

Stronger Communities Select Committee

The Stronger Community Select Committee held five virtual meetings this municipal year. The membership was approved at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting on 3 June 2021. The first meeting was held on 15 June 2021 in the Conference Suite at the newly refurbished Civic Offices. Meetings resumed in the Council chamber from September.

Members for 2021/22:

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Jeane Lea

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Raymond Balcombe

Councillors:

Heather Brady

Ian Hadley

Stephen Murray

Chidi Nweke

Dave Plummer

Sheree Rackham

Janet Whitehouse

Ken Williamson

David Wixley



Councillor Jeane Lea



Councillor Raymond Balcombe

Chairman's foreword

"The Police we fund do a marvellous job and in September last year reviewed the six-month report on their work in the District. This was followed in March by the District Commander's presentation updating members on general policing issues and answering many questions. In September last year, members reviewed the consultation process and governance structure of the Allocations Scheme Review, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Review, Tenancy Policy review and Overarching Housing Strategy. In January the committee reviewed the HRA Business Plan, which will be used to provide us with a reasonable cashflow projection for the next 30 years."

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

Council-funded Police officers 6-month report

The six-month update detailing the range of work and highlighting operations the Council's funded Police team had been involved in was reviewed by the select committee in September 2021. The most significant work had been partnership working responding to a county lines drugs supply in Waltham Abbey. When needed, the policing team had supported Council officers from Environmental Health, Community Resilience, Planning Enforcement and on joint visits at licenced and business premises suspected of committing COVID legislation breaches. Anti-social behaviour, distraction thefts, burglaries, frauds involving vulnerable victims were also targeted.



Essex Police District Commander gave a presentation at the March 2022 meeting on more general policing issues and answered a variety of questions.

Pre-scrutiny highlights

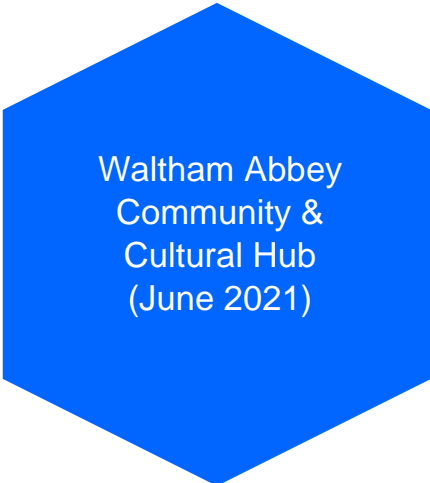
Review of the 'Big 4' Housing Strategies and Policies

On 21 September 2021, the select committee reviewed the Allocations Scheme Review, Tenancy Policy Review, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Review and Overarching Housing Strategy. The Community and Wellbeing Director, J Gould, presented the reports that set out the proposed changes, recommendations and the next steps for the stage 2 consultations. The draft policies were pre-scrutinised on 1 March 2022 prior to decisions by Cabinet on 7 March 2022. The **Allocation Scheme Review** would determine the priorities and the procedure to be followed by the Council, as a Local Housing Authority, when selecting a household to be offered a tenancy of Council owned accommodation or to be nominated for an offer of housing from another registered provider with stock in the District. A review was required every five years and was due for renewal in April 2022 along with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Tenancy Policy and the Overarching Housing Strategy. The revised **Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2022-2027** and the evidence base that supported the strategy, which included the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping review and the Public Consultation Outcome Report, was reviewed by the select committee. The Council had a statutory duty to publish both a Tenancy Strategy or framework as a stockholding Local Housing Authority. The **Tenancy Policy Review** set out the matters to which the Council in relation to its own stock and the registered providers of social housing within its District were to have regard to when formulating their tenancy policies. The current Tenancy Policy was due for review by July 2022. The select committee asked many questions, which can be viewed in the minutes here [Stronger Council Select Committee 1 March](#)

HRA Business Plan

The Council's HRA business plan was reviewed in January 2022 that would provide a reasonable cashflow projection of the next 30 years and was based on evidential data from its current systems and projections for economic assumptions in the social housing sector. Officers had taken both a safe and prudent approach when developing the business plan, with a balance between borrowing, developing, and improving the housing stock. The report set out the context, background and what the decent home standard were, in conjunction with factors that would affect the plan including the Council's house building programme, major works, a stock and condition survey and a sector risk profile. The Housing Services Portfolio Holder, Councillor H Whitbread, advised that it was a very detailed and complex report that provided regeneration. The Council's housing building programme would ensure that the more deprived areas of the community were invested in, and it improved the health of those residents. The Cabinet decision was taken on 7 February.

