

Report to Ordinary Council 17 January 2018

Committee: Audit

Chair: Cllr Roger McCheyne

No Audit Committee meetings have taken place since the last Ordinary Council meeting.

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Committee: Community Health and Housing

Chair: Councillor Chris Hossack

Leisure Strategy

It was agreed at the 4 December 2017 Community, Health and Housing Committee that officers facilitate workshops with industry experts and members to drive the outcomes and principles of the Council's Leisure Strategy. These will be held on the 16 and 17 January at Hutton Community Centre. Following on from the workshop sessions, it was recommended that officers liaise with industry experts to develop the Leisure Strategy for Brentwood to enable the Council to deliver the outcomes, agree the short-term priorities and longer-term objectives. It was also recommended that officers and members explore the potential of commencing a procurement process in parallel with the development of the leisure strategy. The Committee also agreed that the phased approach would be replaced by workstreams to enable greater flexibility.

Courage's Playing Fields -Officers are currently scoping the viability of using soil relocation to facilitate the development of an alternative viable cricket pitch within Courage's Playing Fields.

Warley Playing Fields – It was agreed by Members at 4 December that as part of the refurbishment of the existing play area at Warley Playing Fields that an outdoor gym facility would also be included.

King George's Playing Fields – Members at the 4 December Community Health and Housing Committee agreed to the construction of a new DDA compliant access ramps and steps to the lower bowls green in King George's Playing Fields.

Community events

The Community Services team delivered two successful Christmas events in November and December, Lighting Up Brentwood and Shenfield Christmas Fayre. The 2018/19 event plan was also agreed by Members of the Committee on 4 December subject to the normal annual budget setting process

Brentwood Community Fund

At the 4 December Community Health and Housing Committee, the allocation of the Brentwood Community Fund was agreed by Members. 24 organisations applied for a total of £42,993 of funding and ten organisations were awarded funding totaling £16,300 which supported projects.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

At the 4 December Community, Health and Housing Committee Members agreed to the revised Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Brentwood 2017-22. There are three key agreed health and wellbeing workplan themes of Aging Well, Tackling Obesity to Improve Physical Health and Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Mental Health Small Grants Scheme

The Mental Health Small Grants scheme has supported nine organisations ranging from Dementia Friendly Rock 'n' Roll dances, Mental Health First Aid training in schools, Community Gardening projects and arts projects to support people with Mental Health needs.

Active Brentwood

The next Active Brentwood networking event will be on the 2 February 2018 at Orsett Hall.

Staff Health and Wellbeing Champions

Stress Awareness workshop are being delivered to staff in January and a workplan for 2018 is currently being developed.

Time to Talk Day – On the 1 February

Empty Homes Strategy Update

Members received an update on progress to deal with empty homes in the Borough and agreed to investigate the possibility of increasing the Empty Homes premium to 100% over standard Council Tax as proposed in the Government Budget and to look at the potential for dealing with empty homes across Essex with other authorities.

Events on Open Spaces - Fees and Charges/Procedure/Protocol

Officers took a report to this committee to update existing Terms and Conditions for Events on Open Spaces to ensure up to date procedures/legislation, to introduce some new categories on the fees and charges for events on open spaces, and amendments to fees and charges in respect of

events on open spaces for commercial and community events are incorporated into the budget setting process to take effect from the following financial year which were agreed by Members of this Committee.

It was agreed that the current fees are all increased by 3% within the fees and charges report, and agreed that the following with effect from 1st April 2018.

Wording for Keep fit sessions (for both one off sessions and regular annual classes) to be amended to read "Outdoor activities such as Boot Camp, keep Fit, Yoga, Forest Schools, Orienteering events etc"

New category for family events/celebrations (other than usual enjoyment of parks such as picnics/ball games etc). We are recommending there is no fee for this category, however, if the activity included things such as erecting a bouncy castle, gazebo, family festivals etc that we would

request they gain permission and complete the application form and submit risk assessments etc as appropriate for the event. This category is not currently covered, and officers have often had requests for such events that do not fall within any of the current event categories.

