

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-008-2022/23

Date of meeting: 18 July 2022

Portfolio: Finance

Subject: UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan

Responsible Officers: John Houston (01992564094), Paul Messenger, Duncan Haslam

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That members endorse the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan for final submission to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**
- (2) That members provide any further advice and guidance on delivery.**
- (3) That authority is delegated to the leader of the council, the Chief Executive and the Section 151 officer to sign off the final investment plan following completion of consultation.**

Executive Summary:

The investment plan attached in Appendix 1 sets out proposals for spend of the allocated £1 million Shared Prosperity Fund to Epping Forest district over the next three years. Unlike many other councils we have sought to define the planned projects in some detail. Given the short timescales involved in producing the plan officers have consulted extensively on it's contents as the plan was being developed. See Appendix 2 for list of stakeholders contacted and engaged with. At the time of writing this report officers are continuing to discuss and negotiate with external partners on the delivery of the programme. Updates on these discussions will be presented at cabinet and it is recommended that authority be delegated to the leader to sign off the final submission in light of these discussions concluding.

The primary goals of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund are to build pride in place and increase life chances by making visible and tangible improvements. The central mission is mission 9 which states that 'by 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing'. The three investment priorities for the UKSPF are Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills (the People and Skills element does not come into effect until year 3). Please refer to Figure 1 for more details.

