

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 16 December 2014

Subject: Safer, Greener & Transport

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller

Recommending: That the Report of the Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety

The Community Safety team continues to evolve, with both Safeguarding officers now working effectively within the structure. Currently safeguarding referrals account for 15 per cent of the 450 cases dealt with by the team.

A recent long standing dispute between neighbours in the Ongar area, which had been acting as a drain on both Community Safety officers and police resources, has finally been resolved with the use of mediation. Since the end of the mediation process four weeks ago, there have been no further calls to EFDC or police. The Council's anti-social behaviour officer worked with private and council tenants, police, EFDC housing management, Ongar Town Council and an independent mediator to secure this positive result.

After receiving complaints concerning anti-social behaviour in and around Council buildings in Ongar, the Community Safety team installed a rapid deployment camera, and within a short period of time a local youth was identified from images recorded. Our ASB Investigator, working with the local policing team, sent a warning letter to the parents of the youth and no further complaints have been received.

The productivity of officers in the Community Safety team continues to improve. CCTV downloads have increased from the same period last year by nearly 19 per cent (185 to 220 cases). There has also been an increase in money generated from insurance company requests for downloads, currently to just over £1000 in the last 11 months. Investigations into anti-social behaviour and the safety of high risk victims of domestic abuse and other crime have increased by 8 per cent (356 to 449 cases).

The Domestic Homicide Review relating to the death of Junella Valentine, who was killed at Waltham Abbey in October 2013, has now been completed, and the Report has been submitted to the Home Office, where it will be assessed by its Quality Assurance Panel. This was a tragic case. I took over the chairmanship of the Review panel following the resignation of the previous Chairman in April this year.

The coming year is likely to be a challenging one for the Community Safety team as the new ASB powers start to be used and refined and our policing partners continue to re-structure. However, I am confident that the team will rise to that challenge and continue to deliver a highly professional service to the residents of the District.

Police and Crime Commissioner

The Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, Nick Alston, is due to launch a new 'Essex Victims Gateway' website shortly. This is designed to provide information to

victims and signpost them towards a range of local support services available to them. The portal is being developed in consultation with the PCC's Victims' Forum, to ensure it meets the needs of victims in the most effective way possible.

Safeguarding

Following appointments earlier this year to new safeguarding roles within the Council, we have for the first time been able to compile accurate statistics relating to incidents concerning children, young people and vulnerable adults throughout the District.

The recent Corporate Safeguarding Group meeting was presented with figures covering the period from June to October this year. I am bound to say I was surprised at the extent of safeguarding issues arising across Epping Forest and feel it is important that members are also made aware.

I can report that during this period of just five months, 47 safeguarding referrals were made by our officers to Essex County Council Social Care Child and Adult Services. Some of these referrals related to adults with serious mental health conditions as well as neglect, and others to physical abuse and neglect of children. There was also a raft of domestic abuse cases. It has been identified by Essex County Council that in the majority of cases where there is neglect and abuse of children, there are also incidences of domestic violence within the household.

In addition to these referrals made by our staff, there is a very high level of domestic abuse cases within the District that are referred straight to the police and to agencies such as Safer Places at Harlow. Unfortunately we are aware that around 650 cases of domestic abuse in the District are reported annually and out of these, a regular 12-14 cases are identified as 'High Risk'.

Members will be aware that the Epping Forest District Community Safety Partnership, which I chair, has had to undertake two Domestic Homicide Reviews in the last two years, so the gravity of the situation should not be understated. Members should be vigilant in their dealings with local residents, as we are under a duty to safeguard the public from harm.

Energy efficiency and fuel poverty

Essex Energy Switch

In my Report to the Council's meeting in November, I gave details of the Essex Energy Switch, promoted by Essex County Council, which we are supporting as partners. This initiative gives householders an opportunity to consider a possible change of supplier for their gas and/or electricity in a way which minimises the risk and is far more likely to see a reduction in their bills. Under the scheme, suppliers will bid for the right to supply those residents who sign up, offering them a better deal on the cost of energy by combining their purchasing power.

The scheme has been open since 3 December, and registration should take place by 2 February 2015, without any obligation at that stage. The auction will take place on 3 February and those who have registered will receive an email incorporating a new gas and electricity offer on 13 February, valid for one month for a decision to be made whether or not to accept it.

The first Essex Energy Switch took place in early 2014, when there were about 4,500 registrations. A third of those accepted the offer made to them, securing an average saving of more than £200 each.

Anyone who is not connected to the mains gas supply can still save money by joining the Rural Community Council of Essex community oil buying scheme.

