

# Council Agenda



## Epping Forest District Council

### NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEETING

You are hereby summoned to a meeting of the EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL to be held in the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING at 7.00 pm on Tuesday, 11 October 2022 for the purpose of transacting the business set out in the agenda.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Blakemore".

**Georgina Blakemore**  
Chief Executive

**Democratic Services  
Officer:**

Gary Woodhall / J Leither      Tel: (01992) 564243  
Email: [democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

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#### MEETING NOTICE

**Members are reminded that the dress code for this Council meeting is strictly formal and black tie, in memory of Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II.**

## **BUSINESS**

### **1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION**

This meeting is to be webcast. Members are reminded of the need to activate their microphones before speaking. The Democratic and Electoral Services Team Manager will read the following announcement:

“The chairman would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be broadcast live to the internet (or filmed) and will be capable of repeated viewing (or another use by such third parties).

If you are seated in the lower public seating area it is likely that the recording cameras will capture your image and this will result in the possibility that your image will become part of the broadcast.

This may infringe your human and data protection rights and if you wish to avoid this you should move to the upper public gallery.”

### **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To be announced at the meeting.

### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To declare interests in any item on the agenda.

### **4. MINUTES (Pages 7 - 20)**

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2022, as attached.

### **5. IN MEMORY OF HER MAJESTY THE LATE QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

Two minute silence to be held in honour of the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, followed by tributes to be paid by the Chairman of Council, Group Leaders and other Members.

### **6. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) Chairman's Announcements

### **7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)**

To answer questions asked after notice in accordance with the provisions contained within Part 4 of the Council Rules of the Constitution on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the District:

(a) to the Leader of the Council;

(b) to any Portfolio Holder; or

(c) to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Questions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

**(1) Public Question from Mr J Padfield****Tilegate Farm**

The residential development of nine acres of open field Green Belt in Magdalen Laver remains a source of concern for the Residents of the Lavers. Documentation downloaded and retained by the Parish Council Clerk from the Council's Planning Search website indicates that Officers granted a residential permission to a newly erected "stables". The permission included the dumping of many hundreds of tons of waste material under the pretext of "landscaping". The Parish Council notified the District Council about the dumping and queried the residential permission. The entire Application documentation was then internally removed from the Council records including from EFDC Planning Search.

The investigation undertaken by the District Councils Internal Auditors denies the veracity of the Parish Clerk's documents copied from the Councils website, they state: "Without a proper digital forensic investigation, which would be costly to the Council, the documents you submitted as evidence of their existence cannot be verified." No consideration has been given by the Auditor as to how and why a Parish Council Clerk would both fraudulently construct these documents and also fabricate the associated contemporaneous email trail between the Parish Council and the District Council. No explanation has been given as to why the "Stables" were built to residential standards. This issue is just one of many on the site. Yet another Application is pending. Probity in the planning system is absolutely critical to its function. Should not the Council now properly investigate this issue whatever the cost?

**8. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE**

To answer questions asked after notice in accordance with the provisions contained within the Council's rules in Part 4 of the Constitution on any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties or which affects the District:

- (a) to the Chairman of the Council;
- (b) to the Leader of the Council;
- (c) to any Member of the Cabinet; or
- (d) the Chairman of any Committee or Sub-Committee.

The Council's rules provide that answers to questions under notice may take the form of:

- (a) direct oral answer;
- (b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- (c) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

Answers to questions falling within (a) and (b) above will be made available to the member asking the question one hour before the meeting. Answers to questions falling within (c) above will be circulated to all councillors.

Questions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

**9. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET (Pages 21 - 58)**

To receive reports and any announcements from the Leader and members of the Cabinet on matters falling within their area of responsibility:

- (a) Report of the Leader of Council (verbal);
- (b) Report of the Place Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (c) Report of the Finance Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (d) Report of the Housing & Community Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (e) Report of the Wellbeing & Community Partnerships Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (f) Report of the Customer Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (g) Report of the Contracts & Commissioning Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (h) Report of the Technical Services Portfolio Holder (attached); and
- (i) Report of the Internal Resources Portfolio Holder (attached).

**10. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE**

The Council's rules provide for questions by any member of the Council to the Leader or any Portfolio Holder, without notice on:

- (i) reports under the previous item; or
- (ii) any other matter of a non operational character in relation to the powers and duties of the Council or which affects all or part of the District or some or all of its inhabitants.

The Council's rules provide that answers to questions without notice may take the form of:

- (a) a direct oral answer from the Leader or, at the request of the Leader, from another member of the Cabinet;
- (b) where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication;
- (c) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner; or
- (d) where the question relates to an operational matter, the Leader or a member of the Cabinet will request that a response be given direct to the questioner by the relevant Service Director.

In accordance with the Council's rules, a time limit of thirty minutes is set for questions. Any question not dealt with within the time available will receive a written reply. The Chairman may extend this period by up to a further ten minutes at their discretion.

**11. MOTIONS**

To consider any motions, notice of which has been given under the Council's rules.

Motions, if any, will follow if not received in time to be incorporated into the agenda.

**Reports of the Cabinet****12. ONGAR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (Pages 59 - 60)**

To agree the report recommending that the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan be 'made' (adopted) as part of the Epping Forest District's statutory development Plan.

**13. AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 (Pages 61 - 66)**

(Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee) To consider the attached report recommending that the Annual Report of the Audit and Governance Committee 2021/22 be noted.

**14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (Pages 67 - 68)**

To receive the report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to answer any questions without notice asked in accordance with Council Rules.

**15. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

(a) To receive from Council representatives the reports (attached - if any) on the business of joint arrangements and external organisations and to receive answers to any questions on those bodies which may be put without notice; and

(b) To request written reports from representatives on joint arrangements and external organisations for future meetings.

**16. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**Exclusion:** To consider whether, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press should be excluded from the meeting for the items of business set out below on grounds that they will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the following paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) or are confidential under Section 100(A)(2):

<b>Agenda Item No</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Exempt Information Paragraph Number</b>
Nil	Nil	Nil

The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, which came into effect on 1 March 2006, requires the Council to consider whether maintaining the exemption listed above outweighs the potential public interest in disclosing the information. Any member who considers that this test should be applied to any currently exempted matter on this agenda should contact the proper officer at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

**Background Papers:** Article 17 of the Constitution (Access to Information) define background papers as being documents relating to the subject matter of the report

which in the Proper Officer's opinion:

(a) disclose any facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the report is based; and

(b) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing the report and does not include published works or those which disclose exempt or confidential information and in respect of executive reports, the advice of any political advisor.

The Council will make available for public inspection for four years after the date of the meeting one copy of each of the documents on the list of background papers.

## EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Committee:** Council **Date:** Thursday, 28 July 2022

**Place:** Council Chamber, Civic Offices,  
High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.12 pm

**Members Present:** Councillors M Sartin (Chairman), D Sunger (Vice-Chairman), I Allgood, C Amos, R Balcombe, N Bedford, P Bolton, H Brady, R Brookes, L Burrows, S Heap, S Heather, H Kane, S Kane, H Kauffman, P Keska, J Lea, J Leppert, A Lion, J Lucas, C McCredie, J McIvor, R Morgan, S Murray, M Owen, A Patel, J Philip, Caroline Pond, C C Pond, K Rizvi, B Rolfe, D Stocker, B Vaz, C Whitbread, H Whitbread, J M Whitehouse, K Williamson, D Wixley and S Yerrell

**Members Present (Virtually):** Councillors R Bassett, P Bhanot, E Gabbett, J Jogia, L Mead, S Patel and D Plummer

**Apologies:** R Baldwin, I Hadley, R Jennings, J Jennings, T Matthews, R Pugsley, S Rackham, P Stalker and J H Whitehouse

**Officers Present:** A Small (Section 151 Officer), G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services), J Leither (Democratic Services Officer), N Boateng (Service Manager (Legal) & Monitoring Officer), N Cole (Corporate Communications Officer) and P Seager (Chairman's Officer)

**Officers Present (Virtually):** V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer)

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### 14. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

### 15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

### 16. MINUTES

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 26 May 2022 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 17. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) **Announcements by the Chairman of Council**

(i) **Supplementary Reports**

The Chairman brought to the attention of Members that as an addition to the agenda there were a further four supplementary reports:

- Report of the Housing and Community Portfolio Holder;
- Updated report of the Technical Services Portfolio Holder (pages 59-64);
- Updated Report of the Contracts & Commissioning Portfolio Holder (pages 57-58); and
- Appointment Panel: Vacant Position on the Licensing Sub-Committee; and Joint Arrangements & External Organisations: Appointments to the Epping Forest Culture and Community Trust (Items 11a and 12 on the agenda)

**(ii) Councillor P Bhanot, MBE**

The Chairman congratulated Councillor P Bhanot for receiving an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2022, for his services to the Community of Chigwell.

**(iii) Derek Whitbread, BEM**

The Chairman congratulated Derek Whitbread, an on-call firefighter at Epping who has served the town of Epping for 47 years and was awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2022. In the past he had also received an award at the Council's Civic Awards in recognition of the work and service he had given locally.

**(iv) Lord Lieutenants Platinum Jubilee Service**

The Chairman advised that she had attended the Lord Lieutenants Platinum Jubilee Service at Chelmsford Cathedral and also services to rededicate the War Memorial in St Andrew's Church Yard at North Weald. and the rededication of the Norwegian Stone which sat outside of the airfield near to the airfield museum.

**(v) Annual Petanque Match**

The Chairman reported that the annual petanque match, which took place between Epping Town Council and the District Council early in July, where she and the Vice-Chairman Councillor D Sunger had come up against worthy Epping Town Council opponents in the annual petanque match, District and Town Councillor J H Whitehouse and Town Councillor M Wright but unfortunately, they proved to be no match for the Town Council and sadly lost she therefore went on to congratulate the winning team.

**(vi) Jack Petchey Achievement Awards**

The Chairman stated that she would like to congratulate all of the young people across the district who received Jack Petchey Achievements Awards this year. She advised that she felt privileged to be able to present the awards to many of the young who attended local schools and clubs and also recipients from the Youth Council.

**(vii) Community Culture & Wellbeing**

The Chairman advised that she was looking forward to watching some of the activities that the Community Culture & Wellbeing Team would be putting on for young people during the summer school holidays.

**(viii) Member/Officer Coffee Morning**



The Chairman reminded members that next member/officer coffee morning will be on the 14 September. She advised that she attended the first coffee morning and found it to be a particularly worthwhile exercise as it gave members the opportunity to meet with a variety of officers across the council.

**(xv) Floral Display**

The Chairman announced that she intended that the flowers from this evening's meeting to go to the Community Hub in the Civic Offices to be enjoyed by all staff and visitors.

**18. PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)**

**Question by Mrs Mary Dadd, Chairman of Ongar Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to Councillor N Bedford, Place Portfolio Holder.**

EFDC has identified some 11400 new homes to be built in the district between 2011-2033, with some 4,000+ to be delivered as allocated in the Local Plan Policy SP2 Spatial Development Strategy. by 2033 for individual civil parishes, towns etc. This is supported in the SHMA and OAHN household predictions, which indicate the number of bedrooms and flats or houses and in The Housing Mix (Planning) Guidance Note May 2021 (draft 4), which also indicates the type/topology of housing (house/flat/number of storeys/gardens) and housing mix of number of bedrooms expected for each band of density.

Clearly, and as indicated in the Local Plan Housing Policies, it is crucial to ensure that 'mixed and balanced communities' are retained/achieved and that supporting educational and health services can be planned ahead.

The overall approximate mix is stated as 70% 3+ bed, 20% 2 bed and 10 % 1 bed, although affordable & Mixed are slightly different from Market housing need, the former with more 1 & 2 bed homes and the latter with more 3+bed homes. This is also the same mix for Ongar's housing stock (ONS 2011) Ongar Neighbourhood plan 2020-2033 endorses and supports EFDC Local Plan housing mix as specific to Ongar civil parish.

Allocated sites have been designated indicative density and therefore approx. capacity depending on whether they are edge of settlement, urban etc. NPPF expects efficient use of land, which (para 124) also states "the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character".

Our concern is that it is more profitable for developers to 'offer' the required number of affordable homes on a major development site as a mix, but with predominantly smaller houses or flats with 1-2 bedrooms and also smaller dimensions of room sizes and outdoor space, including in locations where density favours larger units. This is already evident in at least two developments recently applying for planning approval. This will not fulfil the mix of housing need over the Plan period.

Communities/towns are likely to fulfil the numbers allocations but without monitoring at the outset, the mix will be with inappropriate, and in particular, with too few family homes in low density edge of settlement locations. This imbalance is unlikely to be able to be reset in remaining allocated sites coming forward later in the Local Plan lifetime. In turn this will adversely affect educational facilities forecasting and health services predictions. in turn this will lead to more transient population.

**Question**

1. How is the housing mix for new developments being monitored generally in EFDC and specifically in civil parishes or wards as allocated sites and windfall sites are coming forward, including the mix of affordable housing?
2. The Guidance Note for developers would ensure Local Plan Policies are fulfilled and the housing mix suit the housing needs. How is the Guidance Note being used in the Housing and Planning departments? including the recommendations for planning application approval or refusal by housing officers and planning officers?
3. If there is no monitoring (in both departments), please can it be set up as soon as possible?

**Response given by Councillor N Bedford, Place Portfolio Holder**

Councillor N Bedford thanked Mrs Dadd for submitting a question to Council and replied that key officers within the Planning Policy Team, who would have helped to provide a response to her question, were currently on annual leave and therefore a reply would not be available at this meeting. He stated that Mrs Dadd would receive a written answer within the next month, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule Q1, paragraph 3(c).

