



NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEETING

You are hereby summoned to a meeting of the **EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL** to be held in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING** at 7.00 pm on **Tuesday 25 July 2023** for the purpose of transacting the business set out in the agenda.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'G Blakemore'.

Georgina Blakemore
Chief Executive

Democratic Services
Officer:

Gary Woodhall Tel: (01992) 564243
Email: democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

WEBCASTING/FILMING 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. The meeting may also be otherwise filmed by third parties with the Chairman's permission.

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.

Therefore by entering the Chamber and using the lower public 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. If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should sit in the upper council chamber public gallery area or otherwise indicate to the Chairman before the start of the meeting.

If you have any queries regarding this, please contact the Public Relations Manager on 01992 564542.

BUSINESS

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

This meeting is to be webcast. Members are reminded of the need to activate their microphones before speaking. The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager 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

To be announced at the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare interests in any item on the agenda.

4. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the last meeting held on 20 June 2023 (to follow).

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Chairman’s Announcements

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

To answer questions asked after notice in accordance with the provisions contained within Part 4 of the Council Rules of the Constitution on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the District:

(a) to the Leader of the Council;

(b) to any Portfolio Holder; or

(c) to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Questions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

7. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE

To answer questions asked after notice in accordance with the provisions contained within the Council’s rules in Part 4 of the Constitution on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the District:

- (a) to the Chairman of the Council;
- (b) to the Leader of the Council;
- (c) to any Member of the Cabinet; or
- (d) the Chairman of any Committee or Sub-Committee.

The Council's rules provide that answers to questions under notice may take the form of:

- (a) direct oral answer;
- (b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- (c) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

Answers to questions falling within (a) and (b) above will be made available to the member asking the question one hour before the meeting. Answers to questions falling within (c) above will be circulated to all councillors.

Questions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

8. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET (Pages 7 - 42)

To receive reports and any announcements from the Leader and members of the Cabinet on matters falling within their area of responsibility:

- (a) Report of the Leader of Council (verbal);
- (b) Report of the Place Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (c) Report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (d) Report of the Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (e) Report of the Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (f) Report of the Contracts, Service Delivery & Improvement Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (g) Report of the Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder (attached); and
- (h) Report of the Customer & Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder (attached).

9. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Council's rules provide for questions by any member of the Council to the Leader or any Portfolio Holder, without notice on:

- (i) reports under the previous item; or

(ii) any other matter of a non operational character in relation to the powers and duties of the Council or which affects all or part of the District or some or all of its inhabitants.

The Council's rules provide that answers to questions without notice may take the form of:

(a) a direct oral answer from the Leader or, at the request of the Leader, from another member of the Cabinet;

(b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication;

(c) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner; or

(d) where the question relates to an operational matter, the Leader or a member of the Cabinet will request that a response be given direct to the questioner by the relevant Service Director.

In accordance with the Council's rules, a time limit of thirty minutes is set for questions. Any question not dealt with within the time available will receive a written reply. The Chairman may extend this period by up to a further ten minutes at their discretion.

10. MOTIONS

To consider any motions, notice of which has been given under the Council's rules.

Motions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Pages 43 - 64)

(a) To receive the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022-23 (attached);

(b) To receive the report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the meeting held on 18 July 2023 (to follow); and

(c) To answer any questions without notice asked in accordance with the Council Rules.

12. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

(a) To receive from Council representatives the reports (attached - if any) on the business of joint arrangements and external organisations and to receive answers to any questions on those bodies which may be put without notice; and

(b) To request written reports from representatives on joint arrangements and external organisations for future meetings.

13. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Exclusion:

To consider whether, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press should be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on grounds that they will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information

as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

Agenda Item No	Subject	Exempt Information Paragraph Number
Nil	Nil	Nil

The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, which came into effect on 1 March 2006, requires the Council to consider whether maintaining the exemption listed above outweighs the potential public interest in disclosing the information. Any member who considers that this test should be applied to any currently exempted matter on this agenda should contact the proper officer at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Background Papers:

Article 17 of the Constitution (Access to Information) define background papers as being documents relating to the subject matter of the report which in the Proper Officer's opinion:

- (a) disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and
- (b) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report and does not include published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information and in respect of executive reports, the advice of any political advisor.

The Council will make available for public inspection for four years after the date of the meeting one copy of each of the documents on the list of background papers.

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Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 25 July 2023

Subject: Place Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Bedford

Recommending:

That the report of the Place Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Local Plan

Judicial Review Period

The Judicial Review Period elapsed on the 25th April without challenge so the Council have revoked the previously Local Plan documentation Including those policies of the Epping Forest District Local Plan adopted January 1998 that had not previously been replaced and Epping Forest District Local Plan Alterations adopted July 2006 and replace it with the new adopted Local Plan documentation (including the Policies Map, Adoption Statement, Sustainability Assessment Adoption Statement, Habitats Regulation Assessment Adoption Assessment) to form the Development Plan in line with the recommendation made at the March 2023 committee.

Business Continuity

The planning policy team is continuing to provide support to Development Management and Implementation teams through consultation responses to planning applications and pre application consultations as well as Planning Performance agreements (PPA) on larger and strategic allocated sites and strategic masterplan frameworks.

The Planning Policy team are also working closely with Natural England in updating the current Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy to seek contribution from development that Impacts the Epping Forest SAC. They are also working alongside Essex CC as the responsible authority and other Essex Local Planning Authorities in developing a Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document which will identify how Local Planning Authorities will guide developers in securing at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in line with the North Weald Enhancement Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Monitoring

The Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2021-22 has recently been published following member endorsement. The 2022-23 AMR has been delayed due to the significant time and resource required in the preparation and involvement in the Local Plan examination however, work is now being progressed and the 2022-23 AMR will be finalised later this year.

2. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

- Full funding for a new, state-of-the-art Princess Alexandra Hospital has been confirmed by the Government's New Hospital Programme. The hospital will now progress plans to purchase the land for the new hospital in the preferred location within the East of Harlow masterplan area and finalise the Outline Business Case.
- The draft Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework (SMF), a masterplan area which is within Epping Forest District and the Garden Town, is programmed for review for endorsement by Cabinet on 10 July 2023. This will be the first HGGT strategic masterplan to be endorsed.
- The Latton Priory Design Code is being undertaken in-house by the EFDC Implementation Team, funded as part of the Dept For Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Pathfinders Programme. The Design Code will be publicly consulted on in September 2023, after it has been to Cabinet.
- HGGT has been funded by DLUHC Local Digital Fund and PropTech Innovation Fund R3 to tackle challenges around consultation data and maximising value of digital engagement, across council boundaries.
- The draft HGGT Stewardship Charter, and draft East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance SPD will be publicly consulted on from mid-July, seeking views from local communities and stakeholders on these two guidance documents.
- The HGGT Annual Report 2022-23 has been published online.

3. Sustainable Transport

Demand Responsive Transport (DaRT87)

Launched as a 'service of last resort' during Covid (Jan 21) following cessation of Arriva 87 service (ECC subsidy withdrawn due to a 60%+ collapse in usage). There were 200 registrations of interest via EFDC website form, but fewer than 10% of these ever took a trip, although a small number used it repeatedly.

DaRT87 is continuing as a skeleton service only for previous users and only when they wish to travel, pending Essex County Council reviewing their DRT strategy. In comparison, Digigo service around Braintree and parts of Uttlesford just saw its 20,000th passenger journey, which shows that with the right product, technology, marketing and service levels, DRT could be viable in the future here.

Public EV Charging – good progress in 2023

EFDC has moved from 7th to 5th in the Essex District 'league table' of public EV chargers with 39 chargers active at 1st April 23 following the successful launch of a further 4 Instavolt rapid charges at Ongar, Basons Lane car park and additional private sector 'destination' rapid chargers in recognition of our area's strong uptake of and interest in EVs.

The next DfT quarterly dataset is likely to show further improvement although Essex generally still remains well behind many comparable county areas in terms of public chargers per 100k population. EFDC has firm plans for at least another nine public chargers during the rest of 2023 (subject to approval and Epping, Cottis Lane multi-storey car park completion date).

Active Travel

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Waltham Abbey is being managed via ECC's team (but funded by our UK Shared Prosperity (UKSP) fund allocation). There has been some delays in UKSP release, but supplier/consultancy has been appointed, and project should commence this Summer.

Active Travel England (ATE) are also a new statutory consultee on major developments.

4. Climate Change

Climate Change Action Plan Review

Following the Climate Change Officer returning to work, a review of the Climate Change Action Plan has taken place and a summary document produced to record completed actions, actions that can now be seen as business as usual and actions to remove following investigation. The summary document also puts forward five priorities for the 2023/24 to drive forward climate action in the District.

The priority actions have been put forward from those in the original Climate Change Action Plan. These priorities were chosen as they are direct actions that the Council can take on its own assets, land and processes. They are actions that align closely with the Corporate Plan objectives and are expected to deliver higher carbon savings or enable greater carbon savings. The co-benefits of actions for the community and the Council were also considered, as well as actions that were deemed priorities by the public during the consultation period. The summary document and priority actions report was at Place Scrutiny Committee on 4th July for consideration.

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Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Finance, Qualis and Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Philip

Recommending:

That the report of the Finance, Qualis and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.

Finance

Budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25

With the first quarter of the 2023/24 Financial Year having recently come to an end, we will imminently start the process of developing the budget for 2024/25. As ever, there are many large uncertainties which will again make the process difficult to reconcile as inevitably the Council will need to consider some difficult choices. We have developed an improved and more engaged and transparent approach over the past few years and we aim to continue to improve our approach.

Audit

The draft Accounts were published to the Council's website on 2 June 2023, a fraction beyond the end of May deadline, but still considerably earlier than achieved in previous years and therefore represents a continuation of the ongoing improvement in the Council's financial control arrangements and reporting. Unfortunately, the ongoing, long, drawn-out Audit of Accounts process for 2020/21 continues and contributes to the difficulty in publishing financial information. It is rumoured that the Government is working on a solution to the problems with delayed external audit conclusions being experienced across the Country. I hope this will finally move us forward and will report back when, and if, the Government presents its solution.

Together with the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, (Cllr Bolton), I will continue to keep members updated on close of Accounts progress.

Concerns Raised on the Value For Money Delivered by the Qualis Repairs Service

A concern was raised with the Chief Executive by a member of staff that the transferred Housing Repairs function was not delivering Value for Money to the tenants. This concern has been taken seriously and a full and lengthy investigation has been carried out by the Council's Section 151 officer to ascertain their validity.

A report was presented to the Community Scrutiny Committee on 27 June 2023 with the conclusion of this investigation and I summarise the main findings here. The Housing Repairs Service was transferred to a Council owned arms-length trading company, (Qualis), in 2020. This represented a major shift in the management and delivery of the

service, and in the relationship between former colleagues. In this divided relationship a belief developed that Qualis was profiteering from its monopolistic relationship with the Council.

In reality, the fundamental change in the way which the Council was charged for this service, and a rapid rise in inflation, made any direct comparison impossible. But for those that attempted to do so, a misunderstanding of the relative comparability allowed for a case to be constructed that supported the persisting belief that Qualis was overcharging the Council.

A detailed and time-consuming attempt to analyse the data from before and after the move to Qualis only highlighted that direct comparison is not possible in any reliable or conclusive way because of the fundamental shift in the way the service is billed.

Recognising the on-going need for reassurance, and being unable to reliably test the market, the Council embarked upon an independent benchmarking exercise carried out by one of the market leaders for this service.

The results from this review highlight areas of considerable success and of challenge and these are of use to the Council and Qualis in identifying and addressing persisting issues and in shaping and improving future service delivery.

In respect of the cost of the service, the review's position is mixed. Some areas of work charged by Qualis are slightly above average whilst some are below. Taken together, the cost of the Qualis Repairs services provided by Qualis is demonstrably close to the median being paid by other comparator councils for equivalent services.

Based upon the results of this review, it is the **Overall Conclusion** of the S151 officer that the concerns of Qualis profiteering from the Council, are unfounded.

However, there remain deeper cultural issues that have contributed to this belief and work to understand and address these will be overseen by this Community Scrutiny Committee.

The Benchmarking exercise has proved valuable in providing perspective, opportunity and challenge and the Committee further agreed to undertake further reviews annually until the Council is satisfied that the arrangements no longer warrant it.

Qualis

The financial performance of Qualis continues to be regularly reported to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The second quarter's results from their fourth year of trading were reported to Cabinet in May using a new Board report format, presented by Qualis, which is designed to show a clearer consolidated position.

Unfortunately, the same financial conditions that are so heavily impacting on the Council are also still enormously impacting Qualis. These were drawn out in the single year Qualis Business Plan that was presented to Overview and Scrutiny and to Cabinet last year. Qualis continues to report a loss in the 2nd Quarter's trading due to a number of factors in their development and commercial activities businesses.

I continue to meet with Qualis regularly to consider their actions to address this and their trading performance in the current economic circumstances and I will update all members on progress.

Finance Portfolio – Revenues and Benefits

The performance figures for Q1 for 2023/24 were as follows;

Council Tax collection	27.2% (2023/24)	+0.2% change 2022/23
Business Rates collection	28.5% (2023/24)	-0.4% change 2022/23
Benefits New Claims	14.8days (2023/24)	+2.5days change on 2022/23
National Average	20.0days (2023/24)	+1.0days change on 2022/23
Benefits Change in Circumstances	7.3days (2023/24)	+0.2days change on 2022/23
National Average	8.0days (2023/24)	No change on 2022/23

Business Rates collection is down by 0.4%; however, it should be noted, there were more grants and reliefs available to businesses for 2022/23.

Benefits claim turnaround has increased, which is partly due to the reduction in staff (1.5fte) from last year but also because more customers are now claiming UC, which leaves the council to assess the more complex ones, i.e., Working Age Self Employed claims.

