

# Supplementary Council Agenda



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

## **Council Tuesday, 26th September, 2006**

**Place:** Civic Offices, High Street, Epping  
**Room:** Council Chamber  
**Time:** 7.30 pm  
**Committee Secretary:** Council Secretary: Ian Willett  
Tel: 01992 564243 Email: [iwillett@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:iwillett@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

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**5. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER, CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND ANY MEMBER OF THE CABINET (Pages 3 - 16)**

Reports attached.

**9. REPORTS OF THE CABINET (Pages 17 - 18)**

To consider the following report of the Cabinet:

- (d) Council Tax Discounts for Long-Term Empty Homes

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## **Report to Council**

**Date of meeting: 26 September 2006**

**Subject: OS report to Council – September 2006**

**Officer contact for further information: Cllr R Morgan**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246**

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### **Recommendation:**

**That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report be noted.**

### **Report.**

This is the first report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Council for the year 2006/07 under the new arrangements as recommended by the O&S review committee at the end of the last municipal year.

The O&S Committee agreed to the setting up of 5 Standing Panels this year and 5 new Task and Finish Panels. The Travellers Task and Finish Panel convened last year carried on into this municipal year and concluded in July 2006. The Standing Panels each have a rolling programme that consider ongoing cyclical issues and are comprised of the Housing Standing Panel under the Chairmanship of Councillor S Murray; the Constitutional and Members Services Standing Panel chaired by Councillor R Morgan; the Customer Services and ICT panel chaired by Councillor Mrs McEwen; the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel chaired by Councillor Jon Whitehouse; and the Environment and Planning Standing Panel chaired by Councillor Mrs Smith.

The five newly formed Task and Finish Panels are:

(i) The Leisure Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor Mrs Harding, looking at the Future Management of the Waltham Abbey Sports Centre; a review of the future Management of the Roding Valley Meadows local Nature Reserve; a review of Arts Development in the District; and a review of The District Council's Role and involvement in Outdoor and Community Events.

(ii) The Town Centre and Car Parks Task and Finish Panel chaired by Councillor M Colling, looking at what type of Town Centre we would like to encourage within the district and we could assist and encourage the economies and growth of our town centres and development of the new car parking enforcement contract and the development and future use of car parks.

(iii) The Crime and Disorder Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor M Cohen, considering:

- the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and its effect on Scrutiny in EFDC and how it could be improved;
- the involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in the new 'Scrutiny Plus' arrangements to be conducted with other partner agencies;
- the proposal for a 'Community Call for Action' and its implications for EFDC Scrutiny; and

- the role of EFDCs Crime Reduction Team and the resources available to it.

(iv) The Local Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor Mrs Sartin. Their remit is to consider the set up and operation of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership and formulate recommendations on its future in light of the government consultation paper 'Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future' and the Local Government White Paper expected in November 2006.

(v) Services for Older People and Disabled Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor Mrs Perry considering the services offered by EFDC to older people and disabled people (of all ages); and to consider the services offered by the voluntary sector to older people and disabled people in the district.

All these Task and Finish Panels hope to report by January or February next year.

The main Committee have so far received presentations from the Principal of Epping Forest College, have scrutinised the merger proposals with Essex police, have considered the draft Council Plan 2006-2010, have received a presentation from the local commissioner for Children and Young Peoples Services for the District and also scrutinised the Cabinet Forward Plan for the next year in August 2006.

So far this year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met 3 times, the Standing Panels have met 11 times and the Task and Finish Panels have met 9 times.

This year we have implemented a training regime for councillors by an outside consultant who primed the councillors on how to run scrutiny, ask relevant questions and probe deeper into issues that affect the Council and the wider community as a whole. This will, we are confident, lead to a more professional and comprehensive examination of the areas we are asked to scrutinise.

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 26 September 2006

**Subject:** Community Wellbeing Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ms S-A Stavrou

**Item:** 5

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## **Recommendation:**

That the report of the Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder be noted.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

I am currently working to an action plan which I have implemented with a time frame for completion. This is attached.

The structures currently in place for dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour are not as efficient as they could be.

It is quite apparent that much of the ASB is caused by persons travelling cross border.

- I will be looking to introduce CDRP cross border network and tasking groups to identify individuals causing problems in all areas and develop a joint strategy to deal with them. Examples of where they could be effective is Limes Farm and Brook Parade.
- I am working with Transport For London in trying to identify and police public transport routes into EFDC which are used by youths causing ASB but coming from outside the area.
- I have devised and implemented a PCSO joint tasking protocol with Epping Forest District Police . This protocol will require returns to be provided to monitor effectiveness. although the system is working and in place I am developing a protocol within the MOPI (Management of Police Information) framework to allow free flow of intelligence to EFDC from the PCSO's. Much of this is covered by Sec 17 Crime and Disorder Act.
- I now attend weekly Divisional Management Team meetings with Essex Police where emerging problems are identified.

