

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet **Date:** 14 December 2010
Subject: Operational Planning & Transport
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Syd Stavrou **Item:** 7(h)

Recommending:

The report of the Operational Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted

Operational Planning

On Friday 12 November, I met with John Preston and Stephan Solon who took me through the day to day procedures of the Planning and Economic Directorate in dealing with planning applications – from the applicant's initial enquiry through to the determination of the application. It was apparent that there is considerable interaction between the professional officers and their support staff, with support staff (after suitable and appropriate training) performing tasks which professionals might have done in previous years. Conversely it was also interesting to note that professional officers now undertake many routine tasks that traditionally were provided by administrative staff, such as typing up their own reports etc. This amelioration of boundaries, together with the use of improved technology has resulted in a much more streamlined and efficient service for our residents. Work is continuing on scanning historical documents and as all new applications are routinely scanned and added to the system as they come in, this will greatly increase electronic access to growing amounts of material. The ultimate determination of the officer's recommendation to committee, or in the case of delegated matters, the decision, is the result of several officers' reviewing the application. The checks and balances written into the department's procedures precludes any individual completely processing a matter without reference to and the involvement of (senior) colleagues.

It was noted with pleasure that EFDC Planning has joined a Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountants (CIPFA) benchmarking club. There is now a Government consultation about allowing Councils to set their own planning fees, so the benchmarking will be of obvious benefit when we reach that stage. A holding response is being prepared prior to a report being submitted for consideration by the Planning Scrutiny Panel.

Parking reviews

I am pleased to be able to report that work has recommenced on the parking reviews. I have to remind Members that these are being undertaken on a phased basis and therefore it will, unfortunately be some time, before work on all of them is

complete. In the meantime however, I have been able to take some modest steps to assist residents in streets near Loughton Station by agreeing with Sainsbury's to double the number of parking spaces on site for their employees, thus reducing parking pressure in adjacent residential areas.

Decriminalised parking enforcement

Members will recall that I have spoken in the past of the County Council's decision to cease the current on street enforcement agency with the District as of 1 of April 2011. A lot of work has been undertaken in order to deliver this very important service in a way that does not result in significant losses being made, which have to be met by the County Council. It is probable that one or two parking partnerships will be established which will comprise of a number of districts working together, delivering enforcement for the County Council. The creation of these partnerships is a complex issue, not least because we are the only District with an outsourced parking enforcement operation. It remains the intention for the partnerships to commence in April 2011, but this may well be difficult to achieve. I will be presenting a report to Cabinet in the New Year with details of how this partnership process is developing.

Parking Reviews & Local Highways Panel

I will provide members with a verbal update at the meeting.