

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE EXECUTIVE

2007/08

FOREWORD BY COUNCILLOR DIANA COLLINS, THE LEADER OF EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

In 2007/08 we have achieved our objectives, improved recycling, protected the Green Belt, encouraged affordable housing for rent and shared ownership, continued our revitalisation of Debden Broadway and listened to our residents concerns.

In order to do this, our first priority has been to keep our finances in good order. Our share of the Council Tax bill has only increased by 2.5% the lowest percentage increase in Essex. We have not had to cut any services or reduce our reserves and in light of present circumstances globally I think we have done well.

We have reduced our top management and with the salary savings we have made these are being put back into front line services to increase our efforts to make Epping Forest safer, cleaner and greener.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is submitted under Executive Procedure Rule 4(b) of the Constitution (Page H6). It provides a résumé of major policy issues determined and a summary of other issues discussed by the Cabinet across the various Council Portfolios during the Council year 2007/08, the sixth year of full operation of the new Executive Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000.
- 1.2 In line with the vision set out within the Council's Best Value Plan, the Cabinet adopted the following priority objectives for 2007/08:
- A to maintain a sound financial position;
 - B to carry forward dialogue with Epping Forest Youth Council on a regular basis;
 - C to investigate new proposals for affordable housing within the District;
 - D to work with other local authorities in respect of the Green Belt and the final published version of the East of England Plan;
 - E to monitor the new waste management contract; and
 - F to liaise with the local police and our community officers, with regular progress reports on issues such as Anti-Social Behaviour and graffiti, to further the Council's Safer Communities policies.
- 1.3 The major policy issues determined by the Cabinet during the Council year are a reflection of the priority objectives set out in 1.2 above. In each instance, through a cross-reference, an indication is given of how an issue contributes to the achievement of one or more of the priority objectives (a)-(f).

2. PORTFOLIO CHANGES

- 2.1 The number of portfolios covered by Cabinet Members was 8, a reduction from 9 in 2006/07, following the absorption into other Portfolios of the issues previously covered under the former Customer Services, Media, Communications and ICT Portfolio. This reduction also facilitated a closer alignment of Portfolios with the organisational structure. Details of the Portfolios and Portfolio Holders are set out below:
- Leader's Portfolio - Councillor Mrs Di Collins
 - Civil Engineering and Maintenance - Councillor Andrew Green
 - Community Wellbeing - Councillor Ms Syd Stavrou
 - Environmental Protection - Councillor Mrs Mary Sartin
 - Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services - Councillor Chris Whitbread
 - Housing - Councillor David Stallan
 - Leisure and Young People - Councillor Mitchell Cohen
 - Planning and Economic Development - Councillor Mrs Anne Grigg
- 2.2 Issues falling within the Leader's Portfolio included constitutional matters, management and co-ordination of Cabinet business, local land charges and major property/development proposals affecting the Council's portfolio (not including estate management).

- 2.3 It should be noted that, whilst the issues reported on are identified under the headings of individual Portfolios, many of them impact on two or more Portfolios.

3. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

3.1 New Officer Structure

- 3.1.1 The Council approved a new officer structure designed to meet the challenges it faces over the medium term. The first stages of the restructuring involved the appointment of a single Chief Executive, a Deputy Chief Executive and five directors covering Corporate Support Services, Finance, Environment and Street Scene, Housing, Planning and Economic Development. Subsequently, the establishment of, and appointments to, Assistant Director positions were made to enable the Council to build the capacity required to meet the challenges of improving performance and meeting community needs. The final stage involved determination and approval of the restructuring proposals for the remaining elements within the five Directorates. Internal Audit and the Offices of the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive.
- 3.1.2 The re-structuring would achieve an overall saving of £500,000 inclusive of the Top Management Structure review savings of £200,000, as part of the Council's 3% Gershon Savings for 2008-09. Savings from the Top Management structure review had contributed to the Council's objective of setting a budget for 2008/09 with a Council Tax increase no higher than the rate of inflation. Efficiency gains from the re-structuring were being re-invested towards enhancing and extending the delivery of front line services. Vacant posts had been 'managed', ensuring that, where possible, potential savings were identified, whilst protecting service delivery. This had reduced the potential impact of the restructuring on staff in terms of redundancies.
- 3.1.3 In making the required savings, some Directorates had to absorb the workload of previously deleted Heads of Service posts. Furthermore, savings in the sum of £300,000 across all Directorates were made.

(Objective A)

3.2 Council Budgets 2008/09

- 3.2.1 (Although this item is included within the Leader's Portfolio, the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance Management worked very closely together on the preparation and production of the Council Budget). The Council agreed to the 2008/09 General Fund budgets containing the following elements:
- (a) revised revenue estimates for 2007/08, with an anticipated increase in the General Fund balance of £116,000;
 - (b) an increase in the target for the 2008/09 Continuing Services Budget (CSB) from £16.8m to £16.828m (including growth items);
 - (c) an increase in the target for the 2008/09 District Development Fund (DDF) net spend from £1m to £1.078m;
 - (d) an increase of 2.5% in the District Council Tax to raise the charge for a Band 'D' property from £139.50 to £143.01;

- (e) an estimated increase in General Fund balances in 2008/09 of £219,000;
- (f) the Capital Programme to the year 2011/12;
- (g) the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2008/09 - 11/12; and
- (h) the Council's policy on General Fund Revenue Balances remaining that 'they be allowed to fall no lower than 25% of the Net Budget Requirement'.

