

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

2011/12

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 issues discussed by Cabinet across the various Council Portfolios during the Council year 2011/12, the tenth year of the full operation of the new Executive Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000.

1.2 Further information on all issues, including copies of the reports and minutes concerned, is available on the Local Democracy Section of the District Council's website.

2. KEY PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

2.1 The Council set the following Key Priority Objectives. The major policy issues determined by the Executive during the year reflect those priority objectives:

- To review the Council's commercial landholdings to coordinate competing land use proposals, fulfil operational requirements, achieve value for money, and produce additional capital and revenue income to the Council;
- To utilise existing resources to support the Government's vision for the 'Big Society' where individuals and communities have power and responsibility to create better neighbourhoods and local services;
- To work in partnership with Essex County Council and other statutory and voluntary agencies, to ensure the effectiveness of local arrangements and services to safeguard the welfare of children and young people;
- To seek continuous performance improvement and best use of resources against the background of diminishing public expenditure;
- To achieve the levels of net savings necessary to maintain the Council's sound financial position;
- To maximise the provision of affordable housing within the District;
- To mitigate the impact of the current economic conditions on local people and businesses, where resources permit and value for money can be achieved, from the Council's activities;
- To develop a sound Core Planning Strategy, to guide development in the District up to 2031, as part of the Local Development Framework.

3. PORTFOLIO CHANGES

3.1 The number of Portfolios covered by Cabinet Members was reduced from 9 to 8 and there were a number of changes to the range of responsibilities covered by the Portfolios. Details of the Portfolios and Portfolio Holders are set out below:

Leader's and Legal Portfolio – Councillor Mrs Lesley Wagland
Finance and Economic Development – Councillor Gagan Mohindra
Leisure and Wellbeing – Councillor Mrs Ricki Gadsby
Planning and Technology – Councillor John Phillip
Environment – Councillor John Knapman
Housing – Councillor Mrs Maggie McEwen

Safer and Greener – Councillor Penny Smith
Support Services – Councillor John Wyatt

4. LEADER'S AND LEGAL PORTFOLIO

4.1 Development Works on land owned by Epping Forest College

4.1.1 In September 2010 the Council approved the release of a right of pre-emption, and a covenant restricting the use of the land owned by Epping Forest College, in return for which the College had undertaken to provide replacement sports facilities when their main funding situation allowed. Subsequently, in the summer of 2011, the College requested the Council's formal consent in accordance with the restrictive covenant in a Conveyance dated 1 May 1952 to a scheme of works to be carried out on the sports hall. It was intended to implement the planning permission obtained for the demolition of the sports hall and its replacement with a 85-bed care home development incorporating car parking and secure landscaped garden areas. Permission for the approved development under the terms of the covenant (not the release of the covenant itself) was granted.

4.2 Police and Crime Commissioner Elections

4.2.1. Budgetary provision of £148,000 was made in the 2012/13 financial year to provide resources to administer elections in the District for a Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex under new Government legislation. It was expected that the Government would refund the cost of this election. The date for this election was 15 November 2012, which meant that additional provision was required in the 2012/13 budget separate from that for the District and Parish Council elections in May. Administration of the election was a statutory responsibility for the Council's Returning Officer as part of an Essex-wide arrangement.

4.3 Key Objectives 2012/13

4.3.1 The annual identification of Key Objectives provides an opportunity for the Council to focus specific attention on how areas for improvement can be addressed, opportunities exploited and better outcomes delivered over the coming year. The Key Objectives are intended to provide a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for each year, containing specific actions and desired outcomes. They also focus on national priorities set by the Government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the District, and represented the Council's high-level initiatives and over-arching goals for each year.

4.3.2 Approval was given to the Key Priority Objectives as set out in Part 2 of this report.

4.4 Rye Meads Water Cycle Strategy

4.4.1 The Rye Meads Wastewater Treatment Works serves the whole of Harlow and part of the District adjoining Harlow's boundary. It serves a further five local authority areas, either entirely or partly in: Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield. The capacity of Rye Meads works had been recognised as an issue in the East of England Plan, because 70,000 new houses were originally proposed in the catchment area during the period up to 2012; The proposed urban extensions adjoining Harlow in this District would be served by the Rye Meads works.

4.4.2 The 2009 Water Cycle Strategy assessed these constraints and recommended suitable infrastructure provision, with the main implications for this District being a new sewer from Harlow to Roydon, south of the railway line, and a possible new sewer to the west of Harlow immediately east of Roydon. In addition, the Strategy also considered the wider water resources such as water supply, flood risk and mitigation, water quality and conservation opportunities.

4.4.3. Three Valleys Water and Thames Water were confident that the current measures being implemented would mean that water supply would not be a constraint to growth. The Rye Meads works would require upgrades to ensure future capacity could meet the proposed growth, but this would only affect any development adjacent to Harlow. However, there was uncertainty about capacity in the period beyond 2012, and this could be a significant constraint on further development. It was important that new development and water infrastructure upgrades were properly coordinated, and a full review of the current Water Cycle Strategy by 2013 was recommended.

