



### 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 **Thursday 5 October 2023** 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      Tel: (01992) 564243  
Email: [democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

#### WEBCASTING/FILMING NOTICE

Please note: this meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site - at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed. The meeting may also be otherwise filmed by third parties with the Chairman's permission.

You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during this webcast will be retained in accordance with the Council's published policy.

Therefore by entering the Chamber and using the lower public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for web casting and/or training purposes. If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should sit in the upper council chamber public gallery area or otherwise indicate to the Chairman before the start of the meeting.

If you have any queries regarding this, please contact the Public Relations Manager on 01992 564542.

## **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 other such use by 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**

To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2023 (to follow).

### **5. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) Chairman’s Announcements

### **6. 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.

### **7. 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.

## **8. REPORTS FROM THE LEADER & MEMBERS OF THE CABINET (Pages 6 - 38)**

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 & Economic Development Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (d) Report of the Housing & Strategic Health Partnerships Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (e) Report of the Community Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (f) Report of the Contracts, Service Delivery & Improvement Portfolio Holder (attached);
- (g) Report of the Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder (attached); and
- (h) Report of the Customer & Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder (attached).

## **9. 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.

## **10. 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.

## **11. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 (Pages 39 - 44)**

(Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee) To consider the attached report recommending that the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23 be noted.

## **12. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE (Pages 45 - 51)**

(Chairman of the Constitution Working Group) To consider the attached report revising the Terms of Reference for the Audit & Governance Committee. This report is being considered by the Constitution Working Group at its meeting scheduled for 28 September 2023 and any amendments arising from that meeting will be verbally reported to the Council.

## **13. 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.

**14. 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.

# Agenda Item 8

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

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 5 October 2023

**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**

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all Major planning applications will become a statutory requirement from November 2023 (smaller sites from April 2024). Developments often results in impact on, and losses of, nature (net loss). BNG requires developers to deliver for nature, setting a minimum requirement to increase biodiversity by 10% compared to the baseline (net gain). The idea behind BNG is that the environment does not suffer as a result of development, and that there will be more higher-quality places for wildlife to thrive and for people to enjoy. Developers will therefore need to clearly demonstrate how BNG will be delivered when a planning application is submitted.

The Planning Policy team are working alongside Essex CC as the responsible authority and other Essex Local Planning Authorities in developing a Biodiversity Net Gain Supplementary Planning Document which will identify how Local Planning Authorities will guide developers in securing at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in line with our own strategies, such as the North Weald Enhancement Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

### **2. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)**

- The HGGT partner authorities via the HGGT Board have committed to setting up a Joint Committee, approval for which is currently in train across the five partners' individual governance processes. EFDC Cabinet will be reviewing the Joint Committee for approval on 13 November.
- The Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework (SMF), a masterplan area which is within Epping Forest District and the Garden Town, was endorsed by EFDC Cabinet to be an important material planning consideration in July 2023. This is the first HGGT strategic masterplan to be endorsed.
- The Latton Priory Strategic Design Code is being undertaken in-house by the EFDC Implementation Team, funded as part of the Dept For Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Pathfinders Programme. The Design Code will be publicly consulted on in October 2023 for six weeks, after it has been to Cabinet on 18 September.
- The draft HGGT Stewardship Charter, and draft East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance SPD are currently being publicly consulted on until early October, seeking

views from local communities and stakeholders on these two guidance documents. HGGT have appointed youth engagement specialists 2-3 Degrees to support engagement on Stewardship with the Epping Forest and Harlow Youth Councils. The engagement website for both the draft HGGT Stewardship Charter and East of Harlow Masterplanning Guidance SPD consultations can be visited via this weblink: <https://engage.hggt.co.uk/en-GB/>

- The HGGT / EFDC Quality Review Panel Annual Report 2022-23 has been published online, and the QRP Annual Meeting with panellists and officers was held in September.

### **3. Sustainable Transport**

#### **EV and other Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV)**

Local residents and businesses continue to show a strong appetite for ULEV, supported in recent months by good growth in the availability of public EV charging in the District. Highlights including the latest available DfT data on the market:

- At end March 2023, EFDC has the second largest number of plug-in cars in Essex (2,643 out of 71.5k on the roads)
- EFDC has the largest number of Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV\*) in Essex (1,756)
- BEV as a % of all cars (2.46%) is higher for EFDC than all Essex council areas plus all of the adjoining London boroughs and Herts districts.
- At end of June 2023, the number of rapid chargers (50 kWh+) in the District doubled to 22 compared with Q4 2022, with 6 of these being Instavolt chargers in EFDC car parks – two more have gone live in Q3 and usage levels and satisfaction are high.

#### **Active Travel**

Transfer of Rural Prosperity Fund money has now taken place to ECC to carry out the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in Waltham Abbey. PJA appointed and preliminary work is underway with a report in the Autumn.

#### **Demand Responsive Transport**

Essex County Council is consulting on its level and type of subsidy for non-commercial bus services, reflecting continued national and regional problems in restoring bus patronage to pre-Covid levels. Any review of whether and how to support DRT services in the EFDC area can only happen after the consultation and into next year. Digigo and the similar Hertslynx DRT services continue to show usage and service growth in comparable rural/market town environments to EFDC's area, but both were in receipt of major DfT and County investment.

### **4. Climate Change**

#### **Climate Change Action Plan Review**

A review of the Climate Change Action Plan took place, with a summary document and priorities for 2023/24 agreed at Scrutiny committee on 4 July. A revised Climate Change Action Plan has been published on the EFDC website reflecting the minor changes agreed. The

summary document has also been published showing completed actions, business as usual actions, actions to remove, and priorities for 2023/24.

**Climate Change Steering Group**

An officer steering group has been set up to oversee the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan. The first meeting took place on 14 September where the terms of reference and objectives of the group were agreed. The objectives of the group include the sharing of information on climate related projects and best practice, facilitating the progress of actions, and the monitoring and reporting of progress.



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

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 5 October 2023  
**Subject:** Finance, Qualis and Economic Development Portfolio Holder  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor J Philip

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Finance, Qualis and Economic Development Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Finance**

#### **Budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25**

We have now commenced development of the Budget for 2024/25 in earnest and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Again, I report that this is set against the backdrop of considerable financial challenge and uncertainty. Whilst there is some good news that interest rates have been held and inflation finally seems to be heading downwards, the rate of increase in goods and services remains much higher than had been assumed when the current budget plans were developed. The effects of this can be evidenced in the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring report presented to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> September, which forecasts an overspend in the current year of £1.5 million on the Council's General Fund.

The challenges facing our Budget are not unique to Epping Forest District Council, and we have seen these replicated across the Country, with increasing concern being raised by some councils about their financial viability. The talk of Section 114 notices looms large in the media, but I am pleased to say the Epping Forest District Council is not amongst them. That said, with the same issues impacting on us as other councils, balancing the budget next year will require difficult decisions and I would encourage all members to fully engage in the process so that the best outcome can be achieved for the residents of the District.

The Cabinet agenda also contained a paper on the Budget Planning Framework and this marks the formal start of the process in the member arena, although work has been taking place for some time between officers and portfolio holders. Please look out for further papers in due course. We need to have the final budget position determined by the end of January to ensure sufficient time to complete the detailed work needed to present to full council in February.

### **Audit**

As I reported last time, we continue to meet our deadlines for publication of the Council's financial position but remain in the hands of the Council's Auditors in terms of getting

these signed off as correct. Without this Auditor's reassurance, there remains residual uncertainty over the exact position of the Council's balances, and this is deeply frustrating from my perspective, and from the members of the Audit and Governance Committee. As I have previously reported, this is replicated across the Country with hundreds of councils in the same position.

Whilst we inch towards 'sign-off' on the Accounts for 2020/21 the Government has now published its plan for getting Local Government up to date with their Accounts and this involves setting statutory deadlines that Auditors must meet or publish the Accounts with qualifications and explanations as to why they couldn't gain assurance within the new timeframe.

We continue to work with our Auditors to reach conclusions well ahead of these statutory deadlines, but the imposition of fixed dates at least provides reassurance that we might finally move beyond this issue.

## **Qualis**

The financial performance of Qualis continues to be regularly reported to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The third quarter's results from their fourth year of trading were reported to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> September using the new Board report format, presented by Qualis last time. This is designed to show a clearer consolidated position and has been welcomed and well received.

Unfortunately, the same financial conditions that are so heavily impacting on the Council are also still enormously impacting Qualis. These were drawn out in the single year Qualis Business Plan that was presented to Overview and Scrutiny and to Cabinet last year. Qualis continues to report a surplus in all companies apart from their development and commercial arm where difficult market conditions mean that they continue to report a loss. I continue to meet with Qualis regularly to consider their actions to address this, and their trading performance in the current economic climate.

