

## ***Overview and Scrutiny Committee Thursday, 12th November, 2009***

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

**Time:** 7.30 pm

**Democratic Services Officer:** Simon Hill, Senior Democratic Services Officer, The Office of the Chief Executive  
email: [shill@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:shill@eppingforestdc.gov.uk) Tel: 01992 564249

**Members:**

Councillors R Morgan (Chairman), K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman), M Colling, A Green, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs A Haigh, D Jacobs, J Knapman, R Law, G Mohindra and Mrs L Wagland

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND**

### **WEBCASTING NOTICE**

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#### **1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

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

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**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive). To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

**4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

**5. MINUTES (Pages 5 - 14)**

**Decisions required:**

To confirm the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 8 October 2009.

**6. PRESENTATION FROM YOUTH COUNCIL**

(Youth Council Representatives) In 2008/09 the Cabinet had requested the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive an annual presentation from the Youth Council giving an update on the developing Youth Council programme and to present their request for funding for the year ahead.

A DVD presentation is also planned for this meeting. The presentation would be supported by three Youth Councillors who would describe their aspirations, for the Youth Council over the next 12 months and the possible financial implications of those aspirations.

**7. EERA CONSULTATION - 2013 SCENARIOS FOR HOUSING AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (Pages 15 - 22)**

To consider the attached report.

**8. KEY FINDINGS PLACE SURVEY REPORT (Pages 23 - 36)**

To consider the attached report.

**9. REPORT OF THE DEBT MANAGEMENT REVIEW SUB-GROUP (Pages 37 - 48)**

To consider the attached report.

**10. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - SIX MONTHLY REVIEW (Pages 49 - 70)**

To consider the attached report.

**11. ECC CONSULTATION - MINERALS DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENTS (Pages 71 - 80)**

To consider the attached report.

**12. STAFFING IN THE PLANNING DIRECTORATE (Pages 81 - 88)**

To consider the attached report.

**13. CABINET REVIEW**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**To consider any items to be raised by the Chairman at the Cabinet meeting on 16 November 2009.**

(Assistant to the Chief Executive). Under the Overview and Scrutiny rules the Committee is required to scrutinise proposed decisions of the Executive. The Chairman is also required to report on such discussions to the Cabinet.

The Committee is asked to consider the 16 November 2009 Cabinet agenda (previously circulated) to see whether there are any items that they wished to be raised at the Cabinet meeting.

**14. 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):

<b>Agenda Item No</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Exempt Information Paragraph Number</b>
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.

**Confidential Items Commencement:** Paragraph 9 of the Council Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution require:

- (1) All business of the Council requiring to be transacted in the presence of the press and public to be completed by 10.00 p.m. at the latest.
- (2) At the time appointed under (1) above, the Chairman shall permit the completion of debate on any item still under consideration, and at his or her discretion, any other remaining business whereupon the Council shall proceed to exclude the public and press.
- (3) Any public business remaining to be dealt with shall be deferred until after the completion of the private part of the meeting, including items submitted for report rather than decision.

**Background Papers:** Paragraph 8 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules of the Constitution 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 (as defined in Rule 10) and in respect of executive reports, the advice of any political advisor.

Inspection of background papers may be arranged by contacting the officer responsible for the item.

## EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee      **Date:** Thursday, 8 October 2009

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 9.37 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman) M Colling, A Green, Mrs A Grigg, Mrs A Haigh, D Jacobs, J Knapman, J Philip and Mrs L Wagland

**Other Councillors:** Councillors R Bassett, Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Cooper, Mrs M McEwen, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin, D Stallan and C Whitbread

**Apologies:** Councillors G Mohindra

**Officers Present:** D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Engineering Services)), P Maddock (Assistant Director (Accountancy)), S G Hill (Senior Democratic Services Officer), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer), S Mitchell (PR Website Editor) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

**By Invitation:** R Skinner (Essex Fire and Rescue Service)

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### 35. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

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

### 36. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor J Philip had substituted for Councillor G Mohindra.

### 37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J Knapman declared a personal interest in items 6 and 7 of the agenda by virtue of being a member of the Essex Fire Authority.

### 38. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2009 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Third paragraph of item 27 'Call-in – The Broadway, Loughton – Rent deferment Scheme' the following sentences to be changed:

- Change the second sentence to read – “He noted that the LRA had supported the decision made by the Cabinet affecting the plight of the traders and that supporting a rent deferment scheme was untenable.”
- Change the eight sentence to read – “It would be helpful if their business rate had been reduced by 20% or 25% and backdated.”
- Change the tenth sentence to read – “According to his calculations it would cost the council from about £28k to a maximum of £38k for a modest rent rebate.”

### **39. PRESENTATION FROM ESSEX FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES**

The Committee received a short presentation from Ray Skinner, the Community Commander of the Essex Fire and Rescue Services. He started by saying the basic tenet of the service was to protect and save life, property and the environment. The service covers a population of 1.6 million people in Essex and had recently moved to new Head Quarters at Kelvedon Park, Witham, Essex.

The Panel noted that:

- They had 1,441 fire fighters, of which 923 were ‘whole time’ and 518 were retained (not their full time job);
- They have 52 fire stations in Essex with some 128 appliances and an annual budget of around 72 million pounds;
- They have community command based at Harlow that reports back to Kelvedon Park;
- They have an average of 24,490 call outs a year;
- The service tends to concentrate more on protection and prevention and also runs an intervention programme for youngsters;
- They hold regular young fire fighters courses to help young people with their self confidence and life skills; they will also follow up on these students after the course has finished;
- The service will carry out home safety visits free of charge;
- They are involved in trying to reduce to the number of killed and seriously injured incidents on the roads, which are now on their way down;
- The Essex Fire Authority has the task of overlooking their service;
- The current issue facing the service was the move to Regional Control Centres, they would eventually be moving to nine control centres. Currently there was a national controversy about this and the outcome of the next General Election may result in changes to the current proposals;
- As part of the public sector they were considered to be very good value for money;
- They were having growing demands placed on them due to increased flooding and terrorist issues;
- As for industrial disputes, there was no threat of a strike at present. There was currently a ‘goodwill’ ban on such things as overtime or acting up to the next rank. It would also be fair to say that no member of the public would be put at risk. They were currently awaiting the outcome of negotiations.

The chairman then opened the meeting to take any questions from the members present.

Councillor Angold-Stephens raised concerns about the Regional Control Centres as it could cause problems, as experienced with the police. There would inevitably be a settling down period, which may cause confusion and he was concerned about this

period. Mr Skinner said there were some concerns at national and regional levels. A lot of the smaller services wanted this to happen. It would be going live in 2012; if it was too close to the Olympics then it may have to be moved back to 2013 so that it would not interfere with the plans. A lot of resources were going into this and hopefully it would work. At present there was some confusion on border areas, but regional centres would manage this better.

Councillor Knapman asked where the regional control centre would be located. Mr Skinner said it would be outside Cambridge. Councillor Knapman continued that he had little faith in these centres as they were located too far away. There were also questions on computer compatibility, are they working? Mr Skinner replied that he did not have that information, but there was concern some over the IT and it would not go live until they were sure of it working.

Councillor Mrs Grigg asked how they monitored response times to life risk responses. Mr Skinner said that they have a performance team monitoring monthly and quarterly response times and making sure that the attendance was appropriate for each region and to monitor our standards.

Councillor Bassett asked about Guy Fawkes' night, what would the fire service be doing. Mr Skinner said that they had a multi-agency approach in Harlow using local fire stations to educate the public. The multi agency programme uses the Anti Social Behaviour Teams, the Police and the Fire Services to deliver educational messages.

Councillor Bassett said that there were major airports nearby, are there plans in place to deal with major emergencies and do they link in with each airport. Mr Skinner replied that they did have pre-planned strategies and they held exercises throughout the year.

Councillor Morgan asked if there was to be a strike, would the army still be available to cover and do they have the proper equipment. Mr Skinner said that they had contingency plans and they would not rely on the army and their green goddesses.

Councillor Mrs Wagland asked if there were any causes of fire that had increased or dropped away in recent years. Mr Skinner replied that the causes of fires remained fairly constant through the years, although there had been an increase in flooding in recent years.

Councillor Morgan asked if straw fires were on the increase. Mr Skinner said there had been some fires recently but he was not aware of any increase generally.

Councillor Colling made an observation about the manning of stations. He said that 518 staff operate out of main stations and 918 out of lesser stations, why the imbalance? Mr Skinner answered that staffing levels reflected the different modes of operation between full time stations where shift patterns existed and retained stations where there may be a high number of retained staff only some of which are able to respond to an incident.

Councillor Mrs Sartin asked if there was a fire on the border with Harlow, who would be called out, a Harlow fire appliance or an Epping one. Mr Skinner responded that each area had a predetermined appliances assigned to that address. If they were busy they would call the next nearest one. At certain stations if an appliance went out on call another one would come to replace it at that station.

Councillor Morgan said that Old Harlow used to be manned by temporary firemen how was it manned now? Mr Skinner said it was still the same. They have to work

within five minutes of the station. There was talk to extending this time in rural areas to get more people in.

Councillor Green asked if they were fully manned at present and if there was a waiting list for people wanting to join the service. Mr Skinner said there was always a waiting list for the full time service, but they did not have one for part time officers.

The Chairman thanked Mr Skinner for coming to speak to the Committee and answering their questions. He expressed the wish that he would come back from time to time to keep them informed of the latest developments in the Fire and Rescue Service.

#### **40. REPORT ON THE BIRCHWOOD FIRE**

The Director of Environment and Street Scene, John Gilbert, introduced the report on the fires at Birchwood, Hoe Lane, Nazeing. The meeting noted that notes of a multi agency meeting held on 17 September 2009 had been tabled for information.

This report came to the Committee following the consideration by the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel and the Safer Cleaner Greener Scrutiny Panel of the circumstances surrounding two fires at the Birchwood site, Nazeing.

The fires took place in early January and late May 2009 and involved the burning of large amounts of stored waste timber and timber products. The scale of the fires meant in both cases that the Fire & Rescue Service did not seek to extinguish them but instead adopted a control and contain approach. This was partly due to the difficulties in getting water to this site and the need to manage potential environmental damage of water run off into local water courses and the local water table.

The outcome of this approach was that in both incidents, the fires remained alight for many days and local residents and businesses were inconvenience by the effects of the fire (smoke, grit and ash).

Councillor Mrs Wagland asked if a water bowser was now on site. Mr Gilbert did not know but said he would find out and let her know. Councillor Mrs Wagland added that it was good to follow up on deadlines. After the last Planning Scrutiny meeting she had asked for a barrister's view on these fires.

Councillor Colling asked whether tyre bailing was a likely alternative use at the site. Mr Gilbert said that it was one of a number of options that had been discussed as an alternative use for the site.

Councillor Mrs Cooper asked if the fire officer, Mr Skinner, had brought in the fire reports from the January and May fires as she had asked for. Mr Skinner said that the reports were not in the public domain, but he could get the public relations report.

Councillor Mrs Cooper expressed her concerns that:

- There may still be a risk on the site.
- She had asked if there had been a comprehensive risk assessment undertaken of the waste establishment.
- The report did not say that the petition was in excess of 700 people.
- The local health authority did not see a problem in the area, perhaps the Hertfordshire Health Services should be asked.



- The health profile of the district said that there were no problems but there were issues with dust and ash. There was a risk to children through damage to their lungs.
- Did the council have its own air monitoring equipment?
- There were reports of a lot of dead fish reported in Broxbourne area, was this due to leaching?

Mr Gilbert said that Mrs Cooper asked about the Health and Safety Assessment of the waste establishment, but since this was not a designated waste establishment different requirements pertained. With respect to nuisance, local residents had not filled in their dairies over the allotted time period and without this evidence it was difficult for the council to build up a case for legal action. As for the petition, the absence of the number of signatories in the report had not been intended to diminish its importance, and all petitions are treated equally this one had been dealt with under normal Council procedures. With respect to local effects upon health, the Council had taken advice from the West Essex Primary Care Trust (PCT) but officers had also written to the North and East Herts PCT and were awaiting their information. With respect to air monitoring during the fires, that undertaken during the first fire had not resulted in any breach of national air quality standards. The Council had not purchased air monitoring equipment, but had this equipment loaned to them during the January fire. As for the dead fish this had nothing to do with the fire but with algae bloom and local conditions.

Mr Skinner the Fire & Rescue Services representative commented that there was no accidental cause found. They had found out that the fire had started at the edge of the wood pile and not as we would have expected near the centre. Wood chippings were not involved in the main fire. As the site is a place of work their main concern was the employees.

Councillor Mrs Cooper asked if a full fire risk had been undertaken on the current site. Mr Skinner responded that there was nothing there on the site to make a risk assessment off. Mrs Cooper also sought clarification on the notes of the meeting of the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel with regards to spontaneous combustion. Mrs Cooper's recollection was that the fire officer had stated that the stored wood on the site was capable of spontaneous combustion whereas the minutes state to the contrary. Mr Gilbert stated that his recollection agreed with the published notes and Mr Skinner stated that whilst it might be possible, it was, given the probable starting point of the fire, most unlikely. The Chairman of the Planning Services Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Mrs Wagland stated that she was content with the notes as published.

The Committee noted that because the site fell within a B2, general consent category, the County was unable to exercise any additional control. It was felt that in future the County Council should be involved at an early stage and to facilitate this, the County had produced a guidance note "Development Involving County Matters" which made suggestions and recommendations as to how a local planning authority should proceed in these circumstances. It was agreed that this should be referred to the District Development Committee.

It was also noted that the Council was likely to serve a pre-emptive abatement notice on the current operator seeking to ensure that the removal process of the remaining ash on site and consideration of the off site treatment and safe disposal is undertaken appropriately and with suitable protection measures in place to manage the dust which will arise from the process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Skinner for remaining to cover this item on the agenda.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Services and Safer, Cleaner, Greener Standing Scrutiny Panels in respect of the Birchwood, Hoe Lane, Nazeing site, be noted;
- (2) That the present situation and the outcome of the most recent multi-agency meeting be noted;
- (3) To refer the County Council's guidance note "Development Involving County Matters" to the District Development Control Committee for its consideration; and
- (4) The intention of authorised officers of the Environment & Street Scene Directorate to serve pre-emptive abatement notices upon the present operators in order to effectively control any future activities on the site be noted.

**41. REPORT OF THE DEBT MANAGEMENT REVIEW SUB- GROUP**

The Committee noted that the report of the Debt Management Review Sub-group was not yet ready and would go to the next scheduled Overview and Scrutiny meeting in November.

**42. INTERIM REPORT FROM THE PITT REVIEW ON FLOODING TASK AND FINISH PANEL**

Councillor Mrs Grigg, the Chairman of the Pitt Review on Flooding Task and Finish Panel introduced their interim report seeking appropriate funding provision in next years budget. The report sought funding for the out of hours drainage standby service. This service provided a rapid local response to flooding incidents by ensuring the availability of trained drainage engineers outside normal working hours, including weekends and public holidays. This has been provided by the Council for a number of years; from April 2006 to October 2008 the costs were charged to the Environment Agency under a contractual arrangement. When this funding ceased the service had been funded through a DDF revenue allocation which will cease in March 2010. Given the ongoing risks of flooding within the district, and the expectation of affected residents that the council would be able to assist, it was recommended that the out of hours service be provided on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Green noted that with the amount of flooding in the district, the cost of this service was very reasonable and should be supported.

Councillor Philip asked if the amount asked for, £10,100, was for every year or was it a 'one off'. The Assistant Director Technical Services, Kim Durrani, replied that it would be a Continuing Service Budget allocation.

Councillor Angold-Stephens remarked that when there was flooding in Loughton only our service was able to help. It was good value for money.

Councillor Mrs Collins asked that officers in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder be left to decide if it should be a CSB or a DDF allocation.

Councillor Knapman said if it was set as DDF then every year we would have to decide if we were to continue with the service. Councillor Mrs Collins replied that the council had been paying for this out of DDF for the last couple of years without a problem, and repeated that the decision should be left up to officers and the portfolio holder.

Councillor Knapman proposed that the words "on an ongoing basis" be removed from the first recommendation. This was agreed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

(1) That the out of hours land drainage standby service be recommended to the Cabinet to be continued at an estimated cost of £10,100 per annum; and

(2) That Cabinet be requested to consider the allocation of financial resources in the 2010/11 budget to enable the assessment of compliance with the requirements of the Pitt Review and the anticipated enactment of the Flood and Water Management Bill.

**43. AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUB-GROUP**

The Committee noted that the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel had established a sub-group following a discussion for the need for affordable housing and the current lack of supply within the District.

**RESOLVED:**

That the sub-group proposed by the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel to consider the need for affordable housing within the District be noted.

**44. HOUSING SUBSIDY REPORT**

The Assistant Director Accountancy, Peter Maddock introduced the report on the Housing Subsidy Review. The government had been exploring possible changes to the Housing Finance System currently in operation. Part of the process was to invite authorities to pilot some of the proposals. This has now taken place and culminated in the issue of a consultation paper. They wish to change the system and propose that council's be given a proportion of the nations housing debt requiring councils to pay the interest on this debt. The initial estimate suggested that it may be a good thing for this council, as it may lower our annual payments to the government, but at this early stage they are still unsure.

Councillor Mrs Collins commented that a lot of the authorities who are not in debt were concerned about this proposal as local authorities in debt would not be paying much more. There was a need to see what other authorities not in debt are doing about this.

Councillor Knapman observed that local authorities were currently locked into a system that was established in the 1980's, Mr Maddock agreed.

Councillor Stallan said it was a matter of balance, would the EFDC be better off with the new suggested system?

