

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 29 October 2020

Subject: Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Avey

Recommending:

The report of the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

COVID-19 – Response of Contracts and Technical Services

All services continue to perform 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.

Waste Management:

The replacing and refurbishment of the recycling banks sites is due to take place in October/November. This will lead to the replacement of the existing banks by using a new standard bank that will collect all the materials that are collected by the clear recycling sacks and will include glass. The textile banks will remain at this present time.

This new bank system will reduce the amount of space occupied compared to the current system, reduce/eliminate the need for specialist collecting equipment thus reducing the carbon footprint of the service and have a faster reaction time to issues including overfilled banks as we can use our existing freighters. It will also improve the appearance of the recycling sites with distinct EFDC corporate identity.

The start of a trial at certain blocks of flats collecting textiles, batteries and small electrical items using a 340 wheeled bin will commence shortly. We will publicise this to the residents and aim to increase the level of recycling of these items rather than them ending up contaminating the refuse bins.

We are investigating the waste collection from some traveller caravan sites, as the number of caravans and the increase in waste tonnage has in some cases increased substantially. This is causing some collection issues with the quantity of waste, abuse by residents and in some areas the state of repair in unadopted roads that are causing expensive damage to collection vehicles.

Leisure Management

Members will be aware that the District's leisure centres re-opened on 3rd August. The challenges imposed by operating under social distancing conditions have been significant. Managing queues, booking classes and maintaining cleaning regimes being just three of very many factors affecting operations.

I am pleased to report that Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre, Loughton Leisure Centre and Epping Sports Centre are operating relatively well although user numbers are down on this time last year by around 40% on average. The pool at Ongar Leisure Centre is closed for refurbishment at present but the gym remains open.

The refurbishment work at Ongar Leisure Centre is under way with an anticipated reopening of the pool immediately after the Christmas break. The aim of the refurbishment is to get another five to seven years of use out of the centre during which time further decisions about the future of the site can be made.

While the majority of the £1.3m budget will be spent on fixing the roof, replacing the pool plant and upgrading the electrical systems, the intention is to apply any underspends to improving the poolside seating area for parents and families.

Our contractor, Places Leisure, is constantly adapting to changing circumstances reflecting the national position on Covid-19. This is proving to be a huge challenge, but most customers accept the disruption.

Car Parking

Members may be aware that at the onset of lockdown at the end of March, car park usage fell to less than 10% of normal usage. As at the end of September car park usage has recovered to the point where numbers of tickets sold are greater now than prior to lockdown. It is almost certain that the increase in numbers has been aided by the introduction of the temporary 20p tariff in mid-June. However, the reduced tariff has meant a significant drop in car park revenue for the Council especially as many commuters are now working from home.

The Traffic Regulation Orders for on-street parking that were approved in October 2019 and have now been made operational by North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) are listed below:

- Roding Gardens, Loughton - Waiting Restrictions
- High Gables, Loughton - Permit Parking
- Bridge Hill, Epping - Waiting Restrictions
- Hanbury Park Estate, Chigwell - Waiting Restrictions
- Amberley Road, Buckhurst Hill - Permit Parking
- Epping New Road, Buckhurst Hill - Waiting Restrictions and permit bays (Operational in October)
- Church and Temple Mead, Roydon - Waiting Restrictions
- Gould Close, Moreton - Waiting Restrictions TTRO in place
- West View Road, Loughton - Permit Parking
- Stanley Place, Ongar - Waiting Restrictions
- Scotland Road, Buckhurst Hill Permit Parking (Operational in October)
- Westbury Lane, Buckhurst Hill - Change of permit hours
- Staples Road, Loughton - Permit Parking Operational
- Ardmere Lane, Buckhurst Hill - Waiting Restrictions Operational
- Princes Road, Buckhurst Hill - Permit Parking Operational
- Ivy Chimneys, Epping Permit Parking - limited waiting and waiting restrictions
- Traps Hill and High Gables, Loughton - Waiting restrictions and pay and display bays

The Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) that have been approved in October 2020 and will become operational during 2021 are listed below:

- Fairmeads, Loughton - Waiting restriction/s
- Roundhills, Waltham Abbey -Waiting restriction/s
- Victoria Road, Buckhurst Hill - Waiting restriction/s
- Coronation Hill, Epping - Waiting restriction/s
- Shelley Grove, Loughton - Waiting restriction/s
- Purlieu Way, Theydon Bois - Waiting restriction/s
- Garnon Mead, Coopersale - Waiting restriction/s
- Kendal Road Epping - Resident permit area/s
- High Street, Roydon - Resident permit area/s

- The Square/Leaden Close, Loughton - Waiting restriction/s Junction protection
- Gould Close, Moreton - Resident permit area/s and waiting restrictions
- Sidney Street, Coppice Row - Theydon Bois - Waiting restriction/s

Fleet Operations Service

Fleet Operations at Oakwood Hill depot are now operating at 100%, and the MOT test station is now open 6 days a week, there is an increase in the demand for public MOT's that will have a positive impact on the projected budget for servicing/repairs and MOTS for 2020/21.

