

**DRAFT
COUNCIL PLAN**

2006 - 2010

FEBRUARY 2006



Epping Forest District Council

CONTENTS

Section 1 – Leader’s Introduction (Page 2)

Section 2 – The Profile of the Epping Forest District (Page 4)

Section 3 – The Background to the Council Plan (Page 8)

Section 4 – Our Strategic Direction (Page 10)

Section 5 – Our Key Influences (Page 13)

Section 6 – Our Strategic Aims and Priorities (Page 17)

Section 7 – How We Deliver Our Strategic Aims and Priorities (Page 34)

Section 8 – How We Measure Our Achievements (Page 36)

Section 9 – How We Resource Our Priorities (Page 39)

Section 10 – Action Plan (Page 41)

SECTION 1 – LEADER’S INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

- 1.1 Over recent years it has become more important than ever for councils to provide high quality services, and local authorities are increasingly expected to prioritise and address those issues that have a real impact upon residents and quality of life.
- 1.2 Epping Forest District Council is committed to improving our services and wants to be a responsive authority that listens to your concerns and acts upon them. This Council Plan highlights our main priorities for the next four years that provide the framework within which we will make improvements and strive to become a top performing authority. No local authority can serve its residents successfully without a plan for the future and, as our vision is to develop and promote the Epping Forest District as a safe, healthy and attractive place in which to live and work. The council will continue to preserve the natural environment and heritage of the district whilst also developing and improving opportunities for all of our residents and customers.
- 1.3 Through consultation we have established your main concerns and have developed our strategic priorities for the future. To ensure that these priorities are addressed effectively, we have developed aims on a thematic basis in line with the Community Strategy for the district. This Council Plan follows this thematic approach and highlights key aims designed to aid the achievement of our corporate goals, and allows us to more effectively identify and address many vital cross-cutting issues that are important to you. It is our aim to continue to ensure that you receive the best services that meet the changing needs of local people at a price you can afford.
- 1.4 As residents of the district, we want you to know that every effort will be made to provide high quality services that are open, accessible and accountable. However, we cannot do this by ourselves. A high level of public involvement will be required in the future, as will continued partnership working with other public and private organisations, the voluntary sector and local communities, to secure our vision and values and the long-term future of the district.
- 1.5 The Council has welcomed its community leadership responsibilities and took the lead in the establishment of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), a partnership of all the statutory and voluntary agencies that work in the district, to develop the Community Strategy. The Council has, and will continue to, respond to the important issues facing the district. Further partnership working is the key to resolving such issues, as many of these focus on areas where the council has only a supporting responsibility.
- 1.6 ***NOTE: Additional detail to be inserted here in relation to the Council’s four year financial forecast. This issue will be important for the purposes of evidencing that actions and priorities to be achieved over the next four years can be fully resourced, and will be completed once the budget for 2006/07 has been agreed.***

1.7 We believe that everybody in the Epping Forest District should enjoy the best quality of life and hope that you will join us in making this possible.

Councillor

Leader of the Council

SECTION 2 – THE PROFILE OF THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

2. THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

- 2.1 Epping Forest is a contrasting mixture of urban and rural life, covering 34,500 hectares. The district has six main centres of population (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell, Epping, Loughton, Chipping Ongar and Waltham Abbey) and numerous picturesque villages and hamlets, but no natural centre. The majority of the district lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt, designed to restrict the spread of London into the home counties.
- 2.2 The district has a population of 120,896, compared with 116,000 in 1991. Over 40% of the population live in the southwest of the district (Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell and Loughton). The population is ageing, with the 2001 Census profile showing a reduction of under fives and an increase in over seventy-fives. There is a small (5%) ethnic minority population but we have one of the largest number of traveller populations in Essex, stationed on both unauthorised encampments and approved sites.
- 2.3 The district has boundaries with four London Boroughs and a number of Essex and Hertfordshire districts, and overall, the district is seen as an affluent and prosperous area of large houses and wealth. Unemployment is low, and the 2004 Index of Local Deprivation ranked the district as 234th least deprived of the 354 local authority areas in England and Wales, although pockets of deprivation do exist alongside relatively affluent areas.
- 2.4 There is constant pressure for development in the countryside. The Council's planning policies have traditionally been directed towards resisting encroachment into the Green Belt, but this protection is being challenged by Government proposals for significant housing development in the London (M11)-Stansted-Cambridge corridor growth area, and the possible expansion of the neighbouring district of Harlow.
- 2.5 The district is home to a number of places of special interest, including the world's oldest timber-framed church at Greensted, the former Royal Gunpowder Mills site at Waltham Abbey now a centre for leisure and tourism, and an historic wartime airfield at North Weald that has been owned and managed by the Council for recreation since 1980. North Weald Airfield is our most significant land asset and the venue of the largest regular outdoor market in Europe. The Council owns local leisure facilities in four of our main population centres, the newest of which is Loughton Leisure Centre, the majority of which are managed on its behalf by SLM Limited.
- 2.6 Within the district there are twenty-five conservation areas and over fifteen hundred listed buildings, which is the fourth highest total in Essex. The Council's countryside management service, Epping Forest Countrycare, maintains the natural environment of the district for the benefit of local people and wildlife, and areas of parkland and natural beauty such as the Lea Valley Regional Park, the

Roding Valley and Epping Forest itself, provide plentiful opportunities for informal sport and leisure.

- 2.7 There are seven Central Line underground stations and one village served by a main-line railway station within the district. The redundant section of the Central Line running eastwards from Epping and the former underground stations at North Weald, Blake Hall and Ongar may assume future importance as strategic transport routes, as part of the government's proposals for housing development. The district is quartered by the M11 and M25 motorways, but has only two full and one restricted access junctions to these routes. Bus services are poor in rural areas and car ownership in the district is high (2001 Census: 47,996 households with one car or more).
- 2.8 Extremely high local property prices as a result of the proximity of the district to London and Stansted Airport, force many indigenous young adults to leave the district to secure cheaper accommodation elsewhere. As an employer, the Council has difficulties in recruiting staff due to the high housing costs in the district and its proximity to London, where comparable local authority positions can attract higher salaries. There are small and medium-sized businesses in many urban and rural sites, with larger businesses concentrated on industrial estates at Loughton, North Weald and Waltham Abbey.
- 2.9 The Council has always regarded the continued provision and support of affordable housing as a key priority and currently manages and maintains its own housing stock, consisting of approximately 6,000 residential dwellings, 770 leasehold properties and a homeless persons' hostel. Local planning guidance presently requires developers to provide 30% affordable housing on all large-scale residential developments, although the Council is seeking to increase this percentage requirement. For many years Registered Social Landlords have been given Social Housing Grant and free land to enable the development of affordable housing for allocation to applicants on our Housing Register. The Council's housing stock represents approximately 15% of the total social housing stock within the district.
- 2.10 The Council was formed in 1974 and has fifty-eight Councillors elected for a period of four years. The authority currently has no overall control and consists of twenty-six Conservative, fourteen Liberal Democrat, four Labour, four Independent, one Independent Socialist, six Loughton Residents' Association and three British National Party members. The Council has been politically balanced for thirteen years and all committees, including the Cabinet have pro-rata membership arrangements. The authority introduced a Leader and Cabinet system of decision-making in May 2002 and our nine Portfolio Holders are appointed on a pro-rata basis, covering the thematic responsibilities of our Council Plan and Best Value Performance Plan (People First, Community Wellbeing, Planning and Economic Development, Housing, Leisure, Environmental Protection, Civil Engineering and Maintenance, Finance and Performance Management, and Information and Communications Technology and Corporate Support Services).
- 2.11 The district is fully parished, with twenty-four town and parish councils. The development of three-tier liaison is of particular importance to the Council. We have a positive attitude to public participation, and have introduced public speaking

arrangements at the District Development Control Committee and four area-based sub-committees that deal principally with development control matters. Public questions are welcomed at full Council meetings.

2.12 The Council is a large and complex organisation, delivering many services. We do not deliver all the services that our customers receive ourselves, but work closely with a large number of partners from the public, voluntary and private sectors. Our key partners include:

- Essex County Council;
- the town and parish councils in the district;
- Essex Police;
- the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership;
- the local Primary Care Trust;
- other local authorities in Essex;
- educational establishments in the district;
- local business in the district; and
- other bodies such as the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Corporation of London

2.13 The Council works effectively with its partners on many crosscutting initiatives to deliver service improvements, and regards partnerships as an effective way of enhancing service provision, or of providing facilities where none currently exist. The Council is recognised by its partners as being outwardly focussed and concerned for our customers. We have achieved good levels of customer satisfaction in the provision of our services, and are also committed to serving our residents in areas where we have no statutory responsibility, such as children and young people. We have achieved a number of awards such as Charter Marks and the Investors in People accreditation that highlight our focus on meeting the needs of our citizens.

2.14 We have established nine portfolios through which we deliver our aims and priorities, grouped to reflect the themes of the Epping Forest District Community Strategy for 2004 to 2021. Each portfolio is the responsibility of an elected councillor who has a seat on our Cabinet, which is the Council's main decision-making body. The individual services within each portfolio are detailed in our annual Best Value Performance Plan, available from our information centres and website.

2.15 The Council employs over six hundred staff, organised into two arms, Community Services and Resources, each headed by a Joint Chief Executive who together form the Council's corporate Management Board. Nine Heads of Service, the Chief Works Officer and the Management Board constitute the Senior Management Team. The Council is committed to the provision of quality services for its customers. However, the context in which we have to operate, such as the rural/urban mixture of the district, the lack of a single focal centre of the district, the high level of property prices, and our ability to recruit and retain suitable staff present significant challenges.

