

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Subject: Contracts and Technical Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

That the report of the Contracts and Technical Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Waste Management

The Christmas and New Year holiday period collections went well however there was an increase in the number of roads that waste vehicles are unable to access due to inconsiderate parking especially on junctions. This has led to waste and recycling not being collected from entire roads on their scheduled collection day and refuse freighters had to return later in the day or over the following days to collect waste and recycling. This is a costly exercise and is both environmentally and economically unsustainable. Work is underway to try and resolve this issue and reduce the number of inaccessible roads.

As Members are aware the Council has been working on the Epping Forest Recycling Rewards project to engage some of our residents in blocks of flats. I am pleased to report that our residents have been competing over the last year, completing over 18,000 positive actions to top the Recycling Rewards leader board and donate £1,750 to local charities. The Council is running this project in partnership with Jump a leading supplier of sustainability and wellbeing engagement programmes in the UK. Residents living in 1,500 properties across selected blocks of purpose built flats in Epping Forest compete against each other through Recycling Rewards by taking part in activities such as Food Waste Challenge, Recycling Quiz and 'Right Thing, Right Bin'. Recycling Rewards aims to reduce contamination and improve the quality of recycling. In the first two years of the programme, an impressive 18,000 positive actions have been recorded as residents have been doing all that they can to improve recycling both in quantity and quality.

Each month the top six residents who earn the most Green Points win a £25 voucher for reducing, reusing and recycling as much as they can. Over the year individual points all contribute to a community total, with the top scoring community winning the largest share of £1,750 to donate to local charity.

Members of Recycling Rewards vote for the charity which they would like to support. Topping the leader boards for 2019, Waltham Abbey voted for [Epping Forest Community Transport](#) to receive £700; Loughton in second place voted for [Epping Forest Food Bank](#) to receive £550; Epping in third voted for [Safer Places](#) to receive £325; and Buckhurst Hill voted for [The Chigwell Riding Trust](#) to receive £175.

The refurbishment programme of the recycling banks around the district will take place in April/May.

The final meeting of the Waste Management Task and Finish Panel will take place on 3rd March and a report and recommendations will be presented to overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17th March.

Car Parking

I am pleased to report that at the last Joint Committee of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) on 9 January approval was given for eighteen exciting new parking projects with an investment value of over £1 million. Epping Forest District Council had three significant projects approved which were:

- £70,000 to look at Traffic Regulation Orders across the district,
- £30,000 to help formulate and produce a Parking Strategy for the district,
- £30,000 to address Epping Town Parking Issues

The decision comes after NEPP's partner authorities submitted bids for 23 projects to be funded from the organisation's Reserve Fund which enables the organisation to reinvest revenue into parking services across north Essex. Each project was also scored using a previously agreed scoring system.

Projects that were approved to be deliver across the partnership area were:

- A 12-month trial of school parking cameras
- A pilot scheme, and possible future implementation, of on-street bay sensors
- Reviewing and improving car park directional signage in all partner areas

The next step for NEPP will be to carry out feasibility studies and business cases where relevant and consider timescales before the schemes are implemented.

The Car Parking Team are working with NEPP to set up monthly NEPP surgery for Members to discuss on-street enforcement. The first surgery will be on Tuesday 3rd March in the conference room at Epping Forest District Council's Civic Offices from 11am to 1pm. The surgery be an opportunity for members to raise any concerns directly with the NEPP West Operations Manager Michael Adamson. The surgery will take place the first Tuesday of every month.

As part of a programme of car park improvements, Queens Road Lower Car Park in Buckhurst Hill will benefit from potentially six new bays through relocating the recycling bring banks. This will potentially provide more car parking and additional income.

Leisure Contract

I am pleased with the performance of this contract and would like to thank Members of the Leisure Contract Partnership Board for their support and guidance. The strategic relationship with the contractor is excellent with both sides developing a good understanding of the mutual benefits for both parties and the wider public health benefits. There have been significant increases in usage at the new Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre and the extended Loughton Leisure Centre. The Epping Sports Centre and Ongar Leisure Centre usage numbers have improved only slightly, and the general view is that this is due mostly to the ageing nature of the facilities. Ongar has had many technical problems with very old pool plant and is badly in need of significant maintenance work.

In revenue terms, the contract is performing well – in the 2018/19 financial year there is forecast revenue to the Council of around £1.1m and in 2019/20 financial year a forecast of £1.5m.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage (EPD)

During the night of the 19th and into the day of the 20th of December 2019, the district suffered very heavy rainfall. The EPD Team responded to a range of localised flooding incidents across the district and helped residents with both advice and some vulnerable residents were provided with sandbags to protect their properties.

While managing the Council owned flood storage areas officers were also clearing ditches and ensuring our flood assets such as storm grills did not become blocked and cause flooding.