4.4.4 The required infrastructure needed to be in place for any new developments, and whilst concerns had been expressed about the disruption that would be caused, the County Council would have a much greater role in scrutinising the activities of the water companies. Furthermore, the water companies had committed to meeting certain standards in respect of the treatment of waste water, and officers would ensure that these standards were met.

4.4.5. The Strategy had concentrated on the need from new housing rather than new employment opportunities as this generated greater demand for water. By adding the strategy to the Evidence Base, recognition would be given to the need for the additional sewage infrastructure required for any new development. It was agreed that the Water Cycle Strategy should be included as part of the Evidence Base for the new Local Plan with any proposed further updates considered in detail as and when they occurred.

4.5 Annual Monitoring Report 2010/11

4.5.1 The Government requires a monitoring report to be submitted at least once a year, setting out information on activity within the previous financial year, including housing completions, employment land provision, and the protection of areas of natural conservation value. The report was also used to measure progress with the Local Plan. The Annual Monitoring Report for the 2010/11 financial year indicated that performance against housing targets, which had historically been the Government's highest priority was good, with 368 new housing units constructed.

4.5.2. The Annual Monitoring Report will be used as a mechanism for further review of the Local Plan in the future and to test the Council's policies. It also includes other details, for example on deprivation. Further information on decent home figures; the Indices of Deprivation link; and the reduction in permanent planning permissions granted for private caravans would be made available in due course. The Report was agreed for submission to the Secretary of State and publication on the Council's website.

5. ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

5.1 Door Step Textile Collections

5.1.1 A previous door step textile collection service ceased because of operational difficulties. Until recently it has not been possible to reintroduce a door step service textile collection service for a variety of reasons, including the provision of sorting facilities, storage and agreement on costs of collections. A pilot scheme for a new door step collection was launched in April 2011 and this proved to be very successful with residents generating 2.9 tonnes of recyclable textiles. The sale of textiles collected had generated an income of £886 in the first five months of operation. Accordingly, approval was given to the continuation of the scheme, with the income derived from the scheme in 2011/12 donated to the Chairman of Council's Charities for the Year.

5.2 Review of Recycling Bring Bank Schemes

5.2.1 The Council had a total of 23 recycling 'bring' schemes (also called bring banks) across the District. These schemes had been introduced over a number of years when only a limited kerbside recycling collection service was offered to residents. However, the Council now provides a comprehensive kerbside recycling collection service, with all the materials accepted at the recycling bring schemes now collected directly from residents' properties. Residents are also able to dispose of all normal recyclables and heavy or bulky objects such as metal or large electrical items via the Council's chargeable bulky waste collection service or at County Council Household Waste Recycling Centres. Many retailers also recycle old electrical equipment when new goods are purchased.

5.2.2 Consequently, the usage of some of the bring schemes has been in decline. The need to upgrade and modernise the recycling bring schemes offered an opportunity to review the viability of these sites. Given the success of the kerbside recycling scheme and the costs of bank maintenance, collection and processing, it was agreed that all bring schemes relating to the collection of cans, aerosols, and plastics be discontinued. It was also decided that tenders be sought for the provision of bring schemes for the collection of paper, textile, glass and tetra packs (cartons), with only those sites which generated a surplus being retained and with the responsibility for the acquisition and maintenance of bring banks resting with the bring bank provider.

5.2.3 Not all residents of flats in the District have access to a doorstep collection service of recyclables. Consequently each of the sites used within the District will be assessed as part of the tender exercise, with figures produced for each bank and discussions with ward members before a final decision is taken.

5.3 Transfer of Private Sector Sewers to the Water and Sewerage Companies.

5.3.1 Regulations affecting the transfer of most private sewers and lateral drains to the water and sewage companies came into force on 1 July 2011. One of the implications of this was that most private sewers and lateral drains that drain into a public sewer became vested in the appropriate water and sewage company.

5.3.2 It is not certain how much private sector drainage work will remain and what the demand for drainage assistance from residents will be, following the transfer. Given the

nature of the District and its associated drainage problems it was considered prudent to retain one of the two Officers currently working on private sector drainage for at least another year and then review the situation.

5.4 Extension of Waste Management Contract

5.4.1. Approval was given to the Waste Management Contract with Sita UK being extended for a further two years with effect from November 2012 for all the currently contracted waste services. Sita had offered up considerable savings in recognition of the contract extension which, given that 2012/13 was likely to be the most difficult year in terms of the level of budget savings required, would greatly assist the Council.

5.4.2. A more detailed review of the contract specification will be carried out to ensure that when the re-tendering for the contract commences in November 2014, the Council should achieve the best possible value.

5.5 Purchase of Vehicle for Waste and Recycling Service

5.5 1 A total of £1 million was allocated within the capital programme for 2012/13 for the purchase of seven refuse freighters. Refuse freighters have a nominal operational life of up to seven years. Beyond this time span, the costs of maintenance and the effects of operational downtime become significant, generating additional costs and service disruption.

6. FINANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO

6.1 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy 2011/12 – 2013/14.

6.1.1. Approval was given to an amended 2011/12 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2011/12 to 2013/14. This was necessary to ensure that the Council had the powers to borrow the money to finance the debt to be paid to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

6.1.2 As required, the Council had approved the Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and a statement on the Minimum Revenue provision before the start of the 2011/12 financial year. However, following the Government announcement to proceed with the self financing of Council Housing Services through the Localism Act, it became essential that the Council was in a position to borrow up to this amount.

