

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE EXECUTIVE

2008/09

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

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is submitted under Executive Procedure Rule 4(a) and (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 2008/09, the seventh 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 corporate priorities for 2008/09:
- A to ensure that the Council fully contributes to the delivery of the priorities and objectives of the second Essex Local Area Agreement, not only through active participation in the Local Strategic Partnership, but also by robustly monitoring performance against the priority areas that the authority has 'regard to';
- B to explore options to improve the accessibility of the Council's services through customer focused initiatives, including neighbourhood services and one stop shops;
- C to produce a sustainable strategy for the Council, to ensure that the authority minimises the environmental impact of its actions and operations; and
- D to review operations for the future of North Weald Airfield through the continuing work of the North Weald Airfield's Strategy Cabinet Committee.
- 1.3 The major corporate policy issues determined by the Cabinet during the Council year are a reflection of the priority objectives set out in 1.2 above. The responsibility for these and other issues falls within the Leader's Portfolio. Priorities were also determined for each of the other 8 portfolios and details of these are set out within the relevant sections below.
- 1.4 The development of a number of policies and initiatives falling within the Safer, Cleaner, Greener concept was also carried out during the year. This involved progress on the Safer, Cleaner, Greener Strategy itself, the drafting of a CCTV policy, an accreditation process and enforcement procedures, and a response to the Policing Green Paper. It also included work on the proposals in the Epping Forest Transport Strategy 2009-2016.

2. PORTFOLIO CHANGES

- 2.1 The number of portfolios covered by Cabinet Members was increased from 8 to 9 with the Corporate Support Services responsibilities previously dealt with alongside Finance and Performance Management, being separated to form a new Portfolio which also includes ICT. Details of the Portfolios and Portfolio Holders are set out below:

Leader's Portfolio - Councillor Mrs Di Collins

Civil Engineering and Maintenance - Councillor Richard Bassett

Corporate Support Services and ICT - Councillor Mitch Cohen

Community Wellbeing - Councillor Ms Syd Stavrou

Environment - Councillor Mrs Mary Sartin

Finance and Performance Management - Councillor Chris Whitbread

Housing - Councillor David Stallan
Leisure and Young People - Councillor Mrs Heather Harding
Planning and Economic Development - Councillor Mrs Anne Grigg

3. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

3.1 Council Budgets 2009/10

3.1.1 (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 2009/10 with an anticipated reduction in the General Fund balance of £704,000.

(b) an increase in the target for the 2009/10 Continuing Services Budget (CSB) from £17.9 m to 18.1 m (including growth items);

(c) an increase in the target for the 2009/10 District Development Fund (DDF) net spend from £0.7 m to £1.25 m.

(d) an increase of 2.5% in the District Council Tax to raise the charge for a Band 'D' property from £143.01 to £146.61.

(e) the four year capital programme 2009/10 - 12/13;

(f) the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2009/10 - 12/13; and

(g) the Council's policy on General Fund Revenue Balances to remain that they be allowed to fall no lower than 25% of the Net Budget Requirement;

3.1.2 Included within the revised estimates was the 2009/10 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 4%.

3.1.3 The budget used £0.8m of reserves, but this was considered affordable and the Council's policy on the level of reserves could still be maintained. It was intended to also bring the budget back into balance during the period covered by the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The budget had been based on assumptions that Council Tax would increase by 2.5% and the Housing Revenue Account rents increase of 4% had been through a robust process of development prior to being agreed.

3.1.4 Savings of £60,000 were found, as a consequence of which, parking tariffs could remain at their current levels. It was also intended to move the provision for the Youth Council from the Continuing Services Budget (CSB) to the District Development Fund (DDF); the Youth Council would now be expected to justify their funding levels each year. The increase in grant from the Government rose by 0.5% for the year, and there is no certainty over future funding. The Council is a low Council Tax authority, although £300,000 of accumulative savings per annum would be required for the three years after 2009/10.

3.2 Essex Local Area Agreement 2

- 3.2.1 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are contractual relationships between the Government and local authorities intended to secure improvements in priority service areas through enhanced partnership working and improved coordination. The development of the second agreement for Essex, for the period 2008-11, was led by the Essex Partnership Forum, which had formally endorsed the final document on 22 April 2008. The LAA was subsequently agreed by Essex County Council on 6 May 2008. The District Council agreed to adopt and participate in the second Essex LAA (Liberating Potential) with a commitment to work in partnership with the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to achieve the wider improvements sought by the LAA.
- 3.2.2 The adoption of the LAA for Essex committed the Council to pursue the delivery of the local priorities and targets. There were a total of ten priority themes within the LAA, of which the Council had agreed to 'have regard to' six. The targets for these themes were drawn from the new National Indicator Set for Local Government.
- 3.2.3 The LSP also signed up to the LAA. Along with other Partnerships in Essex, the LSP received a share of 'Reward Grant' monies to be used in respect of suitable schemes, each of which would help in achieving key targets. The monies, totalling £453,000 for the Epping Forest District, were to be used in respect of a variety of schemes including a comprehensive supported programme for people with learning difficulties; establishment of emotional health and wellbeing groups, parenting programmes, a Youth Officer post within the Youth Justice System, a community transport initiative to assist in access to after school clubs and enhancement of CCTV Systems.

