

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 3 November 2015

**Subject:** Safer, Greener and Transport (Updated Report)

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor G Waller

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### **Recommending:**

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

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### **Community Safety**

#### *Local policing*

I am sure members are aware that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex and the Chief Constable recently announced new proposals for local policing across the county. The planned changes are designed to address a range of challenges for Essex Police, including the changing landscape of crime, which has seen the escalation of crimes such as domestic abuse, cyber-crime and child sexual exploitation. Added to this are significant financial challenges, with expected cuts of £63 million by 2019/20 from an annual budget of around £262 million.

At the meeting that I attended to learn of the proposals, we were advised that across the county there are 80 police buildings, mostly in a poor state of repair, which require around £30 million of maintenance work to bring them up to standard and £2 million per year just to maintain their current condition. Following careful analysis on usage viability, the police estate will therefore be reduced to 30 buildings strategically placed within Essex. In Epping Forest district, this will see the closure of Epping and Ongar police stations and the front desk of Loughton police station, although the latter will remain as an operational base. The nearest police station open to the public will be in Harlow. We were however informed that very few people now actually call at police stations and that new technology will enable people to use secure online systems for reporting crime and tracking the progress of investigations.

Unfortunately such large scale financial cuts can only be met by reducing the largest police overhead - its workforce, with 83 per cent of the police budget spent on staff. At a local level, this means that the new Community Policing Team for Epping Forest and Brentwood will be made up of one local policing and partnership inspector, two sergeants, 10 constables, one dedicated youth officer and seven PCSOs. This is a significant reduction for the area, but we are advised that the team will be locally based and will prioritise protecting people from harm, preventing and reducing crime, bringing criminals to justice and engaging with the public. It has however been proposed that what is described as 'low level ASB' will be dealt with by local authorities and Community Safety Partnerships within the existing resources available.

Other more serious issues such as organised crime, as well as crime involving gangs, drugs and violent/sexual assault, will be dealt with by special teams assigned on an ad hoc basis to the district. The Council and Community Safety Partnership (CSP) will continue to operate in close cooperation with the local policing team, but we need to make decisions on

the priority areas of work for the Community Safety team when the new arrangements come into effect.

It cannot be denied that, with fewer local police resources to call on, the perception will be that the public can no longer expect the same level of service as in the past. We have held a meeting with the local police commander to assess how the Council and CSP can respond most effectively to the pending changes in order to mitigate their impact. We are working on a number of ideas and I shall keep members informed as they are developed.

### **Safeguarding**

The following safeguarding cases have been dealt with by our safeguarding team during September, but I am informed that although the statistics are lower for this period than for August, we have had several cases that required intensive staff time. These have included a case of hoarding and significant self-neglect which involved collaborative working across our Neighbourhoods and Community Safety teams, Princess Alexandra Hospital and Essex Fire and Rescue service.

Total number of concerns received by the Safeguarding team for this period: ..	16
Number of children-only concerns (where children were victims): .....	6
Number of adult-only concerns (where adults were victims): .....	9
Number of concerns that involved both (adult and children were victims): .....	1
Total number of children involved:.....	11
Total number of adults involved: .....	10

### **Countrycare**

Since my last report Countrycare has continued with its well-attended regular volunteer days. One was on the Roding Valley Fen, assisting the Essex Wildlife Trust Ranger. The others were at Roughtally's Wood, Chigwell Row Wood, Linder's Field and Swaine's Green. A hedgelaying day also took place at Linder's Field in early October.

Two extra days were spent at Belhus Woods near South Ockendon, coppicing hazel. This is an ECC owned wood managed by the Woodland Trust. The latter does not have the resource to coppice annually and Countrycare needed stakes and binders for the hedgelaying season which is about to start. Countrycare therefore did the coppicing and took the materials away in lieu of payment, representing good conservation practice and partnership working. Discussions are under way for further partnership working in the future.

Countrycare led a team-building workshop for the Forward Planning and Trees teams about the importance of hedgerows and how to survey them. Officers then surveyed four hedgerows in North Weald and the results have been sent to DEFRA, contributing to a national database of biological data. Three out of four hedgerows were found to be in 'favourable' condition, which shows Countrycare is managing them positively.