6.1.3 The Council had been debt-free, with £38 million of capital funds available. The proposals from the Government would result in a cost to the General Fund of £1.5 million for Minimum Revenue Provision payments and a further £1.6 million in interest payments. The Council had been in discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government, who had subsequently issued a policy document providing some mitigation for the Council on both issues.

6.2 Capital Programme Review

6.2.1. The revised Capital Programme approved by Council will form the basis of the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan. It had been prepared by updating the programme approved in February 2011 and adding new schemes and allocations. Each scheme had reassessed estimated final costs and the phasing of expenditure profiles for each scheme as part of the capital review.

6.2.2. The programme covers the five financial years to 2015/16. In total there was an estimated capital spend of £46,380,000 by the Council over the five year period.

6.2.3 In terms of the funding available to finance these schemes, estimated external funding from grants and private sources of £2,868,000 had been identified. It was agreed that capital receipts of an estimated £11,545,000 and revenue contributions of £31,967,000 should be applied to finance the capital programme over the next five years. In summary, the balance of capital receipts was expected to fall from £18,694,000 as at 1 April 2011 to £8,300,000 by 31 March 2016, with the Major Repairs Reserve balance expected to increase from £6,540,000 to £14,719,000 by the end of the period.

6.2.4 The £22,000 allocated for the Town Centre Enhancement Scheme at Loughton Broadway was held back until the County Council formally adopted the scheme. When the scheme was adopted, the money would be released for the Council to determine where else it should be spent which would include further CCTV provision within the Broadway area.

6.3 Capital Strategy

6.3.1. The Capital Strategy is a key 'high level' strategic document linked to all other key corporate and strategic documents produced by the Council and its partners, including the Corporate Plan, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Asset Management Plan. It is focused on the current capital schemes and investment plans to 2015/16. Although there is no requirement for the Council to submit the Capital Strategy to the Government for re-assessment, it was deemed important to review it annually and thereby maintain a high level of control over the Council's capital resources and fixed assets.

6.3.2 Each year the Council's strategic aims and priorities are used to reassess the key Capital priorities and the ranking of each key priority is considered as part of the capital Strategy. The order of importance subsequently influences future decisions regarding individual capital projects. The Capital Strategy also identifies partnership arrangements with other partner organisations and is aimed at enhancing the capital programme, setting out the funding approved to date, having regard to forecast income generation.

6.3.3. The Council was mindful of the need to safeguard front-line services as well as keeping the District Council Tax low. Some of the capital projects provide revenue to the Council helping to keep the District Council tax at a low level.

6.3.4. The Key Capital priorities for 2012-2016 are listed in order below, showing the previous year's ranking in brackets under the first column.

Priority	Key Capital Priority	Relevant Corporate Plan Aims
1 (1)	Meeting housing need	Community leadership and protection of the special character of the district.
2 (2)	Improving the Council's housing stock	Community leadership and protection of the special character of the district.
3 (3)	Improving quality of life	Safeguard frontline services; Innovative and transparent council; Improve efficiency; Community leadership and protection of the special character of the district.
4 (4)	Protecting the environment	Community leadership and protection of the special character of the district.
5 (5)	Promoting economic development	Have the lowest District Council Tax; Innovative and transparent council; Improvement efficiency;
6 (6)	Regenerating areas in need	Have the lowest District Council Tax; Innovative and transparent council; Improve efficiency
7 (new)	Developing Council Assets	Maximising revenue from our assets Have the lowest District Council Tax Innovative and transparent council.
8 (7)	Delivering quality public services through e-government	Innovative and transparent council;
9 (8)	Improving private sector housing stock	Community leadership and protection of the special character of the district.

6.4 Council Budget

6.4.1. General Fund budgets containing the following elements were approved:

- Revised estimates for 2011/12 with an estimated increase in the General Fund balance by £63,000;
- A reduction in the target for the 2012/13 Continuing Services Budget from £14.88 million to £14.81 million (including growth items);
- An increase in the target for the 2012/13 District Development Fund net spend from £763,000 to £851,000;
- No change in the District Council Tax for a Band 'D' property to retain the charge at £148.77;
- The estimated increase in General Fund balances in 2012/13 of £19,000;
- The four year capital programme 2012/13 – 2015/16;
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2012/13- 2015/16; and
- 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;

6.4.2. Included in the revised estimates was the 2011/12 Housing Revenue Account. A number of rent increases and decreases were agreed, resulting in an overall increase of 6%.

6.5 Planned Preventative Maintenance Programme 2012-17

6.5.1. Approval was given to a Five Year Planned Maintenance Programme for the Civic Offices and other Operational Buildings and Commercial Property covering the period 2012/13 to 2016/17. The proposed programme aimed to maintain all properties to a condition of 'satisfactory' as a minimum.