2.16 ***NOTE: Additional detail to be inserted here in relation to the Council's four year financial forecast and current and forecasted levels of Council Tax. These issues will be important for the purposes of evidencing that actions and priorities to be achieved over the next four years can be fully resourced, and will be completed once the budget for 2006/07 has been agreed.***

SECTION 3 – THE BACKGROUND TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

3. THE COUNCIL PLAN 2006 – 2010

- 3.1 The Council Plan sets out our priorities and aims for the next four years and gives us the opportunity to identify and promote the key aims that will build upon our successes and take us forward from 2006 to 2010. This document replaces the previous Council Plan issued during 2003, which was intended to be in force until 2007. We have issued a new edition of the plan at this time to reflect our recent progress, the results of our first Comprehensive Performance Assessment and other assessments of our performance, and new duties and responsibilities given to us by the government.
- 3.2 The Council Plan does not cover everything that we do, but focuses on those issues that matter most to people, national priorities set by the government and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the Epping Forest District. As a strategic document, the Council Plan does not contain specific information on the wide range of services that we already provide, or how we deliver statutory duties or enforce legislation. Details of the provision of individual services can be found in the annual business plans produced by each of our service areas, which are available from the Performance Management Unit.
- 3.3 The new Council Plan also recognises the aspirations of the Community Strategy for the district, which was published during 2004 by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The Community Strategy addresses the key challenges facing the district over the next sixteen years, including the likelihood of significant housing growth and its potential impact on the environment, as well as issues such as local health and transport provision. The LSP carried out extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders to produce the strategy, and will monitor the progress of its constituent agencies in achieving the aims of the Community Strategy.
- 3.4 The Council Plan is a key component of our Performance Management Framework, which links the strategic priorities of the Council to the work of our staff. The Framework includes indicators and systems for improving services, our performance and the way we work, to enable us to measure how we are doing and alert us when corrective action is required to bring under-performance back into line.
- 3.5 We want Epping Forest District Council to be a high performing local authority that delivers top-quality services in the most cost effective way, and to ensure that the views and priorities of the users and recipients of our services are integral to everything that we do. Our Customer Charter underpins the culture that we are striving to achieve, and we aim for the council to be well run, open and accountable. Through effective leadership and the provision of quality services we will tackle the problems and opportunities facing the district either ourselves or in partnership with others.

- 3.6 To achieve excellence we will continue to review the effectiveness of our services, to ensure that we provide value for money and minimise the Council Tax burden on our residents. The Audit Commission, an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, assessed us as a 'good' performing authority in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken in February 2004, and we want to improve. In order to achieve excellence we are focusing on key issues and areas of importance to our customers or where we are currently performing less well, in order to achieve improvements in service delivery.
- 3.7 The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a community leadership role for councils to lead their communities through:
- local democratic leadership;
 - leadership through partnership; and
 - communities leading themselves.
- 3.8 The community leadership role requires councils to bring people together to develop a community strategy for their areas, and to produce and deliver improvements in the quality of life for local people. Central to this is the transparency of decision-making and accountability for the value for money and impact of local services, and of the involvement of local people in decision-making. Successful community leadership ensures that local people can become politically, socially and economically engaged. Community leadership is often delivered through partnership, particularly when it is tackling crosscutting issues, and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) brings together key agencies from the public, private and voluntary sectors, and our ability to lead or contribute to partnerships is increasingly important to securing local improvements.
- 3.9 The Council is committed to its community leadership responsibilities and took the lead in the formation of the LSP, which developed the Community Strategy for the Epping Forest District. The Council has, and will continue, to respond to issues facing the district. Further partnership working is the key to resolving such issues, as many of these will focus on areas where the Council has only a supporting responsibility.
- 3.10 The objectives contained in this Council Plan can best be achieved through joint working and partnership involving the council and the local community. We all have a part to play in ensuring that Epping Forest is a district that people will want to live and work in and an area that we can be proud of.
- 3.11 This Council Plan generally follows a thematic approach based on the Community Strategy, which allows us to be flexible and to address the issues that matter most to our customers. The Council Plan will be formally reviewed each year to ensure continued appropriateness, having regard to changing issues and the progress that we make.

SECTION 4 – OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

4. THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

Our Vision

- 4.1 We want the Epping Forest District to be a safe, healthy and attractive place in which to live and work. This is our vision and overall strategic aim for the district for the next four years
- 4.2 Our district is a mixture of suburban commuter belt and beautiful countryside. In the past we have sought to maintain the special character of the area by carefully limiting development. Due to the housing pressures faced in the south east of England we are being set high targets for new housing. Our district has a great many natural advantages and we want to preserve and enhance these whilst recognising the need for managed, sustainable development where necessary. We want to ensure that our communities are safe places, with good housing, local environments, and leisure and employment opportunities. The Council is committed to listening to the views of local people and has adopted a strategy to engage local communities in decisions that affect the services that they use or receive.
- 4.3 The Community Strategy sets out visions for the future of the district on a thematic basis designed to improve the overall quality of life for our residents. Residents of the district have indicated that these themes represent their core concerns for the future. In this Council Plan and our annual Best Value Performance Plan we have linked the way in which we provide direct services and how we can contribute to the achievement of the Community Strategy as a leader, partner or influencer of action, to the following themes of the Strategy where we have specific responsibilities:

Green and Unique – Ensuring the protection of the unique, green and sustainable environment of the district;

Homes and Neighbourhoods - Ensuring that the district has decent housing and clean and attractive neighbourhoods;

A Safe Community - Ensuring that residents of the district can enjoy local amenities with little fear of being a victim of crime;

Fit for Life - Ensuring that residents of the district lead a healthy lifestyle by having access to effective, high quality leisure and cultural services;

Economic Prosperity - Ensuring that the district has a thriving and sustainable economy.

- 4.4 Although our strategic aim and priorities relate to the key issues facing the district over the next four years, we have recognised that some of the everyday services

that we provide to the community are not currently meeting the level of quality or performance that we desire. In order to achieve and sustain high performance in these areas, we have therefore developed the following additional theme for this Council Plan, which recognises the importance of the processes and people that contribute towards meeting community need. This theme is not directly linked to the issues covered by the Community Strategy:

Improving Our Performance – Ensuring that we offer high quality, customer focussed services, provided by skilled and committed staff.

- 4.5 Other themes of the Community Strategy cover issues such as ‘Getting About’ and ‘Lifelong Learning’. These are areas where Essex County Council generally has responsibility and will act as leader and influencer of action to achieve aims of the Strategy. Copies of the Community Strategy can be obtained from the Community Strategy and Partnerships Manager by contacting (01992) 564423 or email msheriff@eppingforestcvs.org
- 4.6 The Council’s strategic aim has been developed with reference to issues such as the views of local people, the current social and economic profile of the district, the pressures and aspirations facing the south-east of England, and central government priorities that we are required to address. The aim reflects the concerns of our residents and the major challenges facing the district over the forthcoming years. All of our plans for the next four years will be aligned to this aim, including this Council Plan, and our Capital Strategy and four-year financial forecast. A separate plan called the Best Value Performance Plan is produced annually to detail how we are going to achieve targets for each of the four years that the Council Plan covers.
- 4.7 ***NOTE: Additional detail to be inserted here in relation to the Council’s four year financial forecast and current and forecasted levels of Council Tax. These issues will be important for the purposes of evidencing that actions and priorities to be achieved over the next four years can be fully resourced, and will be completed once the budget for 2006/07 has been agreed.***
- 4.8 We have adopted our strategic aim to provide focus, direction and priority for the services and activities that matter most to you over the next four years. This aim represents the common core interests of the council, and seeks to ensure that we concentrate on those matters that are important and will help us to direct and allocate resources appropriately.

Our Customer Charter

- 4.9 We have developed our Customer Charter to let you know the overall standards that you can expect from the council and how we will work to provide the best services for the district that we can. We will:
- Consult with our customers, listen to what they say, and respond in the best way we can;
 - Be open in all financial matters, and always remember we are spending public money;
 - Constantly search for ways in which we can improve our services;

- Respond to changes which affect our customers;
- Be open and honest in all our dealings, and treat everyone equally and fairly;
- Strive towards excellence in all our services, and provide the best value available;
- Invest in our staff through training and development so we can provide the best service; and
- Do our best to care for the environment for today and for the future.

SECTION 5 – OUR KEY INFLUENCES

5. INFORMATION ABOUT THE EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

5.1 In the preparation of this new Council Plan, we have taken account of the views of residents in relation to the services that we provide, and have considered a range of sources of factual data and information about the district, in order to determine our strategic aims and priorities for the next four years.

Public Opinion

5.2 We regularly consult our community about our plans, priorities and services, both in relation to corporate and issue specific matters. Every three years we are required to undertake specific consultation exercises in relation to overall satisfaction with the Council and the quality of life in the district, and the quality of our housing, benefits and planning services. These surveys were last carried out in 2003, when the main findings in relation to overall customer satisfaction were:

- 86% of respondents were satisfied with waste collection facilities;
- 78% of respondents were satisfied with local waste recycling facilities;
- 73% of respondents were satisfied with the district's parks and open spaces;
- 63% of respondents were satisfied with the cleanliness of the district;
- 54% of respondents were satisfied with the way the authority runs things; and
- 47% of respondents were satisfied with the district's sports and leisure facilities.

5.4 The survey also sought information on the factors most often chosen as important in making somewhere a good place to live, and the main findings of this element of the survey were:

- Low level of crime (chosen by 73% of respondents);
- Clean streets (52%); and
- Health services (50%).

5.5 The survey also identified that the things that respondents considered most need improving in the district were:

- Road and pavement repairs (highlighted by 50% of respondents);
- Activities for teenagers (45%);
- Level of traffic congestion (40%);
- Level of crime (38%); and
- Clean streets (34%).

5.7 The survey also asked respondents to indicate how things had changed in the past three years, and whether issues had got worse or better. The main factors identified as getting worse were;

- Level of traffic congestion (identified by 75% of respondents);

- Road and pavement repairs (64%);
- Wage levels and the local cost of living (63%);
- Crime (60%); and
- Affordable decent housing (57%).

5.7 The customer satisfaction surveys will be undertaken again during 2006/07.

Performance Indicators

- 5.8 We monitor our performance throughout each year against a range of performance indicators. Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are set by the Government across the range of local government services such as waste, planning, benefits and housing, to reflect national priorities. Local Performance Indicators (LPIs) are adopted by the council to reflect its own priorities and help demonstrate how it is responding to local issues.
- 5.9 We have used the most recent audited BVPI and LPI results (2004/05) to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Census

- 5.10 A Census is a survey of all people and households in the country. It provides essential planning information from the national to neighbourhood level for government, business, and the community. The census is undertaken every ten years.
- 5.11 The most recent Census was held on 29 April 2001, and the next will be held in 2011. Full details of the national 2001 Census results and specific findings for the Epping Forest District can be obtained from the Office of National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/census2001.asp).
- 5.12 We have used the results of the most recent Census to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Index of Deprivation

- 5.13 The Index of Multiple Deprivation measures multiple deprivation at the local area level. Levels of deprivation for each local authority area are assessed by the government on the basis of income, employment, health, education and skills, barriers to service access, crime and disorder, the environment, and deprivation affecting children and older people.
- 5.14 We have used the results of an updating to the Index of Multiple Deprivation completed by the Government during 2004, to identify relevant priorities for the next four years.

