buckhurst Court, Buckhurst Hill and, following the Best Value Review of Housing Services, the Council has agreed to provide non-residential scheme managers at sheltered housing schemes, instead of residential wardens, to reduce long term staff absences due to stress.

(36) To manage the Council's housing stock efficiently to deliver high quality housing services, while charging affordable rents

Progress

A major Best Value Service Review of Housing Services was completed in 2004, which resulted in the formulation of a Service Development Plan, comprising 86 service developments, by September 2005 78% of the Service Development Plan had been achieved, with 89% of the highest priority service developments achieved. In 2004, a Charter Mark for customer excellence in the public sector was awarded by the Cabinet Office for the whole of Housing Services and in 2005, the ISO 9000:2001 quality assurance accreditation for the whole of Housing Services was received for a further three years.

The Council has agreed in principle to the introduction of a 'choice based lettings scheme', to be commissioned in partnership with five neighbouring local authorities to reduce costs, for which a bid for £96,000 has been submitted to the ODPM to assist with the set up costs, and has agreed in principle to the implementation of an Introductory Tenancy Scheme, giving new tenants a non-secure tenancy for 12 months, to reduce anti-social behaviour and rent arrears.

A Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme, operated by an external insurance provider, was introduced in 2005. The Housing Allocations Scheme has been reviewed annually to ensure that Council and housing association accommodation continues to be allocated to those in most need

The Council has continued to develop and support the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and, amongst other things, has consulted the Federation on all proposed policy changes affecting tenants and/or leaseholders. A ‘Sheltered Housing Forum’ of interested older tenants has been successfully established, to represent the views of sheltered tenants on housing issues.

(37) To keep under review the options for the Council's housing stock, both in terms of the whole stock and individual estates, and ensure that the form of ownership and management is the most appropriate to meet the Council's housing objectives and the needs of its tenants

Progress

The Council completed its Housing Stock Options Appraisal in March 2004, which was one of the first formally signed-off by the Government Office in September 2004 and recommended that the Council retains its stock. The Council agreed to review this position by at least March 2009, or earlier if considered necessary, but to date it has not been considered necessary to review the situation earlier.

(38) To enable housing clients to participate in the delivery of their housing service through the receipt of good quality information, adequate and appropriate consultation on relevant housing issues and to provide feedback to the Council

Progress

The Council has continued to develop and support the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and, amongst other things, has consulted the Federation on all proposed policy changes affecting tenants and/or leaseholders prior to consideration by the Housing Portfolio Holder or Cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed to the Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation becoming a co-opted member of the Housing Scrutiny Panel

The Council has continued to support recognised tenants associations, providing annual tenant support grants of £250 per association, delegated budgets of £500 per annum per association for environmental improvements to their estates, and providing housing and other officers to attend tenant association meetings. A ‘Sheltered Housing Forum’ of interested older tenants has been successfully established, to represent the views of sheltered tenants on housing issues, and a second Tenants Open Day was held in June 2005, to which all tenants and housing applicants were invited. The latest Tenant Satisfaction Survey undertaken by the Council established that:

- 84% of tenants feel that the Council is good at keeping them informed about things that affect them as tenants;
- 69% of tenants feel that the Council takes account of their views when decision-making; and
- 65% of tenants are satisfied with the opportunities provided to participate in management and decision-making.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

(39) To undertake an annual review of resources to meet emergencies

Progress

The level of resources available to the Council to respond to emergency situations and business continuity issues is reviewed as part of the budget setting process each year.

(40) To carry out either emergency planning exercises annually in conjunction with other local authorities and agencies and, where appropriate the emergency services, or suitable training to develop the skills of the emergency team and staff volunteers. To respond to the ongoing national review of emergency planning as and when further information is published by the government

Progress

The Council has implemented the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, in partnership with other agencies who have an emergency response role. The Act places a responsibility on local authorities to provide advice about business continuity to businesses and voluntary organisations.

(41) To work with our partners to reduce the incidence of crime and disorder in the District

Progress

The Council has continued to work closely with other local agencies to develop joint community safety priorities through the Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which aims to improve the quality of life in the district for the district's residents, visitors and businesses.

CIVIL ENGINEERING AND MAINTENANCE

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(42) To continue to improve our performance as agents to the County Council in respect of highway maintenance and the design and implementation of local safety schemes

Progress

This aim is no longer relevant, given the reversion of the Highway Agency to Essex County Council in April 2005.