Other work programme highlights undertaken at meetings during the year, included:



Waltham Abbey
Community &
Cultural Hub
(June 2021)



Epping Forest District
Museum
rationalisation of
collections
(September 2021)



Agendas and minutes



Stronger Communities Select Committee agendas and minutes can be viewed at this weblink:
<https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=809&Year=0>

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Stronger Council Select Committee

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Members for 2021/22:

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Peter Bolton

VICE-CHAIRMAN

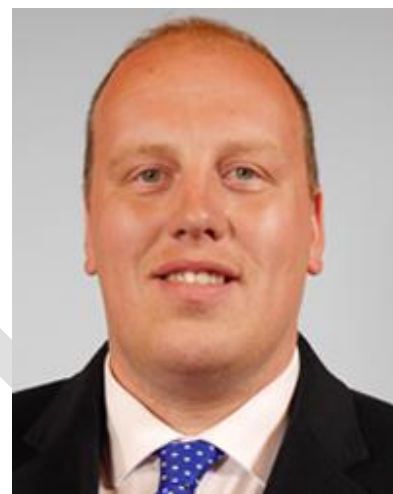
Councillor Tim Matthews

Councillors:

Richard Bassett
Pranav Bhanot
Heather Brady
Rose Brookes
Jayna Jogia
Helen Kane
Richard Morgan
Steven Neville
Jon Whitehouse



Councillor Peter Bolton



Councillor Tim Matthews

Chairman's foreword

"Our review of the Beyond the Pandemic employee survey during April-May 2021 in July, was used to help reshape the Council's future ways of working. The review of the four different elections in 2021 showed the successful 'one team' effort by those staffing the counts, and we reviewed the Accommodation Project closure report on the Civic Offices refurbishment which the Chairman officially opened on 1 October."

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

- ▶ Corporate Plan Key Action Plan
- ▶ Budget Monitoring Reports
- ▶ Financial planning
- ▶ People Strategy

Pre-scrutiny highlights

Accommodation Project Closure Report

This project had set out to refurbish the Civic Building and 323 House, with the Conder building to be demolished and the rear of the Civic Offices site redeveloped for residential use in line with the Local Plan and crucial to the economic development aspirations for the District. In November 2021, M Hassall, Interim Service Manager / ICT Manager, reported on how the project had performed against its original objectives the lessons learnt. It and was on time and on budget. Members thought the Chamber should be updated/spruced up. The Civic Offices officially opened on 1 October 2021. Councillor Helen Kane, Chairman of Council, Council Leader Councillor Chris Whitbread and the Rt Hon Dame Eleanor Laing MP attended the event, along with other councillors and staff.

Our Ways of Working 2021-2022 Beyond the Pandemic

This employee survey carried out from April and May 2021. J Budden, People Culture and Wellbeing Service Manager, reported that officers had not only provided business as usual in support of Epping Forest residents but assisted with other essential work on Project Shield and high street recovery projects. Staff had helped the Civic Offices refurbishment to finish on time and on budget. They achieved improved productivity and digitisation for residents and had vastly improved employee engagement and wellbeing. During the Covid pandemic many employees had been working remotely and were no longer reliant on a fixed desk, in a fixed building, working fixed hours. When completing this survey, employees were encouraged to challenge their thinking, giving them the opportunity to give valuable feedback and insight to help inform plans for beyond the pandemic and help reshape the Council's future ways of working for them and the organisation.

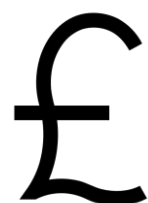


Review of Elections 2021

In September 2021, the select committee reviewed the planning processes and implementation of the 2021 elections held on 6 May. The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex, 21 wards of the District Council and 14 of the District's town and parish councils were postponed from their original date of May 2020 owing to the Covid pandemic. The Government decided to hold these elections in May 2021, and they were combined with the elections already scheduled for this date for Essex County Council. Covid restrictions were still in place during the 2021 elections, which necessitated certain changes to the arrangements for operating polling stations with 'one-way' systems being used for larger stations or a 'one-in-one-out' system for the smaller stations. The operation of the Count was also impacted by a requirement to ensure that the Count Staff were socially distanced from each other whilst counting. In addition, with four elections being held simultaneously, the Count could not be completed in one session. G Blakemore, Returning Officer, reported that the planning, management and delivery of all relevant processes for these elections was effective, especially given the circumstances under which the 2021 elections had been held. The management and delivery of these elections had also been reviewed by the Elections Planning Group, chaired by the Returning Officer. The select committee was also informed that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England intended to undertake a full review of the Council's size in terms of the number of Councillors and ward boundaries, which would culminate in all-out District Council elections in May 2024. The Council was overdue a review as the last such exercise took place in 1998. Members raised a number of questions about queues at very busy polling stations, the coldness of the hangar where the count was held, but there was overall support for the superb effort of staff and outside volunteers during the elections. As new legislation on election law was coming, the select committee requested a future report on the consequences of voter ID, how it would affect the Council and any financial implications.