3.2.2 Included within the revised estimates was the 2008/09 Housing Revenue Account. In accordance with its Rent Strategy and the long-term objective of achieving rent restructuring more promptly, the Council agreed an average increase in housing rents of 6.69%.

3.2.3 The largest Continuing Service Budget (CSB) growth items were £331,000 for the end of subsidy on reinstatement grants made between 1987 and 1991 under Section 541 of the Housing Act 1985, and £250,000 for the Safer, Cleaner and Greener corporate initiative. The largest single CSB saving of £604,000 had resulted from the tendering exercise for the new waste management contract, whilst the Corporate Restructuring had provided significant savings of £506,000. The current CSB total of £16.828m was £28,000 above the budget guideline target. However, a contingency of £175,000 had been included, which could be reduced accordingly if necessary.

3.2.4 In respect of the District Development Fund (DDF), the largest items of expenditure were £288,000 for the generation of the Local Development Framework, £130,000 for the non-Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Building Maintenance Programme, and £100,000 to complete the comfort cooling programme. The current DDF programme of £1.078m exceeded the budget guideline by £78,000. However, it was felt that, as the outturn would be unlikely to exceed £1m, this excess would not be significant.

3.2.5 The increase in the District Council Tax of 2.5% was within the Council's target and compared with a Retail Prices Index figure of 4.0%. Additionally, with current projections indicating that the Council's reserves would be £6.1m by 2011/12, or approximately 34% of net budget requirement, the Council's target of not allowing General Fund balances to fall below 25% of net budget requirement would also be met.

3.2.6 The effects of the new National Concessionary Fares Scheme would not become clear until well into 2008/09. A budget provision based on the estimated costs provided by the current consultants to the countywide scheme had been included in the budget. The recent substantial increases in utility prices and the potential for higher than budgeted wage settlements were also areas of concern, along with the pending clarification of whether the Department of Communities and Local Government would provide a capitalisation direction to cover the pension deficit payments for 2007/08 and subsequent years.

3.2.7 The balance of the HRA was expected to be £5.9m at 31 March 2009, a deficit of £404,000 for 2008/09 due to the £2m increase in subsidy payable to the Government. The HRA had had substantial balances for a period of time and this position was not expected to change in the short-term.

- 3.2.8 The Council concluded that the estimates were sufficiently robust for the purposes of the Council's budget for 2008/09, and that the reserves of the Council were adequate to cope with the financial risks faced by the Council in 2008/09. However, spending would be kept under review, with savings made in the medium-term.
- 3.2.9 The Council set the second lowest District Council Tax in Essex and felt that it was prudent to let the Council's reserves rise to 34% of net budget requirement given the current unsettled conditions in the financial markets. The aim was that no supplementary estimates would be required during 2008/09. The Council received approval for 100% of its Capitalisation Directions to cover the pension deficit payments for 2007/08.

(Objective A)

3.3 Essex Local Area Agreement 2 (LAA2) and the Epping Forest Story of Place

- 3.3.1 The Essex Partnership is made up of a wide range of organisations across the county including Essex County Council, the twelve District Councils, Town and Parish Councils, PCTs, the police and fire services, the business and voluntary sectors. Partners work collectively on improving the quality of life of the people who live in Essex. During the year, the Partnership undertook work leading to the development of the Essex Sustainable Strategy (known as 'Liberating Potential') setting out a vision for the county and the delivery of services until 2018. The mechanism for ensuring the strategy is delivered is LAA2. This sets out priority areas and outcomes to be achieved over the course of the next four years.
- 3.3.2 To ensure that LAA2 properly reflected the diversity of the county and took into account local priorities, the District Council was requested to develop a 'Story of Place' for the Epping Forest District. The concept of a 'Story of Place' was being promoted by the Government, with the whole Local Strategic Partnership involved in its development. The development of a 'Story of Place' was an integral part of the LAA2 process, in which the Council was participating. It was a useful joint visioning tool in the development of the new Sustainable Community Strategy, and could also form the basis of any future Local Area Agreement for the District.
- 3.3.3 Both the Council and the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership endorsed a 'Story of Place' for the District setting out the main issues and challenges to be dealt with in key areas such as protecting and enhancing the natural environment for prosperity, supporting communities, fulfilling potential in education, work and leisure, ensuring a safe and healthy environment and guarding against inequalities.
- 3.3.4 With regard to LAA2, the Council agreed it would 'have regard to' the following indicators:
- (a) more people supported to live in their own homes and better support for carers;
 - (b) more volunteering and participation in sport and culture;
 - (c) Essex is a safe place to live;
 - (d) a smaller carbon footprint with less waste; and
 - (e) a well managed natural environment.