The Revenues and Benefits Team has just commenced a Discovery Phase of work looking at Shared Service opportunities with Colchester City Council and Braintree District Council. This initial phase is focussed on the gathering of data relating to how the team operates and highlighting any strengths, pain points and risks to the service whilst also highlighting any potential immediate opportunities. This Discovery Phase is expected to run for a period of 3 months.

A major project for the Team this year is to revisit the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme, which is currently very complicated, difficult to understand for claimants and is expensive to administer. The aim is to provide a simplified Banded Scheme which will make it clearer for Claimants to understand their entitlement and more efficient to administer. Current work is focussed on modelling different options to ensure fairness in the Scheme in line with its affordability. The Team is again working with Colchester CC and Braintree DC as they prepare similar schemes for 2024/25. A period of extensive consultation will follow over the summer and the proposed Scheme will be brought before Members for approval in the autumn.

Economic Development Programme:

Utilising 2022-2023 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocations, the Economic Development team is working in partnership with a place promotion app called 'Discover', to help promote local businesses, events and tourism and visitor assets across the district. This app is expected to be launched by the end of July. In addition, Huq, a digital footfall monitoring toolkit has been procured to monitor the economic vitality of the district's six main high streets as well as a small pilot group of rural areas. This toolkit has also been deployed by other councils in west Essex and eastern Hertfordshire.

At the end of June the council received confirmation from the UK Government that its reporting on delivery and expenditure from year one of UKSPF had been fully approved and funds unlocked for year two (2023/24), including the Rural England Prosperity Fund allocation. The Rural funds have now been received but at the time of writing the UKSPF monies had not. This late confirmation has caused challenges in delivery of projects

linked to the year 2 UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme. Nonetheless, progress is underway for the delivery of projects in this financial year. This includes work to develop a community capital grants scheme utilising the REPF allocations. For the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, work is underway with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to provide business support opportunities to local businesses through a subsidised membership scheme and networking events. Officers are also supporting the generation of feasibility studies; for example, the LCWIP study for Waltham Abbey, which should help the area to attract investment to improve cycle route infrastructure. Work is also getting underway to help deliver a playground in Oakwood Hill which is being supported through the UKSPF.

The Economic Development team is also developing a new inward investment website called 'Invest Epping Forest', which will be launched shortly. This website will help to promote the area to prospective businesses looking for available commercial properties, whilst providing them and existing local businesses with general information about the district and opportunities for business support. Invest Epping Forest will also link into subregional inward investment initiatives from the UK Innovation Corridor, Innovation Core and neighbouring councils. The website can be found at this link:

<https://www.investeppingforest.co.uk>

Monthly Business E-Newsletter:

The Economic Development Team has released the June edition of the 'Business Matters' e-newsletter to over 2,000 local businesses with topics focusing on EFDC's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, an update on the progress of EV charging in the district, the Essex Business Accelerator programme and HMRC's new valuation service. If you would like to receive a copy of the monthly e-newsletter, please contact Matteo Pesci at mpesci@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

General Economic Briefing:

Epping Forest's unemployment rate per total working population is 2,135. This rate has fallen for the last two consecutive months.

Visitor Economy:

At the Epping Forest District Tourism and Visitor Board June meeting, members reported that the local visitor economy was thriving with a calendar of events back to its pre-pandemic scale well supported by locals and visitors alike. Responding to the cost-of-living crisis, many venues and attractions have created added value and free activities and entertainment to counter increased prices caused by operational cost rises that have had to be passed on to customers. Epping Forest has new data which shows higher visitor numbers and increased dwell time, the White Water Centre is offering free live entertainment in its Terrace Bar and events such as RideLondon are bringing a marked increase in cyclists into the district. Elsewhere, hospitality venues and attractions are benefiting from the recent good weather and business is buoyant compared with earlier in the year when the weather was poor. Visit Essex reports that the 'staycation' effect continues to bring visitors from the north of the country and marketing campaigns are targeting the Midlands, Yorkshire and Liverpool and this trend is also noticeable in the out-of-area visitors to the district's tourism website.

Areas of concern and opportunity identified by the Tourism and Visitor Board included the problems recruiting and retaining volunteers (key to the running of bigger attractions), interest in developing and promoting green tourism and catering for visitors

with disabilities. It was agreed that these would become focus items with specialist speakers for future Board meetings and that the audience would be opened up to allow a wider range of visitor-based businesses to be invited and benefit.

Statistics for the district's updated tourism and visitor website show that for the first 90 days of the 2023 tourism season, 50,000 visitors viewed 100,000 pages. Currently, around 5,000 visits take place each week with people searching for event information, places to walk and cycle, food and drink outlets and camping/self-catering. Where the site is the sole source of local information, for example for community-based events, the visitor numbers can show related peaks. The sites' 'What's On' page currently carries over 40 individual events in the district up to the beginning of August, with more for the school holidays expected to be supplied over the coming weeks.

Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ):

The DIZ published its latest Annual Progress Report in June. The report captures the highlights of the DIZ work programme over the last twelve months as well as taking a light-touch look ahead at where the partnership will be focusing some of its efforts over the coming year. A copy of the report can be downloaded from the DIZ website at <https://diz.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/DIZ-Annual-Progress-Report-22-23-Published-Web.pdf>

The DIZ also completed and distributed its report on the broadband and mobile connectivity of each of the five districts of the DIZ, based around an in-depth review of the data published by Ofcom as part of its Connected Nations Report. The analysis examined the general patterns of connectivity availability across each district and took a deep dive into the levels of gigabit-capable connectivity in rural and urban areas as well as across commercial and residential premises. The report also explored the patterns of data usage by residents. Further details of the report are available to members via the Economic Development team.

The DIZ held an 'In Person' Advisory Board session for stakeholders in April which explored the pressing digital issues as seen by key local representatives from higher education, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector as well as our district and county council partners. The session also sought feedback and reflections on partners views of current and future digital opportunities and challenges and how we might work better together to achieve our collective digital aspirations. This feedback has been collated and will inform future strategic discussions of the DIZ Executive Board in shaping its work programme.

The guest speaker sessions at the monthly DIZ Advisory Boards this year have so far included presentations on 'Applications of Artificial Intelligence', 'Digital Outcomes Through Collaboration', 'Innovative Street Furniture for a Smart Place Eco-system' and 'Building a Smarter Region with a Strong Innovation Ecosystem'.

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Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Housing and Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Holly Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Housing

Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS)

EFDC's annual return to the government was completed 13th July 23. This is a detailed return containing details of our stock numbers, breakdown of property types, stock value, waiting lists and a host of other data.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

Work is underway to commission an independent provider to carry out Tenant Satisfaction surveys on behalf of EFDC. The surveys are due to take place in September 23. Engagement across the whole of EFDC and our key delivery partners will be important to this being successfully launched and received by our customers. The TSMs will be the key measure of Tenant Satisfaction and, will need to be reported to the Regulator for Social Housing in April 24.

Older Peoples Strategy

Planning work is underway to develop an Older Peoples Strategy. This is a commitment within our Housing Strategy. The target date for completion of the Older Peoples Strategy is December 23. This work will be routed through the Council's scrutiny and cabinet meetings.

2. Housing Development Update

Pentlow Way, Buckhurst Hill - 7 units; 6 x 1B2P Flats, 1 x 2B4P flat

Works are progressing on site. Handover is expected 14th December 2023. Monthly site progress meetings are being held on site and the next one is the end of July. Planning for an opening event will begin planning three months prior to handover and key members will be involved in the planning.



Photo 1 – Construction site at Pentlow Way

Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey - 8 units; 7 x 1B2P & 1 x 2B4P

Site progress is being made; Handover is expected 15TH November 2023. Monthly site progress meetings are being with the next site visit scheduled for the end of July. As with Pentlow, an opening event will be planned in due course.



Photo 2 – Construction site at Woollard Street

LAHF Project

We were awarded £1.1 Million of funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and communities to deliver 5 main element properties and 1 bridging accommodation property to provide homes to Ukrainian and Afghanistan refugees. We have sought to do so by bringing back units into use that were either previously considered for sale or a void with extensive works required. So far four properties have been secured through this route. There are two further units with active discussions underway for acquisition.

3. Assets

Lime Farm Estate Regeneration Project

Regeneration work at the Limes Farm Estate is progressing well. The outdoor gym was formally opened week commencing 19th June. This is a great piece of work and will bring many years of activity for residents. The regeneration works are also progressing well, and we expect to see the first block being handed over in coming weeks.

Energy Efficiency Retrofit

EFDC are working with E.ON to project plan works that will deliver energy efficiency improvements to over 100 homes. This will be part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF).

Stock Condition Survey (SCS)

Over recent months, property condition surveys of half the EFDC stock have been carried out. This will provide us with detailed information about the condition of our properties and enable EFDC to focus planned and reactive works going forward. A detailed report from the specialist consultants Ridge and Partners LLP is due for the end of July 23.

Asset Management Strategy (AMS)

Work is underway to commission a specialist provider to support EFDC with the development of an AMS. This will inform our strategic approach to investing and prioritising work on our stock over the next 5 years. The findings of the SCS will also feed into the development of the AMS.

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Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Community, Health & Wellbeing
Portfolio Holder: Councillor S Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Community, Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder be noted.

RideLondon 2023

Sunday 28th May saw Epping High Street come alive with community celebrations in support of the Ford RideLondon-Essex mass cycle event. Crowds gathered along the route to cheer on the 25,000 riders taking part, with many riders pausing on their way to take advantage of the town being designated an official 25-mile rest stop. EFDC received £4,371 of County activation funding via the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) to deliver the community activities which were enjoyed by hundreds.

The community event in Epping, which was coordinated by the Community & Wellbeing team, demonstrated strong community cohesion and showcased excellent partnership working. The public enjoyed visiting stalls provided by Essex Police, Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, St Clare's Hospice, VAEF, Epping Youth Football Club, Active Essex, the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance and Open-Door Friendship Group. Nearly 100 faces were painted, and 185 pavement art creations were chalked! Family fun included "Come & Try" activities such as; Play in the Park, Trailnet's adapted bikes, Taekwondo, EFDC's Care to Move Project and fun Smoothie Bikes, all of which encouraged families to take part in physical activity on the day and beyond.

One of the highlights for this year's event was a live performance from the local Rock Choir which enhanced the community atmosphere. The Chairman of Council presented the winner of the community raffle with a bike, kindly donated by Cycle King. The winner of the online Instagram competition also collected their bike on the day, travelling from Tunbridge Wells to receive it.

Additional funding of £667 was secured by the team via Active Essex for the Care to Move Project. The aim of this project is to bring older people together by increasing access to physical activity for those who might normally find it difficult. The team also received an Essex Cycle Grant of £2,366 and has partnered with Essex Highways to provide a free, 2-day summer course for children aged 9+ teaching basic cycling and road skills. Two adult bike maintenance workshops have also been delivered in the district.

To date 38 wider organisations across the district have received Active Essex Find Your Active funding totally £82,337 as a direct result of RideLondon taking in the Epping Forest district.

Crucial Crew 2023

Crucial Crew is an interactive personal safety and health & wellbeing initiative based around key life skills for Year 6 pupils to prepare them for secondary school, addressing challenges and risks they may encounter in everyday life. It supports the health and wellbeing of students through encouraging physical activity, good nutritional choices and positive mental health. The project underpins the priorities and objectives set out in the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022 – 2026 to help ensure that children and young people have the best start in life.

The Community & Wellbeing Team were delighted to reintroduce Crucial Crew “Live” back into the district on 28, 29 and 30 June at the Civic Offices after two years of virtual delivery. Year 6 pupils from six schools attended the pilot days: Thomas Willingale, Roydon, Stapleford Abbots, Alderton Juniors, St Andrews C of E North Weald and Ongar Primary. Six topics were presented in an interactive scenario format including Safer Places delivering Healthy Relationships; Essex Highways delivering Road Safety; EFDC delivering Physical Activity and Nutrition; Mind in West Essex delivering Positive Mental Health; The Red Balloon Foundation delivering Online Safety and Youth Unity delivering the Dangers of Nitrous Oxide. Feedback gathered from pupils, partner agencies and teachers has all been resoundingly positive.

What’s On Brochure: July - September

Community & Wellbeing service’s latest “What’s On” brochure was launched digitally in early June. Hard copies are available at EFDC venues including the Civic Reception and EFDC social media can be followed for updates. Bookings for the C&W Summer Holiday 2023 Programme can be made on Bookings Live at <https://eppingforestdc.bookinglive.com/>

For budding performers, the musical Matilda will be recreated in a “Musical in 2 Days.” Multi-Activity Days will provide a variety of sports and arts & craft activities for children. Drop-in activity sessions will take place at the Museum and a full Disability Inclusion summer programme is offered.

Thanks to the support of Town and Parish Councils, Play in the Park staff will be travelling around the district again this summer, bringing free fun and games to local parks and green spaces far and wide.

Youth Council 15th Birthday Celebrations

The Epping Forest Youth Council marked its 15th Anniversary at the Civic Offices on Thursday 20 July 2023. It was an evening of celebrations and an opportunity for the Youth Councillors to express thanks to their numerous supporters and funders. Guests attending included The Deputy Lord Lieutenant, the Chairman and Leader of EFDC, Mayors of Epping and Waltham Abbey Town Council, Chairman of Ongar Town Council, and many other dignitaries.

The Youth Councillors invited their Head Teachers along with active partners including; The Red Balloon Foundation, FoodBank, Essex Police, the Fire Service, NHS colleagues and the Jack Petchey Foundation, which is one of the Youth Council’s major funders. Youth Councillors spanning the past 15 years also attended. The evening was funded via a £1000 Jack Petchey Leader Award Grant received by Diane Butler, Young Persons’ Officer, earlier this year.