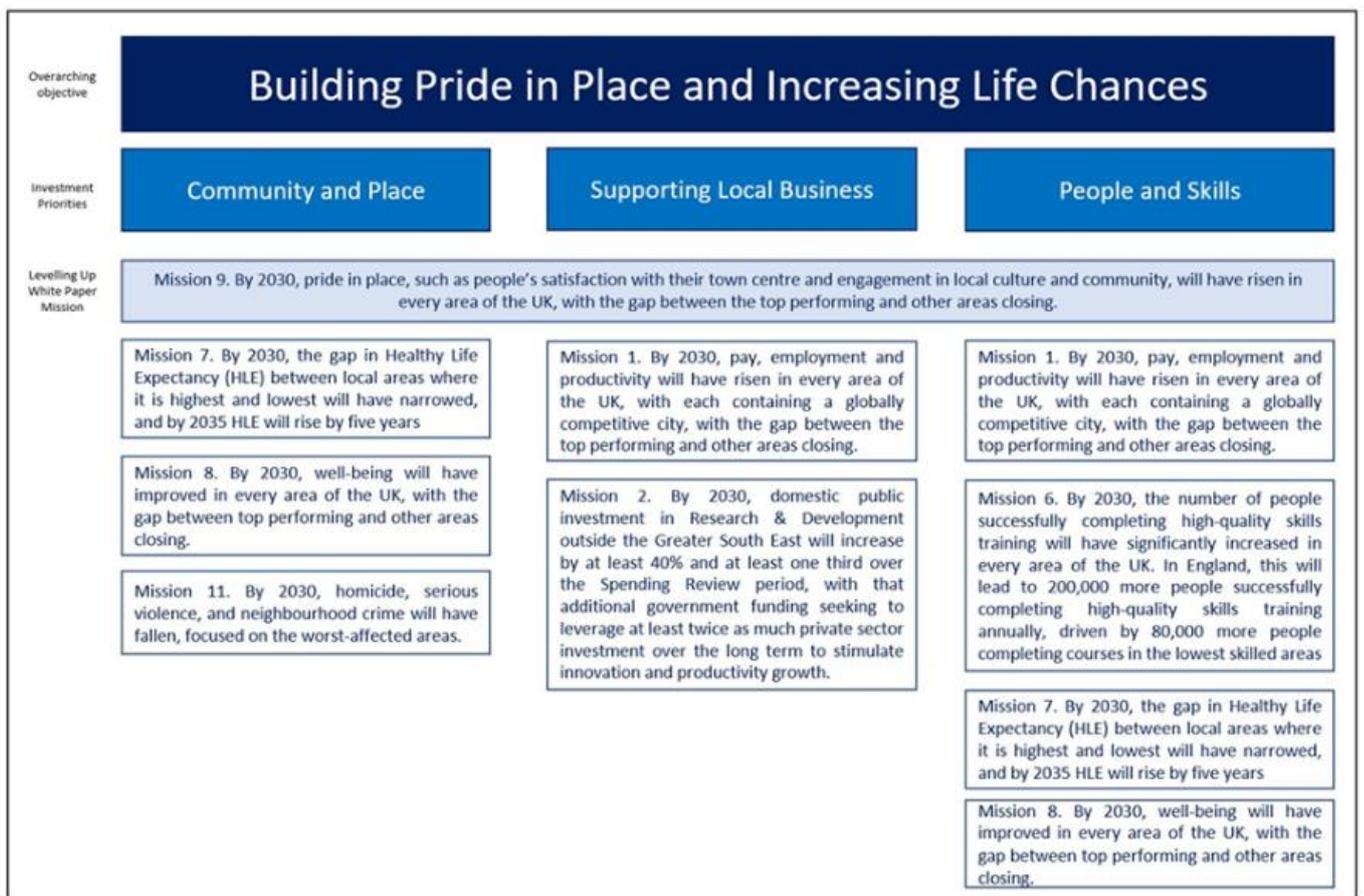


Figure 1

The £1 million allocation for Epping Forest District Council is phased and is as follows: Year 1 - £101,319 (2022-2023) Year 2 - £202,638 (2023-2024) and Year 3 - £696,043 (2024-2025). Following consultation with internal and external stakeholders' officers have focused on programmes that pick up key local issues to the district along the themes of:

- Theme 1: Investment in deprived areas and communities.
- Theme 2: Rural communities.
- Theme 3: Supporting Local Business.
- Theme 4: Establishing pathways to work/skills education and training.

The district's proposals are designed to deliver visibility, legacy and impact. They include direct provision of service from within the Council and commissioning support from a wide range of other local bodies and outside agencies.

Attached in Appendix 1 are details of the individual projects proposed. This document is a living document to be finalised and approved by mid-July. Funding on the individual projects is compliant with government guidance and the funding allocation of the three years of the programme including reference to the capital and revenue spending criteria. An operational focus has been placed on firming up year 1 projects in view of short timescales. Year 1 projects include: New Ninefields Playground, Maybe Tech Social Media support, Loyal Free High Street Loyalty scheme, Huq footfall monitoring platform, UK Innovation Corridor contribution. These programmes need to be completed within six months following confirmation of government approval in October. Under current government guidance **any underspend on budget will have to be returned to the UK Government. This is a rule for following years as well.**

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

In order to unlock the allocated £1 million funding over three years the council is required to produce an investment plan in consultation with local stakeholders and local MPs. The final plan requires the approval of the leader of the council, the Chief Executive Officer and Section 151 Officer before submission on the 29th of July. At the time of writing this report the expected final technical guidance from central government has still not been received.

Other Options for Action:

There are numerous interventions cited by government that funding can be used to achieve. Any of those would have value but given the limited nature of funding and the need to achieve impact and legacy, Officers following detailed consultation with Stakeholders have focused on a reduced level of interventions.