Qualis makes a valuable contribution to the Council's financial position and work is underway to update and refresh the Qualis Business Plan over a longer timeframe and this will be reported to the Council in due course. It will also be used to inform Budget planning for future years.

## **Economic Development Programme:**

Multiple different projects linked to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund/Rural England Prosperity Fund are being coordinated or managed by the Economic Development Team. A list of updates on delivery is provided below on the various projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

- On 7 September, the Economic Development Team launched a new place promotion app for the District called Discover. The app already contains over 1000 businesses in the district, across six town centres and beyond.  
<https://www.discoverapp.co.uk/the-discover-app-for-councils/>
- On 22 September a launch event hosted by Regus in the civic offices will help to promote a new subsidised FSB Membership programme following on from a successful programme two years ago.

- UK Shared Prosperity Funded grants to projects with North Weald, Stanford Rivers and Theydon Bois Parish Councils are being organised, with project delivery underway.
- A new Rural grant fund (REPF – Rural England Prosperity Fund) is being prepared worth £440,000 over two years (£110,000 year one) to be launched in eligible areas with a focus on improving community assets. This will be a partnership with parish and town councils. Two consultation events will be held in September to finalise arrangements.
- An LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan) feasibility study has been procured to look at options for improving sustainable transportation routes in and around Waltham Abbey.
- Voluntary Action Epping Forest has received a grant to continue digital inclusion work with vulnerable residents until the end of the financial year.
- Work underway to procure rural regeneration reports to better understand economic opportunities and challenges for six rural areas in the district.
- Preparation underway internally around delivery of new green gyms and playgrounds across the district. So far Ninefield's playground has been delivered which contained funding via the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund). Moving forward funding for new play area apparatus in Oakwood Hill is being considered, as well as ideas for updating playgrounds and potentially a green gym in Limes Farm estate. In addition, officers are looking into the potential for playgrounds to be introduced in rural areas.
- In 2024-2025 £260,000 worth of UKSPF funding will be deployed to improve the skills of residents. Work is underway with neighbouring authorities and Essex County Council to identify which programmes can be jointly procured.

Officers are exploring the implementation of plans to work closely with NEEB (North Essex Economic Board) authorities around economic development. The partnership consists of North Essex authorities.

John Houston, Economic Lead and latterly also director of the Digital Innovation Zone, will be leaving Epping Forest after working at the council for 14 years. His contribution is being recognised for his long years of service and delivery.

#### **Monthly Business E-Newsletter:**

The Economic Development Team are set to release the September edition of the 'Business Matters' e-newsletter to over 2,000 local businesses with topics focusing on the newly launched place promotion app 'Discover', an update on EFDC's UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund and the Federation of Small Businesses subsidised membership scheme. If you would like to receive a copy of the monthly e-newsletter, please contact Matteo Pesci at [mpesci@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:mpesci@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

#### **General Economic Briefing:**

Unemployment to the end of July 2023 stands at 2,180 out of the total working population. This is a slight uptick on unemployment and marks its highest levels since December 2022.

## **Visitor Economy:**

During the 2023 school summer holiday period, the tourism website enjoyed an average of 4,700 visits per week with people accessing an average of two pages per visit, or 56,000 pages in total. As seen throughout the year, peak traffic was at weekends, although weekday use didn't vary as much as normal. Saturdays were consistently experiencing around 750 users although a spike to 2,199 users occurred on Saturday 26th August, over a bank holiday with 1,500 being for the Eastern Electrics Music Festival.

Whilst the majority of users were locally Essex and London-based, 2k came from the Midlands, 600 each from Norwich and Plymouth, and 450 each from Edinburgh and Cardiff. The interest from the Midlands is in line with the interest evidenced by Visit Essex who, as a result, have been running media campaigns there.

Apart from the home page (6,500 views) and two big music festivals (4,500 views), the top 10 sections viewed were: camping, pubs & bars, accommodation, events, activities, travel information, walking & cycling, attractions, North Weald Airfield and towns & villages. The top 10 products viewed were: Debden House Campsite, North Weald Market, Lee Valley Animal Kingdom, Epping Ongar Railway, District Museum's Tiger Who Came to Tea exhibition, Theydon Bois Country Walk, Toot Hill Show, EFDC's Play in the Park, Rose Lea at the Squadron and Lee Valley Almost Wild Campsite.

Generally, the site is being well used on a regular basis. Local businesses are engaging more to update their content and request we feature more information. Those events and destinations that have very little other presence online continue to bolster our visitors and the two Waltham Abbey music festivals are typical examples. The fact that searches for accommodation, and especially campsites, plus travel information is evidence of the continuing strength of the staycation, the rise in the number of visitors unfamiliar with our district and the impact of the rise in the cost of living. These factors are also all addressed with our new 'Discover' visitor app which has just launched and is featured and linked across the website.

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

The DIZ Programme Manager and Director have been working closely with Essex CC, Herts CC and ASELA to prepare a bid submission to the DSIT UK 5G Innovation regions funding competition. If successful, the project would secure up to £3.8million of DSIT funding to drive deployment and adoption of 5G and advanced wireless connectivity. As well as support from DIZ Partner local authorities we have also reached out to key local private sector and academic sector organisations for both support and indications of interest in involvement in the proposed projects.

The DIZ is planning a number of key strategic sessions over the coming weeks and months. First of all, an 'in person' strategic review of the DIZ priorities will be held at the ARU Arise Hub in Harlow to explore what the priorities should be for the DIZ work programme. This will be followed by an online workshop to explore the potential reuse of public sector assets by telecoms companies to extend and densify telecoms networks. This is a follow-up to the DIZ's involvement in the DSIT Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator (DCIA) programme where it was a member of the Early Adoption Group. The workshop will explore the requirements and implications of any strategy to make selective public sector assets available for such a use as well as an examination of the benefits – connectivity, economic, social - that could accrue to a place through such an approach. The DIZ team will also be attending the Connected Nations conference in

September to hear from industry on the latest developments in the digital sphere including on mobile and fixed connectivity, smart technologies, communities, digital inclusion and skills.

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** September 2023  
**Subject:** Housing and Communities Portfolio  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Holly Whitbread

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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## **1. Housing**

### **Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)**

The TSM's are a set of key satisfaction measures for HRA housing and property services delivered by EFDC. We have commissioned a specialist provider; Acuity, to deliver these on our behalf. They will be conducting surveys at varying points during 2023/2024 ahead of us reporting final, combined results to the Regulator of Social Housing in April 2024.

### **Older Peoples Strategy**

A commitment of the EFDC Housing Strategy 2023-27 was for us develop an Older People Strategy during 2023. Work on this is progressing well with Denise Peglar, Team Manager, Older Peoples Services and Keith Bowman, Interim Housing Strategy Manager leading on this work. Our aim is to have this work completed for December 2023.

### **Consumer Standards**

Within the Regulatory Standards set out by the RSH are Consumer Standards. These are outlined below:

- [Home Standard](#) – quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance
- [Tenancy Standard](#) – how properties are allocated/exchanged and terms around tenure
- [Neighbourhood and Community Standard](#) – issues around neighbourhood and communal areas and anti-social behaviour
- [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard](#) – customer service and complaints, tenant rights and involvement
- [Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard](#) – reporting against the TSMs, which cover information on areas such as repairs, safety checks and complaints (applies from 1 April 2023).

Social housing providers such as EFDC are duty bound to operate within the standards set out by the RSH. Through our Interim Housing Strategy Manager Keith Bowman, we are currently assessing our position in relation to delivery against the standards. This work includes liaison with the EFDC Tenant and Leaseholder Panel.

## **Independent Living - Digital Switchover 2025**

A Portfolio Holder report was presented in 2022 outlining the need to upgrade the alarm system due to the analogue telephone signal being discontinued in December 2025 and, the alarm monitoring contract coming to an end in November 2024.

Work to move this forward had unfortunately been delayed following challenges with the appointed contractor at the time (Everon) not progressing as planned. This workstream has since been re-started and a revised feasibility/transition report from the TAS, the industry and advisory body for telecare enabled care (TEC) is due late September 2023. This report will inform our revised plan of action and work moving forward. ~Project costs will be re-evaluated in view of the requirement for a new contractor.

## **Temporary Accommodation - Demand**

Epping Forest District Council, in common with other local authorities, is experiencing an increase in demand for temporary accommodation. Figures show a 9% increase in comparison with the same period last year. The Council continues to liaise with neighbouring authorities to share best practice and experience.