Fleet Operations has provided Qualis Management (housing repairs) with a new fleet of repainted and refurbished motor vehicles, fitted roof racks, security locks, specialist auxiliary equipment and fitted the new Qualis corporate livery and despite the challenges of the last few months have managed to stay on target.

Grounds Maintenance

The Grounds Maintenance teams have been kept very busy over the summer months as the long days and warm wet weather has encouraged continued vegetation growth. Hedge and shrub cutting continues at a pace with priority being given to highway site lines and sheltered housing accommodation.

Assistance has been provided to CountyCare and Land Drainage with the summer cutting of the Councils flood plains throughout the district. These areas include Thornhill, Thornwood, Bobbingworth and Church Lane in North Weald. Throughout these sites the majority of the grass is cut and collected to provide substantial flood water storage should the need arise whilst some vegetation areas are left to encourage greater biodiversity. Grounds have also assisted with the induction of the two new Highway Ranger's providing mechanical equipment training.

The Grounds Service undertake the marking and maintenance of the many football pitches located on Roding Valley Recreation Ground. The specialist team responsible for this work have now completed all the new line-markings required and installed the goal posts to ensure the pitches are ready for the coming season.

With the closure of the former Swimming Pool at Roundhills in Waltham Abbey access to the Playing Fields behind is restricted and has prevented the Town Council from maintaining the site. Grounds Maintenance have assisted with the cutting of the fields as required and compliments received from residents. The team has also received positive feedback from both members of the public and Town and Parish Councils for their continuing excellent work in the district.

Country Care

CountyCare has gained 2 new members of staff, 2 Countryside Assistants, and both have settled into their roles very well. The team is now fully staffed and the merits of having extra hands is already showing benefits.

Despite volunteer days being limited for a period of time, the team have managed to complete all essential habitat management tasks for the summer on our wildflower meadow sites.

Reptile recording mats have been out at Home Mead LNR in Loughton for the first time this year which has been a success and shown there to be a healthy population of breeding Slow worms. Other wildlife records of note for this period include passage migrant birds visiting some of our sites, such as Pied Flycatcher and Stonechat.

The team have been helped by Grounds Maintenance once again with the cutting of some of the larger meadows.

With winter approaching, the wintering Snipe will be arriving back at Thornwood Common Flood Meadow LNR and the team will be working on some of our more wooded sites.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage

During the recent heavy rains and localised flooding events in Loughton and Epping, the team provided support to residents throughout issuing sandbags and identifying where further assistance may be required. In the following days the team continued to respond to incidents, provided advice to residents and assisted in determining the potential sources of the flooding such as Thames Water's drainage systems and Essex Highways' assets and referred the issue to those bodies where applicable. In general, the flooding was a result of the intensity of the rainfall over a short period of time that overwhelmed the networks but subsided within a matter of hours.

Flash flooding in urban areas will be a recurring issue in the future and the team, as part of their involvement in the new development sites within the Local Plan, will continue to push for robust and well-designed Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to be holistically built into masterplan designs. The long-term stewardship of SuDs and related assets is also portrayed with an example of one of the storm grills that EFDC maintain in order to help reduce the risk of flooding to property. One such grill on the edge of the Epping Forest can be seen below in a 'before' and 'after' scenario. The rainfall of the 17th August, even within a relatively small area, resulted in the washing down of around 8 tonnes of forest debris that would have otherwise blocked a critical culvert had it not been for the grill arrangement. The importance of checking and maintaining of these assets by Officers cannot be underestimated.



Before

After

The impact of the coronavirus has meant that certain visits to premises to assess less urgent drainage issues or undertake sampling of private water supplies had been reduced and only undertaken where risk assessed as safe to do so, however with the recent recruitment of a Principal Environmental Protection Officer this will bring much needed extra capacity to the overall team to work on pollution and contaminated land matters.

Highway Rangers:

The Highway Rangers has now transferred to EFDC and two new staff have been recruited. They have completed their initial induction and training they have they have now begun working out in the district initially on priority tasks referred from ECC. Once these are complete the Rangers will begin assessing other requests such as work on Epping High Street and Sun Street in Waltham Abbey to help rejuvenate these areas, as well as commence work on issues raised by the Town and Parish Councils. The EFDC website has been updated with information on the team and a link to the new webform for requests for work that is available to members of the public and Councillors. Information on how to access the service will be distributed to the Towns and Parishes to provide further advice and also to explain that some further functionality will be added in the coming weeks to enable them to approve requests from members of the public or reject them if they are duplicates or not needed.

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/environment/highway-rangers-service/>