3.3 Adoption of East of England Plan

- 3.3.1 (Although this item is included within the Leader's Portfolio, the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development worked closely together on this matter). The East of England Plan was adopted and published on 12 May 2008. The Plan embeds, within the statutory planning system, sustainable long-term proposals for development in a region with particularly strong growth pressure. It represents a 15-20 year vision to tackle climate change, address housing shortages and strengthen the region's economy.
- 3.3.2 The Plan contains targets for the Essex Districts for the provision of new houses and jobs. It also contains strategic policies for key urban centres (including Harlow) and the sub-regions of the London Arc (including the Epping Forest District), the Essex Thames Gateway and Haven Gateway. The main implications for the District were the urban extensions to Harlow that would fall within the District and a minimum target of 3,500 new houses to be developed within the District by 2021. It was intended to fully review the Plan and take it forward to 2031, whereby the District could expect further increases in the rate of housing provision between 2021 and 2031.
- 3.3.3 It also contains reduced job growth targets, and promotes the retention of town and neighbourhood centres, with a clearer definition of the role of each centre being encouraged. However, it makes little mention of the provision of the necessary infrastructure to support the targets within the Plan. It was felt that strategic reviews of the Green Belt would be needed to accompany the growth requirements promoted by the Plan, but the District's continued location within the London Arc implied that

the current policies of restraint would remain in force, with greater emphasis on the promotion of more positive management and use of the Green Belt.

- 3.3.4 The Plan became the subject of a judicial review following an application by Hertfordshire County Council. In the meantime, in responding to the requirements of the Plan and formulating the Local Development Framework, the Council was continuing joint coordinating working with neighbouring authorities and partner organisations in a way which best meets the needs of the District.

3.4 Other Issues

- 3.4.1 Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the Review of the Executive Constitution and a Review of the Calendar of Meetings.

4. CIVIL ENGINEERING AND MAINTENANCE

4.1 Priorities 2008/09

- 4.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objective for this portfolio in 2008/9:

- To consider the outcome of the pilot 'localism' arrangements in respect of local highway maintenance, and to bring forward proposals for adoption of similar arrangements within the Epping Forest District.

4.2 Parkmap - Procurement of Software Package

- 4.2.1 The District Council undertakes parking enforcement for its own off street car parks and on street parking restrictions through the Agency Agreement with the County Council. For the Parking Team dealing with telephone enquiries to be able to undertake their roles effectively, access is needed to information on restrictions throughout the District. The County Council use software known as 'Parkmap' to record the nature and geographical details of restrictions, which is then overlaid onto proprietary mapping software.

- 4.2.2 Whilst the District Council originally held two licences for 'Parkmap', since April 2005, when the Agency reverted to the County Council, there had been no updating of the system. With the increasing level of parking activity being undertaken through parking reviews, it was felt essential that sufficient licences were in place to enable multiple access to the information, and that the system was updated and fully maintained.

- 4.2.3 To facilitate good customer service and ensure that enforcement was properly undertaken, it was essential for a range of officers to have access to an updated 'Parkmap' system. This ensures that information can be speedily and accurately provided to enquirers without the need to refer them to the Parking Office or the County Council. Accordingly, approval was given to the procurement of the updated Parkmap software and maintenance package.

4.3 Management of Main Rivers

- 4.3.1 The District Council managed a number of main river watercourses and associated flood alleviation schemes throughout the District. Following a change in legislation on 1 April 2006, the enforcement responsibility for these assets was transferred to the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency had contracted back the

management of these sites to the District Council for the period from 1 April 2006 until 31 October 2008.

- 4.3.2 The Environment Agency decided to competitively tender this work, with the Director of Environment and Street Scene authorised to prepare and submit a tender for a further two year contract on the basis that there were no cost risks to the Council. The Environment Agency carried out a rigorous procurement exercise but the Council's submission proved unsuccessful.
- 4.3.3 There are a number of financial and other implications for the District Council arising from the failure to be awarded the contract. These include the loss of benefit associated with the District Council undertaking the work alongside other work required through its own riparian responsibilities; the likely refusal of the Environment Agency to take over the flood alleviation schemes with the ongoing maintenance responsibility and the associated flood risk management therefore remaining with the District Council; and the need for it to commit adequate resources towards flood defence expense to carry out its riparian owner responsibilities.

4.4 Out of Hours Land Drainage Standby Service

- 4.4.1 An Out of Hours Land Drainage Standby Service for dealing with flood emergencies has been operating in the District since the large scale flooding in 2000. The service guarantees the availability of Land Drainage Engineers, outside normal working hours, who receive additional payments under the Council's Out of Hours Working Policy. When the Environment Agency entered into a contractual arrangement with the District Council for the management of main river assets in 2006, the Agency funded the service under the new contract. This arrangement continued until the end of the contract in October 2008.
- 4.4.2 The Agency was no longer willing to pay for the service as it considered that the scope of the Council's Land Drainage Standby Service fell within the Environment Agency's main river responsibilities. Although it would endeavour to assist the District with flooding emergencies associated with main rivers only, it could not guarantee a response as there might be competing priorities elsewhere.
- 4.4.3 To ensure provision to deal with flood alleviation schemes and assets was maintained, the District Council agreed to continue the Standby Service and fund it from its own resources.

4.5 Improvement and Enhancement Works - Bakers Lane Car Park, Epping

- 4.5.1 Approval was given to improvement and enhancement works, costing approximately £120,000, at Bakers Lane car park in Epping. The Council manages a total of 18 car parks in the District, and, in recent years, major engineering improvement works had been carried out to some of these, including Cottis Lane in Epping and Burton Road and Vere Road at Loughton Broadway. Bakers Lane car park had been identified as being in need of works, including improvements to the drainage, enhanced lighting, a new CCTV system, resurfacing of the tarmac surface and new lining. These works will improve and enhance the Council's asset and provide better safety and security to the car park users.