New category for Event organisers booking multiple large events – if an organiser is booking multiple events in advance, i.e. 10 events in a 12-month period (to be paid 6 monthly) in advance they will receive a 25% discount if paid on line prior to the events

Introducing on-line payment form for applicants (from 1st April 2018) to use rather than invoicing will ensure payment is received prior to event – the applicants would only be given the link to this on-line form once the event has been given approval. The original application will also from

1st April 2018 be an on-line application form with mandatory categories (i.e. attaching relevant paperwork such as risk assessments, site plans, insurance policies, at the point of applying), this is in keeping with a modern Council and providing an efficient and effective system.

Ensuring that the Terms and Conditions and the application form are up to date with procedures and legislation and this included adding a category regarding Fireworks on Council owned land and for safety reasons on Council owned land the Council will not permit any Firework displays apart from professional organised displays whereby the organisers are members of the British Pyrotechnists Association and adhere to BPA professional industry standards.

Community Safety Update

ASB Officer – The Community Safety Team have been fortunate enough to gain an ASB Officer on secondment for a minimum of 6 months. The ASB Officer will be dealing with anti-social behaviour across the borough. They will be using the ASB module on Uniform to record ASB occurring in Council premises and more serious issues affection the borough of Brentwood. More information in the section below.

ASB issues – There has been some excellent work by the CSP and Essex Police to deter anti social behaviour and driving in William Hunter Way car park. Various warning letters and notices have been sent out and will continue to be sent out if anyone else causes issues in these areas. There has also been a rise in issues in the High Street, Pilgrims Hatch and Hutton. A PSPO is currently with legal so that further action can be taken against ASB in key areas. Community Safety Accreditation was successfully awarded to the Council by Essex Police. We are currently working on vetting for staff from various service areas including Community Safety, Housing, Environmental Health, depot, CCTV, and Community Services. Once the vetting is completed and staff receive the training they will become accredited officers with similar powers to that of a Special Constable and will therefore improve the Council enforcement opportunities. These officers will also be supplied with body worn cameras and dash cams for when those officers are out of the office.ms

Engagement Days – Throughout the year the Community Safety Partnership alongside Neighbourhood Watch engage with the public at least 2 times a month. The engagement days revolve around a particular topic such as fire safety, fraud, senior safety, Essex Community Message system and more. The CSP and NHW have a stall in the libraries, Baytree Centre, High Streets (Brentwood, Shenfield and Ingatestone) and are sometimes accompanied by other agencies, such as Essex Police, Essex Fire and Rescue and various others. All agencies provide a variety of safety advice to the public as well as answer questions.

Firebreak – A funding bid to Essex County Fire and Rescue Service was successful. A date for the course is January 29th, 2018. We were also fortunate enough to get a further course free of charge which is taking place at the end of March. The courses are for 12 students and will be available for schools.

Gang Prevention Work – Bespoke gang awareness sessions and 1-2-1 support for young people and their families has started in local secondary schools. Every school in Brentwood has been offered the bespoke sessions and 1-2-1 support. Approximately 6 secondary schools have taken up the offer of one or both services available.

The Two Johns – The Two Johns are well known for delivering bespoke training sessions within schools and other organisations that cover all areas of Child Sexual Exploitation. The Two Johns will be visiting 7 schools in Brentwood in March.

Chelsea's Choice – Chelsea's Choice is an Applied Theatre Production based on real-life stories in raising awareness around child sexual exploitation, trafficking, healthy relationships, safe internet use and the grooming process. We are aiming to get Chelsea's Choice in Brentwood before the end of the financial year.

School Roadshow – The CSP, NHW, Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Services will be visiting schools and nurseries with a police car and fire truck and speak to the students about saying safe, speeding and what it means to work for the partners. This will be taking place over the summer.

HOUSING SERVICES

Development of Council Garage Sites

Housing Services have now completed both new build sites and new Council housing will shortly be achieved for the first time in a generation.

Fawters Close (4 single-storey senior living properties):

The original project completion date is now well ahead of schedule which was originally planned for November 2017 and was finished on schedule. Allocations to the properties were completed and let in accordance with the Lettings Plan for this site.