**RESOLVED:**

That the submission of the draft response to the Department of Communities and Local Government Consultation Paper on the reform of the Council Housing Finance be approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**45. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING****O&S Work Programme**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer, Simon Hill, took the Committee through their work programme. The Committee noted that:

**Item 3:** Scrutiny of London Underground – due to the impending Olympics it was thought beneficial to widen out the invitation to Transport for London (TfL).

Councillor Mrs Haigh said it would be useful if the committee could decide upon their question before hand and work out some secondary questions as well. She would also like to discuss car parking with the TfL.

**Item 5:** West Essex PCT, joint scrutiny review – the Essex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were discussing how to enhance local scrutiny and they were looking to local meeting to help in this. We are still awaiting their detailed response.

**Item 6:** District Transport in Rural Areas – Officers had chased up county for a final report.

**New Item:** Mr Hill reported that he had recently received a letter from 'Health for North East London' who was looking to set up a scrutiny for health provision for north east London. They had proposed an initial meeting for 2 November. Normally this would go to full Council for them to nominate a member to sit on an outside body. However, there was not enough time for this to happen. He proposed that the Chairman in consultation with the Leader appoint a member to this meeting. It may also be that members would want a formal presentation on this so that we could have a more informed debate during the consultation period. Members agreed that they would welcome this.

Councillor Mrs Haigh commented that this would affect a lot of people who live in the south of the District who would naturally travel south for their health care.

Councillor Mrs Collins said that Councillor Sandler would be the ideal members to sit on this committee if he was available. Councillor Knapman added that if Councillor Sandler was not available then he would offer himself as a member.

**RESOLVED:**

(1) That Councillor Sandler or Councillor Knapman, if Councillor Sandler was not available, to be appointed as an EFDC member to go to the meeting of the Health for North East London committee to be held on 2 November 2009; and

(2) That officers liaise with the West Essex PCT and the ECC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a view to further discussions of the

proposals at a meeting during the consultation period in order to formulate a formal response by the Council.

**Constitution and Members Service Standing Panel:**

The Chairman of this Panel, Councillor Mrs McEwen reported that they were looking at other councils and how they carried out their scrutiny work. They would then come back with their finding for the O&S review they were currently undertaking. They were also looking at interviews and electronic call-ins.

**Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel:**

John Gilbert informed the Committee that the next meeting of this Panel, on 27 October 2009 would be their first one dedicated to Crime and Disorder matters and he reminded members they were welcome to attend.

**Planning Services Standing Panel:**

Councillor Mrs Wagland, the Chairman of the Panel noted that a full work programme would be coming to the O&S Committee.

**46. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT 2007 - TASK AND FINISH PANEL**

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Sustainable Communities Task and Finish Panel established at their last meeting were still in need of members. They had to date only two members agreeing to sit on the panel and he was using this opportunity ask for more volunteers to nominate themselves.

**47. CABINET REVIEW**

It was noted that there was no business to report to the Cabinet.

**CHAIRMAN**

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## **Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

**SCRUTINY**



**Subject: EERA Consultation – 2031 Scenarios for  
Housing and Economic Growth**

**Officer contact for further information: Ian White (01992–564066).**

**Committee Secretary: Simon Hill (01992–564249).**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To respond to the first six consultation (of eight) questions as follows:**
  - (a) A fifth scenario should be considered which deals with the realistic assessment of infrastructure provision in terms of the implications for deliverable housing and economic growth;**
  - (b) The information on Harlow's future growth is misleading. The consultation document should give far more detail about how the figures for the 4 scenarios are going to be split between Harlow, East Herts and this district. This authority also believes that the growth totals proposed in scenarios 3 and 4 are unrealistic and undeliverable in this district;**
  - (c) Scenario 1 of the four in the consultation is preferred, but the fifth scenario (in (a) above) is likely to be the most realistic;**
  - (d) The regional impact assessment should include Green Belt;**
  - (e) The vision and objectives of the Plan remain suitable; and**
  - (f) Policies H3 and H4 (from the Single Issue Review) should be included in the next review of the Plan as they concentrate on provision only up to 2021;**
- (2) Not to respond to the last two questions of the consultation;**
- (3) To agree to be a signatory to the proposed Essex Local Authorities' Joint Response to the consultation.**

### **Summary:**

The East of England Plan is being partially reviewed to roll it forward to 2031, and a consultation exercise has been prepared by the Regional Assembly. Four growth scenarios covering the period 2011 to 2031 are described, with three questions being directly about these and one on the regional impacts of the scenarios. The consultation also asks about the extent of the review of the Plan, notably whether its vision and objectives remain suitable, and whether other policies should be included in the review.

The results of this consultation will enable the Regional Assembly to prepare a draft plan in 2010 for full public consultation.

The document can be easily misinterpreted, because it is not made clear that much of Harlow's growth will have to be located in adjoining districts, including Epping Forest. Housing and economic growth, particularly the quantities proposed in scenarios 3 and 4, potentially affect the whole of the district, so this is a key decision.

## **Report:**

### **Context**

1. The East of England Plan (EEP) was published in May 2008. It is the strategic part of the development plan and sets growth targets for all the districts in the region up to 2021. This consultation is therefore very important as it means that the Council's views will be taken into account in the final determination of housing and jobs targets for the ten-year period beyond 2021.

2. Regional plans should set out long term strategies for at least 20 years, so the Government asked the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) to carry out an immediate (but partial) review of the EEP to address development needs for the period 2011 to 2031. Growth in the range of 30,00 to 40,000 new homes every year in the region was to be tested. (The Government considers that this scale of growth is necessary to stabilise long-term house prices.) This compares to 26,000 in the current EEP and past delivery of 22,000. EERA believes that it is inappropriate to test the highest end of this range as this would nearly double the rate of house building in the region, and would rely on large scale immigration and jobs growth significantly greater than the most optimistic projections. Some account also needs to be taken of the immediate to medium term impacts of the current recession. Nevertheless, in the light of the Government's intention to further increase housing provision, the review is intended to contribute to the increased national target of 240,000 additional homes per year by 2016.

3. The review is intended to ensure that:

- the region's ability to deliver growth in a sustainable way has been fully investigated. EERA is therefore undertaking an "integrated sustainability appraisal" which will incorporate strategic environmental assessment, equality and health impact assessment, and a Habitats Regulation Assessment;
- overall growth is linked to adequate infrastructure. EERA and the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) are developing an "Implementation Plan" to show what actions are needed to deliver the policies in the EEP and the Regional Economic Strategy; and
- the strategy addresses the challenge of climate change.

4. The consultation period runs from 2<sup>nd</sup> September to 24<sup>th</sup> November. There are three questions on the scenarios, one on regional impacts, two on the extent of the review and two on supporting information. EERA contacted the Association of Town and Parish Councils about the consultation presumably on the understanding that that organisation would inform all its associated councils. The Director of Planning and Economic Development has written to all the parish and town councils in the district to advise them of the consultation and to stress that the period for replying will not be extended.

5. EERA intends to prepare a draft plan in early 2010 which will be subject to full public consultation. This will be followed by an Examination in Public.

### **The Growth Scenarios**

6. Four growth scenarios are described in the consultation document, and their environmental impacts and infrastructure requirements are considered. No locations within the district are suggested for the new housing – that is not the function of the EEP or its



review. When the final figures for the region and all the districts are adopted, it will be the function of the Local Development Framework (LDF) to identify suitable sites for new housing and employment. EERA advises that the scenarios should only be seen as “tools for helping us to consider the future”, and the final strategy for growth could contain elements of all four or of others identified through the consultation.

7. The detailed breakdown of the scenarios gives annual average new housing figures and 20-year targets (ie 2011-2031) for each district in the region. This presentation is, however, very misleading as the Harlow growth figures will potentially entail significant development in this district and in East Herts. The consultation document gives no indication of how Harlow’s growth would be apportioned for any of the scenarios. Appendix 2 merely states (in relation to Harlow) “tightly bound urban area, part of growth implied may need to occur in surrounding authorities.”.

8. Scenario 1 – Roll forward of existing Plan

Most councils in the region have indicated that a continuation of the current EEP rates to 2031 is the highest level of development that would be deliverable, and even so would need Government support for new infrastructure. It would also mean that growth is concentrated at the main settlements identified as “key centres for development and change” (KCDC) in the EEP. Harlow is one of 6 KCDCs in Essex, and there are concerns about its existing infrastructure deficit, as well as doubts about adequate future infrastructure provision to cope with the projected growth levels. Detailed figures for new housing for this district and Harlow are shown immediately below, although as outlined in paragraph 7, the distribution of the Harlow numbers is not discussed in the document:

	<u>Annual average</u>	<u>20 year target</u>
EFDC	160	3,200
Harlow	1,010	20,200

9. Scenario 2 – National housing advice and regional new settlements

This option uses the lower estimate of the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit (NHPAU), and considers which parts of the region have the capacity to accommodate significantly more growth than in scenario 1. The analysis concluded that such growth should be focused on Cambridge, Norwich and Chelmsford, with smaller expansion at Ipswich, Colchester and Bury St Edmunds. In Essex, new settlements could be considered in “the Braintree area” or “south of the A120/east of Stansted Airport”. (The latter is only an option if there is likely to be significant growth at Stansted, and this seems to be increasingly unlikely.) Consequently, although the regional housing target (30,000 homes/year) is slightly larger than that for scenario 1 (26,000), the figures for this district and Harlow are unchanged.

10. EERA has decided that the major regional growth proposed at Cambridge and Norwich under this scenario is unrealistic, as current activity is already pushing the limits of the market for delivery on an annual basis. This means that Essex would take half the total regional increase and the County Council indicates that it feels that this is disproportionate.

11. Scenario 3 – National housing advice and regional economic forecasts

The same housing number as for scenario 2 is used, but the extra growth (over scenario 1) is distributed to those council areas where there is forecast to be demand for additional workers. EERA has used the East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM) to develop a set of economic and employment projections for the region up to 2031. The output of this model highlights a mismatch of jobs and homes at the local scale in a number of places in the region. This includes districts where job growth is not projected to keep pace with new housing provision (eg Harlow), and vice versa.

12. Where housing growth exceeds new job numbers, the scenario assumes that intervention will take place to enable job growth to be increased to support the new levels of housing growth. Conversely, where job growth will significantly exceed the local labour supply up to 2031, the scenario assumes that these jobs should be filled by the local workforce, so it allocates sufficient extra new housing to these local areas.

13. This results in particular concentrations of additional growth in Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and south Essex. This has significant implications for new housing in this district, although the figures for Harlow are again unchanged: EFDC – annual average of 390 new homes with a 20 year target of 7,760 (the document does not explain why this figure is not 7,800). This amounts to a 142% increase in the housebuilding rate compared with the current planned figure in the EEP, and requires the new rate to be achieved on an annual average basis over a 20 year period.

14. Setting aside the lack of information about the distribution of the Harlow quota, this scenario could involve significant growth in the towns and main villages of the district which in turn could require a substantial review of existing Green Belt boundaries. While there have to be limits about the amount of detail which can be included in a “high-level” strategic document, the lack of any guidance on the proportionate distribution of growth in this scenario between urban extensions to Harlow, and the expansion of other settlements in the district, is very unsatisfactory. It is also unclear from the consultation document what the economic justification is for this extra growth.

15. The Interim Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (IISA) accompanying the consultation document is somewhat ambiguous about the implications of this level of growth on the Forest itself (the main part of which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation - a recognition of its importance for nature conservation at a European level). There is some concern that growth “could increase pressure on the internationally important ancient woodland complex”, the main threat coming from increased traffic through the Forest which results in increased nitrogen deposition. The Habitats Regulation Assessment section of the IISA, however, comes to a different conclusion – “ ....the allocation ....for Epping Forest .... is unlikely to introduce major conflicts with internationally designated sites.” This brings into question the issue raised in paragraph 7, ie has this analysis understood that potentially significant development credited to Harlow could actually be built in this district.

16. New job totals for scenarios 1 to 3 are only discussed at regional level, so there is no indication of the implications for this district or how the employment growth at Harlow will be accommodated. The relevant figures are: Scenario 1 - 25,400 jobs annually (508,000 overall); Scenarios 2 and 3 – 28,000 jobs annually (560,000 as a 20 year target). The IISA does suggest that scenario 3 “appears to perform better from a stand-point of addressing deprivation” and notes that this district, in the context of the London Arc East sub-area, does show “some relative deprivation”.

17. Scenario 4 – National household projections

The scale and distribution of growth are taken from Government projections of the number of new households, involving demographic trends (eg births, deaths, household formation and migration). This approach results in the largest number of new houses being required (33,650 per year in the region) and focuses the majority of the additional growth in Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, although there is no explanation for this distribution. Confusingly, the numbers for this district increase significantly while those for Harlow are even more significantly reduced. If this is a “statistical adjustment”, this would be inconsistent with the other three scenarios, but the consultation document again simply does not explain how the figures have been arrived at:

	<u>Annual average</u>	<u>20 year target</u>
EFDC	550	11,000
Harlow	200	4,000

18. The scenario 4 projections make no allowance for the impact of future government, regional or local planning policies, changing economic circumstances, or other factors which may influence demographic trends and behaviour. A large proportion of the population and household growth arises from major net in-migration to the region from other parts of the UK. EERA has considerable discretion in policy terms whether or not to provide for such growth, particularly if it considers that the impacts on the region are unsustainable and incompatible

with infrastructure delivery programmes. EERA has prepared a series of “Sub-Area Profiles” to provide more information about the scenarios and the “London Arc East Sub-area” includes this district and Harlow. That document suggests that the figures for Harlow drop significantly in this scenario because the planned expansion of Harlow (in the EEP) has not yet started and so is not reflected in past migration trends. There must be questions about whether this scale of growth would be sufficient to encourage the regeneration of the town.

19. Scenario 4 is inconsistent with a decision taken by EERA in July 2008. The Assembly meeting decided that the lower end of the NHPAU projections (ie 30,000 new homes annually in the region as in scenarios 2 and 3) was the maximum that should be considered in the review of the EEP. This scenario proposes 33,650 new homes annually.

20. Simply by virtue of their greater housing numbers, scenarios 3 and 4 offer better opportunities for addressing the need for increased affordable housing provision in the district, but doubts must remain about the likelihood of being able to sustain such building rates over a 20 year period, and this in turn would affect the provision of new affordable units.

21. Officers conclude that the growth scenarios (particularly 3 and 4) are a significant risk for the district in terms of (a) pressure and demands on infrastructure; (b) adverse impacts on the general character of the settlements and countryside; (c) loss of Green Belt; (d) possible imposition of an Urban Regeneration Company to deal with the extensions to Harlow; and (e) boundary changes in the longer term. An appropriate entry should therefore be made to the Planning Directorate Risk Register.

### **The Growth Scenarios Questions**

22. The first 3 questions of the consultation concern the growth scenarios themselves and are:

- Have the right growth scenarios been chosen for consideration, and if not, what other scenarios should be considered and why?;
- Does the Council have any comments on the four growth scenarios?; and
- What is the Council’s preferred growth scenario and why?

23. Although there is a recognition in both the London Arc East Sub-area profile and in the Interim Integrated Sustainability Report that Harlow has a significant existing infrastructure deficit, none of the four growth scenarios appears to address this in a meaningful sense. Officers therefore believe that a fifth scenario should be tested and examined, which could be titled along the lines of “Realistic Assessment of Infrastructure Provision.” Beyond 2011, the scenario would therefore assess the deliverability of housing and economic growth based on the likely timing of provision of major infrastructure – notably but not exclusively a new Junction 7A on the M11 north-east of Harlow with a direct link to the town, a northern bypass to Harlow from the A414 to the new motorway junction, capacity improvements to the West Anglia Main Line and the Central Line, and addressing the commuter parking problems at the London Underground stations in the district. Feedback from earlier consultations suggests that, unless Harlow’s transport communications are significantly improved, the regeneration (a key aim of the EEP) and expansion of the town will at best be significantly delayed, if not put in jeopardy. This fifth scenario would recognise this and could identify limits to growth until or unless adequate provision of infrastructure is made – in essence it would be a far more realistic option than the four outlined in the consultation document.

24. In answer to the second question, officers are disappointed at the lack of detail in the consultation document – key aspects of this being (a) the lack of information about how the proposed growth in Harlow (which is significant in scenarios 1 to 3) is to be distributed; and (b) no assessment of a housing/jobs balance. The EEP recognises that there are significant environmental constraints to the south and west of Harlow, so growth up to 2021 results from redevelopment, and expansion to the east and north. The EEP also indicates that longer-term growth should be concentrated to the north, but the growth scenarios do not address this. This leaves the question of further eastern expansion open, particularly whether the M11

itself could be breached.

25. Officers also believe that the totals in scenarios 3 and 4 are unrealistic and undeliverable as they represent growth rates (to be sustained over a 20 year period) which have never been achieved in this district. It is also impossible to comment meaningfully on the jobs figures because they have not been broken down to district level.

26. Officers assume that the third question is intended to cover the four growth scenarios in the consultation document, in which case scenario 1 has to be the preferred option (ie the least disliked) because it has a more realistic growth rate than either scenario 3 or 4, even although the distribution of Harlow's growth is unclear. This would mean that the issues of affordable housing and economic deprivation have to be addressed separately. If the third question is also intended to include the response to the first question, then the preferred scenario should be the one based on infrastructure provision, as outlined in paragraph 23 above, with affordable housing provision and deprivation being again treated as "special issues".

### **Regional Impacts of the Scenarios**

27. The consultation document and the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal assess a wide range of issues at a regional scale. These are:

- Air quality;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate change (including energy and flood risk);
- Community and well-being (including deprivation, health, "sense of place and community", access to services and other cross-cutting issues);
- Economy, employment and regeneration;
- Historic environment;
- Housing (including affordable housing);
- Land availability;
- Landscape character;
- Rural areas;
- Transport;
- Waste; and
- Water resources and quality.

