

## **Report to Ordinary Council 27 June 2018**

**Committee: Audit and Scrutiny**

**Chair: Cllr Will Russell**

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### **Internal Audit Progress Plan 2017/18**

The report was intended to inform the Audit and Scrutiny Committee of progress made against the approved internal audit plan for 2017/18, which was approved by the Audit Committee in March 2017.

The following reports had been finalised since the last Committee, and a summary of the findings were included in the progress report:

- Customer Services (Moderate / Moderate Assurance)
- Car Parks and Payment Collection (Limited / Limited Assurance)
- Environment (Limited / Moderate Assurance)
- Main Financial Systems, including Outsourced Functions (Moderate / Limited Assurance)
- Risk Management (Limited / Moderate)

Information Security Assessment (advisory review) had also been completed.

Following a discussion from the committee, members did have concerns on what was reported. Internal Audit and officers assured members that follow up recommendations will be reviewed following the audits and reported back to committee.

### **Internal Audit Annual Report 2017/18**

Since publication of the agenda, further information had been supplied to the auditors which increased the assurance from limited to moderate. The new report from the Auditors was appended to the minutes as a revised Appendix A and presented to members at the meeting.

Overall, the auditors were able to provide moderate assurance that there was a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Council's objectives and that controls were being applied consistently. In forming the view of the auditors, they took into account that:

The Council had performed broadly in line with budget regarding financial performance. The Council had shown strong financial management with moderate / substantial and substantial assurance opinions provided in the 2017/18 audits on the financial planning and budget monitoring and capital projects respectively.

The Council's record in implementing audit recommendations required some improvement. Whilst management were proactive in discussing plans to address the risks identified in audits, there was a lack of engagement when internal audit followed up recommendations, therefore they could not report a year end position relating to recommendations made during 2017/18 that had fallen due before 31 March 2018.

47% of audits received limited or part limited assurance. These included car parking and payment collection, environment and community halls viability, and the key areas of risk management, main financial systems, housing and partnerships. Although the main financial systems issues were mainly contractual.

Whilst a moderate assurance has been given, which has been a more marginal decision than previous years. Internal Audit have noted a deterioration in the controls environment whilst new arrangements are taking time to bed down. However, management has responded positively to the reports and if the improvements required were implemented this would support a better position in 2018/19.

### **Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/2019 Update**

Previous scrutiny work programmes were reported to Corporate Projects Scrutiny Committee in the municipal year 2017/18.

The report provided the 2018/19 draft scrutiny work programme for members consideration and was attached at Appendix A.

Members noted that the workplan was a timeline of the latest and proposed working position of the working groups and **not** the actual timeline of the subject matter or project being reviewed. These timelines were subject to change depending on the work and outcomes of the working groups.

Following the Policy, Projects and Resources Committee on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018 further additions may be reflected in the Work Programme.

The Committee was requested to consider the draft work programme at Appendix A and agree any amendments.

### **Leisure Strategy Working Group**

The report provided a progress since the last Leisure Strategy Working Group (LSWG) for consideration by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Since the last meeting of the LSWG, a verbal update was provided to the Corporate Projects Scrutiny Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

Further to that update in March, further progress has been in relation to the Leisure Strategy. Alliance Leisure Services have now been appointed to develop a sustainable

business plan for King George's Playing Fields. A project brief has been agreed with some key desirables for the site and an update on progress is due to take place on 25 June 2018. Consultations with key stakeholders is currently taking place.

Wider consultation on King George's Playing Fields will take at the Council's Strawberry Fair event on 16 June 2018.

The consultation for the draft Leisure Strategy has now closed and feedback from respondents will be included in the final version which will come back to Community Health and Housing Committee on 3 July for Member consideration.

The refurbishment of the play area in Warley Playing Fields is progressing well and the official opening is planned for 10 July 2018. Pupils from Warley Primary School, Butterfly Montessori, together with residents of Gibraltar House have been invited to attend a mini family fun day to celebrate. Once agreed the Working Group report will be submitted to Community, Health and Housing Committee for consideration on 3 July 2018. A separate piece of work is being undertaken for the installation of an outdoor gym with a contribution from the Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Board.

A separate Play Area Strategy is due to come to Community Health and Housing Committee on 3 July for Member consideration.