**19. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER NOTICE**

The Council noted that there were no questions by members under notice that had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

**20. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET**

The Council received written reports from Portfolio Holders. The Chairman invited the Leader of Council to provide a verbal report and the opportunity for other members of the Cabinet to give verbal updates on matters concerning their relevant portfolios.

**(a) The Leader of Council**

Councillor C Whitbread advised that he had been meeting with members of the Cabinet to discuss the work programme for the year ahead and what the Cabinet were seeking to achieve. He stated that he had also had a number of meetings to discuss the initial work on the Council's Corporate Plan which was emerging and will be going before the select committees before being presented at Cabinet.

He advised that he was still meeting with different Council Leaders, recently Harlow and Uttlesford to discuss how they could work together in the future.

He had also attended the rededication of the Norwegian Stone and had the opportunity to show members of the Norwegian Airforce around North Weald Airfield.

He advised that he had been around the district visiting local schools and hoped to visit more in the near future to meet the youth of the district and to see the work that was being done in our schools.

In the weeks ahead he advised that he and some of the Cabinet had meetings with BIFFA to discuss some of the issues around the waste collections and how these issues were going to be addressed in the future.

**(b) Housing and Community Portfolio Holder**

Councillor H Whitbread advised that the Council had received £338,000 Safer Streets funding from the Government which the Council have contributed to in the sum of £169,000. This was part of a government initiative to keep streets safer.

The Council would be using some of the money to invest in the Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey, installing CCTV, making sure the communal spaces were more open and safer and also around signage and the bin spaces. Historically in this area there have been issues with anti-social behaviour, drugs and fly-tipping. It was hoped that an improvement would be seen at Ninefields and this Council welcomes its close collaboration with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst.

**(c) Finance Portfolio Holder**

Councillor J Philip stated that he would like to thank a resident of the district for spotting that the Qualis Community Interest Company did not file its reports on time. He added that the Qualis Community Interest Company was now dormant but that it still should have filed accounts. He stated that he had spoken to the managing director of Qualis and she has assured Councillor Philip that the accounts will be filed within the next week. He had been advised that due to staffing levels and for the fact this company was now dormant the details did not go for audit with the auditors, this will be added to the process going forward so that it would not happen again.

Councillor Philip stated that he would like to inform Council of some good news, just before the close of business this evening officers submitted our response to the Shared Prosperity Fund to Government and we should hear from the Government sometime in October 2022 on the result of our bid. This was a significant piece of work and it was worth noting that we as a Council took much more of this through the democratic process and got the bid in before time.

**(d) Technical Services Portfolio Holder**

Councillor K Williamson advised that the pavement licensing, since it was drafted, had been extended until September 2023.

The licensing hearing for the Crooked Billet will be on Tuesday 3 August 2022.

There will be a members briefing on the new planning system, at one stage it was going to be held before this meeting, but that proved to be difficult so it was now being arranged for the very near future and members will be informed of that date.

**21. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS WITHOUT NOTICE****(a) Energy Grant**

Councillor R Balcombe asked the Finance Portfolio Holder how much progress had been made in distributing the £150 energy grant, especially to those who do not pay by direct debit. Further to that was there any news of the discretionary scheme and could he remind Council on how much money had been allocated to this scheme.

Councillor J Philip advised that the main Government scheme had been completed by the Council's Revenues and Benefits team which had been achieved more than 10 weeks ahead of schedule. In terms of the direct debit payers almost 21,200 of those had been paid, regarding the non-direct debit payers almost 3,300 have been paid via BACS payments. All residents that the Council did not hold bank details for

and were eligible for the scheme were contacted by letter to advise them of the scheme and how they would like the money to be paid. For those that did not reply the £150 was credited to their Council Tax account. The total amount of money paid was £4,773,000 for almost 32,000 Council taxpayers who had qualified for this scheme.

He advised that the Council had now moved onto the discretionary funding scheme for those in receipt of Council Tax Support and the deadline for that was at the end of November 2022 which was expected to complete ahead of time.

(b) Planning Application – Russell Road, Buckhurst Hill

Councillor S Heap stated that his question was to the Place Portfolio Holder and stated that at Full Council in April 2022 he had asked a question, to which could not be answered because it was under investigation. Therefore, he would like an update to that investigation and stated that as far as he was aware there was no investigation. He would therefore put the question to the Place Portfolio Holder again, do you think that clandestine meetings between Senior EFDC Officers and Conservative District Councillors to discuss an ongoing planning matter from a Conservative Parish Councillor sends out the right signals of fairness and openness.

Councillor N Bedford asked if Councillor Heap would like to declare an interest on the planning matter.

Councillor S Heap stated that he was unaware of any interests he may have apart from being interested in an answer to his question.

Councillor N Bedford advised that he had sourced his response through legal and stated that the circumstances surrounding the meeting, to which Councillor Heap had already been advised about. The meeting took place with Ward Councillors and Officers prior to the Russell Road planning application, it had been investigated and the Monitoring Officer was satisfied that nothing untoward took place and no further action would need to be taken.

(c) Recent Heatwaves and Wildfires

Councillor J McIvor stated his question was to the Leader of Council and asked if he would join him in thanking the Fire Service who have done an amazing job supporting the district, in particular the rural communities during the recent heatwaves and our thoughts are with those that have had wildfires to deal with.

Many of our residents are anxious and concerned about some of the scenes that we have seen in places like Wennington and asked if the Leader could reassure our residents that the Council's emergency procedures are well tested and that Officers and the Council stand ready to support any of our residents who may find themselves in a distressing situation like other Essex residents have found themselves in.

Councillor C Whitbread stated that this question gave him the opportunity to pay tribute to the firefighters of the district who do an excellent job and as mentioned earlier the tribute to his own brother who had served 47 years as an on-call firefighter in Epping. It was not just thanks to the firefighters it should also be mentioned that their families should be thanked for the support they give to the firefighters that work on the frontline, work long hours and do a brilliant job in protecting our communities.

He stated that he had every confidence in the Council's emergency plans which showed when last year there was a fire in Woodland Close and the Council pulled

out all the stops and offered a first-class service. Every time there was an emergency something new was learned for the next time.

(d) Programme to improve older housing

Councillor C Amos advised that his question was to the Housing & Community Portfolio Holder and stated that he was pleased to see, in recent reports, that the Council were producing a programme to improve older housing properties and asked if there was any specific programme for improving the insulation which was particularly pertinent at this time with the rising energy costs.

Councillor H Whitbread replied in terms of insulation the Council are conducting a 'Council House Regeneration Programme' which was being reviewed and this would be looked at under this programme. The issue which they have come up against was that it was a very costly project, although, over recent years the Council have worked with their tenants to look and installations in council owned properties and are trying to get this to the highest specification as possible.

The Council House Building Programme builds new properties in the most environmental way as possible and that she worked closely with the teams to look at the different solutions moving forwards.

(e) Hardship over the 6-week summer school holidays

Councillor S Murray stated that he would like to mention that he had declarations of interest with the two organisations he was going to mention in his question.

He advised that his question was to the Leader of Council and he asked if the Leader was aware how difficult the 6 week summer holidays were for a significant minority of families in the district and would he like to use this meeting as a further opportunity to put on record our thanks to the Surplus Food Hub and the Free Food For You Hub, who during the summer holidays would be running 30 sessions, 5 a week for six weeks, and would he further like to thank the Epping Forest Food Bank who would also be running over 24 sessions in this same period. He added that last week in a targeted programme with the districts primary schools they were able to distribute over 2.5 tonnes of food to 110 families across the district, personally delivered to them by a team of volunteers.

Councillor C Whitbread agreed that this 6-week period could be difficult for families with young children at home and are still having to work. He stated that he did not think anyone could forget the issues residents were facing, particularly with the cost-of-living crisis that everyone was aware of. We should also welcome the work that was done in our communities by the Epping Forest Food Bank and others that the County Council was also running a whole range of summer events and Epping Forest were actively engaged in these events as well. He went on to say that he did understand and had real concerns for all residents at this present time.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that what was important was getting the word out there and letting residents know what was available, there was a plethora of support through her Essex County Council role and highlighted the Activate Holiday Camp Clubs which are put on throughout the district and offers a full day of activities which included a meal as well as educational enrichment activities and sport.

Last year I visited the West Ham Academy who ran an event at Thornwood Common and I believe they will be doing the same this year and residents should look to see if they were eligible and if so sign up. It was an opportunity for children to meet their

peers during the summer holidays. There was also other support available for people in times of crisis, whether that be the essential living fund and various other grants through Essex County Council.

She highlighted that she had put together a guide of support and what was available, she would link this to her Facebook page. She gave her thanks to the food banks locally for the work they do which was really important at this time.

(f) Tree Planting

Councillor C McCredie advised her question was to the Place Portfolio Holder and referred to page 37 of the agenda, regarding tree planting and stated that it was to be welcomed the number of trees that had recently been planted over the district but was concerned that during these prolonged periods of dry hot weather how these young trees were faring, did they have aftercare, were they being watered or were they dying.

Councillor N Bedford stated that it was not just the case of digging a hole and planting the tree, there was a whole proper management plan being followed around the tree planting schemes across the district, which was fully supported, normally, by the Town and Parish Councils. The Town and Parish Councils would take onboard an allocation of trees arranged for local communities to clear the ground and plant those trees.

He thought that she would have to agree with him that this particular year was an exceptional year with regards to the heat and drought and maybe for the future different kinds of trees should be looked at especially ones more susceptible to surviving drought conditions, otherwise the future of the greenery of the district could die out.

(g) Local Plan and further main modifications

Councillor C C Pond advised that his question was to the Place Portfolio Holder as it arose from his report on page 35 of the agenda regarding the advice being given by the Local Plan Inspector on further main modifications. He asked if the Place Portfolio Holder could advise when these would be issued for formal public consultation, which he believed should last for 3 months so what would be the starting and the terminal dates of the consultation.

Councillor N Bedford advised that the Inspector, Mr Bore has written to the Council with quite an extensive timetable and has indicated that he would like everything completed by the Autumn of this year. In his report, the Inspector had submitted a further 106 questions to which some of the questions he has drafted the wording he would like. Some of the wording the Council are challenging which was around the previous Inspector's recommendations. Information was being supplied back to Mr Bore of how the Council came to that decision to change that wording and therefore there was a slight delay.

It was hoped that the consultation would have started in mid-July but with the slight delay and it would be preferable for it to go out for consultation after the summer holidays. Last year it went out for consultation for 8 weeks and as there were only minor alterations now it would only go out for consultation for 4 weeks. Therefore, it was anticipated that the consultation would be finished by late summer and the minor modifications would be going to Full Council in the autumn.

(h) Summer Holiday Activities

Councillor J Lucas advised her question was to the Wellbeing and Community Partnership Portfolio Holder regarding the summer activities across the district. She informed Council that she was really pleased to see the efforts that had been put in with regards to the number of activities that have been planned across the district and would like to know more about these and if there were any other activities that were going to be planned throughout the year.

Councillor A Patel advised that as restrictions have been reduced and we have returned to a normal way of life, following the height of the Covid pandemic, the Councils Community, Culture and Wellbeing Team (CCW) have put on a packed programme of activities this summer. With the summer holidays now in full flow I can confirm that bookings for the children's holiday programme 2022 are filling up quickly and many of the events are now fully booked.

The Play in the Park sessions are proving to be very popular this year. Members will see from his report that CCW were piloting a new style of brochure called 'What's on in Epping Forest'. The brochure was for the months of July, August and September, to promote activities and events for all ages and volunteering opportunities for adults. The booklet was available online on EFDC's website or as a hard copy from the Civic Offices in Epping or the District Council Museum in Waltham Abbey.

(i) Safer Streets Funding

Councillor S Yerrell advised his question was to the Housing & Community Portfolio Holder and stated that he was pleased to see that the Council had received some Safer Streets funding and that the Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey was going to be a recipient of this funding. Could the Portfolio Holder please explain more about it and would there be a consultation on how the money would be spent.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that she would be going to the Ninefields Estate tomorrow to meet with some residents but also to look at where they would put the plans that were in place. She added that this was an exciting project and that she had worked closely with Roger Hirst to secure the funding and would like to put on record her and the Councils thanks to him for helping to secure this bid.

There had been ongoing consultation with the Ninefields Residents Association who the housing team have built up a good relationship with and there would be consultation with them in that respect but there were some key goals that the Council wanted to achieve in terms of enhancing the CCTV network and looking at the bin areas and making those much tidier areas and to deal with fly tipping. She advised that she would be happy to meet up with Councillor Yerrell and the Residents Association to discuss the implementation of this scheme.

(j) Local Plan

Councillor J M Whitehouse advised his question was to the Place Portfolio Holder and thanked him for the update on the Local Plan and asked as part of that work were the trajectories being updated as the report went to Cabinet earlier this week and a lot of the commencement dates seemed unrealistic and indeed some had passed and when would we get an updated trajectory as it was fundamental in terms of delivering the right number of homes at the right pace and time.

Councillor N Bedford stated that he had a meeting with officers the following day and would need to get an update from them regarding the trajectories and would get a written response to Councillor Whitehouse as soon as possible.

(k) Safety in HMO's

Councillor J Lea advised her question was to the Housing & Community Portfolio Holder and stated that she had concerns regarding the amount of HMO's that appeared to be popping up around the district. She advised that she knew of at least three in Waltham Abbey and was concerned about whether they were being checked properly for fire regulations as one in Waltham Abbey did have a fire last year and she could not get any details of how many people there were living in the house. Therefore what could be done to make sure that these HMOs are regularly checked to make sure they are safe to live in.

