

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 14 February 2012**

**Subject: Finance and Economic Development Portfolio**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gagan Mohindra**

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Finance & Economic Development Portfolio**

**Holder be noted**

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## **Accountancy**

This is always a very busy time of year for the Accountancy Service with the work to compile the budget and produce a variety of reports to the many meetings that consider the budget. Accountancy also produces the Capital Strategy, but as there are separate reports on both the budget and the Capital Strategy I will not say anything more here about either of these pieces of work.

## **Benefits & Revenues**

I am sure that Members will be aware from the media coverage of the difficult passage of the various welfare reforms through Parliament. Putting the merits of the many changes to one side; it is unhelpful that this process has created further delay and uncertainty around the legislation.

The timetable for implementing the changes is a very challenging one and major questions remain on the localisation of Council Tax Benefit and the role of local authorities in the delivery of Universal Credit. It is difficult to develop plans without an exact structure and regulations to follow but officers are working closely with colleagues at other districts and the county council to prepare for these changes.

The structure and regulations for the local retention of business rates are also eagerly awaited. This is another area where officers are working closely across the county to evaluate the threats and opportunities arising from the changes.

## **Economic Development**

The Council's Economic Development Officer has returned to her post following maternity leave. The main task at hand is preparing the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy for the district, which is an important piece of evidence for the preparation of the Local Plan.

The Council continues to build links and develop partnerships working with the West Essex Alliance, the South East LEP and has formed the London Anglia Growth Partnership with Harlow, Uttlesford and the North London Strategic Alliance.

Officers are working on a London Anglia Growth Prospectus, aiming to identify regeneration and development priorities in the area and attract inward investment.

The Local Strategic Partnership business team has been developing and progressing the following projects:

1. A procurement event was held on 25 January with forty businesses attending. Officers from Essex County Council, Epping College and our own Procurement Team made presentations and were available to discuss and share information on their procurement processes.
2. One Shops Local. 130 businesses had registered by the end of January. Approximately twenty of these were outside the district and taken off the site for this reason. The site is being monitored to ensure that business representation is confined to only our district area. We have been contacted by a number of organisations interested in buying the concept and design for the website. The 100th shop to register on the site was Churches butcher on Epping High Street and a photo opportunity took place on 27 January.
3. At the time of writing, LSP partners were being lined up to send an email to all their staff containing information about the site and its offers. The website was updated to include a section with vouchers from a wide array of businesses, offers are now available. A fashion show, showcasing local high street boutiques is being organised to take place in July. Epping Forest College students are being lined up to assist with running the show and offer input on organising the event.
4. On employment skills, the Future Jobs fund achieved 67 placements over six months, 29 of which were within the District Council. This amounted to £373,441 worth of funding being brought into the District, £162,355 of this was brought directly into this Council.
5. The Task and Finish Group has made a number of recommendations for improvement and these are being implemented. A request for expanded Hail and Ride in the rural areas of the district is being progressed
6. The work of the Big Society Task and Finish Panel has been completed and recommendations made, these are now being prioritised by the partners, while a new charter to support volunteering is being finalised

## **Performance Management**

### Key Objectives 2012/13

At this meeting, the Council will consider a recommendation of the Cabinet to adopt the Council's Key Objectives for 2012/13.

The Key Objectives reflect national and local priorities and specific service challenges, and provide a clear statement of the Council's plans for the year ahead. The Key Objectives detail specific actions articulating how they will be achieved, and measurable outcomes to demonstrate achievement. A number of the Key Objectives have been carried forward from 2011/12, with new or revised actions and intended outcomes, alongside new objectives that seek to respond to developing issues of national or local importance. Six-monthly and outturn progress against the

achievement of the Key Objectives will be reported to the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The delivery of the Key Objectives will also be reflected within the Directorate Business Plans to be produced for 2012/13, thereby further linking the various elements of the Council's performance management framework. The business plans will be approved by each Portfolio Holder having executive responsibility for the work of individual directorates or service areas, and progress will also be formally reviewed with the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) on a six-monthly and year-end basis.

The Key Objectives will be published on the Council's website as an update to the Corporate Plan for 2011/12 to 2014/15, alongside details of progress against the achievement of the Key Objectives for 2011/12. In order to minimise production costs, the Corporate Plan is only published on the website, although copies are available on request from the Performance Improvement Unit. Physical copies of the Plan will however be made available for all members newly elected to the Council in May 2012, as part of the new member induction arrangements.

#### Key Performance Indicators 2011/12 – Quarter 3 Performance

The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel will consider cumulative performance for the third quarter of 2011/12, in relation to the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the year, at its meeting in March 2012. At that time, the Scrutiny Panel and the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee will also consider proposed targets for the KPIs for 2012/13. The nine-month position with regard to the achievement of target performance for the KPIs for the current year, will be reflected in my next report to the Council

The Scrutiny Panel has also considered the continued relevance of a number of existing KPIs, and recommendations in respect of the deletion of several indicators were agreed by the Cabinet Committee on 16 January 2012.

### **Facilities Management & Estates**

#### Facilities Management

With the Government's expansion of the Building Regulations in 2005, the adequacy of the design, installation and testing of domestic wiring installations under Approved Document "P" has been the responsibility of Building Control. Until now, where an approved and registered electrical installer is not used, Building Control has had to engage the services of private electrical contractors to undertake this work. Arrangements have been agreed with the Council's Facilities Management Section for qualified electrical staff to carry out the testing, inspection and certifications on behalf of Building Control.

Whilst the numbers involved and revenue generated is not significant there will be a small income but perhaps more importantly an improved service to the customer through quicker response times and less administration for the Building Control section.

This further collaboration follows on from the work Building Control undertook in 2011 to carry out the survey of all operational and commercial properties for the Five Year Planned and Preventative Maintenance Programme 2012 – 2017. This type of

collaboration is a very good example of internal partnership working to make the most efficient use of in house expertise and resources.

### Estates and Valuation

The recent work of the section has included:

#### (1) Brooker Road Industrial Estate Waltham Abbey

A new 10 year lease was completed in January 2012 in respect of 143 Brooker Road a difficult to let unit that has been vacant since June 2009 despite continual efforts to find a new tenant. This will produce an annual income of £17,000. There will be a rent review at 5 years.

This follows on from the successful letting to a security company of two difficult to let units at Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate Loughton that I reported at the last meeting all of which help the Council to maintain a high percentage of occupancy and to maximise income from the commercial property assets.

#### (2) Langston Road Depot and adjoining T11 Site Loughton

I am pleased to report a positive response has been received from Essex County Council Highways Department in relation to the planning application for the redevelopment of the site.

Arrangements are now being made by officers in the Planning and Economic Development Directorate in consultation with the Chairman of the District Development Control Committee to convene a special meeting of the Committee to consider the planning application. It is anticipated that the meeting will take place during March 2012.

#### (3) Liaison with Parish and Town Councils

I, together with other appropriate Cabinet Members, have recently had the opportunity to meet with local members and interested parties at both Epping and North Weald to discuss particular land related items of concern.

In the case of Epping the purpose was to discuss the progress with the Development Design Brief for the St John's area and to seek local input into how the consultation should be conducted to maximise the chances for people to comment. I know further meetings have taken place since and am grateful for this continuing constructive approach.

Equally at North Weald we were happy to answer the questions of and listen to the views of the local representatives. Understandably these focussed around the Airfield but also touched on the wider agenda of how local opinion and experience can be fed into the planning process to positively influence the future of the area. I was therefore grateful to the Leader and the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio holder for their detailed knowledge and advice.