28. Analysis of these issues at this scale is inevitably very broad-brush and even cursory, particularly so when specific locations for growth have not been identified. Officers therefore find it difficult to make practical comments on these sections of the documents. The consultation question asks whether all the regional impacts of the four scenarios have been covered, and if not, what else should have been addressed.

29. There is very little, if any, mention of the Metropolitan Green Belt in the consultation document. This is a valid regional issue and, while it affects only those authorities closer to the boundary with London, the protection of the Green Belt is a key consideration for this Council. Officers therefore believe that an assessment of the regional impact on the Green Belt by the four scenarios should have been carried out by EERA and be included in the consultation. The review should acknowledge that any significant new development in this district will have to be in the Green Belt. This will eventually lead to a net loss of Green Belt land which cannot be compensated for, or replaced, within the district. It is very unlikely that local residents will be satisfied with a strategic review of Green Belt boundaries elsewhere in the region.

### **Focus of Review of Plan**

30. EERA believes that the vision and objectives, and many of the policies of the EEP remain "fit for purpose" and so do not need to be reviewed. Those that will need updating obviously relate closely to the growth scenarios and their implications, eg spatial strategy,

jobs and housing numbers, and implementation. Other policies need to be reviewed in the light of further developments in national policy, or because of other changes, eg climate change and energy.

31. The fifth and sixth questions of the consultation deal with the vision and objectives of the Plan and the selection of policies to be reviewed:

- Do the vision and objectives of the Plan remain suitable, and if not, what changes should be made?
- Do other policies need to be updated or created?

32. The vision and objectives of the current Plan address economic development, housing shortages, impact on and exposure to climate change, quality of life, and improving and conserving the region's environment. Officers agree with EERA that these remain fit for purpose and so do not need to be reviewed.

33. The consultation document does not indicate that the policies for sub-areas and KCDCs are to be updated. The County Council has been asked to review policy HA1 (Harlow KCDC), and officers assume that (a) a similar review is being carried out on relevant policies elsewhere in Essex and (b) the other counties in the region are also reviewing policies for sub-areas and KCDCs.

34. Officers believe that the new policies H3 (Provision for Gypsies and Travellers) and H4 (Provision for Travelling Showpeople), which resulted from the Single Issue Review of the EEP, should be included in the next review, as both only look forward to 2021. This would help to link future housing provision with that for the travelling community, which is now a requirement of Government policy.

### **Supporting Information**

35. The final two questions of the consultation concern the supplementary documents – the Sub-area Profile and the Interim Integrated Sustainability Appraisal. These have been assessed by officers but their very broad-brush nature means it is difficult to make specific comments on their content or coverage. Officers have therefore not attempted to answer both questions.

### **Essex Local Authorities' Joint Policy Response**

36. The County Council has proposed that, in addition to the individual responses from Essex authorities to the EERA consultation, a joint response from the Greater Essex authorities should also be sent. An Essex Members' meeting was held on 15<sup>th</sup> October to discuss county-wide and strategic concerns about the consultation. Issues discussed included (a) lack of infrastructure; (b) impact of the recession on housing completions, and the time-lag before the industry recovers, with consequent implications for meeting existing EEP targets, let alone the projections to 2031; (c) whether the consultation document and process are "fit for purpose". An "Explanatory Background Briefing" prepared by the County Council was circulated before the meeting, and this examined these issues in some more detail. The main conclusion of the meeting was that "the prospect of delivering the higher housing targets in scenarios 2, 3 and 4 is not realistic or sustainable". While a final "Joint Policy Response" has not yet been prepared, officers believe that this Council should sign up to such a statement as it will simply reinforce the recommendations of this report.

### **Reason for decision:**

The four growth scenarios appear to ignore the existing infrastructure deficit in Harlow, and the severe problems that will occur if new housing and employment growth goes ahead without adequate provision of new infrastructure. Scenarios 3 and 4 propose building rates to be sustained over a 20 year period which have never been achieved in the district. They are therefore considered to be undeliverable, although they perhaps offer the best solution (of the four scenarios) for the current deficit of affordable housing. The lack of clarity about the

location of much of Harlow's growth is a significant concern.

Protection of the Green Belt is a key planning aim for this authority, and this should be reflected in the review.

The list of policies to be reviewed does not include those dealing with the sub-areas and Key Centres for Development and Change. These areas and centres, however, will be directly affected by the review, so the policies should be added to the list.

Although provision for Gypsies and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople, has been recently addressed by the Single Issue Review, the newly adopted policies H3 and H4 of the East of England Plan only deal with provision up to 2021. These policies should also be rolled forward to 2031, and should therefore be included in this review.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to respond to the consultation which would mean that the Council's opinion would not be heard or considered at this stage of the review of the East of England Plan.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Director of Housing

**Resource implications:**

The review of the East of England Plan will be dealt with from existing staff resources.

**Community Plan/BVPP reference:** GU1, GU4, HN1, EP3, EP5

**Relevant statutory powers:** Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; PPS12: Local Spatial Planning

**Background papers:**

East of England Plan 2031: Scenarios for housing and economic growth (Consultation September 2009)

London Arc East Sub-area Profile

East of England RSS Review: Integrated Sustainability Report: Interim ISA Report (September 2009)

Explanatory Background Briefing for proposed Essex Local Authorities' Joint Policy Response (ECC October 2009)

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** The higher growth scenarios could have a significant impact on the character of the main settlements and of significant parts of the countryside. There could be other adverse environmental effects if infrastructure provision is not adequately addressed.

**Key Decision reference: (if required)**

## **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**Date of Meeting: 12 November 2009**

**Portfolio:** Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services

**Subject:** Epping Forest Place Survey 2008 Research Report

**Officer contact for further information:** Valerie Loftis (Ext 4471)

**Democratic Services Officer:** Adrian Hendry

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To consider the Epping Forest Place Survey 2008 Research Report and what measures to take forward from issues identified in the survey.**

### **Background**

The Government produced a new performance framework for local government, outlined in the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper. The White Paper contained National Indicator measures about improving quality of life in places and providing better public services.

The 'Place Survey' contains 18 National Indicator questions within the new National Indicator Set and was intended to replicate much of the survey methodology of the Best Value Performance Indicator Surveys.

BMG Research carried out the survey jointly with other District Councils in Essex on behalf of Epping Forest District Council and its partners One Epping Forest (Local Strategic Partnership).

The survey took place from September to December 2008 and was a postal questionnaire delivered to a random sample of over 1350 residents. Residents were asked various questions about where they live, public services and questions about social cohesion.

The following key findings show the results of survey, along with some comments and background information.

### **Key Findings**

Council officers were asked to give input, local knowledge and their understanding of issues which might explain these results e.g. knowledge about the Council's performance, constraints, difficulties in a particular area and delivering an excellent service over time, location and at speed. They were also asked how they might

address issues and concerns of residents and/or sustain best practice where indicated.

## 1.0 Views on the local area

- 1.1 *Residents feel that the most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live are the level of crime (55%); Health services (44%); and clean streets (38%) page 12. The issues which are considered to be in most need of improvement are road and pavement repairs (50%); activities for teenagers (45%); and the level of traffic congestion (32%) page 14.*
- 1.2 **Road and pavement repairs** - Road and pavement repairs concerns have not changed for many years and has not seemingly changed since the highways agency reverted to the County Council in 2005. Pot holes and pavement repairs always have and always will outstrip the resources available to deal with them. This will remain so until central government funding catches up with the reality that the highway infrastructure is deteriorating. In this district the main thoroughfares are pretty good, but away in the more local residential areas, there are some very poor conditions. In order to address this, we will continue to engage robustly with Essex CC in the main, through the newly formed Local Highways Panel, which will enable EFDC members to influence ECC maintenance priorities. However, the amount of resource available is limited, and therefore it is inevitable that low priority schemes will be deferred well into the future.
- 1.3 **Activities for teenagers** - Some anti-social behaviour is clearly linked to a lack of available activity for young people and similarly, many residents and particularly the more elderly, often cite as their reason for fear of crime as young people "hanging around". In order to address this, The Epping Forest Youth Council is one of the key forums to advise the Council about the needs of young people. In addition, under the new Essex Children's Trust arrangements, commissioning of children's and young people's activities will be dealt with by a West Children's Trust Board (WCTB) consisting of 32 representatives from the public and voluntary sector across Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford. To ensure that local needs are identified and communicated to WCTB, an Epping Forest Children's Partnership Group has been set up which will be chaired by The Council and will include partners from all agencies providing services for 0-19's within Epping Forest District.
- 1.4 Close liaison will also need to be maintained with the County Council and other agencies young peoples' services. There is also a need to address concerns which arise from cross border young people coming into this district to seek "entertainment".
- 1.5 **The level of traffic congestion** - This district is in a very difficult geographic situation, with two motorways within its area plus being very close to North London. The district carries a lot of through traffic on all of its roads, and when difficulties arise on the motorways, the district can soon suffer with very high levels of slow moving traffic. Some of our towns can suffer high levels of congestion at peak hours, especially during the "school run" and early/late rush hours where our proximity to a number of central line stations encourages commuters into the area. There are also HGV issues in some parts of the district, often in the more rural areas where the roads are least able to cope. In order to address this, action has to be seen across a number of fronts working with a number of agencies. Issues to be addressed include commuter versus local parking needs, getting children to school safely (especially in



more rural areas, liaison with Transport for London, Greater London Authority and London Underground Limited. There are no easy solutions, as can be seen from the outcomes of the parking reviews recently undertaken. The County need to be pressed into completing their Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) and freight studies as well as reviewing their signage policy for HGV routing.

## 2.0 Priorities for Improvement

2.1 *Priorities for improvement (i.e. the aspects that are regarded both as important and as in need of improvement) are the level of crime (55%); and cleanliness of streets (38%) page 16.*

2.2 **Crime** - Although crime is reducing the perception of crime as an issue remains high. Last year we had an 8% reduction in crime across the district with a corresponding reduction in anti-social behaviour. However, some local high profile issues can cause a more general alarm, for example, high streets in Waltham Abbey and Loughton have seen an increase in assaults and violent crime, which has increased perception of crime and anti-social behaviour in the district. Certain crimes such as burglary has increased. Burglary is a very personal crime, and affects residents perception of safety. National reporting of crime plays heavily on local perceptions. In order to address this we will have an Open day and question time at Waltham Abbey in November to better gauge public opinion and see how we can align the data with the perception and a future strategic assessment must include a wider public view.

2.3 **Health** - Health services are one of the most important services to residents in the district. Residents' perception of health related issues vary considerably with location and age. The latter is understandable given that health often worsens with age and the need to access health facilities increases. There are locations which are some distance from health facilities or are located between two Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and residents find themselves being passed between facilities. This added to often poor transport infrastructure limiting access to facilities will produce a high level of anxiety in some residents. In order to address this, we can do no more than to remain engaged, through the Local Strategic Partnership, with the PCT, health providers and Social care agencies to make sure residents concerns and wishes are heard, understood and where possible acted upon. At a local level, the Council's Community Services teams are working closely with the PCT and voluntary agencies, to deliver a wide range of activities and initiatives to address health inequalities across the district, including providing targeted services to children, young people and the elderly and, addressing key geographical areas that are identified within the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

2.4 **Clean Streets** - Our performance has increased and the new rapid response unit is able to provide a speedy resolution to many low grade environmental problems. It may be that the survey coincided with the withdrawal of some local cleaning teams, but these have now been reintroduced. In order to address this, the contractor has completely rescheduled street cleansing and the way the cleansing teams operate. This should bring further and sustained improvements. We need to undertake some analysis into why residents think the district is not clean when all our data suggests it is. The district is considerably cleaner than it was, yet the public do not see it that way. We need to find out why.

### 3.0 Overall Satisfaction with Area

- 3.1 *The majority of residents are satisfied overall with their local area as a place to live (87%), (NI5). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are highest among residents living in Buckhurst Hill (97%); Theydon Bois (96%); Chipping Ongar (96%); and Moreton and Fyfield (95%). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are lowest among residents living in Chigwell (78%); and Waltham Abbey (78%) page 21.*
- 3.2 Parts of the district show very high levels of resident satisfaction as places to live. Even in those areas that were rated less highly, most residents still express satisfaction. Lowest satisfaction levels can be seen in some of the urban areas of the district on the boundaries of London boroughs. Further data analysis might be able to establish links between satisfaction levels and perceptions of crime, social and economic causes or environmental issues.

### 4.0 Neighbourhood Belonging

- 4.1 *More than three fifths of residents report feeling a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood (62.6%); and this tends to increase with age (76%), (over 65). The highest rated area is in Moreton and Fyfield (98%); and the lowest rating area is Lower Sheering (38%), (NI2) page 22.*
- 4.2 The council has held a number of events in local halls to engage the public on services and issues in their neighbourhood. These events have brought neighbours together to find out what is going on, and in a fun way discuss what their area needs to improve provision facilities and services. In addition, the Council's Community Services provide direct support to super output areas in the district, in terms of: community liaison; support to Community Associations; Education and training opportunities and local activities.

### 5.0 Satisfaction with Local Public Services

- 5.1 *The majority of residents agree that local public services are working to make the area safer (53%); and cleaner and greener (63%), (NI21) page 26.*
- 5.2 **Safer** - The Safer Communities Partnership still needs to develop stronger communications programme ensuring all the good work that does go on is disseminated across the district.
- 5.3 **Cleaner and greener** - 63% is a reasonably good outcome. The result of this may have been swayed by the street cleansing response which has been responded to earlier. The Place Survey questionnaire was not able to determine why residents see the district as not as clean & green as it should be. An investigation would help to show where, if any issues have arisen, as performance levels continue to be high. We will continue to develop the Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative and as part of this we will engage with other agencies, such as the Corporation of London and Lee Valley Regional Parks Authority to see how we can better interface with them, since the public does not distinguish (and nor should it) between litter on Forest land and litter on the street - all they see is litter! The new enforcement team and response unit should also enable more enforcement and quicker responses to environmental issues.

- 5.4 **Fair treatment from public services** - Half agree that they treat all types of people fairly (50%). Agreement declines when asking whether they act on the concerns of local residents (36%), especially in Theydon Bois (40%), Chigwell Row (36%) and Loughton Alderton (32%); and/or promote the interests of local residents 37%, especially in Chigwell Row (46%) and Loughton Alderton (40%), (NI140) page 23.
- 5.5 This might suggest that concerns about certain developments in or near Theydon Bois which have had adverse local consequences (Blunts Farm) are still prevalent. Or it may be more of a concern about the loss of certain local community facilities within Theydon Bois once run by Essex County Council.
- 5.6 **County and Other Services** - Among respondents who have used public services in the past year, around three quarters are satisfied with their Fire and Rescue Service (77%); and Local GP/family doctor (76%). At least three fifths of those who have used them are satisfied with the local hospital (66%); and the local dentist (62%). While around half are satisfied with the local dentist (62%); and police force (51%) page 27.

A number of recent reports have rated various health facilities serving the district highly. Perceptions of crime-levels will impact upon Police satisfaction.

## 6.0 Environmental Services

- 6.1 *The majority of respondents are satisfied with environmental services; particularly doorstep recycling (81%); and refuse collection (74%). Satisfaction is lower in relation to keeping public land clear of litter and refuse (63%), particularly in Chigwell Row (25%); and Loughton (24%)* page 28.
- 6.2 There is no clear reason why the residents in particular areas feel as they do, especially since these are high priority areas and receive high levels of street cleansing service. In order to address this, we will increase monitoring of these areas, especially after the new cleansing schedules have been implemented and settled down.
- 6.3 **Door step recycling** - This is a good performance overall and reflects the work done to engage with residents around recycling services. In order to sustain this, we will continue to improve the service by monitoring and maintaining high levels of public information and education and putting pressure on the contractor to ensure a high level of service.
- 6.4 **Refuse collection** - The result may have been influenced by both the timing of the survey and how a particular respondent felt about issues such as alternate weekly collections. Responses around September were swayed by the reversion to alternate weekly collections, although this has now been superseded by the new services. There has been much national press around waste collection and high profile campaigns by some local newspapers to discredit wheeled bins and recycling arrangements. However, recycling rates remain high which suggests that residents are content. In order to sustain this, the new service should, once the initial period has settled, see an improvement. The contractor will be kept under pressure to deliver a consistently high level of service and to avoid missed collections etc which have a high impact on customer satisfaction.

6.5 **Local /tips household recycling centres** - In terms of the most frequently used are local tips household recycling centres (53%). The most popular service amongst those who have used them, around three quarters are satisfied with recycling centres (75%) page 29.

6.6 Recycling Centres for Household Waste are provided by Essex County Council and are now somewhat old and would benefit from some further investment by the County. However, the scale of investment in other waste plant/equipment precludes this. Some criticism of the centres arises from the controls now in place to regulate access and to ensure that waste is separated into recyclable and non recyclable waste. This can cause frustration but is necessary. Lastly, there are only three Recycling Centres for Household Waste in the area and that travelling times for some residents may also affect the performance rating. Liaison with Essex County Council over the operation and effectiveness of the Recycling Centres for Household Waste sites in the district would work towards addressing these issues.

## 7.0 Satisfaction with Leisure and Cultural Services

7.1 *In terms of leisure and cultural service, the most popular and frequently used facilities are parks and open spaces (17%) and around three quarters are satisfied with them (72%). Around half are satisfied with sport and leisure facilities (51%) page 30.*

7.2 **Parks and open spaces** - Given the amount and mix of open space in the district, this is a respectable outcome. Much of the land is not under the direct control of Epping Forest District Council is well managed and maintained. As with many other areas we need to ensure that our relationships with other major land owners Corporation of London, Lee Valley Regional Parks Authority and Parish Councils etc, are sound and that we are working in a joined up way when we can.