Councillor H Whitbread stated that as Councillor Lea had mentioned this to her recently she had asked officers to put together a full response but just to give clarity and understanding of how HMOs work. If they are five bedrooms or above or more than 5 people live there they have to go through our licensing process, there were a number of HMOs across the district and that might be for various different reasons, they provide cheaper rent solutions and the Council have run HMOs in the past. There were 145 HMOs across the district and the Council actively seeks out those that are not licensed. We seek them out by looking on sparerooms.com and from intelligence by the public.

She advised that she would make sure Councillor Lea received a copy of the detailed response which had been prepared by officers.

(l) Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Councillor D Wixley advised his question was to the Place Portfolio Holder and referred to item 3 on page 36 of the agenda which referred to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project, particularly as there were going to be 3,900 homes in the Epping Forest District Council area and asked if the Portfolio Holder would be willing to organise a visit for Councillors to look at where this new town was going to be.

Councillor N Bedford advised that the short answer to his question had to be no, the reason being that was there had been numerous briefings and workshops, over the years on the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town so members should be aware of where it was, The Council were now moving into the development phase of the programme where developers were putting forward their master planning projects, therefore there was not a great deal to see at this present time except for empty fields.

Once the new bridge over the river Stort, which was under a judicial review, gets the go ahead and the development of the first phase starts there may be more of an opportunity to go and visit then.

(m) Refurbishment of Frank Bretton House, Ongar

Councillor B Vaz advised his question was to the Housing Portfolio Holder and stated that Frank Bretton House in Ongar which was in his ward and which he visited on the 21 June, at the official opening after a recent refurbishment and asked the Portfolio Holder why this work was done and if there were any plans to do similar works across the district.

Councillor H Whitbread advised that this was the first of the regenerations of our sheltered scheme and it was something that the Council were looking to bring forward further. A report came to the last Stronger Communities Select Committee



which was well received, and she looked forward to bringing that report to Cabinet later this year.

The regeneration of sheltered housing was one of the most important parts of the Councils regeneration scheme and one of the biggest challenges that the Council had was in terms of housing was trying to get people to downsize and in order to do that we have to create nice places for people to live.

(n) Ride London

Councillor C McCredie advised her question was to the Finance Portfolio Holder and stated that it was regarding Ride London, which was a very exciting event for the district however, she was concerned about the adverse effect it has had on some of the local businesses and wondered if there had been a debrief yet or was there a debrief to come in the near future.

Councillor J Philip replied that from an economic development point of view it had been looked at, but was not yet finished, it had been noticed that Epping had seen a downturn in footfall during this period which was almost completely balanced with a similar rise in footfall in Waltham Abbey and Ongar. Therefore, it was being looked at and work was being undertaken with the Federation of Small Businesses to make sure that we can give as much support as possible. The Ride London this year there was very little time to react to it and if it goes ahead next year, we will be in a better position to move forward and work more closely with local businesses.

## 22. MOTIONS

The Chairman reported that there were no motions to be considered at the meeting.

## 23. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor H Kane, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee reported that the reports in the agenda had been transposed and the report on page 95 should start on page 71 as this was the annual report to go with the attachment and the report on page 71 should start on page 95, which was the report from the last meeting held on the 16 June 2022.

### (a) Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Council received the seventeenth Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, its Select Committees and Task and Finish Panels for 2021/22, to be approved, by the Chairman of the Committee Councillor H Kane.

Councillor S Murray referred to page 83 of the agenda, 'Call-in – tree planting, Jessel Green' and stated that this was a really good example of scrutiny working well, the Portfolio Holder made a decision, it was called-in by local members because they felt the decision could be improved and then it was settled by an informal discussion rather than having to follow a formal process. The outcome of the trees and where they were going to be planted has produced a better solution. He went on to say that it had only been a couple of years ago that the Council were planning to build on Jessel Green.

He went on to congratulate the 'Save Jessel Green Group' for their excellent grassroots campaign to save Jessel Green, he also went on to congratulate Councillor H Kane on the scrutiny report and also paid tribute to the Leadership of the Council who did the right thing by Jessel Green.

**(b) Report of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Council received a written report from Councillor H Kane, the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the meeting held on the 16 June 2022.

There had also been a further meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the 26 July to which Councillor H Kane gave a verbal update.

She informed members that at this meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee went through Cabinet reports and KPI's where there was a good debate. All questions were answered by the number of officers that attended the meeting and represented the Portfolio Holders.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee would continue to scrutinise the Council's business in a positive and constructive way this coming year. Councillor H Kane encouraged other members to attend the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, especially the newly elected members giving them a chance to enhance their knowledge of how the Council works.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Council approved the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- (b) That the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 June 2022 be noted.

**24. APPOINTMENT PANEL**

The Leader of Council advised that following on from Annual Council in May of this year there was one vacancy remaining on the Licensing Sub-Committee which I understand should be the entitlement of the Green Party, however if this vacancy were not to be taken up by the Green Party I have a Member who has already had training and served on this committee last year.

Therefore, if the Green Party did not have a candidate for this position the Conservative Party would like to put forward Councillor D Sunger.

Councillor S Heap, Leader of the Green Party advised that they did not have anyone to fill that position.

The Chairman asked for any other nominations to which there were none and asked Members if they were happy to support the nomination of Councillor D Sunger to fill that vacancy.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor D Sunger would fill the remaining vacancy on the Licensing Sub-Committee.

**25. JOINT ARRANGEMENTS & EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS****Report of the Cabinet – Appointment to Outside Body**

**Mover:** Councillor C Whitbread, Leader of the Council

Councillor C Whitbread presented a report regarding appointments to be made to the Epping Forest Culture & Community Trust and recommended:

- (1) That the invitation from the Epping Forest Culture & Community Trust to appoint two Members of the Council as Trustees be accepted;
- (2) That future appointments to this Outside Body should be considered a Council appointment, rather than a Leader appointment, be agreed;
- (3) That suitable nominations to this new Outside Body be considered and appointments made for the terms beginning with the 2022-23 municipal year; and
- (4) That the appointments be made for a four-year term, in line with the term of office for the other Trustees, starting from the 2022-23 municipal year and ending with the 2025-26 municipal year.

He therefore recommended that Councillor H Kane and Councillor C Nweke be the members appointed to the Epping Forest Culture & Community Trust.

**Report as first moved ADOPTED**

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor H Kane and Councillor C Nweke be appointed to the Epping Forest Community & Culture Trust which was agreed.

**CHAIRMAN**

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## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: 11 October 2022**

**Subject: Place Portfolio**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Bedford**

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Place Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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#### **1. Local Plan progress update**

The Council was notified 06 May 2022 that a new Planning Inspector, Jonathan Bore MRTPI, has been appointed to complete the District's Plan Examination.

As updated previously, the Plan Inspector outlined in his correspondence of 16 June 2022 that changes are required to the text of the submitted Local Plan and the Main Modifications (published and consulted upon in 2021) in order to meet the tests of soundness as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Officers have worked hard over the last couple of months to respond to and satisfy each of the Inspector's Actions and are working to refine an updated Schedule of Main Modifications for consultation. This Inspector has responded quickly when contacted. Recognising the complexity of matters addressed, the response to the Inspector's Actions will be published alongside the revised further Main Modifications at the launch of the consultation period. This approach is consistent with that undertaken for Inspector Phillips' post hearing Actions and the Main Modifications Schedule consulted upon in 2021. Timescales for consultation are not yet confirmed, but it will be no longer than the statutory 6 weeks. Officers are working to deliver the consultation as soon as possible in the coming weeks to move towards the conclusion of the Examination and the final adoption of the Plan.

#### **2 Neighbourhood Planning**

Neighbourhood Planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need. Local Planning Authorities are required to facilitate Neighbourhood Planning and constructively engage with communities throughout the process.

The Ongar Neighbourhood Plan was considered at Cabinet on 18 July 2022 with agreement sought that the draft Plan, with proposed amendments from the Inspector, meets the basic conditions and for it to therefore progress to a local referendum. That referendum was held on Thursday 8 September 2022 to decide whether local electors want Epping Forest District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Ongar to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area. The outcome was in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan.

### **3 Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)**

The HGGT aims to coordinate and enable delivery of 16,000 homes by 2033, along with associated infrastructure, delivering the Garden Town Vision, principles and guidance that has been agreed by the 5 partner councils. 3,900 of these homes are allocated within Epping Forest District, making up over a third of the District's allocated housing.

The key priorities for the Garden Town for 2022 are:

- Delivering the Garden Town Vision of quality, beautiful and sustainable places
- Enabling the Infrastructure Foundations for Growth
- Maximising and Accelerating Delivery with a focus on outcomes by 2025
- Ensuring our Governance is Fit for the Future

EFDC officers continue to liaise with key stakeholders across the five Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) authorities and relevant site promoters. This is undertaken in the context of wider Garden Town activities. Key updates in terms of the Garden Town are:

- Work has progressed on the Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan (one of the strategic sites within the Garden Town and within Epping Forest District) by the applicant and design team, in discussion with the Council's Implementation Team and HGGT partners. The strategic masterplan is expected to be reviewed by EFDC Cabinet in November, for approval for public consultation. Consultation is expected to take place in November- December.
- The five Council partners have now all, through their formal processes, agreed 'in principle' to explore the creation of a Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Joint Committee, consisting of representation by all five partner Councils. A Delegations Framework and further work on the Joint Committee is currently in progress in draft.
- The Garden Town's Your Quality of Life consultation, funded by DLUHC and asking people about what they like, dislike, value and need, was open from 15<sup>th</sup> July to 14<sup>th</sup> October. Analysis and consultation data insights in terms of social value and quality of life across the Garden Town are currently being progressed. There were over 4000 visits to the website, with 650+ responses. Findings and insights from this social value data will be fed into masterplanning & design, stewardship approaches, policy & guidance and engagement practice across the Garden Town.
- The Garden Town team is currently progressing a number of projects, including (but not limited to) the draft HGGT Green Infrastructure Framework, draft HGGT Stewardship Guidance & Charter, updated HGGT Infrastructure Delivery Plan, East of Harlow Masterplanning Principles, and the Homes England funded STC Connector Route Study and London Road EZ/ Newhall Mobility Hub Design.

### **4. Sustainable Transport**

#### *DaRT87 Demand Responsive Transport*

Continued difficult trading conditions, with major changes in travel patterns delaying any return to pre-Covid patterns (especially no mass return to five-days per week commuting). New Flexiroute passenger App ought to streamline registration and booking process and a new £2 flat fare per journey should also stimulate some demand.

#### *Public EV charging*

Instavolt chargers at Oakwood Hill East was launched in March '22. There has been encouraging usage with sessions doubling in first three full months and a 50% increase compared with equivalent pre-Covid months on car park revenues. Further chargers in Basons Lane car park, Ongar (an EV charging 'not-spot') and Debden likely this year or early 2023.

Housing have a pilot scheme in planning for 2023 to deliver chargers in estates/replacing lockup garages. Chargers in Epping multi-storey car park are coming next year, plus private sector chargers are imminent in Buckhurst Hill (Waitrose), Epping (Tesco) plus some BP and Shell service stations, so the District's EV charging profile is looking better.

Market conditions, especially end user price increases on charging, are being watched carefully in case they start to depress EV uptake. Key high local mileage groups like licensed minicabs and SMEs are still very cautious though about switching to EV – cab fare tariff review is needed as a November '21 survey said that affordability of initial cost is a major problem for the trade, despite the ongoing low fuel and maintenance costs being attractive to them.

#### *UKSP Funded options*

LC-WIP for Waltham Abbey will enhance Ninefields estate regeneration and other wellbeing/employment initiatives locally. 24/25 funding includes £40k for Sustainable Transport initiatives. Rural England Prosperity Fund options being researched include EV charging and/or energy generation/savings for village halls and parish council sites.

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# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Council  
**Date:** 11 October 2022  
**Subject:** Finance Portfolio Holder  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor John Philip

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Finance Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **Finance**

### **Budgetary Position and Outturn for 2021/22**

It will not have escaped anyone's attention that the Country is facing some of the most worrying and financially uncertain times in more than a decade. This uncertainty is affecting the Council budgets in the same ways it is impacting on our residents.

The first Quarter's Budget Monitoring report presented to Stronger Council and Cabinet during September highlights the impacts that just some of these factors are having on our finances, with the worst still yet to come. Reductions in income and higher cost pressures are showing a predicted net overspend of more than £1 million in this financial year. It is unusual for a predicted overspend of this magnitude to occur so early in the financial year and this is symptomatic of the current economic uncertainty.

Budget Planning has already commenced for 2023/24 and the financial conditions facing the Country will make this one of the most challenging budgets to balance that the Council has ever been presented with. Inflationary pressures, higher borrowing costs and supply concerns are impacting both the budgets of the Council and those of the Council's suppliers. With cost pressures emerging from all sides the Cabinet has commenced an exercise to find options for reducing expenditure and increasing income that have the least impact on service provision, however in the face of such an unprecedented amount of financial pressures it is inevitable that some difficult choices will need to be presented to members. To ease the in-year financial pressures, where opportunities can be captured immediately that do not impact the services provided, these will be taken.

The development of the budget will be reported through Stronger Council Select Committee and Cabinet so that members are sighted on progress.

### **Audit**

I reported to the last meeting of Council that the Auditors are now on-site working through 2020/21's Accounts and with the expectation of following straight on to 2021/22's. At the time of writing, we still await their draft Audit conclusion for 2020/21. When this is received it

will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee. Together with the Chair of Audit and Governance Committee, (Cllr Bolton), I will continue to keep members updated on progress.

## **Qualis**

The financial performance of Qualis continues to be regularly reported to the Cabinet and Stronger Council. The results from the third quarter of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of trading were presented to Stronger Council on 26<sup>th</sup> September and Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> September. The report shows that Qualis made an overall loss during the year to date for reasons consistent with those previously reported. Essentially, a combination of Qualis continuing to carry costs associated with the development at Roundhills, Waltham Abbey, (which cannot be taken to the Balance Sheet until Planning consent is obtained), together with ongoing difficulties in finding suitable regeneration sites to acquire within the district. With these exceptions, performance is broadly in line with the Business Plan expectations.