## **Housing Allocations Scheme – Year one review**

The Housing Teams have been busy working on a review of the Housing Allocations Scheme after a year of the new scheme being in operation. The draft report/findings were discussed with the tenant & leaseholder panel on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2023. The report is due for presentation to the Communities Scrutiny Meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September.

## **2. Housing Development Update**

### **Pentlow Way, Buckhurst Hill - 7 units; 6 x 1B2P Flats, 1 x 2B4P flat**

Works are moving forward following difficulties due to design and material changes to the scheme. Our contractor has requested a TIME EXTENSION AND NEGOTIATIONS ARE ONGOING. However, work to the superstructure is well underway. Handover is forecasted for February 2024.



## **Woollard Street, Waltham Abbey - 8 units; 7 x 1B2P & 1 x 2B4P**

Works are progressing on site with the superstructure weathertight and the internals in progress. An Extension of time has been requested from the contractor, to which our EA has reviewed and responded to, and continue to negotiate on. There have been design variations to the contract with some confirmed and others being negotiated. Handover is expected January 2024.



## **Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Project**

Work is well underway on the LAHF project, and our first refurbished property will be ready by the end of September. The allocation to the property will be confirmed in due course. We have a further 5 homes which are being worked on, and these will follow on with delivery. We are working with, and supporting local businesses with this project, and it has been a great success so far.

### **Planning**

Planning application submissions have been submitted for schemes within phase 5, these will be monitored through the process and, those determined as committed schemes will then be tendered and progressed through to contract.

We are working to get both Ladyfields and Chequers B tendered and in contract by the end of the financial year. These schemes will deliver our first passivhaus developments and we look forward to sharing their progress with members.

Our second audit done by Homes England was passed with no recommendations. This was acknowledged by our portfolio holder.

Our completed schemes have all entered their first year in defects and all first-year end of defects inspections have been done with works completed by the relevant contractors. We have also been able to successfully draw older schemes to a close with final accounting being completed and schemes formally handed over to Qualis management.



## **Strategic Partnership**

B3 living are delivering 18 units (14 SO and 4 AR) which have all gone to residents either working or living in the district. An opening event will be held on the 6th October with our portfolio holder to formally open the scheme. Some of the units are already occupied and it is good to hear that these have been positively received within the community.

Network homes will also be delivering two sites totalling 85 units and completion of these units begins from January 2024 onwards. We look forward to the completion of these and allocating these homes to more families within the district.

## **3. Assets**

### **Energy Efficiency Retrofit**

We are currently carrying out retrofit assessments at the 103 homes included in our energy efficiency retrofit project part funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF). The homes are some of our least energy efficient and, will benefit from improved insulation, heating systems and photovoltaic panels as appropriate. The work will ensure the homes achieve a minimum energy efficiency performance of EPC band C. Subject to contract, the work will be delivered by E.ON. We expect to start work on the first homes before the end of the calendar year and for the project to complete by the end of the funding period, March 2025.

### **The Broadway**

We are progressing a major works project at The Broadway. The scheme will replace the life expired roof, windows, doors and asphalt walkways to give the two blocks on either side of The Broadway a new lease of life. We will work closely with the residential and commercial leaseholders in relation to their contributions in accordance with their respective leases. We expect works to start in summer/autumn 2024 and expected to be completed in approximately 18 months.

### **Stock Condition Survey (SCS)**

Ridge and Partners have completed a stock condition survey of EFDC housing stock. The survey comprised 3,290 dwellings (51%) and 399 blocks (87%). It is usual to survey a sample and extrapolate the findings. In EFDC's case, the findings include:

- The majority of our housing stock was built between 1930 and 1975. Very little of our housing stock is less than 40 years old.
- We should expect to spend £329million over the next 30-years to replace life expired components. This equates to £1,711 per dwelling per year.
- Work will be prioritised to ensure all Council properties meet the minimum 'Decent Homes' standard.

### **Asset Management Strategy (AMS)**

The results from the stock condition survey will inform our asset management strategy. We are currently evaluating tenders from specialist consultants to help us develop the AMS. We expect to appoint a specialist consultant in September 2023 and, we aim to have an asset management strategy in place for December 23/January 24.

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

**Committee:** Council  
**Date:** 5 October 2023  
**Subject:** Community & Wellbeing  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Smruti Patel

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Community, Health & Wellbeing Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### Funding Success for the Buddy Up Adult Inclusion Project

The Buddy Up Project continues to go from strength to strength. The Project is currently supporting over 50 adults across West Essex with additional needs, including learning disabilities and autism, to enable them to become more independent and live healthier, happier lives.

Following a bid to the National Lottery for Reaching Communities funding to continue this excellent work, the Council's Community & Wellbeing service area has received confirmation that it has been awarded the sum of £264,946. This will allow the Buddy Up Project to run for a further 3 years and also fund the appointment of an additional Officer to enable the provision to grow in capacity and to support more organisations to deliver an inclusive service.

### Strength and Balance – Falls Prevention Programme

The Community & Wellbeing service area has been jointly commissioned by Essex County Council and the Herts & West Essex ICB (Integrated Care Board) to deliver the Strength and Balance programme across West Essex for a further two years.

The service aims to reduce falls by increasing strength, mobility and independence in residents who are at risk of falling. The value of the contract over the next two years is £221,700, with EFDC being the lead authority in a facilitated partnership with Harlow Council and Uttlesford District Council.

In Epping Forest this highly effective service is delivered across the district in different locations in line with demand. The service offers 12 weeks of free activity, followed by onward signposting to wider services and support.

### Summer Holiday Programmes

The West Essex Inclusion Project once again delivered a highly successful Summer holiday activity programme for children and young people with a wide range of disabilities in the Epping Forest district. In total, 92 hours of activity was delivered over 6 weeks, and the programme saw 219 children from 70 different families attend. Evaluation and feedback was resoundingly positive and great fun was had by all!

The Community Development & Wellbeing Team successfully delivered Play in the Park outdoor sessions district-wide, Multi-Activity Day Camps and “Matilda: A Musical in Two-Days”. The core summer programme was given an overall rating of 4.8 out of 5 for quality by parents. Feedback received included comments such as ‘My girls absolutely loved Matilda in 2 days - best holiday club they’ve been to. The performance was just brilliant!’ and “‘Will (Fordham) and the team are incredible with the children. My son enjoyed every second, as did we. Thank you so much’.

Play in the Park ran for three weeks during August, offering thirty sessions funded by ten participating Town and Parish Councils. Over 459 children came along to PiP this year with the most well attended sessions being at Town Mead (Waltham Abbey), and Jessel Green (Loughton).

#### Ninefields (Robert Wood Johnson) Project

As part of the Council’s pace-based approach (Permanence and Care Excellence) to improving health and wellbeing in the Ninefields area, a consultation is currently being undertaken to gather first-hand insight into resident’s aspirations and goals specifically relating to employment, careers, and associated skills. The information gathered will be used to shape future work with local training providers to offer training courses and skills development programmes locally and on the Ninefields estate itself.

#### Public Health Accelerator Funding Expression of Interest submitted to Essex County Council

The Community & Wellbeing service area has developed and submitted a formal Expression of Interest to Essex County Council for funding in a bid to replicate its whole-systems approach work to tackling health inequalities in three further areas of the district.

It is anticipated that an invitation to submit a full application will be received in the Autumn.

#### Creativity and Sports Awards

The highly prestigious Creativity and Sports Awards for local young people launched in September. Nominations close in December with winners announced at the Civic Awards Ceremony in the Spring of 2024.

#### Youth Councillors speak at Youth Voice Conference

The Jack Petchey Foundation invited members of the Epping Forest Youth Council to speak at their annual Youth Voices conference in August. The Epping Forest Youth Council is widely recognised as a model of excellence nationally and projects such as MiLife and, most recently, work associated with the cost-of-living crisis are highlighted as flagship initiatives which have been developed by young people themselves for their peers.

#### Funding secured for youth work in Nazeing

As a direct result of one of the Council’s Community Champions raising concerns regarding an increase in anti-social behaviour in Nazeing, the Community Development & Wellbeing Team has been central in securing funding to enable the commissioning of partner agency, the Red Balloon Foundation, to delivery youth outreach sessions in the area. Red Balloon have

subsequently applied for wider funding to re-establish a permanent youth club based in St. Giles Church Hall.

