

SELECT COMMITTEES

1. COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

The Communities Select Committee consisted of the following members:

Councillor Y Knight (Chairman)
Councillor G Shiell (Vice Chairman)
Councillors R Baldwin, A Beales, R Butler, K Chana, R Gadsby, L Girling, S Heap, L Hughes, S Jones, A Mitchell, D Sunger, B Surtees and H Whitbread

The Lead Officer was Alan Hall, Director of Communities. The Committee also appreciated the Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor S Stavrou, attending the meetings to help them with their deliberations.

Wyn Marshall represented the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation, attending the meetings as a non-voting co-opted member to provide the views of residents and stakeholders.

Terms of Reference

The Communities Select Committee was tasked:

1. To undertake overview and scrutiny, utilising appropriate methods and techniques, of the services and functions of the Communities Directorate;
2. To develop a programme of work each year, informed by relevant service aims and member priorities, to ensure that the services and functions of the Communities Directorate are appropriate and responsive to the needs of residents, service users and others;
3. To consider any matter referred to the Select Committee by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet or a relevant Portfolio Holder, and to report and make recommendations directly to the Committee, the Cabinet or such Portfolio Holder as appropriate;
4. To consider the effect of Government actions or initiatives on the services and functions of the Communities Directorate and any implications for the Council's residents, service users and others, and to respond to consultation activities as appropriate;
5. To establish working groups as necessary to undertake any activity within these terms of reference;
6. To undertake pre-scrutiny through the review of specific proposals of the Council and its partner organisations or other local service providers, insofar as they relate to the services and functions of the Communities Directorate, to help develop appropriate policy;
7. To undertake performance monitoring in relation to the services and functions of the Communities Directorate, against adopted key performance indicators and identified areas of concern;

8. To identify any matters within the services and functions of the Communities Directorate that require in-depth scrutiny, for referral to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
9. To recommend the establishment of task and finish panels to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as necessary, in order to undertake any activity within these terms of reference.
10. Transformation Projects relevant to this Committee:
Details of relevant new transformation projects to be submitted to the relevant SC for scrutiny.
11. Transformation Projects closure and benefits reports:
That any Directorate appropriate project closure and benefits realisation reports to be submitted to this SC for information.

The Panel scrutinised a number of important issues over the last year, which included:

(i) Communities Directorate's Business Plan 2017 – At the beginning of the year (June 2017) the Committee received the Communities Directorate's Business Plan for 2017-2018.

This was a slimmed down version of the usual plans (the HRA Business Plan, Community Services and Safety Business Plan and Private Housing Business Plan), and more akin to an action plan for the directorate. The three relevant Portfolio Holders (Leisure and Community Services; Safer, Greener and Transport; and Housing Portfolios) attended the meeting to take the Committee through their sections of the plan.

(ii) Draft Housing Strategy 2017-2022 - Also at that meeting the Committee reviewed the Draft Housing Strategy for 2017-2022. They noted that a Housing Strategy was last produced in 2009 and although it was no longer a legal or policy requirement it was accepted good housing and local government practice. The new Housing Strategy has now been approved by the Cabinet to cover the period 2017-2022. Its production had been delayed as officers were waiting for the draft Local Plan to be produced as much of the Housing Strategy related to the provisions within the Local Plan

(iii) EFDC Safeguarding Work – The Committee received a report on the range of safeguarding work carried out by the Council over the last three years that the safeguarding team had been in place.

The team was established in May 2014, following initial DDF funding for a fixed period of 2 years and a subsequent Cabinet decision to make the posts permanent.

(See Case Study for full details)

(iv) HRA Financial Plan 2017/18 - The Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financial plan for 2017-18. The Financial Plan set out the forecast income and expenditure for the Council's HRA for the following 30 years, to enable early decisions to be made based on these long term forecasts. Each year,

the Financial Plan takes account of the latest budget figures, Council policy, Government policy and Council decisions, and makes assumptions for a range of future income and costs.

It also took account of the Cabinet's decisions following the Stage 1 HRA Financial Options Review undertaken earlier in the year, when it was agreed that the Council should continue with its Council Housebuilding Programme for Phase 4-6 and revert to the Government's Decent Home Standard from the Council's own Modern Home Standard.