6.5.2. The programme envisaged a proactive approach to facilities management for all operational buildings and commercial property which would ensure that;

- The buildings and their infrastructure would be maintained to an appropriate level, meeting health and safety, statutory regulations and contractual obligations;
- The buildings and their infrastructure would be maintained to a standard to comply with EU statutory regulations;
- The risk of unreliability and failure of critical systems, services and building fabric was reduced;
- Good financial management through forecasting was maintained; and
- Performance standards/indicators were maintained or improved upon.

6.6 Government Consultation – Technical Reforms of Council Tax

6.6.1. The Government published its 'Technical Reforms of Council Tax' consultation paper on 31 October 2011. The review proposed changes to the discounts available for second and empty homes, changing the default number of payment and a number of other technical changes. When the consultation was issued, the Secretary of State had suggested that the changes could allow a £20 reduction in council tax for a band D property. Whilst this might be the case for a District with a very large number of second and empty properties, it was unlikely to provide a significant benefit to this Council. There was concern that the impact on cash flow and collection rates in moving from 10 to 12 payments per annum would cost more than any additional income generated from the changes to discounts.

6.6.2. The Council broadly welcomed the principles of the changes in that they would give greater discretion to billing authorities. However, in noting that the intention was to bring the changes into effect for the commencement of the 2013/14 financial year, the Council submitted a number of comments to the Government on the proposals, including the concerns referred to in 6.6.1. above.

6.7 Council Property Asset Strategy Options

6.7.1 Funds in the sum of £205,000 were set aside for inclusion in the 2012/13 budget to engage consultants to carry out design, valuation and costing of potential development for a number of different sites. The information obtained would then, in turn, allow for strategic decisions to be made regarding the future use, sale and development of each site, including the submission of any planning applications as necessary. By obtaining this data the Council would be able to better assess the risks associated with the proposals for each site.

6.7.2 The provision related to eight different sites within the District, including consideration of the provision of public toilet facilities. The estimated Gross Development

Values of these sites ranged from £750,000 to £38 million. The monies would be funded from the District Development Fund.

6.8 Self Financing for the Housing Revenue Account

6.8.1. As a first step towards the Housing Revenue Account becoming self-financed, approval was given to the Council being able to borrow up to £200 million through its revised Treasury Management Strategy. At the same time the 'in principle' decision to commence a new affordable house-building programme, once the Housing Revenue Account had moved to a self-financing basis, was re-confirmed, subject to financial appraisals proving the viability of such a programme. This approach gave the greater range of options for borrowing and obtaining the borrowing at the cheaper rate.

7. LEISURE AND WELLBEING

7.1 Lowewood Museum

7.1.1. Consequent upon an approach made by Broxbourne Borough Council, a five year agreement for the management of Lowewood Museum, in Hoddesdon, by the District Council was entered into. The shared service arrangement with Broxbourne Borough Council will enable the District Council to realise revenue savings of around £10,000 per annum for the period of the agreement, and further benefits will be realised through the increased opportunities to access external funding for projects across the two local authority areas.

7.1.2 The partnership will also provide a range of staff development opportunities and a joint service will be able to draw on the combined collections of both museums to provide services and present a more attractive opportunity for marketing.

7.2 High Level Operations Plan for White Water Centre – Olympic Games 2012

7.2.1 Whilst the Olympic venue for the white water canoe and kayak events is situated at the Lee Valley White Water Centre located within the boundaries covered by Broxbourne Borough Council, the area is adjacent to this District's border in Waltham Abbey. Furthermore, the transport and taxi hubs are both located wholly within this District.

7.2.2 Host authorities are required to draw up a high level operations plan to cover a range of operational and local issues to ensure that the events at the location are successful and contribute fully to the overall success of the Games. Broxbourne Borough Council had also produced a high level plan, which was merged with this Council's version to form the overarching operations plan for the venue. A key component of the delivery of the combined Operations Plan was the joint working between the two local authorities, especially on matters pertaining to street scene.

7.3 Olympic Games – 'Look and Feel' and Ticket Allocation

7.3.1 A key element of the Olympic celebration will be the decoration of the venues and the surrounding area, referred to as 'Look and Feel' which includes items such as lamp column banners, flags, bunting and banner covers. Approval was given to expenditure of £35,000 for 'Look and Feel' schemes in the Epping Forest District, with local Town and

Parish Councils given the opportunity to request 'Look and Feel' pound for pound match funding to assist their local communities in celebrating the Games.

7.3.2 The District Council had been approached by the Olympic Executive Committee in November 2010 to bid for tickets for the Opening and Closing ceremonies of both the Olympic and Paralympics Games, as well as a number of the Canoe Slalom events at the Lea Valley White Water Centre. Approval was given to expenditure of £3,000 to purchase the tickets awarded and the Council agreed to allocate the tickets to deserving residents within the District, including the Citizen of the Year plus runners-up, Young Citizen of the Year plus runners-up, St Clare Hospice, Chigwell Riding Trust, Oakview School in Loughton, and King Harold School in Waltham Abbey, with the rest allocated to individuals for their role in the community, nominated by the public, and determined by a Panel consisting of the Chairman of Council, the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder and the Council's Olympic Champion.