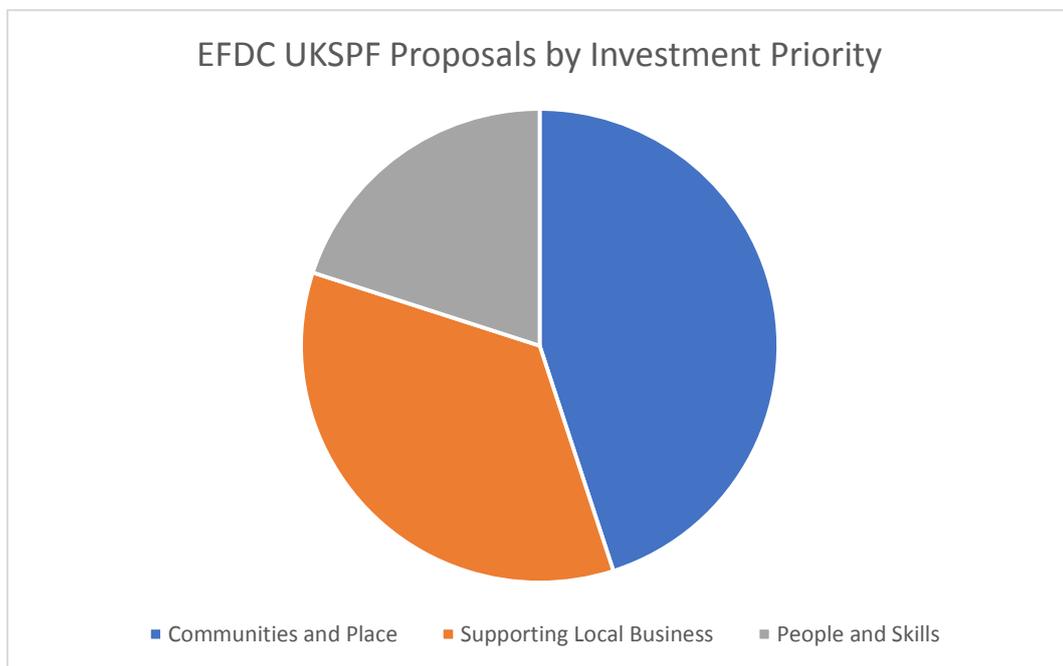
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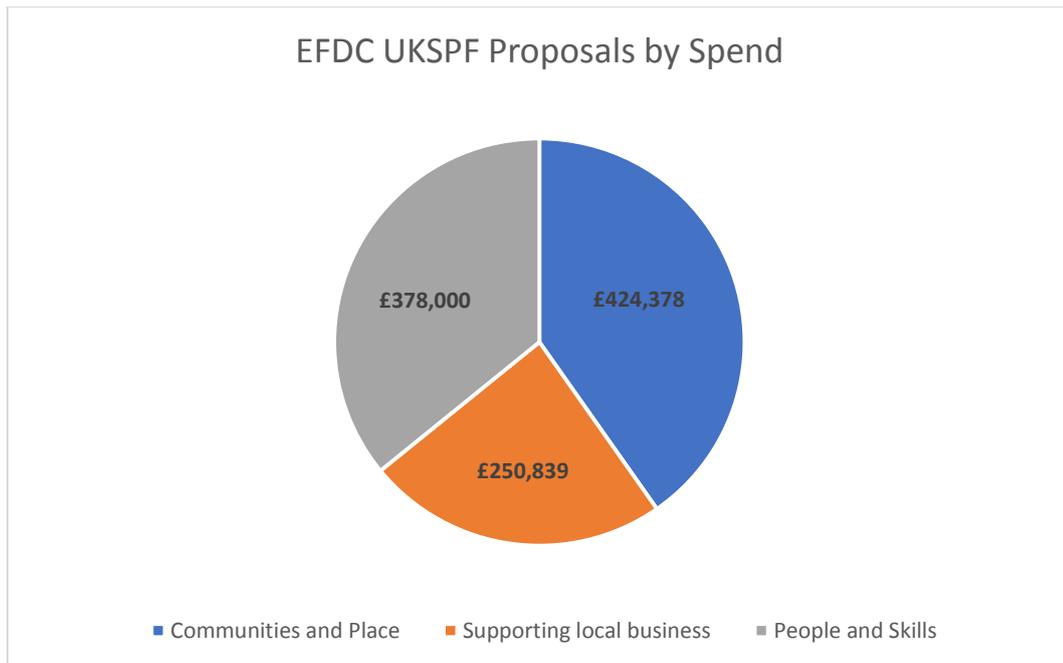
Using agreed formulas, the UKSPF has been allocated by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to Councils across the country. Epping Forest District is considered to be one of the more fortunate areas of the Country and as such has been allocated the minimum allowance of £1m, as have a number of our neighbouring authorities. Although an attractive figure, it is considered that it is in fact a small amount for the size of our District and its range of needs and requirements and therefore needs to be carefully allocated and defrayed to ensure maximum impact.

The objective of the fund is to “build pride in place and increase life chances” by making “visible and tangible improvements”. This message was reinforced at a meeting with Alex Burghart MP. He considered it essential that the use of these funds should be visible and provide legacy. These objectives and guidelines have been applied to all proposed projects to ensure the best use of the funds.

The project list (Appendix 1) forms a part of a living document which until it’s submission is continually being adjusted and amended as stakeholder feedback is received and project research & feasibility considerations are taken into account.

