

Select Committee Agenda



Stronger Council Select Committee Tuesday, 14th September, 2021

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Stronger Council Select Committee**, which will be held at:

Council Chamber - Civic Offices
on **Tuesday, 14th September, 2021**
at **7.00 pm**

G Blakemore
Chief Executive

**Democratic Services
Officer**

Adrian Hendry, Democratic Services
Email: democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors P Bolton (Chairman), T Matthews (Vice-Chairman), R Bassett, P Bhanot, H Brady, R Brookes, J Jogia, H Kane, R Morgan, S Neville and J M Whitehouse

SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE:

6:00 pm

WEBCASTING NOTICE

Please note: this meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site - at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed.

You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during this webcast will be retained in accordance with the Council's published policy and copies made available to those who request it. Therefore by entering the Council Chamber and using the seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for web casting and/or training purposes.

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1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

This meeting is to be webcast. Members are reminded of the need to activate their microphones before speaking. The Chairman will read the following announcement:

“The Chairman would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be broadcast live to the internet (or filmed) and will be capable of repeated viewing (or another use by such third parties).

If you are seated in the lower public seating area it is likely that the recording cameras will capture your image and this will result in the possibility that your image will become part of the broadcast.

This may infringe your human and data protection rights and if you wish to avoid this you should move to the upper public gallery.”

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Pages 3 - 28)

To agree the notes of the meeting of the Select Committee held on 20th July 2021.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare interests in any item on the agenda.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 29 - 32)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed the terms of reference and work programme for the select committee. Members are invited at each meeting to review both documents.

7. PRESENTATION FROM COUNCIL'S LEVEL 2 APPRENTICES

We are so proud of our Business Admin Apprentices : Isabella Cray, Luke Allen and Mitchell Kemp for successfully completing their Level 2 Business Admin Apprenticeships. In this meeting they will talk to you about their journeys so far and what they still hope to develop and learn within Epping Forest District Council.

8. EQUALITY POLICY (Pages 33 - 48)

To consider the attached draft Equality Policy.

9. QUALIS QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT - Q3 2020/21 (Pages 49 - 64)

To consider the attached report on Qualis Monitoring for Quarter 3, 2020/21.

10. REVIEW OF ELECTIONS 2021 (Pages 65 - 72)

To consider the attached report reviewing the elections held in May 2021.

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To note the next meeting dates for this Committee will be held on;

16 November 2021;
18 January 2022;
03 March 2022; and
14 April 2022.

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**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF STRONGER COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 JULY 2021
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 8.42 PM**

Members Present: P Bolton (Chairman), T Matthews (Vice-Chairman), P Bhanot, S Heather, H Kane (Chairman of the Council), A Lion, R Morgan and S Neville (Leader of the Green Party Group)

Co-opted Member:

Other members present: S Kane, D Sunger and J H Whitehouse

Apologies for Absence: R Bassett, H Brady, R Brookes and J Jogia

Officers Present A Small (Strategic Director Corporate and 151 Officer), M Hassall (Interim Service Director (Strategy, Delivery & Performance)), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), J Budden (People, Culture & Employee Wellbeing Manager), T Carne (Corporate Communications Team Manager), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), P Maginnis (Service Director (Corporate Services)), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor) and G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. SUBSITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Committee noted that Councillor S Heather would substitute for Councillor H Brady and Councillor A Lion would substitute for Councillor R Bassett for the duration of this meeting.

3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:

That the notes of the meeting held 13 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME

The Select Committee noted their terms of reference and work programme. They also noted that item 3 of the work programme 'Digital Enablement' included the IT Strategy.

Mr Small noted that two other items had to be added to the programme; that of quarterly budget monitoring and the quarterly Qualis management report.

6. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORTING - QTR. 1

Maryvonne Hassall the ICT Manager introduced the corporate performance reporting against the Q4 milestones and noted that some KPI Q1 data was not available at the time of this report. She went through the corporate projects on an exceptions basis only commenting on any amber issues. She noted that quite a lot of list were highlighted in blue, indicating that the projects had been completed.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse raised concerns about museum collection rationalisation project, although it was highlighted as green. She asked what was the roles of the Parish and Town councils in this, were they being consulted? M Hassall said that she would investigate and get back to her. The Chairman asked that something be added to the minutes on the involvement of the local councils.

- Post meeting update on the 'Museum Collection Rationalisation':

"The update is that all items that are stored at the North Weald storage location have been reviewed and 44 out of the 55 have been agreed to be outside the museum's collecting policy – these have been signed off by the steering committee and the PH decision process. The museum is currently exploring new homes for these items – so far 10 have been transferred to local community allotment projects to be used by the community.

In terms of local council involvement – it was extremely unlikely that the museum will be removing any items that have a local story to tell. If items from specific local areas are being considered the relevant local town or parish council will be consulted. It is likely these items will be paper documentation which will need to be transferred to the Essex Record Office which is responsible for paper archives and therefore will still very much be within the public domain.

It has been confirmed that the parish and town councils were consulted."

The item 'Reprovision of Hostel' was showing as amber as a proposal document was being brought to Governance group for discussion. Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked which hostel this was referring to. He was told that they did not have that information there and would provide a written response. Councillor Neville commented that the committee did not want generic titles that did not tell them anything. Could officers be more specific.

- Post meeting update on 'Reprovision of Hostel':

*"Temporary housing for homeless People:
The provision of temporary housing for homeless people is one of the most important services provided by Epping Forest District Council. There are many reasons why someone may become homeless and the deficiencies of temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation are well-known. We have a long and positive track record of helping people in need. For many years Epping Forest District Council has therefore provided dedicated hostel accommodation with on-site*

support staff and communal facilities to help people back on to their feet and into permanent housing. Currently we have no one in B&B. Everyone is provided for within our dedicated schemes.

Around 80% of our dedicated temporary accommodation is currently based on one site. While it provides a very good service, our locations are relatively remote. Access to good local services such as schools, healthcare, public transport and employment often play key roles in helping people back into permanent housing. Easy access to the support of close family and friends can also play vital role.

In recent years we have been innovative - delivering modular units for single homeless people in an environment where they can get the support they require. However, we cannot stand still, and further innovations have the potential to make more improvements. We are therefore starting a new process of considering how to best meet the housing needs of residents who find themselves homeless in the future. Those considerations are at a very early stage and we will share more information as soon as we are able."

A Small noted that officers were refreshing projects at present and Councillor Lion added that service plans had been raised with Mr Dawe asking that they be presented to the select committees. A Small replied that was why they were going through the service plans so they could be presented to the select committee in due course. Councillor Lion noted that there was a time constraint here and that the select committees needed to design their work programmes around the service plans. In the past there had been too many verbal reports that were too late to scrutinise.

The Chairman said that this would be something to discuss at the next joint chairman's meeting.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked about the item on 'Digital Member Journey'. He was told that this was a focused activity to ensure members were not having issues and how they could be helped. There was still a long way to go on this. Councillor Lion noted that as a customer he was far from happy with the service at present. He had problems with his iPad which was taking a long time to fix. He would like to examine the KPIs attached to this.

The Chairman said that it was unfortunate that this had disappeared from the scrutiny programme as a lot of members were having problems. He was told that this was about continuous improvement and was not finished yet. Councillor Lion asked if there was a closure report on this project and was told that officers had not seen a final report on this.

- Post meeting update on Digital Member Journey:

"Update: A working group was set up to address Members Digital issues. Key trends and issues were identified and have been worked on by Customer Service & ICT. A full closure report and recommendations on actions going forward including one to one coaching and support sessions for Members will be provided in due course, the Officer working on this is currently off sick. In the meantime Members are encouraged to raise any ongoing ICT issues in the usual manner so that they can be logged and tracked for a timely resolution and any major issues identified."

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked about the Council Portal where no progress was indicated. It was some time since we had a report on this though she appreciated that no real progress had been made. What was frustrating was the things that we used to have such as the yearbook that had information that was not available elsewhere and was told it would be on the Council Portal. Had there been any progress on this item? M Hassall said that no work on this had been carried out so far as there had been other priorities. Councillor S Kane noted that the yearbook was on the Modern.Gov system, he would see if a link from the website could be made for this. He noted that both he and Councillor Patel wanted this to happen but there was always the question of priorities as we had a lot of big projects to carry out in the last few years, so this had slipped in the queue. The key point was the turnaround time, how long it took to fix a problem for members or any other customers.

Councillor H Kane said that this committee would like some information and history on this. It was important to have a report. Councillor Lion commented that it was important that projects that were closed had a closure report as it was vital for scrutiny. Councillor S Kane said he would ask for reports to be completed.

- Post meeting update on Council Portal project and Yearbook:

“Update: A full review, project brief and business case is to be completed to ensure we are clear on the expected outcomes and benefits a portal may deliver, this review will be completed 22/23.

Update: The Year Book has not been produced for two years now and was increasingly downsized for several years before that as it was deemed not in keeping with our paperless digital ways of working. It was very expensive to produce in both time and physical printing costs and was considered out of date the moment it was produced whilst the information is readily available and up to date electronically. This was previously agreed with Councillors by Simon Hill. All information is available via Councillors iPads, for any help or assistance please use Members Contact.

All projects are to have closure reports.”

Councillor S Neville noting the Engagement and Wellbeing project wondered if the training mentioned would be opened up to Members as well as staff. J Budden said that officers would need to look at this and come back to him.

M Hassall then took the meeting to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). She noted that it was a very tight timescale to get the end statistics from the end of the last quarter to this meeting. She did have some of the finished figures here and could if wanted, go through them. However, the complete set of figures would also be reported at the next quarters report. The timings of the meetings will have to be looked at to help with this.

Councillor Neville was disappointed that there were no figures to go with the KPIs, it would be very helpful if the KPIs had some figures to go with them. It would be nice if we could synchronise everything up to have the figures in a full report so we could scrutinise it.

The Chairman added that it would be difficult to go through them all without having a complete report but asked if members had anything they wanted to highlight for the full report for the next meeting.

Councillor Lion commented that with some of the other actions such as the Local Plan Delivery, there seemed to be a lot of overlap between the select committees. There was a need to clarify who did what. He would also like the air quality around schools to be looked at. The Chairman said this would be something for the Chairs of the Select Committees to discuss when they next met as they had agreed to review this after a year's trial, which was now up. M Hassall noted that all the KPIs for all the committees was to come to a single place and put all the KPIs into a single document.

Councillor S Kane noted that this was, as just pointed out, an amalgamated report covering all projects and all Select Committees, but it might be helpful if an extra column was added to indicate which scrutiny committee each item would be going to. M Hassell said that it was in the report, but they had missed that column out to make it easier to read.

Councillor Lion noted that at the start of the report it highlighted some of the exception projects and wondered if some of these should form part of the work programme, such as 'climate action plan' 'the green infrastructure' and 'customer services: telephony solutions'.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse said that she had mentioned the Green Action Plan at the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee that used to go to the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee, but she was not sure to which Committee it should go to. The Chairman said that this would also be something to debate at the joint Chairman's meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the committee reviewed and noted the progress of project delivery against Q4 milestones.

7. ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME REPORT

Maryvonne Hassall the ICT Manager introduced the accommodation update report. She noted that things had changed since this had been written due to the opening up of restrictions as from the 19 July. This would not mean a return to the office for everyone. It was expected that people would mainly operate in a hybrid mode, sometimes in the office, sometimes at home, and sometimes at other locations, or working out in the field. The accommodation project would be formally closed within the next few weeks when they will review its outcomes and the need for further actions and the understanding of how we could use the new spaces. Familiarisation sessions have been set up and have started. Preparations were underway for the opening of the Community Hub. A provisional opening had been set for the 16th August subject to final agreement with the partners on the 2nd August. We are also still in discussions with Essex County Council about usage of some of the ground floor space for the library.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse commented that the projects were not ready for closure as members had not seen the building and they needed an opportunity to give feedback. As an example, the air conditioning went off in the evening just when the members were coming in for meetings. She also noted that the Civic Offices were being referred to as 'The Civic' which did not make sense as it was just an adjective.

Councillor Morgan noted that members had not had their familiarisations sessions as yet. The Chairman noted that a tour would be arranged on the 29th July and there had been one previously.

Councillor H Kane noted that at the beginning of the project members were asked what they would like to see in the building, but since then some of the officers had left and other people had taken over, so our suggestions were lost. Things had changed and we needed to know what had changed from the original plans and since our consultations. A Small noted that the familiarisation sessions were next week, and it seemed sensible that we waited until after that to capture members views and then come back with a further report to this committee for a further debate.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse asked why we no longer issued the clear rubbish sacks from the Civic Office reception, why was that an improvement, as it was a basic service. He was told that the number of places where you could pick them up from around the district had increased and so we no longer used the Civic Offices.

Councillor Morgan commented that originally, we were going to have a Members room, but we do not have a Members room anymore. He was told that the space was still there for Members and officers. It would be better to have this conversation after the familiarisation session next week.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the summary of progress on the Accommodation Programme as at 6th July 2021 when this report was written and the verbal updates.

8. BEYOND THE PANDEMIC EMPLOYEE SURVEY (APRIL-MAY 2021)

Joanne Budden the Service Manager (People, Culture & Wellbeing) introduce the report. She noted during the past year, officers had not only provided business as usual in support of our residents but assisted with other essential work on Project Shield and Highstreet recovery projects. They had completed an office refurbishment on time and on budget, improved productivity, and digitalisation for our residents, and had vastly improved employee engagement and wellbeing.