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**Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator Programme of Work 01/09/2006 – 31/08/2007**

Objective	Actions	Outcomes	Target date
Develop a working protocol with all relevant partners concerning ASB issues. Protocol to include determining lead department on complaints received.	Consult with partners Examine best practice Draft protocol for debate Implement agreed protocol		31/08/2007
Develop internal staff training programs concerning latest ASB strategies, which will encourage a pro-active approach to ASB work within EFDC.	Determine best practice Consult with acknowledged experts Liaise with relevant EFDC departments concerning identified training needs Produce a rolling series of courses for staff		31/08/2007
Develop a training programme for parish councillors to explain the law and their responsibilities to ASB work.	Examine best practice Consult with partners Develop with Essex Police Crime Reduction Officer Develop training package Identify nominated Parish Councillors to lead on ASB and represent their community on action groups as problems arise.		31/08/2007
Develop local protocols and training regarding ASB issues with all Registered Social Landlords in EFDC.	Identify RSL's Determine SPOC Draft and agree single working protocol		31/08/2007

Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator Programme of Work 01/09/2006 – 31/08/2007

<p>Develop a joint tasking strategy with Essex Police on the deployment of PCSO's. Obtain statistical return to monitor effectiveness.</p>	<p>Liaise with District Commander seek agreement. Formulate tasking strategy. Obtain Essex Police PI's for PCSO. Liaise with CRO Essex Police Develop a system to identify EFDC led taskings. Develop local arrangement for the handling of sensitive intelligence. Liaise with Loughton DIU and develop intelligence packages re ASB to be disseminated to interested EFDC depts. and Essex Police.</p>	<p>Tasking pro forma drafted Tasking results agreed as per Essex Police PI's. To be returned for each tasking Interested EFDC services notified Strategy developed in line with Joint Service Agreement on PCSO's Briefing pack completed for target area Limes Farm. Will be updated as new offenders come on line.</p>	<p>COMPLETED 13/09/06 Completed 08/09/06</p>
<p>Develop generic multi-agency approach to recurring seasonal ASB issues (ie Trick or treat, fireworks)</p>	<p>Examine best practice. Consult with licensing. Liaise and develop with CRO and Essex Police Problem Solver. Approach Trading Standards re TP work on those businesses suspected of infringements. Task PCSO's. Involve Schools Liaison Essex Police</p>		<p>31/08/2007</p>



Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator Programme of Work 01/09/2006 – 31/08/2007

<p>Implement an interim ASB recording database.</p>	<p>Liaise IT Implement Access database Liaise with Housing, Environmental Services and RSL's. Develop system of recording data from all of above</p>	<p>Interim ICT CRIS database installed 12/09/06 ASB Project Board database still in development</p>	<p>COMPLETED 12/09/06</p>
<p>Deal with complaints of ASB using multi-agency strategies. Set targets and measure achievements.</p>	<p>Ensure working protocols are produced. Ensure best use made of Essex Police CRO Attend Police taskings Ensure continued lead on ASB NG Attend best practice seminars Obtain YOT attendance ASBNG re parenting contracts</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>
<p>Develop and implement the use of technology in gathering evidence of ASB.</p>	<p>Obtain and develop the use of CDRP CCTV. Develop working policy on use. Evaluate new equipment for suitability of use in ASB</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>
<p>Develop with partners a positive media strategy to promote CDRP effectiveness and reduce the fear of crime.</p>	<p>Liaise with Essex Police media officer for Epping Forest District. Work with EFDC CDRP Co-ordinator. Positively promote all partnership actions.</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>	<p>31/08/2007</p>

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# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 26 September 2006

**Subject:** Housing Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor D Stallan

**Item:** 5

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## **Recommendation:**

That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.

## **Promotion/Consultation on Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme**

I am anxious to look at ways that the private sector can assist the Council to meet the housing needs of the District. The Council currently supports and works with the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme to operate a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme. This scheme provides a guarantee to landlords whereby, instead of the tenant having to provide a damage deposit of one month's rent at the start of the tenancy, the scheme re-imburses the landlord if the tenant vacates the property without paying for the damage.

However, I feel that use of the scheme would be increased if more private landlords were aware of the scheme. I would also welcome some feedback from landlords on what they consider to be any weaknesses with the scheme. I have therefore asked the Head of Housing Services to invite all estate agents and lettings agents operating in the District to a short lunchtime seminar on the 25 October 2006 to find out more information and to provide feedback on the scheme.

