

<b>Committee(s):</b> Ordinary Council	<b>Date:</b> 13 <sup>th</sup> December 2023
<b>Subject:</b> Leaders Report, Cllr Barry Aspinell	

Since I have occupied the Chair in the Leader's Room, I have become rapidly aware of the increased demand and expectations from within and outside this Council on the Leader of a local authority. This has increased dramatically since the last time I had the honour of holding this position. Below are a few of the issues I have been dealing with in the last few months. There are, of course, many more; quite a few that cannot be aired in public session at this moment due to commercial sensitivity and the waiting of planning applications being submitted.

#### Brentwood Enterprise Park

I attended, along with Cllrs Philip Mynott and Martin Cuthbert a presentation of the Brentwood Enterprise Park. This project is nearing its full planning submission. Many members on both sides of the Chamber also took the opportunity of a site visit, seeing the projected proposed development from the various angles and positions. Works are expected to commence once the planning procedure has been completed.

#### Brentwood School

I attended a presentation by the Chair of Governors and Bursar of Brentwood School to discuss their aspirational plans for future development. These plans will be submitted as individual applications but the school wished us to have an overview of their ambitions. Obviously I cannot give an opinion under our rules of engagement covering planning but I look forward to the submission of the plans so that our Planning Committee members can make a decision at the appropriate time.

#### Local Highways Panels

Whilst this panel is a County function, Brentwood Borough Council members and Parish Council representatives have historically enjoyed being part of the decision-making process on behalf of their local communities. Sadly, that is no longer the case and for some reason known only to themselves, the Conservatives at County Hall have taken the decision to allow individual Chairs of Local Highways Panels to decide who will, or will not, attend those meetings. In Brentwood's case, attendance by our Borough Councillors and Parish Representatives is no longer permitted. Therefore, the current status of membership for the Brentwood LHP is just four County Council members.

I personally believe this decision has total disregard for local democracy and accountability and offers no transparency for residents.

#### Staffing Levels

As part of discussions of the #OneTeam Programme Board it has become increasingly obvious to the elected members of both Brentwood and Rochford that

staffing levels in both councils need to be increased. In Brentwood, we will be addressing those areas we believe require resource increase as a matter of priority.

Our Democratic Services and Facilities Management functions are just two areas that require urgent attention and I will also be discussing other areas that we believe additional resource input is required with the Chief Executive.

### 'Brentwood : Our Borough'

It has been a long-held concern by many members of this Chamber that our communication channels with residents have been based solely on social media platforms. Now those members are part of this joint administration we have been able to address the situation and I'm very pleased to say that the inaugural edition of 'Brentwood – Our Borough' magazine is being delivered through every door in our borough. I thank those officers involved in this project for their efforts in producing such a high quality, informative publication.

### Discussions with Essex Leaders

Following discussions with Leaders throughout Essex, the impact of the Government's decision to stop accommodation funding for asylum seekers and refugees has been devastating. These families are/were being housed in various hotels throughout the County. Thanks to the Government's decision responsibility for paying for the accommodation of these people and their future wellbeing is now being undertaken by the authorities in which are living. This is not just a financial burden, which in itself is considerable, there is also the human impact that it will have on those seeking safe refuge here. One of our neighbouring councils has families that were integrating into their community, many had found local employment and their children were attending local schools. They have now received the devastating news that they are being relocated to a town that was able to accommodate their entire family / community. That town is Inverness. This is an extremely serious situation that I am sure will receive considerable discussion at the next Essex Leaders Meeting and the newly formed South Essex Councils meeting.