Through the pandemic many of the employees had been working remotely - no longer reliant on a fixed desk, in a fixed building, working fixed hours.

In April 2021 an employee survey was designed, this followed on from the 2020 employee wellbeing survey. This new survey was called 'Our Ways of Working 2021-2022 Beyond the Pandemic'. When completing this survey, employees were encouraged to challenge their thinking, giving them the opportunity to give valuable feedback and insight to help inform plans for beyond the pandemic and help reshape the Council's future ways of working for them and the organisation.

Part two of the survey was a selection of 8 travel questions. A short video was played, outlining the results of the survey. **A copy of this presentation as a PDF, is attached to these minutes for information.*

Councillor H Kane thanked J Budden for the presentation saying it was good to know how people felt. She then asked about the Council's out of hours service, had this not been included in the survey asking how people felt about it. She added that to the best of her knowledge, we had about three weeks without an out of hours service. J Budden said that she would investigate.

Councillor Sunger noted that the last 18 months had been difficult and challenging and thanked the staff for continuing to provide vital front line services. He was also proud that we had now trained more than 80 mental health first aiders which provided important support for the staff.

Councillor Lion said it was an interesting presentation. He asked about people working from their dining room tables how many of them would not be happy working from home. There were also other aspects of remote working, not only could people work from home or the Civic Offices, but we did have other hubs that they could use, as working from home could be very isolating. He was told that the survey covered this as it did not reference just a single site. Councillor Lion asked if people were keen to do this. He was told that as a new way of working, people would get used to this way.

Councillor Neville noted that the presentation went by too fast for them to take it all in. He asked if it actually went out to 438 people or was that just people who viewed the survey. J Budden replied that 438 employees viewed the survey, 356 started doing the survey and 292 had completed it.

He then asked how many people took up the free DRT87 transport service offer. He was told that the officer did not have that figure with her. The Chairman asked how many people would this offer affect as it only covered a specific travel corridor. J Budden said that she would have to get back to him on this as that information sat with the travel plan.

Councillor Matthews asked if the data was also collected on the age range of the responders – if people said they were happy to work from home what age range would that cover. He was told that information formed part of the survey.

Councillor H Kane asked that the presentation be sent to the Members of the committee. She then asked what would happen to this data; what would it help you to do in the future. She was told that the presentation would be sent out to councillors and that the presentation was just the top level of the data they had; there was a lot of detailed data that they had to go through and that would go to inform the people strategy and their future plans. Councillor H Kane asked if there was a timetable on what would happen next and if so, could the Committee have a report on this. She was told that officers would provide updates on this as they moved forward and evolved a strategy.

Councillor Bhanot asked what safeguards or checks were done to see what the cross section of staff was who were completing this survey; what safeguards were there to avoid duplication of the survey by the same individuals; and if 80.02% completed the survey how did that correlate to the number of staff. He was told that it went out to roughly 508 people but the survey was anonymous so we used an outside company and an employee could only complete the survey once.

Councillor Morgan asked if the officer had any data on how many staff had left over the last two years and were we up to full quota for officers now. He was told that the current turnover was 3.3%. we had lost 103 members of staff in 2018/19, and 109 in 2019/20; and this year we have so far lost 117 but 79 of these were included TUPE transfers. So, its been quite level over the past few years. The Chairman did not think that the percentage figures added up to the actual figures just given.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse asked if feedback was given to the staff who said they had problems and what was the gender balance compared to the whole council as it was 68% female and 28% male who answered the survey. She was told that the council's balance at present was 37% male and 63% female. We were evolving our wellbeing support all the time, we do a lot of employee wellbeing sessions, virtual coffee sessions, exercise classes and generally have lots of support for our employees.

Councillor Heather asked about the access staff had to private GP appointments; how did this work. He was told that staff had access to a benefits platform called 'Perkbox' part of this was to have access to private GP appointments online. They can also get private or NHS prescriptions. The Chairman asked if there was feedback to that persons own GP. He was told no, as it was part of the privacy policy, but they could ask if they could contact their GP.

A Small noted that because of the pandemic the move to homeworking had happened overnight. The survey was to take a temperature check on how the workforce felt about it. This had also happened to a large section of the country at the same time. A lot of staff do not want to come back to the offices. However, it provides challenges such as keeping people in contact and informed. This was something that we would continue to do and will continue to provide feedback to this committee. As for the DRT route that was selected; a large proportion of the workforce lived on this route. Also mentioned was the mental health training and if it could be opened up to members – this will have to be looked into, as members were not employees. But we would like to if we could.

Councillor Lion asked about staff retention, did they record staff retention by length of service? He then asked if we had a defibrillator on site? And did we have any information on home broadband services and how officers were finding their access to our corporate services at home. He was told that broadband services were part of the survey; yes, we did have a defibrillator on site and yes, they did have the figures on staff retention broken down into service areas.

The Chairman said that it would be helpful to know where the defibrillator was located.

Councillor S Kane said that it occurred to him that if we had conducted this survey in February 2020, just before Covid, we would have got very different results. We were just considering the change in office use, but then Covid hit and we had to accelerate everything by five years, and now we have people saying how nice it is working like this. Given that, was there any intention to repeat this survey in six months' time to see how people were settling into the hybrid way of working as opposed to just homeworking. J Budden noted that they carried out surveys all the time; but as for a bespoke survey, they would do another one in 6 months' time.

Councillor Sunger urged members to take the tour around the Civic Offices, they had provided a lot of technology for the staff and also working areas and non-working areas, all to support the staff. There was also the Perkbox platform and he urged members to look into that. If you kept staff happy, happy staff makes for a happy employer.

Councillor Matthews noted that the survey had engaged about half of the staff and asked if there were any plans to engage the other half to get a fuller picture. He was told that the survey was voluntary and not mandatory so you would need a mandatory element to entice everyone to complete the survey, but you would get a

lower engagement. So, we try to make it voluntary and hoped the figures would increase in time.

**Attached is also a short workforce data sheet for information.*

RESOLVED:

The Committee considered and noted the report and the accompanying video.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted their future meeting dates.

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Our Ways of Working 2021/2022 - Beyond the Pandemic

Employee Survey

Client: EFDC

Date: 12th April – 11th May 2021

Sample: 292

Demographic: Employees at EFDC

Client contact: sbowershamilton@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Summary author: nilam.shukla@onepoll.com

hello@onepoll.com | 020 7138 3053



Employees

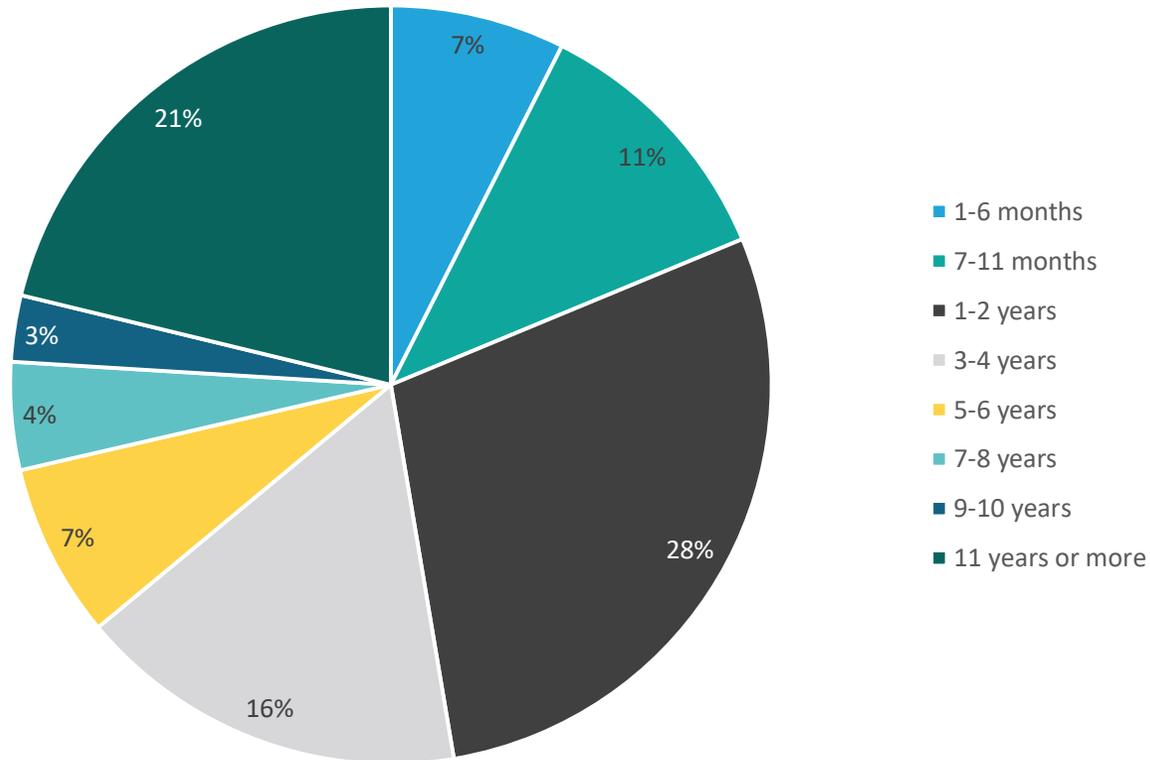
- Over three quarters (76%) have been **working from home most of the time** since the pandemic started in March 2020
 - A fifth (20%) have been working in a **hybrid** way
 - 4% have been working from the **office/depot location all of the time** during the pandemic
 - And 1% have a job where they **must be on site**, so can't work from home
- 68% of employees who answered the survey are **female**
 - 28% are **male**
- A fifth (20%) are aged between **18-34**
- 47% are aged between **35-54**
- A third (33%) are **55 or above**
- Over three quarters (76%) are **individual contributors**
 - 16% are **managers of individual contributors**
 - 6% are **managers of other managers**
 - And 1% are **Executive Team Members**

Page 18



Question:

How long have you been in your current role?



Page 13

Insight

- Over a fifth (21%) have been in their role **11 months or less**
- 44% have been there **1-4 years**
- 14% have been there **5-10 years**
- And 21% have been there **11 years or more**





Arrangement

- On average, employees surveyed work **35.4 hours** per week
 - 22% work **up to 35 hours**
 - Three fifths (60%) work between **36-40 hours**
 - And 17% work **41 hours or more**
- On average, employees surveyed work **4.7 days** per week
 - Over four fifths (81%) work **5 days**
- Two thirds (66%) are **currently living** with a **partner/spouse**
 - 11% live on **their own**
 - 6% live with **parents**
 - 10% have **another living arrangement**

Of those that are not single occupants (n=260):

- 46% have a **dependent** currently living with them

Working from Home

Of those that have been working from home during the pandemic (n=279):

- Over three quarters (77%) **started** working from home in **March 2020**
 - 12% started working from home between **April 2020 and July 2020**
 - 11% started working from home between **August 2020 and March 2021**
- On average, respondents currently spend **78.9%** of their working time **working from home**
 - 10% spend **under 40%**
 - 15% spend **41-80%**
 - Three quarters (75%) spend **81-100%**

Of those that can work from home AND are not single occupants (n=258):

- 12% say **more than one other** in their house will also **work from home**, going forward
 - 37% say **one other** in their house will
 - 40% say **no one** in their house will





Factors

Of those that can work from home/remotely (n=290):

- Two fifths (40%) have a **dedicated room** in the house to work
 - 27% have a **dedicated space**
 - 2% have **separate building**
- 24% **do not have** a dedicated space