(Objectives A, D and F)

3.4 Development Land Sale - Langston Road Industrial Estate

- 3.4.1 The Council completed the sale of the T11 industrial development site at Langston Road, Loughton. In addition, a planning consultant was appointed to submit a planning application for office/light industrial, general industry, storage and distribution on the Council Depot site.

(Objective A)

3.5 Other Issues

Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act – Need for Review of Executive Governance Arrangements;
- Forester Magazine – Use of Procurement Hub for Competitive Quotations for the Design, Advertising, Print and Distribution;
- Supernumerary Post – Decision to make post permanent; and
- Land at Merlin Way, North Weald – Sale of Land for Provision of new Medical Centre.

4. CIVIL ENGINEERING AND MAINTENANCE

4.1 Response to the Pitt Review - Interim Report on Summer Flooding 2007

- 4.1.1 During August 2007, Sir Michael Pitt, on behalf of the Government, carried out a review of the flood-related emergencies, occurring during the summer of 2007. The interim report of the review was published in December 2007 with three objectives:

- (a) to identify issues which need urgent action;
- (b) to set out the direction for the remainder of the Review; and
- (c) to provide a document for consultation before the final report was published.

- 4.1.2 Whilst the Epping Forest District, and indeed the county of Essex, was not significantly affected by the events of 2007 there would be significant implications for all local authorities, if the Government decided to adopt and act upon the 15 main recommendations and if the 72 interim conclusions become firm recommendations in the final report expected in the summer of 2008. From the District Council's perspective, the implications arising from the report could affect a number of services - Emergency Planning, Land Drainage, Planning (Development Control, Forward Planning and Building Control), Housing and Local Land Charges.

- 4.1.3 In recognising the Interim Report as a considered and comprehensive review, the Council put forward a number of other recommendations, including placing more emphasis on the public taking greater responsibility in known areas of risk through protecting their own property, reinstating that property and cleaning up after a

flooding event, businesses making their own continuing arrangements and riparian owners taking responsibility for their duties.

(Objective D)

4.2 Parking Concessions for Key Public Health Service Providers

- 4.2.1 There had been a demand from certain key service workers for special dispensation from parking restrictions. As the parking restrictions within the District had expanded, so the pressure for concessions had increased. It was agreed, initially, that the dispensation should be restricted to certain key public health providers, although it could be expanded in the future to encompass more key workers. To keep the scheme as simple as possible, it had been agreed to base it on the current scheme in operation for disabled drivers. Thus, the concession would be vehicle specific and time limited, but would not permit free parking in any of the Council's car parks.
- 4.2.2 The Council had agreed, subject to proof of need, for parking permits to be made available to general practitioners, District nurses, midwives, pharmacists and approved carers. A fee of £25 per annum was to be levied to cover administrative costs. The scheme was to be reviewed after it had been in operation for six months.

(Objectives A and D)

4.3. Other Issues

Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Epping Drinking Fountain – Rescinding of previous decision to transfer ownership from the District to the Town Council; and
- Cottis Lane Short Stay and Bakers Lane Long Stay Car Parks, Epping - Change of Status to combined tariff.

5. COMMUNITY WELLBEING

5.1 Grant Aid Scheme and Voluntary Sector Assistance

- 5.1.1 During the course of the year a total of £96,365 was allocated from the grant aid scheme, either through longer term three-year agreements or on individual schemes, to various voluntary and community groups:
- 5.1.2 Further grants totalling £107,850 and £32,360 were awarded respectively to the three Citizens' Advice Bureaux in the District and Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF). VAEF also received further assistance to offset accommodation and other overhead costs.

(Objective A)

5.2 Removal of Graffiti Policy

- 5.2.1 Approval was given to amendments to the policy and procedural arrangements for the removal of graffiti. The Council is mindful of the negative effects of graffiti on the District and society as a whole. Although there is no legal requirement for a local authority to remove graffiti, the Council has reacted to the need to deal with graffiti

removal and has included specific provision within its budget for several years. Previously the approach had been to deal with the problem whenever it occurred, usually in response to complaints rather than via a pre-determined policy.

- 5.2.2 During 2006/07, the Council budgeted £30,250 for the removal of graffiti. However, demand within the District led to an overspend of approximately £5,000. The difficulty in containing this budget resulted from an attempt to remove all graffiti wherever it occurred, including locations which were the responsibility of private individuals or other public bodies. The incidence of graffiti was increasing significantly, and to prevent a repeat of the overspend it was agreed that a new formalised policy be introduced for prioritising the removal of graffiti within available resources. All Parish and Town Councils were consulted on the new policy.

