

## **Report to the Council - 27 January 2016**

**Committee: Audit, Scrutiny and Transformation**

**Chair: Councillor Paul Faragher**

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### **Strategic Risk Review**

In accordance with the Council's Insurance and Risk Management Strategy risks are reviewed and reported to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

As a result of the current strategic risk review 7 scores remained unchanged, 1 risk had increased (Local Development Plan) and 3 new risks were added. The three new risks were:

- Rollout of Universal Credit
- Extension of Right to Buy to registered provider tenants
- Failure to deliver key Corporate Projects

The Council has also identified 41 operational risks. Of these there are 17 low, 24 medium and no high risks.

### **Corporate Complaints Monitor and Freedom of Information Requests**

The report provided an opportunity for Members to monitor and review the complaints received through the Council's formal complaints process and provide information on the number of Freedom of Information requests received during the period April to September 2015.

To date the Council had received 43 formal complaints of which 3 were upheld and 12 were still being reviewed in accordance with the complaints process.

The Council also received 284 Freedom of Information Requests during the period.

### **Scrutiny Work Programme 2015/16**

The Committee discussed and agreed the latest version of its work programme for 2015/16.



## **Report to the Council - 27 January 2016**

**Committee: Community and Health Committee**

**Chair: Councillor Will Russell**

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### **Assets of Community Value**

The Bull Public House in Blackmore was added to the Council's Asset of Community Value Register on 14 December 2015. At present there are a total of seven Community Assets currently listed on the Council's register.

### **Leisure Strategy**

Members agreed at the 14 December Community & Health Committee to establish a working group to develop a work programme to deliver the Leisure Strategy over the next five years.

### **Health and Wellbeing Board**

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between Essex County Council and Basildon Borough for a Public Health specialist post for a period of 2 years. The priority is to look at reducing obesity.

### **Green Gym**

Officers are exploring the possibility of setting up a Green Gym in Brentwood subject to costs and implications.

### **Lighting Up Brentwood & Shenfield Christmas Fayre**

This year's Lighting Up Brentwood took place on Saturday 28 November and the Shenfield Christmas Fayre on Sunday 29 November. Both events were very successful and attracted large crowds despite the wind and rain!

### **Event Plan 2016/17**

The Event Plan was agreed by members for 2016/17 (subject to the budget setting process and will include six Family Fun Days, Strawberry Fair, Lighting Up Brentwood and Shenfield Christmas Fayre.

### **Active Brentwood**

Active Brentwood has awarded funding as part of the Grant Aid scheme to the following clubs and individuals: Brentwood Youth Amateur Boxing Club, Athletes in Action, Brentwood Selo Sub Aqua Club, Daniel Ogoro and the Over 50's Club based at Hutton Community Centre. A Sportivate funding application was also successful to promote to support increased participation for the 14 – 25's age group.

## **Council for Voluntary Services**

The Volunteer Essex website was officially launched on 14 January 2016 at Brentwood Library. The website has been running for a few months now and now holds details of more than 2,100 unique volunteering roles available to residents in Essex.

Officers are continuing to work with Brentwood CVS to establish a Volunteer Centre for Brentwood.

## **Community Safety update**

### **Achievements**

- Daniel Cannon successfully achieved his Certificate of Completion for Major Event Management. This was a great achievement and he continues to develop in his role.
- A successful Night of Action took place at Railway Square involving partners including Essex Police, Essex County Council Youth Service, Essex Young Peoples Drug and Alcohol Service. Every resident visited and given an information pack. Complaints have ceased.



- Co-ordinated action with Police colleagues and Council car park and CCTV to deal with nuisance vehicles in William Hunter Way car park. Local residents visited and information packs delivered. Community Safety sent 12 warning letters and Essex Police dealt with four offences whereby one vehicle was seized. Problems have decreased and no complaints have been received in recent weeks.
- Co-ordinated action at Bishops Hall, Pilgrims Hatch. A list of offenders were identified and warning letters sent to parents. Main offenders were also banned from the Brentwood Centre.