Magdalen Gardens (3 three-bedroomed houses):

The original project completion date is now well ahead of schedule which was originally planned for the end of October 2017 and was subsequently completed ahead of schedule. The completion of this development meant we could increase supply of family-sized homes and will enabled move-on for current transfer residents, in turn creating more opportunities for homeless households in temporary accommodations.

Whittington Road Sites (Phase 2):

Housing Services held two stakeholder engagement events (13th and 17th June 2017). The first engagement event was held at Hutton Community Centre and was extremely well attended by residents (approximately 70-80 individuals). Residents recognized the

value in the development programme whilst voicing concerns about local impact, particularly in relation to parking. Residents were provided with an overview of the architectural plans and an insight into some of the potential options which are open to us.

A further Stakeholder event was held on the 9th November to allow residents a further opportunity to see the design plans before they were submitted to Planning which should in January 2018. Although, there was a smaller number of attendees, the overall feedback was positive.

Modular Housing – Garage sites

Following a motion held at the 18th October 2017 Ordinary Council meeting that the Council investigates the opportunity that the use of modular construction homes, in conjunction with the utilization of our multiple garage site assets to address the need to meet our Housing supply a report was drafted and presented to the Community, Health and Housing Committee on the 4th December. The committee approved the recommendation that (a) The committee authorizes Officers to investigate (i) Options in relation to the development of the Council's Housing garage sites including Modular Housing, (ii) Options in relation to developing a local assembly plant within the Borough to provide modular housing and that a further report on the options as set out above is provided to the next Community, Health & Housing Committee.

Repairs & Maintenance Contract

The re-procurement process for the existing Wates & Oakray contracts which are due to end in 2019 is now well underway. A contract re-procurement report was presented at the committee of the 4th December and it was agreed that there would be a cross party working group throughout the procurement process.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ('HRA17'):

The above primary legislation is due to come into force on Tuesday 3rd April 2018. A draft statutory Code of Guidance has been issued but not ratified. The Code outlines a significant number of new statutory duties in relation to homelessness prevention and relief. The new legislation does not create any new tools to tackle homelessness; it simply puts greater statutory duties on Local Authorities to provide an evidence-based system of advice for all customers. It does NOT create new duties or powers in terms of provision of accommodation and does not replace the non-priority need and/or intentional homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1996. It seeks to put prevention at the heart of solving homelessness, but does not directly provide any new options or financial resources for customers.

Within our sub-region all Local Authorities are anticipating a very significant upsurge in workload, risk and capacity requirements. We have embarked on a review of service provision, including staffing and ICT resources, as well as rolling out direct professional and partnership training to Officers. A new ICT HRA17 module has been procured and

we are shortly to appoint 2 new full time Officers to assist with the increase in service demands.

Arrears Drive

Estates Management are about to embark on a four week arrears drive. This is in addition to the monthly arrears campaign. During the four weeks officers will solely focus on arrears for three full days per week to ensure each account is up to date with arrears actions.

The main aims of the arrears drive are;

- To reduce arrears by 30%
- To ensure each account in arrears has a current action and agreement in place
- To follow up agreements and politely remind Tenants when a payment agreement is due to be paid, to prevent missed payments
- To highlight any account with suspended Housing Benefit claims and chase Housing Benefit as necessary
- To highlight any account in receipt of Universal Credit so that the officers can focus more attention on money management advice
- To arrange for Income and Expenditure forms to be online to make it easier for Tenants to complete
- To utilise text messaging for rent payment/arrears reminders in line with changing digital inclusion
- To take court action at the earliest opportunity to prevent arrears mounting too high that Tenants do not believe they can ever repay them
- To monitor how many arrangements are being made and subsequently adhered to

Housing Officers will be temporarily handing over viewed lettings and mutual exchanges to colleagues in the Housing Options team to ensure Void turnaround targets and legislative timescales are kept. Any other Tenancy issue will be dealt with on the two non-arrears days to ensure service delivery is maintained.

This is the first time Estates Management have embarked on such a project and it will be closely monitored to see how successful it is in increasing rent collection. If successful then the process will be repeated quarterly to reduce arrear figures.