## **Wickfields Sheltered Housing Scheme, Chigwell – Stock Transfer**

The Cabinet has previously approved, in principle, the transfer of Wickfields sheltered housing scheme, Chigwell to Home Housing, to enable a major improvement scheme to be undertaken, in a similar manner to the recently completed scheme at Robert Daniels Court, Theydon Bois following a transfer. Following a decisively positive ballot of tenants, I recently confirmed that the transfer should take place, in accordance with the authority delegated to me by the Cabinet, and agreed the transfer price that should be paid to Home Housing, which was much less than previously expected.

The Head of Housing Services has made a detailed formal submission to the Secretary of State for consent for the transfer, and Government officials have recently advised that consent will be issued. The extensive legal documentation is currently being finalised, and I expect the transfer to take place at the beginning of October 2006, with the improvement scheme commencing shortly after.

## **Choice Based Letting Scheme**

The Cabinet has previously agreed to the introduction of a "choice based lettings scheme" for all of the Council's housing vacancies. Under the scheme, all vacant Council and housing association properties will be advertised on a website and in a fortnightly magazine, and applicants will be invited to express an interest in any vacancies. Tenancy offers will then be made to the applicants who have the earliest application dates in the highest bands,

for properties in which they have specifically expressed an interest. The Council is working with our five neighbouring local authorities in a consortium, and has successfully bid for funding of almost £100,000 to jointly introduce and operate the scheme.

The Housing Scrutiny Panel recently considered the draft specification for the scheme in detail and I will be formally approving the specification, taking account of the Scrutiny Panel's views, in the near future. The target date for implementation is July 2006; I will ensure that all Members of Council are fully briefed on the operation of this innovative scheme, prior to its launch.

### **Springfields Improvement Scheme, Waltham Abbey**

The Cabinet has previously agreed a list of improvements, and a budget of £4m, for a major improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey. It also agreed to repurchase a number of properties on the estate leased under the Right to Buy. These repurchases and the detailed design is progressing, and I expect that tenders will be invited before the end of the financial year.

### **One Day Conference on Sub-Regional Working in the East of England**

I will be accompanying the Head of Housing Services to a one-day conference on the 4 October 2006, organised by the East of England Regional Assembly and targeted at housing portfolio holders, to find out more about the increasing and developing approach being undertaken towards all aspects of affordable housing at the sub-regional level. Epping Forest is within the London Commuter Belt Housing Sub-Region.

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 26 September 2006

**Subject:** Leisure Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor C Whitbread

**Item:** 5

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## **Recommendation:**

That the report of the Leisure Portfolio Holder be noted.

## **Sports and Leisure Centres**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2006 saw the start of the Partnership to manage four of the Council's Sports and Leisure Centres, with Sports and Leisure Management Ltd. (SLM). Appointed after a competitive tender. SLM were judged as the contractor best able to deliver the Council's Key Objectives with respect to lower revenue costs, the transfer of risk, capital investment and continuous improvement.

The first nine months of the contract have been successful with a smooth transfer of staff and responsibilities. Customers have already seen physical improvements with the re-branding of the two fitness suites at Loughton and Epping. At Epping, users have benefited from all new fitness equipment. However, the majority of SLM's investment of £1.4million, is now underway with extensive refurbishments and new Health and Fitness Facilities at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool and Ongar Leisure Centre, due to open to the public before Christmas.

The contract makes provision for a Joint Management Board with SLM, which has met on two occasions, with no significant contractual issues or concerns identified

The Cabinet at their meeting in September also agreed, in principle, to support another exciting development at Ongar Leisure Centre. Officers have proposed a scheme, which should attract extensive external funding to improve the playing fields and provide a "multi-sports hub, offering top quality opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate in outdoor sport.

## **Museum**

Refurbishment of the lower galleries at the District Museum in Sun Street, again after a period of consultation, is due to begin in earnest in October, improving access to the District's Social History.

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# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 26 September 2006

**Subject:** Planning and Economic Development Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Mrs A Grigg

**Item:** 5

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## **Recommendation:**

That the report of the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.

## **Development Control Performance – August 2006**

Development Control Performance in August 2006 showed an improvement in all the three categories of planning applications defined in Best Value Indicator 109 compared to the performance in July 2006. Performance on all application types exceeded the BVPI targets.

The performance in August does not seem to have been adversely affected by the ending of the planning 'hit squad', but this is still a factor which may impact upon future performance.

## **Major Applications**

Performance in August 2006 saw 67% of major applications decided within the 13 week target, compared with 60% in July 2006. This means that we are now into the third consecutive quarter where this target has been achieved.

## **Minor Applications**

Performance in August 2006 saw 81% of all minor applications decided within the 8 week target, compared with 73% in July 2006.