4.6 National Concessionary Fares Scheme in Essex - Transfer to Essex County Council

- 4.6.1 The new National Concessionary Fares Scheme began on 1 April 2008 but, despite it now being a national scheme, was being administered by local authorities in their roles as travel concession authorities. The Department for Transport recognised that this is not the most efficient or cost effective way of providing a national scheme and this aspect would be re-examined as part of the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 4.6.2 In Essex, the Districts and the County Council were seeking to achieve an earlier transfer of the duties and risks associated with being travel concession authorities. A draft Participation Agreement document was provided by Essex County Council in anticipation of the transfer of the local scheme to the County and that document was approved by the District Council.
- 4.6.3 The National Scheme was not being fully funded by the Department for Transport and this placed considerable financial pressure on many authorities. As the take up and use of passes increases, the demands for reimbursement from the bus operators will also increase. This represents a considerable financial risk to travel concession authorities, which the proposed scheme limits, by fixing the contributions from Districts for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

5. CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES AND ICT

5.1 Priorities 2008/09

The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

- To ensure that ICT is provided in a strategic manner to support performance improvement throughout the Council;
- To undertake a review of the Council's depot facilities within the district with a view to rationalising existing provision, the disposal of site(s) surplus to requirements; and the re-provision of suitable depot facilities for the Waste Management and Grounds Maintenance Services;

5.2 Business Continuity and Resilience

- 5.2.1 A couple of incidents occurring early in 2008 resulted in interruptions to the main power supply for the Civic Offices Complex. The consequent disruption highlighted the need for improvements to be made to the Council's Business Continuity and Resilience arrangements.
- 5.2.2 In the first instance, the Civic Offices remained without power for 39 hours following the damage to a high voltage cable during an excavation in Epping High Street by a third party contractor. The major disruption suffered had been the loss of the data network and computer services, although the back up generator provided emergency power to keep a number of critical systems operating such as the fire alarms. The second incident had been caused by two appreciable power fluctuations in rapid succession, leading to a further loss of computer services for 24 hours.

5.2.3 The Council consequently agreed an allocation of £20,000 to cover the costs of providing a secondary 11KV power supply at the Civic Offices. A further review of critical services is to be undertaken, to identify additional measures to re-distribute essential supplies and increase the capacity of the back up generator supply.

5.3 Car and Cycle Allowance Policy

5.3.1 Approval was given to a Car and Cycle Allowance Policy covering all staff and casual workers employed by the Council. The policy set out guidelines on when employees were able to claim allowances, what and how they were able to claim.

5.3.2 The policy would be used by Directors to ensure that the appropriate employees were designated as essential users and by managers in ensuring that any claims submitted by their employees were valid.

5.4 Cycle to Work

5.4.1 The Government has introduced a Green Transport initiative which grants tax incentives for staff purchasing cycles. The Council has adopted a Cycle to Work Policy which incorporates this concept.

5.4.2 The policy involves a salary sacrifice scheme whereby the cycles remained the property of the Council until the hire period finished (i.e. the pay back period, which was usually over 12 or 18 months). At the end of this period, employees have the opportunity to buy the cycle at a 'fair market value'. The cycle has to be used for 50% of the commute into work and can be used freely in the employee's own time.

5.5 Land Charges Income 2008/09

5.5.1 In terms of income from the Council's Local Land Charges Service in 2008/09, there was a shortfall of approximately £250,000 when compared with the income level anticipated. The level of income was affected by the overall reduction in searches, exacerbated by the downturn in the housing market and the increasing numbers of personal searches as opposed to official searches.

5.5.2 Official searches were charged at £100 (reduced during the year from £120), whereas personal searches were charged at £11 (there being fewer searches in general and fewer official searches in particular. The service was also complying with the Government requirement, from September 2009, to set the official search fee on a cost recovery basis. Thus, a more realistic revised estimate was required for the second half of the financial year along with a close analysis of providing the service in future in an effort to reduce costs, including a review of the staffing levels concerned.

5.5.3 The Council has agreed to review the cost of providing the Local Land Charge Service. The projected income level was adjusted to reflect housing market conditions, the increased number of personal searches being undertaken in preference to official searches, and the calculation of the official search fee on a cost recovery basis.

5.6 Sickness Absence

- 5.6.1 The 2008 Annual Report of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development showed that the public sector has an average of 9.8 days sickness absence per person each year compared with 7.2 days in the private sector. The public sector figures also include Health, Social Care, Police and Education.
- 5.6.2 The outturn figure for the District Council is 2006/07 was 10.89 reducing to 8.48 in 2007/08. However, there was an increase of 1.29 over the first three quarter periods in 2008/09 and this had been of concern. Consequently an analysis of the reasons for the increase was carried out with measures implemented aimed at improving performance.
- 5.6.3 The new measures included absence training for managers, provision of a dedicated resource within Human Resources to work with managers on absence cases and new businesses planning processes aimed at improving the Council's absence figures.

5.7 Depot Facilities and Fleet Operations

- 5.7.1 There are a number of proposals, at varying stages of progress, involving Council owned land and depots at: Langston Road, Loughton; Town Mead Depot, Waltham Abbey, Epping Depot and land at North Weald Airfield.
- 5.7.2 In respect of the Langston Road Depot, outline planning permission for the development of the site for B1 and/or B2 and/or B8 use was sought and granted in July 2008. Initial plans for relocation of the Museum store at Town Mead have been prepared and it is understood that it is intended to relocate the refuse vehicles at a site in North Weald.
- 5.7.3 A development brief has been jointly commissioned by this Council and Essex County Council covering land at St John's Epping which incorporates the Epping Depot site. It is understood the users of the Depot would relocate to North Weald also. Urban Practitioners, the consultants are preparing various options following consultation.