(Objective F)

5.3 National Concessionary Fares Scheme

- 5.3.1 The Transport Act 2000 introduced a national minimum standard for local authority concessionary travel schemes for elderly and disabled people. The concession required at least half fare off peak travel on local buses within the travel concession authority's area. Since 1 April 2006, local authorities have been required to provide their residents aged 60 and over, or disabled, with at least free off-peak local bus travel. The 2006 Budget announced that the statutory minimum was to be extended to free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England from 1 April 2008.
- 5.3.2 The District Council, worked in partnership with all Essex authorities, in providing an enhanced version of the statutory scheme. Under the scheme, pass holders can travel for free anywhere within the county. The Council was also in a partnership with Transport for London to offer residents free off-peak bus travel in north east London. This scheme ceased on 31 March 2008, as the National Scheme offered free off-peak travel on all local buses in England. The 2007/08 year saw a reduction in the number of Transport for London passes issued, reducing the net budget required for the Transport for London scheme for 2007/08. It was agreed that the resultant saving of £12,000 should be included in the revised budget for 2007/08. The balance of £65,000 would be added to the budget for the countryside scheme in 2008/09, to provide a contingency to meet any additional costs not met through additional government grant.
- 5.3.3 The District Council agreed to continue participation in the Countywide Scheme and to extending the period covered by the passes from 2 to 5 years, thereby reducing the ongoing annual burden of issuing passes. It also agreed that the benefits available should be in line with the new National Scheme.

(Objective A)

6. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

6.1 Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy

- 6.1.1 The District Council signed the "Memorandum of Understanding" with the County Council, establishing the basis behind partnership working, to progress the agreed Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS). Subsequently, the Council approved the signing of a "Letter of Support" made by the Chairman of the West Essex Waste Management Joint Committee. The letter formed a crucial part of the County Council's application for PFI credit to fund the significant infrastructure, which

would be needed to support the JMWMS. The Government would not provide PFI funding unless there was a clear commitment on behalf of the Districts and Boroughs and the County Council in delivering the jointly agreed waste management strategy.

- 6.1.2 In the letter, the constituent members of the West Essex Joint Committee confirmed their support and commitment to meeting statutory targets for recycling and diversion and the “Reference Project”, the waste infrastructure project put forward to Government in support of the PFI bid.

(Objective E)

6.2 Licensing Act – Licensing Policy

- 6.2.1 Under the Licensing Act 2003, each licensing authority has to determine its licensing policy for a three year period, and publish a statement of its policy before the beginning of a new three year period, in this instance from 2008.
- 6.2.2 A three month consultation on the present policy resulted in two responses. The responses led to a revised Statement of Licensing Policy for the next three years ahead, incorporating the following:
- provision for a licence to be granted in the absence of any representations, with any representations being upheld at a hearing;
 - a recognition of the ‘Hampton’ principles of inspection and enforcement.

(Objective F)

6.3 Nottingham Declaration

- 6.3.1 The Council became a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration. The declaration had originated from Nottinghamshire County Council in 2000, and was specifically for local authorities to show their commitment to the management of climate change and associated environmental issues.
- 6.3.2 The declaration included the following:
- working with central Government to contribute locally to the UK Climate Change Programme, the Kyoto protocol and the 2010 carbon dioxide reduction target;
 - participating in local and regional support networks;
 - developing plans with partners and local communities to address the causes and impacts of climate change, tailored to local priorities and community benefits;
 - publicly declaring within appropriate plans and strategies, the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the Council’s own activities;
 - assessing the risks of climate change and the implications for Council services and communities and adapt accordingly; and

- encouraging all sectors in the local community to adapt to the climate change impacts.

(Objective D)

6.4 Biodiversity Plan

- 6.4.1 Biological diversity or biodiversity is defined as the variability among living organisms from all habitats including terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part. It therefore includes diversity within and between species and of ecosystems.
- 6.4.2 Biodiversity is a core component of sustainable development, underpinning economic development, community wellbeing, and local quality of life. Biodiversity contributes to the delivery of key services such as food production, provision of clean air and water and flood management, and adds considerably to people's sense of enjoyment and wellbeing.
- 6.4.3 To fulfil the Earth Summit commitment the UK Government published its first Biodiversity Action Plan in 1994. This included a description of the UK's key biological resources, and strategic plans for the protection of these resources. It recognised that the national objectives could only be achieved if there was action at all levels and by all sectors of the community, and the principal means of achieving this is through the preparation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans.
- 6.4.4 LBAPs have two broad functions:
- (a) to ensure that national action plans are translated into effective action at local level; and
 - (b) to establish targets and actions for species and habitats characteristic of each local area.
- 6.4.5 The Council agreed to adopt the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and to receive annual reports on progress, as a practical expression of its commitment to promote sustainable development throughout the District, and to reinforce the nature conservation policies of the Local Plan.

(Objective D)

6.5 Safer, Cleaner and Greener Initiative

- 6.5.1 The Council approved a Safer, Cleaner and Greener Initiative through which would apply significant additional resources aimed at ensuring the District's residents and visitors would see real differences in the way the District looks and the Council's ability to respond rapidly and effectively to environmental complaints and concerns. The proposals will also enable the Council to positively implement the additional powers provided by Government through its recent cleaner neighbourhoods legislation. The proposals take account of the options available to the Council for obtaining more effective environmental enforcement and the use of existing enforcement resources.
- 6.5.2 In recognition of its support for the initiative, the Council approved the establishment of a CCTV Operations Officer, two Antisocial Behaviour Investigation Officers, an Environment and Neighbourhood Officer and a Rapid Response Unit. The Rapid

Response Unit provides an immediate reaction service dealing with issues such as small fly tips or small amounts of dumped rubbish; cutting back of encroaching vegetation; cleansing of street furniture; graffiti removal; and fly posting/illegal advertisement removal.