Protecting vulnerable residents

The Council's Green Corporate Working Party meeting which I attended on 1 December received a presentation from UK Power Networks, the electricity distribution company for our region. Now that winter is truly with us, their staff will be on high alert to get the power back on in the event of cuts due to high winds or any other cause - a process involving continuous assessment of the weather risk. If and when power cuts take place, a team of 1800 'scouts' will scour the region, carrying out damage assessments and making safe, ahead of the engineers whose job is to restore power.

UK Power Networks have also recently launched an initiative addressing fuel poverty, and have held a series of young carers' workshops, with over 90 per cent positive feedback. They will shortly be rolling out a programme of community surgeries to help residents who have particular problems relating to energy.

Countrycare

During November Countrycare started work at Wormley Primary School, working with staff and pupils to create a Forest Schools area around the edge of the playing field. This consisted of team activities for the staff including building a bridge, balance boards, a bird feeding area and stag beetle habitat. Eventually this will all make up a wildlife and sensory trail for the pupils for use in lessons. Countrycare has since been in to the school to plant 500 trees with 60 pupils from year 5, to create a hedgerow along the northern boundary of the playing field.

Countrycare has also planted a ginkgo tree at Weald Common Local Nature Reserve to replace a dead one, which has been left in place as standing deadwood for wildlife.

Meanwhile, a full programme of well attended weekly volunteer days has continued. As part of an agreement with Sheering Parish Council, Countrycare volunteers have spent two days at Sheering Copse, starting to transform an area of neglected ancient woodland, to the delight of local residents.

Conservation

As heralded in my last Report, a new Assistant Conservation Officer, Frederique Caillat, started on 17 November and has been working on the Waltham Abbey Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Her appointment will enable work on several forthcoming Character Appraisals to progress, providing valuable benefits for the historic built environment of the District.

Car parking

Car parks strategy

The district wide public consultation that took place in the summer months provided some helpful input into the review of the Council off-street car parking strategy. I

now intend to bring a report to Cabinet in early 2015, setting out the revised strategy including proposed amendments to the tariff structure.

The procurement for the replacement of old pay and display machines which are effectively obsolete, and for which the acquisition of spare parts has become increasingly difficult, has been successful, resulting in three companies submitting good quality tender bids. Metric Group has been awarded the contract to install new pay and display meters in all Council car parks.

Parking Reviews

Essex Highways are finalising the legal paperwork for the official Traffic Order which will enable the introduction of the new parking restrictions in Buckhurst Hill to take place. In parallel, the design drawings and related information have been submitted for the preparation of cost estimates to carry out the signing and lining work.

Once this is completed, work will start on the Loughton Broadway Parking Review in the New Year.

North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP)

At the most recent meeting of the NEPP Joint Committee on 16 October, each district / borough / City Council was asked to submit four schemes. I am pleased to say that in the event we managed to get six schemes approved for Epping Forest. These are at: Carisbrook Close, Epping; Hillyfields, Loughton; Castle Street, Ongar; Park Avenue, Hastingwood, Woodland Road, Loughton; and Sewardstone Road, Waltham Abbey.

Epping Forest Community Transport

Epping Forest Community Transport (EFCT) began life under the wing of Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF), the umbrella organisation for charities in the Epping Forest District. In 2011, having become a fairly large project, EFCT left VAEF and was taken under the wing of Essex County Council, with a view to it becoming an independent charity. This meant forming a board of directors/trustees, setting up a bank account, business plan, obtaining company and charitable status and all the other fundamentals required for the running of an independent business. Councillor Will Breare-Hall is currently the Chairman, and Councillor Richard Bassett is also a trustee.

The journey towards independence has taken much longer than anticipated, but ECC Portfolio Holder, Councillor Rodney Bass, finally approved the Key Decision allowing EFCT to become an independent charity as from Monday 1 December 2014.

EFCT is located at the Social Care Building, St Johns Road, Epping CM16 5EB. It has a workforce of eight people, consisting of four paid office staff and four paid drivers. There are also approximately 11 volunteer drivers and two office volunteers.

EFCT's mission is to run an effective transport service which benefits the lives of the community at an affordable cost. It is for people who have difficulty accessing conventional transport, either because of restricted mobility or because there is no alternative form of passenger transport available. Its vision would be to operate a service that allows everyone to be able to experience freedom of travel.

The provision of a door to door accessible transport service enables disabled, rurally isolated people to remain independent by providing transport which allows them to do such basic tasks as shopping and attending medical appointments. Epping Forest Community Transport wants to give the Epping Forest community freedom of choice, improving the quality of life at an affordable cost.

At present, EFCT have approximately 500 individual and 60 group members who use the service, and the scheme enables an average of 2,600 passenger journeys to be made each month.

EFCT currently owns six mini buses, and the social cars are made available by volunteer drivers using their own vehicles.

At the moment Epping Forest Community Transport is short of volunteers, social car drivers, minibus drivers and escorts to assist with the groups. If members know of anyone who is able to offer their time, please get in touch.