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

## **Report to Ordinary Council 27 June 2018**

### **Committee: Community Health and Housing**

**Chair: Cllr Chris Hossack**

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### **Leisure Strategy**

At the 5 March 2018 Community Health and Housing Committee agreed to the draft Leisure Strategy to be sent out for consultation and that the final strategy will come back to committee for approval after the consultation. It was also agreed at that committee that subject to the required resources and budgets being agreed that delegated authority be given to appoint a Leisure Development Partner to develop a business case for improvements to King George's Playing Fields. Alliance Leisure Services have now been appointed and they are currently developing a sustainable business plan for the site to get the Council to the planning stage for improvements. Once completed this will come back to Community Health and Housing for Member consideration.

Warley Playing Fields – One of the workstreams of the Leisure Strategy was improvements to the Council's play areas. One of the first sites that have been improved is Warley Playing Fields and the refurbishments works are nearly completed/are now completed. The official opening of the play area will take place on 10 July 2018. Pupils from Warley Primary School and Butterfly Montessori have been invited along with the Mayor and representatives from Bellway Homes. The next phase of improvements to the site is the installation of an outside gym. Finalised options for the outdoor gym design will come back to Community Health and Housing for Member consideration.

### **Community Events**

Strawberry Fair took place on 16 June on Shenfield Common.

The Family Fun Days will be delivered in the school summer holidays at the following locations:

- Friday 27 July - King George's Playing Fields
- Friday 3 August - Blackmore Village Hall
- Friday 10 August - King George's Playing Fields
- Friday 17 August - Bishops Hall Park, Pilgrims Hatch
- Friday 24 August - Coronation Playing Fields, Mountnessing
- Friday 31 August - King George's Playing Fields

All of the events are 10.30 – 3.30pm and wristbands for the bouncy castles are £3.50, all other activities apart from face painting are free.

### **Brentwood Community Fund**

The Brentwood Community Fund was launched on 2 April 2018 for applications of up to £2,000 to support Council priorities and is open until 28 September 2018. The report will come back to the Community Health and Housing Committee in December 2018 for recommendations and for Members to approve the allocation of the Fund.

### **Mental Health Awareness Week**

Mental Health Awareness Week took place between 14-20 May and offered a variety of activities for staff to participate in throughout the week to promote good mental health.

### **Mental Health Small Grants Scheme**

Nine Mental Health and wellbeing projects have been funded including physical activity, art therapy and promoting Mental Health First Aid in schools.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

Two out of five of all GP appointments are non-medical. Since the social prescribing scheme was launched in April 2017 there have been 450 referrals for patients to other activities to improve their health and wellbeing. The project is now called the Care Navigation Programme and works with three providers Provide, The Essex Lifestyle Service and Community Agents. There have been some positive outcomes but there are still 22 GP practices across Basildon and Brentwood are not using it at all.

The Public Health grant funding Community Tree leaflets to all households which list all of the support agencies for Mental Health in the Brentwood area. Under the strand of ageing well the grant funded Green Candle Dance project which will run for 12 weeks for up to 20 people in Chichester House, sheltered accommodation. They will train an instructor in Brentwood, so that the project can be sustainable. The project is aimed at those that are socially isolated with the onset of dementia.

### **Active Brentwood**

The target for Active Essex is to get 1million people active. This is a realistic target as there are already 700,000 active people in Essex doing over 150 minutes of activity/week. Active Brentwood is targeting those that are currently inactive and has a target to increase activity.

## **Garage Site update**

We are currently reviewing our occupancy levels for all of the Housing garage stock. At present we have 805 garages occupied and 301 garages void across all garage sites. We are in the process of reviewing all garages that are occupied but that are in rent arrears which we have currently 72 cases which are currently under review. We have a number of garages that have been used by the Housing Department or other departments for storage, we are also reviewing these to determine whether these are still required. Once this review is complete then we will be able to identify certain sites that can be entirely secured to reduce the likelihood for anti-social behavior and also be prioritized for future development. We are anticipating that this review will be completed by the end of July.

