

Report to the Council

Committee: Council
Date: July 2021
Subject: Community and Regulatory Services Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Aniket Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Community and Regulatory services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Commercial services:

North Weald Airfield:

Aviation: I am pleased to report that the implementation of landing fees on April 10th went very smoothly. The online payment portal is working well. The scheme has generally been very well received and in the 3 months of operation we have met income target.

I am pleased to report that the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust aircraft are now flying from their new purpose built facility.

NPAS - Complainants regarding NPAS continue to be very few in number.

I am pleased to report that the EFDC website "Complaints / Compliments / Comments" page has been updated to include North Weald Airfield as has the "Report a noise problem" page. This has made it very simple for residents to let us know if any activity taking place at NWA is a cause for complaint.

To date just 1 complaint has come through either of these channels.

Market: The market has reopened fully and as was the case after the first lockdown it has been extremely busy with football being high. Negotiations are due to start with the operator with regards to a new lease.

HMRC site: I am pleased to report that the HMRC site continues to operate without disruption to any of the local road networks although it must be said that vehicle numbers are significantly lower than originally predicted. Since April to the end of June a total of 6697 vehicles have visited the site which is far fewer than the initial transport modelling predicted.

I am pleased to report that the issues around the Clearway in Vicarage Lane West have been dealt with to the satisfaction of the Parish Council and residents although the situation will be monitored by Essex Highways.

General: Casual bookings for activities such as driver training etc were expected to take time to recover and this proving to be the case.

However, the first public event since March 2020 took place on the weekend of June 26th & 27th. Over 2 days the Wings & Wheels Remote Control Model Air Show attracted 5000 visitors.

NWA Master Plan: The Master Plan is on-going with recent workshops taking place around the heritage aspects, sustainability and place making.

Building Control: Final accounting for 2020/21 is ongoing, however indications are that the Building Control service closed some 14% below budgeted income with a shortfall of £80,500 from the forecast £561,000. Considering the far-reaching impact of Covid-19 on the economy and a trend earlier in the financial year for a 30% reduction in application numbers, this result is not overly disappointing.

Combined Building Control fee-earning income from in-district and Local Authority Building Control (LABC) partnership schemes for Month 1 of 2021/22 was circa £41,000. Comparison with 2019 figures of £37,000 is promising, however strong competition from private Approved Inspectors for in-district work remains and partnership work continues to support the service income disproportionately compared to 2019 figures.

I am pleased to report that the Council successfully prosecuted the owner of a motel at Forest Lodge, Epping Road, Epping for five breaches of Building Regulations. The owner had erected an extension without an application for approval and without notification to inspect. The Building Control team intervened and secured removal of serious fire-safety breaches by cooperation and gave the owner ample opportunity to address the remaining procedural and technical breaches. The owner became uncooperative and failed to attend court on two separate occasions. The court proved his guilt in his absence on the 11th May and fined him £660 for each of the five offences and ordered him to pay the Council's prosecution costs of £1123.50 and a Victim Surcharge of £190.

The priority for the service remains the implementation of a new back-office software system shared between Planning and Building Control. This will in the long term enable greater alignment to the Council's objectives for agile working and reduced storage and office accommodation. Training, development, and quality management in preparation for the enactment of the Building Safety Bill remains high on the agenda and I am pleased that the team have been engaging with more structured training linked to individual development plans.

A vacancy on the establishment has been identified as suitable for creating a trainee/apprentice Building Control Surveyor. Candidates would need to complete a degree programme in Building Control Surveying which has been designed in partnership between the University of Wolverhampton and LABC and is eligible for Apprenticeship levy funding.

One key member of the Surveying team left the Council in June. Stuart Mitchell was a long-serving member of Epping Forest District Council with some 27 years continuous service. His input to the Council as a Building Control Surveyor, but also as someone with extensive experience of the Council's own property portfolio from his previous management roles in Facilities Management and Property Maintenance will be missed. It is anticipated that we will need to seek interim support to cover any recruitment gap.

Regulatory Services

Environmental Health Commercial and Air Quality

Covid compliance and enforcement: I am pleased to report that the Regulatory Service, with the Community Resilience Team and Licensing Team, have continued to work proactively and reactively to ensure compliance of the Corona virus restrictions in order to protect the community. A focus has been on ensuring businesses and the public are clear on the new

requirements as the Road Map to recovery unfolds. The volume of complaints relating to non-compliance has reduced but the teams have been busy dealing with larger events and activities at both licenced and non-licenced businesses and there has been an increase in Temporary Event Notices (TENS) requiring detailed risk assessments.

Env Health, Licencing and the Essex Director of Public Health responded recently to intelligence of poor compliance to Covid rules at a venue showing the football. Officers visited and obtained revised RA's to ensure that further showings went without incident. No further complaints about this venue have been received since officer's intervention.

Our Covid marshals continue to support EFDC's high street work, checking on shops and business compliance, answering the publics questions, promoting business grants and following up on track and trace cases, forwarded by Essex Public Health Teams. They are also assisting with distributing leaflets to encourage businesses to sign up to the new business e- letter that is produced each month by the Economic and Development Team and also to inform about the Essex Business Adaptation Fund and 'Click it Local' scheme. As the restrictions are relaxed and we are moving into the 'containment' phase of outbreak management, we will be supporting the Essex Public Health Team further, by distributing covid self-testing kits and providing information to encourage take up and use of the kits, to help break viral transmission.

Food Safety: I am pleased to report that there has been some return to BAU with EHO's recommencing physical inspection of food businesses. The Food Standards Agency have given all LA's a two-year schedule to get the inspection programme back on target. We consider this to be an achievable target.

Those wishing to set up a new food business can now Register directly with EFDC online through our website. Previously, applicants would have to download a PDF from the Government website complete it and upload before it got to EFDC. We believe that EFDC are the first LA in the country to develop their own on-line form which fulfils the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requirements in data gathering.

Environmental Health:

Private Sector Grants:

I am pleased to report that the team continued to work extremely hard through 2020/21 to deliver as many adaptations to the elderly and vulnerable residents of EFDC.

The total Disabled Facilities Grant spend for the year was £687,367 from a budget of £855,956 which is an excellent performance considering the limitations imposed by the pandemic and the reduced staffing during this period.

I am pleased to report that this year the budget has increased to £971,213 and we will do everything in our power to spend as much as possible to help our residents to remain living safely and independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

Officers are working collaboratively across the county via the Essex Well Homes Group to review individual LA polices, with a view to trying to develop more unity in the delivery of DFG's especially discretionary DFG's.

For example, more LA's are abolishing means-testing for stairlifts and other works costing less than £5,000, but some councils with much smaller budget allocations can't finance this. We are therefore also exploring ways to move money between councils so that those who are unlikely to be able to spend their full budget could simply redistribute some money to a council

that cannot fund all the adaptations that they have in the pipeline. These are exciting times and our team are committed to explore and develop ideas for the benefit of residents.

Licensing: The Licensing Team Manager, Kim Tuckey retired at the end of May after more than 20 years of service with this council. I would like to put on record my thanks to Kim for her all her work, support and expertise in administering the licensing functions of the Council during this time. I am pleased to report that we have successfully appointed a new Licensing Team Manager who will start on 24 August.