In addition to the investment priorities of the UKSPF: Community & Place, Supporting Local Business and People and Skills, the EFDC bid also follows themes provided by members and Council leaders. These are: Investment in deprived areas and communities, Rural communities, Business Support and Establishing pathways to work and have been applied to all proposals to ensure that they are taken into account. The pie charts below show how investment priorities and themes are allocated within EFDC’s UKSPF investment plan.





In approaching this bid and selecting projects, key evidence has been accumulated to demonstrate how these relate to the UK Government’s investment priorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund. In terms of the ‘Community and Place’ investment priority IMD indices of deprivation have been used to help identify areas in the district requiring community regeneration projects together with internal discussions with officers from Housing and Communities. In addition to this it has been felt that with key town centres being apportioned large scale funding throughout the pandemic, more assistance to rural communities and programmes has been needed. A key mission of the UKSPF is also to build pride in place and therefore developing our rural places attractiveness as destinations is a key objective in the council’s programmes. Officers have sought advice from the Rural Community Council of Essex, and rural parish councils into appropriate ways of investing in rural business and communities. These have been incorporated where possible.

With the ‘Supporting Local Business’ investment priority it has been felt that by providing businesses with the skills to improve their profitability, generate more footfall and take advantage of the digital economy the council can help make our place a great place to live, work and do business. In additions this will help to create more employment in the district. In research carried out by Maybe * 79% of UK consumers spend over seven hours a week on social media, whereas only 87 businesses within Epping Forest district are active on social media. This evidence helps to focus the investment plan around programmes to improve social media usage by the area’s businesses. In the district, officers completed a snapshot survey of 300 local businesses as Covid pandemic restrictions had ended, looking at business confidence and barriers to growth. The key issue to emerge was the difficulties businesses were encountering in recruiting staff and in particular staff with the right skills. Therefore projects in Appendix 1 have been designed to bridge these skills gaps by developing apprenticeship and skills/training schemes across sectors.

The apprenticeship and skills/training programme helps the council deal with challenges in our area that characterises another key investment priority of the UKSPF ‘People and Skills’. Epping Forest District has an above than average level of adults without formal qualifications- 23% as of 2019. Moreover, unemployment in the district remains double the levels that were experienced for much of the decade prior to the Covid19 (around 2000 now according to NOMIS). Helping people without jobs into vacant positions will have a significant impact on business growth, income for disadvantaged families and significant health and wellbeing improvements.

Conversations with neighbouring authorities and local parish and town councils, town centre partnerships and others have been undertaken to collaborate where possible and increase the impact of funding. Contact was made initially with local MPs in April 2022 to discuss approach and any key priorities. Areas raised included; rural infrastructure, apprenticeships and skills. Officers have also raised SPF at Chamber of Commerce networking event meetings and renewed existing programmes that have been found to have benefit. The government guidance suggests in particular for year 3 that the investment plan takes account of currently funded programmes in the employment and skills area that may be coming to an end. Officers have met with regional representatives of DWP who ascertained which of these may have particular impact on the district and also discussed this with officers from ECC particularly around year 3 investment in skills.

Resource Implications:

While many other areas have had significantly larger grants as part of the Levelling Up agenda linked to the deprivation scores, the £1 million allocation can have significant impact locally, especially if used in a focused manner and as a potential pump priming source to draw in other investment.

Officers have sought wherever possible to partner with external organisations to resource the projects listed in Appendix 1.

During this project officers will work to ensure where possible local procurement routes are sourced.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund prospectus was released on the 13th of April and final detailed guidance is expected in early July.

EFDC's UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid should be submitted to HM Government by the 29th of July 2022.

Approval should be received by the end of September 2022.

Allocated funds will be paid annually in advance with the first year's allocation paid in October 2022.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan needs to meet interventions and outcomes agreed with HM Government.

Any funds not defrayed with the financial year will be reimbursed to HM Government (they cannot be carried forward).

Significant reporting requirements from government on expenditure will require detailed and coordinated project management throughout the period of the scheme. At the time of writing this report the expected final technical guidance from central government has still not been received.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

All the programmes listed in the investment plan are designed to deliver significant value against this priority.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation has been a critical element of work on SPF. Officers took the view that partners should be involved at the very start of the process, and their views used to shape the investment plan as it evolved and not simply asked for their approval at the end of it. Appendix 2 details the contacts made.