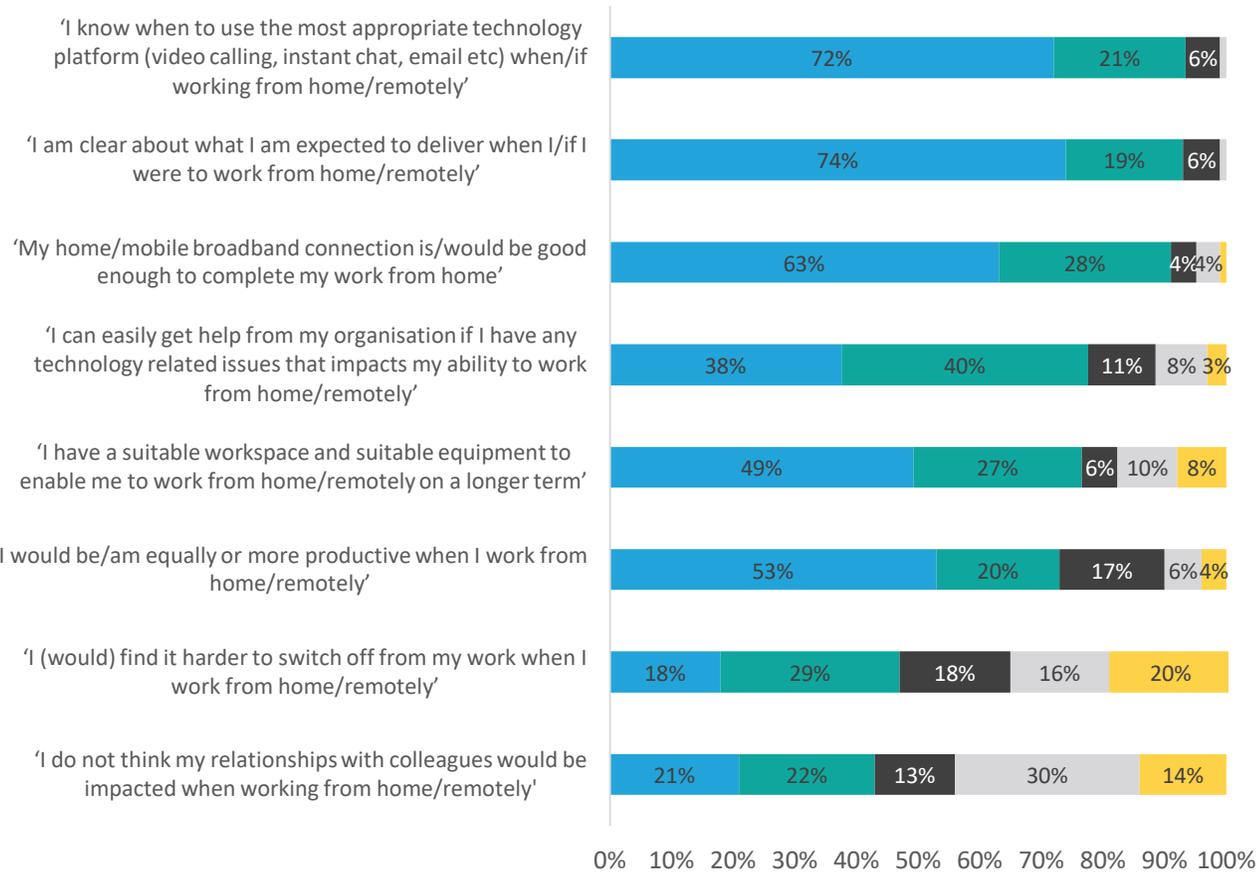
- In the **future**, respondents would **like to work from home/remotely 66.1%** of their working time on average
 - 19% want to do **under 40%**
 - 36% want to do **41-80%**
 - 45% want to do **81-100%**

- 73% **agree** that **working from home** is a **positive experience**
 - 44% **strongly agree**
- 15% **disagree** that it is a **positive experience**
 - 6% **strongly disagree**

Question:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ' _____ '

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Page 27

Insight

Of those that can work from home/remotely (n=290):

- 93% **agree** that they **know when** to use the most **appropriate technology** when/if working from home/remotely
 - Another 93% **agree** that they are **clear** about what they are **expected to deliver** when//if they were to work from home/remotely
- 91% **agree** that their **home/mobile broadband connection** is/would be good enough to complete their work from home

Flexibility

- 86% of employees surveyed said that within their **current contracted hours**, they feel as though they can be **flexible in their role**
- Over four fifths (82%) **agree** that having a **flexible working pattern** is **beneficial** to them
 - 63% **strongly agree**
- Just 5% **disagree** that this is beneficial
- Over three quarters (77%) **agree** that they feel their **manager** has **supported them** in understanding **how** they can **adopt flexibility** into their **working day**
 - 57% **strongly agree**
- Just 5% **disagree** that their manager has supported them

Of those that have been working from home during the pandemic (n=279):

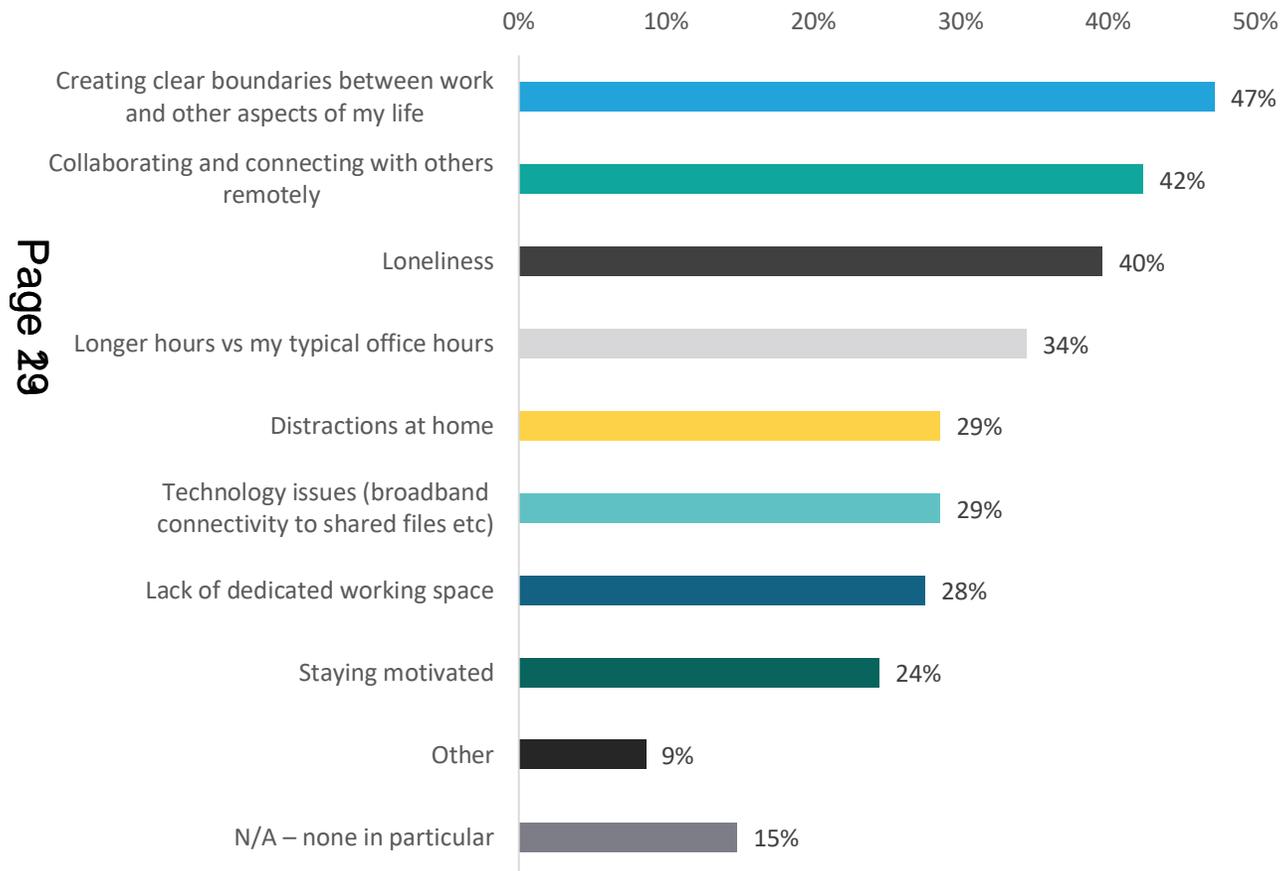
- Over half (52%) **agree** that they feel **more isolated** since they **started to work from home**
 - 19% **strongly agree**
- 29% **disagree** that they feel isolated

Employee Survey



Question:

What do you think are the biggest challenges of working from home/remotely? Tick all that apply



Insight

Of those that can work from home/remotely (n=290):

- Top 3 **challenges** of **working from home/remotely** are:
 - Creating clear boundaries between work and other aspects of their life (47%)
 - Collaborating and connecting with others remotely (42%)
 - Loneliness (40%)



Benefits

- **Benefits** of working in a more **effective, flexible way** from **home/remotely** are:
 1. No commute (80%)
 2. Flexibility (78%)
 3. Productivity (57%)
 4. Reduced costs (56%)
 5. Time with family (48%)
 6. Improved health (34%)

- 37% are **interested** in the **flexibility of their contract**, this would:
 - Enable them to work their hours in **any combination** over a **7-day period**
 - Offer them their flexibility to work over a **weekend**, should that suit their individual needs

- 39% are **not interested** in doing this

- And 23% are **not sure**

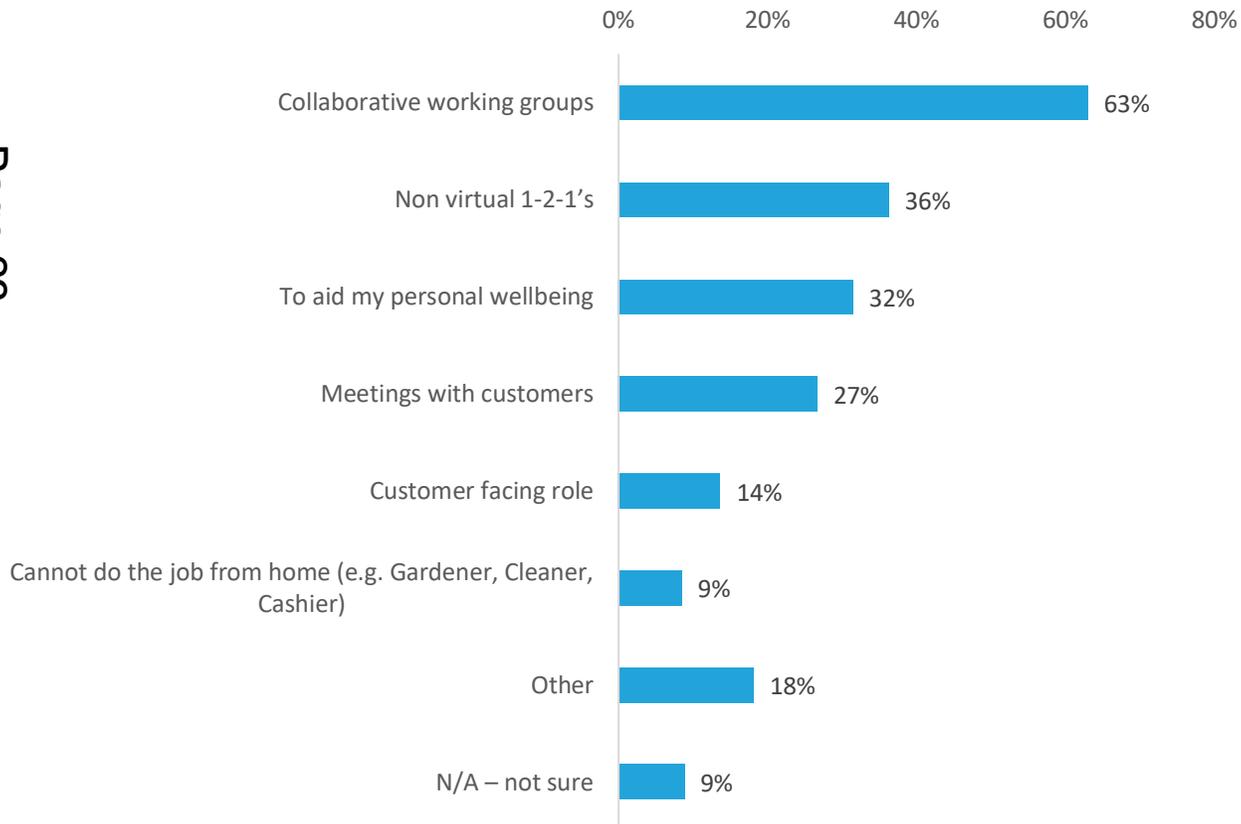
Travel Plan

- 88% **most frequently** used a car to get to work (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic)
 - 8% **walked**
 - 5% took the **tube**
 - 13% used **alternative transport means**
- 82% said their **preferred way(s) to travel to work** would be the **car**
- **This was followed by:**
 - Walking (11%)
 - Parking offsite with the option to use a cycle or walk for the last mile (10%)
 - Car Share (9%)
- 20% **anticipate** they might utilise **car sharing** as a mode of **sustainable and active travel** to travel to EFDC office
 - 14% may use the **bus**
 - 13% may use the **tube**
 - 10% may **walk**



Question:

Working with effective flexibility, what do you anticipate may be the main reasons for travelling into the Civic Offices in the future? Tick all that apply



Insight

- Main **reasons why** employees may anticipate they need to **travel into the Civic Offices** in the future are:
 1. For collaborative working groups (63%)
 2. For non virtual 1-2-1's (36%)
 3. To aid their personal wellbeing (32%)





Routes

- 12% said they would **make use** of the option to travel to the Civic Office for work via the **DaRT87 route**
 - 17% **would not** make use of this option
- 28% would be **interested** in finding out **more information** about **car sharing commutes** if they need to travel to the Civic Office for work
 - 5% would be **very interested**
- 25% are **not particularly** interested
- And 47% are **not at all** interested

onepoll.

Any questions?

