

# ***Report to the Council***

**Subject: Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio**

**Date: 17 December 2013**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller**

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**Recommending:**

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

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## **Domestic Abuse and Domestic Homicide**

At the end of November the Council participated in Domestic Abuse Awareness Week. During this period the Community Safety team sought to remind all our residents that confidential help and advice are available to those suffering from this largely hidden problem.

As part of the week's activities, a special ceremony was held at Grange Farm Meadows to remember Gillian Andrade, a young mother from Loughton who was a tragic victim of abuse, losing her life in July 2012. During the ceremony, attended by friends and the brother of the victim, 14 doves were released to commemorate the 14 deaths arising from domestic abuse that have occurred in Essex since April 2011.



### **Domestic Abuse Awareness Ceremony – Release of the Doves**

Since that date in 2011, Community Safety Partnerships have been required to initiate a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) following a death arising from domestic abuse. I reported to the last Council meeting that our Report on the death of Gillian Andrade had been submitted to the Home Office for their evaluation, and I have now

received a formal response from the Chair of the Home Office Quality Assurance Panel, confirming that the Report has been approved. The response continued:

*'The QA Panel would like to commend you on this well ordered report, which we felt reflected a Domestic Homicide Review that was open and pro-active. It also demonstrated a strong understanding of domestic violence, and a good level of professional curiosity about the circumstances that led to this incident. The QA Panel found the list of those contacted along with their relevance to the review was particularly helpful.'*

We were pleased to learn of this outcome as we are aware that many Reviews have been rejected as 'inadequate', with a requirement for further work to be undertaken. An issue to which our Review Panel drew attention – the need for information to be better collated by ambulance services when dealing with domestic abuse cases – is one that the Home Office is now going to explore with the Department of Health. As the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership, I would like to thank all the members of the Review Panel, including Ann Haigh who chaired it, for their work in carrying out what was a complex Review process. Our Community Safety team led by Caroline Wiggins also provided invaluable input.

Hardly had the Report been sent to the Home Office than we learned of the further tragic death of a woman at Waltham Abbey, Junella Valentine, and I have therefore set up another DHR Panel, chaired by His Honour retired Judge Anthony Bradbury, to commence its work of investigating the full circumstances, in the hope that lessons might be learned that could perhaps prevent more occurrences in the future.

## **Safeguarding**

In line with other local authorities in Essex, the Council has recently reviewed its Safeguarding policy, to incorporate a range of new and escalating issues such as Domestic Abuse and Violence, Child Sexual Exploitation and Forced Marriage. In addition, the new policy contains reference to vulnerable adults, which follows Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards' drive to work more closely together. As part of this review, I would like to draw Members' attention to the important role that the District Council plays in helping to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm:

- Under Sections 11 and 47 of the Children Act 2004, the District Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the well-being of children and young people and to cooperate with Essex County Council in discharging its safeguarding duties as a Children's Services Authority.
- As provider of sheltered housing schemes, homelessness accommodation, Community Safety and a range of other services, the District Council also has a responsibility for the safeguarding and well-being of vulnerable adults and works with Essex Police and Essex County Council Social Care team in its role as the lead agency for the protection of vulnerable adults.

The District Council is therefore committed to maintaining a 'whole' organisation' approach to safeguarding and embraces its responsibility to work in partnership and share information with other agencies such as Essex Social Services and Essex Police.

The new policy document and following Mission Statement will be submitted for approval to Council at its meeting in February 2014:

*'Epping Forest District Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children, young people and vulnerable adults, as service users, residents and visitors to the area. The Council acknowledges the importance of working with partner agencies to ensure that children have safe, healthy and happy childhoods, and that young people and vulnerable adults are given the support they need to enjoy quality of life and well-being.'*

The Mission Statement is underpinned by the following:

- valuing, listening to and respecting children, young people and vulnerable adults as well as promoting their welfare and protection;
- safe and robust recruitment, supervision and safeguarding training for all staff working with the public;
- provision of a current and comprehensive Safeguarding policy and related procedures, which is accessible and promoted to all staff;
- efficient and effective reporting of concerns, incidents and allegations;
- strategic planning and decision-making which considers the impact on children, young people and vulnerable adults.