(43) To monitor the implementation of local on-street parking and to undertake a review to determine locations where additional or amended parking restrictions may be required

Progress

A number of parking reviews are underway but are behind schedule for a variety of reasons. A number of smaller reviews have been successfully implemented.

(44) To continue to introduce Town Centre Enhancement (TCE) schemes and to develop and enhance town centres within the district

Progress

The Buckhurst Hill scheme is complete and Loughton TCE (phases 1 and 2) is underway. Design and consultation is taking place on the initial Loughton Broadway TCE scheme, with a planned commencement date of summer 2006.

(45) To complete the review of the Loughton High Road Town Centre Enhancement Design Guide and bring forward proposals for implementation

Progress

See (44) above

(46) To seek to provide practical and affordable solutions for communities affected by flooding, in partnership with the Environment Agency

Progress

Due to legislative changes, critical watercourses are reverting to the Environment Agency (EA) in April 2006. This will affect the arrangements for grant support to schemes, and it is likely now that only major EA funded schemes will proceed, such as that at Waltham Abbey. The Cabinet is to be requested to divert resources to those areas where the Council has either a riparian or other interest.

LEISURE

(54) To provide and promote access to all of our leisure facilities

Progress

The Council has undertaken a full Disability Discrimination Act compliance audit on all of its leisure facilities, which led to a programme of physical and sensory access improvements for people with disabilities or mobility problems. The new Loughton Leisure Centre is fully accessible and offers a number of specialist therapy sessions.

(55) To provide more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to learn to swim

Progress

An extensive 'Learn to Swim Programme' has been run across all three of the Council's pools, attracting 4,500 participants per annum. A new moveable pool floor is to be installed at Ongar Leisure Centre that will increase the number of swimming classes offered.

(56) To implement new corporate pricing policy to include concessionary access to ensure that those in greatest need benefit

Progress

Negotiations are currently being held with the leisure management contractor to introduce a district wide 'Leisure Card', which will address concessionary pricing policy and promote greater participation.

(57) To acquire the freehold of Ongar Leisure Centre and adjacent playing fields and to extend the Centre by the provision of new health and fitness facilities

Progress

The freehold of Ongar Leisure Centre was acquired in 2004. The leisure management contractor, with part funding from the Council of £450,000, is to provide a new fitness studio and movement studio in 2006. Improvements also planned for playing fields to include the potential provision of a new all weather pitch.

(58) To offer more facilities for young people in villages, linking into our Rural Strategy

Progress

Play provision and community arts and sports initiatives have been extended to rural towns and villages. A number of new playgrounds and multi-use games areas have been provided by rural parish and town councils with financial assistance from the Council.

(59) To work in partnership with the community to promote accessible local opportunities to experience and participate in the arts

Progress

A number of large community arts projects have been held on an inclusive basis, involving participation from local people of all ages and abilities. 'Border Dialogues' a three year externally funded community arts project will run from 2005 to 2008, and increase arts opportunities in rural areas.

(60) To encourage young people to become involved in the Arts as a valuable contribution to their development

Progress

A wide range of innovative arts projects for young people have been held with particular success in youth dance, where the Council's Dance Development Worker has established several new dance groups that are currently participating and performing regularly.

(61) To work in partnership with local and voluntary groups in the provision of activities to promote health and healthy living

Progress

See (62) below.

(62) To ensure our services support the fight against major illnesses or health matters such as cancer, heart disease, mental health and teenage pregnancies, especially in those areas of greatest deprivation

Progress

Three year external funding has been obtained for the appointment of an 'Active Life' Co-ordinator who has increased the range of healthy living initiatives available. 'Lifewalks', the walking for health scheme, has been extended and each week in excess of 120 people are active participants. The GP Referral Scheme has grown with more than 25 GP Practices referring patients with various medical conditions. Cardiac Rehabilitation sessions are running successfully.

(63) To continue to develop co-ordination of health and social care for older people in Epping Forest District across the statutory and voluntary sector

Progress

Leisure Services have been active partners, along with the Primary Care Trust and Voluntary Action, in health and social care initiatives for older people. These range from the ongoing success of the New Horizons 50 + Scheme, to targeted activities such as seated exercise classes in elderly persons residential settings.

(64) To work in partnership with other providers and schools to improve the range of leisure and cultural opportunities in the district

Progress

An effective network of partnerships has been developed with other agencies and schools, which is helping extend opportunities and assists in generating significant levels of external funding, (£2.8 million over the length of this Council Plan).