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ESOMAR^{'21}
corporate

WORKFORCE INFORMATION 2019/20 to 2020/21

TURNOVER	RATE	AVERAGE HEADCOUNT	AVERAGE FTE
2021/22 Quarter 1	3.28%	580	526.41
2020/21 Yearly	13.59% (ex TUPE)	581.5	525.09
	20.12% (inc TUPE)	581.5	525.09
2019/20 Yearly	17.58%	620	544.04

GENDER	
MALE	37%
FEMALE	63%

NO. OF LEAVERS BY HEADCOUNT		VOLUNTARY (e.g. Resignation/Retirement)	INVOLUNTARY (e.g. Redundancy/Tupe/Dismissal)
2021/22 Quarter	23	19	4
2020/21 Yearly	117 (79 ex TUPE)	46	71
2019/20 Yearly	109	82	27

NO. OF LEAVERS IN FIRST 12 MONTHS	
2020/21	10
2019/20	12

RETENTION RATES	
2021/21	86.5% (excluding TUPE) 80% (including TUPE)
2019/20	83.38%

NO. OF EMPLOYEES DECLARING A DISABILITY	
2020/21	6.19%
2019/20	5.80%

EMPLOYEE ETHNICITY DECLARATIONS	2020/21	2019/20
BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic)	4.29%	4.67%
White – All	71.88%	73.22%
Unknown	4.47%	5.64%
Not Declared/Withheld	18.74%	12.09%

NO OF EMPLOYEES BY LENGTH OF SERVICE AT 31.03.2021	Below 1 Year	1 – 10 Years	11-20 Years	21+ Years
	96	270	154	67

AGE PROFILE AT 31.03.2021	<21	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>60
	16	69	92	111	213	77

SICKNESS	2020/21	2021/22 Q1
Total number of days lost to short term absence	1612.8	357.6
Total number of days lost to long term absence	3376.6	478
Total number of days lost to all sickness	4989.4	835.6
Average number of days lost per employee	8.58 days	1.49 days

LIVE VACANCIES	
2021/22 Q1	37

STRONGER COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE 2019/20

Core Areas of Responsibility

- (1) To provide scrutiny for the following corporate projects:
 - People Strategy;
 - Accommodation Strategy; and
 - Digital Enablement
- (2) To monitor the Corporate Plan Action Plan performance report and provide scrutiny of services that are not performing to standard and develop proposals for their improvement. The Stronger Council Select Committee in its review of Corporate Key Performance Indicators can task other Select Committees to review service performance and develop proposals for improvement.

Scrutiny Role of the Select Committee

- (1) To engage in policy review and development, with a focus on improvement and how this can be best achieved;
- (2) To develop a work programme each year that effectively scrutinises the areas of responsibility outlined above;
- (3) To consider any matter referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder and to make recommendations as appropriate;
- (4) To consider the effect of Government actions or initiatives that affect the Select Committees areas of responsibility and the impact on customers, residents, businesses and visitors to our district, and to respond to consultation activities as appropriate;
- (5) To establish working groups and task and finish panels to undertake any activity within these terms of reference;
- (6) To undertake pre-scrutiny through the review of specific proposals of the Council and its partner organisations or other local service providers to help develop policy;
- (7) To monitor and review relevant projects and associated closure and benefits reports; and
- (8) To engage with the community and encourage community engagement.

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**Stronger Council Select Committee
Work Programme 2021/22
Chairman: Councillor P Bolton**

No.	Item	Deadline	Progress and Comments	Programme of Meetings	Lead Officers
1.	Corporate Plan Action Plan (KPI's by exception) – performance scrutiny	Corporate Action Plan KPI's, Q1 Apr, May, Jun – 20 July 2021 meeting Q2 Jul, Aug, Sept - 16 Nov 2021 meeting Q3 Oct, Nov, Dec - 18 Jan 2022 meeting Q4 Jan, Feb, Mar – 14 Apr 2022 meeting Live system reporting – by exception. No pre- distributed reports, projection of live data on the night.		20 July 2021 14 Sept. 2021 16 Nov. 2021 18 January 2022 03 March 2022 14 April 2022	James West?
2.	People Strategy	20 July and 16 Nov. 2021 – 18 January 2022 & 14 April 2022 Project reporting, issues focussed.			Paula Maginnis Jo Budden
3.	Digital Enablement	Prioritisation of Council Technology strategy.			Paula Maginnis Maryvonne Hassall
4.	Accommodation	20 July and 16 Nov. 2021 - & 18 January 2022 Project reporting, issues focussed			Maryvonne Hassall

5.	Financial Planning	Scrutiny of MTFP 21/22 onwards		Andrew Small Christopher Hartgrove
6.	Budget scrutiny	Qtr. 1 Budget Monitoring Rtp. 2021/22 – 14 September 2021; Qtr. 2 Budget Monitoring Rtp. 2021/22 – 16 November 2021; Qtr. 3 Budget Monitoring Rtp. 2021/22 – 3 March 2022 2022/23 budget setting 18 January 2022	Budget Monitoring Reports (Revenue and Capital Outturn for 2020/21)	Andrew Small
7.	Asset Management Strategy	Council asset strategy (new)	Approved by the Cabinet 13/06/19 and referred to Council 30/07/19 for adoption.	Andrew Small
8.	Review of Local Elections 2021	14 September 2021		Gary Woodhall
9.	Presentation from Council's Apprentices	14 September 2021		Lysandra Halmshaw
10.	Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report			Andrew Small/ Chris Hartgrove
11.	Quarterly Qualis Monitoring			Andrew Small



Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14th September 2021

Portfolio: Corporate Services (Cllr D Sunger)

Subject: Equality Policy

Officer contact for further information: Lorraine Miles (01992 562719)

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Henry (01992 564246)

SCRUTINY



Epping Forest District Council

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1) That the Select Committee review the Equality & Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives it contains; and**
- 2) That the Select Committee provide a view on whether to undertake public consultation on the Equality Objectives.**

Report:

1. Epping Forest District Council is committed to advancing equality and inclusion for all. The Council's new Equality & Inclusion Policy demonstrates our commitment to this and our responsibility to our communities and our workforce. The Equality Objectives contained in the Policy set out we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to continuously improve and build on our past achievements to ensure excellent equality practice.
2. The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 require public authorities to set and publish at least one Equality Objective every four years to demonstrate how they will eliminate discrimination and advance equality. They also require public authorities to publish information to show their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty at least annually. Typically, this takes the form of an annual Equality Report or Statement. In addition to the Equality Act, the Council has a statutory duty to reduce health inequalities many of which are associated with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.
3. In our 2020 Equality Statement we made the following commitments:
 - In 2021 we will review our Equality Objectives and produce a new Equality Policy
 - Our Equality Objectives will be supported by a framework for measuring performance and evaluating the effectiveness of our work on equality.
 - Each Service Plan will describe how it is working to improve equality and will report on the delivery of equality.
 - We will review our Equalities Impact Assessment to focus more on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes. This supports our commitment to ensure that these are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage to any protected groups from participation.
 - We will engage and learn from our communities about the challenges they face and ensure that policy development, innovation and growth are inclusive and put people on

- an equal footing.
 - We will continue to promote the District as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued.
4. Our new Equality Objectives build on our previous objectives. They focus on what we will do to advance equality and how we will do it. The following Equality Objectives (2021-2025) are recommended to Cabinet.
- **Equality Objective 1:** To develop, and deliver in partnership, a District-level approach to growth and recovery that builds, and can demonstrate, an Epping Forest that works for all.
 - **Equality Objective 2:** To drive improvement in service delivery through the use of equality data and data on socio-economic deprivation.
 - **Equality Objective 3:** To develop a research and consultation strategy to understand the needs and experiences of our communities with a clear pathway or process to embed their knowledge and experience into service design, development and delivery.
 - **Equality Objective 4:** To understand, and evidence, the impact of our workforce initiatives on improving equality.

These Equality Objectives will enable EFDC to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and socio-economic deprivation.
- Embed this understanding into policy and practice, particularly in relation to growth and recovery.
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership and a clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality and inclusion.
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to people's experiences and the challenges they face in a digital world.
- Provide better evidence of the impact of our workforce initiatives

5. The Equality Policy sets out our commitment to whole council approach to equality and inclusion and actions to ensure continuous improvement. They include adopting the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). They also include identifying Officer and Elected Member leads to provide the linkages between the Equality Policy and other policies and strategies e.g., The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, national strategies and Service Plan objectives.

To deliver the Equality Policy the following actions will be undertaken

- 2021 - Establish the foundation to deliver our Equality Objectives, building on our current commitments.
- 2021 - Collect baseline measures to inform and set targets, integrate existing Equality Impact Assessments into Corporate Impact Assessment Framework.
- 2021 – Develop Equality Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
- 2021 - Review Equalities Impact Assessment to focus on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes.
- 2022 - Ensure higher standards being met in all areas. Address challenges.
- 2023 - Model good practice across the organisation. Self-assessment against EFLG
- 2024/5 - Review Equality Objectives, produce new Equality Policy

To enable the Select Committee to review the Equality Policy and Equality Objectives as part of the Council's commitment to advancing equality and demonstrating this across all its policies, programmes and services.

Options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Resource implications:

Commitments made in the Equality Policy will be met within existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The adoption of the Equality Policy and Equality Objectives will ensure that the Council meets its legal requirements under the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011). The Policy has been reviewed by the Shared Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer & Information Governance Officer. Suggestions have been made and incorporated.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the Safer, Cleaner and Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues.

Inequality and sustainability interact and there are different kinds of inequality many of which overlap. This Policy makes the case for better understanding the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and the socio-economic factors that produce inequalities of wealth. These, in turn, are associated with differences in environmental impact and the carbon footprint of individuals. The data from the actions in this Policy will be used to ensure that inequality and environmental issues are not considered in isolation and that growth is both fair and green.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation has been undertaken with Service Managers, the Leadership Team and Service Directors. Responses were overwhelmingly positive. No substantive amendments were proposed to the Equality Policy or Equality Objectives and minor comments have been incorporated.

There is no statutory duty to consult on the production or publication of Equality Objectives. Many councils do, however, decide to consult to ensure full transparency and provide an opportunity for community engagement.

Background Papers:

None

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The setting and publication of Equality Objectives will ensure that the Council is not in breach of its statutory duty and that mitigation is not required.

Equality

The Equality Objectives will help EFDC address the causes of inequality and promote equality and inclusion across its functions. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for Cabinet which shows that the Equality Objectives will have positive impacts for all protected groups.

Equality & Inclusion Policy

1.0. Introduction

This Policy sets out our commitment to equality and inclusion and shows how we comply with the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011). The Equality Act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. The purpose of this Policy is as follows:

- to set and publish our Equality Objectives
- to show that we have considered the aims of the legislation as it relates to protected characteristics in setting our Equality Objectives
- to show that our Equality Objectives are supported by a sound evidence base and that the process for arriving at them is strategic and well informed¹

We want the District to be “a great place for living, working, learning and leisure” with “people who feel valued and included” (Corporate Plan 2018-2023). We recognise that residents may experience inequality connected to characteristics protected by Equality Act. We also recognise that they may not feel included and experience poor wellbeing due to disparities in health, housing, education, employment and their experience of crime. The connection between equality and wellbeing was made in our 2016 Equality & Diversity Policy and Covid-19 has highlighted the relationship between economic recovery and wellbeing. The Equality Act establishes the principle that considering the needs of all our communities is key to removing or minimising the disadvantage suffered by those most in need. This is something we are passionate about.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, we must pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups, so that everyone feels included. We have a good record of achievement in delivering services which are fair, accessible and of benefit to all sections of the community. As we move into recovery we need to better understand and measure the effectiveness our work to ensure that all our citizens benefit from growth and opportunity and feel part of their communities.

1.1. Our District

The District is a mixture of urban and rural areas and stretches northward from its boundary with Greater London into rural Essex, covering an area of 131 square miles. Over a quarter of the population live in rural and rural related areas.

- The total resident population is estimated to be 132, 200 (all ages, 2020)
- The ward with the largest population is Grange Hill, representing 5.56% of the total population (2020)
- In the 2011 Census 63,650 residents were male and 68,039 were female

¹ Objectives and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities England (and non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales), Equality and Human Rights Commission 2014

- In the 2011 Census the District had a black and minority ethnic population of 9.5%, although 14.7% of residents described themselves as being from a non-white UK population². This compares to 5.7% and 9.3% for Essex as a whole.
- The mean age of residents was 41 years, the same as Essex as a whole
- 15.7% of the resident population have a long-term illness or disability compared to 17.1 for Essex as whole.
- 75.6% of women (aged 16-64) were in employment, compared to 75.9% for Essex as a whole (2019/20)
- 86.0% of men (aged 16-64) were in employment, compared to 81.7% for Essex as a whole (2019/20)
- 76.6% of people (aged 16-64) who are 'White' were in employment, compared to 75.9% for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)
- 82.5% of people (aged 16-64) from 'All Ethnicity Minority Groups' were in employment, compared to 79.6% for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)³
- 46.4% of people over 50 were in employment, compared to 40.8 % for Essex as a whole (2020 Q4)

The inequalities that result from socio-economic issues are covered by Section 1 of the Equality Act. While this section is not currently in force, it is important to consider socio-economic inequality because some people facing these issues also face inequality because of their protected characteristics. Others may not experience inequality because of protected characteristics but can feel excluded because they have a low income, are socially isolated, live in poor housing or experience poor health.

While we are working with our NHS partners to address the health inequalities associated with socio-economic deprivation, we need to better understand the relationship between this and protected characteristics under the Equality Act. Deprivation is a broad concept that refers to unmet need caused by a lack of resources and opportunities of all kinds, not just financial. It can be understood through issues such as poor housing, homelessness, low educational attainment, lack of employment, worklessness, poor health and high levels of morbidity.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) attempts to measure deprivation at small area or neighbourhood level (average 1,500 residents) and provide a picture of relative deprivation. The IMD is produced by comparing each small area (Lower Super Output Area) against all the others based on a basket of indicators within weighted domains: Income (22.5%) including subsets for children and older people; Employment (22.5%); Education (13.5%); Health & Disability (13.5); Crime (9.3%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); Living Environment. (9.3%). Scores are calculated for each small area and areas are ranked against each other from 1 (most deprived) to 32,844 (least deprived). An overall rank is then calculated for each local authority. For district councils, as lower tier authorities, this is between 1 and 317, with one being the most deprived.