Background Papers:

UK Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

Technical guidance- At the time of writing this report the expected final technical guidance from central government has still not been received.

Risk Management:

In order to achieve the aims of SPF the investment plan involves work to be undertaken internally through council departments but also involves significant work with outside agencies.

A detailed risk management plan will be put in place to manage the external delivery and the council's own risk management system will be deployed to ensure risk is addressed within the council.

Appendix 1:

Proposed Epping Forest UKSPF Projects



Epping Forest District Council's UKSPF bid has agreed to support 16 projects across 5 local priority themes. The proposed bid is a living document and work is continuing around specific operational elements of the programme. The Cabinet will be updated at the Cabinet meeting on the 18 July 2022 with any developments.

It is recommended that the cabinet agrees that the final sign off be delegated to the leader as the investment bid requires submission to HM Government by the 1 August 2022.

Theme 1: Investment in deprived areas and communities.

New Parks: Four major investments will be made to establish, enhance and develop parks and play facilities for children and families in areas of deprivation. Extensive investment in Ninefields, Oakwood Hill, Limes Farm and a specific area to be defined in our rural communities will be at the centre of this work. These new facilities will be serving areas of greatest need in our district and will continue to provide enhanced early years opportunities for many years to come. Importantly it will also regenerate surrounding areas, increase pride in place, reduce crime and create safer spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Theme 2: Rural regeneration

Dementia friendly garden in North Weald: Provision of a garden to help people living with dementia enjoy socialising and connect with others by creating a shared experience, to take part in physical activity and stimulate the senses and memories, all of which will greatly improve their wellbeing. North Weald has two dementia care homes located within the area.

Greensted Path in Ongar: A programme to make safe and upgrade the path between Ongar and Greensted Church and replace the tree lined walk previously lost to Dutch Elm disease. This will improve the attractiveness of the area, become a valuable addition to the visitor economy and in turn increase pride in place to the local community.

Rural Regeneration Reports: Development of reports for the districts rural villages to assess key issues and challenges facing the district's rural communities. The reports will provide a focus for further collaboration and investment in critical rural infrastructure. This will be delivered in collaboration with local councils and other stakeholders.

Stanford Rivers Village Hall: To assist Stanford Rivers Parish Council in the provision of a new heat pump at the Village Hall. The village hall is a key asset in the local community and provides for local social interaction and activities. This heat pump will have less environmental impact.

Theydon Bois Cemetery: To part fund an extension to Theydon Bois Cemetery and the provision of new electric gates. With the lack of space within the current cemetery the local council and community are keen to increase it's size. Theydon Bois Parish Council have obtained additional land but require assistance in ensuring it's security and landscaping. It is considered that this is a community asset and that it's improvement will provide legacy and visibility.

Theme 3: Supporting Local Business:

Maybe: To provide an educational platform for local businesses to expand their marketing offer on social media. Maybe provides free access to an established platform and app that delivers information, advice, guidance and training for businesses. This project will operate over three years to allow for the project to have optimum reach and buy in across the district. The target per year is to get 100 local businesses onto Maybe and for 20 businesses, who have done an extra amount of training to get a grant towards social media marketing.

Digital Footfall information: Expanding use and operation of the Huq footfall monitoring programme deployed in partnership with four neighbouring councils. The project will monitor and review the economic performance of the district's six market towns and provide advice and information to traders and other public bodies who can measure the effectiveness of interventions and investment. This facility is available to all parts of the council and can provide information tailored to a range of events and/or specific dates or activities within the town centres. Currently quarterly reports are provided to cabinet and local stakeholders. These reports compare footfall and dwell with previous years and periods.

Loyal Free: Expansion of the current programme, which is currently being run across the district's main town centres. It is planned that this will be continued and extended to our rural community, including all town's and villages across the district. There will also be extensive efforts to improve both residential and business take up with the app. This platform provides a free advertising and marketing platform to encourage increased footfall to the district's various high streets. The advertising promoted through this app is accompanied by a range of trails and local event information.

