

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 30 July 2020
Subject: Contracts and Technical Services
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

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

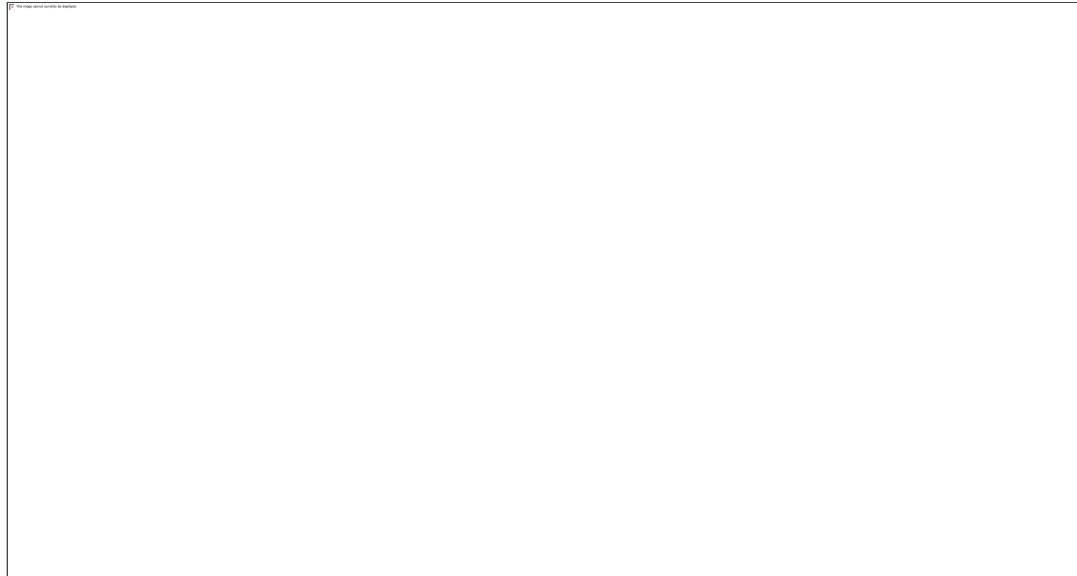
1) COVID-19 – Response of Contracts and Technical Services

All services have performed well during the Covid-19 period. Office based staff are continuing to work remotely by using Microsoft TEAMS. Those who need to come to office for operational reasons are taking precautions to avoid the risk of infection. Operational staff have assisted with the Council's Safer Spaces Project to keep the high streets safe.

2) Waste Management:

I am pleased to say that throughout the Covid-19 lockdown all waste collection services operated as normal and there were no suspensions of service. Members will be aware that a number of Authorities across Essex and nationally faced service disruption at the peak of the Pandemic. I would like to thank Biffa especially their front-line crews who performed very well under some tough and testing circumstances. Biffa did have a number of absences related to Covid-19 and these were covered by staff being made available from Biffa's commercial division that normally collect trade waste. I would also like to thank the Council's own client team of officers who worked closely with Biffa management. I believe it is as a result of a true partnership between the Council and Biffa that we are able to provide high quality services.

During the Covid-19 period overall weights have risen by an additional 24% requiring additional staff and vehicles to collect the volume of waste on all three waste streams (Food and Garden, Dry Recycling and Refuse). Currently it is at 10% higher than the same time last year but is continuing to fall. Bulky special collections requests fell during this period but have now returned to pre-Covid-19 levels and street cleansing services have carried on as before the lockdown period. The graph below shows the trend over the Covid-19 period.



3) Leisure Management

As Members are aware Government has given consent for leisure centres to reopen from 25 July. Places Leisure are working towards opening our facilities from the 3rd August due to the time required to unfurlough staff and put the correct policies and procedures in place. Officers have been working closely with the Council's leisure partner, Places Leisure for reopening under social distancing conditions. It is clear that doing so will result in a very different experience for leisure centre customers. Gym, group exercise and swimming sessions will need to be booked in advance and the timetables at all the centres have been reorganised to facilitate additional cleaning regimes. Given the uncertainty regarding the situation, Places Leisure and officers will be monitoring the response from customers very closely but it would be useful if Members could report any feedback directly to officers.

Some Members will be aware that the Council and Places Leisure have experienced some technical challenges at Ongar Leisure Centre over the past year or so. These challenges stem from the age of the building and plant. Members will therefore be pleased to know that a £1.3m programme of refurbishment work has started at the leisure centre and will include repairs to the roof, replacement of the pool plant and upgrades to various electrical systems including adoption of LED lighting where possible. The work is due to be completed by the end of the calendar year during which time **the swimming pool will remain closed** but the gym and group exercise studios will remain open. I will provide regular progress reports to Members throughout the works.

