

Report to the Council

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

Recommending:

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

Waste Management

Services continue to run well despite the major national issue of the shortage of qualified HGV drivers. Wage costs have continued to increase as our contractor is in competition with other employers to recruit and retain existing qualified staff.

We are in the process of extending the collecting of textiles, batteries and small electrical items using a 340 wheeled bin to more blocks of flats, where the current use of recycling facilities is at a good level with reasonable levels of contamination. We will publicise this to the residents of flat blocks where this is extended to.

We are currently experiencing supply chain issues with the supply of wheeled bins and the wait time for orders have increased from 8 weeks to 16 weeks. At present Biffa have stocks available but, in the future, there may be issues with the replacement of lost and stolen wheeled bins.

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 can provide 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. Further information can be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish/volunteer-litter-picking/>

Leisure Management

All four leisure centres are now operating without any COVID-19 restrictions in place. The usage of the centres is good, swimming is proving to be very popular. Attendances are still below pre-pandemic levels, but we are now receiving a management fee from Places Leisure and no longer providing any financial support to Places Leisure.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage

The team have continued to investigate and follow-up flooding incidents from recent heavy rainfall events. Officers have been assisting Essex County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) with Section 19 investigations under the Flood and Water Management Act to determine the mechanisms of flooding in Chigwell and Roydon where many residential properties were flooded. A new scheme for charging for private water supply sampling and risk assessment has been implemented for residents and businesses who use a private water source including wells, boreholes, and springs where EFDC have a statutory regulatory duty. Officers have been responding to planning applications for key Qualis development sites 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 include installing two of four historic oak gates and new replacement bins in Waltham Abbey Sun Street and Market Square. There is a planned day on the 5th of October to paint bollards with the wider team in Loughton High Road. We continue to receive a number of requests that are rejected as they are works that the rangers cannot undertake such as defective streetlights, potholes or private hedges which remain the responsibility of Essex Highways.

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

Fleet Operations

The team continues to provide a valued service to staff, internal teams, members of the public and provides an income stream for the Council and provides licence compliance testing for the councils approved 450 taxis. The team is leading on the drive to support teams to replace existing fleet with new electric/hybrid vehicles to reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to the Councils ambition to be carbon neutral.

MOT monthly income has increased by 61% in the last 5 years from £15,156 to £24,732 per month and continues to grow, the service has a 4.8 Star rating out of 5 rated by customers.

Grounds Maintenance

The warm wet weather over the summer period has encouraged continued vegetation growth and kept the Teams busy with grass cutting throughout the district. Shrub and hedge cutting continues at a pace with priority being given to highways site lines and sheltered housing accommodation. Where possible removed hedge pruning's are recycled at a local Biogen centre in North Weald where they process the green waste and turn it into compost suitable for commercial and domestic use.

The fleet of ride on mowers continues to perform well with few breakdowns or mechanical issues however there has been some delay in the replacement of the transit tippers and electric vehicles due to manufacturing issues. The replacement vehicles are currently due towards the end of the year.

The nursery team continue to provide a good service, a local supplier has been sourced to grow suitable bedding plants for display and the nursery team collect and plant the flowers as required. The summer bedding is currently being removed across the district with the spring displays to be installed over the coming weeks. The nursery team also provided additional support for the improvements along Epping high road with the installation of 5 new planters.

The team undertake the marking and maintenance of the many football pitches located on Roding Valley Recreation Ground. The specialist team responsible for this work have now completed all the new line-markings required and installed the goal posts to ensure the pitches are ready for the new season.

Countrycare and Landscape

The team have been busy maintaining the districts nature reserves, cutting the grass of meadows, raking, and removing it to reduce competition of the wildflower species growing there. Among other work, maintenance of the heathland at Norton Heath was also conducted as the area was surveyed and new heather saplings were discovered.

Surveys conducted in recent months include: Butterfly transects, Barn Owl surveys, Special Roadside Verge plant surveys and reptile surveying using refuge mats. Unfortunately, Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has been identified on some of the Nature Reserves. Where found they were recorded, submitted to the Forestry Commission, and will be checked early next year. CountyCare's list of sites with protected reptile species has increased from eleven to twelve after the discovery of a new population of Great Crested Newts, previously thought to have died out.

Throughout the summer the volunteers have been operating at full capacity, the volunteers have worked on 13 nature reserves accumulating approximately 930 volunteer hours. Their work included fixing a bridge, raking meadows, installing new benches, building a bug hotel, digging new ponds and drainage channels to reduce surface water flooding on site and much more. Regular contact is maintained with all the volunteers, both those that attend regularly and those who cannot, by the fortnightly Good Newsletter that the team produces.

In September the team hosted Mad about Moths & Batty about Bats, 20 people attended and took part in moth trapping, identifying, and releasing as well as enjoying a bat walk around Bobbingworth Nature Reserve detecting bats.

In addition to the Summer edition of Countrycare Catch-up, the Countrycare Kids!' was relaunched, a fun, educational publication designed to engage children in nature while playing games and learning quick facts and are also shared on the EFDC website, Countrycare's website, social media. We maintain an active presence on social media posting about interesting species found on the nature reserves, information about upcoming events and what the team have been up to. Countrycare can be found on @EFCountrycare on Twitter and Epping Forest Countrycare on Facebook.