Draft Budget 2022/23



Cabinet's draft Budget proposals for 2022/23 were considered on 18 January. The Interim Chief Financial Officer, C Hartgrove, introduced the report. It included the revenue and capital proposals for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account, a schedule of suggested Fees and Charges for the forthcoming financial year, and an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan covering the financial years 2022/23 through to 2026/27 that reflected both the impact of the draft Budget proposals as well as the latest intelligence available. Members were advised that the medium-term financial position was broadly unchanged since it was last presented in October 2021. The provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2022/23 of 21 December 2021 was generally as expected and provided further assurance to the underlying financial sustainability in this draft Budget. However, the annual Settlement for 2022/23 had yet to be announced by the Government and a challenge still anticipated in 2024/25 and 2025/26 was as a consequence of the forthcoming new Waste Management Contract. Members questions included a query on the recent high rise in gas and electric prices and if the figures shown were current. C Hartgrove replied these were the figures he was given, but he would cross check them in the coming week.

The Strategic Director and 151 Officer, A Small, advised that inflation was one of the greatest risks facing the Council. There was doubt about energy prices and also about wage settlements. The Council had received a one-year Government settlement for the year ahead but had expected a three-year settlement to give some certainty. The government still intended to implement a 'fairer funding' change to the way it distributed grant settlements, but the Council did not know how that would impact upon it. The situation could have been worse. It justified having a council tax increase after many years and was the right time to build up the Council's balances. It was a sound budget.

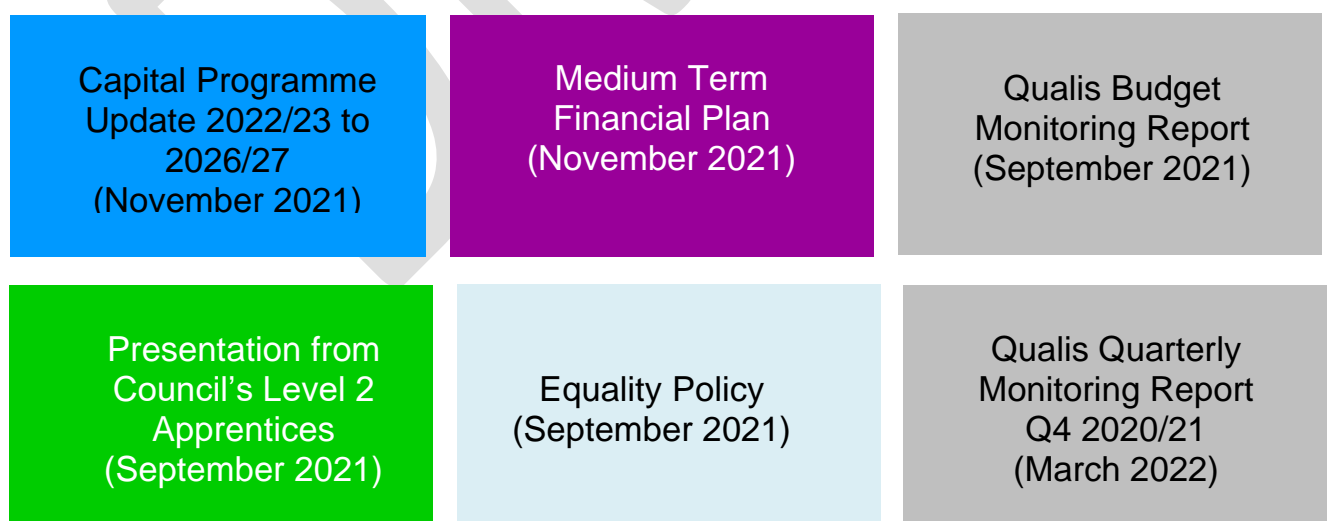
Learning and Development Programme 2021/22

P Maginnis (Corporate Services Service Director) introduced the report on the Learning and Development programme at 3 March meeting. The new learning management system had various virtual courses online for staff to complete. These ranged from the short 'Skill Pill' sessions to the wider leadership programme to the apprenticeship programme. The Council was also expanding the role of the mental health first aiders to also being dementia friends. The select committee asked how staff training needs were identified as most were working from home and were informed that this was picked up in various ways by their managers and their requirements and the skills they needed. Managers would look at their corporate needs and identify needs via inductions for new starters etc. Some training was still carried out face to face. The report listed the current the current organisational training priorities, such as the development of the management spine, getting team management qualifications, developing new skills around agile working, to upskill our apprentices, understanding the impact of Covid on our staff with training on Mental health issues.

