

Report to the Council

Subject: Safer, Greener & Highways Portfolio

Date: 31 July 2012

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gary Waller

Recommending:

That the report of the Safer, Greener & Highways Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety Partnership and Police

On 6 June I was elected as Chairman of the Epping Forest Community Safety Partnership, and have been pleased to note how highly the EFDC team is regarded throughout Essex. Among projects currently taking place, work is under way to upgrade CCTV facilities at Debden, Loughton and Epping.

I visited Crucial Crew at Gilwell Park on 27 June to see this year's scheme in operation. Over the two weeks that it operates, Year 6 pupils from every primary age state and private school in the district learn about topics such as road and fire safety, bullying, domestic violence, alcohol and the dangers that lurk online. I was impressed by the successful way in which the various agencies responsible for delivering the scheme engaged the interest of the pupils.

The new Essex police structures are settling down, and the latest available figures show that overall crime in Epping Forest district has fallen by 4.1% compared with 12 months previously. However, some categories of crime such as burglary dwelling offences have risen, and the detection rate in the division is lower than average.

The Shadow Police and Crime Panel (PCP) has been established, with its first meeting having taken place on 10 July. The Council is represented by Cllr Mary Sartin. Cllr John Jowers, representing Essex County Council, was elected Chairman, and Cllr Malcolm Buckley from Basildon as Vice Chairman. In considering its overall political balance in the light of 15 nominations from the member constituent authorities, the Shadow Panel agreed to increase the number of representatives by one to 16, in order to ensure a Liberal Democrat presence. The Shadow PCP also confirmed that it should have two independent representatives and agreed to a recruitment process to achieve this objective. The Panel looked at its work programme for the period up to November to ensure it is up to speed by the time the Police and Crime Commissioner is elected, and discussed the areas to be covered. The intention is now to meet monthly if possible in shadow form between August and November. The PCP will have an important role in overseeing and acting as a 'critical friend' to the future Commissioner.

Highways and Parking

The new Highways Panel has now been set up, comprising the seven County members representing divisions within the district and an equivalent number of District Council members. It was unfortunate that the first meeting was proposed by Essex CC on a date when not all the District members could attend, and a new date of 14 August has now been put forward. Again, the timing is far from ideal, but I would remind members that this is a meeting which is open to all those with a particular interest in highway matters to attend.

Concern around the parking reviews continues. The recently completed Epping review has elicited

a lot of comments and demonstrates just how difficult it is, despite widespread public consultation, fully to engage residents in the review process and to formulate an outcome which meets the majority of residents' wishes and aspirations. I intend to re-assess our approach before the Council embarks on the Buckhurst Hill and Broadway reviews, to ensure that we carefully consider our engagement processes and satisfy ourselves that we do have genuine resident commitment to any proposed solutions.

Members may recall that the Council commissioned a survey of car park usage, in order to provide some feedback on the way we operate and charge for car parking. Although the online component of the survey has only just ended, we do have the preliminary results of the 'face to face' interviews with our customers. The key findings from the research are:

- ✦ Turnover within the car parks is high. Half of all respondents were parking for less than an hour, and 70% were parking for less than two hours.
- ✦ Most people use the car parks to access the local shops, with around one fifth parking while they work or commute.
- ✦ People don't tend to have a problem finding a space in their choice of car park.
- ✦ There is overall satisfaction with safety and security within the car parks, as there is with their lighting and cleanliness.
- ✦ Around three-quarters of respondents say there are enough spaces in the car parks. Space is more of an issue in three Loughton car parks: High Beech Road, Smarts Lane and The Drive.
- ✦ Most people are happy with the car parking charges, with 62% saying they are about right.
- ✦ Over half (55%) of all respondents say they are not influenced by the price of car parking and, when asked if they would park for longer if fees were reduced, only about one third would do so.
- ✦ The majority pay by cash at the ticket machines rather than using mobile payments or any other method.

I have attended two meetings of the North Essex Parking Partnership. In a relatively short period of time since its inception on 1 April 2011, the Partnership has moved from requiring subsidy to a position of surplus. In addition to civil enforcement activities, the Partnership is dealing with a large number of requests for on-street parking restrictions. At present, four separate schemes are being progressed by the Partnership within the district and, following discussion with the Highways Panel and other members, I expect to be in a position to propose further schemes in the autumn. There is also a backlog of faulty signs and faded yellow lines, and these are being rectified, although delays have been caused due to an inability to apply yellow lines on wet road surfaces.

The enforcement of on-street parking restrictions will transfer from the Council to the Partnership on 1 October 2012. Currently TUPE transfer and other operational arrangements are being finalised. I would remind members that that NEPP will also carry out enforcement in the Council car parks, although their ownership and maintenance will remain with the Council.

North Essex Parking Partnership is considering the acquisition of one or two CCTV-equipped cars, in order to increase enforcement and efficiency while saving costs, particularly with the objective of improving the safety of streets in the vicinity of schools, and also patrolling rural and emergency clearways, bus stops and taxi ranks. It would be helpful to have any views from members before September, when a decision is likely to be taken.

Community Transport

The local Community Transport scheme, established in 2001, was managed by Voluntary Action Epping Forest, with the intention that it should become independent and free-standing. It has developed successfully and is now ready to take that step. Members may recall the decision last year approving interim arrangements operating through Essex County Council. The independent scheme will come into being shortly, once the legal formalities involving Companies House have

been finalised, most likely in August.

There are seven buses at present undertaking approximately 24,000 trips a year. The service includes Dial-a-Ride, social car schemes, transport for day clubs, groups and organisations, MIDAS training, brokerage and regular bus routes such as the Dobbs Weir shopper bus. It provides access to many kinds of social and recreational activities and is much valued by community groups. I have attended two meetings of the 'shadow' trust and have every confidence that the service will thrive in its new independent configuration.

Countrycare and Conservation

I'm delighted that Countrycare has received two Living Landscape awards from the Essex Wildlife Trust. These awards are part of a national initiative to create landscapes which provide enhanced conditions for wildlife to thrive. Ten awards were made for 2011-12 in Essex, and Epping Forest Countrycare received two of them. EFDC is in fact the only council in Essex to receive an award and the only organisation of any kind to receive two. Nicola Rogers's project was for green hay strewning to enhance the floral diversity of a grassland site at Linders Field Local Nature Reserve, Buckhurst Hill, and Kevin Mason's project involved the planting and traditional management of hedgerows at Weald Common Local Nature Reserve. Congratulations are due to both of them.

In another success, the Roding Valley Meadows Nature Reserve has been adjudged to meet the standard required to receive the Green Flag Award for 2012/13. The prestigious Award is the national standard of excellence for parks and green spaces in the UK, and Countrycare worked in partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust to achieve the necessary criteria.

The Council has finalised the Heritage Review of its Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. This document has now been adopted as part of our evidence base for the Local Plan. A presentation was given by the lead consultants DPP on 13 June. We will be looking closely at the recommendations made as part of this report in order to assess how we will be taking them forward. The recommendations include the designation of two new Conservation Areas in Theydon Bois and Buckhurst Hill, amending 13 Conservation Area boundaries and adding 93 buildings to our local list.