#### Care To Move Project for older residents.

Funding totally £667 from the County 'Find Your Active' pot has been secured for a project called Care to Move, which has enabled innovative portable cycling pedals, which can be operated by hand or foot, to be purchased to encourage older residents to take part in fun physical activity sessions. Piloted at the Council's Pelly Court assisted living scheme, and soon to be rolled out to the Chapel Road scheme, Care to Move is helping to support residents to increase their physical activity levels whilst also improving mental health and building confidence. Residents have feedback that 'I think it has helped with my walking', 'I have enjoyed getting back on a bike!' and 'I have started to cycle for longer.'

#### Stay Safe & Well events.

Four Stay Safe & Well events for older residents have been organised for Winter 2023 and Spring 2024, funded by the Community Safety Partnership. Events will take place on 4 October in Debden, 19 October in Buckhurst Hill, 12 March in Ongar and 11 April in Sheering. Partner organisations will provide important information to local residents on the day, and activities will include seated exercise, presentations, a free lunch, information bag, School for Scammers performance and flu / Covid vaccinations (subject to availability) and health checks.

#### Dementia Friendly Communities

World Alzheimer's Month was in September and information was shared with the Council's Corporate Communications team regarding support available, which included a Dementia Friends Information session on 25th September. The Council's Dementia Action Officer is also working with colleagues from Corporate Communications to create a Dementia Information page for the website and has advised the Economic Development Team on a North Weald Dementia Sensory Garden proposal.

#### Multiply Project support funding.

The Community & Wellbeing directorate has received £10,000 to support Essex County Council with the successful roll out and delivery of the national Multiply (numeracy skills) Programme in the district. Staff will assist with the identification of appropriate venues to host community-based Multiply education sessions, liaise with tutors, support the uptake of courses through coordinated marketing and promotion and help target specific specialist groups or organisations in order that bespoke courses may be run as and where appropriate.

#### Epping Forest District Museum

The latest exhibition "Greater in Spirit, Larger in Outlook", opened on 23 September at the Museum. Epping Forest District Museum and Saffron Walden Museum received Arts Council National Lottery funding to work in partnership on world culture collections. The funding stream secured aims to ensure museums and their collections reflect the diversity of local communities and supports initiatives which work directly with cultural groups to tell their stories via objects in the collection.

The Museum Movers are back after their summer break and the class is continuing to grow as word spreads about what a supportive and welcoming group they are. Classes take place at Epping Forest District Museum at 10:30am every Friday with a professional dancer leading the sessions which are inspired by the Museum's collection. Every session ends with coffee and a chat, and members of the group now regularly meet up socially outside of the class.

#### Autumn What's on in Epping Forest Brochure

The Autumn edition of `What's on in Epping Forest` brochure is now available featuring upcoming Stay Safe & Well events, a Christmas Memory Train trip and the festive activity programme at Epping Forest District Museum.

# Report to the Council

**Committee:** Full Council  
**Date:** 5 October 2023  
**Subject:** Contracts, Service Delivery, and Improvements  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ray Balcombe

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## Recommending:

The report of the Contracts, Service Delivery, and Improvements Portfolio Holder be noted.

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## Leisure Management:

Places Leisure offered Summer Social Value initiatives this summer which included:

- Free swimming to children in receipt of free school meals.
- Half price courts.
- 1-month free gym membership for parent / guardians of children on courses.

Places Leisure is supporting the side-by-side dementia initiative by offering selected drop-in days and times in which an adult who has dementia can come along to any of our leisure centres to grab a coffee and have a talk with one of our Mental Health First at Work Instructors. The aim is to build up these sessions into a small community group in which they can then offer gym, swim, or other activities available at the centre.

Places Leisure is delivering a new physical activity session outside of our leisure centres and in our local NHS health care clinics. Targeting underrepresented groups from the community, it has helped individuals to stay active, maintain a healthy lifestyle, provide an opportunity for social interaction and the promotion of mental well-being.

Places Leisure has set up a new group 'Social Active' classes at Epping Sports Centre and Waltham Abbey. The classes are a falls prevention class serving our local community.

## Waste Management:

### Draft Waste Strategy for Essex Consultation

A 10-week public consultation commenced in September 2023 on the draft Waste Strategy for Essex on behalf of the Essex Waste Partnership. Essex County Council (ECC) will facilitate the consultation asking for views and feedback from Essex residents, communities, businesses, and councils that use waste services or are affected by the proposals in the draft strategy.

The consultation period opened on Wednesday 13 September 2023 and closes on Wednesday 22 November 2023. Paper copies will be accepted by post for a further five working days, closing on Wednesday 29 November 2023.

ECC will appoint an independent organisation to collate and analyse consultation responses and produce a report for publication on Citizen space. The revised version of the draft strategy will be prepared by the Essex Waste Partnership following the consultation process which will then be considered for adoption by ECC. The adoption of a Waste Strategy for Essex will be subject to a separate formal decision which will be taken independently by each Essex Waste Partnership member authority.

The Waste Strategy for Essex (WSfE) sets out the vision and objectives of the Essex Waste Partnership (EWP), which consists of the 12 District/Borough/City and County Council in Essex. It provides a framework detailing how we will manage the waste that is produced by homes and businesses in the county for the next 30 years. The draft strategy has been developed collectively by all 13 councils of the EWP. The draft strategy is a consultative document, no decisions have been made; the EWP wishes to seek the views of others before developing a final strategy.

This new strategy, covering the period up to 2055, brings a new focus on how we will deliver an effective, efficient, and sustainable service for the future. Following the Environment Act 2021, national policy and the findings of the Essex Climate Action Commission 2020, the new strategy updates the EWP's approach to reducing the impact that waste management has on climate change. The strategy is research based and sets out the reasons for our approach; the principles of what we will do; and the targets that we will strive to meet.

To deliver the overarching strategy vision, the EWP has identified the following priorities:

**Move to a Circular Economy:**

- Realise the opportunities arising from the circular economy model that will bring wider benefits to Essex.

**Deliver the Waste Hierarchy:**

- Deliver a system that puts waste reduction at its centre.
- Work together to encourage and support reuse and repair initiatives.
- Increase recycling by delivering comprehensive services and supporting residents to recycle as much as possible.
- Use technologies for the treatment of food and non-recyclable waste that aim to minimise the environmental impact of waste and maximise energy and material recovery.

**Collaborate and Innovate:**

- Innovate and work collaboratively with each other and with the Government, business, and institutions to create a more sustainable waste system.

**Educate and Engage:**

- Listen to residents and deliver information and initiatives to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour to reduce waste and recycle more.

Within the draft WSfE, the EWP propose to adopt the government's national targets as a minimum standard together with stretch ambitions and aspirations to deliver greater change and impact more quickly:

**Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions:**

- We will contribute to reducing the county's greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

**Waste Reduction**

- We will halve the amount of residual waste produced per person by 2042.
- We aim to reduce waste by 10% by 2030.
- We aspire that Essex will be a zero-waste county by 2055.

**Recycling**

- We will reuse, recycle, or compost 65% of waste by 2035.
- We aim to reuse, recycle or compost at least 70% of waste by 2030.

**Waste Disposal**

- We will send no more than 10% of waste to landfill by 2035.
- We aim to send zero waste to landfill by 2030.

**Collection Services**

- We will ensure that all Essex residents have access to separate food waste collections by 2026.
- We will ensure that all Essex residents have access to comprehensive recycling services for plastic, paper and card, metal, glass, food, and garden waste, by 2026.



# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 5 October 2023

**Subject:** Regulatory 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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## **1. Regulatory & Technical Services:**

### **Environmental Health**

Government has issued a consultation on the Licensing of Non-surgical cosmetic Procedures in England. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures/the-licensing-of-non-surgical-cosmetic-procedures-in-england#introduction> The Licensing is proposed by virtue of the Health and Care Act 2022. Currently, many procedures, such as the use of LASERs, Botox and fillers are undertaken by therapists who work on the high street rather than in medical facilities and are outside the remit of the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Currently, the main legislative control available to Environmental Health is the Health & Safety at Work Act and the Public Health Control of Diseases Act. The current consultation is aimed at the industry rather than the probable regulators that will include local authorities.

At present, within EFDC, registrations are issued under the Local Govt (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 for prescribed activities including tattooing, cosmetic piercings, acupuncture, electrolysis and micro-pigmentation (a form of cosmetic tattooing). Many of the aesthetic procedures on the high street fall outside the registration regime and the proposed licencing provisions aim to bring these aesthetic treatments into a legislative scheme which stipulates levels of training and standards required prior to a licence being issued. Licensing will bring many more businesses into scope that will generate a demand within the team.

### **Environmental Enforcement**

A Waste Amnesty (Safer Streets) was very successful on Saturday 26 August, the waste vehicle was filled up and residents very pleased. There has been a significant increase in noise complaints for the month of August compared to July however year on year remain consistent.