7.4 Olympic Torch Relay – Additional Funding

7.4.1 The Olympic Torch would be passing through the District on 7 July 2012 on its way from Harlow Town Centre to the White Water Centre in Broxbourne. Whilst every effort had been made to keep all expenditure associated with this procession within existing budgets, the safety of the Torch and those who would attend to watch it pass by was paramount. Approval was therefore given to additional funding of £15,000, to be used predominately to hire barriers for the sensitive parts of the Torch route and to enable payments to those who would be marshalling crowds and providing associated support services.

7.4.2 The responsibility for the safe passage of the Torch along the route rested with the host authorities, of which the Council was one. Whilst the key security of the Torch itself would be the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police, all other aspects of the Torch procession lay with the Council whilst it was within the District. It was essential that those who came to see the Torch, remained safe and that would require a significant degree of activity on the Torch route, including the provision of barriers. Without supplementary funding, it would not be possible to provide some of these elements.

7.5 Equalities Act 2010 – Equality Scheme and Objectives 2012-15

7.5.1 The Council is now under a statutory duty to publish appropriate equality objectives and agreed a scheme incorporating these objectives in April 2012. Further schemes will be published in the future, with a maximum of four years between schemes.

7.5.2 The setting of specific equality objectives helps public authorities to better perform their general equality duty, focusing on the outcomes to be achieved. Equality objectives also helped to focus attention on the priority equality issues within an organisation, to deliver improvement in policy making, procurement of services, service delivery and employment, including resource allocation.

8. PLANNING AND TECHNOLOGY PORTFOLIO

8.1 ICT Disaster Recovery/Policy

8.1.1 Revisions to the ICT Disaster Recovery Policy were agreed to reduce the previous estimated recovery time for key systems following a major incident. The former plan consisted of two separate computer suites located at different ends of the Civic Office complex. Although this offered a substantial form of resilience, having both suites on the same site was not ideal. Accordingly, Parsonage Court (Careline) was confirmed as the off-site location for an ICT disaster recovery suite.

8.1.2 Careline was a control centre which offered 24 hour emergency access to trained professionals to provide assistance to the elderly and vulnerable people within the Epping Forest area. Following the completion of the virtualisation project, the number of servers required to run essential systems had been drastically reduced, as had the space required to store them. A fully air conditioned room was no longer needed, as the smaller number of servers could be cooled using a rack with integral cooling. This reduced the storage footprint and was substantially cheaper to run. The opportunity to use the off-site facility provided for an even more co-ordinated approach to Disaster Recovery. All staff required access to computerised systems for their daily work and it was essential that the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan became more intrinsically linked with the Corporate Disaster Recovery Plan.

8.2 ICT Capital Requirements 2012/13

8.2.1 A number of projects necessary to maintain the current ICT infrastructure, improve business continuity and allow staff to fully utilise the benefits available from ICT systems, were agreed. The project costs, estimated at £170,000 covered the following:

- Replacement of the Private Automated Branch Exchange
- Introduction of a Global System for Mobile Communications Gateway and Integration of SMS texts into Outlook
- Further Disaster Recovery work
- Implementation of e-mail archiving
- Introduction of Document Management for Council Tax.

8.3 Planning and Economic Development – Electronic Records

8.3.1 Planning and Economic Development had made significant progress in moving away from paper based office systems to Electronic Record and Document Management Systems. The use of electronic record keeping had produced a range of benefits such as savings on the cost of paper and file storage, helping residents access information online and with the production of the Local Plan.

8.3.2 However, there was a considerable amount of work still to be carried out to build on these gains to move the Directorate into better and faster ways of working. There remained a need to make more information available electronically as well as enabling the electronic submission of Building Control Plans, thereby increasing the ability to compete for additional work and increase income. Accordingly, approval was given to the use of a previous under spend of £25,000 for use in the development of document and microfiche scanning.

8.4 Local Plan – Revised Project Plan

8.4.1 Continued budgetary provision was made available for the preparation of the Local Plan and the estimated additional expenditure required for further studies in respect of the Evidence Base. In addition, a revised project plan for the Local Plan was approved. The following significant risks to achieving the Plan, and for which appropriate preparatory action would be taken, had been identified:

- A change in the Regulations guiding the preparation of the Local Plan.
- An overwhelming public response to the planned consultation periods; and
- The need to meet the new 'Duty to Cooperate' included in the Localism Act 2011.

9. HOUSING PORTFOLIO

9.1 Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2011/12

9.1.1 The Housing Strategy assesses the District's current and future housing needs, and sets out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. It also includes a Key Action Plan detailing the proposed actions to be taken by the Council to contribute to the achievement of the Housing objectives over the life of the Strategy. Key Action Plans are produced annually for approval by the Council and progress is monitored by the Housing Scrutiny Panel every six months. The Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2011/12 was adopted.

9.1.2 The outcome of the Council's pilot Social Housing Fraud Scheme, and whether the scheme should continue on a permanent basis, will be reviewed at the end of the pilot. It was proposed to investigate the Government's Feed-In Tariff Scheme which could have involved the installation of solar panels on the roofs of some Council properties. However, it was agreed not to pursue this initiative, when the Government announced that it would be significantly reducing the financial benefits.

