

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 20 April 2021
Subject: Environmental and Technical Services
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

The report of the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

COVID-19 – Response of Contracts and Technical Services: All services continue to perform well during the Covid-19 period. Office based staff are continuing to work remotely by using Microsoft TEAMS or ZOOM. Those who need to come to office for operational reasons are taking precautions to avoid the risk of infection.

DaRT87 Demand Responsive Transport Trial:

The trial service commenced on Saturday 2 January 2021 for an initial three months, which has now been extended by a full year to April 2022.

Whilst lockdown has seriously suppressed demand, Cabinet noted good performance under difficult conditions, offering support to key workers and others making essential journeys. Recent signs of growing confidence and need to travel are encouraging (e.g. student use and more journeys by workers seeking tube links as greater office presence emerges). A 'bank' of people who previously expressed interest but have yet to travel should start to pay off soon.

The main journey types for the 85 registering interest online to 23/3/21 are: NHS staff (19), those seeking a tube link for London commutes (25), EFDC staff (10) and school/college (7). The rest are a combination of other commutes and non-commuting daytime use. Geographically, the hotspots for interest remain SW Harlow, Epping Green and Loughton.

Expressions of interest still run in tandem with promotional activity, with a being quarter added since the announcement of the trial being extended on 12th March. The business e-newsletter has also resulted in some interesting sustainable travel queries.

DaRT87 has been able to charge fares since late February and some passengers are using the Flexiroute app to book and pay for journeys. A total of 319 single trips were taken in January and February. A full report covering the whole three month pilot will be produced shortly.

Public EV Charging:

The car parking team is working with two rapid EV charging providers, Instavolt and Osprey to deliver public 'rapid' 50kW chargers (80% charge in 30 mins) in various EFDC short stay car parks. Both operators work on a site rental/profit share basis and take on all survey and electricity supply issues, plus provide ongoing maintenance and upgrades over the contracted period (10+ years). Both offer very good customer service according to Zapmap reviews and usage data and allow simple contactless card payment options instead of restrictive membership cards and apps. According to Zapmap, there are only three 'rapid' charging sites in the whole of the District, which is likely to be restricting EV purchasers locally to those with off street parking. Despite this, Epping Forest has the second highest number of EVs and plug-in hybrids on the roads in Essex.

Exploratory work is underway to add public 'fast' (overnight) public EV charging options for residential areas. A strong option is the use of lamp posts by networks such as char.gy and Ubitricity. As most lamp posts are owned by ECC, we are initially exploring use of EFDC owned lamp posts, which in certain areas meet the requirement of being located kerbside and

in relatively unrestricted locations (e.g. not in resident-only car parks). The Housing and customer service teams are identifying areas where requests have been made and even where people are trailing charging cables over pavements. A new Climate Change focussed Commonplace site is being considered, which would include residents and businesses being able to nominate streets or areas where EV charging is needed.

Bus Back Better (DfT):

Announced 15/03/2021, a long-term strategy for buses in England outside London. It is essential that ECC adopt the Enhanced Partnership approach with bus operators (as Herts CC did last year). The clock is ticking for them to have this in place by Summer as there are various funding and regulatory benefits that will only be available to authorities with an EP in place. EFDC-relevant asks of ECC below:

- Bus emissions to be applied as a tender condition, including targets for zero emission
- Multi operator ticketing – HCC already have this in larger towns with their [BUSnet scheme](#)
- Contactless payment including ticketing apps – again not universal in Essex
- Bus arrival information on screens (none in EFDC area) or via app (operator-specific and not universal)
- Better network planning for a town – Waltham Abbey demonstrates an incoherent patchwork with a plethora of similarly infrequent routes served by four different operators, some services commercial, others subsidised
- DfT view of DRT is compatible with ours: “In lower-density, often rural areas, not served or barely served by conventional buses, we will support new forms of provision, such as DRT in smaller vehicles”
- Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) – Covid support for operators – will be reformatted to compensate greener fleets rather than subsidise running larger, higher emission vehicles (again, DaRT87 is compatible and EFCT is applying for existing BSOG grant scheme)
- There is nothing specific on major housing developments

Waste Management: The levels of waste and recycling is still high, due to lockdown three and people working from home. The waste management team and Biffa are working extremely hard to keep on top of this and doing an excellent job to ensure that all waste is collected.

The waste management team are working closely with housing colleagues to improve bin storage for residents and improve the rates of recycling. This work is working towards improving the look and feel of where residents live.

Car Parking: Breathing Space (debt respite scheme) – the Government is introducing regulations from 4th May that give people with problem debt protection from their creditors for a period of time in order to address their debt and find a solution. These regulations will apply to most corporate entities.

The car parking team regularly refers unpaid Penalty Charge Notices to debt collection agents although very few actually result in recovery action. The small number of problem debt cases relating to Penalty Charge Notices will not have a significant effect on car parking processes. However, Members might find it useful to know that the new regulations exist especially in the context of dealing with residents suffering from problem debt.

Members will also be pleased to hear that 12 of the Council’s off-street car parks received the Parkmark quality award in February.

Leisure Management: Since the announcement of the Governments Roadmap to Recovery, officers and the leisure contractor have been steadily working towards reopening of the centres on April 12th. At the time of writing plans are progressing well and no major issues are foreseen. The social distancing restrictions introduced last year will remain in place until restrictions are fully lifted. Members may not be aware that group exercise classes are not allowed to recommence until May which will frustrate many centre users. However, the phased

opening of the centres will allow the contractor a 'settling in' period after such a long closure period. The contractor has already started contacting customers who chose to suspend, cancel or freeze their memberships over the lockdown periods.

Fleet Operations:

New workshop equipment has been purchased that includes new ramps and a tyre machine that will create savings as replacement tyres will be facilitated in house rather than using an external provider.

18 vehicles in total have been purchased, 5 of which are electric as part of the fleet replacement programme. The team have been working with Nissan UK and Ford UK for training on electric vehicles so that we can carry out inhouse servicing and warranty repairs for the new fleet. The new fleet of motor vehicles will have telematic systems and speed limiters that restrict speed to 62mph fitted to improve fuel efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. By midsummer 2021, 20% of the Councils entire fleet will be electric and speed limiters will be fitted as standard.

The driver training officer has now passed the highest award (MIDAS) in driver training accreditation and the apprentice mechanic has successfully passed her 2nd year exams and is now starting her final year.

Grounds Maintenance:

The winter works programme is ending, and it is the start of the new grass cutting season the team have commenced cutting the numerous Council owned verges and open spaces across the district where ground conditions allow. Hand mowing continues around the communal back gardens and weed spraying around obstacles in the grass is also being undertaken to reduce additional mechanical operations throughout the season.

As well as verge maintenance, the team also regularly clip hedgerows to keep vehicle sight-lines clear and pedestrian footways accessible. However apart from emergencies, this work takes place outside of the bird-nesting period, which runs throughout March to the end of July.

We are currently undergoing a fleet replacement project to ensure the Grounds Service continues to deliver an effective and reliable service to its customers. The current fleet is ageing and has provided over 10 years reliable service, but due to the age and heavy usage of the vehicles the general wear and tear is starting to take its toll with running repair costs increasing and downtime becoming more frequent. The replacement new vehicles have provided the opportunity to replace 33% of the existing fleet with electric vehicle options, this will improve efficiency and reduce the environmental impact of the service.

CountryCare:

Despite there being no volunteer tasks recently the CountyCare team has been busy with small-scale countryside improvement works such as fence and boardwalk mending. The volunteer tasks restart on 15th April with reduced numbers. All the sites are being patrolled and monitored on a weekly basis and newt and butterfly surveys have resumed.

The team has been busy preparing for a Marvellous Minibeasts Zoom event for children as part of the Festival of Culture and the event will be rolled out at Ongar Primary School, the event involves an educational look at bugs and their habitats and the making of a bug hotel.

The CountyCare website was relaunched, and a new CountyCare Catch Up Newsletter was produced in March and will be a quarterly newsletter to reflect the seasons and raise awareness of the natural world.

A report was completed analysing survey data of reptiles and amphibians on our sites and we are pleased that Bobbingworth Nature Reserve and Willingale Road Community Orchard have good populations.

A new member of staff started as an Arboricultural Officer in February and is already settled in the role. The winter tree planting is completed, and some trees have been planted on the Limes Estate in Chigwell

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage:

The team continue to oversee planning applications and generally reducing small scale flood risk across the district including having input into large scale Qualis developments. Whilst it is hoped most of the winter rain has receded, we continue to provide an out of hours service to address flood concerns and ensure storm grills we are responsible for continue to run clear. The contract for renewal of the Annual Watercourse Maintenance Contract is currently being updated to go out to tender as the contract ends in August 2021. A section of path at Roding Valley Recreation ground has been renewed using some grant money from the Environment Agency, further tree planting works to enhance biodiversity on the site will be undertaken later this year.

The current Land Drainage Officer who responds to blocked ditches and consents retires this week and a replacement officer has been successfully recruited to the post so the service will continue as usual.

Highway Rangers:

The rangers continue to work on reported issues from both Essex County Council and those reported by Members and residents. The types of jobs they have completed have included cutting back hedges encroaching from council land onto paths and resetting many pavement bollards that have been struck by vehicles some of which have been broken for years.

The Highway Rangers recently assisted in the preparatory works for the opening Murray Hall Vaccination Centre in Loughton at short notice. The CCG wanted to use a path that had not been used for 12+ years on the college site and was very overgrown, lines faded, with an uneven surface and generally unsafe particularly for elderly residents. The Rangers cleared the path of overgrowth, filled pavement cracks, built ramps and re-sprayed lines on speed bumps to ensure better visibility for residents for which the CCG has been very appreciative.

The rangers have also undertaken works in Epping High Street and Waltham Abbey to paint and refurbish metal furniture such as bollards and railings. Waltham Abbey has had all the black metal work painted including around 70 bollards and several bike hoops and railings. This was done with the help of grounds maintenance staff and another day is to be planned to paint metalwork in Ongar.

A contractor has been tasked with removing old defective coin-operated bike loops and installing new ones in Sun Street and Loughton High Road which, as have a number of further minor works completed such as straightening the sign outside the Civic Office which has been bent for a number of years and resetting posts and railings in Buckhurst Hill and a granite block loading bay. New gates in Sun Street are on order with a joinery company and a quote is outstanding for repair and repaint of streetlamps in Sun Street.

A proportion of reports that are made to the team are rejected as they are work that the rangers cannot work on such as defective streetlights, potholes or private hedges which remain the responsibility of Essex Highways.

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/environment/highway-rangers-service/>