(Objective F)

6.6 Waste Management Service Provider

- 6.6.1 Approval was given to the appointment of Sita UK as the Council's waste management service provider for a five-year period with effect from November 2007. The level of service for residual waste collections will be a 22-week period of weekly collections between May and September and a 30-week period of alternative weekly collections from October to April.

(Objective F)

6.7 Other Issues

- 6.7.1 Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:
- Air Quality Management Areas – Epping – approval of funds associated with declaration;
 - Bobbingworth Tip Remediation Project – additional costs;
 - Establishment of Waste Management Board; and
 - Adoption of bye-laws for acupuncture, tattooing, semi-permanent skin colouring, cosmetic, piercing and electrolysis.

7. FINANCE, PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

7.1 Corporate Equality Action Plan

- 7.1.1 A significant amount of equalities work was undertaken in the year, such that performance against Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) BV2b - the quality of an authority's Race Equality Scheme and the improvements resulting from its application - improved from 63% to 89%. This placed the Council's performance for this indicator in the top quartile of District Councils and represented a significant return on the investment that had been made in this area.
- 7.1.2 The Council has already carried out impact and needs assessments, and had in place, a consultation strategy and programme. The impact assessments had generated a range of corporate tasks required to embed equalities within the Council and which formed the main elements of the Corporate Equality Action Plan. Approval was given to a Corporate Equality Action Plan drawn up to have a five-year lifespan which would be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.

(Objective A)

7.2 Employee Wellbeing Framework

- 7.2.1 Approval was given to the adoption of an Employee Wellbeing Framework, the purpose of which was to set out the support measures available to staff to promote their wellbeing at work. The framework had a number of elements including: a policy statement; responsibilities of members and officers; facilities to promote a healthy work/life balance health and safety provisions, and employee health services.

(Objective A)

7.3 Bulk Procurement of Energy

- 7.3.1 As a means of ensuring it obtained the best prices for energy, the Council joined the consortia of the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions (OGCBS). It was more cost-effective to purchase bulk energy via a consortium as compared to a standard tariff. This was best practice and ensured that the Council obtained the lowest possible energy costs. It also accorded with the Council's decision to become a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration (see 6.3 above).

(Objective A)

7.4 Capital Strategy 2007-12

- 7.4.1 Approval was given a Capital Strategy for the period 2007-12 based on the Council's Capital Programme and taking account of the latest guidance on capital accounting arrangements for local government. The strategy would be updated on an annual basis to ensure that the Council made sound strategic decisions in relation to its use of capital resources, which formed a key element of the Council's Performance Management and Financial Planning frameworks.
- 7.4.2 The Capital Strategy envisaged expenditure of £50million over five years, and was both prudent and affordable. Further use of capital receipts would reduce the investment income received by the Council, hence it was considered prudent not to increase the scope of the Strategy.
- 7.4.3 It was agreed that the ranking of the Council's Key Capital Priorities be revised to read as follows:
- (a) Improving the Council's Housing Stock;
 - (b) Meeting Housing Need;
 - (c) Improving Quality of Life;
 - (d) Protecting the Environment;
 - (e) Promoting Economic Development;
 - (f) Regenerating Areas in Need;
 - (g) Delivering Quality Public Services through e-Government; and
 - (h) Improving Private Sector Housing Stock.

(Objective A)

7.5 External Funding Strategy

- 7.5.1 The Council agreed to the adoption of an External Funding Strategy aimed at ensuring a co-ordinated and consistent approach to external funding across the Council, and limiting the likelihood of missed funding opportunities. Key elements within the strategy included links with the corporate objectives, a need for corporate co-ordination, project planning, sources of advice, a legal and financial appraisal, risk assessment and match or joint funding.
- 7.5.2 It was considered that better inclusion of external funding in business planning and budget provision would give the Council an opportunity to publish an annual report illustrating its success in securing funding. The first such annual report would be produced at the commencement of the 2009/10 financial year.

(Objective A)

7.6 Asset Management Plan

- 7.6.1 Approval was given to a Comprehensive Asset Management Plan for the period 2007-12. The adoption of the Plan would enable the Council to secure the best possible return on its assets, both in terms of revenue and capital value, and in terms of the suitability and sustainability of its buildings, to meet its long-term strategic aims.

(Objective A)

7.7 Other Issues

Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Webcasting Project – Evaluation of Pilot Project;
- Prudential Indicators, Outturn and Treasury Management Stewardship - Approval of Report;
- Civic Offices Environmental Improvements and five-year Rolling Maintenance – Approval of Programmes;
- Staff Conduct Monitoring – Consideration of Progress Report; and
- Release of Restrictive Covenant - Loughton Hall to permit Residential Development.

