

Report to the Council

Committee: Council

Date: 29 July 2021

Subject: Environmental and Technical Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

That 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.

Waste Management: New purple bins for WEEE, Textile and battery purple bins at 10 blocks of flats in the district has been working well and textiles tonnages remain steady. The Waste Management team are currently organising to increase the number of bins at flats for these materials.

The new Recycling Bring banks at various sites throughout the district have been well received. These banks can take mixed recycling and we are looking at capacity in two sites to see if we can reduce collections by having larger capacity.

Litter Picking: The Waste Management team have standardised the information that is given out to litter picking groups, residents and parish/town councils. To aid local groups undertaking Voluntary litter picks, a standard information form and information sheets with a risk assessment that can be adapted by the various groups to help them cover all the relevant issues concerning litter picking has been developed and is available.

EFDC are in the process of making hi vis vests, litter pickers, sack hoops (hold the sacks open) available to lend to litter picking groups. Gloves and sacks will be provided free of charge and the waste/recycling will be collected as well. The council will only take waste from the public highway and not from private land. The council will not take responsibility for either the insurance for these groups or their supervision while the activity takes places.

Work has started with Essex County Council and independently on a Litter strategy for EFDC. Research is being carried out on how the Scottish authorities have tackled the issue and hopefully further guidance will be made available from central government and ideas to reduce litter and keep our streets and areas clear of litter.

Night working on the Crooked mile and parts of Sedge Green are continuing on a monthly basis. This was organised due to the heavy traffic and the lack of any type of pavement which can make it difficult for operatives to clean safely. This night working is carried out with the relevant vehicles and safety procedures including operating a stop and go traffic system by Biffa.

Leisure Management: The leisure centres reopened on April 12th although social distancing and capacity restrictions remain in place until restrictions are fully lifted. Group exercise classes recommenced in May, however due to restrictions this is under a reduced timetable and reduced number of people allowed in each class via pre-booked sessions only. The delay in easing of Covid-19 restrictions has resulted in a 4-week delay before restrictions

can be lifted in full This is no earlier than 19 July and no major issues are foreseen. Usage trends since the opening of leisure centres are progressing well and continuing to increase in a more promising outlook.

As COVID restriction have not been lifted Places Leisure continue to operate with limited capacities and the following measures have been put in place and operational improvements have been made:

- Keep in place rigorous cleaning protocols, despite restrictions potentially lifting they believe customers' expectations will remain high.
- Irrespective of restrictions being lifted Places Leisure foresee a period where visible reassurance such as screens and signs remain.
- Places Leisure are already trialling 'no gym bookings' in 2 leisure centres and their 4 Places Gyms – the operational lessons valuable for a return to 'simply turn up' booking rules. When capacity increases are allowable in the Gyms all leisure centres will revert to 'simply turn up', as requested by the majority of our gym customers.
- Place Leisure are running two booking systems, having built a second behind the scenes this ensures maximum agility where they will hear announcements at the same time as our customers, allowing us to respond by changing capacity settings, up and down, and reintroducing a booking-process very quickly.
- Places Leisure's 'notify me' feature manages any increase in capacity for Group Exercise Classes, Swimming or Gym (if applicable). Should we be allowed to increase capacity this feature allows us to increase capacity in the background and the customer will be alerted when additional space(s) become available. This moves from a key feature to a key part of our customer communications in the 'part change' planning and any phased return.
- Places Leisure have fast-tracked development of a new ticketing system, scheduled to launch in the summer, will allow customers more flexibility in booking group activities (family and leisure swims, etc). This will limit traditional queues when launched and reduce phone calls ensuring our lean resourcing model remains.
- Aggregating swim lessons should capacity & distancing guidance allow – this frees up pool time for other activities.

Procurement and Contracts: Since January 2021, Epping Forest District Council has attempted to include Social Value considerations in Procurement exercises wherever practicable. When possible, it has been given a percentage weighting towards the overall score of the bidder. In other situations where assigning a weighting has not been deemed appropriate, it has been asked as an additional information question to still give bidders the opportunity to offer EFDC some additional social value.

Since January 2021, Procurement has been involved in 7 projects that were tendered, with only one of those not asking for Social Value as it was not deemed appropriate – of the 6 projects that included Social Value criteria, all 6 of them have included some Social Value commitments from the winning bidders.

As new projects continue to arise and current contracts come up for renewal, Procurement will be encouraging the use of Social Value criteria in all appropriate circumstances to maximise the benefits for the local district, communities and charities.