## **Brentwood Foyer Closure**

Following the removal of funding for the Brentwood Foyer, which is due to close on the 6<sup>th</sup> July. The Housing team are currently working with the Foyer to provide Housing Advice to those young people that are required to find alternative accommodation. A workshop was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> June jointly with members of the Housing team and the Foyer staff which was well attended. Housing applications that have been received to-date are being fast-tracked onto the Housing Register as part of the prevention duty. Not all young people have a local connection to Brentwood as they would have been placed into the accommodation by other agencies from out of the Borough and the local connection will be retained by the relevant agency or Local Authority.

We have agreed with the Foyer that for those that do have a local connection, but do not have a priority need we will consider match funding for rent in advance and deposits for private accommodation.

The Foyer have confirmed that they will consider extending the closure date to assist the Local Authority in seeking alternative accommodation for young people, should they require our assistance. To-date not all young people have approached the local Authority.

A further workshop is planned to be held later in June between the Housing team and the Foyer staff if it is required.

## **R&M Contract re-procurement**

The repairs and maintenance contract which is currently held with Wates and Oakray is underway. We received 10 SQ (Selection Questionnaire) responses from interested bidders which have been assessed by the project team and 7 bidders will now be invited to submit the ISDS (Invitation to submit detailed solutions). We will be entering competitive dialogue in August with the bidders that have submitted their ISDS. It is

anticipated that we will report to the December, Community, Health & Housing Committee the successful bidder. The contract is due to start in June 2019.

### **Fire Management Policy**

Following an independent review by a Specialist Fire compliancy consultant, Housing have prepared a Fire Management Policy which is due to be presented at the July, Community, Health and Housing Committee for Approval.

### **Housing Register**

The new on-line Housing register application went live on Locata on the 4<sup>th</sup> June 2018. This will result in significant reduction in duplication by Housing Staff having to re-input the information manually and will result in applications being assessed more quickly and improve the service delivery overall. Further, improvements are still underway in providing a facility for customers to scan documents directly onto their housing application at the point of the application being submitted, which will result in documents no longer being mislaid or misfiled.

### **Keystone**

The Keystone I.T system configuration work was completed by Keystone. The Stock condition data which is held in Keystone, is currently undergoing a data cleanse to verify the data, Further configuration/upgrades to the system is due to be implemented imminently. We have a staff resource from Basildon BC who is coordinating the work required to the system which is being overseen by the Asset Manager at Basildon. Once this work is completed we will be able to prepare future planned maintenance programmes. In the interim we are currently preparing a 'Safety 1<sup>st</sup>' Planned maintenance programme which will concentrate on the key compliance areas, which include Asbestos, gas, electric works etc. within our Housing Stock which are classed as 'Tower Blocks'. A smaller kitchen and bathroom Planned Maintenance programme is also being prepared.

**Report to Ordinary Council 27 June 2018**

**Committee: Environment and Enforcement**

**Chair: Cllr Keith Parker**

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No meetings have taken place this municipal year.