Quality of Life information

- 5.15 An 'Area Profile' for the Epping Forest District has been produced by the Audit Commission, which provides a wide-ranging picture of local quality of life and public services. The profile brings together data and information in respect of the

district from a wide range of performance indicators, assessments of local public services and other sources. A profile for the district has also been produced by the Essex Learning and Skills Council, bringing together key learning and skills information about the district in order to provide an understanding of the learning and skills needs of local people and employers.

Corporate Assessment

- 5.16 The Council is subject to regular assessment of areas of its corporate performance by the Audit Commission.
- 5.17 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) considers the performance of all local authorities, including relationships with and the performance of partners including the Local Strategic Partnership in terms of the delivery of the Community Strategy. The Council's first CPA was carried out in 2004, when we were awarded a 'Good' rating, and we are currently implementing a range of improvement actions arising from the CPA to improve our overall performance. We have recently been required to report to the Commission on how we have improved since 2004.
- 5.18 During the last year the Audit Commission undertook assessments of how effectively we use the resources available to us, and how well we consult and engage with our local communities, and we are currently identifying actions that we can take to improve in these areas.
- 5.19 The CPA is likely to be undertaken again during 2006/07, although the methodology will probably change from that used in the initial round of assessments. In 2007 the Council's overall performance will be assessed from a combination of factors, including a range of performance indicators, how we have improved since the first CPA, how we engage and consult with our residents and communities, how we use our resources, and whether we offer value for money in the services we provide.

Community Strategy

- 5.20 We share and fully support the overall aim of the Community Strategy to build strong communities by placing local people at the heart of local service planning and improving life in the Epping Forest District, and the Council Plan sets out the key issues that we will concentrate upon until 2009. The Plan recognises the work of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Community Strategy, and aims to dovetail the activities of the Council with the ambitions and action plans set out in the strategy.

What do these key influences tell us?

- 5.21 These key influences tell us the following:
- Several of the issues raised in the last customer satisfaction surveys are matters over which the Council has no control or influence, such as wage levels and the local cost of living. Since the surveys were conducted

responsibility for highway services has transferred to Essex County Council, and we now only have some discretionary powers over local roads and footpaths;

- Some of the issues raised in the last customer satisfaction surveys such as crime and activities for teenagers are matters in which the Council has no direct responsibility, but works in partnership with other agencies;
- The customer satisfaction surveys tell us that that the key expectations of the public are that the Council is competent in providing core services that impact directly on the area in which they live, such as waste management, street cleansing and repair and community safety. However, we need to do better in a range of issues, some of which we will achieve jointly with the Local Strategic Partnership;
- We need to improve our performance against a range of key services;
- Pockets of deprivation exist alongside relatively affluent areas of the district; and
- Although we believe that we provide value for money services for our residents and customers, as we have been able to set low Council Tax levels and provide a full range of services, we recognise that we need to be able to demonstrate that we offer value for money.

5.22 We have used the results of the most recent surveys to identify relevant priorities for the next four years. The full results of the survey are available on our website www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk or from the Performance Management Unit. The survey will be undertaken again during 2006/07.

SECTION 6 – OUR STRATEGIC AIMS AND PRIORITIES

6. THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES FOR 2006-2010

6.1 Beneath our vision and strategic aim lie individual priorities. These priorities are set out in this section of this Council Plan, and are linked to themes of the Community Strategy where we have specific responsibilities or provide a range of services. This part of the Plan highlights the issues that have led and informed the development of our individual priorities for the next four years, which are set out in the action plan to be found later in this document.

7. Green And Unique

7.1 Our priority is to maintain the special character and advantage of the district and to address local environmental issues.

7.2 The environment of the district is an important and valuable asset, which contributes positively to all our lives. The Council is committed to protecting and conserving the natural and built environment, addressing inequalities in services that arise from the geography of the district, meeting the needs of our diverse communities, and promoting the minimisation, reuse and recycling of waste.

Green and Unique issues

7.3 The main issues affecting the Council and the Epping Forest District are:

- The majority of the district lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt;
- The district has a population of 120,896, which is estimated to grow to 128,000 by 2011 (Source: 2001 Census);
- The district is of a mixed urban and rural nature;
- The Government is currently proposing major housing development in the countryside of the Epping Forest District. The Draft East of England Plan proposes that the number of homes within the district should increase by 11,000 by 2021, representing an increase of over 20%, and we are widely supported locally in our view that this is too great (Source: East of England Regional Plan);
- The regeneration and possible growth of the neighbouring district of Harlow (Source: Harlow 2020 Vision Community Strategy);
- We were unable to meet our statutory target for the recycling of waste of 30% for 2005/06 (Source: Best Value Performance Indicator data for 2004/05); and

- We need to make our Museum Service more attractive to our communities and to maximise the educational value of the collections of the Epping Forest Museum (Source: Best Value Performance Indicators for 2004/05).

What these issues tell us

7.4 These issues tell us the following:

- The Green Belt designation of much of the district leads to constant and significant development pressure and the Council's traditional stance of Green Belt protection is being challenged by development and regeneration proposals affecting the district;
- Significant population growth in the district over the next ten years will require the provision of additional levels of housing and significant infrastructure enhancements;
- Once the final version of the East of England Regional Plan has been published, we will need to produce a Local Development Framework setting out how our development policies will allow for housing growth in the district whilst also maintaining the special character of the area. The Local Development Framework will be an important means by which the Council will seek to balance conflicting demands whilst achieving its priorities;
- We need to do more to explain to our residents the importance of increased recycling and the production of less waste, and encourage people to do both; and
- We need to improve access to our Museum Service for all our residents.

What we have achieved

7.5 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- We have so far influenced regional planning guidance to secure a 7,000 dwelling reduction in the total number of new homes proposed to be built in the district in future years;
- We have agreed a Local Development Framework scheme with the Government, setting out the timetable for the production of the components of the framework once the East of England Regional Plan has been finalised; and
- We have introduced new waste collection and recycling services through the use of wheeled bins and the alternate weekly collection of waste and recyclable materials, to encourage residents to produce less waste and recycle more. We have implemented these arrangements in respect of approximately 20,000 households in the district and recycling levels have increased significantly in those areas where the new arrangements are now in place.

What we want to achieve

- 7.6 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Green and Unique priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.
- We want to further reduce the number of new homes that the government proposes be built within the Green Belt areas of the district, and work with neighbouring local authorities to protect the unique character of the area for the future, by ensuring that new homes provided in the district through regional growth are sustainable, through sensible planning and the provision of adequate infrastructure (Action GU1);
 - We want to improve our recycling performance to exceed statutory targets, by completing the introduction of new waste management arrangements across the district (Action GU2);
 - We want to increase public awareness and understanding of the social history of the district, through improvements to the Epping Forest District Museum Service and the accessibility of its collections (Action GU3); and
 - We want to complete the production of our Local Development Framework once the East of England Regional Plan has been finalised (Action GU4).

8. Homes and Neighbourhoods

- 8.1 Our priority is to have homes and neighbourhoods in our district that are decent, attractive and safe, and that can accommodate all those who need to live in Epping Forest, including those with special needs.
- 8.2 Everyone needs a satisfactory home and a safe, clean and pleasant environment in order to enjoy a good quality of life, whether they own or rent their accommodation, and the standard of housing is a major determinant of people's health. In view of its close proximity to London, property prices in the district are amongst the highest in the country. This results in substantial numbers of people being unable to purchase their own home. Following a Housing Stock Options Appraisal in 2004, the Council decided to retain its housing stock, but continues to work with other partner registered social landlords to provide new affordable housing in the District.
- 8.3 The Council believes that decent, affordable housing is the minimum requirement for everyone and seeks to achieve this by investing in its own stock, supporting people to stay in their homes and promoting the development of affordable housing. The Council seeks to ensure the cleanliness of local neighbourhoods through its waste management contract and, as the local planning authority, endeavours to plan for anticipated housing needs of the right mix and in the right locations. The Council also has responsibilities in respect of private sector houses

and through its policies seeks to ensure that tenanted homes are in good and safe repair and empty homes brought back into beneficial use.

Homes and Neighbourhoods issues

8.4 The main issues affecting the Council and the Epping Forest District are:

- Around 665 new affordable properties per annum are required to meet both current and anticipated housing need. There are currently over 3,000 households on the Council's Housing Register (Source: Housing Needs Survey 2003);
- Despite the pressure for the provision of more housing and affordable homes within the district, we must balance this need with the protection of the Green Belt;
- Homelessness is a problem. We currently have over two hundred households in temporary accommodation and, at any one time, around twenty-four individuals in bed and breakfast accommodation;
- Approximately 18% of households in the district have somebody with some form of disability, many of whom live in accommodation that does not meet their special needs (Source: Housing Needs Survey 2003);
- Approximately 4% of all homes are empty at any time;
- The Council owns and manages around 6,600 housing properties, although this number is decreasing each year due to the ability of tenants to purchase their homes under the Right to Buy Scheme, and owns around 880 leasehold properties;
- Around 7.2% of the Council's own properties and 24% of private sector properties do not meet the Government's Decent Home Standard. The Government requires us to ensure that all council houses and 70% of private sector homes occupied by the vulnerable meet the standard by 2010;
- There are some neighbourhoods within the district where street cleansing arrangements are below standard or where issues such as fly-tipping are a problem; and
- There are many parts of the district where the on-street parking of vehicles presents real difficulties for residents.

What these issues tell us

8.5 These issues tell us the following:

- There is a significant unmet need for affordable housing in the district for families and single people on low incomes, and for homeless families;

- The geographical location of the district, its proximity to London and its picturesque nature, together with constraints on development in the Metropolitan Green Belt, have resulted in local house prices rising disproportionately to wage levels. As a result, some local people can no longer afford to live in parts of the district due to high property prices;
- There are people with disabilities in homes that are unsuitable for their needs;
- There are some areas of the district where environmental conditions are below the desired standard;
- There are individuals and families living in homes which are in a very poor state of repair and/or do not have adequate thermal insulation; and
- There is a need for the Council to continue to undertake local parking reviews and review its parking policies.