A prosecution file has been submitted for the large fly tip on Council land at Cartersfield Estate, we will be seeking to recover all our costs including the £90,000 to clear.

### **Antisocial Behaviour Team**

The Debden Broadway hotpot patrols are progressing well and yielding a wealth of information and intelligence which is being passed to the Police. The local community, shopkeepers and residents are engaging well with the Council patrol volunteers. Reports of thefts, street

robbery, shoplifting, cannabis odours, rough sleeping, fly-tipping and a case of modern slavery have all been recorded and actions passed over to various teams, partners and police.

### **EFDC Policing Team**

A change of the EFDC funded Police Sergeant will take place on 18 September 2023. Sgt Neill Ross will be replaced by Sgt Robert Fitt.

### **CCTV**

The 5 CCTV upgrade projects in line with the current CCTV strategy are now underway. The Limes Ave shopping arcade is complete, and Moreton former landfill site is next for completion. All five are expected to be completed by 31 October 23.

The CCTV team have also been busy providing CCTV evidence to Police from various incidents around Debden Broadway, these include shoplifting and street robbery.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

The continued mixture of warm and wet weather conditions has provided perfect growing for grass and shrubs, and this has presented quite a challenge for the Qualis grounds teams tasked with keeping it all under control. Teams will generally be split to tackle the various tasks with priority being given to those most urgent, which will include vehicle sightlines, footways, and sheltered housing accommodation.

The mixture of sun and rain has however been welcomed by the nursery team responsible for looking after the seasonal bedding schemes. The weather conditions have helped the plants grow and flower to their best and in doing so, has produced some really eye-catching displays across the district and this has been noted in the many compliments received.

## **2. Planning Services:**

### **Building Control**

#### **Income and budgets**

The request for site inspections remains consistent with previous years as existing 'in-flight' building work continues to be serviced, however there has been a notable drop in new applications this financial year, a theme echoed around other districts across the region as householders and developers make cautious decisions in the face of higher borrowing costs and inflated building prices.

#### **Legislative Change**

The Building Safety Regulator have contacted all Local Authority Building Control providers to request an hourly rate for supplying staff to support the regulator. One key change from the Building Safety Act is the requirement for Local Authorities to support the Regulator through provision of competent staff to service applications made for higher-risk buildings (defined as buildings with at least two residential units which are at least 18 metres in height or have at least seven storeys).

The Building Regulations have been amended to reflect changes in the Building Act in respect of enforcement against a breach of Building Regulations. The conditions surrounding service of 'stop' and 'compliance' notices and the extension from two years to ten years for notice to

remove offending building work have come into effect. Provision to remove the two-year limitation for prosecution are yet to be enacted.

All members of the team undertaking restricted functions (checking plans and inspecting sites) are to be registered with the Building Safety Regulator by April 2024. This requires examination to prove competency. Building Control Management is working with the People Team to seek legal advice on any implications for employment contracts.

### Staffing Update

One of the Technical Support Team leave on 20 September. In July we undertook to host two Local Authority Building Control (LABC) apprentices. These are Trainee Building Control Surveyors undertaking day-release study with their salaries funded by LABC through a new burdens government grant. This investment recognises the skill shortage in the Building Control sector and placements were awarded to authorities where it is anticipated that specialist resource may be called upon by the Regulator.

### Development Management

#### Planning Appeals

Members are reminded that Planning Appeal details are published in the weekly Bulletin, and links to the appeal documents are now provided to enable members to view a relevant appeal by clicking the link.

#### Notable Appeal

- **Land at Greensted Road, Chipping Ongar, CM5 9LA** (Ref: EPF/2627/20), appeal decision relating to a hearing that took place on 08-09 August 2023, issued on 08 September 2023. The application was refused planning consent at District Development Management Committee on 21 September 2022. The application was dismissed with the Inspector concluding that the development as a whole, would cause significant material harm to the character and appearance of the area, would not provide a sufficient level of visitor parking, and it proposed an inappropriate and unjustified mix of housing types in Ongar.

#### Successful prosecutions: Planning Enforcement

On 8 August 2023 at Chelmsford Crown Court two tree surgeons pleaded guilty to offences pursuant to S210 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of the felling of trees at the **Debden Hall Estate, Loughton**. Both defendants were fined £20,000 and ordered to pay the Council's costs. A prosecution against the owner of the land continues.

#### Enforcement Appeals

**Land at "Aura" 179-181 High Road, Loughton IG10 4LF:** an appeal against an enforcement notice issued by the Council on 27 April 2022 which required the demolition of a steel framed extension to the premises 'Aura Bar and Grill' was dismissed. The inspector refused to grant planning permission for the development and upheld the Council's requirement for the structure to be demolished within one month of the date of his decision.

**Gardener's Arms, 103 York Hill, Loughton, Essex IG10 1RX:** an appeal against an enforcement notice issued by the Council on 25 January 2022 which required the removal of a hard surface laid within the grounds of the pub was dismissed by a planning inspector on 21 August 2023. The inspector found that the hard surface did not result in harm to the

special architectural or historic features of the listed building and granted planning permission for the development.

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

**Committee:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 5 October 2023  
**Subject:** Customer and Corporate Support Services  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Sam Kane

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### **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Customer and Corporate Support Services Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Customer Service**

#### **Data Capture Process – Trial with Tenancy & Estate Management Team**

Regardless of the way customers contact us we need a greater understanding of the reasons they contact us, how they contact us to determine blockers to using digital as well as insight on their customer experience, positive or negative. As a reminder we are introducing a 'data capture process' to enable us to capture this insight.

We have been trialling the process with the Tenancy & Estates management team. Customer feedback is positive. We are waiting on ICT resource and prioritisation to extend the trial to all of Housing, followed by other service areas.

#### **Contact Centre**

Call volumes continue to be sporadic dependant on level of service provided by our Waste Contractor. Full KPI information will be reported to Stronger Council.

As of 1 October, we will have a new provider for our out of hours call centre. Following a tender process, I am pleased to confirm that SPS Doorguard Ltd will be our new provider. We have already met with SPS to discuss the mobilisation plan and have been very impressed.

#### **Improving the Member induction and training programme**

At the last coffee morning Members provided feedback on the current induction and training programme which is being incorporated into development of a refreshed programme for next year. To assist Members in completing training at their convenience we are developing interactive online training giving 24/7 access at your convenience without the need to attend in person.

We are also continuing to work in collaboration with Democratic Services to digitalise all induction forms Members are required to complete into a 'tell us once' digital form. The timescales for completion of both strands of work is March 2024 in readiness for the May 2024 Election.

We encourage Members to let us know of any particular subjects they would like to hear about at Members coffee mornings, please email Kim Partridge at [memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

## **Payment Solutions**

The project to update our payment solutions to support the new Housing Civica Cx system is on schedule and expected to be completed by the beginning of September with Civica Cx expected to go live at the end of October. The high priority of the Housing Civica Cx project along with contractual delays means the project to migrate our payment solutions to the cloud has been delayed, new timescales will be agreed, resource permitting this should be November.

## **Corporate Communications**

A new three-year contract for the provision of webcasting has been agreed between Epping Forest District Council and Public-i. New arrangements came into place from 1 July, creating an annual saving of £8,000 over the previous contract.

The following meetings will continue to be streamed live and available to view via the Public-i 6-month archive:

- Council
- Cabinet
- District Development Management Committee
- Area Planning Sub-Committee East
- Area Planning Sub-Committee South
- Area Planning Sub-Committee West
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The following meetings will be recorded:

- Audit & Governance Committee
- Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Place Scrutiny Committee
- Licensing Committee
- Licensing Sub Committee
- Local Councils' Liaison Committee

All live streamed and recorded meetings will be uploaded to You Tube where they will be available for 6 years.

- [YouTube – Meetings from 1 January 2022](#)
- [YouTube – Meetings from 2018 to 2021](#)

As well as the reduction in the number of live-stream hours, the switch to You Tube, and a reduced Public-i archive (from 2 years to six months), savings were also achieved by returning mobile webcasting equipment.

## **Webcasting of meetings for the 5 months from April 2023 to August 2023**

- 32 meetings totalling 38 hours 14 minutes
- 26 meetings were live totalling 31 hours 19 minutes

- 6 meetings were recorded and published on YouTube totalling 6 hours 55 minutes
- Plus 6 member training sessions totalling 6 hours 37 minutes

## **Website**

Improvements to the current Wordpress website have now bedded in.

