

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 3 November 2015

Subject: Environment

Portfolio Holder: Councillor W Breare-Hall

Recommending:

That the report of the Environment Portfolio Holder be noted.

Waste Management

The performance of the Council's waste and recycling contractor, Biffa Municipal, has now significantly improved, with the number of missed collections returning to the historically low level our residents expect. I continue to work with Biffa's senior management to ensure these improvements are fully embedded, and that the service resumes delivery of a uniformly high standard across the district.

Members will be aware that a number of residents requested financial compensation for their missed refuse collections. Cabinet decided that compensation payments would not be made so all such claims have been refused and residents were advised of their right to make a submission to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if they wanted to pursue their claim for compensation.

The first such complaint has now been determined, and the LGO decided not to investigate it. Accordingly, the LGO made no recommendation for compensation to be paid. The outcome of this 'test case' will be significant in determining the outcome of other similar claims.

Grounds Maintenance

As the season's mowing operations draw to a close, the Grounds Maintenance team are busy preparing their winter works programme. As well as the cyclic bed maintenance, hedge trimming and shrub pruning, this work will also incorporate the planting of many thousands of spring flowering bulbs, numerous hardy shrubs and a wide variety of new trees.

Following a successful recruitment process, a new tree officer joined the Grounds team this month. Their key role is to help manage the tree maintenance contracts and ensure that proper care is given to the many thousands of Council owned trees on streets and in woodlands that help make up the district's special landscape.

Noise nuisance

On 8th October 2015, Christopher Piper, of 38 Marlescroft Way, Loughton, was prosecuted by the Council for breaching a Noise Abatement Notice served on him on 11th June 2015, which required him to maintain the volume of music and amplified sound emanating from his property at a level that would not cause a statutory nuisance to the occupiers of noise sensitive premises. The breach occurred on 19th June 2015.

Mr Piper failed to attend a hearing in Chelmsford Magistrates Court and the Magistrates found him guilty of the offence in his absence. They imposed a fine of £120. He was also ordered to pay a contribution towards the Council's prosecution costs of £200, the new Criminal Court charge of £520 and a Victim surcharge of £20.

I can also report that Essex Police obtained a Closure Order in respect of the property on 18th September 2015, and the Council obtained a forthwith possession order in Edmonton County Court on 6th October. An eviction date is currently awaited from the County Court bailiff.

Flooding and Water

As the Lead Local Flood Authority for the county, Essex County Council (ECC) have recently launched two tranches of funding that are available for residents, landowners, and organisations, such as town and parish councils, who are looking to address issues relating to flooding. The first is known as Property Level Protection (PLP) and makes funding of up to £5k available to residents who have been affected by flooding, to help them purchase and install physical measures to protect their homes. The scheme is being administered by a private company on behalf of ECC and the money is distributed on a first come, first served basis. The overall budget available is £100k, so residents are being encouraged to register their interest promptly.

The second funding stream, known as the Flood Programme Grant, totals £400k and is intended to contribute towards the delivery of bespoke flood prevention schemes that are primarily aimed at protecting residential properties. Sources of flooding can include Ordinary Watercourses, ground water and surface water flooding. Flooding from rivers is excluded as this is principally the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

More information can be found on ECC's website. Officers from the Council's own Engineering Drainage & Water Team would be happy to discuss and advise potential applicants and look for synergies with Epping Forest's own flood risk reduction proposals and aspirations.

Private Water Supplies

On the 8th October 2015, Cabinet approved the creation of a new permanent post to help deal with the sub-standard private water supplies and drainage systems found on most of the horticultural nursery sites within the district. The work is complex, time consuming and difficult to effectively deliver. Officers have met with a representative from the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI), where the problems being found on these sites were discussed, and a DWI Principal Inspector has accompanied officers on visits to a range of premises with private water supplies. Officers hoped that this would assist the DWI in understanding the very unique challenges this Council is faced with.

Fly tipping

I'm pleased to report that problems experienced in Q1 as a result of Biffa's difficulties were rectified in Q2. Figures for the period 01/07/15 to 30/09/15 show that 211 out of 232 fly tipping incidents were cleared within the target. This equates to 90.95%.