The District has an IMD rank of 200. This positions the Council in the upper 40% of least deprived Lower Tier Local Authorities (LTLAs) nationally. Within Essex, EFDC is ranked 5th out of 12 district and borough councils for deprivation. It has the highest rank/ least deprivation relating to Health & Disability (266) and the lowest rank/ most deprivation relating to Crime (63). Between 2015 and 2019 deprivation relating to children improved while deprivation affecting older people worsened. The biggest negative change in this period was

² This is the population who do not describe themselves as being white English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British

³ Employment data is aggregated for ethnic groups other than 'White'

in the Living Environment domain (176) which measures the quality of housing, air quality and road traffic accidents.

The table below lists the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in the District and their wards. Loughton Alderton has the only neighbourhood that falls into the two most deprived deciles (1&2) nationally. There are 75 neighbourhoods or small areas in Essex in deciles 1&2

Table 1: 10 Most Deprived LSOAs					
LSOA Code	LSOA Name	Ward Name	IMD Score	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
E01021771	Epping Forest 013A	Loughton Alderton	36.978	5,221	2
E01021816	Epping Forest 007E	Waltham Abbey Paternoster	33.151	6,610	3
E01021806	Epping Forest 009A	Waltham Abbey High Beach	28.681	8,666	3
E01021800	Epping Forest 003C	Passingford	27.203	9,468	3
E01021811	Epping Forest 007A	Waltham Abbey North East	26.996	9,594	3
E01021764	Epping Forest 017A	Grange Hill	26.987	9,597	3
E01021776	Epping Forest 011C	Loughton Broadway	25.623	10,408	4
E01021812	Epping Forest 009B	Waltham Abbey North East	25.406	10,509	4
E01021775	Epping Forest 011B	Loughton Broadway	25.264	10,606	4
E01021774	Epping Forest 011A	Loughton Broadway	24.593	11,012	4

Ward profiles

Grange Hill has the largest population (7,321) representing 5.56% of the total population of the District. Grange Hill has the highest number of Asian / Asian British and Black / African / Caribbean /Black British residents. It has largest number of people who cannot speak English well, or at all, and the highest number of households with dependent children.

Waltham Abbey High Beach has the highest percentage of residents with no qualifications (38.73%) compared to 24.00% for the District as a whole and the lowest number of households with dependent children.

Waltham Abbey Paternoster has the lowest life expectancy at birth for males and females and the highest percentage of people whose daily activities are limited by a long-term illness or disability. Waltham Abbey South West has the highest number of households in social renting other than Council housing.

Loughton Broadway has the highest number of households renting from the Council. It has the highest proportion of overcrowded households, the highest proportion of older people living in poverty, the highest number of pensioners living alone, the second highest percentage of people in very bad health and the third highest percentage of residents whose daily activities are limited by a long term illness or disability.

Shelley has the highest percentage of residents claiming unemployment related benefit (May 2021). It also has the highest proportion of residents aged 15 and under.

Chipping Ongar, Greensted and Marden Ash have the highest number of people aged 65 and over.

1.2. Our Approach to Equality

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to be pro-active in addressing equality and we have many examples of our work to promote and embed equality. This section describes some of our achievements, which we have built on to set our Equality Objectives.

2020/21 were unprecedented times. Covid-19 highlighted the effect of disparities such as age and race on health risks and outcomes and the need to reduce health inequalities. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic we worked with our communities through the Faith and Communities Tactical Co-ordination Group. Underpinned by a collaborative mindset and a desire to achieve collective impact, the Group brought together faith and community leaders to work with public services in a way that hadn't been seen before. Key activities included providing guidance on places of worship, ceremonies and marking key religious, cultural and community events; coronavirus advice for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups and providing advice to employment sectors. Working groups were established to support the mental health and wellbeing of the LGBTQ+ community and for people with dementia. Covid-19 had tragic consequences for many people with dementia in 2020 and a new Dementia and Faith Working Group has been established. This is more reflective of multiculturalism and is now taking forward work on dementia with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Groups.

During the pandemic, the Epping Forest District Museum focussed on developing digital opportunities for the community to engage with its collections in an accessible and interactive way. The Museum continues to focus on how it can represent the whole community and provide meaningful experiences for everyone. To mark its reopening in 2021, the Loughton Boys Holocaust Survivors exhibition told the story of survivors sent to Holmehurst Hostel in Loughton and the staff that supported them.

Our People Strategy sets out how we are working towards becoming a more inclusive employer, promoting the Council as a great place to work, attracting and retaining talent, creating an inclusive, respectful culture where people feel recognised and valued. We have made it easier for a wider range of people to apply for roles, implemented essential inclusivity training for all managers and an e-learning programme on diversity and inclusion. We aim to achieve Disability Confident Level 2 status as an organisation and work in partnership with the Shaw Trust - a charity that helps people with disabilities and those who feel excluded to find the right career path.

We have made a made a commitment to flexible working and research suggests that this has a positive effect on diversity and perceptions of workplace inclusion. It also suggests that creating an environment where people can work in a more varied way is a worthwhile inclusion and diversity initiative⁴. According to national statistics, although more men worked from home before the pandemic, the number of women working from home during the pandemic increased to 48% compared to 46% of men (ONS 2020). Research also found that 64% of people said that the female partner was working almost exclusively from home

⁴ Center for Evidence-Based Management (2021) Flexible working, teleworking and diversity: an evidence review, scientific summary. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

during lockdown compared to 52% of men (UK Working from Home During COVID-19 Lockdown Study).

While Covid-19 brought challenges in terms of additional childcare and home-schooling responsibilities, it is hoped that flexible working and reforms such as the four-day week will reduce labour market inequalities and the gender pay gap. Flexible working also supports people with fluctuating health conditions to stay in work and enables carers to balance work and caring responsibilities. We will seek, therefore, to understand and monitor the impact of flexible working on our workforce.

We are committed to tackling prejudice and hate crime and building community cohesion. The Strategic Hate Crime Prevention Partnership (SHCPP) brings organisations across Essex together to develop a consistent, multi-agency response to hate crime focussed on the following themes: understanding hate crime; preventing hate crime; increasing the reporting of hate crime; increasing access to support for victims; improving the operational response to hate crimes. In-line with the objectives in this Policy we will work with the Partnership to better understand hate crime, including fluctuations in reporting over time and cyclical patterns in performance. We will also work to understand the socio-economic factors that impact on crime including labour market issues such as wages and skills and their relationship to protected characteristics.

Although Covid-19 created physical barriers, we inspired people to connect in new ways and feel part of a community. This included work to address digital exclusion with the WECAN (West Essex Community Action Network) partnership. Digital exclusion applies to people who lack access to the internet or to a device, or who lack the skills, ability, confidence or motivation to use it⁵. Working with Digital Unite, we developed a programme of digital skills learning to support residents and help them engage with the digital world. The programme included a range of guidance on computer basics, document creation, email and internet telephone, social networking and blogs, government services internet security. We also worked with Unite in Kind who aim to create an online community of kindness to help people connect with friends, neighbours and strangers and overcome feelings of isolation. Our Older People's Team and Digital Buddies also provided a support line and access to a briefing scheme for residents in sheltered accommodation.

Our Digital Strategy will ensure that we understand the relationship between digital exclusion, deprivation and protected characteristics under the Equality Act. To help understand inequalities in internet usage the Economic and Social Research Council/ Consumer Data Research Centre have developed an Internet User Classification tool that segments populations into categories based on how they interact with the internet (Appendix A). The majority of our 10 most deprived small areas/ LSOAs (Table 1, page 3) fall into the category 'Passive and Uncommitted Users'. This group has limited or no interaction with the internet and is characterised by higher levels of employment in semi-skilled and blue-collar occupations.

Waltham Abbey Paternoster has an area where residents are characterised as 'E-Withdrawn'. Here we find the least engagement with the internet in terms of information seeking, access to financial services and the lowest rate of online access via a mobile device. E-Withdrawn neighbourhoods are characterised by high rates of unemployment and high use of social housing. Passingford has an area that falls into the category 'E-Rational Utilitarians'. This group is located in mainly rural/semi-rural areas with a higher than average retired population often constrained by poor infrastructure.

⁵ Preventing Digital Exclusion from Online Justice' (April 2018) <https://justice.org.uk/new-justice-report-on-preventing-digital-exclusion>

Table 2: Internet User Classification		
LSOA Code	Ward Name	Category
E01021771	Loughton Alderton	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021816	Waltham Abbey Paternoster	'E-Withdrawn'
E01021806	Waltham Abbey High Beach	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021800	Passingford	'E-Rational Utilitarians'
E01021811	Waltham Abbey North East	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021764	Grange Hill	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021776	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021812	Waltham Abbey North East	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021775	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.
E01021774	Loughton Broadway	'Passive and Uncommitted Users'.

Inequalities in education, confidence, resources, responsibilities (work and caring), language barriers and disabilities may prevent people from participating fully in local democracy. We are reviewing our approach to community engagement and consultation, considering those groups who we engage well with and those whose needs we don't understand well enough and who may lack a voice. Positive outcomes from community engagement include service and project delivery that better responds to communities' needs and the use of local knowledge and skills to improve community experience. Evidence suggests that a 'one size fits all' approach to community engagement and consultation is not effective and that a hybrid approach drawing on participatory research methods and co-design is likely to be successful⁶

1.3. Equality Legislation

The General Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty was created by the Equality Act to harmonise the previous race, disability and gender equality duties and extend protection to newly protected characteristics under the Act. It replaced these duties and came into force on 5 April 2011. The Duty covers age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Under the Duty public authorities must have due regard to the following 3 aims:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

⁶ See for example 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement (2017), What Works Scotland.

- to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Due Regard

Due regard to equality means that these 3 aims must be considered and reflected on during:

- the decision-making process
- the design of policies (including internal policies), and
- the delivery of services.

The duty to have due regard is not a duty to achieve a particular result, although policies and practices must be kept under review.

Advance Equality

This is defined as the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic where these are different from the needs of people who do not share it
- encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low

Foster good relations

This is defined as the need to:

- tackle prejudice, and
- promote understanding

Specific Duties

Specific duties are designed to help public authorities demonstrate how they are meeting the General Duty by preparing and publishing, in a manner that is reasonably accessible to the public:

- one or more “specific and measurable” Equality Objectives, at least every four years, to further any of the aims of the General Duty
- information relating to their employees and others affected by their policies and practices. This includes information to check whether any group protected under the Equality Act is being disadvantaged by their employment policies and to report their gender pay gap.

It is not specified how public authorities should measure the effect of their policies and practices on equality. It is up to each organisation to choose the most effective approach to analysis. The Equality and Human Rights commission recommend that a recognised approach to setting effective objectives is used e.g., S.M.A.R.T. It also recommends that

qualitative evidence is used to measure the experience of people with protected characteristics as well as quantitative information about service outcomes⁷.

Equality Impact Assessments

The Equality Act 2010 does not specifically require EIAs to be carried out, although they are recommended to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. It should also be noted that the legislation refers to 'equality analysis' rather than 'equality impact assessment'. This is intended to focus attention on the quality of analysis and how it is used in decision-making rather than the impact assessment document.

1.4. Our Commitments

While equality is integral to our work, embedding it is a continuous process. In our 2020 Equalities Statement we made the following commitments to equality:

- In 2021 we will review our Equality Objectives and produce a new Equality Policy
- Our Equality Objectives will be supported by a framework for measuring performance and evaluating the effectiveness of our work on equality.
- Each Service Plan will describe how it is working to improve equality and will report on the delivery of equality.
- We will review our Equalities Impact Assessment to focus more on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes. This supports our commitment to ensure that these are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage to any protected groups from participation.
- We will engage and learn from our communities about the challenges they face and ensure that policy development, innovation and growth are inclusive and put people on an equal footing.
- We will continue to promote the District as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued.

1.5. Equality Objectives

Our previous Equality Objectives were to integrate the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty into our partnership work; to apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management; to develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans; to improve and develop equality in our business activities. While these activities remain important, they are now embedded in our everyday work and addressed in our Service Plans. In-line with the principle of continuous improvement that underpins this Policy our prior Equality Objectives will be monitored as they become embedded into business as usual.

⁷ Objectives and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities England (and non-devolved public authorities in Scotland and Wales), Equality and Human Rights Commission 2014

Our Equality Objectives (2021-2025) build on our commitment to delivering excellence in equality. They focus on what we will do to advance equality and how we will do it.

- **Equality Objective 1:** To develop, and deliver in partnership, a District-level approach to growth and recovery that builds, and can demonstrate, an Epping Forest that works for all.
- **Equality Objective 2:** To drive improvement in service delivery through the use of equality data and data on socio-economic deprivation.
- **Equality Objective 3:** To develop a research and consultation strategy to understand the needs and experiences of our communities with a clear pathway or process to embed their knowledge and experience into service design, development and delivery.
- **Equality Objective 4:** To understand, and evidence, the impact of our workforce initiatives on improving equality.

These Equality Objectives will enable EFDC to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and socio-economic deprivation.
- Embed this understanding into policy and practice, particularly in relation to growth and recovery.
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership and a clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality and inclusion.
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to people's experiences and the challenges they face in a digital world.
- Provide better evidence of the impact of our workforce initiatives

To support our commitment to continuous improvement and a whole council approach to equality we will adopt the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). We will also identify Officer and Elected Member leads to make the links between this Policy and other policies and strategies e.g., The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, national strategies and Service Plan objectives.