- Improved Navigation – following customer research last year, work was conducted to improve website navigation. Visitors to the website are now able to find desired content more quickly and easily via the navigation menus.
- Improved Search – extensive development of the search function is also redirecting customers to Essex County Council and other statutory providers more effectively. Further work has been done to aid customers searches with misspelt and alternative terms. Improved metadata is also improving Google and other search engine optimisation (SEO). This allows more customers to go straight from their main search engine to EFDC content without the need to visit the homepage or navigate the menus.
- Reduction in Refuse and Recycling enquiries – the number of searches for missed collections information and report forms has reduced as the service has improved.

Most popular pages include:

- Planning search
- Homepage
- Check bin collection
- Recycling and rubbish

## **Local Gov Drupal**

The current Wordpress website is approaching retirement. Proposals have been made for replacement by Local Gov Drupal, a content management system supported by a cooperative of local authorities. Among the advantages of LG Drupal are the sharing of research and development, the availability of previously developed and user tested content, and the evolution of new forms. LG Drupal also offers potentially better long-term levels of security and accessibility at a potentially much lower cost than an independently produced system.

## **Social Media**

Epping Forest District Council continues to communicate with residents and stakeholders through a range of social media channels. Just over 1,500 people and organisations also subscribe to the Council's Mailchimp media release distribution service.

Day time customer enquiries are now managed via the Customer Contact Centre. Social Media monitoring and customer responses continue out of hours (evenings, weekends and bank holidays) through Corporate Communications.

- Facebook subscribers increased by approximately 11 percent to 4,745 between April and August 2023.

- Instagram increased by just over 3 percent to 2,524 between April and August 2023.
- LinkedIn increased by just under 4 percent to 3,241.
- X (Twitter) fell very slightly to 9,966.

## **X Twitter**

Changes to X (formerly Twitter) have been well documented elsewhere. Since the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022, global usage has reduced considerably. The North Essex Parking Partnership recently announced the closure of its X (Twitter) platform due to a declining number of engagements compared with its other channels.

Epping Forest District Council continues to keep the channel under review. We have seen a modest decline in followers. However, interactions with the EFDC account remain high. Impressions and Likes were up from the last 2 months and second highest for this period, after May, when both were high due to the elections.

We still receive a lot of customer enquiries and questions via X, through private and public messages. On average, we have received 128 messages per month on X from April to August.

## **Corporate Services**

### **People Strategy**

The new people strategy for 2023-2027 was signed off by Cabinet in May 23 and launched to the organisation June 23. However, there has been a review and reprioritisation of the projects identified for 2023-2027, this is due to the focus and work taking place in the HR shared service programme.

Our focus, in addition to BAU now being the following:

**Legislative Changes/Updates** - A quarterly update report is now submitted to the ELT/SLT and Wider leadership team outlining updates and changes to wider legislation reviews/changes and internal policy development.

**Disability Confident** – A draft self-assessment has been submitted to the DWP who we are working with to achieve our Level 2 status. We are waiting to hear back from the DWP to see if we need to change or amend anything before, we submit the self-assessment for our level 2 status.

**Implement Wagestream** – Wagestream, our new financial wellbeing app, was launched to employees on 2 October. There will be further employee/manager comms along with ‘drop in’s’ for further information.

**iTrent – Recruitment Portal & Application Form development** - The People team have upgraded iTrent to the ‘fresh’ look web recruitment portal, the fresh look allows applicants a cleaner and more accessible view of the vacancies we have to offer. Alongside this we took the opportunity to refresh and update the job application form, allowing us to embed some additional information requirements as well as reformatting and removing fields that are no longer required or applicable. The changes will make applying for a job easier for candidates with less pages and fields to complete and help



managers ensure that we obtain the information needed to make good / better shortlisting and hiring decisions. Any further work evolving our recruitment process has been temporarily paused, albeit the work that was envisaged as 'simple projects' has now been completed.

## **Complex Projects**

### **iTrent Multifactor Authentication -**

The work involved in allowing iTrent to use Multifactor Authentication has been completed, we are now in the process of moving teams over to the new method of signing in. (Approx 20% of the organisation completed so far).

**Employee Insight** – Adopting a High-Performance Culture Survey June-July 23 has now concluded. An executive summary has been launched throughout the organisation and insight formed part of the September Leadership Summit event.

### **Service Led Workforce Planning Part 1 Succession Planning -**

The Succession Planning tool developed by People Team was completed by majority of service areas. The outcomes of this have been.

- Conversations re impact of potential retirements, career planning and shared services roles are clearly taking place.
- Management & Leadership development needs are being balanced with technical development.
- Apprenticeship Levy funding is being maximised for leadership development and a number of technical qualifications, thus making the greatest use of corporate training budget.

### **Local Pay – NJC -**

Under our Local Pay arrangements, all Epping Forest District Council employees received a flat rate annual pay increase of £1200 from 1 April 2023, equating to an average 3% award across the organisation.

However, as part of our local pay arrangements, the Council is also committed to matching the National Joint Council collective agreement. The NJC offer, made in February 2023, was a £1925 consolidated increase to scale points up to and including SCP43. Scale points 44 and above were offered a 3.88% increase.

The Employer side reaffirmed that their offer was full and final. The offer has not been accepted by the trade unions. However, following a meeting of the NJC Trade Union Side on 19 September, UNISON indicated that it would not be taking strike action and wished to “...resolve this year’s pay dispute and get that pay increase in [its members] pockets as soon as possible.”

Some industrial action is being taken by Unite against a small number of councils. A GMB ballot of its members on industrial action targeted at some schools and councils closes on 24 October. Although no decision was reached at the meeting of the unions in September, they have arranged to meet again following the result of the GMB ballot.

The Chief Officer NJC pay award has been agreed at 3.50% and this has been applied.

Chief Executives are awaiting the outcome of the NJC negotiations, as they are requesting that their pay award is no less than that given to employees.

Should the NJC offer be accepted, EFDC salaries would increase by a further £725 for salaries up to Grade H. Salaries from Grade I and above (excluding Chief Officers and Chief Executive) would have the £1200 uplift reversed and 3.88% applied instead. The award would be backdated to April.

### **Terms & Conditions - Contract Review**

The EFDC contract templates for Service Managers and above have been legally reviewed and updated to ensure compliance with current employment legislation.

The Team Manager and standard employment contract review is currently on hold.

### **Standby/Call out payments.**

A project group has been looking at how Standby and Call Out is managed throughout the Council and benchmarking this to other authorities and particularly Colchester and Braintree councils.

A new proposal has been prepared and recommendations have been given to the Executive Leadership team to review.

Once reviewed, formal consultation will commence with Unions and effected employees on any changes.

### **Apprenticeships**

Five new Corporate Apprentices are currently being recruited across the Council - Democratic Services/ Elections, Tree Team, Highway Rangers/ Countrycare, Health & Safety and Internal Communications. The Apprenticeship Levy will be used to train the new Apprentices in specific skills for these areas, thus supporting succession planning.

The Apprenticeship Levy is also being used to fund 15 aspiring Team Managers to start an ILM 3 (Institute of Leadership & Management) programme in early October 2023. The Levy will also fund 8 managers to complete ILM 5 (Solace Emerging Leaders programme).

The Levy now supports upskilling employees in areas such as; IRRV, Planning, Legal, Accountancy, ICT, HR, Project Management, Business Analyst and Coaching/Mentoring.

The use of the Council's Levy (which we are obliged to contribute to) means maximising Corporate Training Budgets.

### **Business Support**

#### **Local Land Charges (LLC), His Majesties Land Registry Project**

- Con29 searches at have reduced from 30 to approximately 17 working days. 15 - 20% of current searches are for 'complex land'. These searches have increased since the Local Plan has been adopted and are more time consuming then residential searches.

- Processes and systems continue to be reviewed, benchmarked and improvements identified and implemented.
- HMLR continue to give glowing feedback.

#### **Finance Team**

- Awaiting the testing of Advance Financials from October 2023.
- Purchase card project is nearing completion.

#### **System upgrades affecting Business Support**

- Information at Work.
- M3.
- Advanced financials.
- Civica.

#### **Insurance and Risk**

- Following a difficult negotiated renewal process where UK insurance rates have increased 20 – 60% the Council managed to secure renewal on expiring rates for this policy year, fighting off a potential £200k increase. This year's renewal costs have been kept within existing budgets.
- A Council-wide Risk Management Framework, Policy & Strategy was approved at Audit and Governance Committee on the 17 July and Cabinet on 18 September.
- Risk Management training is continued to be rolled out across the Council to individual Service Areas. Member training will be rolled out in November 2023 in conjunction with the Chief Internal Auditor.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist has commenced and will continue to deliver guidance and support with individual service areas and Directors where appropriate throughout the year.
- The Insurance & Risk Specialist is continuing to work with the Fleet Management team, Health & Safety and HR on revising our Driving at Work policy, Drink & Drugs policy and producing a Drivers Handbook to ensure the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Health & Safety at Work Act and Road Traffic Acts amongst other obligations and is expected to be finalised by Q4 of 2023/2024.