The Qualis 1 year Business Plan for the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Qualis trading was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> September ahead of consideration by Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> October. The key messages contained were that the same unprecedented financial pressures impacting on the Council will also impact on Qualis, resulting in a forced re-evaluation of the viability of all schemes and a slow down in the assumed growth forecasts. Qualis still continues to contribute strongly to the Council's own financial position with over £2 million of interest payments being made each year, but the planned increase in interest receipts is now likely to slow as interest rates continue to rise in the face of higher inflation and a weakening pound.

## **Revenues and Benefits**

The Revenues & Benefits team continue the post-Covid related help for customers, particularly businesses across the district.

### **Covid-19 Additional Relief (CARF)**

Central Government has provided councils with funding to assist those ratepayers whose business were affected by the pandemic but were ineligible for existing support linked to business rates.

Epping Forest have been allocated £2,147,202 for this support package, the aim of which is to reduce the business rates charged in 2021/2022.

Relief has been awarded with the following criteria in mind:

1. The Council cannot award relief to ratepayers who for the same period of the relief either are or would have been eligible for the Extended Retail Discount (covering Retail, Hospitality and Leisure), the Nursery Discount or the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS)
2. The Council cannot award relief to a hereditament for a period when it is unoccupied (other than hereditaments which have become closed temporarily due to the government's advice on COVID-19, which should be treated as occupied for the purposes of this relief)
3. The Council must direct support under this scheme towards ratepayers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic and have been unable to adequately adapt to that impact

Relief under CARF is only available to reduce chargeable amounts in respect of 2021-22 financial year. Full details can be found at:

[Business support grants - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](http://eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

The council has been able to help 1,000 local businesses through this scheme.

### **Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme**

Over the past 6 months the Revs & Bens team have been busy administering the Government's £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme in addition to BAU. The purpose of the scheme was to provide immediate relief to rising energy costs, while targeting those most likely to need the support. As part of the main scheme, councils were asked to provide a £150 one-off payment to council taxpayers for every household that occupied a property meeting the criteria on **1 April 2022** the main ones being:

- It is valued in council tax bands **A – D**.
- It is **someone's sole or main residence** (therefore **won't** be paid for empty properties or second homes)

The council has since paid almost £4.8million to nearly 32,000 customers in respect of this, with over 95% of the payments being made 2months before the cut-off of 30 September 2022.

### **Discretionary Scheme**

Councils were asked to determine locally how best to make use of this funding to provide payments to **other** households who are energy bill payers but not covered by the Council Tax Rebate. In the main, the council chose to provide help to households living in property valued in bands A – H that are on income related benefits – full details of the main and discretionary scheme can be found on the council website:

[Council Tax energy rebate - Epping Forest District Council \(eppingforestdc.gov.uk\)](http://eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

The council has since paid almost £310,000 to 6,000 customers in respect of this, with over 95% of the payments being made 2months before the cut-off of 30 November 2022.

### **Local Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit - Q1 & Q2 2021/22 - 2022/23**

- New claims – 10.3 days (no National Q2 information but Q1 was 19 days)
- Changes in circumstances – 7.1 days (no National Q2 information but Q1 was 8 days)

### **Caseload count comparison (combined HB & LCTS)**

	<b>Number of live claims (adjusted for joint claims)</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>April</b>	6976	6603
<b>May</b>	6955	6576
<b>June</b>	6923	6524
<b>July</b>	6874	6507
<b>August</b>	6833	6525
<b>September</b>	6804	6512

The figures shown are adjusted to take account of 'joint claims' (HB & LCTS) - June 2022 for example, the number of separate HB & LCTS claims was 9,629 of which, 3105 are joint HB/CTS claims and so the adjusted figure is 6524.

It should be noted the claim stats have remained relatively consistent for the past 4months, which may suggest the council has reached or is nearing the balance point at which new working age cases claiming UC is balanced by those on UC reaching retirement age and thereby falling back into Housing Benefit system. We continue to monitor this closely.

## Council Tax Collection

Despite the economic challenges being faced by our customers, the Revs & Bens team continue to work closely with them and partnership stakeholders to ensure the council tax collection rate remains competitive; currently up by 0.5% on this time last year:

2022/23	April	May	June	July	August
Cash Collected	£10,872,782	£20,168,458	£29,081,201	£38,278,497	£47,138,597
Collectable Debit	107,713,175	107,831,308	107,817,533	107,903,713	107,962,860
%age	10.09	18.70	26.97	35.47	43.66

2021/22	April	May	June	July	August
Cash Collected	£10,302,496	£18,533,067	£27,484,756	£35,836,014	£44,410,948
Collectable Debit	102,835,787	102,895,837	102,966,154	102,979,381	102,983,656
%age	10.02	18.01	26.69	34.80	43.12

## Economic Development

### Economic Development Programme:

Officers await the outcome of Epping Forest District Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund £1 million bid to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Upon approval of bid proposals, it is expected that funding will be distributed to local authorities from the UK Government early in October.

A new Rural England Prosperity Fund programme was announced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September, with Epping Forest allocated £437,136. Projects must be capital in nature and the types of interventions that can be approved must link to two of the three investment priorities of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Communities and Place, Supporting local business, but not People and Skills. Programmes will be conducted between years two (2023-2024) and three (2024-2025) of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Moving forward officers will be consulting with stakeholders, to construct and submit a new investment bid to the UK Government. Deadlines for applications are the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2022. If the bid is approved, funding should be released to Epping Forest from April 2023.

### Business E-Newsletter:

The Economic Development Team have released the September edition of the 'Business Matters' e-newsletter with topics focusing on, Epping Forest District Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid, the Rural England Prosperity Fund, LoyalFree's business benefits webinar, business support courses from Essex Police's cyber threat team, the Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce Business Fair and the relaunch of the DaRT87 alongside the new Flexiroute Passenger app. The monthly e-newsletter is distributed to over 2,000 businesses within the district.

### **General Economic Briefing:**

The latest statistics on unemployment from July 2022 show that 2,025 people in the district are currently out of work. This continues a month-on-month downward trend in unemployment since February 2021.

### **Visitor Economy:**

The volume and value report for tourism in the district during 2021 has been released and shows that our visitor economy continued to grow back achieving a total value of £175,977,960, just 27% short of that enjoyed pre-pandemic. Our tourism economy supported 3,360 jobs which accounted for 7.4% of the employment in the district. Day trips continue to dominate both value and volume and seasonality figures show a move towards a peak in the summer reflecting the increasing interest being shown from outside our area looking for new summer holiday destinations. Holiday and visiting friends/family continue to be by far the most popular reason for visitors coming to our district with business travel now just representing 12%.

The Tourism and Visitor Board has resumed and will be meeting to report on the 2022 season and outlook for next year. However, indications are that the recovery from the pandemic is complete with all attractions and hospitality outlets offers now at 2019 levels. However staffing has been raised as a concern as some destinations reliant on volunteers are struggling to meet pre-pandemic levels and commercial areas, especially within hospitality, are finding difficulty with recruitment. This is a national issue. Figures from Visit Essex, supported by their “sentiment tracker” show that having recovered from the pandemic, concerns over the cost-of-living crisis have replaced concerns over Covid. National findings show those who normally holiday abroad are looking at UK destinations whilst those who holiday in the UK are looking for locations closer to home. Day trips are replacing longer holidays and people are looking to spend less are keen to find free activities. This is actually beneficial to our district’s visitor offer with day trips dominating and lots of free and lower-priced destinations available. In spite of the forecast drop in visitor spending nationally, our situation in the southeast and adjacent to London will cushion us from this to a certain extent.

During the summer a major event, RideLondon, took place through our district. Although an annual event born out of the London Olympics, the 2022 RideLondon marked a new era being the first after cancellations during the pandemic and featuring a new route taking riders out into the Essex countryside. As such it was a learning curve for the organisers and hosts alike. Work has already begun on the 2023 RideLondon event with assessments of what went well, and not so well. This will ensure that year two builds on the success of year one and the enthusiasm shown, by capitalising on the knowledge gained by the experience of year one.

### **Essex + Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ):**

The DIZ hosted, in conjunction with Connected Places Catapult, its latest engagement event in September. The ‘Round Table and Connections Café’ event brought together a number of key stakeholders from both around and beyond the DIZ to examine the potential for increased collaboration on innovation. With representatives from national thought leaders, tech innovators, academia, leading local authority members and major local employers, the Round Table examined the barriers and challenges that impact on collaboration between organisations, both large and small, but also explored in detail the opportunities for greater levels of collaboration to deliver the innovations of tomorrow. With over 100 attendees registered for the second ‘Connections Café’ half of the event, this examined the potential for greater collaboration through a keynote speech from Connected Places Catapult and panel sessions on how innovation hubs can catalyse change and the power of digital tech to underpin actions on climate change and sustainability. With a networking lunch at the

beginning of the Connections Café also providing the local organisations, SMEs, innovators and investors with an opportunity to meet, talk and forge new connections, the event will be built upon as a first step in the development of an 'innovation eco-system for the DIZ area.

The DIZ has been working closely with UK5G to develop a suite of communications assets that will enable the DIZ to position itself as an ideal location for 5G innovation. With messaging developed for key industry groups, FAQs created for the wider public, an explainer animation video for the DIZ, key social media assets and plans for enhancements to the DIZ website, this will all support the DIZ in promoting the benefits of 5G technology and putting itself forward to key industry innovators, government funders and investors as a potential beacon area and testbed for 5G innovations.

## **Asset Management**

### **Epping Forest Shopping Park**

I am pleased to report that the roof remedials are now complete along with the first round of snagging.

### **Brooker Road Industrial Estate Waltham Abbey**

The price for 181 has agreed and is progressing with the solicitors to conclude the sale. Letting agents have been appointed and viewings are being undertaken.

### **Cartersfield Road, Waltham Abbey redevelopment**

Unit 10 is in the hands of the solicitors to surrender the lease. The tenant at Unit 51 has signed the new tenancy agreement that concludes on Sept 30<sup>th</sup>. The Commercial Assets team have reported that the demolition tender was out and once that is sorted it will give a good mind to the phasing with a view to start building in the new year.

### **Unit 4 Orbital Business Park, Waltham Abbey**

The lease for the unit had been taken back from the Administrators. The Waste Management Team were now assisting in the clearance of the unit as there were lots of materials left behind by the former tenant. There will also be some repairs required. The Commercial Assets team have reported that the unit does consist of a relatively high office content, which is not what is generally sought in the market right now. However, there have been 2 viewings already and so it is felt that the unit will be a good opportunity for the right tenant once cleared and refurbishment is completed.

### **North Weald Airfield**

Aviation continues to be very busy as the flying schools continue to flourish.

This has led to an increase in noise complaints that are being dealt with on a case by case basis although the fact that more people are working from home has appeared to make people more aware of the aviation activity.

There has also been a surge in individuals looking for space to erect hangars which will bring in additional income over time.

The market continues to be popular with traders and the public alike. From last month an additional 80 traders began to work at NW which means it is now once again one of the biggest outdoor markets in the country according to the operator.

The HMRC Inland Border Facility closed on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> and the decommissioning of the site is on-going. With the 6 months lease break clause in place EFDC will continue to receive rent until the end of this current financial year.

The Airfield will be hosting the Ongar and Hoddesdon Round Tables fireworks event on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November, subject to contract.

The Airfield events programme for 2023 is starting to take shape with all of last years event organisers keen to return.

I am pleased to report that the final version of the Master Plan is being reviewed and all going well should be presented to Cabinet as soon as the Local Plan is adopted.

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# Portfolio Holder Report to Full Council

**Date:** 11 October 2022

**Subject:** Housing Services Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor H Whitbread

To: Holly Whitbread, Jennifer Gould, Deborah Fenton

From: Janice Nuth

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## **Cost of living crisis and advice and support for residents**

The next Housing Newsletter shall include a booklet on the help that is available both from the Council and other organisations in response to the rapidly increasing cost of living. It will also be published on the Council's website and regularly updated.

## **New customer focused style for policies**

We have created a standard customer focussed template for publishing Council policies as they are updated or introduced to:

- improve efficiency when writing or reviewing policies
- offer ease of reference throughout the democratic approval process
- provide consistency and transparency for customers seeking information
- ensure our associated general duties are always highlighted.

The Housing Allocation Scheme for 2022-2027 incorporates all elements of the new standard customer focussed policy template.

## **The Housing Allocations Scheme for 2022-2027 goes live**

Our new Housing Allocations Scheme takes effect from Monday 26 September. We have already begun the process of communicating key changes to residents and staff. The Scheme was approved by cabinet on 7 March 2022 and will help us to deliver on our commitment to ensure that all eligible applicants in our District have fair access to social housing.

## **Homelessness demand**

The Homelessness Team have had an extremely busy summer and took a total of 91 homelessness applications in the month of August. With winter fast approaching, we expect to see a rise in numbers and are trying to prepare for the inevitable increase in demand by filling vacancies within the establishment currently. This includes advertising for a Senior Homelessness Officer and two Triage & Support Officers who are responsible for operating the front doors to the homelessness service.

## **Norway House contributes to Homelessness Exhibition**

Staff from the Community, Culture and Wellbeing Team have begun collaborating with staff and residents at Norway House, to produce an art installation for the Homelessness exhibition at Waltham Abbey in Museum, which is due to be displayed in January 2023. The artwork will relate to the lived experiences of people who are, or have been, homeless, as well as reflecting on what the notion of home means to the wider community. We want to capture authentic experiences of Homelessness from the residents at Norway House, through the use of photographic imagery and miniature cardboard houses.