7.3 **Sport and leisure facilities** - There has been considerable investment, through Sports Leisure Management (SLM), at a number of leisure centres. The district suffers from not having a natural focus, with the need to provide and maintain a number of leisure facilities rather than being able to concentrate efforts on one key facility at a central location. Investment will continue and Members are shortly to decide on further investment at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool in a new sports hall. A feasibility study for the provision of new facilities at Epping Sports Centre and/or St John's area development may determine the issues in the area. In addition to the provision of built facilities, the Council also provides a comprehensive range of sports and cultural activities throughout the district, based at local community halls and within Council Housing areas, which may not be perceived by local residents to be a 'Council' provided service.

7.4 *Respondents are more likely to be dissatisfied with local bus services (30%); local transport information (28%); and theatres and concert halls (30%)page 30.*

7.5 **Local bus service** - Despite encouragement to reduce reliance on cars and to use public transport more, the reality of the past few years has often been a decline in patronage of local bus services. Local bus services are difficult to operate economically and there are limited subsidised routes. The costs and low passenger numbers has lead to amalgamations or reductions of such services.

- 7.6 The nature of the district is such that the south is relatively well served, whereas the remainder is not. In the more urban parts of the District buses are a more common feature (as are rail services). For some in the rural areas, the car is an essential feature because local bus services have never operated to a high degree in those areas. Due to lack of customer support and operational costs the services have been forced to withdraw. Even within new developments (such as Meridian Park Waltham Abbey) where bus stops and subsidised services to the public transport interchanges at Waltham Cross were provided, did not bring about a step change in local bus use.
- 7.7 This is difficult to overcome for a district such as this. Residents demand better services (including free travel on the tube etc). An affordable local bus service for local taxpayers fails to meet customer expectations of choice and quality. This is plainly very frustrating for those who rely on such services, particularly if they contrast the position with services offered in London.
- 7.9 **Theatres and Concert Halls** - The Council does not own or manage any theatres or concert halls. There is one small Public Performance space in Loughton (Lopping Hall) and several other Theatres that are owned by Educational establishments and occasionally open to the public. Lopping Hall Theatre was built in 1884 by the Corporation of London, to compensate local residents for withdrawal of their traditional 'Lopping rights' in Epping Forest. It is now managed under an Endowment Fund and therefore does not secure high levels of funding for investment. However, a limited programme of productions are staged at Lopping Hall including Operatic performances by local groups and Pantomimes. The greatest public use of the remaining theatres is with The Corbett Theatre, based at E15 Acting and Technical Theatre School and this is also on a periodic production basis as part of the students work.

## 8.0 Value for Money

- 8.1 *Just under a third of respondents agree in relation to Epping Forest District Council provides good value for money (36%), and (30%) for Essex County Council page 31.*
- 8.2 In 2008 a value for money review of the way the Council spends tax payers money was undertaken and compared with other local authorities. In the four years 2004/05 to 2007/08 the council made efficiency savings of £1.15 million for a range of services and 84% of council tenants were satisfied with council services which is top quartile performance for a district council. To sustain the council's performance in all services, a Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Committee was set up to evaluate performance data and create working groups to support services which need improvement.

## 9.0 The way the council runs things

- 9.1 *More than two fifths of respondents are satisfied with the way Essex County Council runs things (43%), and almost half are satisfied with the way Epping Forest District Council runs things (49%) page 32.*
- 9.2 **Information** - *Although the majority of residents feel well informed about how and where to register to vote (90%), (NI3) and how their council tax is spent (67%). Many feel that they are not well informed in terms of other aspects; in particular how to get*

*involved in local decision making 59%; and what to do in the case of a large-scale emergency (73%), (NI37) page 33.*

- 9.3 **Local decision making** – The Council provides web based features such as i Plan and webcasting to enable higher customer satisfaction. Becoming involved in the local democratic process can take place at a number of levels. This can range from completion of public consultation forms such as the council's survey prior to introduction of the new waste service, through membership of boards of governors or police authorities, to voting or holding elected office at Parish, District and County Council level. Local weekly newspapers have traditionally provided the main source of information for people to find out about local democratic issues. However, the local media is in a process of decline which has accelerated since the economic downturn. Vibrant local political party activity has also formed a traditional source of information and engagement with people in local communities. Online sources of the information have developed and partly fill the space left by the contraction of traditional local information and engagement sources. New news websites are developing. Single issue pressure groups have also found the internet to be a useful tool for developing and coordinating campaigns. At both member and officer level, local and national organisations are seeking to re-focus communications to take account of these changes.
- 9.4 Locally, general emergency planning messages have been disseminated through a concerted publicity campaign, primarily through The Forester. Articles regularly appear in the quarterly magazine and a centre pull out was included in the Winter 2008 edition. Emergency Planning Officers attend community events and engage directly with people.
- 9.5 Information is also available via the district council and many other agency websites. Residents are increasingly aware of websites, if not the term 'emergency planning' and turn to them for information, for example in the case of severe weather. Residents also turn to national sources such as 24 hour TV and Radio at such times. Other agencies including Essex County Council and the emergency services also work actively to raise public awareness and preparedness. The BBC has been particularly co-operative in helping to raise awareness through general publicity and planned activities such as the County Council 'If' campaign.
- 9.6 Public perception within the survey may not recognise issues as emergency planning awareness. For example, huge amounts of information have been issued at local and national government agency level in order to raise public awareness of swine flu. The issue has received massive amounts of local and national media coverage. Few people can be unaware of swine flu and the measures they may take to protect themselves against it. However, it is debateable whether the public perceives this an 'emergency planning' issue and would consider it in terms of the survey.

## **10.0 Local decision making and involvement**

- 10.1 *A quarter of respondents agree that they can influence local decision making (26%, (NI4). Six in ten feel that, generally speaking or depending on the issues, they would like to be more involved in this process (60%) page 36.*
- 10.2 Regular publicity is carried out to encourage voters to register, continuing to spread the message on voter registration and the fact that regular updates are now published. Epping Forest District Council is not alone in finding problems in finding

members of the Community to come forward to stand for election. This is largely due to local government being perceived as having no independence from central government. The Cabinet system also works against involvement except for up to 10 Councillors. In order to address this the council will identify local people who want to get involved. Epping Forest District Council is trying a new initiative with potential candidates to give them information on what is possible if they become Councillor and what their duties and responsibilities could be.

- 10.3 Involving Council Housing Tenants in new and amended policies and decisions has been a long tradition within EFDC. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation (TLF) hold meetings every six weeks with the Portfolio Holder and Officers to discuss new and amended policies and to give their views. The TLF representatives come from Residents Associations district-wide. The Chairman of the TLF sits on a number of council groups to report tenants perspective to the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Repairs Advisory Group and our Customer Perspective Program Group. The introduction of Epping Forest Youth Council in 2007 has enabled the Council to have direct contact with young people on an ongoing basis and therefore provided a vehicle to enable young people to be directly involved in local decision making. The Youth Council is made up of representatives from every Secondary School in the district including Private Schools and Epping Forest College.

## **11.0 Volunteering**

- 11.1 *Although the majority of respondents have not been involved with any volunteering work in the past year (34%), around one in six volunteer at least weekly (16%), (NI6) page 32. Few have been involved in any decision making groups (5%) page 36.*
- 11.2 The Council, and its partners such as Voluntary Action Epping Forest provide volunteering opportunities. In the case of Countrycare and the tree warden schemes the opportunities have been around for many years. Countrycare is one specific service where volunteers work in partnership with paid staff on a regular ongoing basis. In 2008 Countrycare was assisted by 5,500 volunteer hours equivalent to £73,500 based on the average national wage rate. They are engaged in a variety of projects including practical access, biodiversity, reserve and wildlife projects. The Council does not have a specific policy at the moment on volunteering but is looking at ways to foster an interest in the voluntary work sector and encourage staff to become volunteers in their spare time. There are various opportunities that exist to volunteer and to make real differences to local communities. These may be advertised in The Forester magazine. The Council's Community Services is currently in the process of developing a new volunteering strategy in conjunction with Tottenham Hotspur and West Essex School Sport Partnership, that will see the development of new volunteers to support local sports, arts and community clubs across the district.

## **12.0 Respect and Cohesion**

- 12.1 *Around a quarter of respondents agree that parents in the local area take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children (27%), however around half disagree (52%), (NI22) page 39.*
- 12.2 Nationally, social tensions are not a new phenomenon and continue to exist between young people and the adult population. The District Council and other agencies such

as the Police are working to engage with young people as a means of bridging gaps in understanding and communication.

- 12.3 *More than three quarters of respondents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (78%). Residents in the Waltham Abbey (28%) and Loughton (29%), are more likely to disagree (NI1), (NI23) page 40.*
- 12.4 The council introduced an Introductory Tenancy Scheme which means that all new tenants undergo a probationary period for the first year of occupation. If they cause anti-social behaviour in that period the council can use legal action to remove the tenants. This sends a strong message to would be anti-social tenants.
- 12.5 *Most respondents do not feel that there is a problem with people treating each other with respect and consideration in their local area (70%), and almost three quarters agree that they have been treated with respect and consideration by public services all or most of the time (74%), (NI140) page 41.*
- 12.6 The Councils Charter and Housing Charter sets out how we will respect and treat customers. The Housing Service Standards contain 80 separate commitments of the level of service people can expect from the council. The Housing Appeals Panel sits five Councillors that consider appeals decisions made by Housing Officers. This system works well as a number of decisions have been overturned.

### **13.0 Anti-social Behaviour**

- 13.1 *The majority of respondents feel safe in their local area (89%), during the day and report anti-social behaviour issues to be fairly unproblematic where they live (NI21). There are fewer than one in five respondents who consider one or more anti-social behaviour issues to be a problem in their local area (17.8%), (NI17) page 45.*
- 13.2 Some areas such as Chigwell, Waltham Abbey and Loughton have been identified as needing additional attention from the Police, including the Mobile Support Division. These are areas located in close proximity to our borders with London Boroughs. It has been identified that around 45% of dwelling burglary offenders have come from the London area, (within 11 kilometres of our borders). Recent offences have included an increase in night time dwelling burglary where offenders were breaking into homes whilst residents were asleep in order to steal car keys to steel high quality cars on driveways.

#### **Reason for Decision:**

To identify what steps should be taken from receipt of this information following the Place Survey 2008 and subsequent Comprehensive Area Assessment.

**Resource Implications:** None

**Budget/Personnel/Land:** None

**Council Plan/Best Value Performance Plan Reference:** None

**Relevant Statutory Powers:** *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper

**Background papers:** Communities and Local Government, National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships

**Environment/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** None

Key Decision Reference: (if required): None



## **Executive Summary**

The new performance framework for local government, outlined in the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper is about improving quality of life in places and providing better public Services. The National Indicator Set which is a key element of the framework by which to measure progress against. The Place Survey is a collection of citizens' perspective indicators from the National Indicator Set which is collected biennially and the findings influences the rating of the Council's Comprehensive Area.

An investigation of public perception on behalf of the Local Strategy Partnership 'One Epping Forest' was undertaken by consultants BMG Research. The collection of data was organised across Essex with local samples for Epping Forest District in order to maximise efficiency and value for money.

The following report examines the results of the statutory Place Survey 2008; and the Place Survey's contribution of results for 18 National Indicators within the National Indicator Set.

The purpose of the report is to describe customer satisfaction and perception about where they live, public services and neighbourhood cohesion; highlight areas of competence and areas for concern; and compare, where possible, with Essex County Council, Local Authorities and trends over time.

The report examines overall satisfaction of residents with the local area. It examines perceptions of residents of local public services and shows priorities for improvement and areas to sustain best practice.

## **Method**

The Place Survey is intended to replicate much of the survey methodology of the Best Value Performance Indicator surveys. It continued as a postal survey, sent out in September 2008 to a random sample of 1350 residents in the District. The results were published by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) in June 2009.

## **Key Findings**

The majority of National Indicator scores for performance were average and the following section highlights some of the higher and lower scores in customer satisfaction and opinion:

- The top three factors making area a good place to live were, low levels of crime, health services and clean streets;
- The highest priority for improvement was road and pavement repairs; activities for teenagers and traffic congestion. Young people mentioned transport, shopping facilities and race relations as areas to improve;
- Overall satisfaction with the area as a place to live was up by 10% to 87% from 2006. The majority of residents were satisfied with their own homes (91%), (94% were home owners, 84% were social housing tenants, 85% others). Only 3% expressed dissatisfaction with their home;

## Place Survey Executive Summary

- Most people felt they belonged to their neighbourhood and felt safe in their local area during the day and after dark, but there were perceptions that anti-social behaviour was a problem in their area and that teenagers hanging around the streets was of most concern;
- Overall satisfaction with the way the council runs things was down by 1% to 49% from 2006 which was not a significant drop. Residents rated public service performance high with regard to good value for money but low with regard to acting on the concerns and promoting the interests of local residents;
- Older people were more likely to be satisfied with public services and this increased with age. Satisfaction with public service performance was at its best with doorstep recycling and worst with local bus services and sport and leisure facilities. Three quarters of respondents were satisfied with Fire and Rescue services. Half of the survey's respondents were satisfied with the Police Service; and
- The majority of residents felt that generally speaking, they would like to be more involved in local decision making depending on the issues and the provision for information on how to get involved was felt to be above average. However, residents showed a lack of awareness of emergency planning.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Views on the local area** - Residents feel that the most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live are the level of crime (55%); Health services (44%); and clean streets (38%) *page 14*. The issues which are considered to be in most need of improvement are road and pavement repairs (50%); activities for teenagers (45%); and the level of traffic congestion (32%) *page 16*.

**Priorities for Improvement** - Priorities for improvement (i.e. the aspects that are regarded both as important and as in need of improvement) are the level of crime (55%); and cleanliness of streets (38%) *page 19*.

**Overall Satisfaction With Area** - The majority of residents are satisfied overall with their local area as a place to live (87%), (NI5). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are highest among residents living in Buckhurst Hill (97%); Theydon Bois (96%); Chipping Ongar (96%); and Moreton and Fyfield (95%). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are lowest among residents living in Chigwell (78%); and Waltham Abbey (78%) *page 21*.

**Neighbourhood Belonging** - More than three fifths of residents report feeling a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood (62.6%); and this tends to increase with age (76%), (over 65). The highest rated area is in Moreton and Fyfield (98%); and the lowest rating area is Lower Sheering (38%), (NI2) *page 24*.

**Satisfaction with Local Public Services** - The majority of residents agree that local public services are working to make the area safer (53%); and cleaner and greener (63%), (NI21) *page 28*.

**Fair treatment from public services** - Half agree that they treat all types of people fairly (50%). Agreement declines when asking whether they act on the concerns of local residents (36%), especially in Theydon Bois (40%), Chigwell Row (36%) and Loughton Alderton (32%); and/or promote the interests of local residents 37%, especially in Chigwell Row (46%) and Loughton Alderton (40%), (NI140) *page 33*.

Among respondents who have used public services in the past year, around three quarters are satisfied with their Fire and Rescue Service (77%); and Local GP/family doctor (76%). At least three fifths of those who have used them are satisfied with the local hospital (66%); and the local dentist (62%). While around half are satisfied with the local dentist (62%); and police force (51%) *page 27*.

**Environmental Services** - The majority of respondents are satisfied with environmental services; particularly doorstep recycling (81%); and refuse collection (74%). Satisfaction is lower in relation to keeping public land clear of litter and refuse (63%), particularly in Chigwell Row (25%); and Loughton (24%) *page 28*.

**Local /tips household recycling centres** - In terms of the most frequently used are local tips household recycling centres (53%). The most popular service amongst those who have used them, around three quarters are satisfied with recycling centres (75%) *page 29 and 30*.

**Satisfaction with Leisure and Cultural Services** - In terms of leisure and cultural service, the most popular and frequently used facilities are parks and open spaces (17%) and around three quarters are satisfied with them (72%). Around half are satisfied with sport and leisure facilities (51%). Respondents are more likely to be dissatisfied with local bus services (30%); local transport information (28%); and theatres and concert halls (30%) *page 30*.

**Value for Money** - Just under a third of respondents agree in relation to Epping Forest District Council. provides good value for money (36%), and (30%) for Essex County Council *page 31*

**The way the council runs things** - More than two fifths of respondents are satisfied with the way Essex County Council runs things (43%), and almost half are satisfied with the way Epping Forest District Council runs things (49%) *page 32*.

**Information** - Although the majority of residents feel well informed about how and where to register to vote (90%) and how their council tax is spent (67%). Many feel that they are not well informed in terms of other aspects; in particular how to get involved in local decision making 59%; and what to do in the case of a large-scale emergency (73%), (NI37) *page 33*.

**Local decision making and involvement** - A quarter of respondents agree that they can influence local decision making (26%). Six in ten feel that, generally speaking or depending on the issues, they would like to be more involved in this process (60%) *page 35 and 37*.

**Volunteering** - Although the majority of respondents have not been involved with any volunteering work in the past year (34%), around one in six volunteer at least weekly (16%), (NI3) *page 32*. Few have been involved in any decision making groups (5%) *page 36*.

**Respect and Cohesion** - Around a quarter of respondents agree that parents in the local area take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children (27%), however around half disagree (52%), (NI22) *page 39*.

More than three quarters of respondents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (78%). Residents in the Waltham Abbey (28%) and Loughton (29%), are more likely to disagree (NI1), (NI23) *page 40*.

Most respondents do not feel that there is a problem with people treating each other with respect and consideration in their local area (70%), and almost three quarters agree that they have been treated with respect and consideration by public services all or most of the time (74%), (NI140) *page 41*.