#### **Elections**

- The Annual Canvass continues and the Team is still on track for completion in early December.
- The Team is currently compiling a list of streets within each of the new wards, following the Boundary review. This will be released when complete.
- Planning continues for the all-out elections in May 2024. The Project Plan has been revised and the Elections Planning Group is in the process of reviewing it.

#### **Democratic Services**

- The vacancy within the Team has been recruited to, and the new employee will start on Monday 2 October 2023. This process has taken some time and involved three separate rounds of advertising since the previous staff member retired in May.
- Interviews have been held to recruit our first Democracy & Elections Apprentice to the Team. This is a positive step and will assist in our succession planning.

## ICT

Following the departure of John Houston, Melissa Kemp-Salt, Joint Director of ICT, PMO & Transformation for Colchester and Epping Forest District Council will become EFDCs Digital Innovation Zone Board representative.

Work is about to commence on an audit to assess Microsoft systems used by the Council.

### Service Management, Security & Networks

A cyber security incident was prevented thanks to the good procedures and vigilance of council staff. Following protocols, staff were able to identify a fraudulent attempt to transfer a legitimate payment into a separate bank account. Significant sums involved were subsequently transferred correctly with no harm to the council, residents, or other stakeholders.

Investigations have been carried out to understand the source of the incident and any further measures the council might take to protect itself in the future.

The staff who thwarted the incident have been commended.

A free cyber mandatory training course has been organised for all colleagues in October with Essex Police. This awareness training will explain how phishing emails work and online safety.

National Cyber Security Awareness month takes place in October 2023. Internal Communications and ICT will be looking at promoting customer engagement and awareness during that period.

ICT continues to improve the customer experience, with the teams jointly working on BAU and projects to drive performance and improvements. Customer feedback was overall positive with 100% satisfaction. Tickets are being managed extremely well, with 'on hold' tickets being at a low of 4 and tickets are 95% within SLA's.

### KPI's – SLA Metrics & Analysis for w/c 4 September 2023

Tickets Raised	Outstanding	On Hold	Resolved	Within SLA	% Within SLA	Outside SLA	% Outside SLA
110	5	0	105	109	99%	1	1%

### Customer Feedback August / September 2023

Satisfaction Level	Ticket Handling	Customer service	Technical skill	Time taken
Very satisfied	90%	90%	85%	90%
Satisfied	10%	10%	15%	10%
Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Very Dissatisfied	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(blank) No response	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

**Customer comments on service provided:**

- Thanks for your help Joe.
- Awesome handling of my ticket – Thanks.
- Joe. Completed a great service, very quick and efficient, resolved issue brilliantly.
- Thank you, Jay, for your help.
- Very helpful as always thank you.
- Very quick response thank you.
- Thank you very much for retrieving the file I accidentally deleted. it was handled impeccably.
- Quick work

**Strategy**

ICT continue to explore efficiency savings within projects and BAU (business as usual). Due to having a successful relationship with the business, enables ICT to explore detailed requirements and add value with best practice, cost savings and aligning resources in the areas most needed. This enables ICT to deliver the strategy efficiently and focus on key projects that will assist colleagues and residents across the district.

**Projects – Business Applications and Infrastructure**

The following projects have been delivered by ICT:

- iTrent Multi Factor Authentication has started to rollout to service areas, great early feedback on making it easier for colleagues to sign-in.
- Licence issues on servers has been resolved and a risk closed on the corporate risk register.
- Microsoft Office 365 Multi Factor Authentication rollout to all EFDC colleagues for password reset.
- Encrypted mail to our mail server.
- Data cleanse on the F: Drive, reorganised 1.4 TB of data this could be equivalent to 25 million pieces of paper!

Priorities for ICT to deliver in the next few months continues:

- Omnichannel Customer Contact Capability project go live (Gamma).
- Moving to a Software As A Solution, for our payments application (Pay360).
- Replacement Housing Asset Management cloud solution going live (Civica CX).
- Our Corporate Document Management Solution being significantly upgraded.

**Corporate Projects**

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance and project management resources. The PMO has worked with service areas and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to review, align and agree key projects to EFDC’s corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported on the right

projects. Steering Groups continue to develop and evolve to support the roles of the key stakeholders involved.

Through the collaborative work that has been completed, 12 projects are agreed as EFDC's 'Corporate Priority Projects' which are strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Corporate Priority Projects will be reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny as well as being governed through our internal project framework.

The Corporate Priority Projects are:

- Shared Services Programme
- Housing and Asset Management Project (HAM's)
- M3 Replacement Project
- Omnichannel Customer Contact Experience (Previously Telephony)
- Epping Leisure Centre Project
- Future Waste Services Programme
  - Workstream 1: Future Waste Services Delivery
  - Workstream 2: Environment Operations Hub
  - Workstream 3: Procurement of Waste Fleet Vehicles
- Information @ Work Upgrade
- File Server Data Cleanse
- Financial Systems Replacement Project
- Microsoft Sentinel
- Infrastructure Architecture
- Increase Back Office Automation

In addition to the above noted Corporate Priority Projects, several smaller 'projects' have been identified and work is underway to understand the scope and requirements of these so that the right governance can be applied where appropriate. The PMO is currently working through a check/deep dive on all Corporate Priority Projects to identify any gaps, but importantly to identify any opportunities.

The PMO is also considering new tools, that would provide EFDC with a platform where all our processes, tools, and teams work together which would boost team's alignment, efficiency, and productivity. Any proposal will follow the project governance framework for consideration and will be aligned with the Shared Services Programme.

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

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

**Date:**                 **5 October 2023**

**Subject:**            **Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee  
2022/23**

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

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### **Recommending:**

**(1) That the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23 be noted.**

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1. The Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee outlines the Committee's work and achievements over the year ending 31 March 2023. 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.

# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2022/23

## 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.
- reinforcing the importance and independence of internal and external audit and similar review processes.

## 1. ASSURANCE ACTIVITY 2022/23

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 2022/23 was delivered.



The Committee considered and agreed reports regarding the Internal Audit Strategy, Internal Audit Charter, and Annual Plan 2022/23. It has also monitored progress made by management in implementing audit recommendations and 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. Members are provided with progress made on the issues raised in respect of the Annual Governance Statement and of the annual service assurance process. The Assurance Framework is compiled from various sources of assurance, for instance Directors, managers, 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 2021/22 which identified governance issues requiring further ongoing improvement or oversight relating to:

- Economic issues due to national and global events leading to a volatile economic situation.
- Statement of Accounts – as nationally councils continue to have difficulties in getting their final accounts audited, including Epping Forest.
- Financial Management Code Review – need for an assessment to ensure the Council can demonstrate compliance against the CIPFA Code.
- Business Continuity – to ensure plans are in place, maintained and periodically tested.
- Financial Regulations review to ensure they remain up to date.

The assurance framework remained unchanged during 2022/23. The Council's Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed by the committee in November 2022 to ensure it remains compliant with the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. Only minor changes were proposed (and agreed) to ensure it was still up to date, in line with good practice and fit for purpose.

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, and the implementation of recommendations coming out of investigations undertaken by the Corporate Fraud Team and 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 2022.

### **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. A rolling review of service risks will commence in 2023/24 as the risk management framework, including the format of risk registers, was refreshed during 2022/23.

### **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**

Annually the Committee should review and formally approve the Council's Statement of Accounts for the previous financial year. This would normally take place at the June/July meetings. However, this has not been the case for Epping Forest (and many other local councils) as reported above in the Assurance Framework / Annual Governance Statement section.

However, the Committee has been kept abreast of the situation and had to opportunity to challenge the Council's External Auditors (Deloitte) when they attended 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 five times in 2021/22. The Committee considered items which are presented annually, such as audit results, the draft statement of accounts, the annual governance statement, and audit plans; as well as a number of other items including treasury management as these fall under the committee's remit.

The Committee's work plan is supplemented with periodic bespoke training. For 2022/23, this was on the role of Audit and Governance Committee. In March 2023

the Committee undertook its own effectiveness review which is detailed later in this report.

The Committee helps demonstrate its independence by having two co-opted persons. A recruitment campaign during 2022/3 was unsuccessful to recruit to the one vacant co-opted post and will be undertaken again in 2023/24.

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).
- 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.