4) Car Parking

Car parking income was impacted as a result of Covid-19 and the lockdown, income from EFDC car parks between April to June was down by 87% compared to the same period last year. Free car parking has also been given to NHS and social care staff during this period and this is continuing.

2-hour free parking

As Members are aware that the Council introduced a temporary promotional tariff of 20p for two and a half hours in all of its off-street car parks from 15th June to support the post-Covid-19 economic recovery. Car park usage data indicates that since mid-June there has been a

steady increase in car park usage which indicates that the recovery is progressing as more and more businesses return to normal operations.

Clifton Road Car Park

As Members are aware the Council recently bought Centric Parade in Loughton. The parade is served by a car park in Clifton Road that was operated by a private operator until the sale took place. During the Covid-19 lockdown period officers have been taking advantage of the reduction in car usage to resurface the car park and install pay and display machines and tariff boards etc. The car park is expected to be fully operational in mid-August.

It had been hoped to include two Electric Vehicle charging bays and/or public access pool cars during the refurbishment work, however with staff from the relevant operators being furloughed it was unable to be included at this time. The matter will be pursued as soon as possible.

Queens Road Lower Car Park

Buckhurst Hill Members will be pleased to hear that the car park at Queens Road Lower has also been refurbished during the lockdown period with resurfacing work, re-marking and relocation of recycling bins. Further work is being undertaken this month to clear overgrowth of shrubs and cut back overhanging branches.

Park Mark

The Park Mark Safer Parking Scheme is a Police Crime Prevention Initiative and is aimed at reducing crime and the fear of crime in parking facilities. This award is awarded to parking facilities that have met the requirements of a risk assessment conducted by the police. We are delighted to announce that we have secured the Park Mark Award for a further year.

5) Fleet Operations Service

The Council's Fleet Service are currently operating at 80% capacity for public MOT's, we are hoping to increase to full capacity from the 3rd of August. Strict controls and measures are in place for greeting customers, taking payments, full PPE is worn by workshop staff. The first quarter has seen MOT income down, but servicing and maintenance income is increasing.

6) Grounds Maintenance

The teams are busy grass cutting throughout the district and despite some staff members shielding we have maintained our core work. North Weald Airfield staff have provided some assistance with grounds maintenance work on the site with a former member of the gardening team using the tractor to cut the airfield.

Bedding displays throughout the district are reduced because of Covid-19 and the lack of available plants. The grower was unable to guarantee the normal quantity of plants and supplied only limited stock. The nursery has prioritised the spread of plants throughout the district and we have managed to source some extra plants for additional bedding displays. Sites that do not have displays will be allowed to rest and be improved with additional topsoil for planting up in the autumn months for the spring displays.

Council run play areas throughout the district re-opened on July 4th in line with Government recommendations. All play areas have been risk assessed and some items of equipment removed or made unavailable. Due to the short notice period given for the reopening of the

playgrounds temporary signage will be displayed initially to be replaced with something more robust as soon as possible.

The team mark out and maintain the grass athletics track on Roding Valley Recreation Area and following government restrictions on exercise this provision was temporarily put on hold. New guidance has enabled the 400m track to be reinstated in full which has been well received.

7) Country Care

The new Arboricultural Officer settled in especially well despite only being in post a fortnight before lockdown.

The Countryside Officer has been doing routine maintenance jobs around the district's reserves, some sites have been subject to anti-social behaviour during lockdown with bonfires being reported and barbecues. Dog bins have been emptied more frequently and litter picking has taken place.

The volunteer days were suspended but we are aiming to resume towards the end of July. A programme of work for the late summer is already planned. Every Thursday the team have sent the volunteers a Good Newsletter providing information on what the team have been up to which has been well received.

We have recruited to the two Countryside Assistant posts and the successful candidates will join the team in July and early August.

8) Environmental Protection and Land Drainage

The team have assisted in delivering and laying social distancing stickers as part of the Council's Safer Spaces Project on several of the districts high streets including Epping to aid reopening local businesses.

The impact of the coronavirus has been that home visits to assess drainage or flooding or undertake sampling of private water supplies have been reduced and only undertaken where risk assessed as safe to do so.

The team was recently joined by a new and experienced Contaminated Land Officer which has filled a long-term vacancy. The role of Principal Environmental Protection officer is in the process of being recruited to and once complete will bring the team to full strength.

The Highway Ranger function transferred to EFDC from ECC in April, but the existing rangers did not TUPE across to EFDC. We are currently recruiting to the two posts; interviews are being undertaken via Zoom at present and we expect the successful candidates to be in post in the summer. In the meantime, we are liaising with the Local Highways Officer regarding any requests that are received for the service and responding on a priority basis.