9.2. Review of Private Sector Housing Team

9.2.1. The Government recently introduced the New Homes Bonus. The scheme is a means of rewarding local authorities for increasing housing supply. The net gain in housing supply includes empty homes brought back into use through Council intervention. It was estimated that the Council will receive a reward of around £210,000 over 6 years, as a consequence of the number of empty properties brought back into use between October 2010 and October 2011. Further reward would be received for each year thereafter.

9.2.2. A significant proportion of the empty properties brought back into use since 2010 could be directly attributed to the appointment of a Technical Officer in the Private Sector Housing Team. To maximise the New Homes Bonus received on a continuing basis, it was agreed that the post be increased from 28 to 36 hours a week and that the current three year contract be made permanent. This would cost approximately £36,500 per annum for the remainder of the existing three year contract (until July 2013), to be met from savings on the Housing Directorate's salaries budget, with an addition to the Continuing Services Budget growth list of approximately £32,610 per annum thereafter.

9.2 Restrictive Covenants – Houses in Multiple Occupation

9.3.1. A policy for approving the variation of restrictive covenants placed on any sale of a former Council house, to grant permission for its use as a privately-rented accommodation, was determined. Previously there had been a large number of former Council houses on estates which appeared to be in use as privately rented shared accommodation without the covenant having been varied. The new policy provided a clear policy on instances when restrictive covenants, preventing a former Council house from being used for privately-rented shared accommodation, could be varied.

9.4 Off Street Parking Programme

9.4.1. Approval was given to a revised ranking table for future off-street parking schemes. Subject to the retention of the current budget for the off-street parking programme within the revised Capital Programme and following completion of the schemes at Hillcroft in Loughton, Colebrook Gardens in Loughton, and School Lane in Abbess Roding, construction on the next three schemes, namely Chester Close, Harvey Gardens and Audley Gardens (all in Loughton) would be progressed. Approval was also given to detailed feasibility studies being undertaken on schemes at Worningford Court in Waltham Abbey, Barfields Gardens in Loughton and Avenue Road, Theydon Bois.

9.5 HRA Financial Plan

9.5.1. Having taken account of the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Council agreed a general strategic approach for the HRA Financial Plan. This involved provision being made within the Financial Plan to fully maintain the Council's housing stock to a modern standard, based on current stock condition and standard industry life cycles, as opposed to maintaining the stock at the current minimum Decent Homes Standard. To achieve the Council's aspirations to commence a new Council House Building Programme, provision was made within the Financial Plan to fund such a Programme on the basis that individual development packages were self-funding, without any support or funding from the general Fund, subsidised if necessary from:

- Grant from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA);
- Section 106 Agreement contributions from developers, in lieu of on-site affordable housing provision;
- If allowed by the Government, the proceeds of Right to Buy (RTB) sales as a result of the Government's proposal to increase RTB discounts whilst ensuring that a new affordable home was provided to replace the affordable home lost;
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) surpluses; and/or
- Cross-subsidy from the sale of other development sites within the Housebuilding Programme on the open market;

9.5.2. It was further agreed that average rent increases included within the Financial Plan be based on the following rent increases to achieve rent convergence by April 2017;

- Average rent increases of 6% in April 2012;
- Average rent increases of the Retail Price Index (RPI) + 1.96% for the four years between April 2013 and April 2016 inclusive; and

- Average rent increases of RPI + 0.5% from April 2017, as assumed by the Government within the HRA debt settlement;

9.5.3. Notwithstanding the provision for rent increases included within the Financial Plan, consideration will now be given each year during the HRA budget process to the possibility and appropriateness of making a lower rent increase for the following year, having regard to the short and long term effects on the Financial Plan, the need to meet the Council's housing and financial objectives, Government guidance and the effects on tenants.

9.5.4. Provision has also been made within the Financial Plan to fund £770,000 per annum for housing improvements and service enhancements for the next eight years, increased to £5.47 million per year from Year 10;

9.5.5. Subsequent to making these assumptions, the interest rate to be actually charged by the Public Works Loan Board for the Council's loan was 3.5% less than the 4.75% originally envisaged. In addition, the Council's final debt settlement from the Government was further reduced by £740,000 to £185.5 million. Finally, by extending the pay-back of the debt until Year 30 of the HRA Financial Plan, additional funding for housing improvements and service enhancements has been able to be made available. Arrangements were also agreed for regular reviews of the Plan, at key times of the HRA budget process in March and October, to further inform the budget-making decisions.

9.6. Housing Improvement and Service Enhancements

9.6.1. Through the additional resources of £770,000 per annum identified within the new HRA Financial Plan, approval was given to the following housing improvements and service enhancements:

- Installation of mains-powered smoke detectors in 2012/13 in all Council properties that would not have other planned electrical work undertaken within the next four or five years;
- Introduction of a free Handyperson Scheme at the Council's sheltered housing schemes for all tenants, through the employment of a multi-skilled operative by the Council's Housing Repairs Service;
- An annual grant of £36,000 per annum to Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF), initially for a three-year period, to fund a Handyperson Scheme to provide a similar free service as that proposed for sheltered housing schemes for Council tenants with defined physical disabilities, who have nobody without any defined physical disabilities living with them; and Council tenants over 60 years of age, who have nobody of working-age living with them;
- An increase in the Disabled Adaptations Budget by a one-off sum of £75,000 in 2012/13, to replenish the cost of undertaking large adaptations required in that year and to enable the same number of non-major adaptations to be undertaken as usual;
- Conversion of the existing toilet facilities in the communal areas of a number of sheltered housing schemes and community halls to incorporate disabled toilets;
- Refurbishment of the common room and kitchen area at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey as a second lounge; the remodelling of Jessopp Court from a very sheltered housing scheme to a conventional sheltered housing scheme;