5.8 Other Issues

- 5.8.1 Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:
- Borough Lorry Park - Termination of Lease
 - Church Hill Car Park, Loughton - Residential Development Land Sale
 - Release of Restrictive Covenant - Loughton Hall
 - Planned Maintenance Programmes
 - Server Virtualisation and Storage Solution
 - Domestic Abuse Policy
 - Gazetteer Consolidation
 - Civic Offices - Planned Maintenance Programme

6. COMMUNITY WELLBEING

6.1 Priorities 2008/09

6.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

- To contribute to the alleviation of health inequalities in the district, through effective collaboration with other statutory and voluntary agencies;
- To develop a resource aimed at reducing young persons' fear of crime, through working with the newly formed Youth Council;

6.2 Grant Aid Scheme and Voluntary Sector Assistance

6.2.1 During the year, a total of £105,277 was allocated from the grant aid scheme, either through longer term three-year agreements or on individual schemes, to various voluntary and community groups;

6.2.2 Further grants totalling £111,060 and £38,170 were awarded respectively to the Epping Forest District Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF). VAEF also received further assistance to offset accommodation and other overhead costs.

6.3 Essex Compact

6.3.1 A Compact is a written agreement between the statutory and voluntary/community sector aimed at improving their relationship to joint advantage. It recognises the complementary roles of each sector in the development of citizenship, a sense of community and the creation of a just and inclusive society, whilst setting out principles and standards to ensure that relationship is open and fair. The Essex Compact was originally produced in 2004, then updated and extended during 2007-08 to reflect the changing and developing relationship between the voluntary and public sectors. The new Essex Compact was adopted by the County in April 2008, following an extensive consultation exercise. In writing the new Essex Compact the County paid close attention to district compacts which were up and running in nearly all the Essex districts/boroughs and to the National Compact. The District Council signed up to the new Essex Compact as it is seen as a means of enhancing further the existing relationship with the voluntary sector.

6.3.2 The Epping Forest District Compact was finalised in 2004 following lengthy and thorough consultations between representatives of the voluntary sector, VAEF and the District Council. It was adopted by other partner organisations including Essex County Council, the Primary Care Trust and the Local Strategic Partnership and has contributed to an effective working relationship between voluntary sector and all the partner organisations in the District. The intention is to update the District Compact in the near future so that the various Compacts are even more aligned.

6.4 Furniture Exchange Scheme - Use of Premises at Waltham Abbey

6.4.1 A furniture exchange scheme for the District operated from an outlet at the District Council's depot in Town Mead, Waltham Abbey between February 2007 and July 2008. The scheme had been run in partnership with the Lighthouse Project, a 'not for profit' organisation which had had experience of running a similar scheme in Brentwood. The scheme proved successful and the service was continuing to expand at the time of closure. As a clear need for the operation of a furniture

exchange scheme was demonstrated, the partner organisations had continued to look at the various options available.

6.4.2 Voluntary Action Epping Forest put together a business plan for a new scheme and a potential opportunity arose for the use of a District Council owned shop premises in Waltham Abbey for the scheme to operate from. The Council agreed to an allocation of £20,000 towards the annual rental costs of the new premises, subject to the premises being successfully bid for and an appropriate grant application being agreed. The trading position of the scheme would be reviewed annually.

6.4.3 There is a recognised need for a Furniture Recycling Scheme in the District. It could bring substantial benefits in terms of job creation (particularly for those with learning disabilities), skills training, disadvantaged people being able to access good quality furniture at minimal costs, a positive contribution to the environment and helping the Council to meet its recycling targets.

6.5 Grant Aid Policy Issues

6.5.1 A review of the policy and procedures for the Grant Aid Scheme for Voluntary and Community Organisations was undertaken, with the review focusing on policies in place at other local authorities. Such reviews are carried out on a periodic basis to identify good practice and put new ideas into use where appropriate.

A number of changes were agreed as a consequence of the review. These included:

- the implementation of a scorecard system as a "tool" towards a more objective approach towards the awarding of grants.
- the introduction of a weighting factor within the scorecard for groups in receipt of recent grants.
- a factor within the scorecard for assessing a group's level of activity within the District.
- a requirement for groups to be formally constituted.
- a greater alignment of successful applications with Council objectives.

7. ENVIRONMENT

7.1 Priorities 2008/09

7.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

To address the recommendations and criticisms contained within the Audit Commission's report on the Council's Waste Management Service, with particular emphasis on:

- reviewing the garden waste collection service;
- considering the introduction of a food waste collection service;
- the wider implementation of recycling into flats and communal buildings;

- the adoption of the Essex Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy; and
- continued improvement in the local street scene;

7.2 Adoption of Essex Joint Municipal Waste Strategy

7.2.1 The Council formally adopted the Essex Joint Municipal Waste Strategy (JMWMS). The JMWMS had been subject to an extensive consultation process earlier in 2008, the outcome of which had been to agree with the strategy put forward, particularly given the following elements:

- continued high levels of recycling, with an aspirational target of 60% by 2020;
- mechanical and biological treatment of residual waste;
- anaerobic digestion of separated organic wastes; and
- possible use of solid recovered fuel (SRF) from the Mechanical & Biological Treatment (MBT) plant to provide energy.