1.6. National Developments

As well as delivering excellence, our Equality Objectives will help EFDC respond to new developments built on equality legislation and policy. The government has published the Race Disparity Audit and is currently developing an approach to mandatory ethnicity pay reporting. The new National Disability Strategy is wide ranging with a focus on improving access in work, education, healthcare, housing, transport, leisure and access to goods and services and local authorities have a key role in delivering sustainable improvements for disabled people. A consultation on disability workforce reporting will be launched at the end of 2021, after which the government will publish next steps.

1.7. Actions

To deliver the Equality Policy the following actions will be undertaken

- 2021 - Establish the foundation to deliver our Equality Objectives, building on our

- current commitments.
- 2021 - Collect baseline measures to inform and set targets, integrate existing Equality Impact Assessments into Corporate Equality Impact Assessment Framework.
 - 2021 – Develop Equality Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
 - 2021 - Review Equalities Impact Assessment to focus on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes.
 - 2022 - Ensure higher standards being met in all areas. Address challenges.
 - 2023 - Model good practice across the organisation. Self-assessment against EFLG
 - 2024/5 - Review Equality Objectives, produce new Equality Policy

1.8. Conclusion, Monitoring and Evaluation

This Policy reinforces our commitment and responsibility to our communities and our workforce. While the focus on equality in our Service Plans embeds equality as part of the normal business planning process, we recognise the need to continuously improve and build on our past achievements to ensure excellent equality practice.

To ensure that service and policy work is aligned with the Equality Objectives in this Policy existing and future Equality Impact Assessments will be combined into an overarching, cumulative, ongoing Corporate Equality Impact Assessment. This will provide baseline measures to determine the impact of our work on all protected characteristics under the Equality Act and enable progress to be measured against baseline. A Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will be developed to support this and progress against Plan deliverables reported on a quarterly basis as part of our corporate governance arrangements. We will continue to report on progress towards meeting our Equality Objectives in our annual Equalities Statement, where we also publish our workforce statistics and gender pay gap data.

(Sources: Office for National Statistics: Population Projections Estimate 2018, Census 2011; Labour Force Survey; Annual Population Survey; Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics; Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK, Statistical Bulletin (2020); Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown: Changing preferences and the future of work (2020), University of Kent; Rural-Urban Classification of Local Authority Districts (2011) Defra; English indices of deprivation (2019) Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government; Local Health Data, Public Health England)

Appendix A. ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre: Internet User Classification

e-Cultural Creators - High levels of internet engagement particularly in relation to social networks, communication, streaming and gaming but relatively low levels of online shopping, apart from groceries.

e-Professionals - High levels of internet engagement, located in urban areas aged between 25 and 34. They are experienced users and engage with the internet daily and in a variety of settings.

e-Veterans - Affluent families usually located in low-density suburbs with populations of mainly middle-aged and highly qualified professionals. Higher levels of engagement with information seeking, online services and shopping, less engagement with social networks or gaming.

Youthful Urban Fringe - Live at the edge of city centres and in deprived inner-city areas, young, ethnically diverse comprised of large student and informal households, access via mobile devices. High levels of internet engagement including high levels of social media usage.

e-Rational Utilitarians - Mainly located in mainly rural/semi-rural areas with a higher than average retired population often constrained by poor infrastructure. Undertake online shopping with the internet used as a utility rather than a conduit for entertainment.

e-Mainstream – Live in heterogeneous neighbourhoods at the periphery of urban areas or in transitional neighbourhoods. Have typical user characteristics.

Passive and Uncommitted Users - Limited or no interaction with the Internet. Tend to reside outside city centres and close to the suburbs or in semi-rural areas. Higher levels of employment in semi-skilled and blue-collar occupations.

Digital Seniors -Typically White British, retired and relatively affluent. Average use of the internet, typically using a personal computer at home. Despite being infrequent users, they are adept enough to use the internet for information seeking, financial services and online shopping.

Settled Offline Communities - Elderly, White British living in semi-rural areas. Limited engagement with the internet, may have only rare access or no access at all.

E-Withdrawn - Least engagement with the internet in terms of information seeking, access to financial services and the lowest rate of online access via a mobile device. High rates of unemployment and high use of social housing.

Source: Alexiou, A. and Singleton, A. (2018). ESRC Consumer Data Research Centre; Contains National Statistics data Crown copyright and database right (2017); Ofcom data (2016). CDRC data from Data Partners (2017)

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SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14th September 2021

**Portfolio: Finance, Qualis & Economic Development –
Cllr J. Philip**

Subject: Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report – Q3 2020/21

Officer contact for further information: Andrew Small

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To discuss this report and to make any comments or identify any actions the Committee would like the Qualis Portfolio Holder to consider.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Governance framework for Qualis, as agreed by Cabinet in February 2020, included the requirement that Qualis should report to Epping Forest District Council on its performance Quarterly.
- 1.2. This report presents the third Quarter's monitoring report for the Qualis trading year 2020/21 and covers the period from 1 October 2020 to 30 June 2021. Because of the fall of meeting dates this report will be considered by Stronger Council Select Committee one day after Cabinet considered the same paper. Comments made by the Select Committee will therefore be relayed directly to the Portfolio Holder.
- 1.3. Attached to this report as Appendix A is the Qualis Board monitoring report for Quarter 3, as has been presented to the Qualis Board.
- 1.4. Performance is measured against the business plan targets for 2020/21. The Board report highlights performance against these using the recognised Red, Amber, Green reporting system (RAG).
- 1.5. **Noting the objectives flagged as Amber or Red and the explanations provided, Qualis has again performed in line with expectations during the third Quarter.**

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Qualis Shareholder agreement, as agreed by Cabinet on February 2020 includes the following paragraph,

'The Company shall procure that quarterly management accounts and reports (including a balance sheet, profit and loss account and cash flow statement) containing such information as EFDC may reasonably require are provided to EFDC and EFDC's Representative.'

- 2.2. The Cabinet resolution also requires that the Council's S151, as the key conduit between Qualis and the Council, provides a commentary to the Council on the performance of Qualis at each Quarter review.
- 2.3. In compliance with this requirement Qualis has provided the Council with the Quarters' Management Accounts for the Council's consideration together with the commentary below from the Council's S151 officer.

3. Commentary on the Trading Performance

- 3.1. The Qualis first year was financially dominated by outgoings associated with its creation and set-up. The second year, however, shows a balance of income and expenditure with a small forecast profit targeted within the single year Business Plan presented to Council in December 2020. So, this year's monitoring is more typical of a trading company, recognising that revenue earnings will still gradually be built up over time.
- 3.2. The Qualis report attached at Appendix A meets the requirements placed upon Qualis within the Shareholder agreement. The Board report presents the Balance Sheets, P&Ls and a Cash Flow explanation. It also RAG rates key quarterly deliverables against the Business Plan.
- 3.3. **Cabinet should note that majority of the deliverables for Quarter 3 are flagged as Green with the exceptions highlighted below.**
- 3.4. **Income and Expenditure (Increased to Red)** – The Board report includes cumulative losses up to the end of the 3rd quarter of £1,106,614 (analysed in the table in 3.7) compared to a business plan expectation of a profit of £366,381. This is deterioration on the last quarter where the in-year losses stood at £473,551. However, the reason given is consistent and accepted and is largely associated with accrued expenditure on development sites which Qualis is unable to charge to its Balance Sheet as 'Work in Progress' until planning consent is given. Once Planning consent is awarded, this cost will be removed from the Profit and Loss account. Achievement of Planning consent has taken longer than originally anticipated but now has a scheduled date set for the combined applications to be considered by the District Development Committee in September, having slipped back from July. Should Planning consent not be obtained this cost will remain a charge in the Profit and Loss account until permission is resolved. The delayed acquisition of the third commercial property also contributes to the combined loss and this is discussed further below. These two issues mask the continued improvement in Qualis Management revenues associated with the Housing Maintenance contract.
- 3.5. **Qualis Living (Flagged as Amber)** - The cash balance remains high as whilst Qualis has now secured the final (£10 million) commercial property investment from the balance of the £30 million funding loaned to Qualis in September 2020, the transaction was not completed until Quarter 4. The delay in securing the third commercial property is the reason that this is KPI is flagged as Amber.
- 3.6. The Board report (Appendix A, section 7.5) provides a useful analysis of how last year's £30 million commercial acquisition loan made to Qualis has been utilised.
- 3.7. The table below sets out the actual net income and expenditure against that expected for each of the Qualis companies.

Qualis Company	Expected £	Actual £	Variance £	Last Report £
Group	41,866	41,002	-864	28,272
Commercial	29,105	-1,127,364	-1,156,469	-745,770
Management	45,042	307,362	262,320	106,272
Living	250,268	-327,614	-577,882	137,675
Total	366,281	-1,106,614	-1,472,895	-473,551

- 3.8. The Balance Sheet position, showing Fixed Assets and accumulated net worth of Qualis, is set out in the table below. Fixed Assets are individually identified as the Council charges these for security purposes against the loans provided. The Net Worth position reflects the accumulation and carry forward of set-up costs to be offset by future planned profits.

Qualis Company	Fixed Assets £	Net Worth (Q3) £	Last Report £
Group	48,758	57,382	44,652
Commercial	-	-2,099,101	-1,717,507
Management	69,353	-45,528	-246,681
Living	20,793,122	-510,530	-56,241
Total	20,911,233	-2,597,777	-1,964,777

- 3.9. Delivery of the £238,039 surplus contained in the single year Business Plan will largely depend upon successfully obtaining planning consent for the Epping regeneration sites. In all other respects the Qualis Business Plan objectives are being met and showing good performance against the individual targets set out in the Qualis Board report including progress on bringing forward the redevelopment sites in the District.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1. The Epping Forest District Council 2021/22 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan approved in February 2021 included assumptions on the returns and income generated from Qualis.
- 4.2. The assumptions associated with the lending to Qualis are as follows;

Loan Purpose	Amount and Term	Interest Payments Per Annum £
Working Capital Loan	£6 million for 5 years	£228,000
Asset Purchase	£30 million 10 years	£1,200,000
Construction Loan	£16 million	£560,000
EFDC Asset Purchase	£16.8 million 30 years	£829,056
Less EFDC Borrowing Costs		-£728,000
Net Receipts		£2,089,056

- 4.3. It was expected that the Asset Purchase loan would be completed by 1st April 2021, but is still yet to complete, (although it is expected it is now imminent), due to delays associated with the legal documentation and title. These delays will reduce the lending margin earned by the Council in 2021/22, but it is expected that some of this will be recouped through earlier advances of the construction loan than the budget assumed.

5. Legal and Governance Implications

- 5.1. None contained within this report.

6. Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications

6.1. None.

7. Consultation Undertaken

7.1. None

Background Papers

Group Company Governance Document – Cabinet 6 February 2020



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

Finance and Performance Monitoring Quarterly Report

Year 2, Quarter 3, (1st April 2021 – 30th June 2021)

Subject: Finance and Performance Monitoring

Author: Nick Dawe, Finance Director (finance)
Paul Hewitt, Operations Director (performance)
Sacha Jevans, Managing Director (summary)

Decisions Required: To approve the report and note the actions.

1. To note the figures and performance highlighted in this report that are to plan or will be on plan by the end of the financial year.
2. To support the key actions detailed in Section 8 or this report.
3. To agree that this report should be passed to Epping Forest District Council in line with the shareholder agreement (with any agreed amendments).



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The Qualis Group Board regularly receives updates on financial and operational issues at its monthly Board Meetings.
- 1.2 In line with the shareholder agreement, the Qualis Group Board receives a quarterly Finance and Performance Report that tracks the success of the Group against the shareholder (EFDC) agreed Annual Business Plan and Annual Budget.
- 1.3 This formal monitoring will include any Board and subsequently shareholder approved amendments to the Business Plan and Annual Budget.
- 1.4 The quarterly Qualis Finance and Performance Report will be passed to EFDC to allow scrutiny and to be noted.

2. Monitoring finance and operational performance indicators

2.1 The key performance indicators set out below are those proposed to be used for monitoring purposes in the future. They are top level indicators of the financial health and operation delivery of the Qualis group of companies.

2.2 In line with standard practice, the following colour coded performance flags are used:

Colour	Overall Performance	Detailed Measure
	Cyan, exceptional performance	For finance; over twice the expected figure, for operations, over one month ahead of target delivery.
	Green, good performance	For finance; positive performance up to twice the expected figure, for operations, up to one month ahead of target delivery.
	Amber, poor performance but will be remedied next quarter	For finance; negative performance variance of between 5% and 10% of the expected figure, for operations, one and three months behind target delivery.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

	Red, poor performance but will be remedied in two further quarters	For finance; negative performance variance of between 5% and 10% of the expected figure, for operations, one and three months behind target delivery.
	Black, poor performance requiring immediate board level intervention	For finance; negative performance variance in excess of 10% of the expected figure, for operations, over three months behind target delivery.