Employment Fair: Putting businesses that need employees together with potential employees will be a key element of this project. Together with the Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses the project will establish a regular annual event in the district that will bring school leavers, people who are underemployed and others looking to change career together with businesses that are struggling to attract and retain staff. It will also offer an opportunity for enhanced business to business and networking opportunities in the district and a celebration of what the district has to offer.

Epping Forest Markets Programme: This programme has been designed to support existing markets and provide for new markets across the district. Research has shown that a successful market can increase footfall by 25% for all retailers in the area. With this in mind it

is felt that supporting an active, successful and vibrant market community will greatly assist in the increased performance of the areas in which they operate. Initiatives included within this programme will be marketing and promotional activities, the development of new markets, schemes to promote young entrepreneurs and start-ups and also the inclusion of new activities such as evening, speciality markets and the inclusion of speciality partnerships such as council's stalls etc.

Inward investment partnership/UK Innovation Corridor: (Promoting investment in the sub region) Funding programmes to raise the profile of the Innovation Core which is formed by: Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford councils supported by Essex and Hertfordshire county councils. The Core is in the centre of the UK Innovation Corridor, one of the UK's most important clusters for life and health sciences, IT, digital and advanced manufacture.

Theme 4: Establishing pathways to work/skills education and training.

Year 3 of the project (2024-2025) will focus on the people and skills element of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. As a result of conversations with local MPs and businesses the following key priorities have been identified. Provision of skills and pathways to work sits across a wide variety of local organisations and agencies and effective collaboration and coordination will be central to the approach to create maximum impact and minimise duplication, creating effective pathways into training and skills for local people. In 2024-2025 there will be a shift in the educational landscape towards a focus on Apprenticeships, T-Level qualifications and academic routes.

Maybe: As well as being social media marketing tool to help businesses, it also acts as an education and training platform to bridge the gap between businesses and social media users. Currently, 71% of the UK population spend an hour or more a day on social media, whereas only 19% of businesses are active on social media.

Apprenticeships and Technical level qualifications (T Levels):

Objectives:

- To promote apprenticeships and T Level qualifications across the district.
- To provide and support an increase in the number of local employers taking on apprentices and/or students with T Level Qualifications.
- To increase the number of apprentices/T-Level candidates to take up positions made.
- To develop **a free funded** digital apprenticeship scheme for the district supported by a commercial partner and providing access to a range of high level digital companies.
- To collaborate with local skills and training providers, colleges, schools etc.
- To maintain collaboration with ECC, other councils and consider additional funding options, whilst ensuring that the District's interests are fully maintained.
- To promote apprenticeships as a way of upskilling and/or retraining existing workforce and in turn increasing life chances.
- Explore recruitment of apprenticeship advisor for the district.

Adult education:

- To increase life chances by supporting the development and provision of adult training courses across the district, based on a demand led courses and local business needs.

Appendix 2

UKSPF- Key Stakeholders contacted and events attended.

Events:

IPM UKSPF conference.
LGA (Local Government Authority)- UKSPF Conferences
Chamber of Commerce Public networking event at the Marriott Hotel
ECEP UK Shared Prosperity Fund collaboration workshop.
Department for Levelling up, housing and communities training programmes.

External stakeholders

DWP
Essex County Council
Rural Community Council of England
Uttlesford District Council
Broxbourne Borough Council
Harlow Council
East Herts District Council
Essex Police
Voluntary Action Epping Forest
Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce
Reed jobs.
Alex Burghart MP
Eleanor Laing MP
Robert Halfon MP
Harlow Skills Forum
Innovation Core Chief Executives meeting.
North Weald Parish Council
Theydon Bois Town Council
NHS West Essex CCG
Princess Alexandra Hospital
ECC Commissioner for Skills
Nazeing Parish Council
Roydon Parish Council
Chigwell Town Council
Waltham Abbey Town Centre Partnership
SELEP
2140 local businesses via e-newsletter
New City College
Stanford Rivers Parish Council.
Colchester Borough Council
Basildon Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Thurrock Council
Maldon Council
Southend Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Tendering Council
Castle point district council
Rochford district council
Epping Town Council
Waltham Abbey Town Council
Ongar Parish Council
Ongar Town Forum
Waltham Abbey Town Partnership
Loughton Broadway Town Partnership
Debden Traders Association
Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner

