

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Full Council  
**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024  
**Subject:** Finance & Economic Development  
**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor John Philip

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## **Recommending:**

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

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### Meet the Construction Buyer Event

Funded via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, an inaugural Meet the Construction Buyer event was facilitated by the Council's Economic Development Team on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March at the Civic Offices in Epping.

Twenty-five different exhibitors from across the construction industry, along with representatives from three regional colleges and Council Planning and Procurement staff, attended with stalls, banners and merchandise. Construction companies included Qualis, Vistry, Weston Homes, British Offsite, Pellikaan and Davis Construction.

Running from 4pm to 8pm, over 120 attendees were able to network and secure advice and guidance on how to move their businesses to the next level. Organisations such as TrAc were on hand to discuss apprentice placements, and free business advice resources were promoted by NWES and Backing Business Support. Feedback from attendees was resoundingly positive with numerous delegates reporting that they felt in an excellent position to move towards bidding for work and local contracts as a result of attending the event.

The event enabled the Council's Economic Development Team to build its construction business database and to gain valuable insight into the sector in order to provide further support moving forwards.

### Federation of Small Business Subsidised Membership Scheme

As at the end of February, 36 businesses in the district have taken up the Federation of Small Businesses subsidised membership offer, offered via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Combined, they represent 313 employees, 19 of the businesses are sole traders, 7 have 50+ employees and the rest have up to 10 employees. Since joining, businesses have taken advantage of 52 different products, with insurance and legal products being the most popular.

The offer continues into the new fiscal year with a further promotional event planned in Ongar on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May.

Businesses that have taken up the offer reported; "We are accessing the legal, employment and health and safety advisory support that the FSB membership provides. We are also

about to use the FSB's database for standard contracts, leases and licences that we use in our everyday business".

### Monthly Business E-Newsletter

The Economic Development Team recently released its latest edition of the 'Business Matters' e-newsletter to over 2,000 local businesses with topics focusing on a new West Essex business support programme, a practical summary of the Spring Budget announcement from the Federation of Small Businesses and finance support from the British Business Bank. The next edition is currently being developed and will be released at the end of the month.

### Visitor Economy

The tourism season begins at Easter and all the district's attractions are now fully open and expecting a busy season. Tourism economy data for both the district and Essex shows that the sector has recovered from the pandemic and grown beyond 2019 performance (£252,561,640 in 2022 vs £242,151,200 in 2019). Visitors and local residents alike are increasingly looking for free or low-cost activities and taking a day out or shorter breaks. This plays to the strengths of the district's offer, which is featured on the recently launched Discover App which has recently had pages covering Theydon Bois and North Weald added, as well as a new section featuring the activities offered by the Council's Communities Team. To support the Discover App and local tourism, 70 existing lamppost banners around the district are being updated. The new banners feature the App details on one side and a series of free local attractions on the reverse.

The district's tourism website is attracting 4,000 visitors weekly. The top pages visited in the last 28 days include North Weald Market, the Epping Forest Shopping Park, the Funky Monk Hotel, Theydon Bois Earthworks and North Weald Airfield. The top search areas are Events, Accommodation, Travel Information and Pubs & Bars. The DMS system used to host the site has recently added a range of analytical functions which will be integrated to enhance page-level information on the websites performance. This will work seamlessly alongside the information already being gathered from Google Analytics. Additional training will also be provided to officers to understand the new software functions.

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

The Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) delivered the latest in its ongoing series of Smart Place Seminars on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March. More than 80 attendees registered for 'How Can Data Transform Our Place' which brought together the usual mix of local, regional and national speakers to explore how the public sector can collaborate to generate the best value from the data it creates, collects and stores in order to transform resident and business experience of public sector services. Attendees heard from speakers from the Local Government Association (LGA), London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI), Hertfordshire County Council and Anglia Ruskin University and were introduced to a range of approaches in which organisations can begin or develop their own journeys with data, as well as details of the support that is available.

The Sustainable Digital Special Interest Group of the DIZ is holding a 'Priority Setting' Workshop in March, which will explore opportunities to collaborate across partner organisations in order to enhance the sustainability of the digital technology and applications we use, as well as looking at how digital technology and applications might be deployed to enhance the sustainability of non-digital services.

## ICT

Matthew White has been appointed as the workstream lead for Shared Service across ICT for Epping Forest District Council and Colchester City Council.

### ICT Projects

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

- Ward Boundaries change
- Preparation for up-and-coming Elections
- Moving to a Software-as-a-Service, for our payments application (Pay360)
- Finalising plan of works for 2024/2025
- E5 License Project (Microsoft Enterprise Licencing)
- Investigation of Shared Services opportunities with Colchester City Council
- Museum migration to Trust
  - Email creation, disclaimer, and logo
  - Wi-Fi
  - Security cameras
  - Infrastructure
- Supporting the Waste project (in-house), providing:
  - ICT Kit & Mobile devices
  - Infrastructure
  - Customer interface (web-based forms for customer interactions)
- Final stage on Lone working application replacement (officer safety)
- Approval to commence a new website platform which can be used by Epping Forest District Council and Colchester City Council
- PSTN Update (also known as the Big Switch Off – removal of legacy copper telephone lines)

### PMO Corporate Update

The Project Management Office (PMO) provides governance, assurance, project management resources and support to the business.

The PMO continues to work with service areas and the Senior Management Team (SMT) to review, assure, align, and agree key projects for EFDC's corporate objectives so that time, effort, and money can be directed and supported on the right projects.

Through the collaborative work that is underway, the following projects are noted as EFDC's agreed 'Corporate Priority Projects' which will be strategically aligned to EFDC's Corporate Objectives. Not all projects are governed through the PMO and may have governance arrangements agreed elsewhere within the business. Corporate Priority Projects will be reported on a quarterly basis through Overview and Scrutiny. In addition, there will be a number of other projects are also expected to be developed throughout 2024.

1. Shared Services Programme
2. Waste Services Programme
  - a. a. Workstream 1: Future Waste Services Delivery
  - b. b. Workstream 2: Environment Operations Hub
  - c. c. Workstream 3: Procurement of Waste Fleet Vehicles
3. Housing and Asset Management Project (HAM's)
4. Public Protection Project (Formally known as M3PP)

5. Epping Leisure Centre Project
6. Finance Systems Replacement Project
7. Pay 360
8. EFDC Website Replacement
9. File Server Data Cleanse (Migration to Cloud based storage and improved data Governance and Compliance)
10. The Big Switch Off
11. Infrastructure Architecture (Review of the Council's ICT platforms)
12. Work Management Solution

The programme management office continues to work to align resources with all projects to ensure correct prioritisation and the appropriate allocation of resources. This work will help inform the critical path with a view to complete a forward plan.

The PMO is considering new tools, which will provide EFDC with a platform where all our processes, tools, and teams work together to boost teams' alignment, efficiency, and productivity. This is being considered as a shared project across EFDC, Colchester City Council and Braintree District Council. A Project Brief has been submitted and approved by EFDC's Portfolio Steering Group and an Outline Business Case will be submitted to outline options for consideration for a Proof of Concept (POC) and Minimal Viable Product (MVP).

Any further questions can be directed to Matthew White and Melissa Kemp-Salt at regular meetings.