Community Champions

Community & Wellbeing’s wonderful Community Champion volunteers have supported a plethora of worthy causes in their communities over the last few months.

Champions from Nazeing, Waltham Abbey, Chigwell, Epping, Theydon Bois and Ongar took time out of their May Bank Holiday weekend to help support Sudanese evacuees. With little notice, they provided invaluable assistance to those arriving at Stansted Airport between 28 April – 1st May.

Limes Farm Colts Children's Football Club and Limes Farm Community Group (LFCG) were invited to attend the High Sheriffs' awards event to mark their successful grant award. The Chair of the LFCG and the Colt's football instructor are both Chigwell Community Champions. The funding received is helping to deliver diversionary activities to help reduce local children's risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and potential criminality.

A Community Champion led weekly food pantry for the community now runs in the 'Social Space' session at Victoria Hall, Chigwell. A Defibrillator Training Seminar was organised by the Nazeing Community Champion for the public at Lodge Farm.

Many of the Community Champions enjoyed organising and celebrating His Majesty King Charles III Coronation. Twelve events were held across the district and included afternoon teas, a family fun day, fetes, and the painting of a village hall.

On 7 June, Exercise Stabos Emergency Training took place at Thornwood Village Hall, which involved councils and stakeholder coming together to practice procedures to tackle a serious emergency should it occur. Community Champions supported the event and served refreshments on the day. Community Champions also supported the team's "Stay Safe & Well" event on Limes Farm and RideLondon.

Dementia Friendly Communities Accreditation

Input from C&W, in partnership with wider stakeholders, has seen the Epping Forest district maintained its official Dementia Friendly Community Accreditation for another year.

A recent event coordinated by C&W's Dementia Action Officer to support local residents living with Dementia was the summer Memory Train on 5 July. Hosted by the Epping & Ongar Railway and funded by Epping Open Gardens, 91 people affected by Dementia had a wonderful day out.

Funding from the Community Safety Partnership for health & wellbeing initiatives

Funding from the Community Safety Partnership has been secured to enable the delivery of a series of health & wellbeing projects and key events in specific localities. £4000 will support four further Stay Safe & Well events for older residents: during October in the Oakwood Hill area and in Buckhurst Hill and in April 2024 in Ongar and a rural location.

Arc Theatre Company will deliver a roadshow called Broadcast Junior in ASB priority areas in the district. Debden and Ongar have been identified through crime data. The interactive performance deals with current issues affecting young people: chatting online, TikTok dares, going to meet people alone, current social media platforms and their dangers, coercive behaviour, sexting, grooming, how to seek help, support and the law. £3800 will cover 4 schools in these areas. As part of the Safer Streets Project, Arc Theatre has already delivered Broadcast Junior to Years 5 & 6 pupils in all 4 Waltham Abbey primary schools with excellent feedback from pupils and teachers.

The Limes Youth Club, delivered by Youth Unity at the Limes Centre in Chigwell on Friday evenings has proved to be a vital resource and extremely popular with local young people. £5075 will ensure that the Club can continue to run until at least March 2024.

As a result of the success of the two weekly Ninefields Youth Club sessions in Waltham Abbey, £2980 has been awarded to enable the sessions to run for another academic year from September 2023 inclusive of staff and materials costs.

£4025 will fund Stop & Think Roadshows for Years 7 & 8 pupils in all seven of the district's secondary schools. The interactive workshop covers 'Stop and Search' procedures and protocols, building positive relationships with the Police.

Epping Forest District Museum

The Museum opened its current temporary exhibition 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea' on Saturday 27 May. To date, seven school visits have been facilitated engaging over 250 children in education sessions inspired by the display. The exhibition has also been well received by the public with over 1,500 visitors in the first month and many families sharing their experience online via social media.

The Museum has received £5,000 from the Epping Forest Public Health Community Fund to support wider place-based health and wellbeing work on Ninefields Estate. A series of heritage-themed outdoor sessions will be delivered to schools in the area helping to enhance pupils' sense of place and to encourage the children and their families spend time in nature.

The Museum also recently received AIM funding of £12,000 for a Spradbery conservation project which will see 12 posters held in the collection restored.

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Contracts, Service Delivery, and Improvements
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ray Balcombe

Recommending:

The report of the Contracts, Service Delivery, and Improvements be noted.

Leisure Management:

Free Summer Swimming Pass

Places Leisure are offering a 'Free Summer Swimming Pass' for children receiving free school meals.

Schools will be emailing a letter to all parents/carers of children receiving free school meals in the district. To activate their 'Free Summer Swimming Pass' all they need to do is take their letter to their nearest Places Leisure Facility (*Loughton Leisure Centre, Ongar Leisure Centre, and Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre*) and presented at the facility to redeem the offer. The facility will then set them up with a membership that will allow their child to enjoy free swimming from 1st August to 31st August 2023.

In addition to the free swimming, each child who receives a free-swimming pass will also receive a free pair of Zoggs goggles (subject to availability). These will be issued when they come in to set up their free pass membership.

Energy Saving Initiatives

Working in partnership with Places Leisure, the Council is lowering its carbon footprint in its leisure centres by introducing new energy saving initiatives which include:

- Installing pool covers at Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre and Ongar Leisure Centre
- LED conversions at Loughton Leisure Centre and Ongar Leisure Centre
- New Building Management System and variable speed drives at Loughton Leisure Centre

Leisure centres are one of the Council's major assets and one of the largest contributors of the Council's carbon footprint. Decarbonising leisure centres is an important step to achieving the Council's Climate Change Action Plan. These measures will reduce carbon emissions and operational costs, resulting in more sustainable facilities. All energy saving initiatives have now been successfully installed.

Epping Leisure Centre

The new Epping Leisure Centre will provide a vital community asset, such as swimming pools, sports hall, gym, and exercise studios. The facility will provide widely accessible opportunities for local communities to get involved in sport and physical activity.

The building will achieve BREEAM excellent rating, which will result in an energy efficient building and support the Council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.

Places Leisure and EFDC have made a head start with Pellikaan (Contractor who will build the new facility) via a Pre-Contract Services Agreement (PCSA) for services including programme preparation, Value Engineering, and design development.

Waste Management

Future Delivery of Waste Service

A council owned company is to be created for the collection of household waste and recycling in Epping Forest District. It will also provide street cleansing. The decision follows a review of all the options by Optimum Professional Solutions Ltd (OPS) for Epping Forest District Council.

Councillors met in a private Cabinet meeting, to allow free discussion of commercially sensitive information. Like many councils, EFDC has contracted refuse and recycling collections out since the early 1990s. A wholly owned company signals a major shift in the Council's policy towards household waste collection, recycling and street cleansing.

The Council plan to take full management control includes:

- A council owned operating company.
- Buying, or leasing and maintaining its own vehicles.
- Building a new operations hub at North Weald to support the vehicle fleet and crews.

Councillors will not extend the current contract beyond the November 2024 break point. Jobs will be protected. Many of the current waste and recycling staff will transfer under the TUPE regulations. Additional recruitment opportunities are also expected for other people wishing to join the new operation.

Refuse and recycling collection costs are going up. Based on current market trends and discussions with waste contractors, the Council's current £6.6 million budget could go as high as £10 million a year for a new commercial contract.

Residents of Epping Forest have achieved some of the highest recycling rates in the UK. The council owned company is also expected to pay climate change dividends. The Council is moving away from diesel, looking at ways to procure a greener, cleaner fleet powered by more sustainable fuels.

The company will have more freedom and flexibility to try out and expand other forms of collection, including new wheelie bins and co-mingled waste. New vehicles able to collect different types of materials could lead to less lorries on the road or shorter journeys.

The current contract provides services to November 2024. Council officers and councillors are working hard to achieve a smooth transfer.

Missed Collections

Epping Forest District Council and Biffa would like to apologise for the missed collections with its waste collection services. We are still experiencing issues with vehicles and staff; investment has been made in replacing vehicles and recruiting staff. We are working closely with our waste contractor to resolve the issues as swiftly as possible and while there are missed collections still occurring on the scheduled collection day, we are doing all we can to make sure that the waste is collect within that week. We would like to thank residents for their patience and understanding.

If residents experience a missed collection, please leave the waste out as we will do everything that we can to collect at the next available opportunity within the week that it was missed.

Food Waste Project

Working with Essex County Council (ECC), Epping Forest District Council are introducing new ways to help people reduce their food waste.

From July, (ECC) will be sending eligible households tools to help them recycle food at the kerbside. This includes a sticker for their general rubbish bin, caddy liners and a leaflet. Households in Braintree, Colchester and Epping Forest will receive these first. This project will then expand to other areas of the county.

Currently, 26% of food waste in Essex ends up in the general rubbish bin. These tools have helped other authorities increase food recycling by up to 20%. It has also reduced the amount of food waste sent to landfill.

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Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ken Williamson

Recommending:

That the report of the Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Regulatory & Technical Services:

Environmental Health

15th June was Clean Air Day and the team visited Alderton Hall School in Loughton to promote the event and to speak to those idling their vehicle outside the school. The school has set up its own Eco Warrior Group and the visit was to support them in their awareness raising and campaigns. The team did have to approach one person idling their vehicle who only switched their car off once they were informed they could receive a fixed penalty notice. The team were joined by the Environment Enforcement Team who were on hand to deal with any littering issues and NEPP to deal with any parking related matters.

The team will undertake further events during the year as stated in the recently adopted EFDC Air Quality Action Plan and seek requests from other schools where idling of vehicles is a particular problem.

Licensing

150 Metre Consultation

Due to cost and resource implications, on 1st June 2023 Epping Forest District Council ceased undertaking direct consultation with residential and business properties within 150 metres of premises that are subject to an application submitted under the Licensing Act 2003. Under the Licensing Act 2003, applications for the grant and variation of a premises licence are subject to statutory consultation which includes; a public notice being placed at the premises, in a local newspaper and being advertised on the Councils website. It is also a requirement that responsible authorities (Police, Fire, Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Child Protection Board, Planning, Home Office Immigration and Public Health) are directly consulted.

In addition to the statutory consultation, the Councils Licensing Team also notify Town/Parish Councils, Councillors via the weekly Members bulletin and in recent years all residential and business properties within 150 metres of premises that are subject to an application submitted under the Licensing Act 2003. This additional consultation is over and above what the Council is legally required to do and is inconsistent with other similar regimes (planning etc.). It also places an unnecessary financial and administrative burden on the District Council and is inconsistent with other Local Authorities both locally and nationally who follow the statutory consultation only.

Therefore, it was agreed that from 1st June 2023, it would no longer write directly to residents and businesses within a 150-metre radius to advise them of applications. The Councils Licensing Team continue however, to notify Town and Parish Councils electronically of new applications and to include details in the weekly Members bulletin. This is in addition to statutory consultation and Town and Parish Councils have been advised that they may wish to consider if wider consultation through its own methods is warranted and discuss applications with residents should they wish to do so.

There are currently 2 applications due to be considered by the Councils Licensing Committee. The Standard Public House which was received prior to 1st June and therefore subject to the 150-metre public consultation, the Second Bliss Heights which was received after this date and therefore not subject to the wider consultation. The Council has received 10 objections to the Standard Public House and 39 objections to the Bliss Heights applications. The application not subject to wider consultation has attracted more representations, therefore the early indication is that the revised process is not having a negative impact on residents, and they continue to be aware of applications

Gambling Policy

The Gambling Policy has been approved by Full Council, posted on the website and will be subject to its statutory 3 year review in 2026 (although it can be reviewed beforehand if necessary).

Private Sector Housing

The Sustainable Warmth Energy Efficiency Scheme is coming to an end and approximately £335,000 of energy efficiency improvements have been carried out for eligible residents across the district. The team have also completed a Park Homes Pilot Scheme at one of our large Park Homes Sites, Breach Barns. This element of the scheme resulted in a total spend of £423,120 and 62 energy efficiency measures being installed such as external wall cladding and under-floor insulation.

These figures represent an excellent outcome for the residents who were able to benefit and will ensure that their homes are much warmer next winter.

Environmental Enforcement

The team are performing well and enforcement for flytipping and littering continues to increase.

Quarter Period to date April - June	
Offence Type	Issued
Littering	2
Fly-tipping	2
Nuisance parking - selling or repairing vehicles on the street	0
Graffiti and fly-posting	0
Failure to comply with a community protection notice (CPN)	0
Failure to produce waste transfer notes	27
Failure to produce waste carriers licence	0
Failure to comply with Household Duty of Care requirements	2

Failure to comply with a notice requiring the correct disposal of waste relating to trade or commercial waste receptacles	1
Unauthorised leaflet distribution /Flyposting	0
Total	34
Previous Year/Quarter Comparison	2

The team have now completed Duty of Care compliance throughout the district where a number of FPNs have been issued. Fly-tipping and Noise complaints have increased in line with time of the year and year on year figures. Hotspot fly-tipping areas we are currently tackling include Dowding Way where we have two pending prosecutions, and a further 2 FPNs have been issued after being captured by our CCTV system. A blockade has been arranged to stop the ongoing issue. This will be in place early July.

Antisocial Behaviour Team

ASB Awareness Week 3rd – 7th July and the team are carrying a range of activities to raise awareness across the district.

Planning is underway for a 12 month programme with government funding for the ASB Hotspot Project, committing EFDC volunteers to 3 days per week between the hours of 3pm-8pm with high visibility presence in the Debden Broadway area. The project will be supported by the local Policing teams with similar projects across the County.

EFDC Policing Team

In the last month the team have identified a chop shop located on Avey Lane, Waltham Abbey, seven stolen vehicles recovered and evidence of over twenty vehicles found at the site.

On Friday 16th June. a suspect in the Ongar hate crime incident was located and arrested by the team.