Employee Induction / Onboarding and Litmos Learning Management System

Litmos would give new officers an insight into how the Council worked and what the role of a councillor was etc. by generally giving them an insight into the political world of our organisation. This had now been built into the Council's onboarding process and was also now part of its new Litmos system and the onboarding of new starters. The Council could now also develop its own courses and host videos, policies and links. The Corporate Services Service Director reported at the 3 March meeting that it was far more flexible and more up to date than the previous system. Its functionality would help develop all employees. The new system would also allow members access to it, enabling them to have access to courses, such as members safety. Member Services could be trained to administer this part of the system and enable members access to the training.

Other pre-scrutiny highlights undertaken at meetings during the year, included:



Agendas and minutes 

Stronger Council Select Committee agendas and minutes can be viewed at this weblink: <https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=810&Year=0>

Stronger Place Select Committee

The Stronger Place Select Committee held five virtual meetings this municipal year. The membership was approved at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting on 3 June 2021. The first meeting was held on 22 June 2021 in the Conference Suite at the newly refurbished Civic Offices. Meetings resumed in the Council chamber from September.

Members for 2021/22:

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Alan Lion

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Richard Morgan

Councillors:

Raymond Balcombe

Richard Bassett

Ian Hadley

Simon Heap

Steven Heather

Judy Jennings

Cherry McCredie

Michael Owen

Jo Share-Bernia



Councillor A Lion



Councillor Richard Morgan

Chairman's foreword

"At the beginning of the new council year, with input from members of the committee, the Terms of Reference was reviewed and simplified to improve understanding. A work programme was developed with direct input by members. These were ratified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Comments taken into consideration were to ensure all information and proposals presented were written papers and there was enough time to scrutinise proposals and incorporate comments and changes before presentation to Cabinet.

Proposals scrutinised:

- Options for the new name for the Civic Offices Hub
- Pre-scrutiny of the waste and recycling collection service/street cleansing contract. This was in relation to the forthcoming review of the waste management contract. Generally, it was felt the contractor had performed well. As a cost saving measure, there was a proposal for the introduction of charges for additional, repaired and replacement bins. A breakdown of the costs for collecting fly-tipping and litter was requested. Before a charging regime was considered a more effective cost breakdown was needed. A full business case with accurate costing was requested.
- Epping Forest car parking tariffs were considered. Comments were made on increased costs and the potential impact on high streets.
- Essex County Council Highways - in November, select committee members questioned Essex County Councillor Lee Scott, Highways and Transport Portfolio Holder, on a range of highway maintenance issues."

The select committee covered the Corporate aims and objectives for a stronger place – delivering effective core services that people want; a District with planned development; and an environment where new and existing businesses thrive. Its definition encompassed Epping Forest District as a

physical Place and to scrutinise the direction, policies and projects of the executive that affect the spatial and infrastructure requirements of the District. Scrutiny of the work programme included:

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

Pre-scrutiny highlights

Branding of the Ground Floor of the Civic Offices

The Customer Services Director, Rob Pavey, outlined the proposed designs and names for the re-branding of the ground floor of the Civic Offices on 29 September 2021. This reflected the new community and collaborative purpose of the space and promoted the area as a new destination where EFDC services would work collaboratively with partners to provide wraparound solutions for residents and wider community activity. It was not a proposal to rename the Civic Offices but was for the ground floor area. The refurbishment of the Civic Offices had provided an opportunity to review how the building was used, the building had a reduced footprint for staff and the top floor was occupied on a commercial basis. The Service Director explained about the flow through of these ground floor areas and how the proximity and integration of the ground floor activity lent itself to a common brand. Members had been involved over the summer in the proposed designs and two branding options were presented – the Civic Hub and the Civic and recommended 'The Civic Hub' to Cabinet for consideration.

Essex Highways Update

Cllr Lee Scott, Essex County Council Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, attended the meeting on 4 November 2021 and gave a brief overview of his remit which covered potholes, buses, transport, coastal erosion, cycling, walking and footpaths. He outlined his desire to meet with District and Parish Councils to gain an understanding of the issues across the County, suggested that the key issue for the County was flooding and advised the select committee that he could be emailed directly, or through the Chairman, to address any issues. He reminded Members that there was a limited budget, so if something was dangerous it would be fixed, but this could not be guaranteed for other issues. Members asked a range of questions which can be viewed here [Stronger Place Select Committee 4 November 2021](#).