8. HOUSING

8.1 Review of the RSL Partnering and Joint Commissioning Scheme

- 8.1.1 The first RSL Partnering and Joint Commissioning Scheme had been approved in March 2005. Its purpose had been to prevent Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) bidding against each other for a particular development and to reduce the level of the

resultant bids submitted to the Housing Corporation by the RSLs, which would increase their chances of success.

- 8.1.2 The scheme had initially generally worked well but there had been an increasing number of difficulties. As a result, it was agreed that the Joint Commissioning element of the current scheme be discontinued and that developers be permitted to work with any of the Council's Preferred RSL partners, rather than a single one, with the Council supporting any of the resultant funding bids to the Housing Corporation. The exception would be for rural schemes, where developers would still be encouraged to work with a Housing Association.

(Objective C)

8.2 Shared Ownership Policy

- 8.2.1 House prices within the District had continued to increase, leaving many local people unable to purchase their own home. This has led to more people relying on the Council to assist them with their housing needs, including people on reasonable incomes who, in the past, would have been able to purchase their own property. The most common way to assist such people was through new-build shared ownership, whereby the applicant purchased an equity share in a newly built property and a housing association purchased the remaining share and charged the tenant a rent. The aim was to make the applicant's outgoings less than if they had a mortgage for 100% equity, but with the applicant also having the opportunity to purchase additional equity from the Housing Association, up to 100%.

- 8.2.2 The Council previously agreed that up to 25% of the affordable homes provided on Section 106 developments should be in the form of shared ownership. However, it was agreed that this policy should be reviewed, that the amount of shared ownership on Section 106 sites should be increased to a minimum of 30%, and that this should also apply to other sites on which the Council had influence, e.g. land that the Council owned and was selling on the open market. Experience across the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region had indicated that shared ownership schemes with initial equity shares of more than 35% were becoming increasingly unaffordable. Therefore, it was felt that the target average initial equity share sold to shared owners within any development should be 35%, with a minimum equity share of 25% and a maximum equity share of 50% for individual properties permitted. In addition, shared owners were permitted to purchase additional equity shares up to full 100% ownership, with the exception of rural schemes whereby a maximum of 80% should be maintained in accordance with Housing Corporation guidelines. To keep rents on the unsold equity at an affordable level, whilst also allowing the Housing Associations sufficient income to finance their loans, it was decided that the policy should stipulate an initial rent of no more than 2.5% of the unsold equity per annum, with rent increases determined by the Housing Associations' rent setting policies.

(Objective C)

8.3 Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme

- 8.3.1 The District Council had previously agreed that 30% of all the affordable homes provided on Section 106 developments would be in the form of shared ownership. In the past three years, 27 new shared ownership homes had been completed, compared to 71 general needs social rented homes. However, due to the current Essex Structure Plan targets being exceeded, and the Council having to wait for the outcome of the East of England Plan, there had been a dearth of new development

sites in the District and therefore the amount of affordable homes that could be provided.

- 8.3.2 Approval was therefore given to the introduction of an alternative low cost home ownership initiative which complemented the agreed Home Ownership Grants Scheme that did not rely on new house building and provided a flexible opportunity for applicants to enter home ownership. The Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme would assist non-tenants on the Council's Housing Register. Under the scheme, housing applicants would be able to purchase a one or two-bedroomed property on the open market on a shared ownership basis. The benefits of this approach were that it did not rely on new developments coming forward by developers on Section 106 sites and it provided much greater flexibility to applicants as they could choose the home they wished to purchase within a prescribed maximum purchase price. The main drawback was that, unlike new-build shared ownership, there was no developer subsidy provided from a Section 106 Agreement, which meant that the amount of grant needed was much higher.
- 8.3.3 Although the success of the scheme could not be predicted, it was agreed that the scheme be piloted over a 12-month period during 2008-09, with a review by the Housing Portfolio Holder after 6 months operation.

(Objective C)

8.4 Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

- 8.4.1 The Council is legally required to have a Housing Allocations Scheme setting out the procedures for allocating its housing accommodation and making nominations to Registered Social Landlords. Each year the scheme is reviewed and any changes considered appropriate agreed. A number of changes to the scheme were agreed to ensure fairness to all applicants and discourage under occupation.

(Objective C)

8.5 Home Ownership Grants Scheme

- 8.5.1 Approval was given, on a pilot scheme basis, to the introduction of a low cost home ownership initiative that did not rely on new house building, but through which the Council could provide a capital grant to existing Council secure tenants who wanted to give up their tenancy and purchase a property on the open market. This is known as a "Home Ownership Grant." This policy frees a Council property that can then be re-let and help someone to enter home ownership.
- 8.5.2 Under the Housing Act 1985, tenants had to hold a secure tenancy for five years before they were eligible for the Right to Buy scheme. However, to increase the grant's attractiveness, this restriction is not applied to Home Ownership Grant recipients. Under the Act, a purchaser selling their Right to Buy property within five years has to re-pay a proportion of the discount received. These terms are applied to the provision of Home Ownership Grants.
- 8.5.3 For the pilot scheme it was agreed that five Home Ownership Grants be made available, based on a maximum provision of £170,000 within the 2008-09 Capital Programme. The pilot scheme will be reviewed after six months operation to determine whether the funding allocated is sufficient.