A small number of properties within the district did unfortunately flood, and some residents were also directed to Essex Highways and the Environment Agency in some instances as necessary. The team continue to provide the Councils out of hours flood response service which although not an emergency service, provides assistance and advice where possible to protect properties from internal flooding. Officers are continuing to work with Essex Highways, Essex County Council Floods Team and residents to ensure the future risk of flooding is minimised where possible by investigating defective drainage assets and clearing highway pipes under roads that can become silted or blocked with time. Ordinarily the team work to reduce flood risk on a small but cumulative scale through encouraging development with Sustainable urban Drainage Systems and issuing Land Drainage Consents. Currently we are recruiting to two full-time roles, a Principal Environmental Protection Officer and a Contaminated Land Officer which will ensure resilience to the team.

Grounds Maintenance Service

The recent heavy rainfall resulted in the River Roding over spilling onto the adjacent recreation area and nature reserve. Whilst not an unusual occurrence as the area does form part of a floodplain, it did present quite a challenge for those grounds staff responsible for maintaining and marking out the many football pitches located on the site. However, with the water level now subsided and the pitches once again accessible, the team are working hard to ensure they are back in a playable condition as soon as possible.

Following a donation by a local resident to be used for the improvement of the grass verges along Greenstead Road in Ongar. A small team of gardeners assisted with the planting of daffodil bulbs along this stretch and it is hoped that a good display of Narcissus 'Ice Follies' will be visible to residents and motorists alike during the spring months.

There have been several incidents of highway verge damage in the district from irresponsible car parking, notably at Hyde Mead in Nazeing and Cripsey Avenue in Shelly Ongar. Subsequently the gardeners have been busy with additional reinstatement works at these sites.

The gardening teams are now well into their winter works programme, completing the annual pruning of the numerous roses, shrubs and hedgerows located throughout the district. Many of the ornamental beds have now been covered in a layer of wood-chippings; this is a 'natural mulch' applied to the soil to help suppress weed growth, retain moisture and enrich the soil. This is an environmentally friendly method of weed control and plant management also provides an excellent way of recycling the wood-chippings generated from our tree maintenance work.

Grass cutting operations are still ongoing; the mild autumn has resulted in the teams continuing to mow throughout much of the winter. Once the grass stopped growing and the mowers are stored away, the staff moved onto their 'winter works' programme. These tasks include: bed maintenance, hedge trimming and shrub pruning as well as the planting of spring flowering bulbs, hardy shrubs and over 100 new street trees.

Countrycare

The tree team has been extremely busy and during Storm Ciara the team have responded to 8 fallen trees and a number of fallen branches and a number of calls from concerned residents across the district. This could have been much worse had the trees been in full leaf. The team were working until 22.00 to ensure the most urgent calls were responded to.

Since the last report the team has managed 6 volunteer tasks on 5 sites:

Thornwood Common Flood Meadow, Church Lane, Chigwell Row Wood (twice) all local nature reserves (9LNR), Old Shire Lane and Bobbingworth. These tasks including the team and volunteers mounting a new Barn Owl box at Thornwood Common, clearing some of the scrubby areas from the banks of Church Lane, pruning a laid hedge at Old Shire Lane and they pruned back some areas of bramble at Bobbingworth.

The Angela Godfrey designed way-marker in the field just south of Church Lane was returned to its original spot after being taken away to be repaired. The response on social media has been very positive, saying it has been missed.

The Wetland Bird Surveys for this period have mirrored national trends of lower counts than usual. On our reserves (Church Lane, Thornwood Common or Nazeing Triangle), Snipe have not been recorded during this period. Thornwood Common, where last winter had a high count of 11, has been very wet and the invertebrate population probably has suffered from the site flooding during December 2019. One thing of note was the high count of 33 Mallard at Nazeing Triangle LNR on the Core Count on 12th January 2020.

Following a tree donation, we planted a tree in memory of a resident's late grandmother and received a well deserved thank you; *'I just wanted to say thank you for all your help leading up to today. The weather was perfect, the planting spot was ideal, and the workmen couldn't have been nicer. The whole experience has been great, and I know my nan, who was a stickler for good service, would have approved. I've attached a couple of photos in case they are of interest. Thanks again and I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.'*

Fleet Operations Service

For the first time this year the team have carried out free winter checks on staff vehicles and it was a huge success, the checks included the following;

- Tyres - the overall condition of tyres including the tread, depth and pressure;
- Battery - test the batteries charge to make sure your car starts in the mornings;
- Coolant/anti-freeze - check the strength and levels;
- Wiper blades - splits and damage;
- Windscreen wash system - operation of the windscreen wash system and the level of screen wash and top this up if necessary.

The Service is managing the ongoing trial of the Car Pool Club. This is proving to be very popular and membership is increasing by the day with vehicle utilisation increasing and the benefits of the scheme now evident. The information from the trial will be used to inform the long term strategy for a Council wide car pool scheme as part of the Staff and Visitor Travel Plan.

Epping Forest Community Transport are now using the Council workshop facilities at Oakwood Hill Depot for a 3 month trial period. This new business for the team means that income is up on budget and the team are projecting an increase in income for the second year running.

The driving licence verification process 'Licence Link' is well underway with over 80 members of staff that drive Council vehicles having been validated.

The team are keen to become more commercial and are in the process of applying for and achieving a recognised industry standard accreditation.