CCTV

The Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) supported by Essex & Kent Police which allows for fast provision of video evidence is now fully operational within the CCTV team. There are six new programmes of works to replace CCTV under for maintenance and improvements works. Sites include Limes Farm, Moreton, Cornmill and Oakwood.

Grounds Maintenance

The planned transfer of the Grounds Maintenance service to Qualis Property Solutions successfully took place in May. To ensure a smooth transition was achieved, both Epping Forest & Qualis management teams worked closely with staff to ensure they were kept informed and consulted at all stages of the process. With over 6 weeks since the transfer, staff and operations are now fully embedded into the new working arrangements.

The gardening teams are currently busy with their grass cutting operations to maintain the numerous Council owned verges and green spaces. The wet weather experienced early in the season followed by a very warm spell produced some exceptional growth rates. This in turn, created some challenging mowing conditions. However, staff worked hard to counter this, and the difficulties experienced early on now appear to be easing.

The nursery team have replaced the spring bedding displays with summer flowering plants, including a wide variety of germaniums. The dry ground conditions mean staff keeping a close eye on the bedding to ensure plants are kept well-watered and remain in good condition.

Grounds staff formed part of a wider project team involved in the provision of a new children's playground at Ninefields, Waltham Abbey. After much planning and final installation in May, the playground was officially opened and has been deemed a great success. Ongoing maintenance of this facility will be carried out by qualified playground inspectors from the Qualis grounds team.

2. Planning Services

Building Control

Income and budgets

Net fee earning income at 22/23 year end was £459,000 out of a budget forecast of £530,000 with actual expenditure marginally less than the budgeted £732,000. Building Control charges are set to recover costs of delivering the fee-earning work part of the service and must address any previous years' rolling surplus or deficit. Our accounts at year end show a rolling surplus of £81,000.

April and May saw a slow start to the financial year. The macroeconomic background of high inflation affecting building material prices and high interest rates for borrowers is resulting in slower uptake in householder applications for extension and alteration works. This theme has been echoed around Essex and the East Anglia region at LABC management meetings.

The service fees and charges increased by an average of 12% from April 2024. One knock-on effect of this was the regrettable loss of partnership work to deliver plan approvals of high-volume re-roofing projects around the country with the company choosing to use a private Approved Inspector. Local Authority Building Control delivers these services by checking and inspecting every site and cannot responsibly take a collective decision to inspect only a sample of works. The rise in cost of delivering this service reduced the economic viability of the old charging scheme. Budget income for 23/24 will consequently be lower than anticipated, however this will be partially offset by reduced expenditure on third party inspection fees and a vacant post that will not need to be filled.

Legislative Change

In April the Building Safety Regulator published its final version of the Building Inspector Competency Framework. This sets the expectation of competency requirements for those undertaking Building Control work who will now need to be registered with the Regulator and undertake validation of their own professional competency on a regular basis to deliver the restricted functions of approving plans and inspecting buildings. Inspectors at Epping Forest will need to be registered with the regulator by April 2024 and will need to be examined in the coming months.

New provisions introduced into the Building Act now grant additional powers to issue stop notices and compliance notices to supplement the existing enforcement options of prosecution and removal of offending work notices. The time limit for serving notice to remove offending work has also been increased from two years to ten.

These changes are brought about by the Building Safety Act 2022 which has the intention of improving standards of Building Regulations compliance and increasing the amount of enforcement work Local Authorities undertake. The Regulator becomes a Building Control Body for certain high-risk buildings and an inspectorate with oversight over all other Building Control Bodies and expects Local Authorities to provide competent staff to deliver this function through statute.

Maintaining adequately resourced Building Control teams remains challenging in this competitive field, however Epping Forest has invested in training new entrants to the sector

and is currently applying for a government funded apprentice employed through LABC to be on placement with the Council for the duration of their training. Effective strategies to retain staff at the top of the profession are critical.

On the 15th April 2023, older versions of the guidance to compliance with the Building Regulations for energy efficiency, ventilation, overheating mitigation, vehicle charging and data infrastructure were formally superseded for any new housing developments that had not yet commenced. The new enhanced requirements add significant cost to the design and construction process for developers and additional time for Building Control application checks but will improve the sustainability of future homes.

Service Improvements

Mobile devices have recently been rolled-out to all members of the site inspecting team that enable live access to Building Control cases, plans and site notes in the field. These devices reduce the Council's reliance on the printed format with associated cost and environmental benefits, improve data protection and equip inspectors better to undertake their role. Epping are one of the first Councils to be using the Arcus Global Built Environment solution on mobile devices and have scheduled time with the provider to deliver refinements that will tailor the application to our needs.

Development Management

Planning Appeals

Members are reminded that Planning Appeal details are published in the weekly Bulletin, and links to the appeal documents are now provided to enable members to view a relevant appeal by clicking the link.

Notable Appeal

- 76 Algers Road Loughton IG10 4NF (Ref: EPF/0861/21), written representations appeal decision issued on 31 March 2023. The appeal was allowed with conditions, and a full award of costs against the Council was also awarded on grounds of unreasonable behaviour resulting in unnecessary or wasted expense by the appellant. The application was before AREA PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE SOUTH on 8 September 2021 with an officer recommendation to grant planning permission. The application was refused on Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) grounds, despite the adoption of an Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy (IAPMS) by the Council. The applicant is claiming in excess of £28 000 in costs, a claim currently being disputed by officers.

Successful prosecution: Planning Enforcement

On 14 June 2023 at Chelmsford Crown Court owner and lessee at Sarnia Nursery, Avey Lane Waltham Abbey EN9 3QH pleaded guilty to breaching an Enforcement Notice issued in 2017 requiring the unauthorised use of the land for the storage, sorting and disposal of waste to cease.

After taking relevant matters into consideration, including the guilty pleas by the defendants, Chelmsford Magistrates Court imposed the following:

- The owner: A fine of £6 666 with £30334 costs and a victim surcharge remaining to be calculated;
- The lessee: A fine of £1 333 with £667 costs and a victim surcharge remaining to be calculated.

Unauthorised activities appear to be continuing on site and the team Manager is currently considering the appropriate way forward which could include direct action to secure compliance, further prosecution, injunctive proceedings or a combination of these.

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 25 July 2023
Subject: Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Sam Kane

Recommending:

That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Customer Service

Our aim this year is to continue to improve customer access to our services, increasing use of digital solutions, whilst retaining phone contact for less digitally enabled customers.

Improving our customer experience using AI

We have been exploring new technology to understand how it can help us address our service challenges and ultimately improve our customer experience.

Currently in the discovery stage, we are exploring, building, testing and learning. We have focussed on two key priorities which are

1. Development of a **corporate customer insight portal**, enabling us to capture all insight in one central place, using AI to analyse data and provide key recommendations on improvements. The ultimate aim is that we develop a corporate insight portal which will have corporate benefits for all service areas.
2. Secondly, identifying a model to give us transparency on our most costly, lengthy **customer journeys**, identifying pain points for customers and again areas for improvement.

We are also looking at how AI can automate repetitive tasks as well as exploring Phone & Web Chat AI for deflection of first point of contact customer queries. AI can provide accurate responses to frequently asked questions using a pre-built language model. The findings from our discovery work will be presented to senior leadership in August.

Data Capture Process – Trial with Neighbourhoods Team

As a reminder we are introducing a 'data capture process' to enable us to capture better customer insight. Regardless of the way customers contact us we need a greater understanding of the reasons they contact us, how they contact us to determine blockers to using digital as well as insight on their customer experience,

positive or negative. This data will be fed into our 'customer insight portal' for analysis and recommendations for improvements.

We have been trialling the process with the Neighbourhoods team. The feedback from customers has been really positive they feel more confident they will get a response to their telephone contact as Officers are raising contact requests rather than transferring calls to voicemail if the query is of a technical nature. Since the trial started in May, all contact requests have been responded to within the SLA of one working day. Learnings from the trial are being implemented after which the process will be extended to all of Housing Services, followed by other service areas.

Contact Centre

Members will be aware of the issues with the current Waste and Recycling contract and the number of missed collections experienced by residents in recent months. Customer Service are still receiving an increase in calls above the norm. Full KPI information will be reported to Stronger Council.

Member Coffee Mornings

The next coffee morning is being hosted on Wednesday 12 July and will be used to obtain feedback on the induction and training programme, as well as the usual Officers being available to answer any queries or requests. We encourage Members to let us know of any particular subjects they would like to hear about at Members coffee mornings, please email Kim Partridge at memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Improving the Member induction and training programme

We are working in collaboration with Democratic Services to digitalise all induction forms Members are required to complete into a 'tell us once' digital form. This will save both Members and Officers time.

We are also creating an e-learning area on our online training platform Litmos to create engaging and interactive training content, enabling Members to complete training at their convenience without the need to attend in person sessions. This will increase participation in training and reduce Officer time spent delivering multiple sessions. The timescales for completion of both strands of work is March 2024 in readiness for the May 2024 Election.

2. Digital Inclusion

Independent Living Digital Skills sessions

We are working with local volunteers and partners, including WECAN (West Essex Community Action Network) and Essex County Council, to install Wi-Fi in the communal area of the Independent Living Scheme Hyde Mead House in Nazeing. The project aims to increase residents' confidence with technology and access to services through delivery of a series of digital skills coaching sessions. The project is in the discovery stage and a plan is yet to be developed.

Epping Community Hub Digital Coaching

The weekly drop-in service delivered in partnership with VAEF (Voluntary Action Epping Forest) continue to be popular. The current themes of support are focused

on online form completion and the ability to use the internet to research.

Website Improvements

Officers have used the annual Cabinet Office Accessibility report to make improvements to the website. Using Site Improve software more creatively, the team has seen a number of incremental improvements to accessibility and other areas such as Search Engine Optimisation. Revisions were also made to the website Accessibility Statement. Progress on the development of a new Local Gov Drupal website has been placed on hold while options for joint development with Colchester City Council are explored.

Payment Solutions

At the end of March our remaining payment kiosks at Epping Forest Civic Offices were decommissioned, following which they were physically removed in April. Council Tax and Business Rates kiosk customers had been supplied Allpay cards in February (Housing already had them) and customers channel shifted to this alongside our other existing options. Allpay has been well received by Council Tax customers, with growth since launch to a current average of £112,000 of income collected from around 755 customers per month in the current financial year since April.

A project is underway to update our payment solutions to support the new Housing Civica Cx system. This project is on schedule and expected to be completed by the beginning of September with Civica Cx expected to go live at the end of October.

The high priority of the Housing Civica Cx project along with contractual delays means the project to migrate our payment solutions to the cloud has been delayed. We are currently evaluating which works can proceed in tandem with the Civica Cx project and creating a project plan for delivery.

We have recently completed a project to implement Pay360s Planned Payment Module (PPM). This gives the council an additional scheduled payment option for customers, and we are in the process of planning a pilot of this solution followed by wider demonstrations and implementation within business areas where this channel will be of benefit.

3. Corporate Services

People Strategy

The new people strategy for 2023-2027 was signed off by Cabinet in May 23 and launched to the organisation June 23. However, there has been a review and reprioritisation of the projects identified for 2023-2027, this is due to the focus and work taking place in the HR shared service programme.

Our focus, in addition to BAU now being the following:

Continue	Pause
Legislative Changes/Updates	Total Reward/Employee Benefits Framework review
Disability Confident – assessment	Learning & Development/OD – Employee

underway. Pause at Stage 2	Skills Analysis
Implement Wagestream – working in collaboration with Colchester and Braintree.	iTrent – Recruitment Portal & Application Form development
iTrent Multifactor Authentication	Internal Comms Ambassadors
Employee Insight – Adopting a High-Performance Culture Survey June-July 23	Internal Communications Strategy Review
Service Led Workforce Planning Part 1 – already in flight	Digital Performance Management Tool (Digital Strategy)
Local Pay - NJC	Digital Skills Analysis (Digital Strategy)
T&Cs – Contract review – Pause at SM level. Standby/Call out payments	

Contingency Planning

Service specific BC plans have now been adopted with a process to support those still being created with suitable timetable in place. Corporate Plan is in final stages. Validation exercise is being created for this year to test and train all managers on their individual plans.

Business Support

Local Land Charges (LLC), HMLR Project

- Con29 searches at approximately 30 working days for 'complex land' searches. Approximately 15 'complex land' searches awaiting completion. The Local plan's approval has contributed to the number of land searches received.
- HMLR project completed end of April 23. HMLR are giving us glowing feedback. Achieving 99-100% data accuracy. It is one of the best they have seen.
- New charges introduced April 2023 splitting Residential and Commercial search fees. This will be used to offset the loss of income in personal charges.
- Processes have been mapped and improvements are being highlighted.
- An additional burden payment of £24,000 has also been made.

Restructure

- Following the reduction in 12 FTE from Business Support in April 2023 resource has been rebalanced between the teams. Resilience is being built in and cross training taking place.

Finance Team

- Working with the Shared Services Finance Lead as part of the discovery stage to understand current processes.
- Supporting the move of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis by providing 3 months of training and support to Qualis colleagues.

Accommodation – Commercialisation of our bookable spaces

- The contract between IWG, Regus Epping and EFDC commenced on the 1st of April 2023, we are working together to advertise the space and encourage bookings.

Insurance and Risk

- A Council wide Risk Management Framework, Policy & Strategy is going to Audit and Governance Committee on the 17 July 2023 for approval, with ultimate approval by Cabinet thereafter.
- Risk Management training is continued to be rolled out across the Council to individual Service Areas. Member training will be rolled out in November 2023 in conjunction with the Chief Internal Auditor.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist has commenced and will deliver further training workshops for insurance with individual service areas where appropriate throughout the year.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist is continuing to work with the Fleet Management team, Health & Safety and HR on revising our Driving at Work policy, Drink & Drugs policy and producing a Drivers Handbook to ensure the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act and Road Traffic Acts amongst other obligations and is expected to be finalised by Q4 of 2023/2024.