This further continues the good performance in Quarter 1 of 2006/07 where we exceeded the target of 65% of applications being decided in 8 weeks for the first time recently.

## **Other Applications**

95% of 'Other Applications' were decided within the 8 week target in August 2006, compared to 91% in July. This is compared with 80% in the second quarter of 2005/06, and a target of 80% in BVPI 109.

This now means that we are now well into the third consecutive quarter where the target has been achieved.

## **East of England Plan - Examination in Public Panel Report**

A letter has been sent to Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for DCLG, co signed by John Scott, Joint Chief Executive and David Butler, Chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership, giving Epping Forest District Council's comments on the EiP Panel's Report. This has been supported by all three Members of Parliament in the area. We continue to carefully consider the impacts the Panel's report and the East of England Plan have on this District.

## **Statement of Community Involvement**

This is a procedural document on consultation that will form part of the Local Development Framework. A significant number of responses to the first round of public consultation have been received and these are currently being assessed and analysed.

## **Local Development Scheme**

The Local Development Scheme sets out the local planning policy documents that the Council proposes to produce between July 2006 and the beginning of 2011. The first Local Development Scheme was in May 2005 and a review has recently been undertaken.

## **Loughton Town Centre Enhancement Phase 2**

This project is nearing its completion with some minor work still outstanding. There have been a number of difficulties with regard to utility services that has slowed progress. It is anticipated, however, that completion will be within the next 2 or 3 weeks. Cabinet recently approved additional S106 monies to bring the funding for the project up to £1,415,000.

## **The Broadway Regeneration Scheme**

This project commenced on 18 September and demolition of the Burton Road garages is now underway. It is intended to complete phase 1 ahead of Christmas 2006. We are, however, still awaiting the S278 Agreement with Essex County Council.



## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 26 September 2006

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor J Knapman

**Item:** 9(d)

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### **4. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS FOR LONG-TERM EMPTY HOMES**

#### **Recommending:**

That the discount for Class C Properties (Long-Term Empty Properties) within the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003:

- (a) remains at 50% for six months; and
  - (b) thereafter be removed.
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- 4.1 Regulations allow councils to reduce the discount applied to second homes and long-term empty properties. In 2005, the Council chose to reduce the Council Tax discount for second homes from 50% to the statutory minimum of 10%. At the same time, members decided not to reduce the discount on long-term empty properties (i.e., those empty for more than six months) but to review the situation in 2006 with a view to potentially changing the discount from 1 April 2007. Second homes are distinguished from empty homes as they remain furnished whilst being unoccupied.
- 4.2 The owners of empty properties are currently eligible to a six month exemption from Council Tax provided the properties are substantially unfurnished and no-one's sole or main residence. After the six month period a 50% discount is currently applied. The regulations allow for this discount to be reduced or removed completely.
- 4.3 The principal distinction between reducing the discount for second homes and long-term empty properties lies with the revenue implications. The tax base determines the capacity for a Council to generate revenues from Council Tax. This calculation has to take into account the effect of Council Tax discounts. The fewer discounts there are, the higher the tax base.
- 4.4 Where a Council reduces the second homes discount, both the Council and major precepting authorities benefit from the increase in their tax base used in their Council Tax setting decisions. The tax base used in the calculations of revenue support grant will not be increased. In essence, therefore, the Council and major precepting authorities retain the additional revenue. For 2006/07 the Council expects to receive approximately £60,000 in additional revenue from having reduced the second homes discount.
- 4.5 Where the billing authority reduces or removes the discount for long-term empty homes, this will be taken into account in calculating the tax base for Council Tax setting purposes. Therefore, neither the Council nor major precepting authorities receive the same financial benefit.

- 4.6 However, by reducing the discount on long-term empty homes, it is felt that pressure will be brought to bear on the owners to bring them back into use and help to alleviate the housing problems within the District.
- 4.7 The Housing Scrutiny Panel have discussed this issue as part of the Empty Property Strategy. The Panel recommended that the discount for long-term empty properties should remain at 50% for six months after the period of exemption expires and that after this period, the discount be removed and a 100% charge made payable. This was in recognition that a number of properties are sold between the period of six months and one year from being empty and therefore provides a more gradual reduction in discount after the period of exemption expires.
- 4.8 We have taken account of the views of the Housing Scrutiny Panel and agree that a reduction in the Council Tax discount for long-term empty properties will assist the Council's Empty Property Strategy by putting pressure on owners to bring their properties back into use. However, we are of the view that the Council Tax discount should be removed immediately after the six month exemption period has expired. Accordingly, we recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.

G/COMMM/REPORT-C40/09 2006/COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS REPORT 26.9.06