

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 14 February 2012

Subject: Environment Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Knapman

Recommending:

That the report of the Environment Portfolio Holder be noted

Waste Management

I am pleased to be able to inform Members that the revised contract with Sita has now been signed by Sita and the Council and this puts into place the £850,000 per annum savings arising from changes to the income stream arising from dry recyclables. It will remain important for the existing levels of recycling to be maintained, and where possible increased further. To that end I have asked officers to continue to develop ways in which we can provide a range of recycling facilities in flats and similar communal buildings.

Towards the end of 2011 officers undertook a survey of residents to find out what they thought of the Council's waste and recycling services. Whilst I have asked that the full results of the survey be placed into the Council Bulletin after this meeting, I would like to share some of the highlights with Members this evening. Taking comments for very good, good and satisfactory as 'positive', the key outcomes are as follows:

Refuse collection:	85% positive (44% very good, 30% good)
Food & garden:	92% positive (54% very good, 23% good)
Dry recycling:	92% positive (47% very good, 30% good)
Glass recycling:	94% positive (50% very good, 30% good)
Bulky waste:	79% positive (15% very good, 26% good)
Street cleaning:	75% positive (4% very good, 22% good)
Service delivery:	88% positive (38% very good, 34% good)

(i.e. crews behaviour etc)

This is an encouraging picture and shows that our core services are working well. It is not surprising that bulky collections are less well received because this is a service which has to be paid for. The street cleansing outcome is marginally disappointing given that inspections on the ground show considerable improvement. However, if residents don't see a street cleaner they assume that roads are not cleansed. This of course is not the case.

Alongside the core data we also have a lot of positive and less positive comments which we will look carefully at to see what else we can do to improve. Overall, it's an excellent outcome and I would like to thank the Council's waste team and Sita for their continued good work.

Environmental Health and Neighbourhoods

In my last report to Council I mentioned the Council's prosecution relating to the death of a child at a nursery back in 2007. The case has now started its passage through the Courts with the first hearing having taken place in mid January 2012. As is often with a first hearing, there were a number of procedural issues raised, and defence lawyers sought additional time. The hearing was adjourned for two months and I will continue to update Members as matters move forwards.

Also in my last report I made mention of an accident at a local logistics company where an employee fell from a height and sustained a serious injury. The Council is prosecuting under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and officers will be attending court in February. Officers are also prosecuting a local bakery following a routine inspection which showed food hygiene standards to be far below legislative requirements.

Land Drainage

I have previously informed Members of the Environment Agency takeover of the Council's flood warning telemetry systems and their reluctance to inform the Council in the event of a flood alarm. Although not able to reach an ideal agreement I am pleased to report that the Environment Agency has now agreed to inform the Council if they cannot respond to flood alerts from our assets or at other times when assistance may be required. I have asked officers to formalise the arrangements. This is a good example of joint working and we will be able to offer an improved flood risk response.

The County Council has acquired new powers under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and is keen to work with us to reduce flood risk across the district. Currently two main areas of partnership working are being explored:

- 1) Granting legal consents for works in and around rivers and watercourses, and
- 2) Delegated authority to this Council to make it a Sustainable Drainage System Approval Body.

These are complex areas of work and I have asked officers to look very carefully at the details and any resource impact of taking on additional responsibility. I will update Members when more information becomes available.

Parks and Grounds

The Roding Valley Lake is now back to the level that it was prior to it being partially drained in May last year as part of a murder investigation. The reed beds will need to be replanted but other than that there appear to be no other apparent long term affects. Officers have been working with the Environment Agency (EA) to improve fishing facilities and the general condition of the lake. In December, the EA supplied free of charge, over 1,000 fish in order to help increase the stock in the lake. Two aeration units are to be purchased with a grant from the EA and will be positioned on the lake islands in the next few weeks which will do much to improve the water quality. There will also be the planting of water lily sets that will not only give aesthetic value to the lake but also provide essential cover to the smaller fish. Parts of the causeway between the lake and the river has been repaired and new wooden posts are to be installed in order to prevent vehicular access to this area since it is very vulnerable to erosion.

To assist in the management of the lake there has been discussion with a fishing club to bailiff the lake. Draft terms have been agreed and I will consider these in due course. There are issues with regard to the use of the lake by both fishermen and the public and the monitoring of the area and its wildlife. It is impossible for EFDC officers to be continually patrolling the area either in the day or at night and some inappropriate behaviour can arise both in terms of anti-social behaviour and damage to fauna and flora. Having a fishing club to bailiff the site would give a much needed presence which could control some of these activities as well as being able to alert the appropriate agencies should wildlife get into difficulty. The club will also be able to promote the sport of fishing by having open days and also having a diverse membership including adults, children and disabled anglers. Day tickets will be available for non club members.