- Increasing the size of the Council play area on the Princesfield Estate, Waltham Abbey, with the provision of additional and improved play equipment;
- In light of the successful Pilot Scheme, the installation and use of key safes in the Council's remaining sheltered and grouped housing schemes:
- The creation of a new post of Housing Under-occupation Officer to provide practical assistance to vulnerable under-occupying Council tenants who have insufficient family support to transfer to smaller Council accommodation and generally seek to reduce under-occupation in the Council's housing stock;
- The doubling of the Estate Improvements and Enhancements Budget to £40,000 per annum, to enable additional estate improvements and enhancements to be provided across the District;
- Funding provided to Voluntary Action Epping Forest for the Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants being increased by £20,000 per annum for two years from 2012/13, in order to increase the number of vulnerable Council tenants benefitting from the Service;
- Provision of an additional 21 dog waste bins on Council housing estates across the District;
- The award of a one-off grant of £10,000 to the proposed new Furniture Recycling Scheme, subject to the grant not being provided until there is surety and sufficient evidence provided that the Scheme will become operational and sustainable.

9.7 Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012-15

9.7.1 The Private Sector Housing Strategy for 2012-15 was adopted. The Strategy, subsequently published on the Council's website, replaced the existing Strategy which had expired in 2011. It had been formulated to deal with the conditions in the District's private sector housing stock, as demonstrated by the findings of the Private Sector House Condition Survey carried out in the Summer of 2011. The Strategy also took its direction from legislation and from the current economic climate. It introduced changes to the policies in the previous Strategy relating to the enforcement of private sector housing standards, bringing empty properties back into use and giving advice, assistance and specialist support.

9.8 Succession to a Secure Tenancy

9.8.1. All of the Council's existing secure tenants enjoy many rights under the Housing Act 1985 Part IV (Tenants Charter). One of these is the right to succeed to ("take-over") a tenancy upon the death of a tenant. Any successor tenant who is either a spouse or a civil partner is able to remain at the accommodation regardless of any under-occupation. However, under the previous legislation, in the case of a family member, if the accommodation afforded by the dwelling-house was more extensive than was reasonably required by the tenant, then the Council could serve a notice of seeking possession more than six months, but less than twelve months, after the tenant's death, requiring them to vacate and move to smaller accommodation unless the Council's Under-occupation Policy was applicable.

9.8.2 Under the new Localism Act, the right of succession by family members had been repealed for all new post-Localism Act secure tenants. However, the Act had inserted a new provision within the Housing Act 1985 which gives powers to councils to allow family members to succeed if councils choose to do so. It was agreed that all new post-

Localism Act secure tenants be given the right for family members to succeed (as per current arrangements) provided there is **no** under-occupation and that they have been living at the accommodation as their only or principal home for at least three years (ie. longer than the current statutory 1 year). Where there are under-occupying, they would be required to move to smaller and more suitable accommodation.

10. SAFER AND GREENER PORTFOLIO

10.1 Biological Records in Essex

10.1.1. The Council entered into a service level agreement with the Essex Wildlife Trust to support the development and setting up of a Biological Records Centre in Essex. Included within its remit was the receipt of habitat and species data for use in local authority decision-making and to help local authorities with their statutory obligations in relation to biodiversity.

10.1.2. Whilst there are many organisations and individuals across the county that collect, hold and manage biological data, a local records centre brings all these records together so that they can be checked, verified and made available more easily to those requiring the information. This particularly includes planning authorities when dealing with applications for development or other land use charges.

10.1.3 When determining planning applications in accordance with the Local Plan and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, local authorities aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity through avoidance, mitigation and compensation. Policy NC4 of the Local Plan states that *'Development proposals will be expected to make adequate provision for the protection, enhancement and suitable management of established habitats of local significance for wildlife. Such provision may be more stringent when there are known protected species either on the site or likely to be affected by the development'*. The Biological Records Centre provides specialist advice and information on priority species to help the Council meet these obligations.

10.2 Street Naming and Numbering Service

10.2.1 Charges for the Street Naming and Numbering Service were introduced from 1 October 2011. The charges introduced were £49 for an individual property, plus £16 for each additional property thereafter. The charges agreed were based on the actual time taken to undertake the task and the costs of the required new computer software. It was anticipated that this would generate a net income of approximately £8,000 per year.

10.2.2. The Street Numbering and Naming Service was previously provided free of charge, with the exception of where a housing development changed after the initial consultation had been carried out. The process could involve a significant amount of resource both in staff time and associated costs, and the costs for this service had been met by the Council Tax payer rather than the developer or new resident to the District. The relevant legislation enabled the Council to levy charges to cover the costs incurred.