3. Key performance indicators

Finance KPI	Measure	Target £	Actual £	
Cash	Cash held by Qualis Group of companies, target versus actual	13,534,060	13,743,663	=
Income and Expenditure	Total income and expenditure position of Qualis Group of companies, target versus actual	366,281	- 1,106,614	-
Balance Sheet	Net balance sheet worth of Qualis Group of companies, target versus actual		- 2,597,777	=

The overall financial position is satisfactory. The continued deterioration in the overall income and expenditure position reflects the fact that until planning permission is gained for the initial batch of sites, expenditure is shown as a charge to income and expenditure rather than as work in progress in the balance sheet.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

Operational KPI	Target	Actual	
Qualis Commercial , submission of Epping sites for planning	2 to be submitted by December 2020, remaining 3 by end of March 2021	Submitted to timescale	+
Qualis Commercial , consideration of full business case by Qualis Board for Roundhills	Re-set for April		+
Qualis Commercial , consideration of full business case by Qualis Board for Pyrles Lane	Re-set for May	In train	
Qualis Living , secure start portfolio position	Third asset from £30m loan to be secured by December 2020	Third asset not yet secured but balance for portfolio and long-term income guarantee	-
Qualis Management , deliver phase 1 Business Plan targets	To be achieved by end of May 2021	Achieved by the end of January 2021	+
Qualis Group	Secure external asset loan by end of May 2021	In train	

4. Budget and business plan amendments this quarter

4.1 There have been no agreed amendments to the budget in respect of an increase in the quantum of income and cost this quarter requiring approval by the Qualis Board.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

5. Detailed financial performance, cash

5.1 The actual cash held by Qualis at the end of June was £13,743,663 against a target expectation of £13,534,060. The difference is both positive and small and reflects operational creditor and debtor management issues.

5.2 Significant cash-flow movements over and above normal trading activity are expected in the next quarter, these being:

- Outflow of £9.5m for the purchase of the third out of district investment asset.
- £1.3m payment from EFDC for costs incurred in initial design and scoping of proposed new Leisure Centre in Epping.

5.2 Other major cash-flow agreements are expected to be made in September but will have no impact until the new financial year (of Qualis) and these are:

- The final detailed loan agreement with EFDC, in respect of the already approved construction loan of £65m for the initial development projects.
- The final detailed loan agreement with EFDC, in respect of the already approved second phase regeneration loan of £35m.
- Further progress on raising £5m from commercial lenders for out of district asset investments.

6 Detailed financial performance, balance sheets

6.1 Reflecting the leveraged position of Qualis and the fact that income earning assets have yet to be purchased and the Housing Maintenance Service has yet to transfer. Please note that these are the interim balance sheets pending a review of the income and expenditure position and the finalisation of loans.

6.2 It should be noted that the costs of development projects are by convention treated as “work in progress, i.e., an asset.

6.3 All loans pass through Qualis Group and therefore any uncalled balance remains shown at group level even if the destination of the loan is eventually another company on the Qualis group of companies.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

6.4 Qualis Group

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		48,758	
Current Assets		41,877,119	
Current Liabilities		618,495	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			41,258,624
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			41,250,000
Total			57,382
Profit and Loss Reserve			16,380
Profit and Loss Account			41,002
			57,382

6.5 Qualis Commercial

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		-	
Current Assets		4,316,156	
Current Liabilities		- 2,099,101	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 2,099,101
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			-
Total			- 2,099,101
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 971,737
Profit and Loss Account			- 1,127,364
			- 2,099,101



Qualis Group

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6.6 Qualis Management

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		69,353	
Current Assets		2,692,799	
Current Liabilities		2,807,680	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 45,528
Long Term Assets			-
Long Term Liabilities			
Total			- 45,528
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 352,953
Profit and Loss Account			307,425
			- 45,528

6.7 Qualis Living

		Actual £	Actual £
Assets		20,793,122	
Current Assets		9,128,541	
Current Liabilities		30,432,193	
Current Assets Less Current Liabilities			- 510,530
Long Term Assets			
Long Term Liabilities			-
Total			- 510,530
Profit and Loss Reserve			- 182,916
Profit and Loss Account			- 327,614
			- 510,530

There are no specific issues to raise in respect of the balance sheets.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

7 Detailed financial performance, income and expenditure.

7.1 The income and expenditure summary for the individual companies that form the Qualis Group of companies is summarised below. Noting that the figures are cumulative to the end of Quarter 3.

7.2 Qualis Group

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	1,349,519	1,196,139	- 153,380
Expenditure	1,307,653	1,155,136	- 152,516
Net +Profit / -Loss	41,866	41,002	- 864
Tax Liability		-	-
	41,866	41,002	- 864

There are no issues to raise and at year-end the income and expenditure position should deliver the expected profit of £41,896.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

7.3 Qualis Commercial

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	999,267	-	- 999,267
Expenditure	970,162	1,011,636	41,473
Net +Profit / -Loss	29,105	- 1,011,636	- 1,040,741
Loan Interest	-	115,729	115,729
Profit After Loan	29,105	- 1,127,364	- 1,156,469

Operational costs incurred in delivering projects the costs that cannot be treated as “work in progress” until planning is gained. At this point, and if the planning submission is successful these costs will be transferred to work in progress and be treated as project costs. The position is unchanged as planning determination is not expected now until September 2021, (previously July).

7.4 Qualis Management

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income	2,648,892	4,983,763	2,334,871
Expenditure	2,603,850	4,676,401	2,072,551
Net +Profit / -Loss	45,042	307,362	262,320

The service continues to operate at a profit in excess of target. This position is expected to decline slightly in quarter 4.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

Recent work carried out on an open book basis with EFDC has shown that the volume and cost of maintenance and void jobs is in-line with previous years and that the major concern to the HRA, is it is yet to see the anticipated reduction in overhead charges from within EFDC.

A further extension of services as planned is in active discussion with EFDC as per the original business case.

7.5 Qualis Living

	Target Cumulative YTD £	Cumulative Actual £	Variance £
Income, (less hand-through)	1,481,667	955,235	- 526,431
Expenditure	381,399	382,849	1,451
Net +Profit / -Loss	1,100,268	572,386	- 527,882
Loan Interest	850,000	900,000	50,000
Profit after Loan	250,268	- 327,614	- 577,882

Understandable delay in selecting a third asset has meant that a loss is recorded this quarter, however as the third asset has now been purchased performance should improve throughout quarter 4.

For information the cash impact of purchasing the first three investment assets is tabled overleaf.



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

Property		Leatherhead	
Supplier Name		Detail of Work	Sum of Debit
<input type="checkbox"/> Aquilla		Insurance	5,778.94
<input type="checkbox"/> Colliers International		Valuation Report	7,500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Jones Hargreaves		Site Inspection & Survey	11,190.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Montagu Evans		Reporting	116,195.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinsent Masons		Asset Payment	12,957,656.50
		Professional Fees	40,720.32
		SDLT	672,880.00
		Land Registry Fee	455.00
		Title Insurance Premium	22,400.00
Grand Total			13,834,775.76
Property		Maldon	
Supplier Name		Detail of Work	Sum of Debit
<input type="checkbox"/> Aquilla		Insurance	4,502.03
<input type="checkbox"/> Asset Payment		Asset Payment	1,252.05
<input type="checkbox"/> Jones Hargreaves		Site Inspection & Survey	3,580.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Knight Frank		Valuation Report	5,500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Montagu Evans		Reporting	59,000.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Pinsent Masons		Insurance	703.18
		Land Registry Fees	455.00
		Professional Fees	14,826.40
		SDLT	284,500.00
		Land Registry Fee	455.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Addleshaw Goddard		Asset Payment	5,874,427.12
Grand Total			6,249,200.78
Property		Coventry	
Supplier Name		Detail of Work	Sum of Debit
<input type="checkbox"/> Charles Russell Speechlys LLP		Asset Payment	9,000,000.00
		Land Registry Fees	455.00
		Professional Fees	22,005.06
		SDLT	439,500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> BNP		Professional Fees	8,150.00
Grand Total			9,470,110.06
Overall Cash Flow Impact			29,554,086.60



Qualis Group

Incorporating, Qualis Group, Qualis Living, Qualis Management, Qualis Commercial

8. Key Actions for completion in the next quarter

Action	Responsible Manager(s)	Target Date	Resource Implications Over Budget
Qualis Management Complete fine tuning of Housing Maintenance SLA and final confirmation of operational and financial KPIs.	BJ	March 2021	None
Qualis Commercial Complete asset purchases from EFDC for Phase 1 properties	CI	April 2021 (moved from March 2021)	None
Qualis Commercial Finalise remaining loans of £63m with EFDC as per the approved Business Plan.	ND	June 21, for remainder of loan as initial £6m was secured at the end of March 2021	None

9. Summary statement from the managing director

The Qualis group of companies continue to deliver its objectives and systems for reviewing financial and operational performance are in place. Qualis should achieve all its target by the end, (of the slightly shortened) financial year on the 30th September 2021.



SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14 September 2021

Portfolio: Leader of Council

Subject: Review of Elections 2021

Responsible Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the management and delivery of the Elections held on 6 May 2021 be reviewed;**
- (2) That any proposals of the Returning Officer for changes to the arrangements for the management and delivery of Elections in future years be considered;**
- (3) That appropriate recommendations be made to the Returning Officer for further changes to the future management and delivery of Elections; and**
- (4) That the impending review of the size of the Council and ward boundaries by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be noted.**

Report:

Introduction

1. This report reviews the planning processes and implementation of the following elections held on 6 May 2021:
 - (a) Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex;
 - (b) County Council;
 - (c) District Council;
 - (d) Parish & Town Councils.
2. In the opinion of the Returning Officer, the planning, management and delivery of all relevant processes for these elections was effective, especially given the circumstances under which these elections were held. The management and delivery of these elections have been reviewed by the Elections Planning Group – chaired by the Returning Officer – and any issues arising have been included within this report. Candidates and Agents involved in these elections have also been consulted and their responses are summarised within the report.
3. The Council has also recently received notification that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England intends to undertake a full review of the Council's size in terms of the number of Councillors and ward boundaries, which will culminate in all-out District

Council elections in May 2024. The Council is overdue a review as the last such exercise took place in 1998, and a briefing for Members will be held in the Autumn to provide further information.

Covid-19 Pandemic

4. Due to the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020, the elections due for the Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, 21 wards of the District Council and 14 of the District's Town and Parish Councils were postponed from their original date of May 2020. In time, the Government decided to hold these elections in May 2021, and they were combined with the elections already scheduled for this date for Essex County Council.

5. The United Kingdom was still under restrictions due to the pandemic, when these elections were held. This necessitated certain changes to the arrangements for operating Polling Stations, with 'one-way' systems being used for larger stations or a 'one-in-one-out' system for the smaller stations. Any pencils used by voters to mark ballot papers had to be sanitised after use and supplies of face masks and hand sanitiser had to be provided for each Polling Station. Screens were also procured to protect Polling Station staff.

6. The operation of the Count also had to be re-thought, as there was a requirement to ensure that the Count Staff were socially distanced from each other whilst counting. In addition, with four elections being held simultaneously, the Count could not be completed in one session. Therefore, the Council could not use its normal venue of Debden Park High School, and the use of an aircraft hangar at North Weald Airfield from Weald Aviation was secured.

District and Parish Elections

7. The Elections Planning Group met regularly from the autumn of 2020 to plan for the elections and to ensure that relevant processes were undertaken at the appropriate times. A project plan and risk register was prepared, reviewed and updated on a regular basis, which included the need to plan for and assess any risks relating to the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, all processes remained on track throughout the election period.

8. There were 21 seats on the Council up for election in May 2021, most of which were originally due for election in May 2020 but there were a small number of additional elections arising from Councillor resignations during the twelve-month waiting period. In addition, 14 of the District's Town and Parish Councils were also due for election in this year.

9. At Epping Forest, Elections are the successful collaboration of a number of teams that cross support each other during the peak in workload in the run up to elections. Aside from the Democratic Services Team, these ranged from the Corporate Communications Team right across the Council to Facilities Management, as well as all of the members of staff who make themselves available for duty in Polling Stations and at the Count Centre. This actually is not usual practice across the country – the Association of Electoral Administrators has raised concerns about this in previous Annual Reports – and is a credit to the Council and the many staff involved as well as the Managers who release their staff for elections duties.

Publicity

10. A national campaign was once again undertaken by the Electoral Commission to promote opportunities for online inclusion in the Electoral Register. To support and encourage registration and voting, the Corporate Communications Team undertook a sustained publicity campaign throughout the period of registration deadlines and during the run-up to the election.

11. In addition, BBC London attended one of the daytime Count Sessions to film a segment for their evening news bulletins, which was very well received. This included shots of the aircraft inside the Hangar at North Weald Airfield, where the Count was being held.

Pre-Election Period

12. The nomination process for the elections worked well and officers were once again able to undertake the informal checking of nomination forms before the deadline for the receipt of nominations, even if the system was slightly different this year due to the pandemic.

13. As in previous years, a briefing session was held for local election candidates and agents (including town and parish councils), following the deadline for the receipt of nominations. This Briefing was held on the evening of 12 April 2021 and informed those standing for election on the arrangements to be employed by the Returning Officer for the management of the election and count processes. However, this year the Briefing was held virtually on Zoom. The Briefing is still considered to be a useful exercise in preparation for the local elections each year, and the holding of the briefing on Zoom was well received.

14. Due to the Council no longer having its own Reprographics Section, all of the poll cards and ballot papers for the elections were printed by an external company – Sciprint Limited – who provided an excellent service given the tight timescales for the printing of the ballot papers.

