

Report to the Council

Subject: Environment Portfolio

Date: 19 February 2012

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Will Breare-Hall

Recommending:

That the report of the Environment Portfolio Holder be noted.

Waste Management

At Cabinet on the 4th, it was agreed that I should establish a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group to assist the officers and myself in formulating the next waste management contract. It was also agreed that this process should include consideration of the Council's grounds maintenance service. Group Leaders have been requested to put forward their nominations. In order to ensure however that I get the widest possible views, all meetings of the Advisory Group will be open to all Members to attend and to contribute to.

Snow and ice on the roads resulted in some Waste and Recycling collections being missed at the beginning of the year. I am pleased to say that the 'catch up' arrangements worked effectively and collections for most properties were back to normal by their next collection day. Sita street cleansing crews and Grounds Maintenance teams carried out snow clearance and gritting in the town centres, high foot fall areas, sheltered housing schemes and some of Council's car parks.

Recycling performance for Quarter 3 is better than expected. Residents are to be congratulated for this but we need to continue spreading the message of reducing waste and recycling more. Steady progress is being made in the introduction of recycling schemes in the communal blocks of flats. Every block is dealt with on an individual basis and bespoke solutions agreed in consultation with the residents and agents.

At the last Waste Management Partnership Board it was agreed to let Sita carry out a pilot street cleansing recycling for larger items, for example cans, bottles, plastic and similar items. If this proves successful and feasible a district wide service will be considered.

Environmental Health & Neighbourhoods

At the last Cabinet I was also able to inform Members of the outcome of the recent trial in respect of the death of two and half year old Rhiya Malin at a nursery in Buckhurst Hill back in late 2007. The company which then owned and managed the nursery, Casterbridge, pleaded guilty ahead of the trial, but two individual employees were also prosecuted for offences under the Health & Safety at Work Etc Act 1974 and they pleaded not guilty. Karen Jacobs, the Nursery Manager was found not

guilty and Kayley Murphy, the room manager for Rhiya's class was found guilty. Sentencing has been delayed because the Court has now to consider any mitigating or aggravating features of Casterbridge's plea, and this may take a number of months to complete. As I indicated at Cabinet, in view of the on-going action and potential sensitivities, I will be unable to answer any questions on this particular matter.

Evidence gathered by the Council's Environment & Neighbourhood team led to a prosecution in Chelmsford Magistrates Court on 8 January 2013. Mr. Ben Gan Chapman - Ozcam of Eastern Avenue Romford pleaded guilty to three offences in relation to some fly-tipped waste on garage land at Bushfields Loughton. He was fined a total of £1,500 and ordered to pay £1006.73 towards the Council's prosecution costs which included £108.41 clearance costs. Fly-tipping in the area has noticeably reduced. However, annual fly-tipping incidents recorded for 2012 across the whole of the district, compared with the the same period the previous year have increased.

We have also recently started discussions with Essex County Council Trading Standards to see if their "Buy with confidence" scheme could be applied to waste contractors that operate in the area. The aim is to produce a list of audited companies that can be promoted by the Council, that our residents and local businesses can use with some confidence to dispose of their waste correctly, comply with their duty of care and avoid waste getting into the hands of potential fly-tippers.

Unfortunately we have recently had two incidents of dead horses being fly-tipped in the district and a stray horse being "fly-grazed" in a field in Roydon. This appears to be in line with reports that the cost of caring for horses has become too much for some members of the community.

Dog Control Orders (DCO) came into full force on 14 January 2013. We are due to provide Forest Wardens with training and subject to a police check, we will authorise their officers to issue the Council's incident ticket to record DCO offences and littering on and near their land. The evidence that wardens provide will be reported back to the Council to consider if it is sufficient to prosecute, and if so, whether or not the Council will offer a fixed penalty as an alternative to prosecution.

There has been no significant increase in reported incidents since the DCO came into force. We have had a few reports of professional dog-walkers exceeding the limit of four dogs in one persons control. We are in the process of warning any companies we can identify, with a view to enforcement action later in the year, if the DCO is not complied with in the future.

Land Drainage/Flooding

The recent wet weather continues to keep the Engineering, Drainage and Water team very busy. Some properties and areas that have not historically suffered from flooding have been affected during the recent heavy downpours. This is due to a combination of factors: the intensity and duration of rainfall, saturated ground, high ground water table, blocked highway gullies and the inability of Thames Water systems to cope with the quantity of water. The Council will continue to support residents and is persevering with both Essex Highways and Thames Water to try and reduce flood risk from their assets.