7.3 Inter Authority Agreement - Waste Service Development Plan

7.3.1 The Waste Service Development Plan (SDP) is a key stage in the development of the Inter Authority Agreements between the Waste Collection Authorities, (the district and borough councils) and Essex County Council (the Waste Disposal Authority). The SDP sets out the base position and the desired position, and outlines for the next 25 to 30 years what the Waste Collection Authorities intend to collect, how and where they intend to take it for treatment and/or disposal. The Inter Authority Agreements potentially provide for the County Council to financially support the collection arrangements of Waste Collection Authorities through capital and revenue financial support. In advance of determining the final contents, the District Council agreed the first stage of the Plan, in principle, thereby enabling the timetable for the Inter Authority Agreement to be met.

7.4 Removal of Untaxed Road Vehicles

7.4.1 Devolved powers were adopted enabling the Council, working with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the Police, through the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition equipment, to remove vehicles that are untaxed but not necessarily in such a condition that they could be considered to be abandoned. The service is provided by the Council's existing abandoned vehicle contractor, Redcorn Limited, who are recognised by the DVLA as a contractor able to undertake this role.

7.4.2 The action is taken only if the tax disc is more than 28 days out of date, and the vehicle concerned on highways land not private land. The scheme is administered through a Memorandum of Understanding between the DVLA, the Council and Redcorn.

- 7.4.3 Untaxed vehicles, along with those abandoned, are often associated with anti-social and criminal behaviour. In many cases such vehicles are also not roadworthy and are uninsured, with 80% of impounded vehicles nationally being found to be without an MOT certificate or valid insurance. The DVLA encourages local authorities to adopt the necessary powers and assist them in the management of a growing problem.

7.5 Climate Change Strategy

- 7.5.1 The Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change was signed by the District Council in December 2007, committing it to the development of a Climate Change Strategy. A strategy has now been adopted by the Council, the main objective of which is to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from the Council's own operations and from the District as a whole and to prepare and adapt to predicted climate change impacts.

7.6 Other Issues

- 7.6.1 Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:
- Bobbingworth Tip - Progress Reports
 - Garden Waste Collection Service - Procurement Budget
 - Waste Management Partnership Board
 - Waste Management Service - Exceptional Fuel Costs

8. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

8.1 Priorities 2008/09

The Cabinet adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

To maintain the Council's sound financial position and keep in place the policy of increasing the Council Tax by less than the increase in the Retail Prices Index;

To ensure the Council provides good value for money;

8.2 Council's Investments

- 8.2.1 Given the turbulence experienced in financial markets and the substantial falls in global stock markets, the Council reviewed its investment position and the risks it faced, particularly in the light of problems with Icelandic Banks.
- 8.2.2 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy allows up to £12 million to be invested with banks that have a short-term rating of F1+ and a long-term rating of AA- or a maximum of £5million with banks rated F1 and A respectively. The credit ratings were provided by three agencies and consolidated into a list of approved counterparties by the Council's advisers. In line with Government Guidance, Icelandic banks were included as their credit ratings were good, with competitive rates of interest. The Council placed a number of loans with them, all of which were repaid on their due dates without problem.

- 8.2.3 Concerns were raised informally regarding Icelandic banks by Councillors in November 2007 and subsequently no new loans were entered into. The status of Heritable Bank was reviewed but, as it was registered and regulated in the United Kingdom, it had remained on the counterparty list. Loans totalling £2.5 million were made to Heritable Bank during September 2008, with repayment dates of May and June 2009. On 7 October 2008, Heritable Bank was placed in administration because of difficulties experienced by its Icelandic parent company. Although the Council was designated an ordinary creditor with Heritable Bank and did not get privileged status, the Council's claim was instigated with the administrators. Heritable Bank falling into administration had no impact on the Council's front line services.
- 8.2.4 In respect of the Council's other investments, the money invested with Northern Rock was returned on the due date, whilst a loan of £1.5 million with Bradford & Bingley, due for repayment in March 2009, was covered by the Government's guarantee. The Council also has £11.5 million invested with four different Irish financial institutions following the Irish Government's guarantee of deposits on 30 September 2008. In addition, the Council has £7 million invested with the Royal Bank of Scotland, and with the Government's continuing support providing additional confidence, the Council would consider making additional investments up to a maximum of £12 million.
- 8.2.5 Heritable Bank's assets were frozen in the United Kingdom and could not be returned to Iceland. The only overseas investments in the Council's portfolio were with Irish institutions, and none of the maturity dates exceeded the Irish Government's two year guarantee. The Council had £12 million invested in the Bank of Scotland, and there were no plans to invest further funds with it at the present time. The Council also has £5 million invested with the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation.
- 8.2.6 To identify potential ways of enhancing controls the Council agreed to bring forward the date for its Treasury Management Audit and for a full list of the investments and corresponding maturity dates to be more widely publicised.