**Anti-social Behaviour** - The majority of respondents feel safe in their local area (89%), during the day and report anti-social behaviour issues to be fairly unproblematic where they live. There are fewer than one in five respondents who consider one or more anti-social behaviour issues to be a problem in their local area (17.8%), (NI17) *page 45*.

## **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



# SCRUTINY



**Date of meeting: 12 November 2009**

**Subject: Report of O&S Sub-committee on Debt and Money Advice in Epping Forest District**

**Officer contact for further information: Chris Overend**

**Committee Secretary: Simon Hill**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To consider the recommendations for immediate actions and for future actions as set out at the end of the report.**

### **Report:**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Sub-Committee was set up consequent upon the adoption of a motion at Council on 16 December 2008, and a subsequent discussion at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2009, regarding the current economic situation and the resulting pressures on the public and support agencies, particularly the Citizens Advice Bureau. The Sub Committee was asked to review current debt and money advice provision; to review the support the District Council offers the Citizens Advice Bureau and whether this support should be extended; and to incorporate the outcome of the review into the budgetary process.

2. The Sub-Committee met on four occasions, these being 14 April, 21 May, 7 July and 26 October 2009.

3. Membership of the Sub-Committee comprised Councillors Jon Whitehouse as Chairman, and Councillors Ken Angold-Stephens, Mrs Antoinette Cooper, and Mrs Janet Whitehouse. Councillor John Markham substituted for Councillor Angold-Stephens at the meeting on 14 April 2009. Support was provided by Chris Overend, the District Council's Policy and Research Officer. Other District Council officers and representatives from a number of external partner organisations attended meetings as required. These were Janet Twinn, Janis Hicks and Ian Willis from the District Council's Benefits Service, Roger Wilson, Assistant Director of Housing, Jacque Foile, Chief Officer of Voluntary Action Epping Forest, and Julia Milovanovic and Tony Jennings of Epping Forest CAB.

#### **WORK PROGRAMME**

4. The Sub-Committee determined a work programme at its first meeting. This consisted of a review of existing provision and options for extending that provision, obtaining the views of individuals working in areas, whether internal or external to the District Council, which had been affected by the economic situation, hearing about the experiences of those in receipt of money and debt advice, information on funding opportunities which were available to soften the impact of the recession, and determining conclusions and recommendations.

#### **EXISTING PROVISION**

##### **Citizens' Advice Bureaux**

5. It was noted that the Citizens Advice Service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice and by influencing policy makers. These services are delivered through a combination of face-to-face, telephone, email and online advice. Categories covered by the advice provided include benefits, employment, tax, debt, family, health, housing, education, consumer affairs, public utilities, travel, discrimination, civil rights, immigration and the legal system itself.

6. Every CAB is a registered charity, reliant on trained volunteers and funds to provide the services it offers. Of the 26,000 who work in the service, 20,000 are volunteers. They perform a variety of roles from giving advice to fundraising, IT, administration, publicity, local campaigning and trusteeship. The Sub-Committee noted that there were presently 16 paid staff and 80 volunteers at the Epping Forest CAB. The District Council awarded the CAB a grant of £113,840 for 2009/10.

7. The Epping Forest CAB currently ranks fourth in the Eastern Region in terms of the number of clients it deals with. In a time of recession, the number of cases a CAB has to deal with increases significantly. During the first nine months of 2008, the total number of cases dealt with by Epping Forest CAB amounted to 2,708 (compared with 2,390 for the whole of 2007). Often the cases cut across a number of different categories but it is in the area of debt, employment and benefits advice that the most significant increases have arisen.

### **Voluntary Sector Provision**

8. There are numerous groups in the voluntary and community sector whose role, either directly or indirectly, might involve the provision of welfare, benefits or debt advice. Examples include Age Concern, the various care groups (of which several operate in the District), Debt Counselling Services, Bridges to Work, Alzheimer's Society and the Disabled Employment Foundation.

### **The Legal Services Commission/Community Legal Service**

9. The Community Legal Service concept is no longer being developed. However, the concept of a range of people from different agencies working together on a voluntary basis for the benefit of their communities and organisations, through the provision of better coordinated legal advice was still being pursued, most notably through the Benefits and Independent Advice Agencies.

### **Department for Work and Pensions**

10. The Department for Works and Pensions provides benefits and services for a wide range of people. It has an online benefits adviser service providing information and dealing with queries on benefits entitlement and tax credits.

### **Epping Forest District Council**

11. As well as administering the Council Tax and Housing Benefits Schemes, the District Council offers advice on entitlement. It also provides a signposting service in respect of other benefits such as Job Seekers' Allowance, Income Support, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carers' Allowance. The District Council's Benefits Service works in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify potential claimants which either they or the Pensions Service will visit. District Council staff can take claims for Pension Credit as well as Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit, whilst the Pension Service can take claims for a complete range of benefits and services.

### **Essex County Council**

12. The County Council also offers a purely signposting service on benefits entitlements but not one-to-one, face-to-face contact with would-be claimants.

## **Credit Unions**

13. Credit Unions are non-profit organisations set up by people with something in common such as living or working in the same area. They work by encouraging individuals to save what they can and borrow only what they can afford to repay.

14. Before individuals can borrow or save, they need to become members. Across Essex, Credit Union membership grew by over 25 % in 2008. Membership continues to grow among those who have been refused credit elsewhere and, more recently, with those seeking and wanting to support a more ethical form of finance.

15. All profits are used to make interest rates as cheap as possible for borrowers and rates of return attractive for savers. Credit Unions often lend smaller amounts of money over periods of time that a bank would not consider. Savings tend to be ultra flexible, allowing the possibility of saving amounts, large or small, on a weekly, monthly or other basis.

16. There are presently a number of Credit Unions in the county including Essex Savers, Basildon, Colchester, Harlow Save and Holdfast C. U.

17. On 28 September 2009, the Epping branch of Essex Savers was launched at St John's Church in Epping. The branch opens on Monday each week between 10 a.m. and 12 noon. Loughton Methodist Church had also agreed to 'host' a branch and discussions were taking place regarding the possibility of branches in Debden and Waltham Abbey being opened.

## **HOW THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN IS IMPACTING ON SERVICES**

18. During the course of its review, the Sub Committee received a number of reports and presentations which illustrated the impact the economic situation was having on particular services. These are summarised below.

### **Epping Forest District Council Benefits Service**

- More recently, people were coming forward in greater numbers seeking advice and the number 'new to the system' had increased dramatically, including many owner-occupiers. Some of these claimants could be quite 'aggressive', probably because they were unfamiliar with the system.
- Many self-employed were now seeking to use the service and the assessment of their situation/claims was very time-consuming.
- Recent figures indicated a total of 8,900 claimants (an increase of 700). This figure did not take account instances where a claim was made but it was determined there was no entitlement or where assessments still had to be made. Likewise, enquiries received via telephone calls still had to be dealt with even in instances when it was determined there was no entitlement.
- It had proved necessary to take on additional staff to deal with the increased number of claims.

### **Epping Forest CAB**

- The total number of client enquiries for the first quarter of 2009 was 4640 (compared with 902 in 2008). The number of debt/finance enquiries for the first quarter of 2009 was 1510 (compared with 226 in the first quarter of 2008).

- Debt, benefit and employment advice accounted for 81% of the enquiries. At present, housing issues (by no means repossession cases in each instance) accounted for 9% of the CAB cases. There was often a close link between these categories and any one case might well involve all these issues.
- Clients now had more complex multiple debts.
- The typical profile of individuals coming through the door at the CABs was beginning to change, with an increasing number of bankruptcies and ex company directors.
- 75 appointments for bankruptcy advice were booked for the month of July 2009.
- There were 75 appointments for Debt Relief Orders in July 2009.
- Because of the current demands on CAB, there were longer waiting times before people had their appointment. Consequently they sometimes panicked and sought advice elsewhere. Often this was with a company charging a fee and thus compounding the debts. People then might return to the CAB who had to 'pick up the pieces'.
- As a consequence of the limited resources available, there were gaps in service provision in remote and/or rural areas – examples being Limes Farm, Shelley and villages in the north of the District.
- Epping Forest CAB had a need for both additional funding, particularly to provide for an increased number of Debt Advisers, and improved additional premises.
- Others such as the Benefits Agencies, the DWP and Job Centre Plus were also being inundated.

### **Voluntary Action Epping Forest**

- Previous experience suggested that the voluntary sector suffered severely at times of recession and often face a 'two-way squeeze' in the sense that it faced resultant financial cut-backs but, at the same time, experienced an increased demand for its services. Yet the economic downturn presented opportunities as well as threats.
- One effect of the economic situation had been an increase in the numbers coming forward seeking voluntary work. Some agencies such as Job Centre Plus had helped in promoting volunteering, by having publicity information at their centres regarding the opportunities it presented. Estimates from the various Volunteer Centres in Essex put the increase in volunteering at between 25-50%, reported to be mainly young people and those recently made redundant. Whilst that was good in many respects, the sudden increase did create pressures in other areas such training needs and in terms of placements by the Volunteer Centre. As a consequence, the VAEF service was more in demand.
- Indeed, there were more demands on the voluntary sector in general and, of course, volunteers came at a cost as they still had to be funded.
- Volunteers worked in a variety of services and some of those services were in constant need of further volunteers, drivers for community transport being a good example. Different services required different skills and, although more volunteers were coming forward, allocating individuals to voluntary work which suited their skills was not always possible. Thus



promoting and publicising the need for volunteers was not an issue at present but the processing of applicants was.

- Already there had been significant numbers of staff redundancies amongst voluntary organisations. Further cutbacks and redundancies seemed likely. The feeling amongst voluntary groups was that further mergers would be needed to win contracts but that this might possibly be at the expense of service delivery.

### **Credit Unions**

- One effect of the recession had been to increase significantly the need and demand for credit unions. A number of local authorities had recognised the vital role that credit unions could play and had agreed to provide them with support of one form or another.

### **Epping Forest District Council Housing Service**

- There had been a small but not majorly significant increase in Council Housing rent arrears. The slight increase was attributed more to the recent introduction of a new IT system and a more lenient approach by the courts in pursuing arrears – Judges tended to be more lenient when dealing with arrears in the current economic climate.
- Those in arrears were dealt with sympathetically but obviously a balance had to be struck and it was still the District Council's responsibility to seek recovery of the arrears.
- There had been only a handful of Mortgage Rescue cases in the District so far but there were over 300 in the 'pipeline'.
- There had been a very slight increase in the number of people presenting themselves as homeless. However, there was little evidence that this was the consequence of the recession. Nor had any of the other relevant Housing Performance Indicators shown any significant increase. These included homeless applications processed, local authority repossession caused by rent arrears, registered social landlord repossession caused by rent arrears and notice to quit private rented accommodation.

### **EPPING FOREST LSP TASK AND FINISH TEAM – CREDIT CRUNCH**

19. At a similar time to the setting up of this Sub Committee, the LSP established a Task and Finish Team whose remit was not dissimilar but was more focussed on the effects of the recession on local businesses. As the Task and Finish Team shared some common themes and to avoid duplication where possible, the Sub Committee exchanged ideas and information sources with it, noting details of various initiatives which had been developed to deal with the effects of the recession.

20. The Task and Finish Team concluded its review and put forward the following recommendations in its final report, all of which were agreed by the LSP Board at its meeting on 24 September 2009:

- That partners work with LSPs across West Essex to support and identify opportunities for improved access to external funding and identify and build on examples of good practice.
- That partners engage in and give full support to programmes designed to maximise access to Future Jobs support in the District.

- That partners consider the scope for future events and identify further opportunities for joining up existing support in the District.
- That the impact on advice-giving services such as the CAB be kept under review and partners look at creative ways of meeting enhanced need if required in the third sector.
- That the LSP Sustainable Communities Theme Group, along with partners in the third sector look for opportunities to support volunteering capacity in the District.
- That further work be undertaken to examine a business plan for the growth of credit unions in the District.
- That the role of the Business Champion be kept under review and opportunities for developing the role be investigated.
- That plans be drawn up to agree a new Economic Development Strategy in full consultation with key partners.
- That, in building on the effective working relationships already established, the LSP Sustainable Communities Theme Group seeks to provide and enhance the forum for engagement with key partners in the process and identify key strategic objectives to support on-going work in this field.

## **HELP AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE**

21. The Sub Committee noted information regarding activities and initiatives which had been in place for some time, or had recently been introduced, which were helping alleviate the impact of the economic situation. These included a variety of support services aimed at a range of clients including individuals and businesses. The following list gives an indication of some of the services offered that may have had an impact, whether direct or indirect.

### **Epping Forest CAB**

- Advice on debt, housing and employment issues to both individuals and businesses.
- Dealing with Bankruptcy and Debt Relief Orders.
- Encouraging Benefit Take-up.
- Tackling Fuel Poverty.

### **Job Centre Plus**

- Advice and support for those out of work.
- Information on Learning and Training Opportunities.
- Advice and Support to Employees and Employers facing a redundancy situation.

### **Epping Forest College**

- Special courses aimed at job seekers.

## **Essex County Council**

- Essex Apprentice Scheme
- Increased number of Public Sector Apprentices.
- Funding of Apprentices in Manufacturing and Engineering.
- Benefits Take-up Campaigns.
- Council Tax – Financial support for vulnerable residents.
- Banking on Essex Scheme including medium term lending to local small and Medium- Sized Enterprises.
- Signposting of Business Support Services.

## **Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership**

- Feature in the summer edition of The Forester Magazine providing an ‘easy to read’ summary on support available and tips helping individuals and businesses deal with the recession.
- Involvement of Multi-Faith Forum in identifying potential additional and/or alternative premises for CAB and other advisory services.
- Sponsorship of EERA Skills and Worklessness Seminar in Epping on 5 May 2009.

## **Epping Forest District Council**

- Encouraging greater take-up of Small Business Rate Relief.
- Improved turnaround time for invoice payments.
- Freezing of current rates for use of District Council car parks.
- Work with Building Societies/Banks/Local Social Landlords to formulate a plan for those whose properties are repossessed or are in danger of being repossessed.
- When tendering for work, the District Council seeks at least one quotation from a business located in the District, provided that value for money is achieved and legal requirements met.
- For the supply of goods and/or services to the District Council, suppliers have the facility to register on [www.paessex.gov.uk](http://www.paessex.gov.uk) to receive contract opportunities free of charge that match their business requirements.
- Rental Loan Scheme.
- Rent in Advance Schemes.
- Greater Flexibility in the Shared Ownership Scheme.
- The use of a ‘Recession Busting’ grant from Communities and Local Government to be passed to the Epping Forest Housing Aid Scheme (EFHAS) to provide further rent guarantees.

- An increase from £40,000 to £60,000 in terms of the maximum amount the District Council underwrites in respect of rent guarantees issued by EFHAS to private landlords.
- Home Owners Mortgage and Support, including Mortgage Rescue and Homeowner Mortgage Support..
- Working in partnership with others to deliver the Business Support Open Day 3 July 2009.
- The appointment of Councillor Chris Whitbread, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development, as the District Council's Business Champion to act as an advocate for local businesses and to provide a central point of contact with the District Council and its partners.
- The signing of the Small Business Engagement Accord by the District Council.
- A special 'follow-up' edition of The Forester due to be distributed in mid to late November 2009, setting out further information on the actions which had been taken to assist residents and the business community.

22. The Sub Committee also looked at 'good practice' elsewhere including specific strategies and schemes/initiatives put in place by other local authorities and public organisations:

- Local Government Association – Global Slowdown: Local Solutions.
- Local Government Association and Citizens' Advice Bureau (joint publication) – Managing Money, Helping People With Debt.
- Department for Communities and Local Government – The Credit Crunch and Regeneration: Impact and Implications.
- I&DeA – No Council of Despair; Positive Local Leadership in a Recession.
- Cambridgeshire Together – supporting Cambridgeshire Communities through the Economic Downturn.
- Oldham Partnership – Credit Crunch War Cabinet.
- East of England Advice and Guidance for Employers and Employees.
- Local Authorities and the Recession – Solutions from the Citizens Advice Service.
- CABS – Backing Communities: Local Solutions – Councils and Voluntary and Community supporting people through the Recession.
- CIPFA Finance Advisory Network – Dealing with the Recession.
- Houghton Review: Tackling Worklessness.
- South Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership Newsletter.
- HM Government – Real Help for Communities: Volunteers, Charities and Social Enterprises.
- Bromley LSP – Impact of Economic Downturn.

- Websites dedicated to advice about where to go and what to do.
- Specific loans/grants made available to assist businesses
- Work with Building Societies/Banks to formulate a plan for those whose properties are repossessed or are in danger of being repossessed.
- Encouraging the unemployed to volunteer (but with the prospect of paid employment).
- Audit Commission Publication – ‘When It Comes To The Crunch’

23. A number of funding initiatives had been introduced since the extent and significance of the recession had been realised. Details of the following were noted by the Sub Committee:

- Modernisation Fund Grants Scheme.
- Proof of Concept Fund
- Enterprise finance Guarantee Scheme.
- Future Jobs Fund.
- Volunteer Managers Programme.
- Hardship Fund.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

24. It was clear from the research carried out by the Sub-Committee, and the various presentations received at its meetings, that many of the agencies in the public and voluntary sectors were very much aware of the impact locally and had taken action to mitigate against its worst effects. Indeed, the agencies concerned had effective services and procedures in place as part of their regular ongoing provision whatever the prevailing economic situation. The wide range of initiatives and effective procedures that the District Council's Benefits and Housing Services had in place was a good illustration of this point. Whilst the economic situation had certainly impacted on the District, the county and the region overall, and there were no grounds for complacency, the impact had been no more severe than elsewhere in the country.