What we have achieved

8.6 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- We have worked with housing associations to complete almost 200 new affordable homes in 2004/05 and 2005/06, and allocated social housing grant totalling £1.1m for affordable homes completed in 2004/05;
- We have negotiated the provision of 30% affordable housing on large-scale residential developments in the district, and we have made proposals to alter our Local Plan to require 40% affordable housing, including smaller sites;
- We have produced a Homelessness Strategy, which has resulted in: the prevention of more homelessness; the provision of more temporary accommodation for homeless families; ensuring that no families are placed in bed and breakfast hotels; the provision of the first women's refuge in the district; £1.5m being spent on improving our Homeless Persons Hostel; and increasing the number of homelessness decisions made within the target of thirty-three days by 70% within two years;
- We met the Government's target to reduce the number of non-decent Council homes by a third between 2001 and April 2004, one year early, and now only have around 7.2% non-decent homes. The Government requires the Council to ensure that all of its homes meet the standard by 2010 and we are amongst the best performing district councils in relation to the provision of decent homes;
- We have implemented estate/area based street cleansing teams in Theydon Bois and Waltham Abbey to improve local standards of cleanliness;

- We have undertaken a comprehensive survey to establish the condition of the private sector housing stock in the district, so that we are able to target assistance at key priority areas;
- We have undertaken a number of major parking reviews in areas including Buckhurst Hill and Epping, and have agreed to undertake further reviews in Loughton and Waltham Abbey.

What we want to achieve

8.7 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Homes and Neighbourhoods priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.

- We want to increase the amount of affordable housing in the district to meet identified need and to consider and investigate different options for increased delivery (Action HN1);
- We want to prevent homelessness and to respond to homelessness applications in accordance with statutory requirements, efficiently, effectively and fairly, helping homeless people to secure appropriate accommodation and keeping the use of bed and breakfast accommodation to a minimum (Action HN2);
- We want to help people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, and to provide appropriate levels of support (Action HN3);
- We want to provide assistance to people who live in privately owned or rented homes that are in a poor state of repair or require thermal insulation, and to keep the number of empty private sector homes in the district to a minimum (Action HN4);
- We want to ensure that the Council manages and maintains its homes effectively and efficiently and in particular, that it provides decent homes for its tenants and leaseholders at affordable rents, deals with anti-social behaviour and continues to involve tenants and leaseholders in the way that their housing services are provided (Action HN5);
- We want to continue to improve local environmental standards through the increased use of locally based cleansing teams and new enforcement powers available to local authorities (Action HN6); and
- We want to continue our programme of parking reviews and to implement locally acceptable solutions (Action HN7).

9. A Safe Community

- 9.1 Our priority is to tackle crime and disorder and create safe communities in the Epping Forest District.
- 9.2 The district is a relatively safe place in which to live and work. Some areas suffer from more crime than others and the district has its share of anti-social behaviour, and maintaining community harmony is therefore a challenge. The Council works closely with other local agencies to develop joint community safety priorities through the Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which aims to improve the quality of life in the district for our residents, visitors and businesses.

Safe Community Issues

- 9.3 One of the ways in which crime levels across the Epping Forest District are assessed is by a set of indicators that measure the number of specific offences such as robbery, violence and vehicle crime taking place each year for every 1,000 households or people in the district. During 2004/05:
- 12.57 domestic burglaries were committed per 1,000 households, compared with a national average of 11.72 (Source: Audit Commission 'Area Profile' for the Epping Forest District);
 - 13.93 violent offences were committed in a public place per 1,000 people, compared with a national average of 17.94 (Source: Audit Commission 'Area Profile' for the Epping Forest District);
 - 4.84 vehicle thefts were committed per 1,000 people compared with a national average of 3.75 (Source: Audit Commission 'Area Profile' for the Epping Forest District); and
 - The district has a high proportion of elderly residents who have particular concerns about security inside and outside the home.

What these issues tell us

- 9.4 These issues tell us the following:
- For crime assessment purposes the Council is grouped into a 'family' of fifteen like for like local authorities, each with similar populations and crime levels. As at December 2005, the Council was positioned seventh highest within the family group in terms of its performance against 'all crime';
 - Current statistics show that the average recorded 'all crime' figures for the district per 1000 residents is 18.9, which is below the average for the group of authorities of 19.3 per 1000 residents; and
 - We have to pay particular regard to the needs and concerns of the elderly population.

What we have achieved

9.5 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- A further six Police Community Support Officers have been funded by the Council are now fully operational across the district. These officers work from Loughton and Epping Police Sections, and commenced duties in August 2005;
- The Council has led on a number of key projects to tackle anti-social behaviour, including Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) and Dispersal Orders. Since March 2005, the Council has employed an Anti-Social Behaviour Coordinator to address its response to issues of anti-social behaviour;
- The Council funds a free home safety scheme for over sixty year olds living in the area, and operates a graffiti removal service;
- Closed circuit television systems, improved standards of lighting and other safety measures have been provided in areas of high crime and anti-social behaviour and at town centres and the Council's public car parks through enhancement schemes undertaken across the district. Crime levels have dropped in areas where such measures have been implemented;
- The Epping Forest Community Sports Project developed in partnership with the Nacro national crime reduction charity and Sport England, provides diversionary sports, leisure opportunities and training for young people at risk of offending, and has been targeted at areas of social deprivation in Loughton, Waltham Abbey and Ongar; and
- The Caring and Repairing in Epping Forest (CARE) home improvement agency, funded by the Council and the supporting people regime, provides specific advice and assistance to elderly and disabled persons on how to keep their homes fit to live in, how to protect their properties and enhance personal security, and how eligible persons can obtain grants.

What we want to achieve

9.6 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Safe Community priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.

- We want to provide further security and safety initiatives through the continued provision of closed circuit television systems and improved lighting as part of town centre enhancement schemes; and the upgrading of council-owned public car parks (Action SC1);

- We want, along with our partners on the Epping Forest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, to continue to focus efforts on reducing levels of violent crime, burglary, and vehicle crime across the district and to achieve a 16% reduction in the overall level of recorded crime by March 2008 (Action SC2); and
- We want to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour across the district and, together with our partners provide even more leisure and training opportunities for young people to encourage positive and healthy lifestyles (Action SC3).

10. Fit For Life

- 10.1 Our priority is to address leisure need in the district and to promote good standards of health for all of our residents.
- 10.2 We believe that people who live and work in the Epping Forest District should be able to access healthy living options in order to achieve and enjoy good standards of health. A full spectrum of leisure opportunities from sport and physical activity through to access to the arts, culture, heritage and the environment is important in enriching peoples quality of life. Although the Council does not have a statutory responsibility to provide leisure and cultural facilities, it undertakes a key role in filling gaps in provision and encouraging partnerships. This is a key priority for achieving the aim of the Community Strategy for local people to live healthy lifestyles.
- 10.3 The Council encourages improvements in the health of the whole community by working closely with the local Primary Care Trust and other agencies, to ensure that appropriate health care services are provided in the district. We recognise that leisure and cultural services are an essential feature of a healthy and vibrant area, and make a significant contribution to personal wellbeing and quality of life.

Fit for Life Issues

- 10.4 The main issues affecting the Council and the Epping Forest District are:
- 7.41% of the population of the district are not in good health, compared with a regional level 7.60% and a national total of 9.22% (Source: 2001 Census);
 - 15.49% of the population of the district have a limiting long-term illness, compared with a regional level 16.21% and a national total of 18.23% (Source: 2001 Census);
 - The Council provides leisure facilities in Epping, Loughton, Ongar and Waltham Abbey that offer services to the majority of the population living in the more urban areas of the district;
 - Reduced levels of activity, poor diet and an increase in incidences of obesity amongst children and young people in the district are areas of concern; and

- The Council provides a range of enforcement and inspection services to monitor standards such as air quality, food safety and the safety of workplaces across the district.

What these issues tell us

10.5 These issues tell us the following;

- The overall health of residents of the district is generally above national averages, although we have an ageing population and increasing rates of childhood obesity;
- The limitations of existing public transport services can deter or make it difficult for residents of the rural parts of the district to use the services provided at the councils leisure facilities; and
- Although basic environmental conditions within the district are of a high standard, issues such as changes in lifestyles and increases in traffic levels require that we remain vigilant to ensure that these high standards are maintained for the future health and safety of our residents.

What we have achieved

10.6 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- We have completed the development of a new swimming pool and leisure centre complex at Loughton, jointly funded by Sport England;
- We have entered into a seven year agreement with SLM Limited for the management of our leisure centres in Epping, Loughton, Ongar and Waltham Abbey, which will provide increased opportunities for participation and investment in the facilities;
- We have introduced the 'Active Life' health scheme, supported by Sport England, local health professionals, and the local Primary Care Trust, as part of our commitment to promoting healthy living;
- Consultation has been undertaken on a major exercise called 'Beyond Suburbia' to explore community need in the rural areas of the district that it is recognised often receive less attention than the urban parts. This will lead to targeted programmes of activity in specific areas and bring communities together;
- The second air quality assessment for the district has shown that local air quality is good. We have met the Government's Food Standard Agency requirements for the inspections of food premises within the district and regularly promote and participate in a range of healthy living initiatives such as anti-smoking campaigns; and

- Training courses have been provided for food handlers resulting in the award of seventy-five certificates in the foundation course in food hygiene and the presentation of twelve heartbeat awards to businesses throughout the district.

What we want to achieve

10.7 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Fit For Life priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.

- We want to ensure that the Leisure Management Contract entered into with SLM Limited delivers the Council’s key objectives with respect to lower revenue costs, increased investment, continuous improvement and transfer of risk (Action FL1);
- We want to increase access to leisure and cultural opportunities in the rural parts of the district through the ‘Beyond Suburbia’ Cultural Development Programme (Action FL2);
- We want to increase access to opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to lead a healthy lifestyle through the development of further leisure and cultural opportunities (Action FL3); and
- We want to work more closely with the local Primary Care Trust to ensure that the activities that the Council carry out in environmental monitoring and inspection contribute fully to improving the overall health of the community (Action FL4); and
- We want to support and implement the principle of smoke free workplaces throughout the district (Action FL5).

11. Economic Prosperity

11.1 Our priority is to encourage sustainable economic development in the Epping Forest District.

11.2 The role of the Council is to create a framework within which enterprise can flourish, and to direct resources towards areas of deprivation.

11.3 Enterprise is vital to stimulate economic growth and to expand the range of services and facilities available locally. It is essential that the Council and other partners promote economic vitality by providing and encouraging opportunities for business development and investment, whilst also balancing the need to preserve the local environment and quality of life. With our partners we aim to promote business efficiency in the district, enhance local town centres, assist the economy of the rural parts of the district, and promote local tourism opportunities.

Economic Prosperity issues

11.4 The main issues affecting the Council and the Epping Forest District are:

- Despite the fact that the average Council Tax (Band D) for the district has risen by 38.5% over the past five years, in excess of the increase in average earnings for the same period, the extent of the influence that the Council has over total Council Tax rises is limited. Other precepting authorities such as Essex County Council, Essex Police, the Essex Fire and Rescue Service and local town and parish councils determine 89.5% of the average Council Tax bill;
- The Council and other public service agencies have difficulty in recruiting staff, which can have an adverse effect on the delivery of services;
- There are six centres of population but no major shopping centres or facilities within the district. Bus services are poor in rural areas, potentially leading to exclusion for young people or those without their own transport, 50% of the working age population of the district travel to work outside Essex (Source: Essex Learning and Skills Council Area Profile for the Epping Forest District);
- 75.8% of the working age population are employed, compared with a regional level 76.66% and a national average of 72.13% (Source: 2001 Census);
- Three wards in the district are amongst the top 20% of income deprived wards in the country, six are amongst the top 20% of skills deprived wards, and thirteen are amongst the top 20% of access deprived wards (Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004); and
- Five wards are amongst the top 20% in the country where deprivation affects children and three are amongst the top 20% where deprivation affects older people (Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004).

What these economic prosperity issues tell us?

11.5 These issues tell us the following:

- The Council desires to be a low tax authority in order to minimise the effect of the Council Tax on individual prosperity;
- Some public service recruitment difficulties exist due to high housing costs in the district and the proximity of Epping Forest to London, where comparable positions can attract higher salaries;
- The district has a higher level of employment (full-time, part-time, self-employed) amongst people aged from sixteen to seventy-four, than the national average;
- There is significant 'out-commuting' from the district in terms of the enjoyment of employment, business and retail opportunities;

- Above average levels of deprivation and social exclusion exist alongside areas of comparative affluence, with deprivation tending to be concentrated in 'pockets', including parts of wards in Chigwell, Loughton, Ongar, and Waltham Abbey;
- The large geographical area of the district and its mixed urban/rural nature has led to some instances of access deprivation, and services such as recycling only being available at reduced levels in some rural areas.

What we have achieved

11.6 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- Although the average Band D Council Tax has increased by 38.5% over the last five years, other precepting authorities have increased their part of the charge by 39.2% whereas Epping Forest District Council has increased its share by 32.8%. To set this performance in context, the Council has the third lowest Band D Council Tax of the twelve district local authorities in Essex;
- A modest level of key worker housing has been provided to assist local public sector organisations including the Council, with the recruitment of staff. This housing provision is part of the Council's Recruitment and Retention Strategy;
- As part of revisions to waste management services, recycling facilities have been equalised across the district, and enhanced locally delivered street cleansing services have been introduced for the Paternoster ward in Waltham Abbey, a deprived area that has had particular problems with littering, dumping and poor environmental standards;
- An analysis of the 2004 Indices of Deprivation has been carried out to identify the fifteen most deprived Super Output Areas (comprising between 500 and 1,000 homes) in the district for each deprivation issue (income, employment, health, education skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and disorder, living environment), and measures have been identified to alleviate specific problems identified in these areas;
- The establishment of tenant associations as part of an approach to increasing tenant participation has been facilitated on housing estates, with four of the five associations recognised by the council covering the most deprived estates in the district;
- The completion of town centre enhancement schemes at Buckhurst Hill and Ongar, the commencement of a enhancement scheme for The Broadway in Loughton, and the approval of a further scheme for Loughton High Road; and
- We have continued to fund and support six Town Centre Partnerships across the district, which provide an effective link between the Council and local

business communities, and have been instrumental in the development of our programme of town centre enhancement schemes.

What we want to achieve

11.7 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Economic Prosperity priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.

- We want to remain a low tax authority and our latest four-year financial plan has a Council Tax increase for 2006/07 of 2.46%, with increases for the three subsequent years targeted at 2.5% (Action EP1);
- We want to carry out the town centre enhancement scheme for The Broadway in Loughton and develop wider regeneration proposals for the area surrounding the main shopping area, and commence an enhancement scheme for Loughton High Road (Action EP2);
- We want to co-ordinate our land use and planning policies, and the housing, transportation and infrastructure of the district in a way that ensures economic prosperity (Action EP3);
- We want to ensure that young people can express informed views on issues that affect their lives and actively take part in the democratic process (Action EP4);
- We want to respond to issues of local deprivation in the district by continuing to identify measures to alleviate specific problems identified through the analysis of the 2004 Indices of Deprivation, and to work with our partner agencies to tackle deprivation issues;
- We want to further develop the Town Centre Partnerships and encourage participation in by local businesses thereby strengthening links with the Council (Action EP6).

12. Improving Our Performance

12.1 This section of the Council Plan is not directly linked to the themes of the Community Strategy, but reflects key areas where the Council has recognised that it needs to improve current services or performance.

12.2 The Council aspires to offer high quality services that meet the needs of our customers. We will do this by consulting with our customers, listening to them and responding to what they say. To achieve this we need to have well managed services with trained, competent staff and to ensure that we have effective ways of monitoring and improving our performance, particularly in key areas.

Performance Improvement Issues

12.3 The key internal performance improvement issues facing the Council are:

- We do not answer an average of 150 calls per day between the hours of 8.00am and 9.00am, before our offices open. Between 5.15pm and 6.00pm when our offices are closed, we are unable to answer approximately 35 calls per day. In addition, 31% of calls made to us during office hours remain unanswered. (Source: Steria Corporate Contact Centre Scoping Study – July 2005);
- Although we have previously been rated as one of the best performing Benefit Services in the country, we are not always able to sustain this. A new Benefits and Revenues system was implemented during 2004 and a backlog of claims built up as our staff were unable to process claims for an extended period (Sources: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate report 2004, Best Value Performance Indicator data for 2004/05);
- In recent years our planning performance, particularly the speed at which we determine planning applications, has struggled to meet Government targets (Source: Best Value Performance Indicator data for 2004/05); and
- Although we regularly consult our community about proposals relating to specific issues and services such as town centre enhancement schemes and refuse collection and recycling arrangements, we are not always good at consulting on strategic issues facing the Council (Source: Audit Commission ‘User Focus’ Report – August 2005).

What these issues tell us

12.4 These issues tell us the following:

- We need to be more available to our customers, both during normal office hours and at other times;
- We must continue to investigate ways to improve the provision of housing benefit services to secure and maintain top quartile performance;
- We need to focus on improving our planning performance in order to meet national targets; and
- We need to consult our community better on matters of council policy, such as the setting of our annual budget.

What we have already achieved

12.5 We have already achieved the following in respect of these issues:

- We have engaged consultants to look at how we can better meet customer contact needs, and have allocated resources to the implementation of a programme of customer service improvements known as the Customer

Services Transformation Programme, including the future establishment of a corporate contact centre;

- We have restructured our Benefits Division to ensure that we are able to provide an improved service to customers, and our performance has since steadily improved to the extent that the Council is again amongst the best performing authorities for the assessment of benefit claims. We have generated additional income from anti-fraud work, and received an 'excellent' rating from the Department of Work and Pensions for our performance during 2005;
- We have invested in the implementation of an integrated information technology system for our Planning Services to improve performance, and resources have been made available for the creation of a temporary team of qualified planning officers to deal with a current backlog of planning applications. We have also restructured the Planning Service so that customer enquiries and planning applications are dealt with speedily by knowledgeable, trained staff;
- We have participated in an Audit Commission assessment of the way in which we engage with our communities, and have developed a public consultation and engagement policy and strategy to ensure that the community is consulted about all issues which affect it, and that we act appropriately on the results of consultation;
- We have identified a range of key performance indicators in relation to our priority issues, for which we want to achieve the performance of the top performing district councils in the country (the 'top quartile'). These key indicators support the actions set out in this Council Plan, and we will monitor progress against them on a regular basis to ensure improvement;
- To support these developments a range of human resources initiatives have been implemented to ensure that we have well-motivated and suitably qualified and experienced staff in post to improve performance. These include a recruitment and retention strategy, a managing absence policy and re-accreditation against the Investors in People quality standard.

What we want to achieve

12.6 We want to achieve the following in respect of these issues. These aims represent our Performance Improvement priorities for the next four years and are reflected in the Action Plan section of this Council Plan together with desired outcomes and appropriate targets in order that we can measure our progress.

- We want to implement our Customer Services Transformation Programme (Action IP1);
- We want to achieve and maintain top quartile district council performance for the speed of processing of new Housing Benefit claims and changes of

circumstances, and to maintain our current top quartile performance for the accuracy of benefit assessments (Action IP2);

- We want to complete the implementation of the integrated information technology system for our Planning Services and to achieve and maintain top quartile district council performance for the processing of all planning applications (Action IP3);
- We want to ensure that we undertake meaningful and appropriate consultation with the communities of the district in relation to our major strategies and plans, as well as specific individual schemes, projects and developments, to ensure that all of our customers have the opportunity to inform our policies and service provision (Action IP4); and
- We want to achieve top quartile district council performance for each of the key performance indicators that we identify each year, which represent those areas that we have identified as priorities (Action IP5).

SECTION 7 – HOW WE DELIVER OUR STRATEGIC AIMS AND PRIORITIES

13. OUR VALUES

- 13.1 The Government's Best Value regulations place a duty on all councils to deliver the most economic, efficient and effective services possible.
- 13.2 We manage our resources and the corporate services that provide essential support to the work of the Council, to ensure that we provide efficient, cost effective services that meet customer needs and are constantly improving. The council's budget reflects the aims and objectives set out in this Council Plan, and is reviewed each year as result of changing objectives and priorities.
- 13.3 Although the Council has been politically balanced and in a position of no overall control for more than thirteen years, there remains in this situation a duty on our members to give clear direction on priorities. During this time we have sought to build consensus across all party groups, working together for the common good of the district through adherence to the following values that underpin the delivery of our strategic aims and priorities:

To communicate with the public about service delivery

- The aim of the Council is to provide high-quality services to our diverse and vibrant community. To do this, we regularly seek feedback on the issues that are important to you. We aim to listen and engage with our customers in meaningful ways and to action feedback wherever possible in order to improve our services.

To prioritise objectives and services

- The Council is an organisation with limited resources, which means that we must prioritise our work, concentrating effort and expenditure on the areas of highest need, and that we must also identify issues which are not a priority to our residents.

To co-operate and plan with our partners

- We work with the LSP and our other partners to improve services across the District. We also work in partnership with other Essex local authorities on matters such as the procurement of goods and services to deliver value for money.

To identify and target resources, realise capacity and manage performance

- We want to ensure value for money in all we do. We are designated a debt free authority and seek to manage our resources carefully, mindful of the effect of Council Tax increases.

To procure services in the most beneficial and cost effective way

- We are currently reviewing our procurement strategy to ensure we obtain value for money and work with other Essex authorities to achieve better market management and economies of scale.

To develop services, staff and the working environment

- The Council attained re-accreditation against the Investors in People standard in 2005. We recognise that our staff are crucial in the successful delivery of our services, but are sometimes hampered by recruitment and retention difficulties.

SECTION 8 – HOW WE MEASURE OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

14. HOW WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS

Performance Management Framework

- 14.1 This Plan sets out the Council's direction for the next four years. In order to make sure that we use our resources wisely, targeting them on areas of highest need, and that we know how well we are performing, we have developed our Performance Management Framework. This starts at the strategic level, identifying the overall priorities for the district until 2021 (the Community Strategy), and translating these where appropriate into aims and objectives for the council over the short and medium terms.
- 14.2 Our policies and priorities emanate from this Council Plan, which sets out the overall goals and aspirations of the authority. These are cascaded through the cabinet and committees of the council to individual services and functions, ensuring that strategic objectives are pursued at all levels of the organisation and our staff, who are set personal targets for each year linking directly to the priorities are clear about what they do and why they do it. The Performance Management Framework works by translating strategy into action, and by aligning the work of service groups and individual members of staff to the achievement of our strategic aims and priorities.

Performance Review

- 14.3 Performance Management is a key factor in successful delivery of the targets and aims set out in the Council Plan. Regular monitoring of the priorities in the Council Plan will be important so that its effectiveness is continually under review and there is timely acknowledgement of success as well as emphasising actions where targets are failing. This will ensure that the aspirations in the Council Plan are delivered on time and to budget.
- 14.4 Progress against the aims and targets set in annual Service Plans and the Best Value Performance Plan are regularly monitored. As part of the preparation of this new Council Plan, a review has been undertaken of progress made in the last three years towards the achievement of the targets and aims set out in the Council Plan for 2003-2007. The results of this review have been published as an appendix to the Council Plan.

15. HOW OTHERS MEASURE OUR SUCCESS

- 15.1 Our performance is, in the main, measured by Best Value and Local Performance Indicators. Our performance against these indicators is monitored on a quarterly basis by a panel of our councillors to ensure that we are maintaining appropriate service levels and standards or that corrective action is taken where necessary. Performance is published in our annual Best Value Performance Plan to provide

residents with information about the performance of the council. We are currently improving our systems for the reporting of performance information, in order that we can respond quickly in areas where we need to take action to improve.

- 15.2 In the first year of this Council Plan we want our performance on at least 40% of the most important performance indicators to match that of the best performing local authorities in the country, and we have therefore adopted a range 'Key' indicators upon which we will focus improvement.
- 15.3 In addition to the BVPIs and LPIs, information on our performance is drawn from a range of other sources.

Satisfaction Surveys

- 15.4 We regularly consult residents and service users in relation to the services that we provide. Every three years we consult a sample of residents for their views on service specific issues and matters such as how well you think the council is run and the quality of life in the district. The results of these surveys are submitted to the government and inform our future plans and policies. The next round of these surveys is to take place in 2006/07.

Overview and Scrutiny

- 15.5 We have developed our overview and scrutiny function to provide an independent assessment of our priorities and performance, and have established a number of Overview And Scrutiny Panels to review services and performance in a number of specific areas.

Review and Inspection

- 15.6 The Council has reviewed the majority of its key services in recent years, some of which have also been subject to formal inspection by the Audit Commission.

Local Area Agreement

- 15.7 Councils and their partners have been given greater freedom to explore local solutions to local problems, under a system of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs are a contract between local and central government that is designed to secure improvement across a number of areas over a three-year period. The LAA scheme was first published in June 2004 and a number of pilot schemes were run in a first phase. The second phase was announced in June 2005 and included Essex, although the Government expects every local authority to participate in the LAA process.
- 15.8 LAAs are intended to simplify funding streams, join up public services and give councils and other local delivery partners more flexibility. The Agreements are structured around four key themes: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; healthy communities and older people; and economic development and enterprise. Essex County Council and the district and borough councils in the county are currently developing the first countywide LAA, and negotiating targets and outcomes for specific actions within these areas. The Council has signed-up to

the following priorities of the Essex LAA that it considers it is in a position to influence:

Priority 3 – Ensure development is designed to promote healthier living in the built environment and provide decent and affordable housing;

Priority 10 – Reduce crime and the fear of crime; and

Priority 11 - Actively manage our environment.

- 15.9 Once the Essex LAA has been adopted and appropriate performance targets identified our Overview and Scrutiny Committee will monitor the Council's performance against these three priorities. Our progress in meeting the Council's LAA targets in our annual Best Value Performance Plan

SECTION 9 – HOW WE RESOURCE OUR PRIORITIES

16. FINANCE

16.1 The Council's budget is designed to achieve the strategic aims and priorities set out in this Council Plan. The budget is reviewed annually and is adjusted as necessary to reflect changing priorities and objectives. The Council Plan is underpinned by our resource and financial planning processes and, in undertaking resource and financial planning, the Council observes the following general principles:

- All spending plans are subjected to rigorous and regular review to ensure that they are aligned with established need and to provide value for money;
- Changes in service delivery to meet the corporate aims and priorities are underpinned by the appropriate alignment of available resources;
- The resource and financial planning processes will cover all services, and both revenue and capital expenditure; and
- Efforts are made to maximise the availability of external sources of funding such as central government grants and income, and new partnership funding arrangements are pursued wherever possible.

Our Resources

16.2 In this Council Plan we have set out what we want to achieve across each of the themed areas. In order to demonstrate that these aims are realistic ambitions and not merely aspirational, it is important that we set out the Council's current financial position and ability to fund key service improvements.

16.3 In local authority accounting a clear distinction has to be made between revenue and capital items, with capital items usually being those that are large and will bring benefits over many years such as a new leisure centre or housing development. The Council's position in terms of both revenue and capital is set out in the following paragraphs.

Revenue Spending

16.4 ***NOTE: Detail to be inserted here once the budget for 2006/07 has been agreed.***

Capital Spending

16.5 A medium term forecast is prepared for capital spending, although this covers five years rather than the four covered by the revenue forecast. The spending plans for the next five years are summarised in the following paragraphs:

	2005/06 £000	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	Total £000
Non-Housing	2,691	8,023	2,199	977	612	14,502
Housing	8,049	8,530	7,783	4,736	5,128	34,226
Total	10,740	16,553	9,982	5,713	5,740	48,728

- 16.6 The spending of £48.7m over five years represents a very substantial capital programme. The non-housing part includes spending on information and communication technology systems, leisure centres, the remediation of a former local landfill site, refuse collection equipment and town centre enhancement schemes.
- 16.7 Capital spending is financed from Government grants, a reserve kept for major repairs and capital receipts obtained from the sale of other assets. As part of preparing the capital forecast it is important to match spending plans to the resources available and so projections are prepared for capital receipts and the major repairs reserve. Despite the size of the capital programme it is currently predicted that at the end of the five-year period the Council will still have £8.836m of capital receipts available for re-investment and a balance of £3.897m available on the major repairs reserve.
- 16.8 As well as revenue funds, capital funds are also therefore available to achieve the priority outcomes set out in the Council Plan. The capital balances set out above may be further enhanced during the period by the disposal of surplus land, although the proceeds from such disposals are not built in to spending plans until they are certain.

SECTION 10 – ACTION PLAN

REF	OBJECTIVE AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (KPI) REFERENCE	ACTION (S)	LEAD MEMBER/LEAD OFFICER	REQUIRED OUTCOME(S)	PERFORMANCE TARGET/MEASURE
GREEN AND UNIQUE					
GU1	To ensure that new homes provided in the district as a result of regional growth are sustainable, by good planning and the provision of adequate infrastructure (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	(a) To make representations to the Examination-in-Public of the East of England Plan, in relation to the appropriate level of future residential development in the district;	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The protection of the special character of the Epping Forest District by a reduction in the number of homes planned for the district, and the number of affordable homes allocated to key workers planned for the east of England region.	(a) A reduction in the number of homes proposed for the district in the final version of the East of England Regional Plan from 11,000;
		(b) To approach neighbouring local authorities with a view to jointly planning the delivery of additional homes in the region, following the final East of England Plan has been published.	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The establishment of a joint delivery vehicle for the joint planning of new homes in the Epping Forest District and neighbouring areas.	(b) A reduction in the number of affordable homes allocated to key worker homes planned for the region in the final version of the East of England Regional Plan from 760 to 500 per annum. The establishment of an appropriate Joint Delivery Vehicle by April 2008.
GU2	To increase levels of recycling and to reduce waste growth (<i>KPI Refs: BV82a(i), BV82a(ii), BV82b(i), BV82b(ii)</i>).	To fully implement the wheeled bin and alternate weekly waste collection arrangements across the district;	Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The attainment of statutory and local recycling and waste reduction targets.	The achievement of a recycling target of 40% by 2008/09.
GU3	To increase the profile of the Council's Museum Service and improve access to the collections of the Epping Forest Museum and understanding of the social history of the district (<i>KPI Refs: BV156, BV170a, BV170c</i>).	(a) To undertake improvements to the entrance area and re-display the lower galleries at the Epping Forest Museum;	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	The provision of improved access to the Epping Forest Museum for people with disabilities, the generation of increased numbers of visitors to the museum, and greater public awareness of the Museum Service and the history of the district.	(a) Improvements to museum entrance area to be completed by 30 September 2006;
		(a) To undertake a community outreach programme at schools, libraries and public buildings to increase the profile of the Council's Museum Service.			(b) Improved performance of 5% per annum to be achieved on BVPI's in relation to numbers of visitors to the Epping Forest Museum.
GU4	To develop the Local Development Framework for the district (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To commence the development of the Local Development Framework once amendments to the current Local Plan for the district has been completed and the final version of the East of England Regional Plan has been published.	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The adoption of a development framework for the district against which future planning proposals can be assessed.	The adoption of the Local Development Framework by 30 September 2010 (targets for the completion of numerous intermediate stages of the development of the framework have previously been approved by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