(65) To develop our existing services to cater for all ages and abilities within the district, with particular emphasis on young people

Progress

Opportunities for young people to participate in leisure and external opportunities have been extended across the district. Young people at risk have been targeted by the NACRO Community Sports Programme, in which the Council is an active partner. Young people with disabilities now have access to 'Sportability' coaching sessions.

(66) To implement and monitor a Cultural Strategy to ensure that future leisure provision is well co-ordinated

Progress

The Council has not adopted a formal Cultural Strategy but has a major involvement with the Local Strategic Partnership and input into the 'Fit for Life' element of the Community Strategy.

(67) To investigate alternative management options for our leisure facilities to ensure that they continue to meet the Council's policy objectives by the most efficient means possible

Progress

The Council has undertaken an extensive review of alternative management options, which led to a competitive tendering exercise and the subsequent appointment of SLM Ltd to manage four leisure centres for a seven-year period. Revenue costs have been reduced and an extra £1.5m will be invested by SLM in new facilities.

PEOPLE FIRST

(68) To ensure effective officer support for the Council's overview and scrutiny function

Progress

The proposed appointment of a Scrutiny Officer to support the Council's overview and scrutiny function was agreed but the recruitment process did not generate a suitable candidate for appointment. A further review of the situation has taken place and it has been decided to use the budgetary provision for the Scrutiny Officer post and substitute a further position of Democratic Services Officer. It is hoped that a new recruitment exercise will yield a suitable appointment, allowing more dedicated support to be provided to overview and scrutiny.

(69) To investigate new methods of voting

Progress

After extensive consultation with members, an application has been submitted to the Department of Constitutional Affairs for participation in a range of electoral pilots, including electronic voting, postal vote verification and pre-poll information.

(70) To involve the public and individuals more in the Council's meetings

Progress

The advent of the Modern.Gov information technology system has substantially increased the scope of and accessibility to democratic information through the Council's website. The range of information available is still being extended and work is in hand to include elected councillors in the information network. In terms of engaging with the public, a review of council meeting arrangements is in progress to make these more responsive to the public and more rewarding to members of the Council. Various options are under consideration.

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

(71) To further develop our consultation strategy, to ensure that it is targeted and cost effective

Progress

A new Public Consultation and Engagement Policy and Strategy is to be adopted by the Council in early 2006.

(72) To determine short and medium term priorities for the Council

Progress

The Council's medium term priorities were agreed by the Council in 2003, and are currently being reviewed as part of the development of a new Council Plan. Short-term priorities are set out in the annual Best Value Performance Plan.

(73) To attract additional funding through partnership working, external sources and, where appropriate the sale of assets

Progress

There has been considerable success in attracting additional funding and this has placed the Council in a strong financial position. A recent example of partnership working that attracted funding is the grant of £133,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions to develop mobile working with two other authorities. The disposals of the former Lamb's Garage site and the lorry park site at Langston Road in Loughton have generated significant capital receipts, and sale of the Parade Ground site at North Weald Airfield should be completed during 2006.

(76) To continue to manage all our financial resources, investments and assets to ensure maximum benefit and minimum risk

Progress

The Treasury Management Policy is kept under review and has been amended to take advantage of the greater freedoms available under the Council's debt free status and the introduction of the Prudential Code. In 2004/05 the average return on the authority's investments was 4.67%, which exceeded the standard benchmark (7-day LIBID) of 4.52%, and in monetary terms was worth additional interest of £68,000.

(77) To reduce the impact of the annual Council Tax increase

Progress

Every effort has been made to limit Council Tax increases and this is reflected in the Council having the third lowest Band D Council Tax of the twelve

Essex district councils. The current four-year forecast is based on increases not exceeding 2.5%, to keep increases in line with the Retail Price Index.

(78) To improve the delivery of financial services to the public

Progress

Significant improvements have been made in the delivery of financial services. The Council has improved its performance for paying suppliers promptly and the majority are now paid by BACS rather than cheque. To provide greater convenience for customers paying the Council, systems have been introduced to allow payment on an automated phone line and via the website. Improvements in the Benefits Service have been recognised by the recent 'excellent' rating from the Department for Work and Pensions.