Review of off-street parking tariffs

Also, at the same meeting in November, J Warwick (Acting Service Director) introduced the report on the off-street car parks tariffs and advised members that tariffs had not increased since 2015. The review aimed to ensure tariffs were set at a sustainable level to support the operation of car parks and to assist with budget pressures. Cost benefit analysis and consultation with officers and members had been carried out to inform on the proposed changes to off street parking charges, permits and seasons tickets. The car park payment machines would continue to accept cash and cards. The select committee welcomed the two hours free parking on Sundays but raised queries on the electric vehicle charging points in car parks and the increased fee for up to thirty minutes parking that could impact on businesses and revitalising the high streets. As members were concerned about the reduction in parking allocation at the Civic Offices, they were advised that a variety of options would be developed.

Additional waste container costs

In January 2022, the Acting Service Director, J Warwick, advised about the proposal for residents to be charged for: the assessment, issuing and delivery of additional garden waste bins; the assessment, issuing and delivery of larger waste bins; replacement bin cost when the bin had been lost; and that repairs to bins would be the preferential option and remain free of charge. This proposal had been referred to the select committee by the Waste Management Partnership Board and its recommendations would be submitted to Cabinet for approval. Details of the questions raised by members can be viewed here [Stronger Place Select Committee 13 January 2022](#)

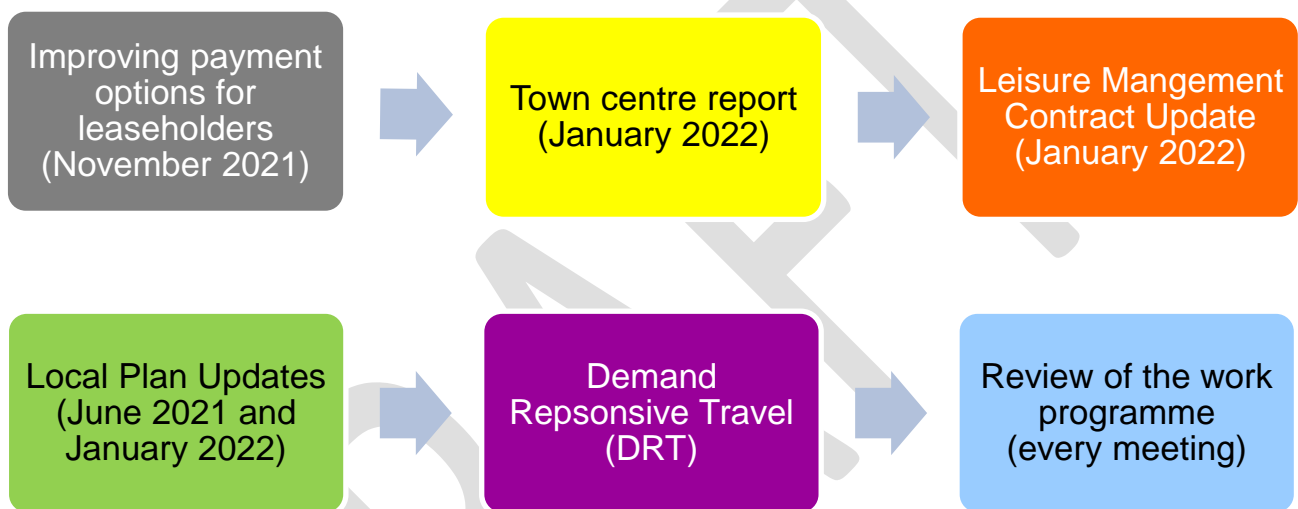
Enforcement Review

Also at the 13 January meeting, Councillor L Burrows, Portfolio Holder, introduced this review and highlighted the potential costs of £250,000 for the implementation of a system for environmental health and technical enforcement, and developing enforcement of parking at key junctions, footpaths and areas outside school in partnership with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and the County Council, as key aspects. Planning enforcement was outside the remit of this review. The focus was on actions that were, in the main, immediate and low cost, and included outline plans for improved technology which could be brought forward in two stages. The select committee was advised that there were many aspects to enforcement activity and recourse to legal action was the last resort.

Transport Strategy and Sustainable Transport

On 15 March,

Other work programme highlights included



Agendas and minutes



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<https://rds.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=811&Year=0>