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Committee: Corporate Projects Scrutiny

Chair: Councillor Jan Pound

Corporate Projects Scrutiny Committee (CPS) meeting 21st November, 2017

Work Programme 2017-18 Update

The Committee considered its 2017/18 updated draft work programme and agreed that notes from Working Group meetings be appended to the agenda for future Corporate Project Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Leisure Strategy

The Committee reviewed the work from the Leisure Strategy Working Group (LSWG) and agreed to note the report and recommendations of the Leisure Strategy Working Group.

In addition the findings of the Leisure Strategy Working Group were submitted to the Community, Health and Housing Committee on 4 December 2017 for their consideration.

Report to the Ordinary Council on 17th January 2018

Committee: Environment and Enforcement

Chair: Councillor Keith Parker

At the meeting of the Environment and Enforcement Committee on 6th December 2017 the following reports were considered:

Performance Presentations

Members were updated on service requests and a breakdown of enforcement actions taken on fly-tipping and environmental crime.

There have been a further seven fly tipping cases with evidence reported to Environmental Health between October and November which are being investigated. A £300 fixed penalty notice has also been issued for a waste carrier.

Verbal Update on Christmas Recycling events

Officers updated about the forthcoming Christmas Recycling Roadshows around the Borough during December to assist with resident enquiries and to give out orange sacks and food waste sacks for residents to stock up for the extra Christmas recycling and information about recycling and garden waste.

Verbal update on Enforcement

A total of 20 Council officers have, or are being vetted by Essex Police for the Community Safety

Accreditation Scheme. It is hoped that training will commence early 2018 after which the accredited officers will then have increased powers to enforce across the Borough.

Recording enforcement activity has moved forward with existing systems being expanded to allow for anti-social behaviour cases to be entered onto an operating system which is used across all service areas. Once fully operational, it is hoped that officers will have the ability to record activity whilst “out on the field” with mobile devices.

A Housing Officer had been seconded to Corporate Enforcement to perform the role of Anti-Social Behaviour Officer. This is to ensure ALL cases are effectively managed and improve consistency. Cases will be logged on the case management system mentioned above which will improve information sharing, efficiency and streamlining of services.

The Council's Street Inspector has also been seconded over to Corporate Enforcement to allow for a more consistent approach to enforcement activity across the Borough.

The Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order is to be expanded, as agreed by Essex Police. The final draft Order will be presented to Committee in March. There will then be a period of consultation, after which the Order will come in to force.

There have been some positive results in terms of enforcement against parking on verges and pavements. Discussions are ongoing with Essex County Council to establish boundaries and responsibilities before the full scheme can be considered.

At this stage the Council will not be able to enforce against parking on land that falls under Essex County Council Highways. Nevertheless, close partnership working is being adopted.

A positive outcome was achieved regarding planning enforcement in Blackmore and Ingatestone resulting in around £9,000 worth of fines and costs.

Two mobile cameras have been erected in Hutton Recreation Ground and William Hunter Way car park which will be monitored by Brentwood Borough Council CCTV. The project was a result of partnership working with Thurrock Council and the local Scout group in Hutton to combat anti-social behaviour and nuisance vehicles. Further partnership working is under consideration to improve our ability to identify perpetrators and allow for more effective enforcement.

The Community Safety Partnership have provided funding for the purchase of body worn cameras and dash cams. A successful trial has taken place in partnership with Baytree Security. The cameras will be made available to Community Safety Accredited Officers for enforcement activity across the borough and ALL service areas. The cameras will not only provide protection for officers but will also ensure we gather best evidence which will allow for improved enforcement activity.

Fees and Charges

The committee considered and agreed to increase Fees and Charges by 3% except for the exceptions outlined below:

- Trade Waste – as agreed previously some services such as Trade Waste operates in a competitive environment and needs to be able to change within the market(s) therefore Trade Waste fees are delegated to make appropriate changes either through negotiations or when the market dictates.
- Garden Waste Leased Bin Charge – current fee for garden waste bin is £46.00. Following an Income Generation review undertaken by BDO the proposal for 2018-19 is to increase the cost of Garden Waste bin charges by 8.70% to £50 per annum.
- Garden Waste biodegradable sacks – 3.3% increase in retail rise to £3.10 per roll of 10 sacks. This will enable the procurement of a sack that has sufficient gauge to ensure the integrity of the sack for a minimum of four weeks.
- Cemeteries – The Income Generation Review by BDO identified several income streams and these were reviewed and compared to the authority's peer groups.