### **The local population and the National Census Data 2021**

The confidential local residents profiling information that the Council gathers for application forms, surveys and equalities impact assessments across housing services has been updated to replicate the questions that were asked in the 2021 National Census. This will enable the service to make direct comparisons between the profile of people accessing our services and the most up to date national statistics.

### **Council tenant census**

Our new Epping Forest District Council tenant census is being distributed to our tenants and leaseholders in September 2022. Residents will be able to complete a paper census or online. Once collated, this information will be fed into the Council's new Housing Management System, allowing the Service to deliver tailored services to its customers.

A number of notable resident involvement activities have taken place during the period. Members may wish to refer to the Resident Involvement Facebook page [www.facebook.com/efdcgetinvolved](http://www.facebook.com/efdcgetinvolved), which showcases some of those activities.

### **Neighbourhood tenancy audits**

We are about to embark on our tenancy audits program across the district which will be on a yearly rolling basis, this will allow us the ability to access every Council owned home for a property check and to gain up to date details on those in our homes.

### **Upgrade of emergency alarm system for older peoples housing**

Presentations of the new alarm systems are in progress. Everon who are providing the system are giving demonstrations to residents and the opportunity for residents to ask questions. The actual installations started on 12 September at Grove Court and Rochford Avenue grouped sheltered schemes in Waltham Abbey. From there we will move onto Hedgers Close, Pelly Court and Chapel Road with work commencing at the Sheltered Schemes the beginning of October. The alarm upgrade programme is due to be completed by end of November 2022.

### **Estate improvements receive a boost from Safer Streets fund**

We continue to work hard to deliver the projects agreed under our four year "More than Bricks and Mortar estate enhancement project", which includes playgrounds, lighting, landscaping, signage, and also under its "Homes Fit For Human Habitation Act Project", that seeks to improve bin storage and provision to our multi-occupancy buildings.

We are greatly excited to be leading on several projects being delivered under the new two-year Home Office Safer Streets fund. More information about the Safer Streets Project can be found at <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/ninefields-estate-safer-streets-project/>

### **Anti-social behaviour apps for residents' mobile devices**

Our Neighbourhood team is now in its second trial period with the ASB app that gives residents more mobile ways to report and record anti-social behaviour, allowing for a better flow of information to and from the customer. The trial period ends in November 2022 at which point we will be looking to roll it out in all our cases.

### **Income recovery**

Our incomes team will shortly be undertaking some training for the next financial year to see how we can best balance the cost of living and rent increase with maintaining a steady reduction in rent arrears which has happened year on year despite Covid.

### **Rent Sense programme**

We continue to reap the benefits from the use of the Rent Sense program which has seen arrears reduce across the borough at the most difficult time with the cost-of-living crisis and the possible rise of the rent cap next year.

### **Restructure and changes to Building Regulations**

Our restructure of the Housing and Property Asset and Operations team is almost complete. We have aligned it with Pennington Choices recommendations (our independent consultant) to help facilitate the requirements of the Building Safety Bill, changes to the Fire Safety Order 2015 with the introduction of the Fire Safety Act 2021; and the Housing White Paper.

Our Surveyors area-based patches have been synchronised with the Neighbourhoods and Estate and Land patches so that there is a consistent approach to works across the teams. Surveyors will be expected to spend more time out and about on their patches, surveying property's and building relationships with tenants in the area.

### **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)**

We have teamed up with E:On energy to prepare a strong partnership bid for funding from the SHDF, including where possible using local contractors that meet the requirements of the retrofit scheme PAS2035. If successful, our bid will require match funding from the Council and should provide some financial relief to some resident's fuel bills given that 130 properties do not have a gas supply. We are extremely optimistic about our chances and will use this as an opportunity to build our decarbonisation strategy moving forward. Successful bids will be notified around February next year.

### **EFDC and Qualis**

We hope to include Qualis in the Council's decarbonisation strategy and have begun discussions with them about what is needed to retrofit our properties in the future. Qualis are generally meeting the agreed key performance indicators that the Council set and the relationship is continuing to evolve.

### **Service and major works for leaseholders**

We are providing ongoing services and major works to ensure blocks are kept in a good state of repair and redecoration and are compliant in respect of safety.

The final accounts in respect of major works were raised in August 2022. The recharge totalled £542,446.55, for the 461 leasehold properties which benefited from various programmes including:

- PVCu Window and Rear Door Replacements where the current units had reached the end of their life cycle.
- Communal Block Electrics to ensure compliance with current Electrical Regulations.

### **Ongoing service charge accounts for leaseholders**

The ongoing service charge accounts were raised in September 2022. The recharge totalled £504,180.01. All 1088 leaseholders received some element of ongoing services such as grounds maintenance, caretaking, and cleaning etc.

Any leaseholder who is having difficulty in finalising payment will be signposted to our Corporate Debt Team who will endeavour to arrange reasonable and affordable payment terms. Any refunds of over-payments are being dealt with promptly.

**New Council housing developments**

September saw the scheme opening of our Pick Hill development site named Spinks House (in honour of Councillor Don Spinks of Waltham Abbey), following handover of two 3-bedroom 5-person family homes earlier in the month. We also took handover of a further two 2-bedroom 4 person homes at our Bushfields site. This now completes all of the units across Phases 4.1 and 4.2 of our programme which has delivered a total of 38 units - a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed homes.

We now look forward to delivering two further schemes early next year at our Woollard Street and Pentlow Way sites, delivering 15 units across both sites. We are also working hard on schemes further into our programme within Phase 5 and beyond.

**Opportunities for grant funding new developments**

Over the next month we will be considering potential Homes England Grant funding across our schemes and where this may be able to be applied.

We are also very much aware of the cost-of-living crisis, BCiS inflation costs, energy costs and the implications this may have on our construction programme. We are closely monitoring our budgets to ensure that we manage our programme to the best of our ability through these uncertain times.

*If you have any questions or would like further information please contact Janice Nuth Housing Strategy Manager (Interim) [Jnuth@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:Jnuth@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)*

## Portfolio Holder Report to Full Council – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022

### Community, Culture & Wellbeing

#### Externally funded Social Prescriber and Health & Wellbeing Coach

The Community, Culture & Wellbeing Team has secured funding totally £83k from the Epping North Primary Care Network (PCN) via the NHS Additional Roles Reimbursement Fund to pilot overseeing two partnership roles for a 12-month period: a Social Prescribing Link Worker and a Health & Wellbeing Coach.

The aim of these innovative roles is to help improve residents' health and wellbeing by motivating and supporting people into non-clinical services. The post holders will be community based whilst linked with the six GP practices which make up the Epping North PCN, and will work closely with the Council's CCW service and Public Health Improvement Officer.

#### Children's Summer Holiday Activity Programme 2022

The CCW service once again provided a full and varied Holiday Activity Programme for the district's children and young people this year. Including the Disability Inclusion Programme and Play in the Park roadshows, 91 sessions were delivered district-wide with a record number of 2,880 children and young people taking part over the six-week period. Particular highlights included the Musical in Two Days, Multi-Sports Days, Science Camp, an Animation Workshop and Bounce & Swim sessions, all of which ran at 80% capacity or over.

#### Ukrainian Information Support

Over a hundred Ukrainian guests and host sponsors attended an information support event organised by the Community & Wellbeing directorate and VAEF at the Civic Offices on 8<sup>th</sup> September.

Alongside EFDC's Housing Needs, Private Sector Housing and CCW staff, practitioners from Epping Forest Citizens Advice, Epping Forest Foodbank, the Department for Work and Pensions, Epping Forest College and a wide range of local community groups were on hand to offer expert advice, support and guidance. NHS colleagues offered free health checks and Covid vaccinations on site. A comprehensive "Frequently Asked Questions" resource pack was provided, both in Ukrainian for guests and in English for hosts. Children attending made friends whilst engaging with the craft activities on offer and guests were able to find out more about CCW's district-wide activity programmes and the free 3-month passes provided by Places Leisure to the district's Leisure Centres.

#### Safe, Well & Secure event for Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey

In support of the Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Strategy's place-based approach, three days of community engagement took place on Ninefields Estate in Waltham Abbey between 30<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

By adopting a joined-up partnership approach staff were able to knock on over 1,900 doors to engage directly with residents and discuss a range of topics. Multi-agency teams were each allocated sections of the estate by a lead officer from the Essex County Fire & Rescue Service. Along with members of the Ninefields Resident's Association partners involved included CCW, Community Safety and Housing Teams, Essex Police, New City College, NHS, EPUT, Peabody, Epping Forest Citizens Advice, Rainbow Services, Essex County Council and the Children's Centre service.

Residents were asked a series of questions that had been provided by the key agencies involved with the aim of signposting those in need to local services whilst also identifying and mobilising willing local volunteers in the form of Court or Road Champions. Along with existing Community Champions, the new local volunteers will enable community capacity to

grow whilst directly supporting key aspects of the Council's successful 'Safer Streets' funded initiatives.

Over the 3 days approximately 60 direct referrals were made to the Home, Fire & Safety Check Department of the Fire Service and over 80 referrals were made to wider partner agencies to follow up on other issues. The middle day saw partners set up information market stalls in the Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre café area, and Covid vaccinations and health checks were also available. Full evaluation of the event will be made available in due course from the ECFRS.

#### Epping Forest Youth Council (EFYC)

The next project to be undertaken by the Epping Forest Youth Council will focus on the cost-of-living crisis. Youth Councillors will aim to share their own newly acquired learning into topics such as budgeting, financial scams, and support services like Epping Forest FoodBank, with their peers. They plan to produce a training pack for School Councils and cascade their learning through school assemblies and classroom talks.

Youth Councillors have been selected to sit on the Safer Epping Independent Advisory Group for Epping Forest and Brentwood and have participated in local consultations including the development of the local Health & Wellbeing Strategy and work related to the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town. A youth debate was held in the Council Chamber with members of Southend's Youth Council covering free education for over 18's.

#### Crucial Crew 2022

Mobilised by CCW in partnership with Community Safety, the Crucial Crew community safety awareness event for children in Year 6 will take place between Monday 3rd and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October this year with three sessions available each day. To date, 16 schools from the Epping Forest district are booked onto the virtual event, with 672 pupils participating. Children will first watch a bespoke film called 'Lines' raising awareness of County (drugs) Lines. This will be followed by interactive workshops on Zoom, which pupils join live from their classrooms in order to engage with the characters from the films. This allows live discussions to take place covering the issues raised in the film. This will again be produced by TikTok productions and delivered in partnership with Chelmsford City Council across Essex.

#### Epping Forest District Museum

Over the summer the Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition attracted over 5,500 visitors to the Museum throughout its three-month run. Donations totally £2,600 were made via on-site contactless card readers, an online facility set up as part of the booking process and cash donations. Additionally, over £2,000 was generated in shop income during this period. On 17 September the Animal Mummies exhibition opened featuring objects and stories focusing on the history of animal mummification and the scientific work that has been done to uncover their hidden stories.

The Museum was recently approached regarding the acquisition of two early Medieval gold coins known as *tremisses*, which had been found by a metal detectorist near Chipping Ongar. The Museum has been successful in securing all the funding to acquire these coins, which will be an important addition to the district's collection. An event is being planned involving the key funders and the wider community to mark the objects going on display.

The Museum service has developed and submitted a number of funding bids in the last month. A bid for £3000 has been submitted to SHARE Museums East to support a marketing video and online exhibition space on the museum website, and a bid for £10,000 has been submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support a specific project focussing on commercialisation and generating income.

The Rationalisation Project continues at pace with over 9,500 objects reviewed to date. A review of social history items was completed at the end of September and work recently began to commence the review of the Archaeology and Photographic collections. Over 500 items have been put forward to the Steering Committee and 200 items have found new

homes via other museums, groups or community use, or have been removed because they have been found to be hazardous.

Volunteers have been working on clearance and design plans for the Museum Garden with the Community Development Officer. They recently planted twelve varieties of herbs in a new herb raised garden area along with a new lavender sensory hedge.

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## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Council  
**Date:** 11 October 2022  
**Subject:** Customer Portfolio  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Alan Lion

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Customer Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Customer Strategy 2022/23 Update**

1 The core vision for our **digital** work is to use digital to deliver the services our customers want whilst driving down our cost. We aim to provide our residents, businesses, and visitors with digital services they will use by default, whilst at the same time recognising others may still require additional support whether face to face or a phone call.

2 To date we have seen a 15% increase compared to last year in the use of **digital forms**. There has also been a 6% reduction in telephone calls over the same period. This is the direction of travel the Council needs to build on in its future digital development. Much of the increase in the use of digital forms has been through the contact centre encouraging customers to self-serve and to promote the benefits to channel switch through social media posts.

3 Focus was given following the customer consultation that took place in March 2022 about how easy it was to use our digital services and what barriers customers met in using these services. The predominant customer feedback on the website focussed on finding what they were looking for and forms being difficult to use. Customer service and Corporate Communications are working together to improve our website; this includes an improved search facility and simpler layout. We have prioritised waste and are developing a new waste section with simplified forms and easier navigation. Options are also being explored to look at alternative platforms to make website development and support much more dynamic and efficient.

4 The provision of additional frequently asked questions and scripts has resulted in an increase in **First Point Resolution** for first six months of year from an average 46% in 2021/22 to average 67% in 2022/23. This means these additional customers are getting their contact resolved by the Customer Service team without the need for the call to be transferred to the back-office or another agency, again with the aim of increasing customer satisfaction and using our resources across the Council more efficiently.

5 Meeting one of the objectives of the Customer Service Strategy we reviewed the provision of **Cash Office at Debden Broadway**. Proposals for cash paying customers moving forwards were presented and agreed by Stronger Communities Select Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> July.

