1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report sets out the Council’s proposed new priorities and accompanying pledges until 2020. They were identified after listening to feedback from residents via customer services, surveys and other research. The council also reviewed local data such as employment rates, crime levels, housing and environment statistics. The priorities are designed to address some of the areas of concern most often cited by members of the community. It also reflected the ambitions of the Leader of the Council.

1.2 During the summer of 2017, a mass consultation took place to get the views of residents on the new priorities and pledges. This was the biggest conversation with residents the Council has staged to date, with nearly three and half thousand people participating. The results demonstrated strong support from residents for the three priorities and pledges. Traffic issues such as parking, congestion and air quality, were also raised with sufficient frequency for the Council to consider including an additional a pledge about this.

1.3 If adopted, the priorities will enable the Council to focus effectively on the issues of most concern to its residents and demonstrate that they are a council that listens and responds to its community.

1.4 A summary of high-level findings from the consultation is included as Appendix A.
2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1.1 Adopt the Council priorities and pledges in Appendix B for the period up to 2020; and

2.1.2 Agree the recommendation to include an additional pledge in response to feedback that arose during the consultation.

2.1.3 Note that further interrogation and analysis of the feedback will take place over the next few months and a full report on residents' views will be released in the new year. This information will help the council to have an even greater understanding of residents' views and will help shape the council's policy decisions going forward.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 The Council introduced a Resident Insight Programme in 2011 in order to regularly understand residents’ views and perceptions. The programme has included the thrice yearly Resident Insight Survey (RIS), along with other more focused qualitative research and occasional ‘mass conversations’ on key overarching topics. The Council’s commitment to listening to residents and acting on their concerns was formalised in the four key principles of Redefining Waltham Forest 2020. The first two of these principles being: Resident Focused and Insight Led.

3.2 In devising a set of priorities and pledges for the new Leader’s first year of office, the Council drew on insight gathered from residents. It also used data from Neighbourhoods and customer service teams, crime statistics and other local insight.

3.3 The priorities and pledges also reflect the aims of the new Leader of the Council, Cllr Clare Coghill and provided direction for a programme of work for her first year in office.

3.4 In May 2017 a series of focus groups with residents was convened with the aim of exploring residents’ views and perceptions in more detail. An earlier version of the new priorities was also discussed in these groups. At this time there were five priorities. The findings from these groups enabled the priorities to be condensed into three. Topics raised in these groups also informed some of the pledges under each priority.

3.5 The mass conversation to consult residents on the new priorities was called ‘Coffee and Conversation’. The concept recognised the borough’s diverse and popular café culture, and the nature of cafes as a place to discuss matters between friends. An online survey entitled ‘Have Your Say on the Future of the Borough’ was the primary instrument for collecting residents’ views. This was launched on 30 June and closed on 30 September. Responses to the survey were driven through an external communications campaign and a series of live roadshow events. A marquee designed as a pop-up coffee shop was present at five of the Council’s summer Get Together events, as well as an additional one-off event in Walthamstow Town Square. Residents could enjoy a free coffee while completing the survey alone or as an assisted interview. Councillors were often on hand at the roadshows to hear residents’ views directly.
3.6 The total number of responses to the survey was 3,315. This is nearly twice the number of people who engaged in the previous mass conversation held in 2014.

3.7 The three priorities on which residents were consulted in the mass conversation were:

- Keep Waltham Forest clean and safe
- Work to ensure everyone has a decent roof over their head
- Improve our residents’ life chances

3.8 In the survey, residents were asked if they agreed that each priority pledges were, “the right thing for the Council to be focusing on”. Residents could then add their own ideas for each priority in a free-text comment box entitled, ‘What else do you think is important?’ After commenting on the three priorities, a further comment box question invited residents to suggest, “One thing that would improve the quality of life in the borough”.

3.9 This was a very open-ended, qualitative survey and most respondents took the opportunity to set out their views in some detail. Many respondents commented on numerous topics – even within each individual question. The amount of data this has generated is therefore considerable, and it will take some time to analyse it all properly. The results shown in Appendix A have been obtained through a preliminary phase of analysis based mainly on the frequency of certain words and phrases occurring in the responses. Further analysis will provide a better understanding of the sentiment and context applied to the comments, but already we can see a good indication of the types of subjects that respondents were most concerned about.

3.10 It should also be noted that the 3,315 respondents were a self-selecting sample and no weighting has been applied. In several key areas the sample is not fully representative of the borough’s population. For example it is skewed towards women at ratio of roughly 60:40. Also, residents identifying as White British and those who have lived in the borough for more than 10 years are also overrepresented.

3.11 What can be said with certainty is that all three priorities were given a strong endorsement from respondents. The average rate of agreement across all three priorities was 86%. Only 1% of respondents disagreed with all three.

3.12 The first priority - Keep Waltham Forest clean and safe - reiterates one of the five 2015-2018 priorities and reflects residents’ frequently expressed concerns over environmental issues such as fly-tipping, littering and dog fouling. As for safety, results of the RIS suggest that most residents do feel safe in the borough. However there were repeated mentions of personal safety issues raised in the focus groups, as well as some high profile knife crime incidents occurring in recent months. The pledges identified for this priority were therefore:

- Crackdown on fly tipping hotspots and prosecute the perpetrators
- Work with the Police to reduce antisocial behaviour and knife crime
- Make sure our town centres are vibrant and welcoming

3.13 This was the priority that received the highest level of agreement from respondents, at 89%. It also received the highest number of additional comments (1,983). The range of topics that residents talked about in these comments was extremely diverse, and so the quantities of responses for each are fairly small. The most frequent type of responses were those mentioning the Police. In the majority of cases these residents were calling
for an increased police presence; either more police officers, or more visible policing. Fly tipping was the second biggest concern, followed by littering.