(Objective C)

8.6 Choice Based Lettings Scheme

- 8.6.1 Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) is different from the traditional way of allocating housing via the waiting list. CBL allows applicants for social housing (and tenants who want to transfer) to apply for vacancies, which are advertised widely in the neighbourhood (e.g. in the local newspaper or on a website).
- 8.6.2 Applicants can see the full range of available properties and can apply for any home to which they are matched (e.g. a single person would not be eligible for a three-bedroomed house). Priority is given to those with urgent needs, but where possible properties are allocated on the basis of who has been waiting the longest. Authorities provide feedback that helps applicants to assess their chances of success in subsequent applications.
- 8.6.3 Locata Housing Services were appointed to run and manage the Council's scheme. The scheme was activated in November 2007 and has proved extremely popular.

(Objective C)

8.7 Other Issues

Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Leader Lodge - High Road, North Weald
- Variation of Contract - Edward Court, Waltham Abbey
- Bed and Breakfast Accommodation - Contract Procedure
- Springfields Improvement Scheme
- Social Housing Grant - The Quadrant, Ongar
- Funds for Handyperson Scheme
- Rural Housing Scheme - Horsecroft, Abbess Roding

9. LEISURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

9.1 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

- 9.1.1 An "Action Plan for the legacy from the 2012 Games" has been developed after extensive consultation across Essex. A formal request was received from the Chairman of the Essex Working Group for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games for the Council to formally endorse the Action Plan and indicate how the District would seek to benefit from the staging of the Games.
- 9.1.2 In endorsing the Action Plan, the Council undertook to investigate the opportunities that the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games presented to the District, including priorities for action and any resource implications. One possibility being looked at was the provision of a park and ride facility at North Weald Airfield for use for the

duration of the Games. The use of an area within the Lea Valley Regional Park as the White Water Canoeing venue presented a further opportunity to the District.

(Objective A)

9.2 Epping Forest District Play Strategy 2007-17

- 9.2.1 The Council received an allocation of £243,871 from the Big Lottery Fund to improve and develop play facilities within the District. This funding would be accessed via an application process that required three key undertakings: establishment of a District Plan Partnership involving play service providers from statutory, voluntary and charitable agencies; development of a Play Policy; and the identification of priority play projects for the area. The priority play projects required a minimum investment of £50,000, and the facilities provided had to be free of charge to participants.
- 9.2.2 The Council had already invested in a number of facilities during the last three years via the Youth Initiatives Scheme. However, a further three areas had been identified for priority funding in the Strategy at Limes Farm, Nazeing and Lambourne. As part of the development of the Strategy, a thorough audit of the existing facilities within the District was undertaken along with an extensive consultation exercise that had included parents, young people, Town and Parish Councils, and other interested partner agencies.

(Objectives A and B)

9.3 Playing Pitch Strategy

- 9.3.1 The Council developed a ten-year Playing Pitch Strategy, setting out the future direction for the provision of sports pitch facilities in the District. The strategy identified current issues of capacity and quality of pitches provided and was intended to give direction and guidance to those involved in providing pitch sport facilities in Epping Forest. The Strategy had identified that Epping Forest compared favourably, nationally, in terms of the number of adult sports pitches provided. However, the key deficiencies in provision were in relation to junior and youth pitches, which were considerably less than other districts. There was a need for providers to meet demand, either by installing new junior size pitches on existing sites, re-designating adult size pitches, or by establishing new facilities specifically for junior use.
- 9.3.2 The Council was continuing to work with local partners in establishing a Community Sports Network in the District (Active Epping Forest). This would enable improved communication of local needs between clubs, and District and local councils. Active Epping Forest had a key role in planning, providing and co-ordinating provision of playing pitches in the District and could assist providers such as local schools, colleges and clubs, allowing community access to maintain and enhance the quality of their pitch provision.
- 9.3.3 Opportunities for new pitch facilities in the District were very limited, but every possible opportunity to secure land for new pitch provision was considered as part of the new housing developments in the District. When Section 106 agreements were negotiated in establishing new pitch facilities, it was possible to attract external funding. The Council had an excellent record in securing external funding for local projects and was aiming to work with local partners, to maximise funding for new pitch provision where deficits had been highlighted.

(Objectives A and B)

9.4 Epping Forest District Youth Council

9.4.1 Approval was given to the formation of a Youth Council for the Epping Forest District. The Youth Council, the first annual meeting of which was held in March 2008, was set up with the following aims during its first year of operation.

- To seek to develop the skills and abilities of the young people to the point where they can actively engage in the democratic processes;
- To act as a specific point of contact enabling the Council to engage with young people, and to seek their views or opinions on a range of local issues and the services that they use;
- To act as an advisory body to the Council, formally responding to consultation exercises relating to specific issues concerning young people in the District, or to other matters on which consultation is important for the development of services;
- To enable young people to comment on and become involved in the Council's decision-making and service delivery processes; and
- To enable young people to influence the Council's policies and decisions that affect them.