As a result of the Broadway office closure we are now working towards implementing an Allpay payment solution for Council Tax and Business Rates customers with the intention to launch the first cards early November followed by closure of the Debden Cash Office late November. The new solution will provide residents and businesses an increased number of outlets and opening hours whilst providing efficiency savings for the Council of around £10,000 per annum plus the release of the building for future rental income potential.

6 On our **Digital Members** journey IT coaching sessions have been held with new and existing Members and in partnership with the ICT Service Desk who have assisted with connection to Council systems via personal devices, tablets, and smart phones (Bring Your Own Device - BYOD). ICT have produced a guide highlighting the benefits of BYOD and encourage all Members to consider whether this would be more suitable for their digital needs and style of work. Please contact the ICT Helpdesk on 01992 56488 should you wish to take advantage of this opportunity. We are currently seeing low volumes of ICT tickets raised by Members for any issues with equipment, as a reminder if you are experiencing problems, please raise via the Member contact form, for immediate help call the ICT helpdesk.

7 Whilst our focus is on providing digital services that most of our customers will choose to use, we recognise that traditional channels will still be required by some members of our community. We continue to see a steady increase in visitors to **Epping Community Hub** on average 38% month on month especially for services that provide help & support around benefits and finance. August saw our highest volume (150) of visitors since opening September 2021. With the closure of Barclays Bank on Epping High Street, we have welcomed Barclays into the Community Hub three times a week providing non-cash transactions such online banking support, account enquires and any other non-cash related assistance to their customers.

8 **Digital inclusion** remains an important objective to help people use digital technology in their lives and to be able to use the digital solutions we offer. We principally use our partners in the voluntary sector to help us achieve with the Council acting as the conduit and signposting people for help. A great example of an initiative offered by WECAN (West Essex Community Action Network) as part of their Digital Inclusion project was the provision of free six-month, Vodafone sim and data cards. These cards have been well received by visitors to the Community Hub in need of this support. We have started to offer digital coaching for residents in the Community Hub on a Thursday, this is being offered by VAEF and WECAN, either on an appointment basis, referral from other partners or as walk ins. The intention is to raise further awareness via Community Champions and local Town and Parish Councils. Limes Farm will be the next venue for coaching to be offered, where we would hope there may well be a greater need and take up from residents.

### **Customer Services**

9 Members will be aware of the issues with the current Waste and Recycling contract and the number of missed collections experienced by residents in recent months. Inevitably the service that receives the initial fallout from such a service failure is the Customer Service team which manifests itself in an increased number of calls related to missed collections.

10 The Waste and Recycling and Customer Service teams have been working closely together to minimise customer calls and provide up-to-date information on-line and through social media as updates for residents. There has been an increase in calls, and it has been a challenging time for the teams involved.

It is an unfortunate consequence that the increase in waste calls led to longer queue times for residents as the Customer Service Team was not resourced for the level of response required as a consequence of the waste issues.

11 There has been a significant increase (43%) in **formal customer complaints** from April onwards relating to the ongoing waste missed collections by our contractor. Since April 44% (82/188) of complaints have been upheld. The majority being upheld are waste related with 75 out of 82. In addition to this increase, we have been working through our Self-Assessment for the Housing Ombudsman ensuring that we are compliant according to the Landlords Complaint Handling code in readiness for 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022.

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# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Full Council  
**Date:** 11 October 2022  
**Subject:** Contracts and Commissioning  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Nigel Avey

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**Recommending:**

**The report of the Contracts and Commissioning Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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**Waste Management:**

**Missed collections update:**

As you aware we are suffering from ongoing missed collections at present, we have been working closely and in daily conversations with Biffa to resolve these issues as swiftly as possible. This largely due to the waste contractors poor fleet management. Vehicles are breaking down and vehicle maintenance impacting on the rounds. Hire Vehicles are being used but these are not equipped with CCTV cameras so this impacts on the missed collection process. There is a national shortage of new and hire vehicles as well as long lead in time for new parts and new vehicles.

We are doing all that we can within the contract to mitigate and improve the current situation. An additional vehicle from a different waste contractor has been brought in to help clear the missed collections.

**Leisure Management:**

**Contract Performance**

We are beginning to see a positive return to leisure centres compared to FY19-20 levels and leisure centre usage trends remain well this financial year, with good performances across the four centres. Swimming remains very strong with high numbers of attendance; however, gym membership continues being slightly down on forecast.

During the pandemic, EFDC provided financial support to Places Leisure to maintain operations of the leisure centres. The recovery rates in leisure centre usage have enabled Places Leisure to resume the payment of fixed monthly management fees.

**New Epping Leisure Centre**

The new Epping Leisure Centre project is currently in the second stage of the procurement phase, with the contract award anticipated Q1 of 2023. The construction phase of the new Epping Leisure Centre is expected to commence Q3 of 2023, with a two-year construction period.

**Procurement and Contracts:**

Procurement have been working with officers on numerous projects, such as the Bakers Lane Leisure Centre Invitation to Tender, Harlow Gilston Garden Town PR and Communications, Installation of a new Playground in Ninefields, Waltham Abbey, the HR and Payroll contract and the Finance Systems project.

A meeting of the Procurement and Contracts Working party was also held this month where the new Procurement Contract Register was demonstrated with a view to going live soon – the register will also have a reminder function so that officers are prompted to address their expiring contracts in good time, which will provide the opportunity to maximise the value obtained from re-tendering.

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Council**

**Date: 11 October 2022**

**Subject: Technical Services Portfolio Holder**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ken Williamson**

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **Regulatory & Technical Services:**

### **Licensing**

Epping Forest District Council has adopted 'National Register of Refusals and Revocations' or NR3. The new register allows licensing authorities to record details of where a hackney carriage or PHV drivers' licence has been refused or revoked and allows licensing authorities to check new applicants against the register.

and now details of all applicants are checked during the application process for the grant of new licences or at the point of renewal. In addition, where an application is refused or a licence is revoked, those details are entered onto the register and this information can be accessed by other local authorities nationwide should the individual apply for a licence in their area.

### **Taxi Tariff**

Following concerns expressed by the licensed taxi trade, the team have undertaken a review of taxi fares applied to customers using a Hackney carriage within the district. Before any published fares can be increased the Council must undertake consultation with the trade and public consultation by way of placing a public notice in a local newspaper.

The current fee tariff has not been reviewed for the last 8 years and was scheduled to be reviewed as part of the wider taxi policy review later this year. However, due to the unprecedented fuel increases, it has been necessary to bring that review forward to support our licensed taxi trade.

A draft report has now been prepared providing a number of options. The report will be considered by the Licensing Committee and once agreed, informal consultation will take place with the trade before statutory consultation is undertaken. Once complete the tariff will be subject to Council approval.

### **Pavement Licensing – proposal to be extended permanently from 2022**

For a second time the regulations introduced under the Business and Planning Act 2020 have been extended at short notice and in response, we have followed the same process as before.

All licence holders have been written to and advised accordingly and the majority have already renewed their licence for a further period retaining previous permission.

### **Applications determined by Licensing Committee & Appeals update**

- Crooked Billet, Nazeing, EN9 2LD – Application for a new premises licence, granted
- Tom, Dick & Harrys, Loughton IG10 4LF - Application for a new premises licence, granted

- Toot Hill Golf Course, Ongar CM5 9PU - Application for a new premises licence, granted
- 1 Taxi Driver Application for new licence -refused.

Appeals

- Gardeners Arms, 103 York Hill, Loughton, IG10 1RX – Directions hearing 22<sup>nd</sup> September at Colchester Magistrates Court to determine timetable for the appeal.

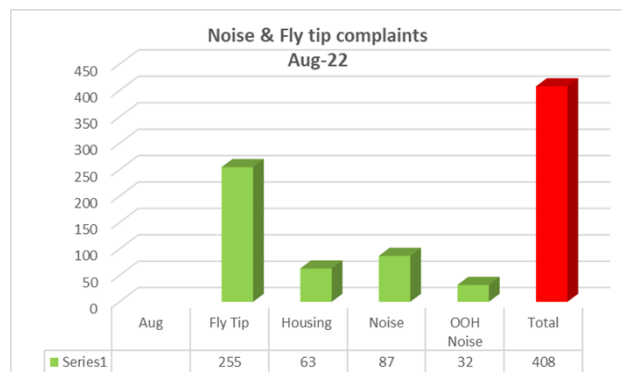
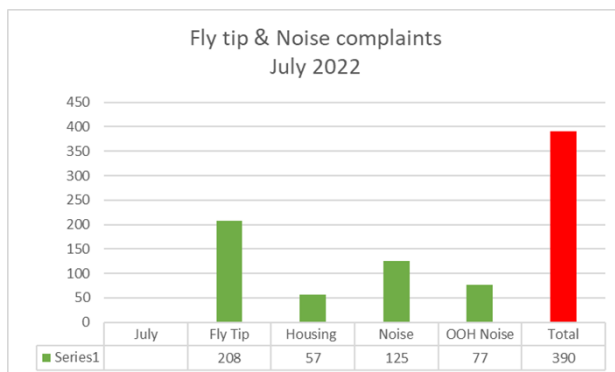
**Community Resilience Team**

Anti-Social Behaviour

- ASB awareness day took place at Limes Farm Estate, multi-agency partnership working with weapon sweeps, community engagement and proactive enforcement
- Partnership working with NACRO housing association in relation to a possible cuckooed property in Loughton
- Complaint of a party house investigated internal referrals to planning and letters to the owner of the property
- Elgar Close, Buckhurst Hill- report of an assault of an elderly resident. ASB Officer found CCTV relating to the assault, liaising with Police to identify the youths and problem solve the wider ASB issues in the area
- Cornmill carpark- nuisance youths- redeployable camera has been installed to capture ASB and littering, working with CCTV to gather evidence
- Vicarage Lane West, North Weald car park- nuisance youths- joint site meeting with the church to look at target hardening to prevent vehicles from using the car park

Enviro Enforcement

- 7 Fixed Penalty Notices issued (1 x duty of care, 3 x littering, 1 x Fly tipping and 2 x breach of Community Protection Notice)
- 76 Community Protection Warnings issued
- 1 Community Protection Notice issued
- 1 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.80 Notice served
- 2 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.108 issued
- 1 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.34 notice Waste Duty of Care issued
- 1 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.47 Notice Waste Containment
- 2 Fly poster warnings sent – Posters removed





**Gardeners Arms** – Enviro Enforcement Officer are continuing to investigate noise nuisance including OOHs and Pre Planned Visits (PPV) whilst awaiting a court date to decide on a condition appeal set out on the new licence conditions.

**Sheesh, Chigwell** – First Hearing regarding failure to pay FPNs for breach of CPNs set for 20<sup>th</sup> September. Complainants being kept updated with case progress.

### **Environmental Protection and Drainage Team**

During the recent weather warnings and heavy rains in August into September the team have been busy responding to flood calls from residents. Sandbags were provided to residents at risk of flooding and in the aftermath have assisted in identifying causes and referring residents to appropriate agencies. In August approximately 30 properties flooded in Buckhurst Hill and Loughton with highly localised heavy rains affecting these areas.

The private water supply charging scheme is approaching the end of the first year in recovering 50% of sampling costs and in October will recover full costs from site owners. A new charging scheme for Environmental Information Regulation requests for property and contaminated land searches was implemented at the start of June and has been used successfully.

### **Highway Rangers**

The rangers continue to work on reported issues from both Essex County Council and those reported by Members and residents. Recent jobs completed include installing several new finger posts, hedge cutting and pavement clearances, offensive graffiti clearances and removing extensive fly posting on lamp columns and signs. They have completed paving jobs in Maynard Close, Waltham Abbey, removing trip hazards. They have installed new goalposts for football teams at Waltham Abbey and cleared a heavily overgrown footpath at Daws Hill. New bench timber has been purchased for renewing the built-in benches in Epping.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

During the dry spell grass areas have browned off in places, although the recent wet weather has encouraged the greening up of sites and further growth.

The team undertake the marking and maintenance of the many football pitches located on Roding Valley Recreation Ground on behalf of Loughton Town Council. The specialist team responsible for this work have now completed all the new line-markings required and installed the goal posts to ensure the pitches are ready for the new season.

### **Tree Team**

In partnership with the Forestry Commission, Country Care, and Grounds Maintenance surveys have been carried out of the tree stock for Oak Processionary moth, which has until now grown unimpeded across the district, and have removed hundreds of nests from the council trees. We will continue to undertake the surveys until it is under control.

### **Countrycare**

The Countrycare Annual Report 2022-22 has been published on the Countrycare website.

All woodlands have been visited with visits to Home Mead, Chigwell Row Wood and Roughtally's Wood and chestnut palling fences have been erected around some of the ponds. The annual meadow cutting, and raking has begun with Tree Top Meadow and Thornwood Common Nature Area.

Two events were held for the Tree Wardens, one was a training session for surveying for Oak Processionary Moth in Chigwell Row Wood, the data has been sent to the Forestry Commission to inform future management of the moth. The second was a training session on

surveying hedgerows on Loughton Recreation Ground. The data was sent to The Great British Hedgerow Survey for their records and will also inform future management of the hedges. Butterfly surveys are continuing over the summer, volunteers will take over future surveys.

## **Building Control:**

### Income and budgets

Income through fees and charges into the ring-fenced account by the end of August (Month 5) was at approximately £245,000 - on track for the full year budget of £540,000. Performance was strong and consistent through April to July but was typically quiet through the August holiday period. Early indications for September suggest the usual pickup in the building industry after the school holidays is muted and falling well behind September 2021. Influencing factors are likely to be financial pressures from inflation, continued scarcity of building materials since the Covid pandemic and anxiety in households and small businesses over fuel costs for winter heating.