8.3 Review of Capital Programme 2008/09 - 2012/13

- 8.3.1 The Council determined the Capital Programme for the period 2008/09 to 2012/13. The Capital Programme forms the basis of the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan. The Capital Programme updated the programme approved in February 2008 adding the subsequent new schemes and allocations agreed. Additions to the capital programme in three areas were included. Firstly, a new project to carry out works at Ongar Leisure Centre, at a net cost of £507,000, for a £1,454,000 scheme was agreed. Secondly, an upgrade of the call answering equipment used by Careline costing £50,000 was approved. Thirdly, an increase of £5,000 in the annual allocation of grounds maintenance equipment was approved. A further £10,000 allocation was added to the programme following the agreement to purchase a replacement Fire and Rescue vehicle at North Weald Airfield.
- 8.3.2 Funding available to finance the capital schemes and the suggested application of the different sources of funding over the five-year period was reassessed. External funding from grants and private sources of £4,490,000 was identified, and it was agreed that the estimated capital receipts of £14,838,000 and estimated revenue contributions of £31.052 million be applied to finance the Capital Programme. In summary, the balance of capital receipts will reduce from £26,824,000 to

£13,305,000 during the period, whilst the Major Repairs Fund balance increased from £7,290,000 to £7,802,000.

8.4 Capital Strategy 2008/13

8.4.1 Approval was given to the Capital Strategy for the period 2008-13. The Strategy detailed past capital investment achievements, assessed the committed schemes in 2008/09 and considered proposed projects. It also identified partnership arrangements with local authorities aimed at enhancing the programme.

8.4.2 In approving the Strategy, the Council reaffirmed the ranking of the Key Capital Priorities below. It also approved funding of £120,000 for improvement and enhancement works to Bakers Lane Car Park, Epping, £90,000 for the purchase and implementation of a Cash Receipting and Income Management System, a carry forward of £170,000 on the North Weald Airfield Market Improvements Works and, financed by a County Council grant, £25,000 for the purchase of additional refuse bins.

- Improving the Council's Housing Stock;
- Meeting Housing Need;
- Improving Quality of Life;
- Protecting the Environment;
- Promoting Economic Development;
- Regenerating Areas in Need;
- Delivering Quality Public Services through e-Government; and
- Improving Private Sector Housing Stock.

8.5 Other Issues

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

- Use of Resources Assessment 2007/08 - Self Assessment Submission
- Replacement of Cash Receipting and Income Management System
- Pay Protection Policy
- Council Plan on Cabinet Priorities

9. HOUSING

9.1 Priorities 2008/09

9.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

- To consider the development potential of a package of small Council owned sites to provide additional affordable housing;
- To consider significantly increasing the funding for off street parking schemes on Council estates;
- To undertake an Options Appraisal for the future delivery of the Council's Careline Service to older and other vulnerable people;

9.2 Energy Performance Certificates - Social Rented Dwellings

- 9.2.1 The Government introduced legislation requiring Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) to be issued for all buildings to improve energy efficiency. This was to be introduced in phases, starting with residential properties as part of the Home Information Packs from August 2007 and, as of 1 October 2008, extending to all private and social rented homes, including Council dwellings. EPC's for commercial buildings were to be introduced from April 2009.
- 9.2.2 As the legislation is mandatory, EPC's have to be produced for all new tenancies (i.e., when a property becomes void and is advertised under the Choice Based Lettings Scheme) and Right to Buy applications. The amount of work involved in producing EPC's meant that a new post was required to meet the demand and, accordingly, approval was given to the establishment of an additional Voids Officer post.
- 9.2.3 The Council is also investigating the possibility of developing an income stream by carrying out EPC's for local businesses.

9.3 Review of Epping Forest Careline

- 9.3.1 Following the completion of a Best Value Review in 2004, it was agreed that Careline provided a good service and that the service should be retained, subject to a further review after a number of years. That further review, carried out during the year, considered three main options for the future delivery of the service:
- retaining the existing service;
 - externalising the service; or
 - retaining and enhancing the service.
- 9.3.2 The Careline service is funded mainly through Essex County Council's Supporting People Grant. The County Council did not favour the service being externalised and felt that, if the Careline Centre was retained and enhanced, it would provide a better service to residents. In addition, if the Careline service was externalised, under the Supporting People contract, the Council would only be able to enter into a short-term contract with any external provider, pending the outcome of their Essex-wide review of alarm centres. This would leave the Council's service vulnerable and subject to changing again in the future. Essex County Council were happy to continue with the same level of funding, which they feel is more than justified if the service is enhanced.
- 9.3.3 Over the years the number of alarm connections had increased with a commensurate increase in the number of computer stations and resultant limits on available office space. For the service to be retained it was necessary to extend the accommodation into the adjacent house, whilst also converting the first floor to an additional older person's flat to be incorporated into the sheltered housing scheme.
- 9.3.4 In the circumstances, and especially bearing in mind how well valued the service was, approval was given to retaining it in-house, to the extension works and enhancement required.

9.3.5 However, it was also agreed that consideration should be given to better utilising the Careline facility, by using the Control Service to receive routine repair requests out of normal office hours, monitoring CCTV cameras, and to seek to connect alarm equipment from other Councils.

9.4 Off Street Parking Programme

9.4.1 Following the return of the Highways Agency to Essex County Council, the District Council had taken over responsibility for the off street parking programme. This meant that all previously identified off street parking schemes had been reassessed in line with a new procedure, with all the sites ranked according to their new assessment score. A detailed feasibility had been carried out of the highest ranked schemes, and local residents consulted. With the growth of car ownership, residents had experienced problems when parking their cars on estates within the District, with vehicles being forced on to grass verges.

9.4.2 A number of proposals were implemented aimed at alleviating the current problems. These include an additional £600,000 to fund further off street parking schemes from 2009/10 and a revision to the policy on vehicular crossovers, increasing the maximum permitted grass verge to be removed, from 6 to 12 metres, subject to the outcome, in each instance, of a consultation exercise involving local residents and ward members.

