

Report to the Council

Subject: Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio

Date: 22 April 2014

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller

Recommending:

That the report of the Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety

West Area Local Policing Area Analyst post

The West Area Local Policing Area Analyst post hosted by Epping Forest District Council has recently been highlighted as best practice by the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, Lindsay Whitehouse. As a result, funding has been agreed by Epping Forest, Harlow, Brentwood and Thurrock Community Safety Partnerships for a further year.

PCC's New Initiatives Fund – Mobile CCTV cameras

The Council's Community Safety team has been successful in a bid to the Police and Crime Commissioner's New Initiatives Fund for five Abus mobile camera systems, which are used alongside other interventions to protect vulnerable victims in the District. The cameras are installed in partnership with Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF), can be used for a set period of time and have the option of being purchased by the user at the end of this period.

Loughton High Street CCTV scheme

The contractor for the refurbishment and expansion of Loughton High Street's CCTV network has been appointed, and work will commence on 24 April. The number in the area is being increased from six to 30, and the coverage will now extend to Traps Hill.

Domestic Homicide Review

The work of the Domestic Homicide Review Panel is now reaching a conclusion, with the Panel considering its final report and the recommendations it wishes to make to the Home Office. As Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership, I hope to submit the report within the usual six month time limit.

Safeguarding

The Council was subject to a comprehensive Safeguarding audit at the end of last year as part of a county-wide assessment of local authorities, NHS and other statutory organisations. This was the first combined audit of children, young people and vulnerable adults and included new themed criteria, against which the Council was required to measure its performance.

The audit was completed by means of a 'self-assessment' process which judged the ability of the 'whole Council' to meet its responsibilities under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. As a result the Council was found to be 'not meeting' 10% and only 'partly meeting' 55% of its requirements; therefore only 35% of the Council's arrangements for Safeguarding fully meet the standards required. Particular weaknesses were identified under the theme of

Embedding Policy across the organisation, and this led to Cabinet agreeing a report which recommended the establishment of Safeguarding Officer and Admin Assistant posts for a fixed period of two years, in order to bring the Council up to the required standards.

One area where the Council was seen to be 'not meeting' the specified criteria was in relation to the training of elected members. Currently, only about 20 members have received training, either through the Council or in the course of their work with external organisations. The Council has therefore developed a condensed member training session, tailored specifically to the role of councillors, which lasts for 1 1/2 hours; this was trialled in October and found to be very useful. A series of training courses is therefore currently being arranged, to ensure that all members can access this essential training.

In addition the Council has recently developed a new Safeguarding Policy and set of procedures which were formally agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 March and will be made available on the Council's intranet.

The document clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Council and identifies key officers who are able to provide support and advice to colleagues and members. It also sets out the Council's Mission Statement in respect of Safeguarding which is given below:

"Epping Forest District Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children, young people and vulnerable adults, as service users, residents and visitors to the area. The Council acknowledges the importance of working with partner agencies to ensure that children have safe, healthy and happy childhoods and that young people and vulnerable adults are given the support they need to enjoy quality of life and well-being".

This Mission Statement is underpinned by the following:

- valuing, listening to and respecting children, young people and vulnerable adults as well as promoting their welfare and protection;
- safe and robust recruitment, supervision and Safeguarding training for all staff working with the public;
- provision of a current and comprehensive Safeguarding Policy and related procedures which is accessible and promoted to all staff;
- efficient and effective reporting of concerns, incidents and allegations;
- strategic planning and decision-making which considers the impact on children, young people and vulnerable adults.

I hope all members will take the time to read the Safeguarding Policy and to book a place on one of the training courses available over the next few months.

New Safeguarding posts

I am pleased to advise Council that we have now appointed to the two new Safeguarding roles that were agreed by Cabinet in December. Members will recall that the posts are initially for a period of two years, in order for the Council to address key actions identified within the Section 11 audit. Full details of the successful candidates will be notified at the next meeting.

Parking

As indicated in my last report, Cabinet has agreed to implement some interim increases in car parking tariffs, ahead of a more fundamental review. These changes will come into effect in the week following the May Day Bank Holiday.