Elections

- The local elections were held successfully and without incident. This has been reviewed by the Elections Planning Group in preparation for the 'All-Out' elections next May, and the Group has visited a potential new Count Venue location.
- The Annual Canvass is getting under way this month. This will culminate with a new Electoral Register being published in early December.

Democratic Services

- Following an unsuccessful recruitment campaign for our vacant Democratic Services Officer role, we have engaged the services of the Resourcing Team at Essex County Council to fill the vacancy.
- We have also started the recruitment of a Higher-Level Apprentice for the Team. The advert is on the Council's website and the deadline for applications is the end of July.

4. ICT

Melissa Kemp-Salt joined the Council on 20 June as the new Joint ICT PMO & Transformation Service Director for Epping and Colchester. Mel has over 20 years' experience in local government in the programme and project profession leading on digital services, including experience of shared services.

Service Management, Security & Networks

The one team approach in ICT continues to improve the customer experience, with the teams jointly working on BAU and projects to drive performance and improvements. Customer feedback was overall positive with 100% satisfaction. Tickets are being managed extremely well with 'on hold' tickets being at their lowest with 6 and tickets are 100% within SLA's.

Phishing ICT security campaign has now successfully been completed. The phishing test comprises of a group of emails randomly sent to all staff, if the recipient clicks on any links or opens the attached document, they will be informed that this is phishing test, and they will see a short video on how to spot and avoid phishing emails. A

second phase will be implemented to those colleagues who were absent during the first campaign.

National Cyber Security Awareness month takes place in October 2023. Internal Communications and ICT will be looking at promoting customer engagement and awareness during that period.

The network connection in the Chamber has been increased from 1Gb to 20Gb to fall into line with all the other edge network switches and improve performance.

ICT attended prior to the extra ordinary Council Meeting, to resolve any technical issues.

Aruba Wi-Fi access points have now been installed at all the Scheme Manager sites and simplified the way this works. Older Aerohive units, Terminals, Monitors, ShoreTel phones and printers were removed. This will enable the scheme managers to be able to work at any sites.

Mike Chapman has been covering the Asset Management officer role since January 2023. I am pleased to inform you that Mike managed to save £63,191.70 on our licensing renewal from 16 January to 24 March 2023.

KPI's – SLA Metrics & Analysis for w/c 26 June 2023

Tickets Raised	Outstanding	On Hold	Resolved	Within SLA	% Within SLA	Outside SLA	% Outside SLA
124	30	6	94	124	100%	0	0%

Customer Feedback June 2023

Satisfaction Level	Ticket Handling	Customer service	Technical skill	Time taken
Very satisfied	100%	100%	100%	100%
Satisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Very Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(blank) No response	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Customer comments on service provided:

- Quick resolution to problem by knowledgeable officer.
- Thanks to the support desk and to Business Partners for running the report again this year for me.
- Excellent response and resolved issue.
- Quickly sorted and great advice given.
- IT were very quick to get the issue resolved which was appreciated.
- I was late with the Leavers request, but it was all handled in time.
- Housing IT were very through in finding a solution. Well done and thanks again!
- Excellent response under the notice period given to implement - Outcome successful.

Strategy

The ICT strategy is being implemented in line with the need to find efficiency savings in the service and across the business to ensure that resources are focussed upon the areas of greatest impact.

Shared services with Colchester City Council and Braintree District Council are being explored and are currently in the discovery stage.

Projects – Business Applications and Infrastructure

The following projects have been delivered by ICT since the last report:

- Cancelling SurveyMonkey contract and using MS Forms saving £10k
- Supplier negotiations on the DR contract meant a renewal with a saving of £30k.
- The Lone Working Application PeopleSafe has been renewed and a saving of £10k. An alternative solution will be explored next year.
- Decommission of Boxi server 4.1 as we finished year end and moved to an alternative server.
- Microsoft Technology Service Group (TSG) SharePoint ICT are scoping in Housing only.
- EFDC Grounds Maintenance Team transferring to Qualis.

Priorities for ICT to deliver in the next few months continues:

- Members Portal
- Litmos for Members
- Telephony - Gamma
- ITrent Multi Factor Authentication
- Licence issues on servers
- Microsoft Office 365 Multi Factor Authentication
- Encrypted mail to our mail server
- Data cleanse F and Z drives

Corporate Projects

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance and project management resources. The 'project portfolio' currently consists of 28 projects, which are either in 'scoping and design' or 'in delivery'. Of these, 28 a number are categorised as priority projects, which are strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Priority projects are also reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny.

The Priority Projects in progress include:

- Financial ICT Systems Replacement
- Housing & Asset Management System
- Epping Leisure Centre (Contract Agreement & Implementation)
- Waste Management Contract
- Transfer Services to Qualis
- North Weald Master Planning/Enterprise Zone
- Local Plan
- M3 PP Proposal

- People Programme

The PMO has continued to work on reviewing and aligning projects to EFDC's Corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported on the right projects. Steering Groups continue to develop and evolve to support the roles of the key stakeholders involved.

Service Planning for the 23/24 financial year continues for all Service Areas. Draft Service Plans were received back from all Service Areas identified proposed projects for the 23/24 delivery year. The PMO have worked through and presented the output for each of these. Several key actions will now be worked through including mapping to strategic objectives, resource planning and delivery planning.

The PMO is also currently moving into a process to complete a full health check/deep dive on all Priority Projects to identify any gaps, re-align where appropriate and identify opportunities for support. This task aligns with the work that is underway on Service Planning. In addition, high level scoping will also be completed for all other proposed projects.

The PMO has procured licenses for TeamHood which gives us a tool to allow us to start to use a Kan Ban Board System which in turn will support our appetite for a greater level of agile project delivery within the organisation.

Report to the Council

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny.
Date: 25 July 2023.
Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23.
Chairman: Councillor D Wixley.

Recommending:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022/23 be approved.

Report:

1. This is the 18th report under the new scrutiny regime instituted by the Council in April 2005, which incorporates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the three Select Committees and any Task and Finish Panels constituted during the municipal year.
2. This report is produced in accordance with Article 6, Overview and Scrutiny Rule 37 of the Constitution that requires an annual report to be submitted to the Council each year and highlights the Scrutiny business undertaken throughout the municipal year.
3. The Committee considered the draft version of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022–23 Annual Report on 20 April 2023 and the final draft version (attached) will be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting scheduled for 18 July 2023.
4. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.

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A stylized illustration of a forest scene. The background is a light blue sky with green foliage. In the foreground, two deer are silhouetted against the trees. The text 'Epping Forest District Council' is overlaid on the scene.

 Epping Forest District Council

Overview and Scrutiny

2022 – 23

Annual Report

© Epping Forest District Council 2023

Report by: V Messenger, EFDC Democratic Services Officer (April 2023)



Chairman's welcome and introduction

May I welcome members of Epping Forest District Council and introduce the 2022 – 23 annual report.

This annual report highlights the work undertaken by the Council's four scrutiny committees, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the three select committees – Stronger Communities, Stronger Council and Stronger Place that are aligned to the Council's key objectives and aims within its Corporate Plan.

This year, I supported a greater focus on scrutinising the Council's services and activities. Scrutiny of outside bodies where the Council was unable to affect or influence their activities was agreed to be held as all-member briefings.

May I take this opportunity to thank the chairmen and members of the select committees and especially my Vice-Chairman, Councillor David Wixley, for all his help and support throughout this challenging year.

And of course, I would like to thank all the officers who have worked so hard to keep the members of the scrutiny committees informed and their help in providing any background information that members needed to carry out their investigations.

Cllr Helen Kane

Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

What is scrutiny?

- ▶ Scrutiny in local government is the mechanism by which public accountability is exercised.
- ▶ In practice the purpose of scrutiny is to examine, question and evaluate in order to achieve improvement.
- ▶ Value of scrutiny is to use research and questioning techniques to make recommendations based on evidence.
- ▶ Scrutiny enables issues of public concerns to be examined.
- ▶ At the heart of all the work is consideration of what impact Cabinet's plans will have on the local community.
- ▶ Overview and scrutiny functions are not meant to be confrontational or seen as deliberately set up to form an opposition to the Cabinet. Rather the two aspects should be regarded as 'different sides of the same coin'. The two should complement each other and work in tandem to contribute to the development of the authority.

Alongside its role to challenge, the scrutiny function has continued to thrive. Scrutiny members have engaged positively with the Cabinet, which is why a Cabinet member cannot be a member of a scrutiny committee. This scrutiny has continued to provide valuable contributions to the Council and the Cabinet remained receptive to ideas put forward by the scrutiny committees throughout the year. The Constitution also allows members to call-in Executive decisions and for the public to ask questions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Scrutiny committees

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The main scrutiny committee has sole responsibility to discharge the Council's statutory duties and responsibilities under the Local Government Act 2000, as defined in the Constitution under [Article 6 – Overview and Scrutiny](#). All the scrutiny committees have a Terms of Reference. Their work programmes are continually updated throughout the year to reflect the progress of their ongoing scrutiny of Council business in relation to corporate performance reporting, service areas, strategies, policies and Qualis.

The committee regularly reviews the Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions to identify suitable matters for its work programme and for the overview of specific decisions being proposed. The Cabinet can equally ask Overview and Scrutiny to pre-scrutinise any of its business.

Select Committees

Restructured into three select committees at the start of the 2019/20 municipal year, they are mainly aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023 and the three pillars of its corporate ambitions:

- **Stronger Communities**
- **Stronger Council**
- **Stronger Place**

Their Terms of Reference are agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting in the municipal year, which sets out a rolling programme of ongoing and cyclical issues specific to their corporate alignments. A lead officer of the Executive Leadership Team, appointed to each select committee, helps to facilitate this and co-ordinates member-led scrutiny throughout the year.

Task and Finish Panels

These panels can be set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to deal with ad-hoc projects or reviews that are included in the annual work programme for overview and scrutiny. The Panels are restricted to those activities which are issue-based, time limited and non-cyclical in character and also have clearly defined objectives.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held seven meetings this municipal year. The committee membership was approved at Annual Council on 26 May 2022. The first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 16 June 2022 when the 2022/23 membership appointments to the select committees and the chairmen and vice-chairmen positions were approved. Councillor C Whitbread, Leader of Council, also presented an overview of the Council's corporate priorities.

Members for 2022–23



CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Helen Kane

VICE-CHAIRMAN:
Councillor David Wixley

COUNCILLORS:

Raymond Balcombe, Roger Baldwin, Richard Bassett, Pranav Bhanot, Elizabeth Gabbett, Ian Hadley, Steven Heather, Bob Jennings, Jeane Lea, Jaymey McIvor, Stephen Murray, Smruti Patel Janet Whitehouse

Led by the new incoming Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny, a general set of principles was agreed with the newly appointed select committee chairmen and vice-chairmen at the first Joint Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen on 28 June 2022.

General principles

- Less scrutiny of outside bodies where the Council was unable to affect or influence their activities. Where members would like to understand the work of these bodies, this might take the form of an all-members briefing and not form part of the scrutiny function.
- A greater focus on the financial overview of the Council's activities.
- Cabinet members should be more accountable to scrutiny for their service responsibilities.
- The implementation of agreed actions should be tracked by each committee.
- Project closure reports be made generally available to all councillors and not just available upon request.
- The function of scrutiny should be to assist Cabinet through pre-scrutiny of decisions.
- Scrutiny committee chairmen would attend Cabinet to present their committee's discussion on items coming through scrutiny to Cabinet.

- Performance Reporting (KPIs) should focus on exceptions and better explanations would be provided for these. Accountable officers should be on hand (virtually) to provide further information, if required.
- Strategies and policies generally to go through the Select Committees unless central to the Council's Corporate Plan objectives.
- Key Qualis decisions to go through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

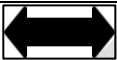


Pre-scrutiny highlights

Corporate Plan 2023 - 2028

The committee pre-scrutinised the Council's Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 introduced by the Continuous Improvement Specialist (N Gambrell) on 27 September 2022. This key strategic plan detailed a new set of corporate aims including a new set of key results, developed to support the aims and key objectives. These corporate aims would be reviewed annually through objectives and key result measures, to deliver and work towards the achievement of each objective that year. The report included digital links to improve reader use. The committee made several suggestions during its scrutiny of the Corporate Plan. It was subsequently agreed by the Cabinet on 10 October and adopted by Council on 20 December 2022.

Corporate Plan Key Action Plan Year 5 2022/23

Detailed pre-scrutiny by the committee was undertaken on a quarterly basis with quarter 1 on 26 July 2022, quarter 2 on 17 November, quarter 3 on 31 January 2023 and quarter 4 on 20 April. These reports detailed the project status summaries, key milestones and RAG status for those projects identified as 'priority projects' within the portfolio aligned to the corporate objectives of the Council. All KPIs regardless of status were also included with comparisons to previous quarters, so progress could be tracked. The committee reviewed performance data in detail at their meetings.