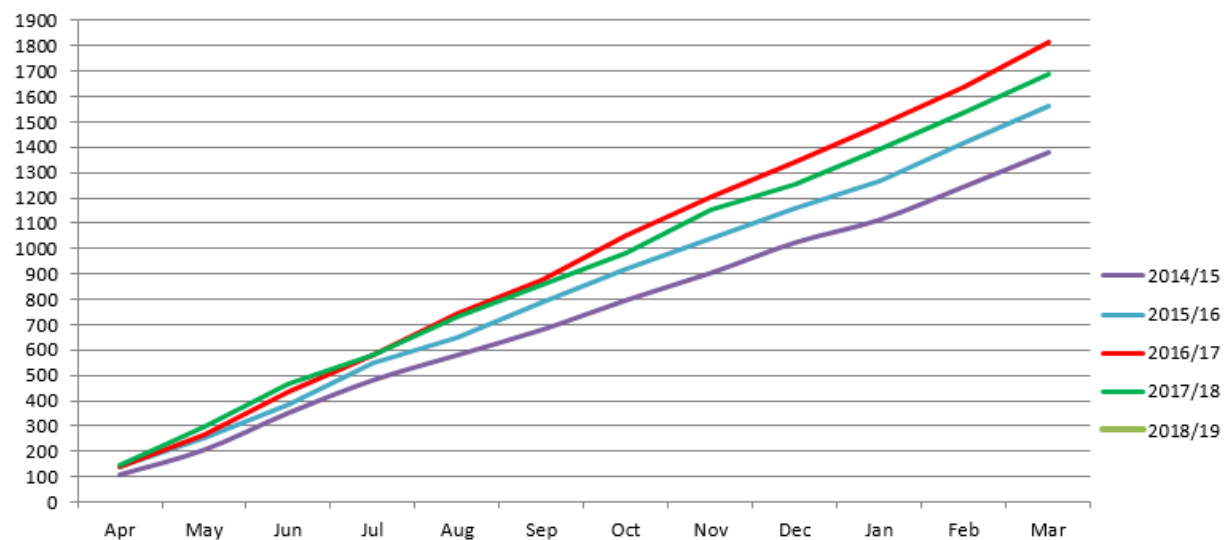
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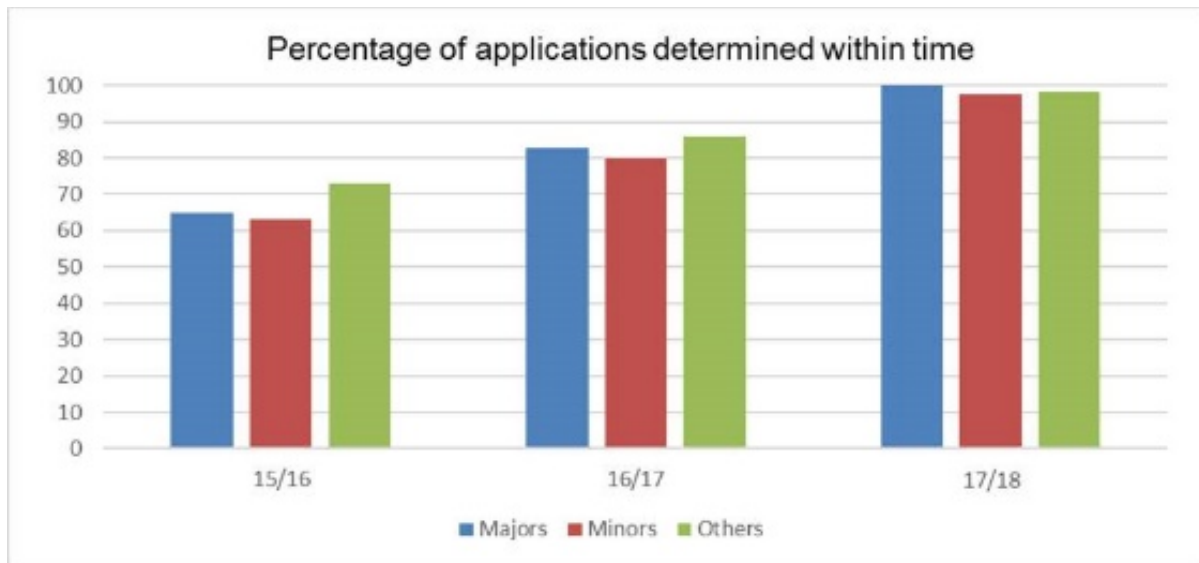
**Report to Ordinary Council 27 June 2018**  
**Committee: Planning and Licensing Committee**  
**Chair: Cllr Olivia Sanders**

**Development Management:**

The number of applications received up to March 2018 was slightly lower than at the same time last year, (a reduction of about 3%) 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 introduced last 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 induction training for new Committee Members has now taken place and a full schedule of Member training sessions to include topics on the Green Belt, Conservation and Enforcement will take place over the forthcoming year. Further changes are also planned to allow Members and the public to view current enforcement cases on a 'self - serve' basis.

The team continue to work with agents and developers at pre-application stage and further agents panels will take place on a regular basis, providing valuable feedback for the department.

### **Strategic Planning:**

The Council approved a revised Local Development Plan timetable in November 2017. Following this a letter was received from the Secretary of State regarding the potential for Government intervention in the Brentwood plan-making process. This letter was one of

15 sent to local planning authorities across the country. The Council made a full response in January 2018 in line with the deadlines set by Government, which set out the progress made, and challenges faced. The Government responded in March 2018 and confirmed that Brentwood Borough Council would not receive intervention subject to meeting its LDP timetable.

LDP public consultation was held earlier this year on preferred site options, part of further Regulation 18 consultation. The team are currently processing all comments, but indications are that just under 1,500 people responded with over 3,500 individual comments. These will be published very soon and are being considered as part of drafting the Regulation 19 version of the LDP.

