

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 24 February 2022
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.

Waste Management:

- WEEE (Waste of Electrical and Electronic Equipment)

The WEEE (Waste of Electrical and Electronic Equipment) wheeled bin for flats has been extended and we are monitoring the effect and the tonnage.

- Resource Issues

The Waste Contract continues to face resourcing issues and challenges due to both a shortage in drivers and road sweepers/loaders. Recruitment is very difficult, and drivers are leaving Biffa each week. The situation is not helped by other companies/industries offering higher rates of pay. Officers continue to liaise closely with Biffa and work to resolve the issues and ensure there is no detrimental impact upon service delivery.

December and January were particularly challenging due to the large number of staff absences due to Covid. However, both the waste management team and Biffa have worked extremely hard to minimise service disruption and keep on top of collections. As a result, crews from street cleansing have been used to help with collections rounds to ensure that residents waste was collected.

- Environment Bill

Parliament passed the Environment Bill on 10th November 2021, meaning the legislation is now UK law.

Defra explained that the Environment Act will help the “transition to a more circular economy, incentivising people to recycle more, encouraging businesses to create sustainable packaging, making household recycling easier and stopping the export of polluting plastic waste to developing countries”.

These changes will be driven by new legally binding environmental targets, and enforced by a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations.

The Environment Act will give ministers the power to introduce a range of waste reforms such as extended producer responsibility, consistent collections and a deposit return scheme.

Defra is currently working on consultation responses, which are due out early next year. EFDC Officers will continue to keep up to date with any new proposals and legislation and keep members informed.

Leisure Management:

We have seen positive growth in leisure centre usage trends in January 2022. There has been a slight decrease of usage trends over the last quarter, however this is normal for the time of the year across the leisure industry. EFDC are closely monitoring usage trends and revenue (currently calculated by an open book examination of Places Leisure operating transactions and financial records).

Places Leisure are implementing the Kickstart Scheme in Waltham Abbey and Loughton centres, which is a scheme providing funding to employers to create jobs for 16 to 24-year olds on Universal Credit. Places Leisure will be providing young people employability skills and work experience for a 6-month programme with funding for support, learning and development of the Kickstarter.

We are delighted to announce that Archie Allen, who has swimming lessons at Ongar Leisure Centre, was the national winner of the "Swimmer of the Year" competition. From a young age, Archie was diagnosed with neuronal migration disorder which caused Archie to suffer with epileptic seizures. When Archie was in the Stage 1 class, he could only kick with one leg and struggled to hold a float. Archie has made exceptional progress and after all his efforts, he is now in the Stage 3 class and can swim 10m kicking both legs and using both arms.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage:

Following heavy rainfall events in July and August the team have provided input to assist the Essex County Council Flood Team in completing their Section 19 Flood investigations to determine the mechanisms of flooding. The reports are currently in draft format for areas such as Roydon.

Private water supply sampling is a Statutory Duty EFDC undertake. Charging for this service has now begun to bring the council in line with most other authorities. The charging regime is being phased in over the next year with reduced analysis costs and free risk assessments for year one.

The two larger contracts that the team manage have been re-tendered and awarded. These include the Annual Watercourse Maintenance Contract for ditch works, flood response and maintenance of the Council Flood Storage Areas. The second contract is the management of the Council house legacy Sewage Treatment Plants on behalf of Housing as the plants are still owned and serve former and current Council houses.

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 historic gates replaced in Sun Street Waltham Abbey and the renovation and full replacement of seven benches. The team have been working with the ASB Team and have been removing graffiti on council property, pavements as well as fly posting and banners on highway railings that are installed without permission.

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, potholes or private hedges which remain the responsibility of Essex Highways. <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/environment/highway-rangers-service/>

Grounds Maintenance:

This season's mowing operations have now come to an end, although the mild autumn meant the grass cutting teams have continued to work well into November last year. The mowing machinery will now receive its essential winter maintenance to ensure it is ready for the coming spring when the cutting cycle commences once again.

The grounds teams will be moving on to their extensive winter-works programme, which includes bed maintenance, hedge trimming and shrub & rose pruning. The nursery team have completed the replanting of the many seasonal bedding displays located across the district. The winter flowering pansies and spring flowering bulbs will provide a welcome splash of colour to our towns and villages over the coming months.

The grounds staff were pleased to attend a meeting with Loughton Town Council and receive recognition for its contribution in helping them achieve the Certificate of Merit Class 1 award presented by the Essex Playing Fields Association for maintaining the Roding Valley Recreation Ground “to the highest standards”.

Assistance has been provided to the Countrycare and Land Drainage services with the autumn cutting of the Councils various floodplains. These valuable nature reserves include Thornhill, Thornwood, Bobbingworth and Church Lane in North Weald. Much of the grass at these sites is cut and collected to provide extensive flood water storage should the need arise, whilst some areas of vegetation are deliberately left for wildlife habitat and to encourage greater biodiversity

Fleet Operations:

Fleet ops have been very busy, the numbers of public MOTS being booked has increased to 90% of capacity. increasing the workshop capacity, that is bringing in vital income to EFDC as well as income from servicing and repairs for internal and external customers.

Recruitment under way to replace our 3rd year vehicle apprentice, Leona has now left EFDC and has found full time employment at a local Loughton based garage business.

A new vehicle ramp and tyre equipment are currently being installed in the vehicle workshops, this will support the growth of vehicle servicing for external companies and assist in reducing expenditure with external tie companies.

12 New electric vehicles have now been delivered and will enter service within the next two weeks.

A new safer greener driving training programme has now been rolled out and 12 EFDC staff have now completed the training.

Countryside and Landscape

20 people came to a Mad About Moths event at Bobbingworth Nature Reserve on an evening in September last year. The evening was a great success and included a well-received Bat Walk around the reserve.

An article written by Countrycare highlighting the importance of smaller wetland sites to winter migrating waders, using Thornwood Common LNR as an example, was published in the annual Wetland Bird Survey newsletter, WeBS News and received really good feedback.

We have recruited some new volunteers who are settling in well to our Thursday group. Countrycare has put on volunteer days at all but one site in 2021, which is a testament to the team's drive and determination to manage these sites.

As a result of a successful funding application Countrycare have received approximately £47,000 from the Nature ECC COVID Safe Tourism and Public Spaces Fund. This funding is being used to create an 833m path around Bobbingworth Nature Reserve to complete a circular path of the site. At Roughtalley's Wood Local Nature Reserve the funding is being used to replace a boundary fence that has been badly damaged by antisocial behaviour.

Linder's Field Local Nature Reserve is currently having enhancement works funded by Qualis to accommodate a population of Slow-Worms which are being translocated from a Qualis site in Loughton. The works include hibernacula, which is needed to increase the carrying capacity of the reserve following a previous translocation of Slow-worms and Grass Snakes.

Countrycare delivered a talk at the Epping Forest Youth Council Climate Change Conference in the Civic Offices on 12th November 2021, which explained the impact of climate change on wildlife and the important role certain habitats have in tackling climate change such as carbon sinks and wildlife refuges.

Tree Team

The team continue to respond to enquiries throughout the district, from Members, Councillors, Essex County council, Housing and members of the public.

The team has now implemented a new tree management system, which is still in the testing phase, and being used to undertake Housing tree surveys, with regards to zoning trees in influencing distances to buildings, and for health and safety in areas of high occupation.

With this in mind, the Tree team will now endeavour to inspect all of Epping Forest district council's tree stock, in Housing, Parks and Openspaces, and where possible, will manage the trees more proactively, in an attempt to reduce insurance claims and unexpected tree failures, and reactive callouts.