9.5 Shared Ownership Schemes - Approach in the Current Market

9.5.1 One of the effects of the current economic climate and property downturn is that housing associations are finding it difficult to sell shared ownership properties, particularly as shared ownership is aimed at first time buyers, who are presently finding it difficult to obtain mortgages. The Council's current Shared Ownership Policy was adopted just prior to the severe downturn.

9.5.2 To alleviate some of the difficulties being experienced by housing associations, the Council agreed that, in situations where they are required to provide shared ownership properties within affordable housing developments, by either the Council's Shared Ownership Policy or Section 106 Agreements, they be allowed to provide these properties either as social rented properties and/or through "Rent now - Buy later" Schemes, whereby applicants are able to rent newly-built properties at "intermediate rents", on the basis that they are able to purchase equity tranches in the property at a later date, up to full ownership. In addition, where the provision of shared ownership properties is required by virtue of existing Section 106 Agreements, the Council has agreed that, in suitable instances, variations to the Agreements can be made, in line with this approval.

9.5.3 This revised approach will be reviewed every six months until the economic climate has improved to a point that mortgages for first time buyers are more easily obtainable.

9.6 Other Issues

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

- Disabled Facilities Grants - Application of Additional Conditions
- Review of Housing Allocations Scheme

- Springfields Improvement Programme
- Private Sector Grant Capital Programme
- Replacement Heating and Re-Wiring programme
- Digital Upgrade of Communal T.V Aerials
- Housing 'Tree' Management Budget
- Rental Loan Scheme - Additional Funding
- Home Ownership Grants Schemes - Continuation

10. LEISURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

10.1 Priorities 2008/09

10.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:

- To complete negotiations with Sports and Leisure Management Ltd and King Harold School, in respect of the future management of the Council's sports centres at Epping and Waltham Abbey;
- To ensure the maximisation of opportunities presented by the London 2012 Olympic Games, and in particular the legacy of the white water canoe venue at Waltham Abbey; and
- To undertake the feasibility of the provision of a new sports hall at Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool, to improve access and increase participation in health enhancing activity in the area.

10.2 Free Swimming for the Over 60s and Under 16s

10.2.1 To promote free swimming for those over the age of 60 or under the age of 16, the Government made funding available to the Council for the financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11. The funding in respect of the over-60s was set at £38,950 for the District, whilst the available funding for the under-16s has been made available following the decision by the Council to participate in the over-60s initiative. Provision of free swimming to these age groups assists the Council in meeting its targets in respect of the national performance indicators on adult participation in sport, the reduction of obesity in children and healthy life expectancy.

10.3 Ongar Leisure Centre – Proposed Development of Playing Fields

10.3.1 To enable the provision of a range of facilities which address local issues of health inequality and disadvantage; the Council is pursuing the development of the playing fields and Ongar Leisure Centre.

10.3.2 The Council previously supported, in principle, a range of improvements proposed for the playing fields at Ongar Leisure Centre, including provision of a multi-sport site offering facilities to maximise participation in sport by people of all ages and abilities. A District Playing Pitch Strategy produced in 2007 identified a lack of good quality playing pitches in the District and particularly in the northern sector. It also highlighted the opportunity for financial support from the Football Foundation to establish a multi-sport hub site at Ongar, which would include junior, youth and adult facilities for football, rugby, athletics and cricket. This financial support would be dependent upon the confirmation of matched funding being available. A strong indication was received from the Essex Football Association, that a further contribution for the project of £200,000 would be available as part of the

Olympic 2012 legacy funding. A funding application to the Football Foundation has therefore been made with a view to development commencing at Ongar in the near future.

- 10.3.3 The Shelley ward within Ongar has been highlighted as an area experiencing some problems associated with low income, unemployment and some health inequalities. Youth anti-social behaviour has also recently increased locally. It is anticipated that the planned facilities at Ongar would provide a much needed, accessible resource for young people, along with opportunities to address the health and well being of people of all ages in the locality.

10.4 Limes Farm Hall, Chigwell

- 10.4.1 The District Council agreed to take over the short-term responsibility of Limes Farm Hall at Chigwell, until 31 March 2010, and to maintain its community use whilst its longer-term future is determined. This decision followed notification from Chigwell Parish Council of its intention to cease management of the hall with effect from 31 March 2009.
- 10.4.2 The Hall is a centre of activity and provides a community focus for a large number of residents at Limes Farm. Because of the need to maintain the facility's availability in an area of significant need, there is a short-term requirement to provide alternative management arrangements. This includes administration of bookings, responsibility for maintenance, and employment and supervision of a Caretaker/Cleaner. The District Council has approved funding of £47,520 to meet these costs.
- 10.4.3 The feasibility of a multi-agency approach to service provision at the site is being examined. This will include organisations such as the County Council, West Essex Primary Care Trust and Chigwell Community Trust. It is also hoped that Chigwell Parish Council will fully participate. A further report will then be prepared following the conclusion of the consultation with local residents and the feasibility study.