Work is continuing to progress a Regulation 19 version ready for approval and public consultation in Autumn 2018. The Council remains on track to deliver the LDP in line with approved timescales, including progress on the delivery of a new garden village community at Dunton Hills.

The Brentwood Town Centre Design Plan was published in November 2017. This work took an overarching strategic view of the Town Centre and considers development options on specific sites. The Design Plan is now informing a Town Centre Design Guide and the Joint Venture Procurement project.

The Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide will provide specific planning policy guidance on the design of buildings and spaces. It will inform decisions on development proposals and form part of the Council's development plan. A public consultation period will take place later this year.

The Economic Development Team is working to deliver our third annual Brentwood Business Showcase, building on the success of events held over the past two years. The date has been confirmed, to take place on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018 at Brentwood School. More information will soon be online as we look to promote the event.

## **Report to Ordinary Council – 27th June 2018**

**Committee: Policy, Projects and Resources Committee**

**Chair: Cllr Louise McKinlay**

### **Asset Development Programme Update**

We have shortlisted 5 substantial national corporations to go through to the next stage of the selection process to become the local authority's business partner.

The fact that 15 companies made submissions shows just how what a prestigious area and sought after prize Brentwood is. To even make the initial submissions required significant investment on the companies' behalf.

Our chosen partner will work with us to develop revenue streams from the council's assets which include William Hunter Way, Westbury Road car park and Maple Close garage sites.

The council has statutory requirements as part of the procurement process which are set down in law and must be adhered to. Any diversion from this strict schedule could result in legal challenges so this is a meticulous and intense procedure.

The next stage will see the shortlist reduced to 3 in September, with a partner selected in early 2019.

### **Early Successes Workstream**

As I reported in January among our early successes are:

#### **1. Memorial Wall**

Groundwork for the Memorial Wall at Woodman Road Cemetery commences on June 18<sup>th</sup> and will take three weeks to complete. This is an incredibly subtle and thoughtful scheme which offers a sympathetic setting for the combination of granite "Columbaria" and "Sanctums" – names which denote the two vault style memorials.

Further plans will include a pet memorial area which will consist of Pet Memorial plaques. However, some remedial work to the boundary fence at the far end of the cemetery is needed before this can be established.

## **Community Halls Management**

The Council's six community halls were included in a Value for Money Review as part of the Council's Leisure Strategy two years ago. We agreed the best route for progress was to negotiate new Halls Management Agreements and Leases with the Brentwood Leisure Trust and I can now report that:

1. A new loan has been offered to BLT to enable measures to be undertaken for to be able to produce more of its own revenue income
2. The Community Halls have been leased to BLT for a further year to manage.
3. As a result of this careful negotiation and agreement, the Management Contract payment to BLT has been reduced significantly – increasing efficiency and saving considerable funds.

## **Asset Development Programme achievements**

The pace of work being set and achieved here should not be underestimated. We have now appointed Montagu Evans LLP as our property advisors – a move that means we will have access to the very best of expertise and knowledge within the commercial property market for both buying and selling. In addition we have:

1. Procured Sharpe Pritchard as our legal advisors
2. Cited BDO as the preferred Financial Advisers when required following lengthy discussions with two top-tier firms
3. established Seven Arches Investments Ltd which was registered on April 12, 2018 a company that can now move forward to search and seek out the best possible property investments for the Council
4. completed the review and list of assets with monthly reports of the Project Board being briefed on potential options for the sites which may include disposal or redevelopment opportunities.
5. Monthly reports for the Asset Development Programme are presented monthly with updated workstreams included therein. This works extremely well and enables swift effective decisions to be made which is clearly essential when moving into the commercial environment.

## **Advertising & Sponsorship**

In a separate potential income stream development, I can report that the Town Hall hoardings have – as you will no doubt have seen – been taken over by the Brentwood Festival. The company that manages the event is paying a fee to take over the space for the weeks leading up to the annual music extravaganza.

It is one of several land assets that we hope to offer out for commercial advertising. We are considering small but prominent council-owned sites that may not be useful for development, but may offer the opportunity for advertising.

This might be small strips of land along major road areas for example, where there will be little or no interest from buyers but potential interest from advertisers.