(79) To prepare for a Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council, looking at how effective we are at setting strategy and turning it into action

Progress

The first Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) took place in March 2004, when the Council was rated as 'Good'. The CPA exercise is likely to be repeated during 2007.

(80) To monitor and report on compliance with the Local Code of Corporate Governance

Progress

Significant progress has been made in this area and a Corporate Governance Group, comprising the Joint Chief Executives, the Chief Finance Officer, the Monitoring and Deputy Monitoring Officers and the Chief Internal Auditor, meet regularly to discuss governance issues. Reporting is covered by the inclusion of Statement on Internal Control in the annual financial statements.

(81) To monitor the Council's performance through the Overview and Scrutiny process and the achievement of Best Value and Local Performance Indicators

Progress

New arrangements for the collection of performance information were put in place in August 2005. The Council has agreed 40 Key Performance Indicators that will be monitored as core to our improving services.

(82) To take advantage of opportunities to save money by modernising our procurement practices

Progress

The Council has participated in two procurement framework agreements through the Procurement Agency for Essex (PAE). These agreements cover various aspects of Human Resources and ICT. Both of these have led to reductions in cost for the Council. Further framework agreements are under development by the PAE and the Council will participate in these if they offer genuine best value and reduction in costs.

(83) To develop a procurement strategy

Progress

An e-Procurement Strategy was agreed by the Cabinet in October 2005. The Cabinet also agreed that the Procurement Agency for Essex (PAE) assist the Council in developing an overarching Procurement Strategy.

(84) To undertake rolling programme of in-depth reviews of all our services, examining quality, cost and alternative ways of provision to achieve an efficiency gain each year

Progress

A comprehensive review of the Housing Service was undertaken in 2004. The review function has been assumed by the new Overview and Scrutiny structure, whereby Task and Finish, and Standing Panels carry out reviews of Council services and functions.

ICT AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

(85) To treat all staff equally through fair job evaluation

Progress

A new staff pay structure was implemented in July 2003.

(86) To implement a new Human Resources and Payroll computer system by March 2006, subject to budgetary provision

Progress

The new Human Resources and Payroll computer system was introduced in April 2004. Ways of joint working to enhance efficiency and internal control between the Human Resources and Payroll Sections are currently being developed.

(87) To develop a recruitment and retention strategy

Progress

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy was agreed by the Cabinet in December 2003.

(88) To develop an equalities strategy to comply with Race Equality Scheme

Progress

Not achieved. This will be undertaken in 2006/07.

(89) To further develop the Council's Corporate Information and Communications Technology Plan in partnership with the Essex E-Government group, in order to support the Council's E-Government objectives

Progress

The Council has fully participated in all Essex Online Partnership projects. These projects have assisted the Council in delivering its e-Government ambitions. The main focus for this work over the past 12 months has been around the development of an Essex wide secure network to allow for the seamless transfer of data and telephone calls between all Essex Local Authorities. The Council's e-Government strategy has been ratified by the Council and good progress is being made on achieving the requirements of BVP1157 that measures the percentage of e-enabled service transaction

available to the public.

(90) To use information technology as a key enabler for electronic government across all Council services and partnerships

Progress

The Council is in the last year of its current ICT strategy that covered the implementation of various systems to address the Council's e-Government aims. These include a Committee Management System and e-Forms solution. Both of these systems are now live and delivering enhanced services to both business and public customers of the Council. The Council will be considering a review of its ICT strategy in December 2005 that will cover a further two year period.

(91) To provide corporate Information and Communications Technology training across all relevant disciplines in support of the Council's E-Government objectives

Progress

The Council has developed a comprehensive IT training portfolio that has been well received by both Management and Staff. The portfolios of training courses are review annually to ensure they are inline with the Council's e-Government programme of work. The Council is now in the process of developing a specific Member IT training portfolio in order to allow Members to make full and dynamic use of the Council's large investment in Information Technology and its associate data sets.

(92) To develop and implement a Corporate E-Government Strategy and Plan and will produce a single, customer focussed delivery channel

Progress

The Council has ratified its e-Government strategy and Plan. The main aspects of the plan are focussed on a Customer Transformation Services Programme (CTSP). The scoping exercise for this programme has now been completed and the Council has adopted the CSTP as part of its formal strategic policy. The Council is currently in process of appointing consultants to undertake the production of the formal programme plan. The plan is being developed using the PRINCE2 project management methodology. The first meeting of the CSTP Programme Board that is planned for November 2005 will set a delivery date for the plan.