HN1	To increase the amount of affordable housing in the district to meet identified need, and to consider and investigate different options for increased delivery (<i>KPI Refs: BV106, H15a, H15b</i>).	(a) To revise the Local Plan for the district to require that 40% of all homes built on developments over fifteen properties are affordable to people on low incomes;	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	An increase in the amount of affordable housing provided through Section 106 Agreements by at least 33%.	The approval of at least twenty more affordable homes per annum through planning permissions, than if the alterations to the Local Plan had not been made.
		(b) To work with housing associations to provide more local affordable housing;	Housing Portfolio Holder/Head of Housing Services	The development of a good relationship between the Council, its housing association partners, and the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership, resulting in the provision of additional affordable housing.	The completion of at least one hundred new affordable homes per annum.
		(c) To consider in detail the following options for increasing the delivery of affordable housing, initially through the Housing Scrutiny Panel:	Housing Portfolio Holder/Chairman of Housing Scrutiny Panel/Head of Housing Services	The consideration and future adoption of new initiatives to increase the amount of affordable housing.	An increase in the amount of affordable housing available in the district.
		(i) allowing the development of residential accommodation in the Green Belt, providing significant levels of affordable housing, as a very special reason for departing from normal Green Belt policy;			
		(ii) the development of affordable housing on large urban open spaces within estates;			
		(iii) setting an absolute minimum amount of 20% affordable housing that will be acceptable on large development sites, irrespective of other planning gains;			
		(iv) the provision of more Social Housing Grant to Registered Social Landlords;			
(v) a review of the Council's landholdings to assess the scope for developing additional affordable housing;					
(vi) the use of grant funding from the Housing Corporation's London Region to be used to fund the development of affordable housing schemes in the district, with nomination agreements being shared between the Council and London boroughs;					

		(vii) greater commitment by the Council to comply with the agreed Joint Commissioning Scheme, to increase the likelihood of Housing Corporation bids being funded; and (viii) the seeking of 'hot spot' status from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to reduce right to buy discounts and deter right to buy sales, thereby slowing down the reduction in Council housing stock.			
HN2	To prevent homelessness and respond to homelessness applications efficiently, effectively and fairly, to help homeless people secure appropriate accommodation and minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation (<i>KPI Refs: BV106, BV183a, H15a, H15b</i>).	(a) To increase the amount of affordable housing in the district to meet identified need; (b) To provide additional temporary accommodation by the extension of the Fresh START Scheme from ten to twenty privately rented properties leased by a housing association, and the development of Leader Lodge at North Weald for the provision of eight to 1ten self contained flats as temporary accommodation; (c) To further develop the Council's homelessness prevention service by the appointment of an additional part-time homelessness prevention officer, specialising in young people's homelessness.	Housing Portfolio Holder/Head of Housing Services	See objective HN1 The provision of eighteen to twenty additional units of temporary accommodation. The provision of improved homelessness services, particularly for young people.	See objective HN1 The provision of an additional ten units of accommodation by 30 April 2006 and a further 8 to 10 units by 30 April 2008. The prevention of at least an additional forty incidences of homelessness per annum.
HN3	To help people with special housing needs to live in homes suitable for their needs, with appropriate levels of support (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To work with the other main agencies involved with supported housing and, after consultation with service providers and service users, produce an annual Local Supporting People Strategy.	Housing Portfolio Holder/Head of Housing Services	The production of an annual Local Supporting People Strategy setting out how the agencies involved with supported housing will help meet peoples special needs.	The production of an updated Local Supporting People Strategy by 1 April each year.
HN4	To ensure that privately owned homes are fit for people to live in, with empty homes kept to a minimum and to provide help to those who need it most (<i>KPI Ref: BV64</i>).	(a) To target assistance at home owners in need;	Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The provision of improved, more secure homes in the private sector.	(a) The provision of at least four home renovation grants and sixty Home Repairs Assistance Grants per annum, at a cost of no more than £200,000 per annum until the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy is adopted;

					(b) 70% of vulnerable private sector households to be living in homes meeting the decent homes standard by 2010/11.
		(b) To produce an Empty Homes Strategy setting out how the number of empty homes in the district can be reduced;		The development of an Empty Homes Strategy setting out the way that the Council will try to minimise the number of empty properties and will deal with long term empty properties causing a nuisance.	(a) The production of an Empty Homes Strategy by 1 September 2006;
		(c) To analyse the results of the latest Private Sector Stock Condition Survey;		To achieve a better understanding of the condition and energy efficiency of the private sector housing stock and the number of empty properties in the district.	(b) The bringing of at least ten empty properties brought back into use per annum as a result of initiatives within the Empty Property Strategy.
		(d) To produce an updated Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, based on the results of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey.		The development of a clear policy on the criteria to be adopted by the Council for the provision of various forms of assistance to owners and occupiers of private sector properties.	The completion of the analysis the results of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey by 31 March 2006.
HN5	To ensure that the Council manages and maintains its homes effectively and efficiently, and that it provides decent homes for its tenants and leaseholders at affordable rents, and deals with issues of anti-social behaviour (KPI Refs: BV63, BV66a, BV 164, BV184a).	(a) To continue to identify which Council homes do not meet, or will not meet, the Decent Homes Standard, provide sufficient resources and carry out appropriate programmes of work to ensure that all these homes meet the Standard by 2010;	Housing Portfolio Holder/Head of Housing Services	The provision of decent homes for occupation by the Council's tenants	All homes to meet the Decent Home Standard by 2010.
		(b) To undertake a major improvement scheme at Springfields, Waltham Abbey;		The achievement of ninety-six improved tenanted and leasehold properties that meet the Decent Homes Standard.	The completion of improvement works by 31 December 2007.
		(c) To implement an Introductory Tenancy Scheme;		All new tenants to be provided with non-secure introductory tenancies, for the first twelve months Council tenancy, to reduce anti-social behaviour by new tenants and to enable the Council to take swift action against offenders.	No serious acts of anti-social behaviour by new tenants, which have not resulted in legal action being taken to evict the offending tenants.

		(d) To introduce a joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme, in collaboration with five neighbouring local authorities.		Housing applicants will be able to "bid" for vacant properties in any of the six local authority areas where they are registered, instead of properties being "allocated" by the local authorities to those in most housing need.	The implementation of a joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme by 1 April 2007.
HN6	To continue to undertake improvements in local environmental standards (<i>KPI Refs: BV199a, BV199b, BV199c, BV199d</i>).	(a) To extend the use of locally based cleansing teams where appropriate to the locality;	Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	(a) Improved standards of street cleansing and local environmental conditions;	Improvements in respect of relevant Best Value Performance Indicators, to achieve top quartile district council performance by 30 June 2006.
		(b) To utilise where appropriate the new powers available to the Council within the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.		(a) Reductions in fly-tipping, fly-posting, abandoned vehicles etc.	
HN7	To seek to deal with problems associated with vehicle parking in the built up areas of the district (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To complete parking reviews for the Loughton and Waltham Abbey areas.	Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The improvement of local parking arrangements, and the management of problems associated with on street and commuter parking.	(a) The completion of parking reviews for Loughton and Waltham Abbey by 31 March 2007;
					(b) The implementation of locally agreed parking controls to include resident parking schemes where appropriate, commencing during 2007/08.
A SAFE COMMUNITY					
SC1	To enhance the safety, security and wellbeing of people using the district's town centres and public car parks (<i>KPI Refs: Not applicable</i>).	To include improved lighting and closed circuit television systems as part of programme of town centre enhancements and the upgrading of the Council's public car parks.	Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio Holder/Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder/ Head of Environmental Services//Head of Research and Democratic Services	The provision of safer and more secure town centres and public car parks.	The achievement of an appropriate accreditation for at least one car park per annum.
SC2	To reduce the overall level of recorded crime in the district (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	(a) To develop a joint Community Safety Team, consisting of the Council's Crime Reduction Unit and local police officers;	Community Wellbeing Portfolio Holder/Head of Research and Democratic Services	The achievement of reduced crime levels across the district.	The achievement of a reduction in the overall level of recorded crime in the district by 16% by March 2008 based on the crime figures for 2003/04.
		(b) To reduce the incidences of recorded domestic burglary, theft of vehicles, criminal damage and robbery that occur in the district.			
SC3	To reduce levels of anti-social behaviour and provide leisure and training opportunities for young people to encourage positive and healthy lifestyles (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To work with the Council's partners to secure ongoing external funding for the project.	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	To reduce levels of anti-social behaviour and to work with young offenders to assist rehabilitation.	The provision of at least one on-going activity per annum in each area identified by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in relation to anti-social issues involving young people.
FIT FOR LIFE					

FL1	To ensure that the leisure management contract entered into with SLM Limited delivers the Council's key objectives for the future of its leisure facilities, with respect to lower revenue costs, increased investment, continuous improvement and the transfer of risk <i>(KPI Ref: Not applicable)</i> .	(a) To undertake regular and effective monitoring of the leisure management contract entered into with SLM Limited;	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	The maintenance of high standards of service and customer satisfaction in accordance with the requirements of the leisure management contract.	(a) The number of Default Notices issued in relation to the Leisure Management Contract to be below ten complaint notices or five default notices in any four consecutive week period;	
		(b) To explore further service initiatives to reduce revenue costs and increase participation;			The provision of new facilities that increase participation.	(b) The number of Stage 2 Complaints made to the Council in respect of its leisure facilities to remain at less than 1% of total number of participants using the facilities.
		(c) To ensure that capital investment is completed on time and to the correct standard.			The maintenance of assets to appropriate standards.	An increase in Participation and level of Income in line with projections contained in the contractor's tender.
FL2	To increase access to leisure and cultural opportunities in the rural parts of the district through the 'Beyond Suburbia' Cultural Development Programme <i>(KPI Ref: Not applicable)</i> .	To implement the key findings of the Beyond Suburbia initiative in partnership with local parish councils and other agencies.	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	The improvement of quality of life for rural communities, the alleviation of isolation and economic benefits.	(a) The achievement of ten new activities in rural parishes per annum;	
					(b) The generation of external funding of £50,000 per annum for one new facility development project each year.	
FL3	To increase access to opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to lead a healthy lifestyle <i>(KPI Ref: Not applicable)</i> .	To expand the district wide 'Active Life' programme of activities to include the 'Life Walks' 'Bodycare' and general practitioner referral schemes, and other initiatives.	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	Increased participation in physical activity by people at risk leading to lower incidence of ill health.	(a) The achievement of an increase in the number of participants in the 'Active Life' initiative of 5% per annum;	
					(b) The achievement of an increase in the number of people referred by General Practitioners and other health professionals of 5% per annum;	
					(c) The achievement of at least two activity sessions becoming self sustainable per annum.	