Consideration will be duly given to suitability first and foremost – regarding the site, the proposed advertising content, and the potential revenue. This will be dealt with on a case by case basis to ensure ONLY appropriate advertising and sponsorship is agreed.

## **Brentwood Business Showcase/Economic Development**

The Brentwood Business Showcase is at the forefront of the Economic Development team's activities which of course give a huge boost to the business character of Brentwood. This year's themes are being developed, but will centre around celebrating the significant interest in Brentwood created - in part - through our Asset Development Programme.

Initial feedback suggests the main headline sponsors wish to retain their partnerships with us for this year's event which is an excellent testimonial

Essentially, Essex is a county of networkers at every level, and feedback from last year shows that Networking in all forms is what businesses and entrepreneurs want to see from this 2018 Business Showcase – and that is what we will provide as *the* council that clearly leads the way for these events in Essex.

## **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**

GDPR replaced the Data Protection Act on May 25, 2018. This was an intensive project that required full staff briefings and training together with considerable legal input to ensure the council was fully aligned with the changes and statutory requirements.

This very process itself was a vital foundation stone which means the council has a strong case to minimize any future challenge or fine or any data breaches.

The consultant employed to oversee the process has now completed the task and the day to day running of the GDPR requirements now fall under the shared services agreement with Thurrock.

It should be noted that this was a time consuming project that came and had to be managed over and above all the other workstreams being undertaken. It is a testament to just how agile and flexible the Council has become that this was managed at minimum cost and disruption with maximum compliance and effect.

### **Town Hall Update**

The council operations across the board continue to develop unaffected by the new locations from which staff are working – including remote working, agile working and working from home.

Indeed, the local election took place in the usual statutory way with officers maintaining service efficiency to such an extent that the results were declared fast and furiously and the event concluded much earlier than had been forecast!

As a result, attention can now focus on the re-branding of the Town Hall as a hub, commercial venue, residential host and police centre

### **Medium Term Financial Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21**

The committee received a report on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018 with recommendations therein. The committee agreed to approve the following which included:

- Medium Term Financial Plan for the General Fund which included the proposed savings target, presenting a zero net Funding Gap for 2018/19.
- The Housing Revenue Business Plan for 2018/19 and beyond.
- The existing and new schemes of the proposed Capital Programme for 2018/19.
- The Treasury Management Strategy.
- The Section 151 Officer's Assurance Statement.

This was subsequently approved at Ordinary Council on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

### **South Essex Vision 2050 and Association of South Essex Local Authorities..**

The local elections resulted in a number of changes across our partner councils in the ASELA. Basildon and Castle Point have new leaders and I am pleased to report that they fully support the aims and goals of the group.

A Statement of Intent has been issued to reinforce the Memorandum of Understanding. Workstreams are underway and already reporting back suggestions and findings. Strategic work is being undertaken with the Thames Gateway project and already the

group is finding early success as a singular body, compared to the effectiveness each solitary authority could have.

### **Roads and Highways**

As I announced at Annual Council, in my role at Essex County Council as Cabinet Member for Finance I allocated an additional pot of money for local Highways Panels, on the provision that borough councils commit to matching the amount on offer.

As Brentwood Borough Council Leader I approved match funding of £100,000 which will provide a healthy sum for works to be undertaken that will tackle some age old problems with Brentwood's roads. This means we can make a real difference to those problems that blight residents on the roads in particular pot holes.

Separately, the appropriately named Devil's Head Cross Roads work has begun. You may recall that we agreed the release of a marginal slip of land that had no financial value as such, to Essex County Council so it could pay for - and proceed with - the long overdue work there. The paperwork has been completed and ECC has cleared the area ready for the work to take place.

### **The Multi Storey Car park refurbishment**

This huge project was expected to cost around £2m - but is now likely to come in at less than this. There has been a minimal two-day delay due to the wet weather and ironically humidity. All pedestrian signage is being replaced as is CCTV, repairs are being made to all fire doors and nearby residents are being kept fully informed. Parking is operating as normal and Becket House residents retain access to the top three decks.



**Report to Ordinary Council – 27 June 2018**

**Committee: Regulatory and Governance**

**Chair: Cllr Louise Rowlands**

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No meetings of this Committee have taken place this municipal year.

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