

# ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet

**Date:** 13 December 2011

**Subject:** Environment Portfolio

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor John Knapman

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## **Recommending:**

**That the report of the Environment Portfolio Holder be noted**

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## **Waste Management**

The updating of the legal and contract documentation between Sita and the Council is nearing completion, cementing into place the two year contract extension and the savings of around £850,000 per annum arising from improved income streams for recyclable materials. The contract with Sita will now come to an end at the end of September 2014.

The County Council has commenced its review of its current Waste Local Plan. Officers from the Environment & Street Scene and Planning Directorates are commencing their review of the County's documents and reports will come forward to Cabinet and Scrutiny in due course.

As we approach Christmas I would like to take this opportunity to inform all residents (and Councillors) about changes to collection arrangements through Christmas and the New Year. In the week after Christmas Day all collections will be displaced by two days, with a catch up day on Saturday 31 December. Collections in the week following New Years Day will also be displaced by 2 days, with catch up Saturdays scheduled for 7 and 14 January. Normal collections will resume on 16 January 2012. I would ask everyone to read their waste collection and recycling calendars carefully to ensure that they put their waste out for collection on the correct day. I would also remind everyone of the importance of recycling their waste through the extended holiday period. There will obviously be more food waste, packaging and glass in the waste stream and we want to recover as much of that as we can. Finally, I would also remind everyone that in recognition of the additional waste that is generated at Christmas, we will collect side waste (i.e. that which doesn't fit into the residual bin) for the first collection after the Christmas break and we will also be collecting real Christmas trees as part of the food and garden waste collection service. Please look at the waste and recycling calendar and Christmas edition of Forester for further information.

## **Environmental Health and Neighbourhoods**

Members may recall a tragic incident some four years ago where a young child died whilst at a day nursery in Buckhurst Hill. Since that time, there have been Police investigations, a lengthy Coroners Inquest and a judicial review of the Crown Prosecutor's decision not to pursue an offence of corporate manslaughter. Once all those processes had been concluded it fell to this Council, as the enforcing agency under the Health & Safety at Work Act, to consider whether action was appropriate under that Act. I can now inform Members that, following an extensive and detailed investigation by the Council's Environmental Health Team, and following consideration by the Council's legal officers and appointed Counsel, the decision has been made to prosecute the company who run the nursery and two individual employees for breaches of the Health & Safety at Work Act. We anticipate the preliminary stages in the Magistrates' Court to commence in January 2012. As Members will appreciate, given the death of a young child, this is likely to be a very high profile prosecution, and I would ask any Member approached for comment by the media to refer all such requests to the Council's Public Relations team.

At the last Council Members received a comprehensive response to a written question regarding fixed penalty notices. I can inform Council that enforcement activity is continuing with a number of cases pending including five for fly-tipping, one for dog fouling, two for breaches of noise abatement notices in domestic premises and two more relating to noise from licensed premises. Action is also proposed for the first time in respect of illegal street trading of cars. Officers have also worked jointly with the Police in a stop/check of vehicles in respect of potential metal theft and fly-tipping.

In the answer at last Council reference was made to the training of PCSOs on the issue of fixed penalty notices and 'incident tickets'. This training has been completed and PCSOs are now able to issue in the same way as the Council's officers. The first fixed penalty notice issued by a PCSO has not been paid, so this too will proceed to prosecution.

I hope this demonstrates to Members the benefits of the Environment & Neighbourhoods Team established under the Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative and also the benefits of joint working with the Police facilitated through the excellent partnership working with the Police facilitated via the Safer Communities Team.

### **Land Drainage**

I have some encouraging news regarding the Council's working relationship with the Environment Agency regarding flood defence telemetry. I had intended to ask Cabinet at its meeting on 5 December to approve new capital expenditure to provide our own telemetry, on the basis that we could not reach an agreement with the Agency in respect of sharing resources. I held a very positive meeting with the Agency just ahead of that Cabinet, when we were able to agree a form of protocol which should ensure that our officers are made aware of warnings and that when the Agency's resources are stretched they will ask for our assistance. I therefore withdrew the report to Cabinet and I will give a verbal update to Council on progress towards completing that protocol. This is something I wanted all along and once in place the protocol will demonstrate the benefits of partnership working and will provide an extra layer of protection for our residents.

Having said that, it is very important that I reinforce the point that these flood defence assets are for flood alleviation and not flood prevention, and that residents in vulnerable areas should continue to ensure that they take reasonable steps to protect their properties and also participate in the Agency's flood warning schemes. Details can be found on the Agency's and Council's websites or from the Land Drainage Team within Environment & Street Scene.