25. One agency which the recession had impacted on significantly was the CAB. There had been a quadrupling in the number of enquiries it had dealt with in the past year with the vast majority of these enquiries being in the categories of debt, benefits, employment or housing, or involving a mixture of these issues. A gradual change in the type of client was being witnessed with an increasing number of bankruptcies and debt advice cases involving individuals from the professional classes such as company directors. The current demands had increased the number of cases and waiting times in general.

26. The impact of the recession on the Epping Forest CAB had been compounded by the lack of suitable additional and alternative accommodation. Even in instances when additional debt advisers might be available, the potential for reducing the backlog was limited because of the lack of further suitable interviewing rooms. Thus the Epping Forest CAB had a need for both additional funding, especially in the area of debt advice, and improved additional or alternative premises.

27. Contrariwise, but not unusually, the economic situation had led to an increase in the number of individuals, currently unemployed, entering voluntary work. This should be seen in

a positive light in the sense that many of the individuals concerned had particular skills to offer which might not usually be readily available to the voluntary sector. They were being introduced to the world of volunteering and might continue to carry out voluntary work even when the economic situation improved and they were re-employed. Volunteering amongst the unemployed is known to be beneficial, not only to their self-esteem but also because it can develop new skills that can help employability.

28. However, voluntary work came neither cheap nor free. The recession had led to greater demands on VAEF and the voluntary sector in general, with greater training costs and volunteer bureaux facing the administrative burden in terms of the placement of volunteers, all of which added to the costs. There was a need to support VAEF and the voluntary sector in whatever ways possible, including promotion of the volunteering ethos but backed up with the provision of the extra resources required consequent upon the additional volunteers coming forward.

29. The number of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Rebate cases had also increased significantly and needed to be monitored in terms of workload and timeliness of responding to clients, particularly given that clients were often in need of urgent help and assistance at an early stage which could prevent them from resorting to obtaining loans from undesirable sources. There was insufficient privacy for Benefits staff when talking to clients at the Civic Offices with the shortage of suitable space leading to long waiting times and adversely affecting customer relations. Thus there was an urgent need for improved accommodation where Benefits staff could talk to clients confidentially.

30. One major problem was that not everybody entitled to benefits made a claim. There were a number of reasons for this, amongst them a lack of awareness, the complexity of the system, personal pride in not being dependent on the state, and the information being difficult to understand. Government statistics suggested that couples with children 'under-claimed' by between 25-40%, with an even greater number missing out on Council Tax Benefit. Welfare rights organisations needed to be supported in getting the information out, with the District Council exploring what it could do to publicise the information. Whilst Council staff already helped with the filling out of forms, further ways of identifying people who might need help, should be considered. Other agencies and organisations might be encouraged to help in this process, for instance, schools through their experiences of children from families in difficulty.

31. In general there was plenty of support available to vulnerable people but getting the information and required support to them was not always effective given the complexity of the benefits available. Communication within and between the different Council service areas was generally good, although being passed from one area to another could cause confusion for claimants and made the process testing. Publicity in *The Forester* and in local newspapers should continue, with easy to read leaflets available at all suitable information points.

32. The Future Jobs Fund offered the potential to get young long-term unemployed people back into employment. The scheme allowed for grants of £6,500 for six month placements of a minimum of 25 hours per week and could be used in respect of socially useful initiatives. Offering apprenticeships to locally unemployed people, especially the young unemployed, was to be encouraged, both internally at the District Council and through local businesses.

## **IMMEDIATE ACTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

33. During the course of the four meetings, a wide range of reports and presentations were received and considered. Following analysis of these and after diverse discussions, The Sub Committee agreed a number of actions it could implement immediately and put forward a number of recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it considered might help ameliorate the impact of the economic situation locally.

## **Immediate Actions**

- (a)** The District Council became a signatory to the Small Business Engagement Accord on 3 November 2009.
- (b)** Local Banks/Building Societies were written to ascertain their current arrangements when, as a consequence of financial circumstances, customers had their property repossessed or there was a threat of repossession. Disappointingly no responses were received from any of the banks or building societies.
- (c)** The need for a Direct Link on the District Council website to Benefits Information was established and subsequently set up.

## **Recommendations for Future Action**

- (i)** That the significant impact of the recession on the number of cases dealt with by Epping Forest CAB and the CAB's excellent response to the increased workload be recognised and, in giving its support, the District Council continues to work alongside the CAB as it seeks additional resources, be they finance, staff, volunteers or premises, to ease the effects of that additional workload.
- (ii)** That the District Council foster an interest in volunteering and voluntary work by encouraging employees to become volunteers in their spare time (e.g. as part of the induction programme), through publicity in The Forester magazine and encouraging other major employers in the District to promote the benefits of voluntary work.
- (iii)** That voluntary work also be promoted through the use of information available at suitable locations, including Council Offices and Job Centre Plus.
- (iv)** That the need for more spacious facilities, also providing greater confidentiality, for interviewing benefits claimants be addressed as a matter of urgency through the Customer Transformation Programme or another Civic Offices work programme.
- (v)** That the District Council recognises and supports the vital role being carried out by Credit Unions in general during the economic recession.
- (vi)** That the District Council also supports the work being carried out by Essex Savers in the District and, in giving encouragement to the extension of its operation to the more outlying rural areas, assists in publicising the role of Essex Savers generally, internally and through other major employers in the District.
- (vii)** That the LSP be supported in its bid through the Future Job Fund for the creation of jobs in the District.
- (viii)** That reports reviewing progress on the implementation of the recommendations of this Sub Committee and those of the LSP Task and Finish Team on the Credit Crunch be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

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## **Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12 November 2009**

**Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme – Six Monthly Review**

**Officer contact for further information: Simon Hill (Ext 4249)**

**Committee Secretary: A Hendry (ext 4246)**

# SCRUTINY

 **Epping Forest District Council**

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### **Recommendations:**

**(1) That the current work programme be reviewed in accordance with rule 9.3 of the Overview and Scrutiny Rules having regard to:**

- (a) the resourcing and scope of the programme; and**
- (b) the reserve programme and new proposals from members.**

1. (Assistant to the Chief Executive). The Overview and Scrutiny Procedural rules state that 'The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme shall be of six – months duration and be reviewed at or before the expiration of that six month period'.

2. The current work programme is attached. A review of this plan is therefore now due.

### **Task and Finish Panels**

3. At the annual review (June 2009) one new Task and Finish Panels was established: The Pitt Review on Flooding Task and Finish Panel has met twice this year.

4. In September 2009 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a second Task and Finish Panel was established. This was to look at the Sustainable Communities Act, 2007. This Panel has not yet met.

### **Scrutiny Standing Panels**

5. No new Standing Panels were created this year..

### **Reserve List.**

6. A reserve list of scrutiny topics is required to ensure that the work flow of OSC is continuous. OSC will 'pull out' items from the list and allocate them accordingly once space becomes available in the work plan following the completion of existing reviews.

7. To date no items have been submitted. Members can put forward any further suggestions for inclusion in the reserve list either during the meeting or at a later date. Existing review items will be dealt with first, then time will be allocated to the items contained in the reserve work plan.

8. Members need to bear in mind that new projects can be added but only if there is capacity among Panels and officers to undertake them.

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## Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme – October 2009

<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Report Deadline / Priority</b>	<b>Progress / Comments</b>	<b>Programme of Future Meetings</b>
(1) Scrutiny of Essex Police – Community Policing Initiative		Came in April 2009. – To arrange again for April 2010 – Now referred to the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel	<del>02nd June 2009</del> 09 <sup>th</sup> July
(2) OS Annual Review/ Annual Report	April 2010	2008/09 Final Report went to April 09 meeting.	<del>03<sup>rd</sup> September</del> 8 <sup>th</sup> October 12 <sup>th</sup> November 17 <sup>th</sup> December
(3) Scrutiny of London Underground Ltd	London Underground had withdrawn from this meeting at the last moment. <b>To rearrange.</b>	Last Came in April 2008 – to rearrange. To broaden it out by inviting TfL or the GLA.	<del>28<sup>th</sup> January 2010</del> 4 <sup>th</sup> March 15 <sup>th</sup> April
(4) Provision of Youth Services within the District	July 2009	Came in July 2008 - Lonica Vanclay (who is the local officer responsible for youth provision in the District) attended July' 09 meeting to discuss this issue.	
(5) West Essex PCT – Proposal for Joint Scrutiny Review	Update went to December 2008 meeting – endorsed in principle.	Further meeting to be arranged with Harlow / Uttlesford to discuss topics and method of any review. It is thought prudent to wait for the outcome of ECC's review of PCT scrutiny arrangements before progressing this review.	

(6) District Transport in Rural Areas		Survey now completed – Data has now been sent to County for their action. To report back to the Committee when County has taken any follow up action. Cllr Hume attended January 09 meeting. Asked County for a final report.	
(7) Scrutiny of Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership – Chairman and Member level EFDC representatives	March 2010	Last came in March 2009 - Representatives of the partnership to report on an annual basis.	
(8) Scrutiny of Cabinet Forward Plan	April 2010	Last looked at in April 2009. To review again when Cabinet next consider their forward plan.	
(9) Six monthly review - (a) Monitoring of OS recommendations (b) OS work programme	November 2009	Last completed in November 08	
(10) To review the strategic direction of Epping Forest College, its vision for the future and its relationship with the Community	January 2010	Principal of Epping Forest College addressed the December 2008 meeting. To be invited in January 2010.	

(11) Budget Report	January 2010	Last completed January 2009
(12) To receive a Health and Inequalities presentation as requested by the Audit Commission.	November 2009	Last came in November 08 - received a presentation from Alison Cowie. Updating report to go back to O&S July/September 09 meeting. Cllr Mrs Wagland wished to discuss 'hip' fractures of over 65's. To ask the PCT to attend a future meeting.
(13) To receive a presentation from the Fire and Rescue Services.	<del>July 2009</del> <del>September 2009</del> October 2009	Members agreed to have this presentation at their April 09 meeting. <b>Postponed to October 2009.</b>
(14) Debt Management Review.	November 2009	A sub-committee, consisting of four members has been constituted to look into this topic. A report will be brought to this Committee once completed.
(15) Review of Secondary and Primary education in the District and to focus on the link between Education and deprivation in the District.	January 2010	To ask the appropriate County Officer or Portfolio Holder to attend a future meeting.
(16) To receive a presentation from Youth Council members	November 2009	As last year, members of the Youth Council will attend with proposals for their funding bid for 2010/11 and give an update on their developing programme.

Standing Panels			
Housing Standing Panel			
Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	High	Went to July 09 meeting	<del>30 July 2009</del> 29 October (meeting postponed and now re-scheduled for 15 December 2009).  21 January 2010 25 March
(2) Review of the Homeless Strategy	High	Went to July 09 meeting	
(3) Review of Housing Performance Indicators	High	Went to July 09 meeting	
(4) Older People's Strategic Review – Response to Consultation	High	Went to July 09 meeting	
(5) Private Sector Housing – Resourcing the Strategy	Medium	Went to July 09 meeting.	
(6) Review of Housing Standards.	Medium	For December 09 meeting.	
(7) Presentation by In Touch Support	Medium	Went to July 09 meeting	
(8) Annual review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	For December 09 meeting – this may have to slip as officers are awaiting government guidance.	
(9) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Allocations	Medium	For December 09 meeting	
(10) Housing Service Strategy on Housing Advice	Medium	For December 09 meeting	

(11) Housing Service Strategy on Equality and Diversity	Medium	For January 2010	
(12) Housing Service Strategy on Harassment	Medium	For January 2010 meeting	
(13) Six monthly Progress report on Housing strategy Action Plan	Medium	For January 2010 meeting	
(14) Six-monthly Progress report on Housing Business Plan Action Plan	Medium	For January 2010	
(15) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	For March 2010 meeting	
(16) Tenant Participation Progress Report	Low	For March 2010	
(17) Affordable Housing Sub-Group		To report back once sub-group has completed its review.	

Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel			
Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Review of June 2009 Elections	<b>Completed - June 2009 meeting</b>		<del>29<sup>th</sup> June 2009</del>
(2) Overview and Scrutiny Review (completion from last meeting of Panel) (a) Feedback from members of council O & S websites; (b) Government White Paper on Empowerment; and (c) Electronic call in	November 2009	Review of Best Practice at other councils for discussion at this meeting, together with a report on electronic call in.	<del>14<sup>th</sup> September</del> 2 <sup>nd</sup> November  11 <sup>th</sup> January <b>2010</b> 22 <sup>nd</sup> March
(3) Planning applications – comments by Parish Councils	<b>Completed – June 2009 meeting</b>	Referred to Planning Services Scrutiny Panel	
(4) Member Training Review	January 2010	Deferred to January 2010 meeting to allow more consideration of new training plans.	
(5) Annual Review of Financial Regulations.	November 2009	Officer Working Party meeting on 20 October 2010 report submitted to this meeting.	
(6) Annual Review of Contract Standing Orders	January 2010		
(7) Annual Review of Officer Delegation	March 2010		



(8) Protocol on Civic Events	November 2009	On agenda for this meeting.	
(9) Review of Internal Audit Report - External Partner Organisations -	Completed September 2009		

## Safer, Cleaner, Greener Standing Panel

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Safer, cleaner, greener (general)  (a) completion of establishment etc (b) formal "launch" (c) accreditation progress (d) enforcement activity (e) Strategy Document	(a) <b>Completed</b> (b) June 2009 (c) August 2009 (d) August 2009 (e) September 2009	(a) Establishment now <b>complete</b> (b) Now scheduled for July 2009 - <b>Completed</b> (c) Corporate accreditation achieved May 2009. Individual officer training scheduled for completion mid August 2009. - <b>Completed</b> (d) Enforcement policy document to the 23 June meeting. - <b>Completed</b> (e) agreed by this Panel at its February 2009 meeting, to Cabinet for adoption in Sept. 09.- <b>Completed</b>	<del>23 June 2009</del> <del>4 September</del> 27 October 8 December  25 February <b>2010</b> 29 April
(2) Safer communities (Safer)  (a) CCTV policy	(a) June 2009 – report postponed to December 09.	(a) Policy document was to go to the June meeting with example warning signs for consideration. Will now go to the December meeting	
(3) Essex waste procurement process and Joint Committee (Cleaner, Greener)  (a) minutes of joint Committee (b) JMWMS (e) Inter authority agreements	(a) Ongoing (b) <b>Adopted.</b> (c) <b>Completed.</b>	(a) No recent meeting to report. A review of the joint Committee is underway. (b) No further action required until review. (c) Agreed at March 2009 Cabinet. Letter of intent signed May 2009.	

<p>(4) Waste Management Partnership Board (Greener)</p> <p>(a) minutes of Board  (b) review of garden waste  (c) Introduction of food waste collection  (d) recycling in flats and similar buildings  (e) new food and garden recycling service.</p>	<p>(a) Ongoing</p> <p>(b to c) prelim results went to October 08 meeting.  (d) Ongoing  (e) Implementation Team updates</p>	<p>(a) Minutes of WMPB on 18 March and 20 April for 23 June meeting.  (b &amp; c) new service agreed at Cabinet at special meeting on 19 January 2009. New scheme due to commence September 2009.  (d) Some progress in 08/09. Further progress as part of new service rollout.  (e) Procurement of major assets in progress. Key Partners/stakeholders being identified road shows being programmed. Presentation to SCG Standing Panel.</p>	
<p>(5) Nottingham Declaration (Greener)</p> <p>(a) Sustainability action plan  (b) Climate change strategy – completed.</p>	<p><b>Completed</b></p> <p>(a) First draft went to February 09 meeting</p> <p>(b) <b>Completed</b></p>	<p>Nottingham Declaration signed in November 2007, by Cllr Mrs Diana Collins</p> <p>Sustainability Action Plan incorporated into Safer Cleaner Greener Strategy, due for adoption in September 2009</p> <p>CCS completed in December 2008 and adopted in April 2009. Action Plan with a report in early 2010 covering actions over the last 12 months.</p>	
<p>(6) Bobbingworth Tip (Greener)</p> <p>(a) Management Group</p>	<p>(a) February 2010</p>	<p>All work essentially completed. Management group to be set up early 2010.</p>	

<p>(7) Flooding matters</p> <p>(a) Strategic Flood Risk assessment</p> <p>(b) Pitt Review and Flood and Water Bill</p>	<p>(a) to be completed in time to contribute to East of England development plan</p> <p>(b) T&amp;F Panel now set up.</p>	<p>(a) Being produced jointly with Harlow District Council. Bulk of the work completed, final report compilation outstanding.</p> <p>(b) New task &amp; finish scrutiny panel established to consider the ramifications of the legislative proposals. This will report directly into OS Cttee.</p>	
<p>(8) Crime and Disorder Matters</p>	<p>October 2009 &amp; February 2010.</p>	<p>The SCG Panel to be handed over twice yearly, in February and October to look at Crime and Disorder matters. Issues requested from members via the bulletin.</p> <p>The October 09 meeting to consider cross border effects on ASB; and protection of vulnerable individuals/families from ASB.</p>	

<p>(9) Outstanding Leisure Task &amp; Finish Scrutiny Panel issues  (a) Waltham Abbey SC</p> <p>(b) Youth initiatives &amp; play strategy</p>	<p>(a) December 2009</p> <p>(b) Completion of facilities installation expected by March 2010. Report to Council early 2010.</p>	<p>(a) Cabinet decision to take forward pre-planning application for new facilities at WASP called in and will be considered at OS Cttee at its meeting on 3 September 2009. This call-in was not upheld. King Harold's School would be keeping the leisure facilities open for the public.</p> <p>(b) Child and youth play facilities installed at Limes Farm (currently completing refurbishment of multi use games area). Children's playground installed at Hoe Lane, Nazeing and youth facility at Elizabeth's Close, Nazeing due to be constructed in August/September. The final facility as part of Big Lottery funding is due for completion by March 2010, at Pancroft Ring, Abridge, following a range of consultation in the village. Additional funding for play facility development has been secured from 'Play Builders', which will see the installation of a new children's playground at Westall Road in Loughton (expected September/October) and the possibility of a new skate facility in Waltham Abbey. These facilities are being developed in conjunction with Loughton and Waltham Abbey town Councils.</p>	
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Planning Services Standing Panel			
Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) (i) New Local Development Scheme and East of England Plan and to keep an overview of work associated with securing a sound New Local Development Framework	Regular updating reports	Final version of the East of England Plan to 2021 complete.  LDF timeline to be presented.	<del>18<sup>th</sup> June 2009</del> <del>8<sup>th</sup> September</del> 10 <sup>th</sup> November  5 <sup>th</sup> January 2010 11 <sup>th</sup> February 27 <sup>th</sup> March
(2) (i) Re-use of buildings in the Green Belt/Traffic Issues in the Roydon and Nazeing Areas. (ii) To keep an overview on transport matters that were the subject of a focus day in Nazeing in March 2007, and the action plan.		<b>On going</b> – VOSA attended meeting of the old Environment and Planning Standing Panel on 28 Feb 2008. Awaiting Essex C.C. transport freight strategy for the Nazeing area.	