Green	Project on track to achieve milestones
Amber	Project at risk of missing milestones
Red	Project has missed milestones/project has serious issues
Blue	Project complete/on-hold
	Project status is unchanged since previous report
	Project status has improved since previous report
	Project status has declined since previous report

Qualis 1-Year Business Plan

The Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer, A Small, introduced the 1-Year Qualis Business Plan at the 27 September meeting. Currently, in the rapidly changing economic climate, considerable economic pressures were not limited to the Council's finances and residents, but also to the Council's partners, e.g., in the construction industry. Although Qualis should produce a 4-Year business plan under the Shareholder Agreement, in this time of great uncertainty, the decision had been taken that a 4-Year Business Plan would be too challenging and be out of date sooner than forecast. The appendix to the report detailed the financial conditions and how Qualis would address them. Qualis had assessed its opportunities. It had reviewed the Council's commercial assets / portfolio with some success and therefore, the transfer of assets seemed the right time, as Qualis had more opportunities to maximise return. The Conder Building had been demolished. Development of the Epping Sports Centre site had started. The Council was confident good governance was robust at Qualis. S Jevans, Qualis Group Managing Director, continued that Qualis was building strong skills. There were challenges but the report set out the savings made, and had identified the key risks, strategic priorities and was optimistic on growth. The committee's many scrutiny questions were mainly answered by the Finance Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip. Minutes of the meeting can be viewed at [Overview and Scrutiny Committee 27 September 2022](#)

Transfer of Grounds Maintenance Service to Qualis

An extra meeting of the committee was scheduled on 3 November 2022 to pre-scrutinise the business case for the transfer of this service ahead of the Cabinet decision on 7 November. The Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer introduced the report, which proposed to transfer the service in April 2023. Qualis had established a vision for itself as a property company promoting and undertaking property development, management and maintenance. The report provided a high-level summary of the current costs of delivering the existing in-house service, including an indicative Contract payment in the event of the transfer of the Grounds Maintenance service. The business case for the transfer represented an efficient way to deliver this service. It enabled the Council to reduce its back-office costs and offset these against the Qualis Management charge.

A lively debate followed as the committee's questions covered a wide range of concerns, which were mainly answered by the Finance Portfolio Holder along with the Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer.

However, the committee's recommendation to the Cabinet was that at this stage the committee felt unable to support the transfer of Grounds Maintenance to Qualis, as a proposed motion was carried. The Finance Portfolio Holder addressed the concerns raised by scrutiny members at the subsequent Cabinet meeting on 7 November. The Cabinet's decision approved the transfer of the Grounds Maintenance service to Qualis in April 2023, in accordance with the broad terms and approach proposed within the Cabinet report.

[The recording of 3 November meeting is available to view](#)

Qualis – Overview

As members felt that a lot of people did not understand what Qualis was all about and in light of the committee being unable to support the transfer of service above, the Qualis Management team was invited to attend the next meeting. At the 31 January 2023 meeting, the Chairman introduced Qualis Group Managing Director, S Jevans, and the Managing Director of Qualis Management, B Johnson, who gave a presentation. This encompassed an oversight of the property management and housing repairs service Qualis provided on behalf of the Council. It also covered Qualis' values, complaints and lessons learnt, performance in 2020 / 21 and how the Council monitored Qualis and its key objectives. This presentation was included in the minutes of the meeting for information. Qualis Management also replied to a variety of questions from the members present.

Annual review of work undertaken by the Epping Forest Youth Council

Our high-profile and national award-winning Youth Council comprised 23 young people, who represented 8 Epping Forest secondary schools, New City College (Epping Forest Campus) and one who was an independent and home schooled. These young people represented the views of their peers and wider school communities. The current cohort would stand down in May 2024. The committee was presented with an annual review of the work they had undertaken at the meeting on 20 April 2023. Paarth Patel and Olu Ayandare from Davenant Foundation, Sarah Chufoon from King Harold Business Academy and William Ayrton from Chigwell School highlighted the key areas of their work, which encompassed:

- ▶ **EFYC project 2022/23 'Repair My Pocket'** – focused on the cost-of-living crisis. Youth councillors had designed a 12-question survey and conducted street interviews at the Essex Police and EFDC community day of action. The survey was shared with all the District's secondary schools for students to complete. The aim was to assess how young people were being affected by financial pressures and to get a better understanding of how services could help them. The findings were presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- ▶ **Jack Petchey Foundation Funding** – £1,000 was received from the Jack Petchey Foundation to help educate young people about scammers. This was used to purchase 800 copies of the 'Little Book of Scams'. Youth councillors arranged a presentation to students in year 10 and above in their own schools during the spring term when these were

distributed. Produced by Thames Valley Police, the Little Book of Big Scams was a valuable resource to avoid being scammed and losing money.

- ▶ **Independent Advisory Group (IAG) Safety Survey** – three youth councillors attended the Brentwood and Epping Forest IAG. Youth councillors presented the results of a survey that had been conducted in all schools by the end of the spring term to identify how safe young people were feeling in their area and in their schools. It covered safety, including speeding, inappropriate parking, street lighting, scams and crime.
- ▶ **MiLife Blue (legacy project)** – the successful MiLife C19 mental health project for schools was designed by the 2021/22 youth councillors. The Council and the Red Balloon Foundation jointly worked on a new model to update the resources. The project remained available to local schools in the new format but was only available to schools outside the District at a cost. The project renamed MiLife Blue, supported a trauma informed response to young people dealing with mental health issues. This would sit alongside the inaugural award winning MiLife Green project, which related to more general mental health awareness.
- ▶ **EFYC Training** – youth councillors had completed their intensive induction training, covering professionalism, team building, leadership, presentation skills and public speaking. Their training would continue to address projects such as Dementia Friends, Hate Crime, Gaming and Gambling addiction, the environment, Ride London and positive mental health.

Routine scrutiny business

Scrutiny undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at every meeting included:

- ▶ **Key Decision List** – regularly reviewing the Cabinet's Key Decisions enabled the committee to identify appropriate matters for the overview and scrutiny work programme and the overview of specific decisions proposed in the Forward Plan.
- ▶ **Work programme** – the committee regularly reviewed its progress on business transacted and also to identify additional items for its current work programme. Scrutiny of the Epping Forest District Museum's operating model was added to the work programme for 2023/24. It was envisaged the timeframe would extend to a 2-year period.
- ▶ **Select committees' business** – the Chairmen of the select committees had the opportunity to report back on their progress against the achievement of their respective work programmes and make any recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Public questions

Public scrutiny in action at the 17 November 2022 meeting saw a resident submit a question on safeguarding at the meeting. Responding to a question on whether any reports had been made in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 8.2 of the Shareholders Agreement with Qualis Group Ltd since it was signed in February 2020, the Chief Executive, G Blakemore, replied on behalf of the Chairman, "yes" and also replied to the follow-up question.

Call-in of Executive decisions

When an executive decision is made by the Cabinet, a Portfolio Holder or a Cabinet committee, or a key decision is made by an officer with delegated authority, such a decision is published in a notice specifying when the decision will come into force and be implemented, unless it is called-in. Further information in the Constitution under Article 6 (Overview and Scrutiny) provides details of the call-in arrangements and protocol for councillors. This year there were no decisions called-in.

Agendas and minutes

Please view at this link [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

Joint Meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

The joint meeting is held twice a year, usually every six months. It provides the scrutiny chairmen and vice-chairmen with an opportunity to discuss any issues raised with the Executive Leadership Team and the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager. The following items were discussed at the joint meetings held on 28 June and 6 December 2022.

Overview and Scrutiny procedures – review

The agreement of a set of general principles that all scrutiny committees would follow was led by the Chairman, Councillor H Kane, at the June joint meeting, as detailed above. This included the specific allocation of scrutiny review tasks between the work programmes of the four scrutiny committees.

External scrutiny

Reviewing external scrutiny at the June joint meeting, it was noted there was a distinction between partner and external organisations. In previous years, external scrutiny had taken up a large part of those meetings, but the reality was that members could not influence an outside organisation to make any changes. Although the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was responsible for discharging the functions under the Local Government Act 2000, the legislation did not compel external organisations to attend a Council scrutiny meeting. It was one of the functions that the Council could choose to do, so a principle was agreed not to preclude external scrutiny but just do it in a different way as all-member briefings in future. At the joint meeting in December, it was also agreed that the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager would organise three all-member briefings throughout the municipal year, which should suffice, but this could be flexible.

Minute actions

Since the Chairman was keen to track actions from previous meetings these were to be detailed in the minutes, so every scrutiny committee could review any actions identified to ensure replies had been provided and none were outstanding.

Scrutiny training

A well-attended member training session with an external scrutiny trainer was held in the autumn at the Civic Offices. As the feedback from those present had been very positive, the Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager, G Woodhall, advised members at the joint meeting on 6 December that further scrutiny training would be organised for the next municipal year. This should take the form of the external trainer presenting two courses – essential scrutiny questions in June 2023 and learning key questioning skills around September 2023.

The Local Government Association and East of England LGA did offer various courses to councillors one of which was on chairmanship skills that members were recommended to do. There was a range of information on the LGA website all aimed at councillors. LGA had also produced a scrutiny handbook for members.

Agendas and minutes

Joint meeting agendas and minutes can only be accessed on the Intranet / Extranet (via the Members portal).

Waste Management Task and Finish Panel

The Task and Finish Panel concluded most of its work at the last meeting in early March 2020 before the first Covid lockdown. At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 July 2020, a recommendation was made to reconvene the panel when there was any new information arising from the Environment Bill, which was re-introduced to Parliament on 30 January 2020 following the general election in December 2019, and /or any new legislation introduced by the Government.

Stronger Communities Select Committee

The Stronger Communities Select Committee held five meetings this municipal year. The membership was approved at the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2022. The first select committee meeting was held on 12 July 2022.

Members for 2022–23



CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Jeane Lea

VICE-CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Jodie Lucas

COUNCILLORS:

Clive Amos, Raymond Balcombe, Ian Hadley, Stephen Murray, Chidi Nweke, Ronda Pugsley, David Stocker, David Wixley and Shane Yerrell

NON-VOTING MEMBER:

Mr Wyn Marshall – Chairman of the Tenants and Leaseholders Forum

Representing the views of the tenants' associations and acting as a consultative body for the Council on a range of housing issues, Mr Marshall was co-opted as a non-voting member of this select committee on 12 July 2022.

The select committee encompassed the corporate aims and objectives for stronger communities – people live longer, healthier and independent lives; adults and children are supported in times of need; and people and communities achieve their potential. Most of the work programmes were not cyclical apart from quarterly Customer Services updates, and the six-monthly update of the Council-funded Police officers' work.

Pre-scrutiny highlights

Review of Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027

At the first meeting on 12 July 2022, the committee was informed that although the Housing Strategy was not a statutory requirement, it provided a cohesive direction of travel for cross-cutting housing related services. Introduced by the Interim Team Manager for Housing Strategy, the aim of the strategy was to reflect and facilitate the co-ordination of activities for those services that directly impacted on the current and projected need for and supply of affordable housing in the District. A review of the Housing Strategy commenced in May 2021 which was underpinned by reviews of the Allocations Scheme, the Tenancy Policy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Approved by the Cabinet on 1 March 2022, these would take effect in September 2022 for the period 2022-2027. Questions answered covered – retaining green spaces in schemes for recreational use that was a key feature of the Council's 'It's more than bricks and mortar' project;

working on proposals and funding with E-ON for a pilot scheme to retrofit older Council properties to become more energy efficient; and in relation to costs involved that the Housing Strategy planned a number of existing services and partnerships that would be delivered through greater collaboration between these services and partnerships.

Sheltered Housing Refurbishment Programme

The Housing and Property Director reported on the successful pilot refurbishment of the sheltered housing scheme at Frank Bretton House, which was completed within six months. The Council wished to continue the refurbishment program at other sheltered schemes within the District to make the communal areas feel modern, welcoming, and desirable. Residents' feedback from 75% of tenants on this pilot refurbishment would assist with the order of works and help improve the customer experience going forward. In July, the select committee recommended to the Cabinet that approval be given to continue the sheltered housing refurbishment programme.

Transfer of services from the Broadway Housing Office

Also, in July 2022, the Housing and Property Director advised the committee that following a review of the number of tenants visiting the Broadway office for housing purposes, it was felt that there was a better, more efficient way to provide the services for those people and for staff to spend more time in the housing estates. The proposal was to close the Broadway office creating a saving for the Council. Meanwhile, St John the Baptist Church in Loughton had contacted the Council to join up with partnerships and other professionals to provide a hub service for tenants and residents, thus enabling the Housing officers to provide a flexible service. The committee had supported this proposal. Furthermore, to assist cash paying customers using the Broadway office, Allpay cards would be issued for council tax and non-domestic rates. Following the initial rollout of the Allpay scheme, an opt-in service would be provided to other customers paying council tax and non-domestic rates.

Refresh of the Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 – 2026

The strategy set out the aims and aspirations of the multi-agency Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living within the District. The partnership Board was made up of representatives from Epping Forest District Council, Essex County Council, the West Essex Health and Care Partnership and the NHS including a wide range of local health and voluntary sector organisations. The Board had published its original ten-year strategy back in 2018, but as a direct result of the Covid pandemic, the decision was taken to review and refresh the strategy early to ensure the District had a robust and meaningful roadmap to maximise resources and expertise to support the best possible outcomes for residents. Following a range of questions at the meeting on 15 November 2022, the select committee asked to receive an annual update.

Domestic Abuse and Domestic Abuse Workplace Policies

On 2 March 2023, the Specialist Technical Services Officer, C Wiggins, introduced these policies to the select committee. Members were informed the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) was launched in 2014 and was managed by Standing Together. The Council had aspired to achieve a DAHA Accreditation to support residents and staff by providing a positive, safe environment and encouraging them to have the confidence to approach the Council at a time of need. The policies set out the Council's commitment to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents and explained how the Council would provide support tailored to the needs of the individual, working in partnership with specialist services to provide a coordinated response. The Specialist Technical Services Officer advised that Qualis would have their own policies, although the policies would be shared as they formalised the services already being delivered by the Council.