9.4.2 The recruitment of a Young Persons' Officer in December 2006 had presented an opportunity to institute an Epping Forest Youth Council, to act on behalf of all young people within the District and represent the District on the Essex Youth Assembly. At a briefing in June 2007, the proposal to set up the District Youth Council was very well received by local stakeholders, and the local schools and colleges had agreed to support a Youth Council nomination and election process. It had been agreed that Epping Forest College and all secondary schools within the District would be allocated two places each on the Youth Council with a further five positions to be available for young people that resided but did not attend a school in the District.

9.4.3 The provision of appropriate induction and training for the duly appointed Youth Councillors was essential if the Youth Council was to be a success and fulfil its objectives. Training had commenced in January 2008 and this would continue on an ongoing process. Access to Cabinet members, Service Directors and wider external partners at Youth Council meetings would also be essential to the success of the project.

9.4.4 Initially the Youth Council would not have its own dedicated budget but it would probably highlight projects for development and then consider avenues of funding, including externally. Town and Parish Councils had been asked to be actively involved in the project, particularly in those areas that did not have a secondary school.

(Objective B)

9.5 Other Issues

9.5.1. Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Feasibility of new Sports Hall provision at Waltham Abbey Pool.

10. PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

10.1 Contaminated Land Consultancy Budget

10.1.1 Under environmental protection legislation, the Council has identified over 5,000 sites within the District that may have had some level of potential contamination. The Council has an obligation under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part 2A, to carry out an analysis of the risk associated with potential contamination and seek remediation.

10.1.2 Government guidance has identified that much of the necessary work of remediation would come forward under the planning process and must be dealt with when sites are re-developed. The costs of remediation fall on the landowner or developer. However there are significant costs incurred by the Council in assessing site investigations and remediation measures. The Council had previously agreed that the costs of such work would be passed to the developer via legal agreements rather than being met from the public purse, but experience had shown that such agreements were almost impossible to achieve. The costs of consultancy had been running at £40,000 per annum and, accordingly, approval was given to a budget to meet these costs.

10.1.3 The Local Government Act 2003 allowed local authorities to charge customers for holding discussions prior to the submission of planning applications. The proposed charge was to be £1,500 plus VAT for major schemes and was being introduced from October 2007. The income from the scheme would be used to offset the amount of £40,000 included in the budget for contaminated land consultancy.

10.2 Local Development Scheme – Direction from the Secretary of State

10.2.1 The Council amended its Development Plan document to address provision within the District for Gypsies and Travellers. The Council had originally sought to develop a Core Strategy Policy to ensure that provision for Gypsies and Travellers would be included in discussions with potential developers at the sites identified to satisfy the East of England Plan targets. However, following considerable correspondence with the Government Office for the East of England, the Secretary of State directed the Council to make the following amendments to the Local Development Scheme:

- include a Gypsy and Traveller Site Development Plan Document;
- commence work on the Development Plan Document immediately; and
- submit it for examination by 30 September 2009

10.3 North Weald Airfield Strategy

- 10.3.1 Approval was given to a new Retail Market Licence at North Weald Airfield covering the period 2007 to 2017, with a break clause from 2010. In addition, approval was given to the use of Hangar One at North Weald Airfield to a firm for the purposes of fabricating structural steelwork.

10.4 Economic Regeneration

- 10.4.1 To enable a greater understanding of the local economy, approval was given to the use of nationally available economic regeneration indicators and other indicators requiring local collection. The set of local indicators had been selected for its relevance to the District, to give an understanding picture of the health of the local economy. The performance indicators would provide a valuable evidence base enhancing the Council's understanding of the local economy and ensuring that the resulting strategy was designed to meet the distinctive needs and aspirations of the District.
- 10.4.2 The Council also agreed the adoption of an Economic Regeneration Strategy which was both sustainable and appropriate to the local context, whilst at the same time being conversant with regional and national policy direction. It was further agreed that the strategy should be linked to existing partnership working arrangements at a local and regional level.

(Objectives A and D)

10.5 Regeneration and Redevelopment Schemes

- 10.5.1 In accordance with its commitment to economic regeneration, the Council gave approval to a revised scheme for the enhancement of The Broadway in Loughton. Approval was also given to the preparation of a Development and Design Brief for the redevelopment and reuse of several sites and building in and around St Johns Road, Epping.

(Objectives A and D)

10.6 Local Development Framework

- 10.6.1 The Council agreed to allocate resources totalling £1.1 million in respect of the Local Development Framework and associated processes over the next four years.

(Objective D)

10.7 Other Issues

Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:

- Charging for Pre-Application Discussions on Planning Applications;
- Consultation on Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation – Response to EEDA;

- Essex Council TPOs – Transfer of responsibility from the County to the District Council;
- Telecommunications Mast - Honey Lane, Waltham Abbey – Introduction of revised procedures for similar applications; and
- Support for Habitats Directive Assessment – East of England Plan.

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