<p>(3) To consider the provision of Value for Money within the following Planning Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Administration &amp; Customer Support</li> <li>b) Building Control</li> <li>c) Development Control (including Appeals)</li> <li>d) Economic Development</li> <li>e) Enforcement</li> <li>f) Environment Team</li> <li>g) Forward Planning</li> </ul>	<p>Report at Panel – Sept 09</p> <p>Report at Panel – June 09</p> <p>Report at Panel – June 09 with revised reports later</p>	<p>VFM Task and Finish report went to September meeting and the November O&amp;S Cttee meeting where it was endorsed.</p> <p>To include response to Economic Downturn.</p>	
<p>(4) Update on current staffing situation</p>	<p>Regular agenda item.</p>		
<p>(5) Improvement Plan</p>	<p>Regular agenda item.</p>		
<p>(6) Update on Gypsy and Traveller Consultation</p>	<p>Regular agenda item.</p>		

(7) Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of Area Planning Cttees. to be invited to a meeting to provide feedback.		Considered at the March 09 meeting. The next meeting was taking place on October 15 2009.	
(8) Report from legal on performance at Planning appeals.	June 2009	Separate meeting to be arranged involving Chairman of Panel, Director of Planning & Legal officers	
(9) Report reviewing the recruiting process for the Asst Director's Post	Considered at the June 2009 meeting.	<b>Now completed</b>	
(10) Comments from the planning agents and amenity groups required matching.		New meetings with planning agents and amenity groups can be organised separately or together.	
(11) That a report be produced setting out the benefits of creating an additional Senior Officer Post, replacing the Compliance Officer post with reference to outcomes, options for funding the new post with consideration given to alternative options for securing the same benefits	Considered at June 2009 meeting	Deferred to a later meeting. Report has been to the Corporate Executive Forum on September 30 2009.	
(12) That a report be produced for the Panel setting out the possible route any planning enforcement investigation could take	Considered at June 2009 meeting.	Deferred to September 2009 with financial implications, however now going before the November 2009 Panel meeting.	
(13) Comments from local councils	Agenda – 10 November 2009	Referred from Constitution & Member Services Panel at request of Chairman of Planning Scrutiny Panel.	



Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel			
Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
(1) Key Performance Indicators – Performance Outturn 2008/09	Performance report to be considered at year end.	Outturn KPI performance report for 2008/09 to be considered at the meeting to be held on 16 June 2009. Performance report to be produced for inclusion in E-Annual Report in place of former Best Value Performance Plan.	<del>16 June 2009</del> 25 August 17 November
(2) Key Performance Indicators – Performance Monitoring 2009/10	Performance report to be considered on a quarterly basis.	Quarterly KPI performance report for 2009/10 to be considered at the meetings to be held on 25 August 2009, 17 November 2009 and 23 February 2010.	<b>12 January 2010</b> 23 February 22 April
(3) Quarterly Financial Monitoring	Reports to be considered on a quarterly basis.	First quarter Information to be considered August 09, 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter in November 09 and 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter figures at the February '10 meeting.	
(4) Council Plan 2006-2010 Performance Monitoring	Performance report considered on an annual basis.	Performance report for third year of the Council Plan (2008/09). Report considered at the meeting held in June 2009.	
(5) Value for Money Cost and Performance Analysis	Analysis updated on an annual basis to reflect latest available cost and performance information.	Revised arrangements for consideration of the Value for Money Analysis agreed in March 2009. The Audit Commission's VFM Profile tool is updated during late February early March each year, and in order for the VFM analysis to be developed from this tool, the analysis will be considered during the April-June cycle each year.	
(6) Annual Consultation Plan	Report considered on an annual basis.	Last completed August 08. Consultation Plan considered at first meeting of each municipal year. Report went to the June 2009 meeting,.	

(7) Detailed Portfolio Budgets	To go to the January 2010 meeting.	To be considered January '10 - Annual review of the Portfolio Holders Budgets.	
(8) Medium Term Financial Strategy	To go to the February 2010 meeting.	Financial issues Paper to 17 November 2009. Review the Council's medium term financial strategy 12 January 2010.	
(9) Equality and Diversity - Monitoring and Progress	Report considered on an annual basis.	Monitoring report in respect of the Council's Equality Schemes and progress with equality issues to be considered at the meeting to be held on 22 April 2010.	
(10) Capital Outturn 2008/09 and use of transitional relief in 2008/09	To go to the June 2009 meeting	Considered at the June 2009 meeting.	
(11) Provisional revenue Outturn 2008/09	To go to the June 2009 meeting	Considered at the June 2009 meeting	
(12) Fee and Charges	To go to the November 2009 meeting	Last considered at the November 2008 meeting	

<p>(13) Customer transformation T&amp;F Panel work</p>	<p>Report to go to 17 November 2009 meeting.</p>	<p>Work of the disbanded the Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panel was placed with the Finance and Performance Management Standing Scrutiny Panel. The Cabinet at their meeting in February 2009 agreed the recommendations with the proviso at (3) that:</p> <p>“(1) That, given the increasing importance of the Council’s Website for communication, information and electronic interactions, the level of dedicated resource to the maintenance and development of the Council’s Website be increased;</p> <p>(2) That a District Development Fund bid be made to fund an additional Grade 5 Website Support Officer on a three-year fixed term contract as part of the budget process for 2009/10, at an estimated cost of £25,000 per annum subject to job evaluation; and</p> <p>(3) That the Task and Finish Panel on Customer Transformation be requested to reconvene and further prioritise the remaining seven recommendations of the original report.”</p>	
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## Task and Finish Panels

### Pitt Review - on Flooding

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
<p>1. Interim report to include any budgetary items for the next budget round.</p> <p>2. As a time limited review - to end by January 2010</p>	<p>1. By October 2009</p> <p>2. By January 2010</p>	<p>The Panel had their first meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> July to consider and agree their Terms of Reference and have arranged another meeting for September 2009.</p> <p>1. Interim report went to O&amp;S on 8 October 09 requesting funding to the continuation of the out of hours land drainage standby service.</p>	<p><del>20<sup>th</sup> July 2009</del></p> <p><del>22 September</del></p> <p>December 09</p>

## Sustainable Communities Act 2007

Item	Report Deadline / Priority	Progress / Comments	Programme of Future Meetings
<p>This Act is designed to allow local authorities and their communities to drive the action and assistance that Central Government gives in promoting thriving, sustainable communities.</p>		<p>New Task and Finish Panel.</p> <p>A notice has been put in the Members Bulletin asking for members to nominate themselves to this panel.</p> <p>Panel work still to commence.</p>	

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**SCHEDULE A:****POTENTIAL SITE FOR FUTURE SAND AND GRAVEL EXTRACTION****Shellow Cross**

Site:	A40
Address:	Land at Shellow Cross Farm, Elm Farm and Newland Hall Farm Willingale, Ongar
District:	Chelmsford and Epping
Estimated Yield:	4.95 mt
Area:	105 ha
Estimated Life:	23 years
Method of Exportation:	Road
Method of Restoration:	Restoration partly at lower level with in-situ clays and soils, and part to former levels using inert infill.
After-use:	Agriculture and nature conservation

## Notes:

1. This site comprises two distinct areas, linked and connected to the A1060 by an internal haul road;
2. Estimated average annual output of approx 250,000 tonnes is proposed;
3. The area of woodland in the centre of the southern parcel of land is not proposed to be disturbed;
4. Processing plant would be sited on the northern parcel of land;
5. Restoration proposals would include improvement to the Public Right of Way (PROW) network and biodiversity initiatives such as the creation of woodland, hedgerows and ponds;

**Schedule A - Site A40**

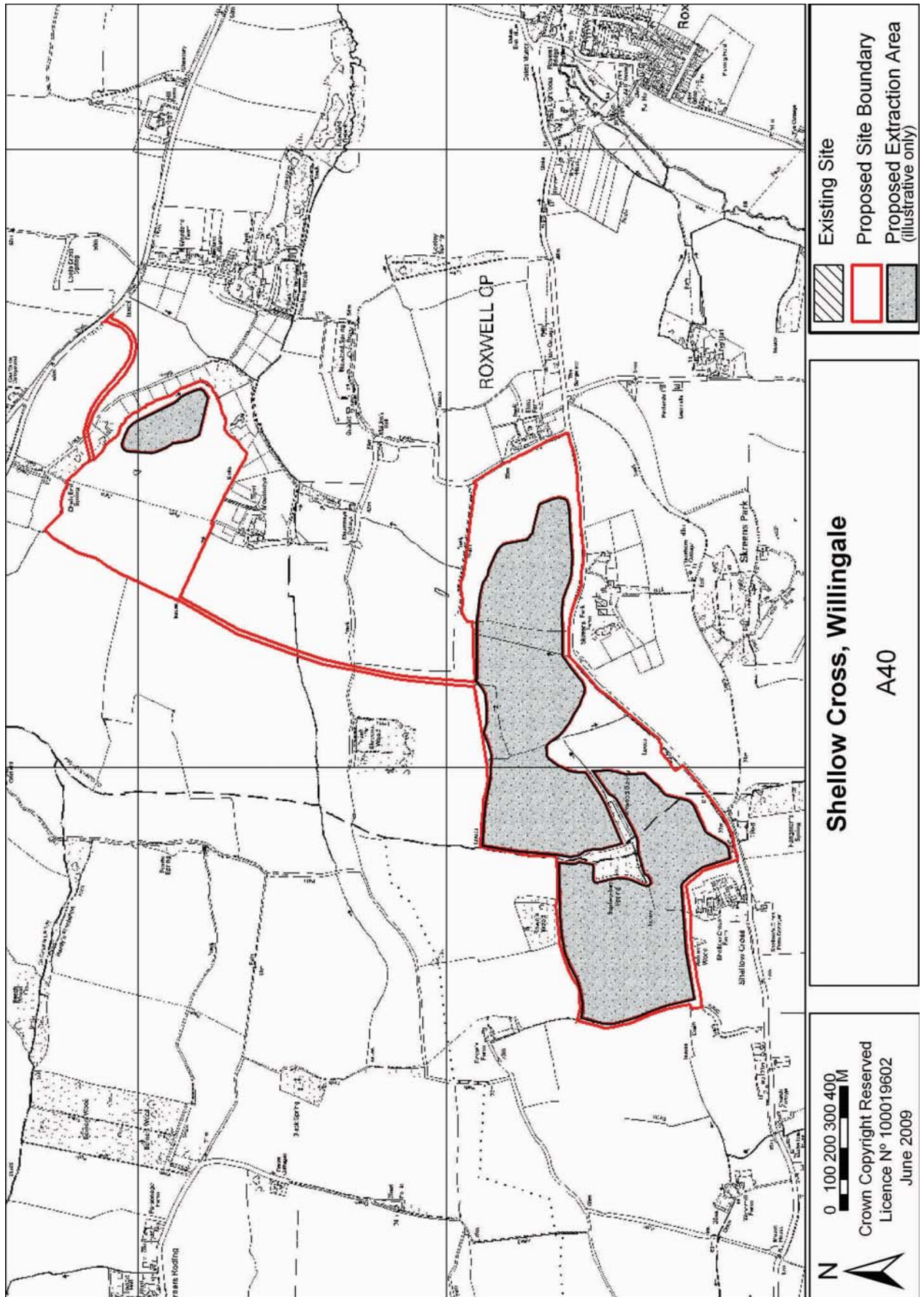
A) Do you support this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?

B) Do you object to this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?

C) If b, are there any changes that could be made to this proposal that would make it acceptable to you?

D) Is the proposed after-use acceptable to you. If not, what do you consider to be appropriate at this location and why?

Map 6 Shellow Cross





**SCHEDULE A:****POTENTIAL SITE FOR FUTURE SAND AND GRAVEL EXTRACTION****Patch Park Farm**

Site:	A41
Address:	Patch Park Farm, Abridge
District:	Epping
Estimated Yield:	1.0 mt
Area:	35 ha
Estimated Life:	7-10 years
Method of Exportation:	Road
Method of Restoration:	Progressive restoration using imported pre-treated inert waste
After-use:	Agriculture and some nature conservation / biodiversity enhancement

## Notes:

1. Access would be onto the A113;
2. Estimated average annual output of 120,000 tonnes with importation of approximately 120,000 tpa of the pre-treated inert waste;
3. Processing plant would be sited in the field to the east;
4. Land to the north-east would enable floodplain compensation works to be accommodated. If found necessary, these works would be short-term (2-3 months) and the land restored to agriculture and / or wetland;
5. The extraction area would be de-watered to allow dry working;
6. An east-west ditch would be constructed across the site to assist with surface and ground water management. The edge of the ditch would be planted with hedgerow and trees;

**Schedule A - Site A41**

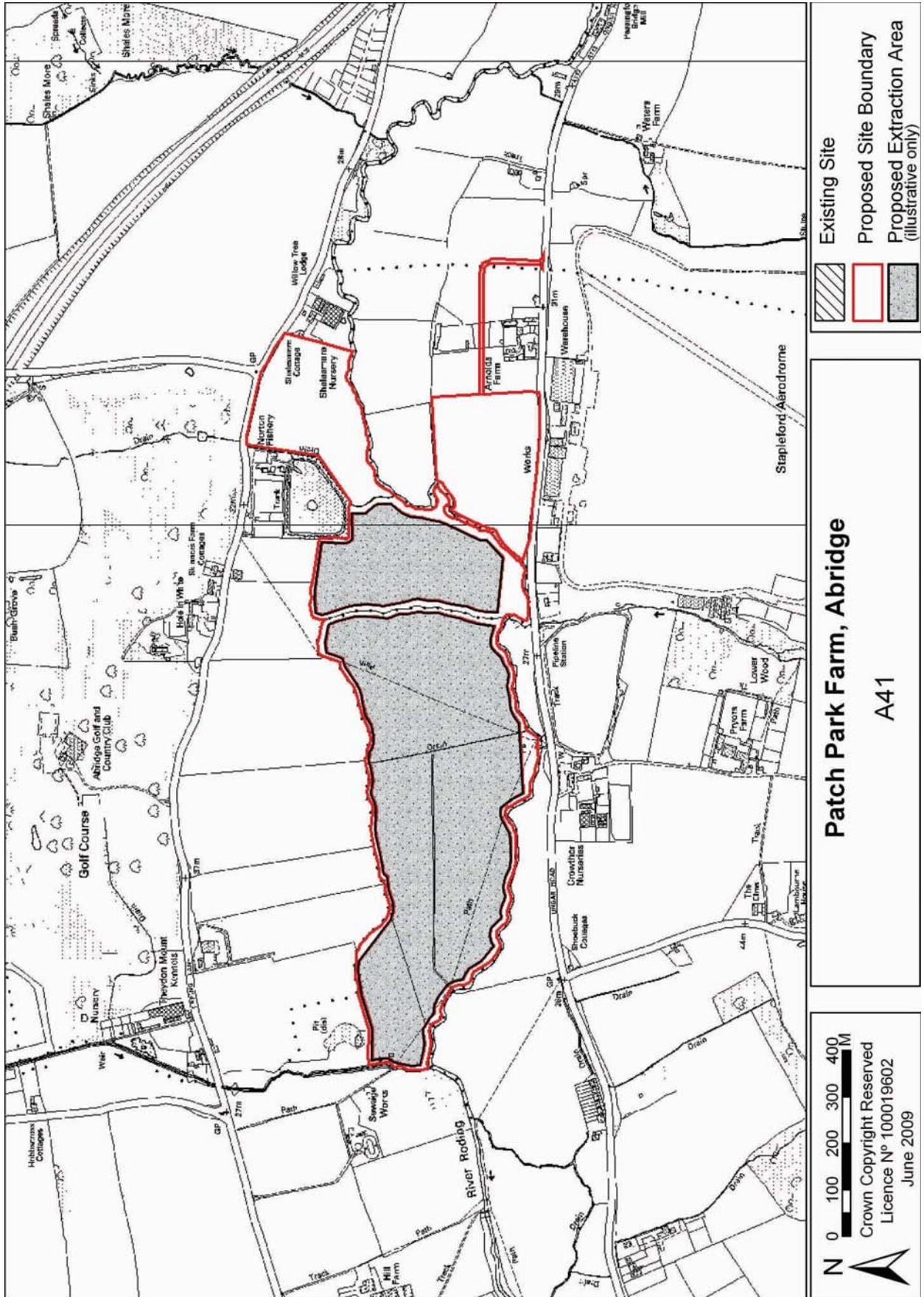
A) Do you support this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?

B) Do you object to this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?