Essex Police presentation

The select committee received a presentation at the meeting on 2 March from the Essex Police District Commander for Brentwood and Epping Forest, Chief Inspector Tina Cooper, who provided information on the following areas:

- Policing structure in the District
- The Force Plan 2022/25
- What community priorities were being delivered?
- Events held such as 'Walk with Us'
- ASB issues, actions, and outcome in Ongar
- Community Engagement events attended
- Performance of the last 12-month period to January 2023
- Public perception survey results

[The recording of the meeting on 2 March is available to view](#)

Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership Annual Strategic Assessment, Annual Report and Plan on a page

The Specialist Technical Services Officer, C Wiggins, reported on 2 March 2023 that the Community Safety Partnership was required to complete an annual Strategic Assessment that was used to direct and guide their activities, under the requirements as responsible authorities of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The policing structure referred to in the annual report related to the Epping Forest District only and the officers were based at Loughton Police Station. The Crucial Crew event organised for the District's state primary schools would be relaunched and was to be held at the Civic Offices.

Discussion Paper – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure 2023/24

The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager, G Woodhall, advised that the Constitution Working Group had considered a report on 16 March 2023 about the proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure for 2023/24 but had requested that a scrutiny committee also discuss the report – hence its discussion on 21 March 2023 by the select committee. The select committee supported the Working Group's recommendation of option 1, which would go to Council on 4 April 2023 for adoption.

Routine scrutiny business

Council-funded Police officers 6-month report

The Council continued to fund the employment of an additional police sergeant and two police constables to supplement existing local policing resources. A third police constable funded by Essex Police joined the team in April 2022. The Police team, which started in July 2018 with an initial 3-year contract, had been extended. At the meeting on 20 September 2022, the Technical Services Specialist reported to the select committee that the police were tasked in-line with District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities identified through the annual Strategic Assessment and aligned with the priorities set by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and Essex Police Crime Prevention Strategy 2021-2025. In response to a question, the Brentwood and Epping Forest District Commander provided a detailed reply after the meeting on whether the police could take enforcement action against drivers who obstructed pavements.

The next six-month report on the work and range of operations of the Council's funded Police team was presented on 2 March 2023 by the Specialist Technical Services Officer. The funded police team continued with the following primary functions of supporting functionality of Epping Forest District Council departments/teams; providing 'added value' to the District in supporting the Community Policing function; and targeting action against criminality in the District. By the end of 2022, the police team had accepted and completed thirty-nine tasking requests during that year.

Museum collection rationalisation programme

The Epping Forest District Museum was currently undertaking a review of its collections to ensure material held remained relevant, accessible, and safe for public and staff. This was a procedure recommended to be undertaken by all museums, and followed guidelines and ethics laid out by the Museums Association. The Heritage and Venues Team Manager, F Pellegrino, presented an

update on the progress of the project over the last year, which the select committee noted at its meeting on 15 November 2022.

Annual Lettings report

The select committee reviewed the allocations and lettings performance between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. Presented by the Interim Housing Strategy Manager, the report outlined the demand for social housing on 31 March 2022 from qualifying applicants in accordance with the Council's Allocations Scheme for 2018-2022. It covered typical waiting times and profiling information on age, mobility needs and ethnicity of the applicants that had been rehoused. Details were also provided on the number of mutual exchanges and management transfers that took place outside of the allocations scheme during the same period, and the number of properties that former tenants purchased from the Council under the Right to Buy. The select committee queried the appeals process, armed forces applicants and the statistics of applicants in different bands.

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update

The Interim Housing & Property Director, P Wharfe presented an interim update on the HRA Business Plan on 21 March 2023. It was noted that the stock condition survey was underway, and an Asset Management Strategy would be produced alongside the HRA Business Plan. It would be presented to the Committee in October 2023 and annually onwards. Members asked a number of questions on the report and answers were provided by the officer in attendance.

What are our customers telling us?

At the meeting on 20 September, the Service Manager (Customer Services), S Lewis, updated the committee progress over the last six months and answered several questions. These included – the wait time for customers phoning the Contact Centre, which was currently 5.5 minutes; Biffa was providing daily updates on waste collections which Customer Services passed on to residents; officers were working towards an automated response for all contact forms that would be part of the back office customer journey mapping; users of the Epping community hub were asked to complete a survey, so information could be compiled on where they had travelled from etc; and the Housing and Community Portfolio Holder, Councillor H Whitbread, advised that the idea was to recreate the community hub in other areas in the District in a similar form or as pop ups across the District. The Customer Service Manager would also raise any problems that members were experiencing with their Council devices or their own as not all devices were compatible with the Council's systems. A Members Portal had been created on the Council's website, which provided members with useful information plus access to committee agendas and minutes all in one place.

The Service Manager (Customer Services) presented a further Customer Services Strategy update report and what residents had been telling the Council on 21 March 2023. Members asked several questions on the report and answers were provided by the Officers and Portfolio Holder in attendance.

Other work programme highlights

- ▶ **New support model for sheltered housing** (20 September 2022)
- ▶ **Review of proposal on caretaking in blocks** where residents rate the cleaning (21 March 2023)
- ▶ **Annual Housing performance report** (21 March 2023)
- ▶ **Estate improvements at Harveyfields, Waltham Abbey** creating great places where people want to live (20 September 2022)
- ▶ **Changing Landscape of Housing Paper 1** Building Safety and Health and Safety analysis (12 July 2022)

Agendas and minutes

Please view at this link [Stronger Communities Select Committee](#)

Stronger Council Select Committee

The Stronger Council Select Committee held five meetings this municipal year. The membership was approved at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting on 16 June 2022. The first select committee meeting was held on 21 July 2022.

Members for 2022–23



CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Jaymey McIvor

VICE-CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Smruti Patel

COUNCILLORS:

Richard Bassett, Rose Brookes, Elizabeth Gabbett, Ian Hadley, Steven Heather, Jayna Jogia, Richard Morgan, Sheree Rackham and Jon M Whitehouse.

The select committee had an overview of the Corporate aims and objectives for a stronger Council – democratic engagement; the People Strategy and a culture of innovation through improved workforce skills and performance through innovation and technology; and financial independence with low council tax. Therefore, much of the scrutiny work was of a cyclical nature, as the select committee regularly reviewed the following.

- ▶ Budget monitoring reports
- ▶ Qualis monitoring reports
- ▶ Financial planning
- ▶ Digital enablement
- ▶ People Strategy

Pre-scrutiny highlights

Azure – move to the cloud

The select committee reviewed the business case for the move to Azure on 21 July 2022. For more than 12 months the Council had worked closely on this project with Microsoft and Agilisys to complete a detailed costing analysis and to spec out the Azure option. The Council's digitisation strategic plan included standardising its infrastructure and services to a cloud first strategy and this project would create a cloud platform that supported the longer-term digital ambitions of the Council. If our existing data centre was destroyed by fire, the Council would be completely without any IT structure. Also, the Government's advice was to move to the Cloud and not have a single point of failure. With the majority of staff working from home, we were almost in a cloud environment already. Members were assured there would not be a major issue on performance for the end user as many of the applications that we were moving to were designed to be used in the

cloud. What was changing was where the data was stored and how it was delivered but not the end use. The select committee commented on the business case. The decision taken to award a contract to Agilisys for the procurement of Azure – move to the cloud, which was made under delegated arrangement by the Internal Resource Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Kane, in July 2022 (IRS-001-2022/23).

Outsourcing of the Concierge Service

On 24 November, members looked at the Concierge service provided at the Civic Offices. The service included numerous responsibilities – to open and close the building, manage and maintain our bookable spaces, monitor the employee car park, issue security cards, monitor CCTV and much more. The existing service covered 06.30-22.00 Monday to Friday, with out of hours, on site security being provided by a contractor between 22.00-06.30 on weekdays and across the whole weekend. Due to various operational and resource challenges, the Senior Leadership Team had agreed to explore the outsourcing of the Concierge Service by formally going out to tender, review the bids and then make a decision on whether the Council proceeded to the formal stages of outsourcing. Only one contractor, PCS Group, out of four had shown an interest and submitted a bid. It was noted that the current out of hours contractor had not made a bid. Members asked a range of questions. But in their comments passed to the Cabinet they wanted the current staff to be kept up to date on this proposal and that the new contracted workforce coming in, was trained properly on the ways of the Council and that there would be a continuity of those staff.

Draft Budget 2023/24

The Finance Portfolio Holder, Councillor J Philip introduced the draft budget report for 2023/24 on 24 January 2023. This had gone to the Cabinet in December 2022, with a final report still to come. The full report included revenue and capital proposals for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as well as a schedule of suggested Fees and Charges for the forthcoming financial year. An updated Medium-Term Financial Plan covering the financial years 2023/24 through to 2027/28 was also included, which reflected both the impact of the draft Budget proposals as well as the latest available intelligence at the time. As required by law a balanced position (eliminating a previously identified projected deficit of £4.126 million) had provisionally been reached for 2023/24, and the medium-term financial position, although having a similar profile, had some differences compared to the position presented to the Cabinet on 10 October (and subsequently to this select committee on 24 November). There was a particular challenge still anticipated in 2024/25 and 2025/26 because of the forthcoming new Waste Management Contract. However, some significant uncertainties remained. The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24 released in December 2022 had provided further assurance as to the underlying financial sustainability of the draft Budget proposals as currently presented. The Council would be looking for voluntary redundancies but that might not be the case. Currently there were 18 roles involved in the overall budget package, with up to 48 staff involved in the consultation exercise. It was anticipated the loss of staff would be much smaller than that and mostly through voluntary redundancies.

Onboarding / induction

On 24 January 2023 the select committee was updated by J Budden, Service Manager People, Culture and Wellbeing, on developments made to the onboarding/induction process. In addition, a live demonstration of the system by A Cartwright, HR Corporate Business Partner, showed the various elements that went into the onboarding process. Candidates would form an impression of an organisation throughout the recruitment process. However, what was often overlooked was the period between a successful candidate accepting a job offer when they were working their notice and their start date, which could be a number of weeks or months. Pre-start date onboarding helped to settle a new employee into the Council and ensured they had everything they needed before their start date. It also supported the new employee in understanding more about the Council's culture and values, as well as some of the more practical aspects that might otherwise be overlooked. New employees would do their induction and job specific training with their line manager and there was the opportunity to attend a welcoming introduction when they would meet one of the Senior Leadership Team. The Service Manager advised there were plans for member induction via the system as it could be useful to new councillors.

Launch of the new employee Wellbeing Hub

The select committee learned about the launch of the new employee Wellbeing Hub at the January meeting, which included a short presentation. J Budden and S Kits, Business Partner (Corporate Communications), outlined the excellent wellbeing resources and support available to employees. In addition to the Employee Assistance Programme (Perkbox) that offered counselling sessions and support for all employees and their close family members, EFDC had focussed on developing a solid network of individuals within the organisation to help support colleagues. This included the Perkbox Wellness Hub for free content on wellness resources, and over 90 employees had trained to become Mental Health First Aiders. Members were impressed with the Wellbeing Hub, which set a high standard for other local authorities to follow. When querying the engagement of staff working from home, the select committee was advised that virtual coffee mornings for employees were organised and managers had been upskilled to educate them in mental health issues. In relation to staff retention, it did lead to a better understanding of that staff wanted.

Routine scrutiny business

Budget Monitoring Reports

The General Fund revenue and capital positions as well as the HRA revenue and capital positions were reviewed at the meetings on 21 July 2022 (quarter 4 (outturn)) for FY2021/22 and for FY2022/23 on 26 September (quarter 1), 24 November (quarter 2), 24 January 2023 (quarter 3) and quarter 4 (18 April 2023). The Strategic Director Corporate and Section 151 Officer, A Small, and Interim Chief Finance Officer, C Hartgrove, highlighted the current global, national and local economic malaise and the uncertainty this created for the Council. The financial pressures were detailed in the monitoring reports and outlined the current positions, which were dominated by a range of substantial spending pressures. The Council's budget for 2022/23 (both General Fund and HRA) had been approved by full Council on 24 February 2022. These reports updated members on how the Council's services had performed against their budgets each quarter and projected forward to the anticipated outturn for the end of the financial year. When the select committee acknowledged the general fund reserve of £4 million now stood at £3 million at quarter 3, the Finance Portfolio Holder advised there was a desire to get back to our minimum balance, but without impacting on our services.

Financial Planning Framework 2023/24 to 2027/28

Like virtually all local authorities, the Council was facing major financial pressure following a series of significant external World events – including Brexit, a pandemic, and the invasion of Ukraine – which had combined to create a worldwide economic crisis that was worsening almost daily. On 26 September the select committee reviewed the proposed approach to financial planning until 2027/28, which included the reporting and governance timetable. The select committee was advised that the Local Government Settlement was expected to be announced by mid to late December 2022, but it was unlikely there would be a two-year settlement. The Finance Portfolio Holder advised that the Cabinet was working with lead officers, initially over a gap of £4 million.

Updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Although the Cabinet considered the updated MTFP on 10 October, as agreed in the governance timetable, it should be scrutinised by the select committee and was reviewed on 24 November. As a forward-looking document, it provided a tentative look at the Council's financial picture over the next five years (2023/24 through to 2027/28) and set the scene by providing a framework for developing both the General Fund and HRA budgets for 2023/24. The General Fund forecast within the MTFP revealed a projected deficit of £4.126 million for 2023/24. This reflected major spending pressures driven by inflation. Looking further ahead – assuming a balanced budget was achieved for 2023/24 without recourse to the use of reserves – a budget gap was expected to open-up again on the General Fund from 2024/25, with annual budget pressures in the region of £1.4 million anticipated for two consecutive financial years. It was noted that the biggest expenditure currently was staff and not accommodation. A substantial amount of savings would therefore have to come from staff. The select committee was informed that salary costs had always been high, exceeding any other expenditure that the Council had. The comparatively high vacancy

rate captured some of the potential savings to be had without impacting on staff directly. Options had been presented to the Cabinet and they were working through them.