I am pleased to announce that, following a recent re-assessment of all the Council's car parks, they have retained their 'Park Mark' accreditation, which means that the car parks are

in good repair and provide a safe environment for those who use them. This is good news, and I congratulate the Council's parking team for maintaining the required standards.

The North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) continues to implement a number of parking restriction schemes across the district and I can inform members that earlier this month the following schemes became operational:

Ladyfields, Loughton
Lushes Road, Loughton
Borders Lane and Ladyfields, Loughton
Oawood Hill junction with Chigwell Lane/ Rectory Lane
Forest View Road /Connaught Avenue, Loughton

The Buckhurst Hill Parking Review scheme is progressing satisfactorily. Final plans for the formal public consultation have been modified, where possible, to take account of residents' responses to the informal consultation. I have been advised by Highways engineers that the formal public consultation will have begun by the time of the Council meeting.

Countrycare

Since January, Countrycare has been running its regular volunteer days with good numbers of volunteers turning up. Sites worked on include Springs Pond Wood in Ongar, Linder's Field in Buckhurst Hill, Chigwell Row Wood and Bobbingworth Nature Reserve.

The new Countrycare kids' magazine has been launched and distributed to local libraries, with an electronic format version emailed to those on the mailing list. At the end of March, Countrycare and the Friends of Ongar Orchard spent a day planting a mix of native wildflower plugs with 26 children from Bright Stars Nursery and Shelley Primary School.

Countrycare also worked with Essex Wildlife Trust to coppice some large willows next to the River Roding, with the cuttings then used to plant up the areas of the river bank next to the playing fields, the intention being that the cuttings should take root and help to stabilise the bank which is currently eroding.

Trees and Landscape

Alongside their normal workload, the Trees and Landscape team have been dealing with an increased number of tree failures and concerns about dangerous trees, stemming from this year's exceptional winter weather.

There has been external recognition of the team's pioneering work in community engagement from two sources. Chris Neilan has had a proposal for a paper on the subject of 'The Extent and Effectiveness of Community Engagement in Urban Forestry in the UK' accepted for the International Research Conference on Trees in Towns at Birmingham this month. His paper focuses on our programme of Community Tree Strategies and initiatives such as favourite trees, and the main research element is a survey of the extent of comparable community engagement by local authorities, presenting examples of good practice from around the country.

In this connection, I was delighted to attend the launch of the action plan for the Loughton Community Tree Strategy, which will develop in partnership with the Town Council, working also with the Conservators of Epping Forest, tree wardens, schools and community groups.

Chris Neilan was also the keynote speaker at the European Tree of the Year awards for 2013, presented in the presence of the EU Commissioner for the Environment at the European Parliament in March. This is a result of his work on what he has called 'soft power', based on the approach which the Trees and Landscape team have developed in

partnership with Countrycare, focussing on community engagement using initiatives aimed at using persuasion and encouragement to protect trees alongside their use of legal powers, such as tree preservation orders.

Conservation

Following the publication of the Staples Road and York Hill Conservation Area Character Appraisals, work on those for the Baldwins Hill and Copped Hall Conservation Areas has come to the forefront. The creation of an Article 4 Direction to remove some permitted development rights within the Baldwins Hill Conservation Area, in line with the Directions already in place for the Staples Road and York Hill Conservation Areas, is currently being considered. The final decision will lie with members and, should the decision be supportive, the Article 4 Direction will be drawn up, closely followed by publication of the Appraisal which will reflect the changes in permitted development rights. It is likely that the Appraisal for the Copped Hall Conservation Area will include amendments to the boundary. As in previous cases, there will be a period of consultation with residents before publication to gather their views.

The Appraisal for Waltham Abbey Conservation Area will follow. A visit was made to the Epping Forest District Museum before its temporary closure to seek out documentary sources, and help is also likely to be sought from Waltham Abbey Historical Society as part of the research.

Information leaflets on the designation of two new Conservation Areas (St John's, Buckhurst Hill and Theydon Bois) are being prepared for circulation to residents. These leaflets are intended to raise awareness of the new Conservation Areas, for which there appears to be some support, and the implications for their designation. Work on the formal designation of these two Areas will follow publication of the Waltham Abbey Conservation Area Character Appraisal.