3.14 The additional topics that residents mentioned in highest frequencies tended to be concerned with traffic and highways. Specific mentions of the Mini Holland programme (of which 15% were positive) were the fourth most frequent type of comment. This was followed by parking and air quality – in nearly all cases linked to traffic. The Council should therefore consider acknowledging these comments by including an additional pledge under this priority that commits to tackling some of these issues.

3.15 The second priority - Ensure everyone has a decent roof over their head - proposed four pledges:

- Prioritise affordable housing for local residents
- Help our young people get a decent home in the borough
- Push for more services such as GP surgeries and schools as part of new developments to benefit all residents
- Improve the quality of housing in the borough

3.16 Generally, the 1,498 comments made in this question tended to mirror the pledges. A lack of affordable housing is consistently one of the top three biggest concerns among respondents to the RIS, and it was the most frequently mentioned issue in this question by a significant margin. Many respondents questioned the term itself – how ‘affordable’ this type of housing actually is, and to whom.

3.17 Second most frequent were comments calling for increased social housing, and third were references to landlords – in most cases the need to tackle those that are unscrupulous and irresponsible.

3.18 The pledges proposed for the third priority – Improve our residents’ life chances – were:

- Help residents gain the skills that will get them into work
- Improve access to affordable childcare
- Tackle isolation and loneliness in older people

3.19 Services for older people were the subject of 21% of all comments in this question – mentioned nearly twice as frequently as the second biggest topic, which was childcare. Mentions of childcare were usually in the contexts of affordability and sufficiency. Opportunities for young people and skills for work also featured strongly in the responses. Mini Holland tended to be mentioned here from a point of view that it causes access issues for elderly or mobility-impaired people.

3.20 The final open-ended question in the survey gave residents the opportunity to state what they felt was the single biggest issue in the borough, and how they thought it could be addressed. A total of 2,378 comments were provided. The nature of the question meant these comments covered a broad range of topics, so the percentage frequencies for each are all low.

3.21 Comments mentioning Mini Holland occurred with the most frequency in this question. There were a range of opinions expressed about the scheme, many critical but also some in favour. The second most frequently cited issue was air quality – one of the biggest issues across the whole survey. Parking ranking fourth in this question also demonstrates how prevalent comments about traffic and highways were in the survey responses. Overall, issues related to roads and traffic were the most frequent type of response in the survey. Although it should be noted that these comments represented many
different opinions. For example, issues such as the need to improve road safety and tackle irresponsible driving occurred in significant numbers.

3.22 Support for all three proposed priorities and pledges has been evidenced through robust and democratically representative research with residents. We therefore recommend that the Council adopt the priorities and pledges set out in Appendix B until April 2020.

3.23 We also recommend that an additional pledge is added under the first priority (Keep Waltham Forest clean and safe):

- Tackle air pollution and make transport in the borough work for everyone.

4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

4.1 It was not necessary to consider any other options, the proposal is a statutory obligation.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

5.1 These priorities supersede the arrangements to support the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and will form the basis of departmental work plans in the coming years.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 Please see Appendix A. In summary, the proposed priorities were based on a range of evidence and insight including findings from the quota-based Resident Insight Surveys and focus groups which are demographically representative of the population. While the subsequent online consultation, was “opt in” and thus not representative, there was strong endorsement for the proposed priorities, with an average level of importance of 86% across the three priorities.

6.2 The persistent reference to traffic issues, such as congestion, air quality and road safety, indicate a significant that this is an area of concern for a lot of residents. Based on this evidence, the Council should consider acknowledging this by including a pledge to addressing some of these issues. The most appropriate place for this pledge would be the ‘clean and safe’ priority.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

Enabling the Council to direct its resources more effectively on the core priorities of residents will deliver better value for money for them. However the priorities need to be aligned to the level of Council resources; this will be a continuous process as austerity continues.

7.2 Legal

The Council has power to set priorities to direct the delivery of its services. These priorities can be considered when making decisions about the discharge of Council functions alongside the various legal considerations,
e.g. statutory duties to deliver services, finance, equalities and its public law duty to make rational decisions.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

This is a high-level report that will trigger the development of more detailed proposals and projects to deliver the priorities. Detailed impact assessments of the equality and diversity of each subsequent initiative will be undertaken. However, it is important that the priorities are consistent with the public sector equality duty in s.149 Equality Act 2010 and do not establish a policy which may be indirectly discriminatory. The PSED will be considered when priorities and policies are implemented by services. An equality analysis has been completed (Appendix B) which has not identified any potential for negative impact on those with protected equality characteristics and suggests that the proposed priorities are likely to make a significant contribution to the advancement of equality for particular groups.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

By developing these longer-term priorities, the Council is better placed to promote the sustainability of the work that sits under each priority. Most of the priorities and pledges positively reinforce sustainable behaviour.

7.5 Council Infrastructure

If adopted, to promote the new priorities internally to staff and externally to residents and partners will require resource within the Communications team. This can be delivered within existing resources and structures. There are no other direct implications for the Council’s infrastructure.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

Resident Insight Survey Wave 17 Report, July 2017

Resident Satisfaction and priorities focus group report, May 2017