Qualis Monitoring Reports

Also in September, the select committee reviewed quarter 3 from 1 April to 30 June 2022 for the Qualis trading year 2021/22. Presented by the Strategic Director Corporate and Section 151 Officer, the Board report highlighted performance against the business plan targets using the recognised Red, Amber, Green (RAG) reporting system. This showed a continuing loss, which was primarily associated with delays in achieving planning consent at Roundhills, and challenges with finding suitable regeneration property to acquire. It was acknowledged that Qualis faced similar financial challenges to the Council. When the select committee queried if there were any economies that could be achieved by Qualis working with other third parties, the Finance Portfolio Holder emphasised that Qualis must remain a separate entity from the Council and detailed that Qualis had driven value from contracts. When asked if there would be any impact from changes in stamp duty, members were advised this would be difficult to predict owing to the position in the development sequence, but Qualis did ensure that external factors were regularly reviewed.

People Strategy 2020 – 2022

In July the Corporate Services Director, P Maginnis, presented a detailed report for 2022. Also, a draft version of the new strategy that would run until March 2023, was being reviewed. The Service Director answered members and advised that: the Council was not experiencing a higher turnover of staff; the HR Business Partners led power hour sessions on various issues for managers/staff; the review on 'creating our tomorrow' focussed on how officers wanted to work in hybrid and agile ways; and a glossary of terms used in the report was provided for the minutes.

In November the select committee received a presentation from the Corporate Services Director on 'Creating our tomorrow – our ways of working for the future 2022 and beyond'. This outlined the results of the One Poll employee survey from 1 June to 12 July 2022. The 77% response rate amounted to 410 employees taking part. The Council had a performance management programme, with managers holding regular one to ones with staff, and also set targets and measurements for individual staff and parts of the organisation. Also, line managers controlled the allocation of work and monitored it. Many teams had regular meetings on 'Teams' and there were benefits and gains from staff working from home. Also, working from home was easier for some roles than others – it was a balance. The select committee commended the officers for organising the recent member / officer meetings. It was noted that officers were looking at customers and their needs in what we did as that was key to what we would do. They were also looking at better ways in how we communicated and how we could improve our systems to make them more effective.

Agendas and minutes

Please view at this link [Stronger Council Select Committee](#)

Stronger Place Select Committee

The Stronger Place Select Committee held four meetings this municipal year. The September meeting was cancelled owing to the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, as it would have taken place during the period of national mourning. The membership was approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 July 2022. The first meeting was held on 5 July 2022.

Members for 2022–23



CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Raymond Balcombe

VICE-CHAIRMAN:
Councillor Ronda Pugsley

COUNCILLORS:

Ian Allgood, Richard Bassett, Peter Bolton, Heather Brady, Simon Heap, Steven Heather, Judy Jennings, Cherry McCredie and Richard Morgan

The select committee covered the Corporate aims and objectives for a stronger place – delivering effective core services that people want; a District with planned development; and an environment where new and existing businesses thrive. Its definition encompassed Epping Forest District as a physical Place and to scrutinise the direction, policies and projects of the executive that affect the spatial and infrastructure requirements of the District. Scrutiny of the work programme included:

- ▶ Local Plan updates
- ▶ Council housebuilding
- ▶ Economic growth, skills and employment
- ▶ District-wide Waste Management provision
- ▶ Leisure Management Contract updates

Pre-scrutiny highlights

Litter Strategy

The strategy would help to deliver the commitment to the Government's Litter Strategy for England along with the Environmental Protection Act (1990) and the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse (2019). Officers would work with Keep Britain Tidy to ensure this strategy and any associated actions were in keeping with the aspirations of the Government's Litter Strategy. The strategy for a Cleaner Epping Forest District laid out the Council's plans to continue its work in the transformation of our open spaces and streets to ensure that it met the Government's expectations. It also reflected residents' desire to have a clean and healthy local environment free of litter, fly-tipping and dog waste. Street sweeping was one of the most important services any council operated to

improve the appearance of a street or area. With less litter, fly-tipping and dog fouling, the Council could reduce its spending on collecting and disposing of it. Having a litter strategy would contribute positively towards the Council's environmental policies to reduce carbon in response to the climate emergency. In addition to statutory performance indicators, success would be measured in the Council's reduced carbon footprint with less waste going to landfill. The strategy would provide a platform to engage with partners to enhance the local environment, by securing behaviour change. At the meeting on 5 July 2022, J Warwick (Acting Service Director (Contracts)) advised that five litter picks had been completed and 72 bags of litter collected during the Great British Spring Clean. There had also been sixteen applications for support for equipment for litter picks, with fifteen completed. The select committee challenged the strategy on a number of points and it was agreed that the strategy would be reviewed, strengthened and refined. On 8 November, the committee reviewed the Litter Strategy as approved by Cabinet in October and commended the revisions made to the draft version that had been scrutinised by the select committee in July. The select committee proposed that an update on the Litter Strategy should be included in the 2023/4 Stronger Place work programme.

Leisure Services Contract update

The Council appointed Places for People Leisure as its partner for the development and management of its four leisure facilities when the agreement commenced in April 2017. It was a 20-year design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) contract. On 8 November, the Acting Service Director (Contracts) stated that the contract was managed through monthly leisure contract managers meetings, where performance of the delivery of services in accordance with the agreed contract was reviewed. The Leisure Management Contract Partnership Board provided strategic oversight and robust challenges over the contract, providing effective dialogue and resolution of issues at senior officer and member level. The Council monitored the services to ensure performance against set requirements and Key Performance Indicators in the contract. During the Covid-19 pandemic, EFDC provided financial support to Places Leisure in order to maintain the operations of the leisure centres in the District. The recovery rates in leisure centre usage had enabled Places Leisure to resume the payment of management fees. Rising energy costs were posing a significant challenge but mitigating the rising energy costs was being achieved by implementing measures across the centres to reduce the levels of consumption. In January 2021, Cabinet agreed that the new leisure centre in Epping was to be delivered by Places Leisure under the DBOM contract, as had the Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre. A formal Deed of Variation was issued, and an external legal adviser was appointed to prepare and negotiate the DBOM contract variation. The new Epping Leisure Centre project was currently in the second stage of the procurement phase, with the contract award anticipated early 2023. The construction phase for the new leisure centre was expected to start in summer 2023, with a two-year construction period.

Waste Management Contract update

On 8 November, the Interim Acting Service Director (Contracts) advised the Council was in contract with Biffa Municipal Ltd. for the delivery of waste, processing of dry recycling services and street cleansing. The Cabinet had agreed to undertake a full procurement process for this contract that would expire in November 2024. Officers had started the procurement process and market engagement events had been held with potential waste contractors. A Portfolio Holders Advisory Group would be established to consider the current challenges and support the procurement of a new waste and recycling contract. The Waste Management Partnership Board provided a strategic oversight of the contract at senior officer and member level. It was supported by monthly managers meetings and daily monitoring and inspections by the Waste and Recycling Team Manager and area waste officers. It was acknowledged that there had been unprecedented levels of missed collections over the course of this year. This was due to multiple factors including a national shortage of staff, in particular drivers and loaders, and vehicle breakdowns compounded by a lack of hire vehicles. Biffa had implemented a variety of investments and initiatives to improve their performance. The select committee asked for a list of missed collections to be highly visible on the Council's website when this involved whole streets or known areas; sought clarity on the wheelie bin trial in Theydon Bois; suggested narrow access vehicles could be used when there were cars parked on both sides of a road and in rural areas with restricted access; raised concerns that bins were not being repaired but replaced; and discussed the potential charging to collect garden

waste. A visit to the recycling centre at Edmonton for members of the select committee would also be arranged.

Parking update

At the meeting on 16 January 2023, the Interim Acting Service Director (Contracts) presented the update report highlighting that the tariff changes agreed by Cabinet in November 2021 had been successfully implemented on 4 April 2022. An annual increase of approximately £150,000 in parking fees and charges was projected, compared to the previous year (post-pandemic). The select committee was advised that although pre-pandemic parking income levels had not been reached, car park income and occupancy rates were continually reviewed by EFDC officers. Other parking updates comprised news of: further electric vehicle (EV) charging points; a school-led initiative (3PR) offered across the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) to help prevent inconsiderate and dangerous parking around schools; and a new online process for Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) applications. Also, as pavement parking was not prohibited in Essex, the NEPP could not enforce against obstructive parking, which could only be carried out by the Police.

Off Street Civil Parking Enforcement Policy

In January, the Leisure and Parking Team Manager, A Hoke, advised the Committee that the Civil Parking Enforcement policy had been reviewed and amended. The updated policy provided a simplified document with updated terminology. The policy reflected the legal process, covered EV bays, virtual payments and the introduction of a £50 administration fee, which had been added to suspension requests in addition to standard suspension charges per bay fee. The select committee was informed the policy stipulated that motorists could challenge penalty charge notices for exceptional circumstances including breakdown and each representation was considered on its own merits and assessed in line with best practice; the observation period for offences was set by legislation with the grace period set locally at 10 mins; and blue badge holders parked for free if they correctly displayed a valid blue badge. However, officers would look to develop publicity around the misuse and confiscation of blue badges.

Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP)

The Technical Services Manager, M Thompson, reported that the process to develop the AQAP was prescribed in law and required a public consultation exercise before submission to Defra for approval and the subsequent adoption by Council. The proposed draft AQAP sought to improve air quality in the District. It supported the aims of the Climate Change Action Plan and work around improving air quality for the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Technical Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor K Williamson, commended the plan to the select committee on 16 January. Councillor N Bedford, Place Portfolio Holder, also advised that the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group for Air Quality had held discussions on air quality in Epping Forest and as part of the mitigation strategy associated with the SAC. Monitoring sites near the Wake Arms roundabout had been agreed with the City of London (CoL) which was considering the installation of temporary signs to advise motorists to turn off their vehicle engines, rather than leave them idling. In addition, road improvements had also been agreed on the A1403 between the Wake Arms and Woodford. Members raised a number of points with the Air Quality Environmental Officer, A Ventura, and the Environmental Health Team Manager, B Stalabrass. Although the select committee endorsed the draft AQAP and approved the four-week public consultation between the months of January and February 2023, it suggested that transport was critical to the delivery of the AQAP and the impact on non-human sensitive receptors, e.g. bees, should be considered.

Sustainable transport update

S Lloyd Jones, Sustainable Transport Officer, presented highlights of this report to the select committee on 7 March 2023, which included:

- The national and local pressure on bus services and the extension of the national £2 flat fare for buses until the end of June 2023.
- The introduction of a Flexi-route app to support the EFDC funded DaRT86 Service, the promotional material available and the social value of this service, which was run in

conjunction with Epping Forest Community Transport and needed to be booked at least 24 hours in advance.

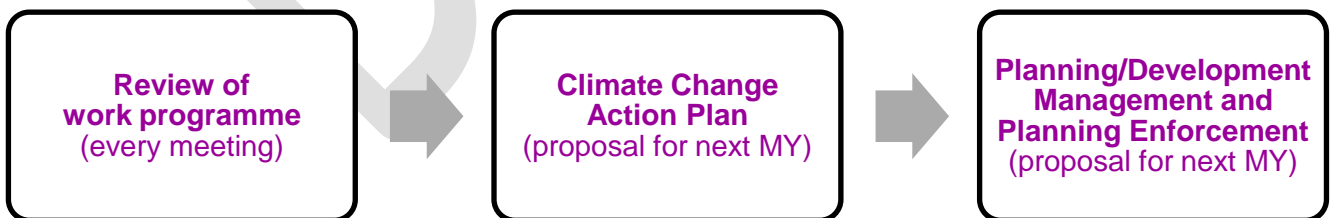
- The Electric Vehicle (EV) market share was increasing. EFDC had the highest number of Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) on the road in Essex but the level of public EV charging points was an issue.
- Work with Instavolt would expand rapid chargers, these would be available in six Council car parks. The facilitation of planning requests for public or semi-public charges should increase the number of EV chargers to match the England ratio by the end of 2023.
- EFDC had very low utility and commuting cycling compared to the neighbouring boroughs. A Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Waltham Abbey should be carried out in 2023/24.
- The Local Plan could provide funding for active travel.

The select committee recognised the value of the DaRT86 and requested promotional material for distribution and to publicise the bus service to the local councils. It was agreed there was a need for more infrastructure to encourage the shift to, and use of, public transport but acknowledged that this would need to be addressed on a subregional or national basis. Members recognised that the infrastructure for on street EC charging could be restrictive and additional pressures and requirements could be required for rural areas. It was suggested that a relaxation on the rules for personal driveways and integration with mobility grants could increase the number of EV charging points. The select committee acknowledged the lack of cycle infrastructure and that safe cycling was an issue across the District.

North Weald Airfield development

The Commercial Service Manager, D Goodey, outlined the North Weald Airfield Master Plan and the proposed development of the eastern side of the aerodrome at the meeting on 7 March 2023. This would dictate a change to how aviation operations were performed due to the requirement to relocate the control tower building function, the potential need for a new entrance and alternative locations for operational buildings. Following a two-phase review that had been carried out by Osprey Consulting, the recommendation was that North Weald Airfield remained an unlicensed aerodrome but with improved facilities, security, and safety. Members had agreed with this recommendation and welcomed the aviation business and training opportunity this would provide. As the control tower building was listed it would remain in situ, but its function would be relocated. Details of the shared road and taxi runway space were provided at the meeting, in addition to the mitigation measures that were in place to minimise any risk of accident. Confirmation was received that the development for commercial use for freight was not a consideration of the report and that the London Metropolitan Police Helicopter base had moved back to Lippitts Hill, High Beach.

Other work programme highlights



Agendas and minutes

Please view at this link [Stronger Place Select Committee](#)