In order to build upon its achievements to date and to raise awareness of the work of the Committee during the coming year the Committee will focus on the following:

- Continue to review governance arrangements to ensure that the Council adopts best practice.
- Continue to support the work of audit and ensure that appropriate responses are provided to their recommendations.
- Continue to help the Council manage the risk of fraud and corruption.
- Provide effective challenge, particularly to officers, raising awareness of the importance of sound internal control arrangements and giving the appropriate assurances to the Council.
- Consider the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements.
- Provide existing and new members to the Committee with relevant training, briefings etc. to help in discharging their responsibilities.

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

**Committee:** Constitution Working Group

**Date:** 5 October 2023

**Subject:** Changes to the Audit & Governance Committee Terms of Reference

**Chairman:** Councillor A Lion

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### **Recommending:**

**(1) That the changes to the Audit & Governance Committee Terms of Reference be approved.**

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1. The role of the Audit and Governance Committee has three main functions:
  - Maintenance of governance, risk, and control arrangements
  - Accountability and public reporting
  - Assurance and audit arrangements
2. These are described in detailed in the CIPFA Audit Committees Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police, which was updated in June 2022. The guidance includes a model Terms of Reference for a local authority Audit Committee.
3. The Audit and Governance Committee's Terms of Reference have been updated to reflect this and attached as an Appendix to this report, and we recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.

## **AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE (proposed)**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Committee's purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. Its role in ensuring there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

The Committee has oversight of both Internal and External Audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

1. The specific functions of the Committee are:

#### **Governance, risk, and control**

- a. To review the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework, including the ethical framework, and consider the local code of governance.
- b. To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management in the Council.
- c. To monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the Committee.
- d. To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
- e. To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) financial management code.
- f. To consider the Council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
- g. To review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption.
- h. To monitor the anti-fraud and corruption strategy, actions, and resources.
- i. To review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaboration.

#### **Financial and governance reporting**

##### **Governance reporting**

- j. To review the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, including the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion.
- k. To consider whether the annual evaluation for the AGS fairly concludes that governance arrangements are fit for purpose, supporting the achievement of the Council's objectives.

## **Financial Reporting**

- l. To monitor the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met.
- m. To review the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the Council.
- n. To consider the External Auditor's annual letter to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

## **Arrangements for audit and assurance**

To consider the council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the council.

## **External Audit**

- o. To support the independence of External Audit through consideration of the External Auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA).
- p. To consider the External Auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance.
- q. To consider specific reports as agreed with the External Auditor.
- r. To comment on the scope and depth of External Audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
- s. To consider additional commissions of work from External Audit.
- t. To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between External and Internal Audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.
- u. To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit Committee Chair for the auditors, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

## **Internal Audit**

- v. To approve the Internal Audit Charter.
- w. To review proposals made in relation to the appointment of external providers of Internal Audit services and to make recommendations.
- x. To approve the internal audit strategy and plan, including Internal Audit resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurances and any work required to place reliance upon these other sources.
- y. To approve any significant interim changes to the plan and resource requirements and make appropriate enquires of both management and the Chief Internal Auditor to determine if there any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
- z. To consider any impairments to the independence or objectivity of the Chief Internal Auditor arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing and to approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.

- aa. To consider reports from the Chief Internal Auditor on Internal Audit's performance during the year, including the performance of external providers of Internal Audit services (if applicable). These will include:
  - updates on the work of Internal Audit, including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of Internal Audit work.
  - regular reports on the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP).
  - reports on instances where the internal audit function does not conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and Local Government Advisory Notes (LGAN), considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the AGS.
- bb. To consider the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report, including:
  - the statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme that supports the statement – these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of Internal Audit.
  - the opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion – these will assist the Committee in reviewing the Annual Governance Statement.
- cc. To consider summaries of specific Internal Audit reports as requested.
- dd. To receive reports outlining the action taken where the Chief Internal Auditor has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the Council or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.
- ee. To contribute to the QAIP and in particular to the external quality assessment of Internal Audit that takes place at least once every five years.
- ff. To consider a report on the effectiveness of Internal Audit to support the AGS where required to do so by the Accounts and Audit regulations.
- gg. To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit Committee Chair for the Chief Internal Auditor, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

### **Treasury Management**

- hh. to be responsible for the scrutiny of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, including receiving regular reports on activities, issues and trends to support the Committee's understanding of treasury management activities, risks and associated assurances.

### **Accountability arrangements**

- ii. to report to those charged with governance on the Committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements and Internal and External Audit functions.



- jj. to report to the full Council on a regular basis on the Committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the Committee in meeting its purpose.
- kk. To publish an annual report on the work of the committee, including a conclusion on the compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement.

### **Membership**

- 2. The Committee shall comprise 7 members, including 5 Councillors and 2 co-opted members. Councillors serving as members of the Committee shall be appointed at the Annual Council meeting of Epping Forest District Council for a term of office of one year and shall be eligible for re-appointment for further terms of office.
- 3. Seats on the Committee should be allocated so they are not all drawn from one political group and are also open to Councillors who are not affiliated to any political group.
- 4. Co-opted members shall serve for a period of 3 years from appointment. Such three-year appointments shall be overlapping in terms of their expiry dates. A co-opted member may serve for a total of two such terms as of right but may be considered for two further three-year terms, provided he or she is successful after open competition following public advertisement. Re-appointment for further terms shall be subject to satisfactory attendance.
- 5. Casual vacancies for members of the Committee who are Councillors which occur shall be filled at the next ordinary Council meeting (but not an extraordinary meeting) with a term of office expiring on the date of the next Annual Council meeting.

### **Eligibility for Membership - Councillor Members**

- 6. Councillors appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee may not also be members of the Cabinet or any select Committee appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with responsibility for reviewing the Council's finances or financial procedures.
- 7. A Portfolio Holder Assistant (other than any Assistant involved in any portfolio dealing primarily with the Council's finances) appointed by the Leader of the Council shall be eligible for appointment to the Committee.
- 8. Appointment of Councillors shall be made on the basis of evidence of the aptitude, experience, or interest and for this purpose the normal rules for pro rata appointments shall not apply.
- 9. Formal attendance standards be operated in respect of the three Councillor members when reappointment is under consideration by the Council's Appointments Panel and the Chairman and co-opted members of the Audit and Governance Committee be consulted informally about the appointment or reappointment of Councillors at the appropriate time.

### **Co-opted members**

- 10. Co-opted members, independent of the Council, shall be appointed by the Council on the basis of their professional expertise, experience, and

background as relevant to the role and responsibilities of the Audit and Governance Committee. Initial appointments of co-opted members and the filling of casual vacancies shall be made following public advertisement and interview, the latter conducted in accordance with arrangements agreed by the Council. If the number of suitable applicants exceeds the number of co-opted places on the Committee, the Council shall keep a waiting list of suitable applicants should casual vacancies occur.

### **Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

11. The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee shall be appointed at the first meeting of the Committee in each Council year for a term of one year expiring on the date of the first meeting of the Committee of the next Council year.
12. Casual vacancies in the position of Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall be filled in the same way as required in respect of members of the Committee.
13. Both Councillors and co-opted members serving on the Committee shall be eligible for appointment to the office of Chairman and Vice-Chairman.
14. Where the Chairman of the Committee is a Councillor, the Vice-Chairman will be appointed from among the Co-opted members. Where the Chairman is one of the Co-opted members, the Vice-Chairman shall be a Councillor.
15. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall be eligible for re-appointment.

### **Meetings of the Committee**

16. The Committee shall meet at least three times each financial year.
17. The Committee shall be entitled to require any Member, Director, their representatives, or any other officer to attend their meetings in order to discuss any matters under discussion including the annual audit programme.

### **Decision Making**

18. Only the Councillors and co-opted members serving on the Committee shall be entitled to vote.
19. All members of the Committee shall be entitled to all documents, advice, and facilities relevant to their membership of the Committee, regardless of their status as either a Councillor or Co-opted member.

### **Other Requirements**

20. All members of the Committee shall respect the confidentiality of Council information and proceedings where appropriate, particularly where exempt or confidential business is involved.
21. All co-opted members of the Committee shall be required to make a statutory registration of interests in the same form as those required of serving Councillors and to be aware at all times of the requirement to clear any interest relating to their work on the Committee.

22. Members of the Committee should seek to attend all meetings of the Committee unless there are exceptional circumstances which prevent this.
23. All members of the Committee should ensure that they participate fully in any training designed to assist them in their responsibilities as members of the Committee. Similarly, all members should act on appropriate advice and other information supplied by the Council to improve their effectiveness.