(v) Housing Service Standards – Performance Report 2016/17 and Review -

Since 2007, the Council has had a range of Housing Service Standards, covering all of the Housing Service's main areas of activity, formulated in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

Last year, when reviewing the Service Standards and the Performance Schedule, the Select Committee requested increased performance and activity information on a number of the Service Standards within the Performance Schedule, which had therefore been included in this year's Schedule.

There were 48 Housing Service Standards that include measurable and measured targets. Of these, 39 (81%) of the targets had been achieved in 2016/17.

(vi) Key Performance Indicators 2016/17 (Outturn) Performance – The Select Committee received reports throughout the previous year on the Key Performance Indicators for 2016/17.

Ten of the Key Performance Indicators fell within the Communities Select Committee's areas of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at the end of the year, which was considered in the early part of 2017/18 for these indicators was:

- (a) 8 (80%) indicators achieved target;
- (b) 1 (10%) indicators did not achieve target; and
- (c) 1 (10%) indicators performed within their tolerated amber margin.

(vii) Corporate Plan Key Action 2016/17 – Quarter 4 (Outturn) Position – The Select Committee received reports throughout the previous year on the Council's Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2016/17.

15 actions fell within the areas of responsibility of the Communities Select Committee. They considered the end of the year position in the early part of 2017/18:

- 8 (53%) of these actions had been achieved at year end; and
- 3 (20%) of the deliverables or actions were not completed by year-end albeit significant progress had been made;
- 3 (20%) of these actions were expected to achieve target in the next 6 months;
- 1 (7%) action (i) (b) 5) became no longer required during Q2.

(viii) Review of Housing Allocations Scheme – In September 2017 the Committee noted that the Council was legally required to have a Housing Allocations Scheme for determining priorities and the procedure to be followed in selecting a person for accommodation, or nominating a person to be a tenant for accommodation held by another Registered Provider of Social Housing.

Under Government Guidance, authorities were given powers to decide locally how accommodation should be allocated based upon local priorities and were empowered to allocate their accommodation in any way they saw fit, provided schemes were both legal and rational.

The Committee was therefore asked to review the Scheme, in order to consider whether any further changes were required, and to submit a report to the Cabinet on the outcome of its review and any recommended changes. The subsequent recommendations of the Select Committee were approved.

(ix) Corporate Plan Key Action Plan 2017/18 - Quarterly Progress - The Committee reviewed the Corporate Plan actions relevant to their Select Committee on a quarterly basis.

(x) Key Performance Indicator 2017/18 – Quarterly Progress - The Committee reviewed the Key Performance Indicators relevant to their Select Committee on a quarterly basis.

(xi) Presentation from Essex Police’s District Commander – In November 2017 the Committee received a presentation from Essex’s Police District Commander, Chief Inspector Lewis Basford, on current policing and crime issues in the District.

The District Commander for the Brentwood and Epping Forest Community Policing Team outlined the current level of policing. This comprised ten police constables and seven support constables for the whole district, who covered community issues and were split into two shifts – early and late. There was a local policing team at Loughton that operated on a 24-hour basis, 7-day coverage and handled 999 emergency calls and 101 calls.

Domestic violence, which included violent crime, was responsible for 34 per cent of all crime, which was why there was a dedicated team that looked at this specific issue.

In light of the current trend of national threats by terrorism, there were on-going training exercises to tackle this hazard. The Police had listened to the public’s reports of ASB by individuals using motorcycles / mopeds and was researching tactics to combat this problem. The work of the Council’s Community Safety Team and their partnership with the Police had helped in the conviction of an individual for human trafficking offences, who was now serving six years in prison.

(xii) Annual Report of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) – The Epping Forest CSP consisted of a mix of statutory and voluntary sector bodies, including Essex Police, Epping Forest District Council, Essex Fire and Rescue, the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), the National Probation Trust, Trading Standards and Voluntary Action Epping Forest. Other agencies were also invited to attend, including local Town and Parish Councils, The Corporation of London (Epping Forest), Epping Forest College and representatives from Health.