## **Parking**

At its last meeting the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee considered the approach to be taken in respect of car parking tariffs. The Committee agreed that, following an absence of tariff increases for the past five years, and taking account of the current financial position, the time has come to review tariff levels and structures. There is a recognition by the Cabinet that tariffs need to be structured in such a way that the economic performance of our high streets is not adversely affected. Achieving this aim while generating a higher financial contribution overall will not be an easy balance to achieve, but I have tasked officers with a review of tariff structures based on this principle.

I have noted that some Members are becoming increasingly concerned about the performance of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), and some disquiet was also expressed at a recent meeting of the Local Councils' Liaison Committee. While it may be that some of these concerns arise from misunderstandings about NEPP's role and activities, justifiable views have been expressed by several member authorities that the organisation needs to explain those activities more openly, as well as performing more efficiently. I have asked officers to set out in the Members' Bulletin a summary of our involvement with NEPP and an explanation of its responsibilities, and I also welcome the intention of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to invite a representative of NEPP to attend a future meeting.

At the time of writing this Report, it was intended that the informal public consultation on the Buckhurst Hill Parking Review should start in early December (representing some slight slippage from the earlier timetable). This offers residents the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to on-street parking restrictions, in advance of final decisions and the formal public consultation.

## **Highways**

Essex Highways have made progress with the preparatory work for a potential new Junction 7A on the M11, with a link road between Gildea Way, Harlow and the motorway. A series of public exhibitions is currently taking place at venues in Harlow and Epping from 2 December 2013 to 31 January 2014. By the time of the Council meeting, an exhibition, with display boards showing how the new junction links into the existing road network, as well as demonstrating associated improvements, will already have taken place at North Weald Library, and a further staffed event will take place at Sheering Village Hall on 10 January between 3.00 and 8.00 pm.

## **Conservation**

A new Technical Officer for Conservation has been appointed and started work in October. The calibre of applicants was extremely high but the successful candidate shone during the interview process, displaying her breadth of building conservation knowledge, experience and qualifications. As well as providing general support to the Conservation Officer, Maria Kitts, she has been tasked with completing and publishing three Conservation Area character appraisals that are currently in final draft form (York Hill, Staples Road and Baldwins Hill). At present she is on a temporary contract until the end of March 2014, but it is proposed that her contract can be extended for a further 12 months through the use of some old outstanding town centre Section 106 monies, so that more character appraisals can be progressed.

With the Technical Officer's assistance, it is anticipated that the Conservation Officer will publish the York Hill and Staples Road Conservation Area character appraisals in early 2014, with Baldwins Hill following shortly afterwards. Attention will then be turned to the character appraisal for Copped Hall, which is also currently in draft form.

The District has 25 conservation areas of which only six have character appraisals. These set out the special interest of an area by exploring its history, archaeology, the built environment and its unique character; they can also include a management plan. Once an appraisal has been established, suggestions are produced as to how the area's special interest can be preserved or enhanced. These documents are helpful in guiding appropriate new development in conservation areas and informing planning decisions.

Along with the four character appraisals currently in draft form (York Hill, Staples Road, Baldwins Hill and Copped Hall), three other areas have been identified as priorities (Chipping Ongar, Waltham Abbey, and Nazeing and Roydon). As well as these, the Heritage Asset Review from May 2012 (a document which forms part of the Local Plan Evidence Base for heritage conservation) identified two areas for potential Conservation Area designation: St John's, Buckhurst Hill and Theydon Bois. With a full time member of staff dedicated to working on appraisals, it is estimated that the drafting and publication of a full character appraisal would take between three and four months.

This is important work which will help us to preserve and maintain the most precious features of our District for future generations.