FL4	To work more closely with the local Primary Care Trust to ensure that the activities that the Council carry out in environmental monitoring and inspection contribute fully to improving the overall health of the community, including specifically the promotion of anti-smoking initiatives (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To review the Council's environmental, inspection and enforcement arrangements and policies along with the Primary Care Trust.	Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The alignment of the Council's inspection, enforcement and awareness activities with the relevant public health objectives of the Primary Care Trust	The adoption of a jointly agreed public health policy with the Primary Care Trust by 31 March 2007.
FL5	To implement the requirements of forthcoming legislation dealing with smoking in the workplace (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To incorporate the enforcement of workplace smoking into the Council's existing environmental health inspection regime.	Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The achievement of a reduction in coronary heart disease, lung cancer and other smoking related diseases.	(a) To undertake appropriate public information campaigns to bring the requirements of workplace smoking legislation to the attention of employers, employees and users of public premises in the district, within six months of the date of the new legislation coming into force being known;
					(b) To monitor reductions in smoking related illnesses within the district in liaison with the Primary Care Trust.
ECONOMIC PROSPERITY					
EP1	To continue to remain a low tax authority (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To set Council Tax increases for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 of no more than 2.5% per annum.	Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder/Head of Finance	Council Tax levels for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 will increase no more than 2.5%.	The actual level of Council Tax increases for 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10.
EP2	To enhance the town centre areas at Loughton High Road and Loughton Broadway to provide improved environments for the users of the centres and the providers of services (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To complete the agreed programme of town centre enhancement works and improvements.	Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services	The achievement of enhanced town centre environments, providing improved facilities for all users of the town centres.	(a) The completion of Phases 1 and 2 of the Loughton High Road town centre enhancement scheme by 31 December 2006;
					(b) The commencement of Phase 1 of the Loughton Broadway town centre enhancement scheme by 31 July 2006.
EP3	To co-ordinate land use and planning policies, and housing, transport and local infrastructure (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	(a) To secure amendments to the district Local Plan to ensure the planning and development policies for the district for the foreseeable future are co-ordinated and appropriate;	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The coordination of land use, planning policies, housing, transport and infrastructure to promote sustainability, economic prosperity and tackle areas of deprivation.	The completion of the coordination of all relevant policies by 31 August 2006.

		(b) To secure the inclusion of a statement in the new Local Development Framework emphasising need to co-ordinate land use, planning policies, housing, transport and infrastructure in a way that ensures economic prosperity and tackles deprivation, taking account of what has been secured in alterations to the Local Plan.			
EP4	To ensure that young people can express informed views on issues that affect them and actively take part in the democratic process (KPI Ref: Not applicable).	To support the work of the Essex Youth Assembly and local youth councils to enable young people's voices to be heard.	Leisure Portfolio Holder/Head of Leisure Services	The empowering of young people to influence decisions on those matters that directly affect them.	The achievement of full representation for the district on the Essex Youth Assembly and youth councils by local young people by 31 December 2006.
EP5	To respond to issues of deprivation in the district, based on the results of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004. (KPI Ref: Not applicable).	(a) To continue to identify measures to alleviate specific deprivation problems identified through an analysis of the 2004 Indices of Deprivation; and to work with partner agencies to tackle deprivation issues; (b) As a partner agency to the Epping Forest local strategic Partnership, to establish children's centres within the district.	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The development of targeted programmes of action to address the needs of local communities.	The establishment of six children's centres within the district by 31 March 2008.
EP6	To maintain and improve the links between the Council, local town centres and the business community of the district (KPI Ref: Not applicable).	To further develop the Town Centre Partnerships, or other appropriate local business forums, to encourage participation by local businesses.	Civil Engineering and Maintenance Portfolio Holder/Head of Environmental Services/ Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The achievement of stronger links between the Council and local business communities across the district.	The achievement of full local business community representation on the individual Town Centre Partnerships or other appropriate local business forums.
IMPROVING OUR PERFORMANCE					
IP1	To implement the Customer Services Transformation Programme (KPI Refs: BV8, BV9, BV0, BV12, BV14, BV157).	(a) To identify and agree the appropriate resource requirements for the implementation of the Customer Services Transformation Programme;	Information and Communication Technology Portfolio Holder/Head of Information and Communication Technology	The achievement of improvements in answering telephone calls and the implementation of consistent telephone answering standards; the	The resource requirements for the Customer Services Transformation Programme are currently being assessed by the consultants

		(b) Subject to (a), to establish a corporate customer contact centre as the first phase of the Customer Services Transformation Programme.		provision of customer access to Council services through 'self service' electronic channels; the provision of customer access to the majority of services in a single ground floor reception area at the Civic Offices; and the provision of extended opening hours to meet customer demand.	engaged by the Council to devise the programme. Specific targets and performance measures will be developed as the implementation of the Customer Services Transformation Programme is progressed.
IP2	To achieve and maintain top quartile district council performance for the speed of processing of new Housing Benefit claims and changes of circumstances, and to maintain current top quartile performance for the accuracy of benefit assessments (<i>KPI Refs: BV78a, BV78b, BV79a</i>).	(a) To implement an Electronic Records Document Management System for the Benefits Division;	Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder/Head of Finance	(a) Time currently lost on searching for paper files will be able to be devoted to more productive activities and medium term efficiency gains secured.	(a) The achievement and maintenance of top quartile district council performance for the speed of processing of new Housing Benefit claims and changes of circumstances. The necessary hardware and software for the Electronic Records Document Management System are already in place and funding of £15,000 has been allocated to aid the implementation of the system.
		(b) To investigate the use of information technology to enhance performance by mobile working, in partnership with other appropriate local authorities.		(b) Benefit Visiting Officers to be provided with tablet personal computer equipment containing benefit information that can be used to check and verify benefit entitlement during the course of a visit. Eventually claims will be able to be processed during visits, which will assist claimants and improve performance.	(b) To maintain current top quartile district council performance for the accuracy of Housing Benefit assessments. A grant of £133,000 has been awarded by the Department of Work and Pensions to enable this initiative to commence in partnership with two other local authorities.
IP3	To achieve and maintain top quartile district council performance for the determination of all planning applications (<i>KPI Refs: BV109a, BV109b, BV109c</i>).	To fully implement agreed proposals for planning performance improvements, including new information technology systems, a planning 'hit squad' and the service restructure.	Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder/Head of Planning and Economic Development	The achievement of improved determination times for all classes of planning application.	The achievement of top quartile district council performance by 30 June 2006, and the maintenance of top quartile performance thereafter.
IP4	To deliver customer-focused services which meet the needs and aspirations of the diverse communities of the district (<i>KPI Ref: Not applicable</i>).	To develop and adopt a corporate Public Consultation and Engagement Policy and Strategy.	Finance and Performance Management Portfolio Holder/Head of Human Resources and Performance Management	The establishment of meaningful opportunities for residents and customers of the Council to inform and influence policy development and service provision.	The adoption of new Public Consultation and Engagement Policy and Strategy by 31 October 2006.

IP5	To achieve top quartile district council performance for each Key Performance Indicator identified by the Council on an annual basis (<i>KPI Refs: BV2b, BV8, BV9, BV10, BV11a, BV11b, BV11c, BV12, BV14, BV16a, BV17a, BV63, BV64, BV66a, BV78a, BV78b, BV79a, BV82a(i), BV82a(ii), BV82b(i), BV82b(ii), BV106, BV109a, BV109b, BV109c, BV156, BV157, BV164, BV170a, BV170c, BV183a, BV184a, BV199a, BV199b, BV199c, BV199d, BV204, EH6, H15a, H15b</i>).	(a) To develop improvement plans in respect of all Key Performance Indicators;	All Portfolio Holders/All Heads of Service	The achievement of top quartile district council performance in the service priority areas identified by the Council each year.	The achievement of top quartile district council performance in priority areas by 31 March each year, based on quartile data published by the Audit Commission.
		(b) To monitor progress towards the achievement of top quartile district council performance for each Key Performance Indicator on a quarterly basis.			



DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN 2006 – 2010

FEEDBACK FORM

Thank you for reading Epping Forest District Council's draft Council Plan for 2006 to 2010, we hope that you found it informative. We are interested to know what you think of the Council Plan and our proposed priorities for the next four years, and would be grateful if you could complete and return this short questionnaire. The replies that we receive will be used to inform the format and content of the final version of the Plan.

Please return this form to:

Epping Forest District Council, Performance Management Unit, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, Essex, CM16 4BZ.

Please circle the **number** of the answer to each question that comes closest to your view of the draft Council Plan. Please only circle one number for each question.

Example question

The Council Plan is easy to understand

True	Tends to be true	Neither true nor false	Tends to be false	False
5	4	3	2	1

(1) Overall, how interesting did you find the draft Council Plan?

Very interesting	5
Fairly interesting	4
Neither interesting nor boring	3
Not very interesting	2
Not interesting at all	1

(2) Overall, how easy to read did you find the draft Council Plan?

Readability	Very easy	Fairly easy	Neither easy or hard	Not very easy	Not at all easy
(a) Easy to read?	5	4	3	2	1
(b) Format easy to follow?	5	4	3	2	1

(c) Finding any information that you may have been looking for?	5	4	3	2	1

(3) Overall, how do you think that the draft Council Plan informs you about the role of the council and its priorities?

Information	Very well	Fairly well	Neither well nor poor	Not very well	Not at all well
(a) How well do you think that the draft Council Plan informs you about the role of the Council?	5	4	3	2	1
(b) How well do you think that the draft Council Plan informs you about the issues that the district faces over the next four years?	5	4	3	2	1
(c) How well do you think that the draft Council Plan reflects the priorities of local people?	5	4	3	2	1
(d) How well do you think that the draft Council Plan makes the Council's proposed priorities for 2006 to 2010 clear?	5	4	3	2	1

(4) Do you have any views or comments on the content and priorities of the Council Plan?

Content	Yes	No
(a) Do you have comments on the content of the draft Council Plan?	2	1
(b) Do you have any views or comments on the Council's proposed priorities for 2006 to 2010	2	1

Please use the space below to give us your views or comments on the Council's proposed priorities (please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

(5) Equal Opportunity Monitoring

The Council is committed to promoting equality in all the services that it provides and aims to ensure that everyone is treated fairly, regardless of race, disability, sexuality or religion. In order that we can make sure that our equal opportunities policy is working effectively, we should ask you to fill in the following equal opportunities monitoring form.

Surname and initial(s) _____

Title and Organisation (if appropriate) _____

I am Male Female *(please tick as appropriate)*

(a) What is your ethnic group? Please choose ONE option from the sections below and tick the appropriate box to indicate your background.

White British	Mixed	Asian, Asian British, Asian English, Asian Scottish, Asian Welsh
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English

White and Black Caribbean

Indian

Scottish

White and Black African

Pakistani

Welsh

White and Asian

Bangladeshi

Other, please state:

Any other Mixed background, please state:

Any other Asian background, please state:

Any other White background, please state:

Black, Black British, Black English, Black Scottish, or Black Welsh

Chinese, Chinese British, Chinese English, Chinese Scottish, Chinese Welsh or Other ethnic group

Caribbean

Chinese

African

Any other background, please state:

Any other background, please state:

(b) Do you have a disability? Yes No

Disability in this context means a 'physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this feedback form