

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 February 2015

Subject: Safer, Greener & Transport

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller

Recommending: That the Report of the Safer, Greener & Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety

The Community Safety Team has had a very active start to the year. Cross border networking meetings continue to be held monthly in Chigwell and are demonstrating excellent co-operation between the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Investigators, Essex Police, the Metropolitan Police, British Transport Police and other organisations when required. This initiative is managed by the Council's investigators, thereby promoting consistency and continuity at times of regular staff changes on the part of the police. An example of recent work involves identifying a persistent offender from the Metropolitan Police area who was also committing crime at Limes Farm. Working with the Metropolitan Police, the Council's investigator has provided a community impact statement about the effect the offender is having on the community at Limes Farm. With the Council's support, the Metropolitan Police are applying for a new Criminal Behaviour Order as a result of the offender's activity, and one of the prohibitions will include a ban on entering the Limes Farm area.

Following the recent Council re-structure and the Community Safety team's placement in the Communities Directorate, I am pleased to report there is good integration with Housing officers. Strong links are being built, and ASB Investigators meet regularly with Housing teams providing support, advice and direction in relation to more complex ASB issues. It is expected that this will provide prompt identification of developing problems, allowing for earlier and more effective interventions.

CCTV continues to be used to good effect. Officers were called out on New Year's Day at the request of the Metropolitan Police to download footage relating to a serious crime. Officers were able to identify a vehicle used by the offender and obtained a full registration plate, as well as being able to provide identifiable details of the vehicle. This remains an active investigation led by the Metropolitan Police. CCTV also identified a vehicle involved in fly-tipping in the Bobbingworth area, and details of the vehicle have been passed to the Council's Neighbourhoods Team for investigation.

The Council's CCTV officer was recently asked by Essex Police to give a presentation at Police Headquarters to police and council licensing officers covering the whole county. The presentation covered the basic requirements licensing officers should consider recommending when dealing with licensed premises. Attended by 25 officers, the presentation was very well received, illustrating the high regard in which officers from the Council's Community Safety team are held.

The Community Safety team is working closely with Essex Police Architectural Liaison officers to provide advice and encouragement on new developments to build to Secured By

Design standards. This is crime prevention at a very basic level but a cost effective way of delivering community safety by designing out crime. The Community Safety Officer has recently been successful in achieving a City & Guilds Advanced Certificate qualification in Environmental Design and Crime Prevention.

The Community Safety team dealt with 469 incidents in 2014, representing a 23% increase from the previous year. The team dealt with 253 requests for CCTV downloads in 2014, which is an increase of 27% on 2013.

Safeguarding

The Council's Safeguarding Officer has now submitted the annual Section 11 self-assessment audit and the Vulnerable Adults audit, as required by Essex County Council and Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards. This is part of an annual, county-wide audit involving a wide range of public sector agencies including key organisations such as schools and the NHS.

The submission deadline for audit responses was 30 January 2015, which provided a three month window for organisations to collate the necessary information, as far more detailed submissions were required this year. This included the production of a wide range of associated new documents as well as copies of written evidence relating to the Council's application of Safeguarding measures, with agendas and minutes of relevant meetings that had to be uploaded as part of the assessment. The range of new documents required for the audits included new EFDC policies and strategies for Child Sexual Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Honour Based Abuse and the Prevent agenda, as well as a complete refresh of the Council's Safeguarding policy and procedures.

The submission was signed off by the Council's Management Board in January and the information will now be assessed by Essex Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards, which will produce a report on the effectiveness of each local authority in Essex.

Last year, the 2013/14 safeguarding audit demonstrated that the Council was only partly meeting its responsibilities, with 55% effectiveness in some areas. This led to a request for additional resources to apply to Safeguarding, and subsequent approval was given by Cabinet for a DDF item to enable the appointment of a Safeguarding Officer and Administration Assistant. I am pleased to say, that following successful appointments to these two posts and the capacity that this has created to address areas for improvement, the Council has fared much better in the recent audit, with an average of 80 – 85% effectiveness and in some areas reaching 100%.

However, the Safeguarding agenda is constantly changing, with new issues and responsibilities emerging all the time, including new legislation such as the Care Act, which has already had an impact on the language used to describe 'Vulnerable Adults'; we therefore need to ensure that the Council keeps abreast of these changes and continues to meet its duties to local residents. The Council's Safeguarding Officer is already working on the development of an Action Plan to address these new areas and make improvements in current practice.

The initial findings of the audit are available for any Members who wish to have more details of how the Council is meeting its duties. The new Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for the Council will be reported to Cabinet in March, but is available on the Council's intranet for reference by staff and Members.

I would like to remind any Members who are yet to undertake Safeguarding training that we have a Members' training session planned for Tuesday 24 February between 6.00 and 7.30 pm.

Countrycare

Since the last Report Countrycare has been participating fully in the National Tree Planting week, with 230 trees planted at two sites in Loughton at the request of Cllr David Wixley and Loughton Town Council.