## Projects Update

- **Senior Safety Roadshow** – The roadshow continues to grow from strength to strength and the team is booked up to Christmas. It's a real partnership project involving Essex Police, Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, NHW, Home Instead and Age UK.
- **Engagement/promotional events** – The team continues to engage with local residents and promote the work of the Community Safety Partnership and Council. Last event was in partnership with Essex Police and NHW in the High Street. More are planned for 2016
- **Firebreak** – A course for 12 students is set to take place in March.
- **Prevent** - Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on certain bodies ("specified authorities" listed in Schedule 6 to the Act), in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". The Home announced funding for Local Authorities to assist in meeting their obligations in October 2016. The deadline for spending the allocation is very tight and has to be spent by the end of March. So far on line training has been organised for staff to ensure they are adequately

trained, a play is taking place in a local school in Feb (as mentioned below) and there is further training being put together for schools, Members and partners on 15th and 16th March. More detail to follow.

- **Senior Safety Day** – The next Senior Safety Day is looking at taking place at the end of March. More details to follow
- **Day of Action** – Following issues regarding burglary in Ingatestone, partners are arranging a day of action and engagement to take place in Ingatestone on Saturday 30 January 2015.
- **Skin Deep/Power of Love** – two theatre plays will be going in to schools in February and March. They tackle healthy relationships, ideology etc.



## **Report to the Council - 27 January 2016**

### **Committee: Economic Development**

#### **Chair: Councillor Keith Parker**

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The third Economic Development Committee was held on the 2 December 2015 during which it was agreed:

- To support Beckett Keys and Endeavour Schools to take part in the 2016 "Opportunity Brentwood" event working with Thurrock Council and to continue to promote the opportunity to other secondary schools to encourage further take up.
- To promote the Essex Rivers Rural LEADER funding programme to businesses and parishes and encourage grant applications to be submitted and projects to be implemented.
- To work with Crossrail and partners on launch celebrations in May 2017 for Shenfield.

#### Projects in progress

- Implementation of the Borough Council Apprenticeship Programme continues to support the skills and employability agenda, Corporate Plan and ED Strategy priorities of the Council. The Programme include 3 parts: a) an in-house local authority apprentice in the Council (to be in post end January 2016), b) support for Brentwood Community Print to recruit two apprentices with mental health issues (in post), c) £10,000 towards a wage subsidy scheme to encourage 10 Brentwood employers/businesses to recruit 10 apprentices, working in partnership with Essex County Council's apprenticeship team. To date £8k has been spent with 8 apprenticeships being secured through the wage subsidy scheme.
- Following negotiations, a contract to develop a Brentwood Visitor and Location Website has now been agreed with NVG. The ED Team is currently working on a project plan and timescale and then will be working with NVG on project development over the next few months. A pilot website is planned to be launched in April 2016 for testing and a final website completed Summer 2016 for a grand launch Autumn 2016, possibly at the Brentwood Business Showcase.
- Work continues to implement the first ever 2015/16 Brentwood Business Showcase Event to support the Business Support and development priority of the ED Strategy and Council Corporate Plan. Initially it was agreed that this would



be delivered in March 2016. However following an initial tendering exercise in October 2015, the preferred supplier informed us that they were unable to undertake the work for us due to their own internal resourcing issues over the next 6 months. The project has been re-tendered and offered to Pro-actions to work closely with the ED team to deliver this event in October 2016.

- Work continues to progress well with the Brentwood Borough Renaissance Group to support a variety of activities and projects to promote the town centre and support its traders including the recent Lighting Up Brentwood, Shenfield Christmas Fayre (and the £2k secured by the Cluster for the sponsorship of the ice rink), the Ingatestone Victorian Evening and Kings Road Christmas Market.
- Another successful free business workshop was held in partnership with Pro-actions Ltd during November 2015 to support businesses with great leadership and management. Another is planned for end of January on Time Management. These events are always well attended with positive feedback.
- We have now completed the Brentwood Business Directory phase 2 data update and now have just over 5,000 businesses on the directory, 1850 with email addresses, which is a key tool when engaging with businesses and communicating any events or support available to them.