One of these streams was the Councils Cemetery Services. Whilst Officers are conscious of the sensitive nature of this service area they are also mindful of the cost of the service to provide and the need for services to be sustainable and where possible cost neutral. The BDO report highlighted that the authority's charges were lower than others within its peer group and recommended that to bring it in line with its counterparts, increases be applied over a two-year period to achieve this. The increases form part of a two-step process to ensure the Council is in line with its other peer group members whilst avoiding a significant increase in a single year. This will result in a similar increase being tabled to members as part of the fee setting process for the 2019/20 financial year.

In addition to this, the committee agreed to reduce the length of period an Exclusive Right of Burial [ERB] is issued for. The authority currently issues ERB's for 100 years before they are due for renewal, Officers are now frequently finding that ERB's are expiring without being transferred to alternative living family members or friends due to the excessive time that will have lapsed since the ERB was issued. This can make tracing ERB owners almost impossible if a need to contact them arises in the future. In addition to this it is recommended by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management [ICCM] that ERB's should not exceed 99 years and under statute must not exceed 100 years. Following the consideration of the above and in line with many other authorities in the County. The Committee agreed to reduce the active time for an ERB from 100 years to 50 years. This would take effect from 1st April 2018.

Open Space Protection Measures

Additional measures to improve security of Council land were agreed to a maximum of £25000 from the 2017/18 budget. Areas of land that had been targeted by unauthorised incursions had been identified and improvements to gate entrances have been suggested to sites including Alexander Lane Shenfield, Seymour Field Ingatstone, Bishops Hall Park, Bannister Drive Hutton, Larkins Playing Field, Little Warley Common and the Brentwood Centre.

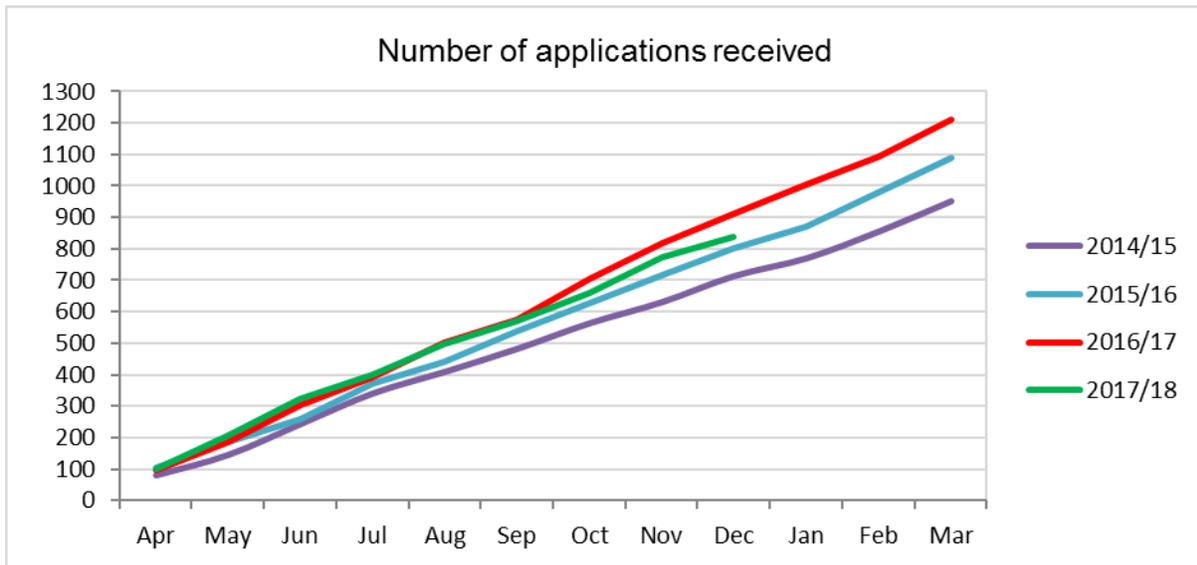
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Committee: Planning and Licensing Committee