The usual well attended Thursday volunteer programme has continued across the District. Just before Christmas a special lunch was arranged for the volunteers at Linders Field, Buckhurst Hill to thank them for their work during 2014. At this time of year the team are working on the hedgerows around the District, and hedge-laying has taken place in North Weald and Thornwood.

Despite some very wet Thursdays in the first few months of 2014, Countrycare recorded 670 volunteer days overall during the year. While this is a slight decline on 2013, the wet weather experienced in 2014 played a significant part in the reduction. As many as 53 people came out volunteering during the year including 10 who were new to volunteering. The total of 670 volunteer days equates to 4020 hours of volunteer work which, at an assumed rate of £7 per hour, represents a saving to the Council of £28,140. A total of 50 tasks were organised during the year, averaging 13.4 volunteers per task.

In recent high winds Countrycare have dealt with fallen trees in the reserves at Chigwell Row, Norton Heath, Buckhurst Hill and North Weald. Routine maintenance on the reserves has included footpath clearance, hedge cutting, re-pollarding trees and scrub clearance from grassland areas.

Countrycare has also been allocated the management of a new site at All Saints Church, Nazeing, with a remit to make it more wildlife-friendly. Work is beginning in February.

Trees and Landscape

The tree and landscape team have been active across a variety of fronts. The total number of TPOs for 2014 was 28, slightly more than average. Recent orders mostly relate to development pressures, but include a strategic TPO to protect the most important trees at Garnon Mead, Coopersale.

The team has also given advice on the usual range of planning applications with potential tree and landscape impacts, as well as continuing to follow up on the implementation of conditions, several contraventions and dealing with applications for works on protected trees. Advice on planning applications has ranged from impacts on single trees to intended large scale housing development in the green belt. In those cases the officers have made use of the agreed Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Studies, which proved very useful in distinguishing those sites where development would be most damaging, and particularly where the effects could not be successfully mitigated by planting or design. Recent TPO applications include a proposal to remove two prominent trees, a Redwood and a Cedar at Fir Trees, Palmers Hill, Epping, on grounds of alleged subsidence. The initial assessment found that the evidence was clearly short of what would be required to determine the application; the applicants have been invited to withdraw.

The team has also been working with Countrycare in preparing the ground for a programme of future Community Tree Strategies, following a promise of significant external funding for 2015. Meanwhile work has begun on putting the Loughton Community Tree Strategy into action, as well as assisting Theydon Bois Parish Council with their Landmark Tree project, the results of which will be recorded on the Favourite Trees website.

Fuel Poverty

Professor Sir John Hills undertook a review of fuel poverty in 2012 and, as a result of his findings, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) carried out a consultation on a new fuel poverty strategy for England in the autumn of 2014. It is currently anticipated that the Government will issue its new Fuel Poverty Strategy and fuel poverty targets before the General Election.

Currently a family that has to spend more than 10% of its average weekly income to attain a reasonable level of heating is considered to be in fuel poverty. The consultation proposes a new definition with fuel poverty occurring when a household's residual income after fuel costs leaves them below the official poverty line.

The previous fuel poverty target proposed ensuring no one was living in fuel poverty 'where practically possible'. The proposed new statutory target will be to ensure as many homes as is reasonably practicable achieve specified minimum energy efficiency standards by 2020 and thereafter by 2025 and 2030.

The Council has information dating from 2011 on the number of its residents in fuel poverty using the current definition. This shows that an estimated 18%, equating to approximately 8,000 private sector homes in the District, were living in fuel poverty at that time. The Council also has some data on the energy efficiency of both private sector housing and its own stock. However, the Council currently has no data on levels of fuel poverty under the proposed new definition.

The Council will have to determine what action it needs to take to meet the targets in the new Fuel Poverty Strategy once it is published.

Car parking

Car parks strategy

Following the Cabinet decision on 2 February relating to the revised off-street car parking strategy, implementation plans are now proceeding. These include the procurement of new 'smart meters' to replace the old pay and display machines, the installation of new CCTV systems and improved lighting.

Although it has been agreed that tariff increases should take place in some car parks, the following measures have been designed to assist traders and visitors to our high streets and town centres: the retention of a 30 minute tariff; no increases in Waltham Abbey and Ongar car parks except for an increase from 10p to 20p for half an hour; two hours free parking at weekends; free parking at weekends and bank holidays in December; and free parking for Blue Badge holders. Charging at the Civic Offices car park will be introduced, with free parking for visitors to the Council.

Parking Reviews

Essex Highways are finalising the legal paperwork for the official Traffic Order which will enable the introduction of the new parking restrictions at Buckhurst Hill to take place. In parallel, the design drawings and related information have been submitted for the preparation of cost estimates to carry out the signing and lining work.

North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP)

At the most recent meeting of the NEPP Joint Committee on 11 December, held at the Civic Offices in Epping, the Committee agreed that a review of the Partnership's off street function should be carried out. This work has now begun and I shall seek to ensure that

the outcome of this review results in a reduction in cost to this Council.

At the next meeting of the Committee on 12 March, I shall be nominating the next tranche of highest scoring schemes in the District. The relevant Ward Members will be contacted directly by officers to seek their views on the proposed changes.