The cost of delivering the Building Control Service is currently tracking marginally below our budgeted expectation. (Full year budget £732,000 – current forecast of £713,000).

### Legislative Change

The Building Safety Act became statute on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022. We are currently in an interim period awaiting secondary legislation and phased enactment of all parts of the Act. The main impact on Building Control is the control of certain High-Risk Buildings by the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), the provision of staff by Local Authorities to support the BSR and the mandatory examination and licensing of Building Inspectors. There is also provision to extend enforcement periods to 10 years and introduce prison sentences as the maximum penalty for a breach of Building Regulations.

These new burdens on Local Authorities carry a risk to recruitment and retention policies in what is already a highly competitive sector with private Building Control Bodies. Funded training places have been secured with Government funding and are being utilised, subject to staff availability to manage the service, throughout 2022/23. Epping Forest District has been identified as an area with High-Risk Buildings and will be expected to provide staff to support the work of the Building Safety Regulator. The mechanism for charging and cost-recovery has not yet been determined.

The enhanced scrutiny of all Building Control Bodies has resulted in a significant increase in the number of cases referred to the Council by private Approved Inspectors. Approved Inspectors are not authorised to enforce and may only certify compliance. It was previously an extremely rare event for an Approved Inspector to cancel their notice to control works and revert the site to the local Authority for enforcement of the Regulations, however following several private Building Control bodies failing audits by their regulator and one high profile provider being struck-off for reckless issue of final certificates (currently being challenged by Judicial Review), providers are shedding their more challenging cases by reverting to the Local Authority. This is an additional burden for our service, but one for which we are authorised to recover costs for by setting appropriate charges.

### Service Improvements

Building Control became ISO 9001 registered for quality management with Alcumus Isocar. This scrutiny of procedures and quality is intended to demonstrate to the Building Safety Regulator our effectiveness to deliver a Local Authority Building Control Service and give the residents and businesses of the district similar reassurance.

In June 2022, we implemented a new cloud-based back-office solution for Planning and Building Control. This was a substantial and important project to improve our efficiency and ability to measure ourselves against Key Performance Indicators. Initial experience with the system is positive and early, expected teething problems are being engineered out. Our next steps will be to implement mobile working devices to enable Building Inspectors access to plans and calculations on-site to remove the need for the printed format.

### **Planning - Development Management**

#### **SAC Backlog**

The Service continues to make good progress in releasing planning decisions held back by the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As of 20 September 2022, we have issued 189 decisions, delivering 289 dwelling; 23 applications have been withdrawn and 26 applications have been refused. A number of applications (16) are awaiting the completion of S106 agreements and issuing of these decisions are imminent.

#### **Planning Enforcement**

The Heritage, Enforcement and Landscaping Team Manager retired in June 2022, and the newly appointed Team Manager (James Stubbs, currently working for Chelmsford City Council) joins the service on 3 October 2022.

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# **Report to the Council**

**Committee:** Council  
**Date:** 11 October 2022  
**Subject:** Internal Resource Portfolio  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Sam Kane

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Internal Resources Portfolio Holder be noted.**

## **People Team**

### **People Strategy 2020 – 2022**

#### **Attracting, On-Boarding and Retaining Talent**

- The portal in which candidates search for jobs will be reviewed as improvements are scheduled for the new (calendar) year. This will give an opportunity to revisit the look / feel of the portal and make any necessary changes.

#### **Developing our skills and behaviours**

- We continue to support a high level of successful apprenticeships; One level 7 AAT (Accountancy) apprentice will start soon. We are advertising for 2 Legal apprentices and a Careers Coach/ Employment Practitioner Apprentice who will be based with the Homelessness Team (via Changing Futures funding). Also, we continue to look at upskilling current employees via apprenticeship levy; including Level 5 Institute of Leadership Management apprenticeships, level 5 Arboriculture and we aim to have a Level 5 Cultural & Heritage apprentice in the first cohort of this qualification in January 2023.

#### **Engagement and Wellbeing project**

- The results from our June 2022 'Creating our Tomorrow – our ways of working for the future and beyond' have just arrived. Some key highlights are;
  - Currently, 53% of employees work from home or remotely most of the time, 39% have been working in a hybrid way, 4% have been working from the office/workplace all of the time, 4% have a job where they must be on site, so cannot work from home
  - Those respondents who currently working from home some of their time (376) on average, spend 73.6% of their working time, working from home
  - 81% of employees surveyed said that within their current contracted hours, they feel as though they can be flexible in their role
  - 86% agree that having a flexible working pattern is beneficial to them
  - 79% agree that they feel that their manager has supported them in understanding how they can adopt flexibility into their working day
  - Employees would like to (continue to) work from home/remotely 70.6% of their working time on average
  - 95% of employees feel well equipped to work in line with the hybrid approach

- 92% of employees feel supported by their manager in a remote working environment
- 93% feel supported by their team in a remote working environment
- 23% of respondents would recommend EFDC to a friend or family member

## **Business Support**

### **Local Land Charges (LLC), HMLR Project**

- The LLC Team have recently been working through one of many lists of data corrections in preparation for the migration to Her Majesty's Land Registry (HMLR). A new set of data corrections is due to be issued to the Council on 19<sup>th</sup> Sept, with just a 5 day turnaround, regardless of the volume.
- The Service Manager for Business Support is working with our Continuous Improvement Officer and our Change Manager to hold workshops with the LLC Team to scope out the future model of the service, to increase efficiency and reduce our operating costs. As part of this process, we are also reviewing our fees and charges, and will follow the correct governance process should those need to change.

### **Projects**

#### **Accommodation – Commercialisation of our bookable spaces**

- A PFH report was approved earlier in the year to partner with IWG and Epping Regus (our tenant on the top floor of the Civic Offices) for the advertising and booking management of our Conference Suite and Council Chamber at the Civic Offices. Regus is IWG's brand and they are the world's largest flexible workspace company, operating across 120 countries, in 3,500 locations, with over 7 million users. Some of their clients include Amazon, Apple and Disney. Epping Regus were issued with a final draft of the contract in July and they are working with their legal team to come back to us.

#### **Soft Facilities Management – Outsourcing our Concierge Service**

- An options appraisal using soft market research was presented to the Executive and Senior Leadership Team recommending a formal procurement process to review the option of outsourcing our Concierge Service at the Civic Offices. The data and detail that comes out of the tender process will then be used to provide the Executive and Senior Leadership Team with an additional options appraisal to take a decision as to whether we progress with the opportunity or not.
- The benefits for considering this as an option include;
  - Increased resilience as we will be working with a company that can be scalable to our needs and ensure we always have appropriately trained staff available to cover the shift requirements. In turn this will improve internal and external customer service and support an increase in revenue from the Conference Suite.
  - We will have an opportunity to work with a service provider and shape what we want the service to look like, such as SIA security trained employees.
  - A possible reduction in annual operating costs (as per soft market research).
  - A reduction in direct costs such as recruitment to roles, sickness absence pay, annual leave and sickness absence cover costs (we outsource this currently).

## **Contingency Planning**

- A Safety Advisory Group (SAG) has been formed for the World Champion Slalom Event which is being held at Lee Valley next year, which includes the adjacent showground for camping.

## Democratic and Electoral Services

- The Democratic and Electoral Services section have completed their permanent move out of Homefield House as part of the 'Our New Ways of Working' workstream within Programme 2025.
- A severed ICT connection has meant the Elections Team has also moved out of Homefield House slightly ahead of time, (the move was due to be mid-December). Officers are considering the future use of the building.

## Parking

- **Car Parking Income**

We are seeing long-term behaviour change regarding parking income post-Covid, as occupancy levels appear to have still not reached pre-pandemic levels in long-stay car parks. This is assumed to be due to the prevalence of working from home.

The implementation of new car park tariffs on 4th April 2022 is generating more income to the Council, with an increase of approximately 8.9% in parking fees and charges, compared to the previous year.

Car park income and occupancy rates are continually being reviewed by EFDC Officers.

- **InstaVolt Electric Vehicle Charging Stations**

The partnership with InstaVolt for Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations in Oakwood Hill East car park has proved to be very successful with good usage levels, customer satisfaction and increasing car park occupancy levels. The chargers are generating income to the Council through ground rent and additional parking fees income (due to increased occupancy).

InstaVolt and EFDC Officers have identified three commercially attractive EFDC off-street car parks for the next phase of EV charging points. These are Basons Lane Car Park (Ongar), Burton Road car park (Debden) and Cornmill car park (Waltham Abbey). Lease negotiations will begin for 4 rapid charging points in both Basons Lane and Burton Road car parks. The Cornmill car park proposal is subject to site survey for power supply.

- **Permits in Cornmill Car Park and Oakwood Hill East Car Park**

EFDC have introduced business, residents and visitor permits in Cornmill Car Park (Waltham Abbey), and business permits in Oakwood Hill East Car Park (Debden). The introduction of these permits has been well received and is generating additional income to the Council.

- **Cottis Lane Car Park**

The Cottis Lane car park closed on the evening of Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022 as Qualis begins construction works on delivering the new multi-storey car park, which is expected to be completed by Summer 2023. To reduce the impact on the community, Qualis have worked with local Councillors to create temporary car park at St John's Road which opened on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022 to provide additional spaces while the work is being carried out. EFDC are carrying out parking enforcement in the temporary car park.

## ICT

### Service Management

The ICT Service Desk is the first point of contact between customers (members and colleagues) and ICT

ICT service ticket management process has improved significantly in the last 9 months. The delivery against SLA for the team from January to September 2022 ranged from 98% to 100%. Up by 4% on previous year. The average ticket age has reduced and complex tickets are being resolved more quickly.

- Work is ongoing to continually improve the starters and leavers process. This includes improving the laptop build process and automating the set-up where possible. From January to September 2022, we have processed 120 new starters and 140 leavers.
- Customer satisfaction for the period:
  - Very satisfied : 96%
  - Satisfied : 4%

### **Strategy**

- Work to deliver the ICT strategy is ongoing and a series of infrastructure and network projects are being planned to underpin the overall move to the cloud
- The strategy is being updated in line with the need to find efficiency savings in the service and across the business – to ensure that resources are focussed upon the areas of greatest impact.

### **Projects – Business Applications and Infrastructure**

- The new Digital Planning application went live in June with learning from this project to be taken forward. A second phase of the project is being planned in order to improve Customer access.
- We successfully migrated to a new secure, personalised, free platform for emergency messaging and implemented a new fraud management system.
- The team have delivered key infrastructure projects:
  - A faster logon solution for remote/home workers.
  - Wi-Fi improvement at our satellite offices.
  - Email security improvements.
  - Scheme Managers are having old terminals replaced with corporate laptops and their way of working is changing so they no longer need local printers or telephones.
  - Out of date storage has been replaced with systems that provide better performance and 99.99% up-time.
  - ICT security has been improved through the replacement of firewalls. Additionally ICT security audits, including a 5 week Microsoft audit, are ongoing to identify potential vulnerabilities in a world where ICT security risk is increasing.

### **Resourcing**

Following the departure of the previous service director an interim manager has been appointed and will handover to a new postholder once recruited..

Continuous work is being done on the skills matrix to ensure resilience and to focus training needs for individuals. New skills are being concentrated on areas that support the future business.

Service Desk team continue to take on more responsibilities, enabling other areas of ICT to focus on project work.



### **Corporate Projects**

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance and project management resources to priority projects which are strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. A number of projects are in progress including :

- The Housing and Asset Management (HAMs) project with an expected 'Go Live' date of April 2023.
- A replacement financial and purchase to pay system
- New telephony solution which supports new ways of working
- Complaints case management
- Revs and Bens application transfer to the Cloud
- Microsoft Azure – moving infrastructure to the cloud

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## ***Report to the Council***

**Date:** 11 October 2022

**Subject:** Ongar Neighbourhood Plan

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor N Bedford

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### **Recommending:**

**That the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan be ‘made’ (adopted) as part of the Epping Forest District’s statutory development Plan.**

### **Background**

The 2011 Localism Act empowers local communities to shape their areas by enabling town and parish councils along with other designated bodies to prepare neighbourhood development plans. A detailed legislative framework for undertaking neighbourhood planning was set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended).

There are a number of legally prescribed stages that need to be undertaken in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan needs to be subject to examination by an independent examiner against the basic conditions set out in the Localism Act 2011 (as amended). Subject to a positive outcome from such an examination the plan then proceeds to a referendum. Where a Neighbourhood Plan is subject to a successful referendum, and the local planning authority is satisfied that EU and human rights obligations have been met, it is a legal requirement to bring the Plan into force as soon as reasonably practicable.

A Neighbourhood Plan, once adopted, forms part of the statutory development plan and carries the same weight as the Epping Forest District Local Plan.

### **Background to Ongar Neighbourhood Plan**

An application for a Neighbourhood Area designation covering the Parish of Ongar was received in May 2017 and approved in June 2017. A draft plan was produced and consulted upon in January 2021. A revised plan was submitted to the Council which was published under Regulation 16 for 6 weeks between 11 November and 23 December 2022.

Following this, an Independent Examiner was appointed by the Council with the agreement of the Town Council and Ongar Neighbourhood Plan Community Group (Ms. Ann Skippers BSc (Hons) MRTPI) to examine the draft Plan against the basic conditions set out in the Localism Act 2011 (as amended). The examination took place by way of the written representation procedure. The Examiner’s Report was received on 13 May 2022 and recommended that, subject to a number of modifications, the draft Ongar Neighbourhood Plan met the basic conditions and should progress to referendum.