Chair: Cllr Olivia Sanders

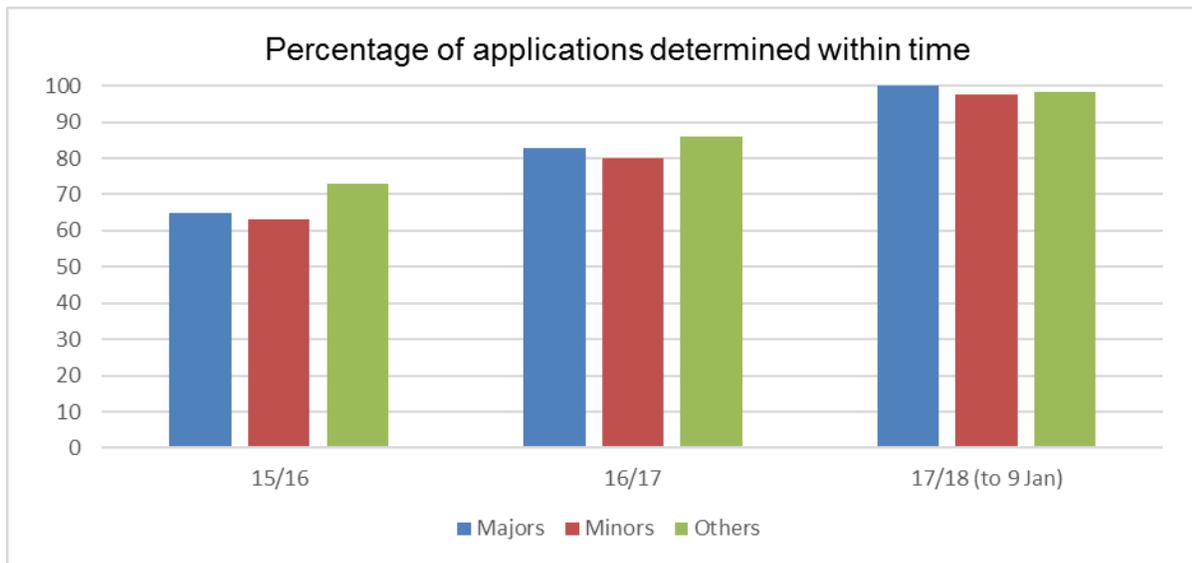
Development Management:

The number of applications received is slightly lower than at the same time last year, although higher than in previous years.



The number decided within time remains at the highest level recorded for the department (see chart below). The performance in determining applications in a timely manner is

currently the best in the county and joint 9th best in the country.



Application and appeal performance are comfortably above the new national requirements to be introduced this year. Officers have focused on ensuring this is the case as those planning authorities that fail those measures risk losing some control over determining applications and involvement of the Secretary of State to raise performance. There is no danger of that occurring in Brentwood although achieving timely decisions and a good record at appeal remain an ongoing priority to protect the service in the future.

The Development Management team has recently recruited new staff and is now fully staffed. Two planning Members training sessions have taken place with a further two scheduled shortly. A further planning agent's meeting took place in October with another scheduled within the next quarter, providing valuable feedback for the department and engaging with key stakeholders by the end of the year. Agents indicate that they appreciate our new improved ways of working and improvements to the system of preapplication advice.

Strategic Planning

Work continues to prepare a new Local Development Plan for the Borough. Progress was reported to Members at Extraordinary Council meetings held in November and December 2017, along with the publication of a range of supporting evidence base documents. Further Regulation 18 consultation will take place very soon and a revised

timetable agreed for the publication and submission of the Plan. Significant progress has been made to understand infrastructure impacts and joint working with neighbouring South Essex authorities through the South Essex 2050 project.