## **Report to the Council - 27 January 2016**

### **Committee: Environment & Housing Management**

**Chair: Councillor Chris Hossack**

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#### **Bins for West Horndon**

At the Environment & Housing Committee on 23 September 2015 it was agreed to implement a pilot scheme for the introduction of bins at a cost of £5,000.

However, at the December meeting of the Environment & Housing Committee, after positive discussions with West Horndon Parish Council, it was agreed to extend the pilot to a majority of the homes in the village.

The scheme will now include 650 homes, and they will be issued with two bins, a 240ltr bin for dry recycling waste, and 180ltr bin for residual waste. This will increase the cost of implementation from the initial £5,000 to approximately £20,000. It is felt that this will provide better data, as it will cover a full collection round, and provide a wider range of feedback from residents.

#### **Council Garage development sites**

The Housing department was granted planning permission on the 1 December 2015 on two sites - Fawters Close and Magdalen Gardens to develop affordable homes.

The Fawters Close site has planning permission to build 4 x single storey units. The Housing department is planning to retain ownership of the units for older persons over 65 years who are currently occupying larger family accommodation and wish to downsize to a smaller property.

The Magdalen Garden site has planning permission for 3 x 3 bedroom houses, which will be family accommodation.

Both schemes will be let to people currently on Brentwood Council housing register.

The procurement process is being finalised and will be completed by the end of March 2016.

#### **Rent Setting 2016/17**

The method of setting rents had changed in the Government's summer budget 2015: as part of the new Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015/16, it was announced that rents in the social housing sector were to be reduced by 1% a year for the next four years.

The total rent reduction to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) over the four year period would be £2,380,927.00. This is a significant reduction to income and will require the Council to make savings to HRA.

The Housing service, at the same time as the proposed rent reduction was taking place, was undergoing a transformation programme. As part of this transformation programme there was a need to improve the method of identifying and prioritising planned maintenance capital works to the Council's properties and to facilitate this, a full stock condition survey needed to be undertaken.

It was approved at Environment and Housing Committee to:

1. Decrease rent by 1% from April 2016 and for the next 4 years.
2. To stop non priority planned maintenance and capital programme works for 2016/17. This will reduce the Capital programme by £1 million in the first year (1 of 4 years) and enable the additional £1 million (rent reduction) to be spread over the following 3 years.
3. Freeze the proposed Services Charges at 2015/16, levels which will then be incorporated within the 2016/17 Budget.

### **Stock Condition Survey**

As part of the Housing transformation programme Officers have identified that Brentwood Borough Council currently held limited stock condition data on its HRA assets. It was proving problematic to appropriately identify properties that failed the Decent Homes standard, which required capital investment, which meant the Council is not delivering value for money. It is essential that the Council has robust property intelligence on all its properties to ensure that informed investment decisions are taken when selecting properties for capital works or planned maintenance. It was agreed the best approach is commission the employment of an external provider to undertake a 100% stock condition survey and produce a report including a future programme of capital works.

Environment and Housing Committee approved £210k to be used to procure a Stock Condition Survey. It is estimated the procurement process will be completed by the end March 2016.

## **Report to the Council – 27 January 2016**

**Committee: Planning and Licensing**

**Chairperson: Councillor Roger McCheyne**

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### **Licensing**

Consultation has ended on the Gambling Act 2005 and Licensing Act 2003 policies. Both have completed without representation or comments being received. Both policies form part of the agenda at this Council meeting for approval to publish with immediate effect.