C) If b, are there any changes that could be made to this proposal that would make it acceptable to you?

D) Is the proposed after-use acceptable to you. If not, what do you consider to be appropriate at this location and why?

Map 7 Patch Park Farm



# **Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12<sup>th</sup> November 2009**



**Subject: Essex County Council Consultation – “Minerals  
Development document: Site Allocations – Issues & Options Paper”**

**Officer contact for further information: Amanda Wintle (01992–564543).**

**Committee Secretary: Simon Hill (01992–564249).**

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To consider and agree the proposed key issues to be contained in the consultation response to Essex County Council in respect of their current consultation document.**

## **Summary:**

Essex County Council has published a consultation document as part of the process of considering further sites for mineral extraction across the County. Two potential sites in Epping Forest District have been identified.

The sites are both considered unsuitable for a number of reasons including impact on the Green Belt, local landscape, the local road network and flooding implications. Officers also consider that the site selection process is flawed.

## **Report:**

### **Background**

1. The current Minerals Local Plan was adopted by Essex County Council in November 1996. A new Minerals Development Document (MDD) is now being prepared to replace the existing plan, and to set out the policies for mineral extraction over the period 2007 – 2026.
2. The MDD will establish the vision, objectives, strategy and new sites to meet the need for sand, gravel, silica sand and brick clay aggregate across Essex. It has been identified that an additional 39.025 million tonnes (mt) is required to meet the requirements of the East of England Plan. Essex County Council has previously undertaken consultation on the following documents:
  - (i) MDD: Site Allocations – Issues & Options Paper (December 2005)
  - (ii) MDD: Additional Site Allocations – Issues & Options Paper (March 2006)
  - (iii) MDD: Further Issues & Options Paper (January 2009)
3. None of these documents identified any extraction sites in Epping Forest District. In considering the strategic distribution of sites across Essex, the County Council has made it clear that it considers there is a lack of provision in both the south and west of the district, and has therefore focused its most recent “call for sites” in these areas.

## Current Consultation

4. The consultation document identifies two potential sites for sand and gravel extraction in the district, at Shellow Cross, Willingale and Patch Park Farm, Abridge. Copies of the maps enclosed in the consultation document are attached at Appendix 1 for information. The current consultation runs between 17 September and 12 November 2009. In consultation with the Leader and the Environment Portfolio Holder, EFDC officers will submit a response prior to the deadline. ECC officers have confirmed that the further views of the Committee can be submitted following this meeting. The consultation document asks specific questions of each of the potential sites:
  - a. Do you support this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?
  - b. Do you object to this potential site for sand and gravel extraction?
  - c. If b, are there any changes that could be made to this proposal that would make it acceptable to you?
  - d. Is the proposed after-use acceptable to you. If not, what do you consider to be appropriate to this location and why?
5. The sites in Willingale and Abridge have been identified as a result of the final “call for sites” outlined in paragraph 3. The consultation document makes clear (paragraph 2.1) that neither Essex County Council nor the British Geological Survey hold sufficient detailed geological data for the county to identify all potential extraction sites themselves. This is particularly disappointing as there are large “inferred spreads of sands and gravel” in Epping Forest District. This suggests that the process by which potential sites are being identified is flawed. It does not seem that all possible alternative options will have been identified if a comprehensive survey of the county (and particularly this district) has not been undertaken.
6. The County Council has also stated in the consultation document (pages 6 and 7) that a detailed site assessment will be undertaken in accordance with a standard approach. This assessment will then be used to inform the preparation of the preferred site options document.

## Shellow Cross, Willingale

7. The potential site at Shellow Cross lies across the administrative boundary with Chelmsford Borough Council, with approximately a third of the site being in Epping Forest District. The details of the potential site are contained in Appendix 1.
8. Officers **object** to the identification of this site for sand and gravel extraction. The site is wholly within the Metropolitan Green Belt. PPG2 (paragraphs 3.11-3.14) states that mineral extraction is not necessarily harmful to the Green Belt. However processing plant will be required on the site (suggested for the northern parcel of land, within Chelmsford Borough Council area), which by definition will be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt and should therefore be resisted.
9. The Forward Planning team has commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment to inform the preparation of the Local Development Framework. This research is not yet complete, but the initial findings can be drawn upon to determine the extent of any harm to the landscape of the potential working of this site. The Willingale area is predominantly rural in character, and there is a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity throughout. The presence of a network of mature hedgerows in the area is key to the character, and should be protected and enhanced where possible. The Assessment considers that this area has a moderate to high sensitivity to change. Clearly, the impact of a mineral extraction facility in this location will be detrimental.
10. The details of the site refer to an area of woodland in the centre of the potential

extraction site. This area is also a designated Local Nature Reserve. It is claimed in the information provided that this will not be disturbed. However, no information is given about how this wooded area would be protected, and officers are doubtful that this area can be properly protected from harm.

11. The route of the access road is only indicative at this stage, and suggests all traffic will be routed via the A1060, rather than the more rural Skreens Park Road. No information is provided about the potential number of lorry movements that would result if the site becomes operational, and therefore the traffic impact cannot be assessed from the available information.
12. Flood risk does not appear to have been considered at this stage. This council's Land Drainage engineers have made a brief initial assessment of the site and have identified a number of areas of concern. These include the lack of information provided, the presence of a number of waterways within or near to the potential extraction area and the presence of a natural spring in the centre of the site which suggest a complex groundwater environment. Significant changes in this area could affect the flow of water in the area, and cause a detrimental impact on local habitats, as well as local well users.
13. It is not considered that any changes could be made to this proposal that would make it acceptable.
14. The method of restoration proposed is partly at lower levels within in-situ clays and spoils, and part to former levels using inert infill. Inert infill is defined as "construction, demolition and excavation waste, a high percentage of which comprises mixed soils.". It is not proposed at this stage that the site will be used for domestic landfill. There is no suggestion of how long the restoration period will be following the extraction period (23 years), but as it is proposed that the site will be partially filled with material which will need to be delivered to the site, this suggests a further traffic impact over a longer time period. Notwithstanding the unsuitability of this site for sand and gravel extraction in the first instance, the proposed method of restoration is probably the "least worst" scenario as only some of the material required to return the land to former levels would need to be delivered to the site. The land would be returned to agricultural and nature conservation use, and it is possible that with appropriate partnership working, enhancements to the local landscape could be achieved.

#### Patch Park Farm, Abridge

15. The potential site described as Patch Park Farm, Abridge lies to the north of Ongar Road opposite Patch Park (formally Crowther's) Garden Centre. The site details are contained in Appendix 1.
16. Officers **object** to the allocation of this site for sand and gravel extraction. Similarly to the potential site at Shellow Cross, the land is entirely within the Metropolitan Green Belt and there are potential impacts on the openness of the Green Belt caused by the processing plant. During the 1960s and 70s planning applications were made for sand and gravel extraction on this land. All were rejected, primarily on grounds of the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt. There is nothing to suggest that there has been a significant change in circumstances in this area to warrant a site now being allocated, particularly in relation to the opening admission of the consultation document that a full survey of the County has not been undertaken.
17. The Landscape Character Assessment referred to above concludes that this area also has a moderate to high sensitivity to change. This is due to the generally open views along the river corridor and strong sense of intervisibility between the valley corridor and the adjacent arable and pastoral fields. There are no identified areas of nature or biodiversity significance within or adjacent to the potential extraction site, but a full assessment must be undertaken to determine that no significant harm will be caused to

biodiversity or habitats that exist nearby.

18. The indicative access point is shown to the east of the main extraction area, joining onto the A113 (Ongar Road). No details of potential lorry routes have been provided, or the number/frequency of trips, so there are significant concerns about the impact sand and gravel extraction, and site restoration, would have on the local road network.
19. A high pressure gas pipeline runs alongside the northern side of the A113, and a small part of the potential site falls within the protective buffer zone. No acknowledgement of this gas pipeline is given, nor any assurance that sand and gravel could be safely extracted in the southern part of the site.
20. The potential site is entirely within Flood Zone 3, and the brief information given in the consultation document suggests that the County Council is aware of the significance of the flood risk in this area. There is a short reference to the possibility that flood alleviation works will be required in the short term. However, there are no details of how the “de-watering” of the site will be achieved and what impact this may have on surrounding land and property.
21. Progressive restoration is proposed using imported pre-treated inert waste. This would cause a more intensive pattern of lorry movements during the period the site is operational, but should not significantly extend the period over which lorry movements visit the site. Depending on the type of material used to fill the created void, there may be a further risk associated with the nearby airfield and an increased risk of bird strike. There is a history of flooding in the area, and it is disappointing to see that no permanent flood alleviation measures are proposed as part of the restoration of the site. However, even if such measures were incorporated, there would still be a number of other issues to be addressed before an operational site in this location could be considered acceptable.

**Reason for decision:**

The potential sites for mineral extraction identified in this district would have detrimental impacts on the Green belt, the character of the countryside and the road network, and it is therefore vital that the Council submits a response.

**Options considered and rejected:**

To not submit a response to the consultation.

**Consultation undertaken:**

None at this stage. Further discussion with the Leader and Environment Portfolio Holders will be required to finalise the response from officers

**Resource implications:**

None

**Community Plan/BVPP reference:**

EP3

**Relevant statutory powers:**

**Background papers:**

Minerals Development Document: Site Allocation – Issues & Options Paper August 2009

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:**

Sand and gravel extraction from either site would have significant local environmental impacts, and would increase HGV movements on some unsuitable roads.

**Key Decision reference: (if required)**

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## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-*nnn*-2009/10

**Date of meeting:** 99 Month Year



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:**

**Subject:** Staffing in the Directorate of Planning

**Responsible Officer:** John de Wilton Preston (01992 564111).

**Democratic Services Officer:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That posts PEF06 and PST02 be deleted from the Establishment.
- (2) That post PPC16F have its hours increased from 0.8 FTE to 1.0 FTE
- (3) That a new Senior Enforcement Officer post be added to the Establishment.

### **Executive Summary:**

These proposals seek, within existing CSB budgets, to make some changes to staffing within Planning, in particular to enhance the Enforcement team and to make provision to preserve protected trees.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

Some changes are suggested, reflecting on points made by Councillors at previous meetings. The proposals are within existing budgets, and make a small saving.

### **Other Options for Action:**

Not to make any changes to the Establishment.

### **Report:**

1. The Panel have considered whether to replace the Compliance Officer post within the Planning Enforcement team, and various options for doing that, in particular an option for a new Senior Officer post within the Enforcement Team. That post could have the same job description and person specification as the existing senior position in the team.
2. The Panel wanted to understand how such a post could be funded from within existing budgets, rather than as a CSB growth item.

3. The table below shows how this could be achieved;

**DIRECTORATE OF PLANNING PROPOSALS FOR SCRUTINY**

<u>POST TITLE</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>GRADE</u>	<u>2009/10 SALARY MIDPOINT</u>	<u>MIDPOINT x FTE</u>	<u>PROPOSAL</u>	<u>CSB SAVING</u>	<u>CSB ADDITION</u>
Compliance Officer	PEF06	0.5	5	24,930	12,465	Delete	12,465	
Senior Enforcement Officer		1	8	38,930	38,930	New post		38,930
Technical Officer (Landscape)	PPC16F	0.8	5	24,930	19,944	Funding for extra hours needed to create 1 FTE		4,990
Admin Supervisor	PST02	1	7	34,200	34,200	Delete	34,200	
							<b><u>NET SAVINGS POSITION</u></b>	2,745

4. This proposal will thus achieve what the Panel were seeking within the Enforcement team, and it also allows for an increase in the hours of one post within the Trees and Landscape team.
5. **Technical Officer (Landscape) PPC16F** This post is on the present establishment as 0.8 FTE; predecessor posts have variously been at 1FTE or 0.8. The workload of the team presently suggests that 1 FTE is required, partly because of work associated with the re-provision of Tree Preservation Orders in advance of Essex County Council rescinding such orders. The decision of the County Council, and consideration by this Council was at Cabinet on 8 October 2007; those reports are attached as background. At Appendix A. Councillors had made it clear that they did not expect to see trees left unprotected when Essex complete the rescinding of orders made by them. The Essex orders are all intended to be rescinded by the end of March 2010. This post has been involved in justifying the case for new replacement orders by EFDC. Some measure of the scale of that work can be seen by comparing the numbers of Tree Preservation Orders issued by EFDC in recent years, as shown in the following table;

**Tree Preservation Order Data**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Orders Made</b>	<b>EFDC Orders</b>	<b>Essex Re-Survey Orders</b>	<b>Notes</b>
2006	22	22		
2007	12	12		
2008	55	30	25	
2009	51	20	31	Up to 21/09/2009

Total number of Tree Preservation Orders = 994  
(1974 – 21/09/2009)

6. When that work is complete, the future work associated with those new orders will fall upon EFDC, and not ECC. Technical work associated with delivering what is expected as a result of the existing Regional Plan is additional work for the team, and underlies the continuing requirement, rather than a short term one. The post is graded at grade 5 and the cost of an increase of 0.2 FTE is £4990.
7. **Administration Supervisor PST 02** The post holder left earlier this year, and the post has been held vacant since, in part because if savings of some magnitude are required, then removing the post from the establishment completely, or replacing it with a lower graded post, may have been the least harmful way to achieve such savings. If the post is deleted and the savings are used for the purposes set out in this report, that has some consequences for the Customer support team. It is intended that the new Business Manager will review several issues within that team.
8. Recent information provided to Councillors by the Director of Finance and ICT emphasises that the Council is likely to have to make savings over the next few years, and in particular from CSB budgets. Those savings are of some scale, and any decision now to use or reallocate CSB funds needs to be seen in that context.
9. The Panel considered Building Control information at its last meeting and in scrutinising shared service arrangements will present an opportunity to consider savings. As vacancies arise, some hard choices will be necessary whilst continuing to maintain and improve performance
10. Providing the Panel agree with these proposals they can be reported to Cabinet for their formal approval.
11. Staff and unions have been consulted about these proposals, and any comments received will be reported to the Panel. At the time of drafting this report the following comments had been received. (Post titles rather than individuals names have been used in this report);
  - a. GMB Representative. I forwarded your report to the regional office of the GMB who have no issues with it.
  - b. Members of staff have individually made the following points;
  - c. Comment 1. I am disappointed that the Supervisor post is to be deleted.
  - d. When the Business Manager reviews the impact of this on the admin team I presume he will either undertake some of the Supervisor's tasks or change my job description to reflect the tasks I have covered since the Supervisor left in February, if this happens will my job have to be re evaluated?
  - e. We spoke at the time of the Supervisors departure of the need to have two people in the Admin team for development control, as the Supervisor post is now being deleted and a contract post is covering some of the roles I use to do when the Supervisor was here are you going to create a post that perhaps that person can fill on a more permanent basis rather than being on a contract? In response to this the Director commented; " I note your disappointment.

- f. With the arrival of the new Business Manager (BM) the complete customer support teams have The Assistant Director (Building), The Principal Building Control Officer and the new BM to guide and manage them.
- g. However, I recognise there may be a case to evaluate how the Admin Supervisors work is being dealt with, and that your role may well end up being re-evaluated. That may also be relevant to others. I have sought to keep the three contract posts whilst the customer support team is more fully reviewed, and recognising the unfilled vacancies of the Scanning Assistant and the afternoon Receptionist posts.
- h. If you want to speak, please come and see me.”
- i. Comment 2. I understand the need for savings at this difficult time. I would like it to be noted that in deleting an admin post services will suffer. We have all taken on different tasks to maintain the admin services of the Directorate in the belief that this was a temporary situation. If it has not been noticed that there was any difference in the services offered it is certainly to our credit that so many tasks have been temporarily absorbed without making a fuss. There is however no cover available for leave or sickness and backlogs will accrue. It now seems that we are being penalised for having helped to maintain the service by the deletion of a post.
- j. In response to this the Director commented; “The efforts of the staff to seek to maintain a high level of service is not unrecognised in these difficult times, and it is known that the taking of leave, and sickness, quickly impacts upon the services offered.
- k. Workload (on some measures) and income are down, and there are other pressures which these proposals seek to respond to. As indicated at paragraph 7, the new Business Manager will be asked to urgently review the complete admin team, including the points that you raise.
- l. If you want to speak, please come and see me.”

**Resource Implications:**

As set out in this report.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Unless there is adequate capacity in the Enforcement and Landscape teams there could be adverse consequences.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None

**Consultation Undertaken:**

Staff and Unions

**Background Papers:**

None

## Impact Assessments:

### Risk Management

There are risks if the Planning Enforcement Team operates below capacity and if it operates without sufficient capacity to not only investigate but also to evaluate the planning implications of unauthorised development. These proposals seek to lessen these risks. Similarly if trees currently protected by Essex orders were left without any protection they could be at risk of being felled or damaged.

There are some risks of deleting a supervisor's post. It is considered that sufficient managerial capacity exists. The recession has lessened some workloads, but a further review will consider the full capacity of the administrative teams.

### Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? **No**

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? **No**

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

N/A

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## **Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of meeting: 12 November 2009**

**Subject: Staffing in the Directorate of Planning**

**Officer contact for further information: John de Wilton Preston**

**Committee Secretary: S Hill**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) To receive the comments of the Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel; and**
- (2) To consider and comment on the attached report to the Cabinet on staffing in the Planning Directorate.**

### **Report:**

The attached report is to be considered by the Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Their views will be reported to the O&S Committee verbally at their meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup>..

The Planning Services Panel has been considering the staffing situation of the Planning Directorate and any options for the improvement of the current staffing situation by enhancing the Enforcement team. The attached report will be presented to the Standing Panel on Tuesday 10 November 2009 and the results of their deliberations will be reported to this committee. This committee's recommendations will, in turn, be reported to the Cabinet on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

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