In January 2017 police radio communications were installed in the Community Safety Team's office, which had increased the effectiveness of the Council's CCTV systems, to communicate directly with Essex Police Force Control Room. This action had achieved a very positive effect in respect of coordinated working and highly effective intelligence sharing between Essex Police and the CST.

(xiii) The Ageing Population Study Action Plan - The Committee noted that the Council had carried out a comprehensive study during 2015/16 of the ageing population in the District, which had generated over 40 recommendations for the Council and various statutory and voluntary sector partners to address. The resulting action plan was launched in October 2016 and this report provided an update on the progress of key areas of work. A consultation of 300 local people aged 55 – 95 from a range of demographics and areas of the District focussed on three main themes which were:

- Health and Wellbeing;
- Living in the Epping Forest District (EFD); and
- Communication and Engagement.

(xiv) Government's Prevent Strategy – The Committee were informed that the Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy was developed in 2011 to combat terrorism and terrorist activity in the UK. This had consisted of four main elements of work under the 'Contest' heading, which included:

Pursue: the investigation and disruption of terrorist attacks;

Prevent: work to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;

Protect: improving our protective security to stop a terrorist attack; and

Prepare: working to minimise the impact of an attack and to recover as quickly as possible.

'Contest' covered all forms of terrorism and aimed to reduce risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people could go about their lives freely and with confidence. The current threat to Essex was assessed as low, and that did not mean that the Council would neglect 'Prevent', but would need to keep this under review as there was a balance that the CST and Essex Police had to monitor.

(xv) Fire Safety in Council owned Accommodation and Park Homes – In January 2018 the Committee received a report on the Council's fire safety procedures in Council owned accommodation. This was asked for subsequent to the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London. Officers were awaiting the outcome of the inquiry and the changes in law or regulations or advice that may affect our procedures.

After reviewing the report the Committee discussed the possibility of installing sprinkler systems into each of the Council's sheltered housing schemes and at Norway House, North Weald and Hemnall House and agreed that a feasibility study should be commissioned.

(xvi) Rationalisation of Sheltered Housing Assets – initial Scoping Report – The Committee received a report on the proposed rationalisation of the Council's sheltered housing assets. The Council had a number of sheltered and grouped housing schemes to accommodate older people. In both cases, residents currently received a daily well-being check from their Scheme Manager, usually through a

home visit, and were also monitored by the Council's Careline Service 24 hours a day.

In recent years, there had been a sharp decline in the popularity of sheltered housing (which was reflected across the country), with older people tending to prefer to remain in their own homes for much longer, until they needed to move directly into independent living, residential or nursing accommodation.

At the same time, the Council had increasing numbers of local people registered on its Housing Register in need of general needs housing who were having to wait long periods of time to be accommodated, usually years, and in the meantime living in deficient existing accommodation. Furthermore, demand for temporary accommodation for homeless households had increased too.

Officers believed that the number of low demand sheltered properties now needed to be reduced through decanting the existing residents at some sheltered housing schemes to other suitable accommodation and then developing the resultant vacant land or buildings to provide accommodation to help meet the housing needs of local people registered on the Housing Register, or homeless households, through the Council's Housebuilding Programme.

(xvii) Annual Review of Protected Characteristics – Home Seekers and Lettings - This annual report reviewed the protected characteristics of home seekers and lettings. The Committee noted that following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Equality Duty in 2011, public bodies had to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, shaping policy, and delivering services.

Generally the statistics confirmed that the Protected Characteristics of homeseekers housed in Council accommodation was similar to those on the Housing Register.

(xviii) HomeOptions Choice Based lettings Scheme – Progress Report – the Committee received the annual report on the "HomeOption" Choice Based Letting Scheme.

The Committee noted that the scheme was administered by the external Choice Based Lettings Agency 'Locata Housing Services' (LHS). Under the scheme, all vacant social rented properties were advertised to applicants on the website and a weekly 'Property List' giving details of location, type, rent, service charge, council tax band and landlord of the available accommodation. Applicants applied for a property by "expressing an interest" in up to a maximum of three properties for which they had an assessed need, either in person, by Internet, telephone, text, or email.