The Gambling policy will be reviewed again over the following few months as originally outlined in the report to Planning and Licensing Committee. This follows the publication of new guidance and codes of practice by the Gambling Commission and Home Office respectively, which will now be incorporated into the Council's policy and re-consulted prior to adoption.

A further consultation is currently underway following revision of the Council's Street Trading and Market policy. This will run until early March, with comments reported back to Planning and Licensing Committee in April. All Members have been consulted and are advised that they may make comment on the revised policy direct to the licensing team.

### **Planning**

#### **Local Plan Update**

Members will note from tonight's agenda that we have now reached a key stage in our preparation of the Draft Local Plan for Brentwood. Having considered various site and policy options following extensive consultation through last year, we have now finalised our Draft Local Plan for formal public consultation. This Plan sets out our spatial strategy and includes the policies and proposal sites we expect to help us to deliver the highest quality of development in our Borough over the next 15 – 20 years.

We do have to make some tough decisions in our new Plan – none more so than the need to consider development on our precious green belt. However, if we are to meet our development needs for the future of Brentwood, this is something we must do in the most effective and sustainable way for our residents and businesses. We cannot shy away from making these difficult choices and I believe, that in the Draft Local Plan presented to the Council tonight, we can demonstrate a pragmatic and sustainable strategy for growth is being proposed for the benefit of Brentwood as a whole.

## **Modern Planning Service Update**

Following the recommendations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015 Policy, Finances and Resources Committee, a cross party Members Working Group was set up to review the Modern Planning Service. The Working Group has met on 3 separate occasions to assess the on-going Modern Planning Service and the various options available to improve the Council's Planning Service in the light of the current resources and corporate priorities.

As well as looking at best practice elsewhere in Essex for certain elements of the service, an internal audit was commissioned to look at how well the Modern Planning Service was operating in terms of email alerts and the recently introduced online planning system. The conclusions were that, overall, the new processes were in line with best practice elsewhere throughout Essex and that the new online service was now being used successfully.

However, it was acknowledged that there were still ways of the service being more effective and efficient and so an Action Plan, as set out below, was recommended. By implementing these actions, it is considered that the Modern Planning Service will be even better for our customers.

## **MODERN PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN**

1. Officers to engage proactively with members throughout the planning application process. This includes officers using initiative to alert members to information they are likely to find useful even though they haven't expressly asked for it. This would include alerting ward members to the referral deadlines when they have expressed an interest in a particular application. **IMMEDIATE**
2. Planning application case officers to "own" their cases throughout the process until decision notice is sent out. **IMMEDIATE**
3. Provide regular briefings for members and officers to share ideas on planning issues (e.g design, enforcement, local plan etc). To include legislation updates and emerging government policy. **JANUARY 2016**
4. Officers to work alongside members to continue to review and improve planning processes for all of our customers. **IMMEDIATE**
5. Committee meetings need to be refined and streamlined to use committee time more efficiently and effectively. Where possible, more reports should be

delegated to the Head of Planning to determine in consultation with Committee Chair to lessen Committee time. **JANUARY 2016**