Officers that are responsible for the contract management of those contracts will be encouraged and reminded to meet with contractors. This is to ensure that the social value elements are successfully implemented, and the benefits of social value are maximised by EFDC.

Fleet Operations:

The Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) that replaced The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) carried out an audit in May 2021 and reported that EFDC are fully compliant for vehicle inspections and MOT testing.

Procurement is on-going for replacement electric vehicles for the Estate Teams and North Weald Airfield operations. This will bring the total to 25% for electric fleet replacements across EFDC. The team are also working with and supporting Epping Forest Community Transport on a 20-seat electric bus for trials across the district.

A review of a car-pool club scheme is being carried out with trials of different electric vehicles to support a new scheme.

Work is being carried out to explore the option of a One Card fuel card for vehicle fuel petrol/Diesel purchasing utilising an All-star fuel card framework, that will deliver future savings on fuel purchasing.

The team continue to offer a wide range of services across EFDC including vehicle and plant servicing; driver training; driving licence checks, an important function identifying disqualified drivers thus protecting EFDC, accident management and Taxi Licencing compliance.

Grounds Maintenance:

The teams are currently busy with mowing operations in order to maintain our numerous verges and green spaces. The extremely wet weather we experienced earlier this season combined with the warmer weather has without doubt produced some exceptional growth rates, which have in turn created difficult mowing conditions. All machines and grounds staff are working hard to complete grass cutting operations and with drier weather hopefully on its way, things should start to ease, and the focus will then turn to shrub and hedge pruning.

Summer bedding displays throughout the district are being installed and the required plants have been sourced unlike the previous year where Covid conditions restricted supply. Five new planters have been installed along Epping High Road as part of the High Street enhancement works which have been positively received by members of the public and local shop keepers.

The team have been working with the Community Development Team to assist with moving their polytunnel from North Weald Airfield to an allotment site in Waltham Abbey where the local residents are hoping to grow some additional crops and cleared some vegetation at Cripsey Brook in Ongar to allow the local primary children to 'seed bomb' the site and encourage meadow flowers to germinate.

Countryside and Landscape

Volunteer tasks resumed on the 15th April with a maximum of six volunteers, full numbers returned on 6th May. Volunteers have worked on ten different Nature Reserves, the installation of solitary bee hotels has been a feature of some of the activities with benches and hoverfly lagoons also installed. Willingale Road Community Orchard was surveyed on one of the days and 35 slowworms were discovered.

Whilst we are still unable to pick up the public transport volunteers at Loughton, Countrycare continues to produce and distribute the Good News Letter for its volunteers fortnightly.

The team delivered a Marvellous Minibeasts Zoom event at Ongar Primary School and followed it up with a Zoom event. This was in conjunction with the Communities Team. The event looked at bug habitats and the making of a bug hotel.

Countrycare also delivered a remote Country walk as part of the Festival of Culture, guiding people around the grass and waterbody habitats of Waltham Abbey and the Lee Valley.

A new Countrycare Catch Up Newsletter was produced at the end of May. This will be followed by a children's version 'Countrycare Kids' it will contain news of the natural world, what to look out for at this time of year and have puzzles and quizzes for children to engage with.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage:

The team responded to calls regarding potential flooding incidents during the week of the 14th of June with some heavy rain and yellow thunderstorm warnings issued by the Met Office. Many calls were minor and were referred to other agencies such as blocked road gullies to Essex Highways as there was no immediate property flood risk.

Since the last update a new Land Drainage Officer has been appointed and has integrated into the team well. The team continues to work on reviewing flood risk and planning applications to ensure flood risk is minimised where practicable. A burnt-out vehicle was dumped on our Church Lane flood storage site and we are currently in communication with Essex Police about its removal or link to any potential crime.

Officers have recently been trained in a Private Water Supply Sampling Accreditation course which supports the charging regime in the process of being implemented as our team are now shown to be competent and accredited. The team have also been involved in delivering the Epping Safer Spaces Pavement Widening Schemes in Epping.

Highway Rangers:

The rangers continue to work on reported issues from both Essex County Council and those reported by Members and residents. Recent jobs completed include bollards painted and reset in town centres, benches renovated and stained in Epping.

The team have been working with our ASB colleagues and have been removing graffiti on council property as well as fly posting and banners on highway railings that are installed without permission.

We continue to work on renovating benches in Sun Street Waltham Abbey and have now installed 3 completely renewed benches. The historic lamp columns in Sun Street were also repaired, painted and cleaned by a contractor.

Quite a number of reports that are made to the team are rejected as they are works that the rangers cannot work on such as defective streetlights, pot holes or private hedges which remain the responsibility of Essex Highways.

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