10.3 Off –Street Parking Enforcement across the District

10.3.1 The Council entered into a five-year contract for on and off street parking enforcement with Vinci Parks Limited in September 2007, with the option to extend by a

further two years. Following the formation of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), the on street enforcement responsibility would transfer to the Partnership at the end of September 2012 at the time when the option to extend the contract with Vinci Parks have been implemented.

10.3.2 Discussions with Vinci Parks for the extension of the off street element of the contract took place. However it had also been considered prudent to seek from the NEPP a bid for the delivery of the off street enforcement functions to sit alongside those being undertaken on street. On balance it was decided to agree the Partnership bid of £250,000 to manage the Council's off street parking enforcement for a five year period commencing 1 October 2012 on the basis that this would be the most cost effective arrangement.

10.3.3 The previous Car Parking Team consisted of four officers. Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations all four officers were transferrable to NEPP from 1 October 2012. However, the Council needed to consider the staffing levels required to manage and monitor the arrangement with NEPP, manage its own car parking assets and carry out the remaining highways general fund functions. The off-street car parking operation generated income of over £1.1 million a year and the Council needed to ensure there were adequate staffing resources to safeguard this income after October 2012. Two new posts were therefore added to the Council's establishment, these being a Parking and Street Furniture Manager, and a Parking and Street Furniture Support Officer. It was estimated that these staffing changes would result in increased revenue savings in the sum of £34,000 in both 2012/13 and 2013/14.

10.4 Funding of Police Community Support Officers

10.4.1. Along with Essex Police, the District Council had jointly funded Police Community Support officers (PCSO's) for a number of years. The initial number of PCSO's had been six, but this was reduced to four as part of the 2011/12 budget setting process. The current review of policing in Essex, the 'Essex Blueprint', resulted in significant changes in the way community policing is delivered. Essex Police receive Government funding for a core number of PCSO's in Essex and had indicated they would no longer be able to support the funding of PCSO's beyond this core number. Therefore, as Essex Police are unable to fund those additional posts, and the Council did not want to fund the PCSO's in their entirety, it seemed appropriate for the Council to cease its joint funding. The arrangement came into effect at the end of the 2011/12 financial year, resulting in a saving of £62,750 for 2012/13.

10.5 Off-Street Car Parking - Traffic Orders

10.5.1 Approval was given to the making of the Off Street Parking Order 2011. The original order had been sealed in 2003. This controlled the use of the Council's car parks and since 2003 there had been a further three orders made which had amended the original order. In addition, the Council had published a number of notices varying parking charges over time in accordance with previous budget decisions. The new Order consolidated all previously made orders, regularised the use of the Council's RingGo system and introduced a new class of Permit to allow, at the Council's discretion, use of parking places for commercial enterprises.

10.5.2 The Council is now part of the NEPP and it is important that the Council's Parking Orders are robust, up to date and reflect current operation. The use of Commercial Permits allows additional income to be generated within the car parks.

11. SUPPORT SERVICES PORTFOLIO

11.1 Fleet Operations – New Equipment

11.1.1 Fleet Operations, based at the Langston Road depot, is responsible for maintaining, servicing and repairing the Council's fleet vehicles, carrying out taxi and private hire vehicle inspections and is a registered vehicle testing station with the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency. MoT testing is undertaken for a number of local franchised car dealerships and small local garages, as well as staff, Councillors and the public. In 2010/11, the service made an operating surplus of £85,544.

11.1.2 Approval was given to the purchase of a new lift/ramp and ancillary equipment to provide an additional bay for MoT tests, at a cost of £24,000. Prior to the purchase of the new bay, an average of 20 tests per week were being turned away, with a resultant potential loss of £46,000 income per annum.

11.2 Public Relations and Information Service

11.2.1 In the light of reductions in Government funding and the requirement for the Council to seek revenue savings, the Public Relations and Information Service had looked at ways in which savings might be achieved, whilst protecting its front line service. The most suitable option identified was the transfer of the satellite information services in Loughton and Waltham Abbey to Essex County Council Library Service. This option, which was agreed for implementation, endorsed the principles of providing satellite information services through a third party at a reduced cost, whilst creating an income stream through the provision of specialist communication services to another public sector organisation. It was also agreed to hold discussions with Uttlesford District Council regarding the potential for a shared public relations and information service.

11.3 Smoke Free Workplace and Public Place Policy

11.3.1 The Council's Smoke Free Workplace and Public Place Policy was introduced on 2007, reflecting the provisions of the Health Act 2006. Consideration was given to a proposition put forward that smoking should also be banned from all enclosed areas of the Civic Offices and at other Council sites. It was decided this would be difficult to enforce and might also discourage current employees who smoked and prospective employees, from working for the Council. As a compromise, it was agreed to retain the existing Policy but with smoking breaks no longer permitted in work time and staff wishing to smoke having to use their flexi time to do so.

11.4 Pay Policy Statement

11.4.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to publish a Pay Policy Statement setting out the details of its remuneration policy, with particular regard to its highest and lowest paid employees. Approval was given to the 2012/13 statement which reflected remuneration in the broadest terms and included items such as fees, allowances,

benefits in kind, pension entitlements and options in respect of the car leasing scheme which was under review.