At the end of the weekly cycle, the Council analysed the "expressions of interests" received and allocates each property following a prioritisation and selection process in accordance with its own Housing Allocations Scheme.

(xix) HRA Financial Plan 2017/18 – Six Month Review – Also in January the Committee received the six month review report on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Financial Plan for 2017/18.

The HRA Financial Plan set out the anticipated HRA income and expenditure over the next 30 years.

The Cabinet had asked the Communities Select Committee to review updates to the

HRA Financial Plan twice each year. In addition, senior Housing and Finance officers also formally review the Financial Plan in July and January each year too.

(xx) Youth Council Annual Report – at their last meeting of the year in March 2017, five members of the Youth Council gave an illustrated talk on the work and projects they carried out during the year and their request for £8,000 DDF. There was also a recommendation from officers that the Youth Council be allowed to reduce their twice yearly presentations to the Select Committee down to just one a year, which was agreed by the Committee, with a further recommendation that their presentation be given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee direct.

The Youth Council thanked the Council for granting them the £5,000 project money for 2017/18 which enabled them to carry out a drugs project to raise the awareness of the dangers of using 'gateway drugs'. They had also devised an online survey asking young people about their awareness of drug use in their area. To date the survey had been completed by 2884 young people.

In 2017 they held a Youth Conference at the Civic Offices with the aim of promoting Local Democracy Week. They had over 70 delegates representing ten secondary schools from around the District.

(xxi) MiLife (Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing) Report - Working with staff from the Council's Community, Health & Wellbeing Team, Youth Councillors formulated and co-designed a project, which they named 'MiLife', to address the issue of mental health via a programme to be delivered in schools.

The objective of the MiLife project was to support children and young people to help them understand mental health, dispel stigma, and to equip them with tools to develop personal resilience. It would also help them find information to wider support services.

Since the roll out in 2016, over 6,000 Epping Forest young people had taken part in the Adolescent MiLife Programme to date.

(xxii) Communities Directorate Business Plan for 2018-19 – also at their last meeting of the year the Committee was taken through the proposed Business Plan for the coming year by the Director and Portfolio Holders.

Case Study: EFDC Safeguarding Work

In June 2017 the Committee received a report on the range of Safeguarding work carried out by the Council over the last three years that the safeguarding team had been in place.

The team was established in May 2014, following initial DDF funding for a fixed period of 2 years and a subsequent Cabinet decision to make the posts permanent.

Over the last three years there has been a gradual increase in the number of safeguarding concerns raised on behalf of children, families and adults with needs for care and support. Since 2014, the amount of referrals received in the safeguarding team had reached over 600 (involving a total of 842 children and adults), ranging from neglect of children, to adults suffering from the effects of hoarding and poor mental health.

A training programme for staff had been provided across the Council and has enabled staff to become more proficient at identifying signs of abuse and neglect and more confident in referring cases. Hence, the Council had been able to be more proactive in addressing concerns and making effective referrals to our statutory and voluntary sector partners, in order to provide the support needed in each case.

Apart from the core training delivered to frontline staff and Elected Members, we have also devised specific models of training for delivery to the Council's trades people, as part of their 'Tool Box Talk' sessions and have assisted these staff in their ability to report concerns, by providing a report card, which they can use to tick key things that they have identified in households.

Poor mental health was prominent in many of the safeguarding cases dealt with on a regular basis by the Council and this could impact on children, neighbours and wider families. Neglect was another key concern across the district and forms part of most safeguarding cases referred. A significant amount of time was expended by Council staff in collating information to be forwarded to Social Care and proving local cases, as often referrals were met with resistance if care services have previously or are currently involved with, the family.

We now also have a Suicide Protocol and Procedures to help support staff in dealing with an increasing number of incidents, especially those working in Benefit's and Council Tax teams. This has also been circulated widely across the Council and special staff briefings have been provided.

Staff have also dealt with a number of cases dealing with such issues as Modern Slavery and Child Sexual Exploitation, which required swift and effective working with the Police.

Since the time the Council first established a dedicated safeguarding resource as part of the Community Safety Team, there has been approximately 80% more safeguarding cases identified each year, and this was due to the provision of training and awareness rising amongst staff across the Council.