15. The proofs for the ballot papers for each election were checked by the Team Manager for Democratic & Electoral Services, and a number of errors were found, but there simply was not the time to hand check all of the printed ballot paper books once they had been received. However, all of the books were supplied with ward names and ballot numbers printed on the cover of each book so that Presiding Officers could easily verify ward details when issuing ballot papers. Although usually each book of ballot papers is 'flicked through' to ensure it is correct, no errors in the issue of ballot papers were reported in any the polling stations.

16. In the run up to the election, the Returning Officer again received valuable assistance from Essex Police. One of the Council-funded Police Officers – Sgt Neil Ross – regularly attended meetings of the Elections Planning Group to discuss the policing of the elections and the security measures to be put in place for polling stations and the count centre, which ensured the integrity of the election process. There was a very visible presence by Essex Police throughout the period of the election and the Returning Officer has recorded their appreciation to Chief Inspector Basford and his officers for their support in maintaining the security of the election process and at the count, although no situations requiring the presence of uniformed officer presence occurred this year.

Postal Voting

17. Postal voting continues to be popular amongst registered electors across the District and a total of **12,174** postal vote packs for the local elections were issued on 21 April 2021. A low number of ballots were rejected by the Returning Officer at the scanning stage of the postal vote opening process and no evidence of fraudulent activity was identified. The returns for postal votes for each of the elections were as follows:

(a)	Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner	8,796	(72.3%)
(b)	Essex County Council	8,662	(71.2%)
(c)	District Council Wards	6,764	
(d)	Town / Parish Wards	3,721	

18. As not all of the District and Town/Parish wards were up for election, it would be misleading to give a percentage return rate of postal votes for these elections based on the 12,174 postal vote packs issued.

19. Although 100% of identifiers were checked as part of the scanning process, some technology issues arose during the postal vote opening sessions regarding the operation of

the scanning equipment. There were occasions when only one scanner was available, due to network issues in the Civic Offices.

Staffing

20. The Returning Officer encouraged all Council staff to consider participating in the election and Service Managers and Directors were very helpful in making officers available for these elections. Staff appointments for the elections were again facilitated through the use of an electronic system which enabled employment offers to be issued and accepted online. This approach worked well and the majority of the staff appointments were completed in March 2021.

21. Assumptions made about the level of staff required for the issue and opening of postal votes were proved correct, as these processes were completed efficiently and effectively by a large team of experienced staff. An appropriate level of staffing for polling stations and the count process was achieved and officers of the Democratic Services Section and other service areas provided essential support to the Electoral Services Section, by assisting with enquiries concerning registration and voting.

Polling Stations

22. The initial need to move the Polling Station at Murray Hall due to it being a vaccination centre was resolved. Following a meeting with the NHS Staff, and in particular Jenny Knight, the NHS confirmed that there would be no reduction in vaccinations because of the requirement for this venue as a Polling Station.

23. In the Spring, the Government had requested Returning Officers to avoid the use of schools as Polling Stations if possible. As a result of this, the following changes were made:

(a) the Polling Station at Whitebridge Junior School was moved to St Michaels and All Angels Church Hall; and

(b) the Polling Station at The Nursery Unit, Thomas Willingale Primary School was moved to the nearby Barrington Hall Community Centre.

(c) the Polling Station at Shelley County Primary School was moved to Ongar Youth Centre

24. Leverton Primary School was still used as the location was separate from the main school and fenced off. There was no viable alternative to using either Epping Upland Primary School so that location was retained.

25. On the day of the election, all polling stations opened on time and operated throughout voting hours (7.00am-10.00pm) without any significant difficulties being required to be resolved by the Returning Officer. The procedure developed for the handling of queues at the close of poll were not required to be invoked and turnout was at the level expected for local elections.

26. There was one issue reported for the Polling Station in Lindsey Street. Initially, the back door was not unlocked and voters waiting to vote had to stand outside as the staff were (rightly) only allowing a certain number of people in the station at any one time. Following a visit by the Returning Officer and one of the Deputy Returning Officers in the morning, a telephone call was put through to the owners of the Hall, and the back door was opened. This allowed a one-way system to be utilised for the rest of the day, which enabled more voters to wait inside rather than outside.

Verification and Count

27. Due to the requirement to retain social distancing, for both attendees and staff, as well

as the need for the Counts to continue over a number of days for all of the different elections, Debden Park High School could not be used as a count venue. Officers were able to secure the use of Hangar 6 at North Weald Airfield, which was being leased by Weald Aviation. The majority of the aircraft within the Hanger was cleared by the day of the Elections, which enabled staff to complete the setting up process during the day of the Elections, rather than in the evening.

28. The venue also necessitated additional arrangements to be made by Officers, which included the provision of:

- outside lighting for the verification on Thursday night,
- Portaloos for all three days,
- refreshments from the nearby Wings Café (also run by Weald Aviation),
- signage along the route from the Gatehouse to the Hangar for staff and attendees to follow,
- additional trade waste bins to be stationed at the Hangar for the whole weekend,
- security guards to patrol the perimeter of the hanger during the periods when counting was not taking place so that all of the ballot papers could remain in situ until the Count was completed, and
- additional heaters for the Hangar for the Thursday night.

29. In addition, staff on the Airfield provided valuable assistance to ensure that no attendees got lost on the way from the Gatehouse to the Hangar, and two members of staff worked overtime on the Thursday night to patrol the Airfield. Some of the casual staff employed at the Airfield for events also made themselves available to assist with the parking of cars outside the Hangar throughout the three days of the Count. The Returning Officer was grateful for the assistance of all who contributed during the three days of the Count.

30. With four separate elections occurring at once, some of the arrangements for the verification and counting of the ballot papers were prescribed by the Returning Officers for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and County Council elections. Consequently, only the full verification of all ballot papers was completed on election night.

31. The verification process itself was more complicated than in previous years, due to the number of different elections taking place simultaneously and did not get completed until 4.00am. There were a number of factors that contributed to this, the size of the venue, the amount of ballot papers involved, the size of some of the ballot papers, the distance of the count centre from the Polling Stations and the numerous times certain ballots papers had to be counted.

32. Staff returned at 9.00am on the Friday morning to begin the counts for the County Council election. This was completed at approximately 11.00am and, after a short break, the election counts for the District Council and Town/Parish Council wards were begun.

33. Staff again returned at 9.00am on the Saturday morning to begin the count for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Essex. This is a transferable vote election, with the count in two stages. After the first stage, the two candidates with the highest number of votes go forward to the second stage whereby the second 'preference' votes of the candidates who have been knocked out at the first stage also get counted if they are for either of the two second stage candidates. However, if one candidate gains more than 50% of the vote at the first stage then they are declared the winner and there is no need for a second stage. In the event, this is what actually happened, and staff were permitted to leave at approximately 12.30pm.

Post-Election Consultation

34, The Returning Officer has written to all candidates and agents for the local elections, to seek comments or observations with regard to the management and delivery of the elections for consideration by the Select Committee. Members were also invited to comment on the

management and delivery of the elections, through the Council Bulletin. Two responses have been received and they are outlined in the following paragraphs.

35. One of the participants stated that *“The admin office team were very helpful on providing guidance on the forms and identifying key dates. The paperwork issued by the team was in the correct order along with guidance, my only view on this can this be digital as an online version (just an idea linking in with sustainability and friendliness for the environment by eliminating paper use)? When I hand delivered my election papers to the admin team, I thought the staff were friendly and very approachable considering the constraints around covid.”*

36. The response of the Elections Team was as follows: *“We need to make sure that all candidates get the same paperwork and if things were available online, they might ignore bits of the pack. Many people don’t have printers so there would be difficulties in them printing off the paperwork ready for completion and signature so to treat everyone the same, we produce the paper packs. It also means that, hopefully, candidates will complete our forms rather than obtaining other styles.”*

37. The comments of another participant were as follows:

“(1) Pre May 6th

As a town council election candidate here in Loughton I found all the procedures running up to Election Day to be excellent, the paperwork, candidate briefing and dealing with any enquiries was excellent.

(2) Polling Day Itself

All my comments (apart from one) refer to my experience in the Loughton Roding Ward and it’s two polling stations (23 – The Oakwood Hill Community Centre and 24 – St Michael’s Church Hall).

- As the key holder for polling station 23 - I saw the staff in at 6.20 am and again at 10.15 pm for closing the hall . Everything appeared to run smoothly and I have received no feedback from the very small part of the Roding ward electorate that actually use this polling station (it is largely used by the electorate of one polling district of the Loughton Alderton ward).*
- Polling Station 24 was my main experience of polling day, as tellers were not encouraged, I remained at this polling station for all of the 15 hours of voting.*
- Due to government guidelines about keeping school’s open the normal polling station for AZ (White Bridge School) was not available and this meant a further possible 1,100 electors were allocated to this polling station St Michael’s Church Hall.*
- This resulted in an electorate of 3,200 being allocated for this single polling station on May 6th (St Michael’s usually has a potential electorate of 2,100).*
- For this very reason I was expecting enhanced staff and on the day actually found less staff than normal.*
- As a result in my opinion there were unacceptable queues for voting for 7 of the 15 hours the polling station was open.*
- Between approximately 9.20am – 11.20am the wait was 20 minutes, between about 2.15pm – 4.15pm 20-minute queues formed and between 5.30pm and 8.30 pm the queue was about 35 minutes in length.*

- *I feel that this was unacceptable, and I would estimate from what I saw on the day and the very negative feedback I have received since somewhere between 70 to 80 electors were deterred from voting.*
- *I feel that with some prior planning this situation could have been avoided as an adjacent hall remain unused all day.*
- *There was no staffing to inform the queue what was going on or to prioritise the needs of the more elderly etc who clearly would not have been able to wait (I took on this unofficial role a number of times , bringing those who were unable to wait in line to the front , fortunately the other queuing residents were very understanding).*
- *The polling staff did the best they could in difficult circumstances and did respond by bringing down an extra voting booth, which helped a little, without the situation would have been much worse.*
- *Asking around since May 6th this issue of long waits throughout the day does not appear to have been experienced elsewhere and certainly not for very nearly 47% of the hours of polling.*

(3) *The Count*

- *This was conducted with the customary efficiency.*
- *I feel more communication could have been given as regards what was actually happening on the tables during the count.*
- *I was closely observing a multi member count and to be honest I didn't have a clue about how they were being counted and /or sorted and which stage of the process had been reached.*
- *Information either on the day or before hand would have been very useful."*

38. The Elections Team responded to this as follows: *"Looking back at the paperwork which accompanied the count entry tickets, there was an information sheet produced for each "session" which gave details of exactly what was going to happen during each session. This included detailed information about how the Parish/Town Council counts would be conducted using the counting boards because of the multiple vacancy element to deal with. The use of counting boards isn't new - the only difference this year was that each member of the count team had to have a board to themselves because, due to COVID, they couldn't work as a pair which is the norm."*

Future Elections and Lessons Learnt

39. The Elections Planning Group have already begun to review the Elections that took place in May 2021, and any lessons learnt from the management and delivery of these elections will be used for the planning of the elections scheduled in May 2022. This will begin shortly. Some of the issues already identified by the Group are detailed in the following paragraphs.

40. In respect of the impact of Covid-19 on Polling Stations, the equipment and arrangements made for the Covid restrictions appeared to work well and were adapted over the day, if Polling Stations began to experience long queues. It was acknowledged that one candidate had contacted the offices a number of times throughout the election day but all attempts to improve the queue at this Polling Station had been made by the Presiding Officer, Returning Officer and Station Visitors taking additional equipment.

41. It was noticeable that although the verification process had been more complicated and taken longer, the actual counting of the ballots was smooth and completed in good time. There were a couple of issues with typographical errors appearing on the verification sheets that were displayed at the venue, and this will be reviewed for future election counts to improve the transition of the verification data to the Corporate Communications Team. One

option would be to increase the number of laptops available at the 'top table' for future election counts.

42. By law, the number of votes on each table were required to be checked 3 times before they could be accepted by the Senior Officers on the 'top table' if they did not match the total on the corresponding Ballot Paper Account. It was noted that voters could and do walk out of polling stations with ballot papers, but the Presiding Officers and polling staff ensured that this happened as infrequently as possible.

43. The venue had been used due to the Covid requirements and had proved useful because of its size. The setup of the venue could begin earlier in the day, cars could drive into the venue to deliver equipment and everything could be securely left for the following days' counts. It was acknowledged that the temperature within the Hangar was cold, particularly during the verification process on the Thursday night, and this may also have been a factor in the verification taking longer than usual. It might be possible to hold future election counts at either the Civic Offices or another Council asset such as the Depot at Oakwood Hill. However, this would depend on the number and type of elections being held that year.

44. It was noted that the deadlines set for the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, and the Essex County Council elections, greatly impacted on the management of the count, due to most of the same staff returning to count the following day at 9.00am after a 4.00am finish for the verification. Again, this was out of the Council's control and therefore had been dealt with to the best of the staff's abilities.

45. The Corporate Communications Team had received positive feedback from the media outlets that had attended the various count sessions.

46. In respect of the Location of the equipment used in the Elections, access to the equipment will need to improve so that Presiding Officers can collect and return their equipment to a safe and dry area. It was acknowledged that the Elections Team might not remain in Homefield in the long-term, and other options are being considered including using an area of the underground car park at the Civic Offices or other property assets owned by the Council.

47. The Select Committee is requested to review the management and delivery of the elections held on 6 May 2021 and consider any proposals of the Returning Officer for changes to arrangements for the management and delivery of local elections in future years, and to make appropriate recommendations to the Returning Officer for any further changes to be made to the management of future local elections.