The Countryside Manager presented the work of Countrycare to the Leytonstone Women's Guild at a monthly meeting.

### **Trees and Landscape**

The Trees team has recently received the report of an independent review of the Roydon Landmark Trees project, which the Council undertook as a pilot in that parish in 1996. The aim was to test the theory that community recognition of the value of particular trees, by designating them as 'Landmark Trees', would work as a complementary alternative to formal protection by legal order where there was no immediate threat. It was hoped that owners who were proud of their trees, and who were aware that the wider community also valued them, would be more likely to want to keep them and to look after them. The purpose of the review, undertaken in June and July 2015, was to see how well the designation had worked in practice. The main finding is that, of the 88 trees which had been designated in 1996, (either as individuals or as part of groups), 80 were found to remain. Of those lost, the reasons for the felling were known in seven out of the eight instances, and were entirely due to a decline in the trees' condition. The single tree that was missing for unknown reasons was one of a larger group, which was otherwise intact. The author of the review, Sharon Hosegood, comments:

'The survey also provided an opportunity to trial the Heritage Tree nomination form, developed by Barrell Tree Consultancy. I found that two trees are strong contenders for the nomination, and many more are reasonable contenders. I also carried out a CAVAT [ Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees, a method for managing trees as public assets, developed by Chris Neilan and now widely used ] valuation of the tree population. The value of the total Landmark Tree population in Roydon is just under £4 million. The value of the trees is, however, so much more than financial. The trees are integral to the rich social landscape and ecological heritage of the parish, and inspire awe.'

Officers are now working with partners in Theydon Bois and Loughton to designate Landmark Trees in both those parishes as part of the Community Tree Strategy action plans, and it is hoped to extend the scheme more widely, both as part of future strategies, and as free standing projects.

## **Energy Efficiency**

### *Energy Savings*

The management and payment of energy supplies has historically been spread across numerous Directorates. In May 2015, the Council appointed energy consultants Smith Bellerby to produce an accurate consolidated database of our energy supplies, identify potential savings and streamline current working practices.

As a result of this, the time taken processing invoices for energy supplies, around 5000 a year, has been reduced from about two weeks to three hours a month. In addition, in the event of any dispute, Smith Bellerby deals directly with the energy companies on our behalf. As well as these, the largest savings are from the transfer of gas and electricity supplies to cheaper tariffs.

A further benefit of these arrangements is to provide accurate information on our fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions which has to be reported to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). Consideration is now being given to extending the contract with Smith Bellerby for a further year at no extra cost.

### *Essex Energy Switch*

In 2014 I agreed that the Council should actively support the Essex Energy Switch initiative that was developed in partnership with Essex County Council. The aim of this was to encourage consumers to consider changing to providers of cheaper energy by making it

simpler to switch. There was no cost to the Council and we were reimbursed for the time spent by officers that assisted in the administration of the scheme.

The last Energy Switch took place in early 2015 and a one-day 'auction' took place, with energy companies coming forward to offer their best possible tariffs. 108 households in the Epping Forest District registered and, as a result, 52 households (including my own) switched suppliers. The average savings by those that switched was £265.69.

A further auction will take place between December and February. As before it is likely that use will be made of the library network, the Contact Essex helpdesk and participating districts and boroughs to help residents to submit paper submissions if they wish. I shall keep members informed of the outcome.

## **Car parking**

### *Car parks strategy*

Good progress has been made in implementing the Car Parking Strategy. I am pleased to inform members that Cabinet approved the business case for Invest to Save funding for replacing existing lights with more energy efficient LED lamps. This will now enable us to commence the project for the installation of new CCTV systems and enhanced lighting. I am grateful for the advice and support offered by the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group on the Car Parking Strategy.

### *Parking Reviews*

The work on the Buckhurst Hill Parking Review is coming to an end and any final items of work were due to be carried out by Essex Highways by the end of October. This now enables the Parking team to consider the way forward on the Loughton Broadway Parking Review. As previously agreed, I have made arrangements to meet with local ward members to give some initial thought to the scope of the Review.