6. Members need to make appointments to see officers to discuss applications. This will help officers prepare for the meeting in advance and also manage their time more effectively. Members will also always be assured that they get to meet the appropriate officer when they need to see them. **IMMEDIATE**
7. Members to send all requests to refer queries to “Referrals” inbox to channel enquiries to one place so we can coordinate/prioritise. Failure to do this will mean referral requests will not be considered. **IMMEDIATE**
8. Members should use a specific “Cllr X” email address so that officers can easily identify member emails regularly. This is also good practice re ensure clear delineation between officers and members in internal and external communications. **JANUARY 2016**
9. Whenever possible, referral requests must be submitted by day 28 of process (having liaised with case officer beforehand). This has been demonstrated to be best practice throughout Essex. **IMMEDIATE**
10. Members should not meet/discuss planning applications with applicants/developers on their own. Officers need to attend/lead these discussions so as not to prejudice the Council's position and ensure a consistent Brentwood Council message is always delivered to our clients. **IMMEDIATE**
11. Once the Committee agenda is published and reports have been made public, officers will arrange Planning Committee information sessions to allow any member to clarify any aspects of the reports being presented for decision. These meetings will normally be held within 5 days of the Committee meeting itself. **JANUARY 2016**
12. Neighbourhood notification letters to include details of ward members for reference – **IMMEDIATE**
13. Monthly “Live” Enforcement cases to be circulated to all members – **JANUARY 2016**
14. Appeals notification letters to be sent to members preferred address (home or pigeon-hole). **IMMEDIATE**
15. Continue to send list of applications “due to be determined” list. Members to be given 5 days (currently 2 days) to request referral prior to decision notice being sent out. This needs to be reviewed again in 3 months time to assess impact on the service to customers and performance figures. **IMMEDIATE**
16. Officers to produce a chart to show the timelines of the planning application process for members information. **IMMEDIATE**



## **Report to the Council - 27 January 2016**

**Committee: Policy, Finance and Resources**

**Chair: Councillor Louise McKinlay**

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### **Adoption of the Vision for Brentwood 2016-2019**

A new vision for Brentwood for 2016-2019 was adopted by the Committee. The vision sets out the strategic direction for the Council which will lead to projects and programmes being formulated in order to deliver the plan's objectives.

### **Licensing the Town Hall Rooms for Wedding, Civil and Celebratory Service**

The Committee agreed to apply for a license to have marriage ceremony rooms in which to hold weddings, civil and celebratory services. This could generate an income of £20,000 per annum based on historical data. This took into account on-going costs estimated at £22,000 and set up costs of £5,000.

The service would offer rooms for hire from Wednesday to Saturday, maximising revenue, whilst enabling Committee Rooms to be available on Mondays and Tuesdays for Council use. Committee Rooms would therefore be out of use day and evening from Wednesday to Saturday.

The Council would seek to commence the service by early 2016.

### **Town Centre and Town Hall Projects**

An update on the key corporate projects of the Council was provided. These were currently defined as:

- a) The Town Hall & Service Delivery Hub
- b) The Local Development Plan (LDP)
- c) The Town Centre (incorporating William Hunter Way)
- d) The Transformation Agenda of the Council

The above is not an inclusive list and other projects might be incorporated as determined by the committee. However such projects were defined as being integral to the delivery of the revised Corporate Plan 2016-2019.

### **Preliminary Medium Term Financial Plan**

The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) sets out the key financial management principles and budget assumptions. It is then used as the framework for the detailed



budget setting process to ensure that the Council's resources are managed effectively in order to meet its statutory responsibilities and deliver the priorities of the Council, over the medium term.

The preliminary position was shown in the report and the final budget will be approved by Council on 2 March 2016.

### **Income Generation Update**

The Committee received an update on a variety of income generating activities being undertaken by the Council and agreed further actions in respect of these areas.

### **Income from Property Investment**

Following a review of the original property acquisition business case by the Committee it was agreed that the property acquisition policy be reviewed and the size of the acquisition fund is revisited.

In addition the Council's existing portfolio will be considered for development opportunities and a business case presented to a future Committee.

### **Update on Planning Process Working Group**

The Modern Planning Service has been operating for over 6 months. It is therefore prudent to review the processes and procedures to make sure that they are helping deliver the level of service that the Council and its customers expect.

A Members' Working Group was established to carry out the review and as a result actions were agreed by the Committee and authorization of any further service improvements are delegated to the Head of Planning and Development in consultation with the Chair of the Planning and Licensing Committee.

### **Hutton Community Centre**

Following an informal tender process the Committee received details of the bids that were received to run Hutton Community Centre. It was agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Head of Paid Service, Section 151 Officer in consultation with the Chair of Policy, Finance and Resources to negotiate the terms of lease on Hutton Community Centre.