10.5 Epping Forest Youth Council

- 10.5.1 Established in early 2008, the Epping Forest Youth Council developed into a most valuable resource to the District Council. The 17 Youth Councillors, aged between 13 and 17 years, undertook a wide range of training and development to support them in their roles and each took on specific responsibility for a Portfolio or area of business. The Youth Council implemented the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken by the Council, with over 900 young people responding to an on-line and paper survey. The survey identified local issues important to young people and culminated in the Big Youth Debate in November 2008, involving Members of Parliament and Heads of Police, Primary Care Trust and Children's Services. The Big Debate set the framework for Youth Council work in the medium term.
- 10.5.2 The Youth Council was successful in securing external funding in excess of £9,500. West Essex Area Forum funding of £5,500 was used for local youth project work. Youth Capital Funding of £2200 was put towards the costs of staging the Big Debate, and the remainder of the funding allocated to the provision of uniforms, marketing and youth office equipment. Officers, local partners and stakeholders were very impressed with the commitment and ability of the Youth Council and fully supported their key priorities. In recognition of that support, the District Council approved £12,000 towards the ongoing provision of the Youth Council.

10.6 North Weald Airfield - Market

- 10.6.1 The operators of North Weald Market, Rondeau (General Markets) Limited, trading as Hughmark International, went into administration in January 2009. A temporary licence was subsequently granted to Hughmark Continental Limited to run the market for a four week period (covering five years). The temporary licence was granted following due diligence checks on ownership, insurance and the position of the Administrators.
- 10.6.2 To safeguard the future of the market, the Council agreed to negotiate towards the assignment of the licence to Hughmark Continental for the remainder of the existing term until August 2010. This enabled the Council to safeguard the income stream as far as possible and support both stallholders and customers by maintaining the continuity of the market.

10.7 Other Issues

- 10.7.1 Other issues dealt with under this portfolio during the course of the year included the following:
- Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool – Feasibility of Provision of new Sports Hall
 - Loughton Leisure Centre Maintenance Work
 - North Weald Airfield – Fire Cover
 - Waltham Abbey Sports Centre – Management Arrangements

11. PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

11.1 Priorities 2008/09

- 11.1.1 The Council adopted the following priority objectives for this portfolio in 2008/09:
- To recognise the Government approval of the East of England Plan and to work with key partners to deliver the Local Development Framework and, in particular, to consult on the core strategy;
 - To respond to sustainability issues by the development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan for the district;
 - To continue work on development briefs for key sites at The Broadway in Loughton and the St John's area of Epping, and to adopt both following consultation;

11.2 North Weald Airfield Strategy

- 11.2.1 Following an extensive review, the Council made a number of decisions on its strategy for North Weald Airfield. To proceed with further strategic work, it agreed to produce a scoping report examining the intensification of aviation use with limited business or other uses, including leisure, to make it economically viable.

11.2.2 For tenants with leases without security of tenure on renewal at the Airfield, which are largely due to terminate in 2010, new ten year leases were offered, with five years guaranteed and annual break clauses thereafter.

11.3 Stansted Airport Generation 2 Proposals - Second Runway and Other Related Infrastructure

11.3.1 As a neighbouring local authority, the Council was invited to comment on planning applications to Uttlesford Council in respect of a second runway at Stansted Airport. Associated infrastructure applications related to buildings and other facilities, highways works, the change of use of agricultural land to nature conservation, common land and village green, and the demolition and reconstruction of numerous listed buildings.

11.3.2 The Council has always opposed a second runway at Stansted because of the long-term adverse effects on the character of the District and on the quality of life of affected residents, including aircraft noise, traffic generation, urbanisation pressures and infrastructure provision. Nothing in the applications or the supporting documentation alleviated these concerns. Thus the Council maintained its stance and put forward its objections to the applications on similar grounds.

11.4 Loughton Broadway Development and Design Brief

11.4.1 The company, Urban Practitioners, were commissioned to conduct a public consultation exercise on the proposed Development and Design Brief drawn-up for The Broadway area, in Loughton. Urban Practitioners conducted an analysis of the responses received and formulated recommended changes, subsequently adopted by the Council as follows:

- more information on the landmark building planned for the gateway site;
- an outline of the process for seeking an alternative location for the petrol station;
- minimising the impact of parking for new development on existing residents;
- further detailed design for the Vere Road proposals;
- funding of streetscape enhancements through section 106 Agreements;
- improving the links to Langston Road;
- local support for controlled parking zones;
- retaining the existing station parking;
- more facilities for young people;
- explaining the need for new housing in the area;
- highlighting that any new development around Vere Road or Burton Road would accommodate the servicing needs of the shops.

11.5 Development Plan Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

11.5.1 National Planning Policy requires a significant increase in the number of gypsy and traveller sites in appropriate locations, with a focus on increased provision over the next 3 to 5 years. Local development plans must include land zones for additional pitches. The Government has directed the District Council to produce such a plan by 29 September 2009.

11.5.2 A review of the East of England Plan will establish targets for all local authorities in the region. The level has yet to be finalised and the Council has disputed the draft figure of an additional 49 pitches in the District by 2011, estimating the need of an additional 35 pitches, based on emerging evidence from research.

11.5.3 As part of the process, the District Council also consulted with local residents. The responses received from that Consultation will be analysed and assessed to be taken into account as part of the plan to be submitted to the Government.

11.6 Sites in St John's Road, Epping

11.6.1 The Consultants, Urban Practitioners, were appointed to prepare a Development and Design Brief for the future redevelopment and reuse of several sites in St John's Road, Epping. The brief, the work of which was still ongoing, was to include options for realising the prospect of new community and commercial uses, as well as social housing. There was a special consultation day held at Epping Hall and three potential development options were under active investigation.

11.7 Other Issues

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

- Adoption of East of England Plan
- Loughton Town Centre Enhancement Scheme
- Award of Costs - Planning Appeal - Wansfell College
- Local Development Framework - Resource
- Building Control Fees and Charges 2009/10
- Conservation Officer Post
- Saving the Local Plan Alterations Policies