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (Regulation 18) require the local planning authority to outline what action is to be taken in response to the recommendations of an examiner under paragraph 10 of Schedule 4a to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as applied by Section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

After considering the recommendations made in the Examiner’s Report and the reasons for them at a Cabinet meeting of 18 July 2022, Cabinet resolved to accept all the Examiner’s recommendations and agreed that the draft Ongar Neighbourhood Plan should progress to a local referendum.

A referendum was then held on 8 September 2022 in the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan Area with the question “*Do you want Epping Forest District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Ongar to help it decide planning applications in the Neighbourhood Area?*” 1,139 (21.72%) of registered electors recorded votes, of which 1,102 (96.75%) were in favour of ‘yes’. Given the outcome of the referendum and in accordance with part 2(9) of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) and Development Management Procedure (Amendment) Regulations 2016, the District Council must formally ‘make’ the Neighbourhood Plan within 8 weeks of the referendum. The Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory development plan and sit alongside Epping Forest District’s Local Plan. Decisions on planning applications will be made using both the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan, and any other material considerations.

**Other Options for Action:**

Delay or refuse to ‘make’ the Draft Ongar Neighbourhood Plan. This would mean that the Council is not meeting the legislative requirements and is not fulfilling its statutory duty in the production of neighbourhood plans.

**Background Papers:**

- Examiner’s Report on the Draft Ongar Neighbourhood Plan (13 May 2022)
- The Draft Ongar Neighbourhood Plan (as amended) and associated documents
- Report to the District Council’s Cabinet (18 July 2022)

All documentation is available on the District Council’s website at

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/ongar-town-council-neighbourhood-plan/ongar-neighbourhood-plan-referendum/>

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:**           **Audit & Governance**

**Date:**                 **11 October 2022**

**Subject:**           **Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee  
2021/22.**

**Chairman:**           **Councillor P Bolton**

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### **Recommending:**

**(1) That the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2021/22 be noted.**

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1. The Annual Report of the Audit and Governance Committee outlines the Committee's work and achievements over the year ending 31 March 2022. The Annual Report helps to demonstrate to residents and the Council's other stakeholders the vital role that is carried out by the Audit and Governance Committee and the contribution that it makes to the Council's overall governance arrangements.

2. The Annual Report is attached as an Appendix to this report, and we recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**OF THE**

**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**2021/22**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the Audit Committee is to:

- provide independent assurance to the Council in respect of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements, risk management framework and the associated control environment; and
- independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Council's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment.

Whilst there is no statutory obligation for a local authority to establish an audit committee, they are widely recognised internationally across the public and private sectors as a key component of effective governance. Similarly, it is considered good practice for the Committee to report annually to the Council on its work.

The key benefits of an effective audit committee are:

- increasing awareness regarding the effectiveness and continued development of the Council's governance arrangements;
- providing additional assurance on the robustness of the Council's governance arrangements through a process of independent and objective review;
- reducing the risks of illegal or improper acts;
- increasing public confidence in the objectivity and fairness of financial and other reporting;
- contributing to performance improvements in assurance levels and awareness of the need for strong internal control including the implementation of audit recommendations; and
- reinforcing the importance and independence of internal and external audit and similar review processes.

### **1. ASSURANCE ACTIVITY 2021/22**

To help the Committee draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the Council's internal control framework, governance and risk management it gained assurances from the following sources:

#### **Internal Audit**

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 require the Council to maintain an adequate and effective internal audit which is discharged by the Section 151 Officer. Internal Audit is a key source of assurance for both Members and management on the effectiveness of the control framework. The Committee has a responsibility for ensuring that Internal Audit is effective in the provision of this assurance and has worked with the Chief Internal Auditor to ensure the agreed Audit Plan for 2021/22 was delivered.

The Committee considered and agreed reports regarding the Internal Audit Strategy, Internal Audit Charter and Annual Plan 2021/22, and progress by management in implementing audit recommendations. It also received regular progress reports on the work and performance of Internal Audit. These reports have helped in ensuring that reported weaknesses have either been addressed or the identified risks

adequately mitigated by management and that there is an effective system of governance and internal control in place.

### **Assurance Framework / Annual Governance Statement**

The Committee's terms of reference include advising on the effectiveness of the Council's assurance framework including the production of the Annual Governance Statement.

During the year, the Committee has received reports on the control framework and how the annual review and assurance process is undertaken. The Assurance Framework is compiled from various sources of assurance, for instance Directors and other key officers.

The Chief Internal Auditor provides an annual report and opinion regarding the Council's control framework. This opinion is considered by the Committee alongside other sources of assurance.

The Committee reviewed the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2020/21 which identified governance issues requiring further ongoing improvement or oversight relating to:

- Ensuring the health and safety of staff, partners and the public in the way it delivers its services especially with regards to Covid-19
- Financial Management Code review
- Statement of Accounts
- Disaster recovery
- Risk management and service/business planning
- Financial regulations – training and awareness

The assurance framework remained unchanged during 2021/22. The Council's Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed by the committee in January 2022 to ensure it remains compliant with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. The review confirmed the Code is still up to date and fit for purpose and no changes were required.

The Committee was able to satisfy themselves that there is a robust assurance framework in place to safeguard the Council's resources through reliance on the annual review of the Council's system of internal control and the Chief Internal Auditor's annual opinion.

### **Anti-Fraud and Corruption**

Countering fraud and corruption is the responsibility of every Member and officer of the Council. The Committee's role in this area has been to monitor and support the actions taken by officers to counter fraud, particularly as the Council has its own in-house Corporate Fraud Team, who work in tandem with Internal Audit.

The Committee receives reports and presentations on such work undertaken in the Council and proactive fraud work, for example participation in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI).

The Council continues to send out a strong message that fraud will not be tolerated and that where fraud is proven the strongest possible actions of redress will be taken.

Based on the work to date, coupled with no major incidences of internal fraud and corruption being highlighted by management, the Corporate Fraud Team or Internal Audit, the Committee concludes that there is a sound anti-fraud and corruption framework in place. The Council's anti-fraud and corruption strategy was approved



by Council, following approval by the Audit and Governance Committee in November 2021.

### **Risk Management**

The Committee receives and discusses reports relating to risk management. Work continues to enhance monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure there is adequate scrutiny and challenge of risk across the Council and aligning this with the service planning process. Committee members are routinely presented with the corporate strategic risk register.

### **Treasury Management**

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Committee reviewed the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and considered the risks associated with the Council's treasury activity and how these are managed. The Committee also considered progress reports on the treasury management function and performance against prudential indicators.

### **Statement of Accounts and External Auditors**

At its July 2021 meeting the Committee reviewed and approved the 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement and the 2019/20 Statement of Accounts.

The Committee has been kept abreast during the year on issues regarding the 2020/21 Accounts, seeking explanations for the delay from both the External Auditors (Deloitte) and the Council's Section 151 Officer. The External Auditors will be on site at the end of July 2022 for the 2020/21 accounts directly followed by the 2021/22 accounts, and the Committee will be updated at the September 2022 meeting.

## **2. COMMITTEE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Committee has a rolling and flexible programme of work for its main areas of activity which is proactively reviewed and amended throughout the year to reflect changes in policies, priorities and risks. The Committee met four times in 2021/22. The Committee considered items which are presented annually, such as audit results, the statement of accounts, the annual governance statement, and audit plans; as well as a number of other items including treasury management as this falls under the committee's remit.

The Committee's work plan is supplemented with periodic bespoke training which is open to all councillors. Training topics included anti-fraud and corruption, risk management and the role of the Audit Committee.

Members of the Committee have a wide range of both experience and professional knowledge which, coupled with it having two co-opted persons, has continued to help demonstrate its independence. One co-opted post has been vacant throughout the year with plans to have a recruitment campaign in 2022.23.

In November 2021 the Committee undertook its own effectiveness review and reviewed its Terms of Reference, the results of which concluded its Terms of Reference did not need updating and the Council was able to demonstrate compliance with recommended best practice for an effective Audit Committee.

The Committee has the benefit of being well supported by Council officers. This includes the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, and the Chief Internal Auditor as well as the Council's external auditors.

There have been no reported major breakdowns in internal control, governance and risk management that have led to a significant loss in one form or another, nor any major weakness in the governance systems that has exposed, or continues to expose, the Council to an unacceptable level of risk.

The purpose, strategy and work programme of the Committee mitigates against any major failure by the Council to obtain independent assurance in relation to the governance processes underpinning:

- An effective risk management framework and internal control environment including audit;
- The effectiveness of financial and non-financial performance (to the extent that it affects exposure to risk and poor internal control); and
- The compilation and consideration of the Annual Governance Statement.

### **Outcomes / Achievements**

Through its work, the Committee's main outcome is in the additional assurance provided of the robustness of the Council's arrangements regarding corporate governance, risk management and internal controls.

The Committee has added value through its activity and in particular:

- it has continued with the importance placed upon governance issues, particularly risk management, anti-fraud and the assurances sought that key risks are being mitigated; and
- it has continued to raise the profile of internal control issues across the Council and to seek to ensure that audit recommendations are implemented.

### **Conclusions**

The Committee's remit is achieved firstly through it being appropriately constituted, and secondly by the Committee being effective in ensuring internal accountability and the delivery of audit and a robust assurance framework. The Committee has received and challenged reports including those from internal and external audit.

The agreed work programme enables the Committee to provide independent assurance to the Council as to the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment.

The Committee has continued to have a real and positive contribution to the governance arrangements of the Council. The Committee's key achievement is in the additional assurance provided of the robustness of the Council's arrangements regarding corporate governance, risk management and the control environment.



## SCRUTINY



## **Report to Council**

**Date of meeting: 11 October 2022**

**Chairman: Councillor H Kane**

**Democratic Services Officer: V Messenger (01992 564243)**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report for July to September 2022 be noted.**

### **Report:**

#### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 26 July 2022**

- Quarter 1 corporate performance reporting was reviewed in full, as was agreed with the Committee. The report detailed a project status summary, key milestones and RAG status for those projects identified as a 'Priority Project' within the portfolio and which aligned to the Council's Corporate Objectives. All key performance indicators (KPIs) regardless of status were included in this report. Members queried several KPIs covering Customer Services, Community Health and Wellbeing, Contract, Planning and Development and People services areas.
- The select committee (SC) chairman, reported on scrutiny undertaken at their last meetings. Councillor J Lea commented that Stronger Communities SC had co-opted W Marshall as a non-voting member, and reviewed reports on: cash paying customers at the Debden Broadway office; refurbishment of Frank Bretton House; the Housing Strategy 2022–2027; and the Changing Landscape of Housing Paper 1. Councillor J McIvor advised that Stronger Council SC had reviewed the People Strategy Overview 2022, Azure – move to the Cloud business case and the quarter 4 Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22. The effectiveness of officers attending meetings via Zoom was added to the work programme. Councillor R Balcombe reported that the Stronger Place SC had scrutinised EFDC's Litter Strategy, but an updated version would be reviewed at the next meeting.
- Future work programme items for the Committee included the new Corporate Plan, the Qualis 4-Year Business Plan while Epping Forest Youth Council would attend in April 2023.
- Members queried Cabinet's Key Decision List of 1 July 2022 and received clarification from the relevant Portfolio Holders on the Local Government Council Size and Boundary Review, Air Quality Action Plan and charging for additional waste containers.

#### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27 September 2022**

- The Committee pre-scrutinised the Council's Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027 introduced by the Continuous Improvement Specialist (N Gambrill). This key strategic planning document detailed a new set of corporate aims including a new set of key results – developed to support the aims and key objectives. These Corporate aims would be reviewed annually through objectives and key result measures to deliver and work towards the achievement of each objective that year. Members made several suggestions such as: to clarify that Epping Forest was referring to Epping Forest District (not the forest); the inclusion of references to historical ancient hill forts; more on the Council's focus on health, climate change, waste recycling and the relationship building opportunity the Council had with local councils.
- The Strategic Director (A Small) introduced the 1-Year Qualis Business Plan. In the rapidly changing current economic climate, considerable economic pressures were being put on

the Council's finances. Although Qualis should produce a 4-Year business plan under the Shareholder Agreement, in this time of great uncertainty the decision had been taken that a 4-Year Business Plan would be too challenging and be out of date sooner than forecast. Members raised many questions which were answered by the Finance Portfolio Holder (Councillor J Philip), the Strategic Director and Qualis Group Managing Director (S Jevans).

7. The select committee (SC) chairmen updated members on the business undertaken at each of their committees. Councillor J Lucas (Acting Chairman) provided a short report for the Stronger Communities SC, which reviewed several reports. These covered the work of the Council-funded police in the District, a Customer Service strategy update, estate improvements undertaken at Harveyfields in Waltham Abbey and the new support model for sheltered housing. Councillor J McIvor reported that members of the Stronger Council SC were being kept well informed by the Finance Portfolio Holder and officers in this demanding economic situation. The quarter 1 Budget Monitoring Report 2022/23, Financial Planning Framework 2022/23 to 2027/28 and Qualis Quarterly Monitoring Report had all been reviewed. Members had been especially interested in Council overspending and where the challenges were in the service areas. Councillor R Balcombe advised that Stronger Place SC's September meeting had been cancelled as it would have taken place during the mourning period for Queen Elizabeth II. The Committee had agreed to reschedule the work programme to ensure outstanding business would be realigned to be completed within this municipal year.
8. The Committee reviewed its current work programme and noted that quarter 2 Corporate performance reporting was scheduled for the next meeting on 17 November 2022.
9. The Cabinet's Forward Plan of Key Decisions for 1 September 2022 was assessed and the Leader (Councillor C Whitbread) advised that a response on the draft proposals for the Government Council Size and Boundary Review was due to be received in the first week of October 2022. Also, the Housing and Community Portfolio (Councillor H Whitbread) replied to queries on what provision the Council was making for Ukrainian refugees in the District.