The Brentwood Town Centre Design Plan was published online in November 2017. This provides a vision and starting point for bringing redevelopment forward on key sites. Preparation of a supporting Design Guide is now underway with public consultation expected soon. The next stages of work include preparing development briefs for specific sites, which crosses over with the strategic assets work to test the market on development viability and partnership options.

The team successfully organised and held a bigger and better Brentwood Business Showcase in November 2017. The event was a huge success, supporting local business networking and hosting an impressive line-up of keynote speakers. Work is now underway to plan the 2018 Showcase.

Licensing

The quiet trend for this year has continued with no Licensing Act 2003 or Gambling Act 2005 applications, or reviews being required to be referred to the Licensing Committee for determination.

Complaints to the Council relating to Uber vehicles operating in the Borough over recent months has reduced, but the situation is remains under monitor by the Licensing Team.

Licensing enforcement activity has been focused on Scrap Metal Dealers with the licensing team carrying out joint visits to Essex Police to a number of unlicensed sites. Premises have been given the option to licence or face further enforcement action.

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Committee: Policy, Projects and Resources Committee

Chair: Cllr Louise McKinlay

Asset Development Programme Update

With Council Assets now clearly identified, a range of “market soundings” took place at the end of last year. The aim is to establish potential areas where the council can work strategically with commercial partners to get a view on the potential of the council’s portfolio, within a commercial economic context. The goal is to ensure revenue streams can be generated to maximum effect for the council and its residents.

I can report that Interest was high and the feedback was complementary. More than that – there was a keen recognition of all Brentwood has to offer - with Brentwood’s location, offering and significant opportunities for development, retail and residential opportunities very enthusiastically recognized by all the companies consulted. These experienced corporations expressed an eagerness to work with the council particularly given the structured and considered manner in which Brentwood Borough Council is developing this project.

Memorial Wall

This project is developing with officers about to liaise with potential contractors regarding costings but importantly it has now been established that modular built plinths can be included. Some of these would allow for the actual storage of ashes – a facility that has proved popular at Colchester Cemetery and Crematorium. Plans have been amended by officers to ensure these changes are accommodated within the optimum sympathetic setting. A re-working of the business case finances and options is being amended and changed alongside this to ensure a full commercial and income forecast can be accurately delivered.

A monthly Project Highlight Report for the Asset Development Programme is reported to the Project Board updating and establishing the state of play and achievements on a month by month basis.

Asset Development Programme achievements in December

** Market soundings completed with complementary responses that can now be further explored

** signed up to CCS framework to call off Property Advisors now underway

- ** Legal advisors with suitable and flexible expertise were procured
- ** A service requirement specification for Financial Advisors has been produced and discussions took place with two top-tier firms who will now work on a costings submission
- ** Further exploration of the potential to set up a separate but linked company structure is underway taking into account full tax and legal implications
- ** The new potential facilities that could be offered for the Memorial Wall would seem to offer better financial returns and less risk so officers are looking into how this might work and the income generating benefits
- ** Assets identified in the November 29 report are now being pushed forward for the sales process to commence
- ** Joint working arrangements with Basildon Borough Council are being considered with all options currently being researched

January activities:

- ** Company structure options being explored with lawyers and our legal team
- ** financial implications being updated regularly in order to ensure “best options” can be put forward
- ** negotiations with the Brentwood Leisure Trust for the management of Community Halls being progressed
- ** A full report is being written for PPR in February that will cover the commercial options for the Memorial Wall whilst reflecting sensitivity to this particular project
- ** The monthly report for the Asset Development Programme will be written

Brentwood Borough Renaissance Group Strategic Review and re-naming

The group has a new Chair and has rebranded itself “Brentwood Business Partnership”. The original purpose, aims, objectives and goals have been changed to reflect a readjusted vision for the group.

10 years ago, the Council’s Policy Board decided to set up a Town Centre Steering Group – known as the Renaissance Group – which was independent of the Council but worked with the local community, businesses and retail to enhance Brentwood Borough Council’s town and village environments.

During this time, commercial priorities and consumer habits have changed a lot. Last year, the group reassessed its purpose with a view to maintaining its effectiveness over the coming years ahead.

Part of this is a new identity that better encompassed the group's purpose – which is to increase presence and boost spending in the local area for the local economy.

