

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 16 December 2014

**Subject:** Governance and Development Management

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor J Philip

---

## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Governance and Development Management Portfolio Holder be noted.**

---

### **1. Internal Audit**

The Audit Charter, which was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee in September 2014, includes in the Roles and Responsibilities of Audit, "Advisory Activities". These are achieved via consultation to identify reviews at the request of management that add value and improve governance, risk management and control processes and support management in their work.

This activity involves using either contingency time within the audit plan, or the rescheduling of planned audits by bringing them forward in the year to enable any benefits identified to be brought into action at the earliest possible date.

Audit have recently completed a review of the processes within Facilities Management, requested by the Assistant Director (ICT) in which a number of improvements were identified, including a reporting process from the Marketplace system, to enable early identification of expenditure to suppliers which could exceed Contract Standing Orders financial limits and may not be subject to the correct level of testing for value for money.

A further review is currently in progress of the processing and monitoring of utilities invoices. This follows concerns raised to Internal audit by staff in the Governance Directorate.

### **2. Online Communications**

As many residents adopt new channels of communication geared towards 24/7 access, Epping Forest District Council has introduced additional ways of communication. Unlike traditional media, the new forms of media are increasingly interactive, providing the Council with the opportunity to listen to our residents as well as talking to them.

Social media is a particularly strong growth area with our residents choosing to access more of their information and ask for more customer services via a range of channels. Council staff began unofficial out-of-hours social media monitoring and response in 2010. Christmas and New Year was covered for the first time in 2013. Formal out of hours monitoring and response was introduced earlier this year. Online and social media is managed predominantly by the Council's Public Relations Service. The North Weald Airfield Operations Team contributes significantly to the Council's output. The Museum Service has also significantly increased its social media coverage.

Twitter and Facebook form the main focus of social media customer comments and enquiries requiring rapid response. Many customer service issues can be dealt with by directing the resident to more comprehensive online information available through the Council website. Service requests can also be referred directly to directorates for action the following day. Misinformation and reputational issues can be picked up early to enable the Council to provide accurate information.

Other forms of online and social media are achieving significant expansion. The Council has incorporated YouTube and Flickr video and photo sharing services very effectively into its online services. It has also experimented with Pinterest and Instagram. It is important to keep new social media platforms under review to ensure we continue to focus our efforts where our residents lead.

Social media is often used as a signpost to new information as it becomes available on the Council website. News items (most of which are also issued to the traditional media as news releases) published on the Council website are always linked to by Twitter and Facebook. Webcasting of council meetings is well integrated into system. Council, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny webcasts are integrated into regular news items. With planning meetings, these webcasts are also promoted through the committee management system and social media. ContactUs, the Council's generic email address commonly used in conjunction with the Council website received 4,080 customer service emails (excluding spam) from 19Feb14 to 17Nov14. Other email addresses such as Erefuse, also receive significant levels of customer service requests.

The following table provides a statistical summary of social online communications:

<b>Twitter and Facebook</b>		<b>Followers</b>	<b>Following</b>	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Facebook Likes</b>
Epping Forest District Council  @eppingforestdc	19Feb14	3,246	857	3,507	1,101
	17Nov14	4,189	1,005	5,804	1,208
	Increase	29%	17%	65%	8%
Other Council Twitter and Facebook Accounts	19Feb14	1,357	970	2,643	1,365
	17Nov14	2,913	1,919	6,338	3,525
	Increase	14%	97%	129%	158%
Twitter and FB Accounts Combined	19Feb14	4,603	1,827	6,150	2,454
	17Nov14	7,102	2,924	12,142	4,733
	Increase	54%	60%	97%	93%
<b>Flickr</b>			<b>Viewed</b>	<b>Comments</b>	
@eppingforestdc	19Feb14	1,426 photos	200,895 times	11 - 48 fav	
	17Nov14	3,584 photos	471,025 times	15 - 63 fav	
	Increase	2,158	270,130		

<b>Twitter and Facebook</b>		<b>Followers</b>	<b>Following</b>	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Facebook Likes</b>
<b>YouTube</b>		<b>Videos</b>	<b>Views</b>	<b>Subscribers</b>	
@eppingforestdc	19Feb14	85	28,429	30	
	17Nov14	117	40,411	41	
	Increase	32	11,982	11	
<b>Blogs</b>		<b>Views</b>			
Chairman of Council		3,982			
North Weald Airfield Community day		15,654			
Epping Forest District Museum		2,345			
<b>Website News Releases (Wordpress)</b>		<b>Published</b>	<b>Pages views</b>	<b>Average views per news item</b>	
	19Feb14	2,002			
	17Nov14	2,212			
	Increase	210	223,243	1,063	

### 3. Equalities

Equalities provision is not always about the big projects and large costs. Some cross directorate cooperation has led to a positive outcome in relation to provision of baby changing facilities for visitors to the Civic Offices. The cost of major works to the ground floor toilet facilities was prohibitive – but the first floor toilet (opposite Human Resources) can be accessed by the public via the lift and for approximately £300 a baby changing unit could be bought and fitted. Budget has been identified and the work added to the Facilities Management programme.

### 4. Development Management

Building Control continue to show good progress with current income, at month eight, £13,800 above budget.

Development Control continues to show a performance well above budget with income for each of the last five months above the three year average for each of those months. The total number of all planning related applications continues to be around 300 up on this time last year.

Two significant major planning applications have recently been submitted for consideration. These are as follows:

#### Land at Harlow Gateway South, London Road, Harlow

This is a hybrid application (EPF/2517/14) for: 1. Part full planning permission for development of Plot A of site for B1 (business) and B8 (storage and distribution)

purposes by C.J. Pryor Ltd and 2. Part outline planning permission for use of Plot B -E for B1 (business) and B8 (storage and distribution) purposes with all matters reserved save for access.

This planning application is linked to enabling development applications for 9 residential units (EPF/2516/14) at Foster Street Farm, Foster Street, North Weald and a development of 65 residential units (EPF/2518/14) at C. J. Pryor, Cecil House, Foster Street, North Weald. All three sites are in the Metropolitan Green Belt.

#### Land and garages off Burton Road, Loughton

This is a full planning application for 52 affordable dwellings and is Council owned land which includes redeveloping the Burton Road depot site.

It is anticipated that these planning applications will be reported to relevant planning committees in the early part of the New Year.

Finally, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority have been granted permission to judicially review the planning permission at Valley Grown Nursery, Paynes Lane, Nazeing for a proposed large glasshouse extension, creation of storage ponds, together with habitat enhancement and landscaping and installation of combined heat and power unit. Planning permission was granted in August 2014 and the challenge is on Green Belt openness grounds. We have sought a legal opinion and the advice is that the Council's decision is defensible and therefore we should fight the judicial review, which may have cost implications.