The new “Brentwood Business Partnership” is felt to better reflect, clarify and promote the group's work. It will also help it develop partnerships with the Brentwood Centre, Havering college, day and night time economic interests and consider the reinstating of an Ingatestone cluster.

Importantly, there is no cost to the Council - the group will fund its activities for the next three years without the need for a grant from Brentwood Borough Council. So it offers Brentwood Borough Council considerable benefits at no direct cost. There are implications for officer time, in terms of joint working and developing sponsorship and advertising revenue generating opportunities. However, these are expected to be negligible once weighed against income.

National Non-Domestic Rate Relief Policy

A policy for Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief (DNDRR) is put forward to ensure a consistent approach that should close off any potential legal challenge based on all and any claim of discrimination. Around 2,375 non-domestic properties have been identified in Brentwood. Discretionary relief can be granted on top of the mandatory relief and the government has set out three new non-domestic discretionary rate reliefs:

** Public House Relief ** Supporting Small Business Relief (both already being provided by the council) & ** Discretionary Business Rates Relief Scheme (which we are due to start at the end of January)

An external consultant has been used to create the new policy which takes into account these changes, new relief rates and ensure consistency across our councils that share this service. This consistency of approach and implementation will therefore apply across the board for Brentwood under the Shared Service and head off any opportunity to divide and conquer through legally challenging these complex changes.

Businesses facing the steepest increases in their Business Rates bills as a result of revaluation can access the government discretionary fund.

Brentwood has received a pot of £215,000 spread over a four year period. Ratepayers who may qualify have already been identified with 230 Business Rate Accounts benefits from the relief in January

Preparation for General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

GDPR will replace the Data Protection Act on May 25, 2018. The council has taken all necessary steps to ensure it is aligned with the changes and statutory requirements. It's imperative to adhere to this to show – if challenged – that the council has followed protocol and best endeavours in this to provide a solid base to minimise punitive fines that could result from any legal challenges. A successful online training campaign has seen good take up among staff and this training will now be rolled out to all members during January. Further documents will be distributed during this month to staff and compliance with the changes is ongoing and closely monitored. A more in depth report taking into account these various actions will be presented on March 12.

Town Hall Update

All staff and department moves have been completed and operations continue smoothly and unimpeded by the significant physical and psychological changes made to such a large organisation. We are now at the point where the second phase of construction is about to begin and concentration now centres on working with the commercial sector to deliver suitably designed Hub space. *The formal appointment of contractors is due to be carried out this month.*

Seven Arches Road has seen an incredibly smooth transition from the old style reception for customers at the Town Hall to a walk in and walk through hub where i-pads, scanners and staff working through online forms on the spot, are the new norm. Weddings continue and take up is good maintaining the same continuity and bookings as before but with the room offering a facility as a meeting place outside of these appointments. Mind and the Papworth Trust have successfully relocated with services maintained and CCTV and Parking have been accommodated within the SAR building too.

The Department for Works and Pensions “Job Centre Plus” is just one of the groups that will be moving into the Hub in 2019 together with the Council for Voluntary Services, CAB and MIND. This commitment ahead of the Town Hall transformation completion is positive news for the council and the Brentwood community.

Elsewhere:

** 130 staff work from 76 desks at Regus - council services have seen no disruption with residents receiving utter continuity

** Depot space now hosts Licensing –taxi drivers get the full service they require from one location and another 11 extra staff spaces have been created

** A fit-for-purpose print room offering full service to the entire council operations is now accommodated in a smaller space

** Electoral services at Merrymeade have held one Parish election and are preparing for the May election date in the normal manner with no disruption.

** Member services pigeon holes at the rear of SAR are accessible 24/7

** Council meetings from Brentwood School have settled down into a routine with staff, members and the public adapting to and accepting the changes

** IT – has provided hard and software that is ultimately compatible with the services the council needs to offer but also have the potential to adapt and develop to meet new technological challenges and change ahead of the relocation back into the Town Hall in 2019.

The review regarding the potential sprinkler system at the Town Hall has been undertaken and the report into the costings and recommendations will be submitted once received.