

## ***Report to the Audit and Governance Committee***



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: AGC-014-2017/18**  
**Date of meeting: 5 February 2018**

**Portfolio: Environment**

**Subject: Progress Report - Town Mead Depot Waltham Abbey**

**Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564051).**

**Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**(1) To receive an update on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Fire Risk Assessment for the Council's shared operational depot at Town Mead in Waltham Abbey.**

### **Executive Summary:**

At the last Committee meeting Members expressed concern at the lack of progress in the implementation of recommendations of an external Fire Risk Assessment of the Town Mead Depot and asked for an update by a senior officer of the Council.

This report sets out the background context and progress made in the implementation of fire and general health and safety improvements.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

The Committee, having received a limited assurance audit report at the last meeting regarding health and safety at Town Mead Depot Waltham Abbey, asked for a senior officer to give an update at the February meeting.

### **Other Options for Action:**

None.

### **Report:**

#### **Background**

1. Town Mead Depot, Waltham Abbey is a small operational depot which is in the ownership of the Council and is jointly occupied with Waltham Abbey Town Council (WATC). Some photographs attached to give Members a better idea of the site. The Council's Countryside management service, Countrycare, operates out of the Depot and WATC has its grounds maintenance service based there.

2. In addition to the above, other services that use the Depot are:

(a) Council's Grounds Maintenance team for storage of the grass cutting

equipment for the west of the District;

- (b) Biffa static street sweeping operative for Waltham Abbey;
- (c) Temporary storage of small items of street furniture;
- (d) Waste and Recycling service use a small area of the Depot for storage;
- (e) Communities Transport for storage of surplus materials;
- (f) Voluntary Action Epping Forest for storage; and
- (g) Waltham Abbey Town Council Grounds Maintenance and market storage.

3. The Council inherited the Depot in 1974, prior to that the depot was in the ownership of Waltham Holy Cross Urban District Council. It is understood that at one stage the depot was the operational base of the waste collections in the Urban District Council.

4. Of the footprint of the Depot circa 60% is occupied by Waltham Abbey Town Council and the remainder by the Council services.

#### The Council's Aspirations for Redevelopment of the Depot

5. For a number of years the Council aspired to redevelop the site for affordable housing. A number of feasibilities were carried out. However the depot is located in a Flood Plain and it was not possible to change the use.

6. One consequence of the efforts to consider redevelopment options for the depot has been that only essential maintenance was carried out in recent years. The depot is built of modular construction materials and was not designed to last this long. It is in need of major repair rather reconstruction to make it fit for current purpose.

#### Fire Risk Assessment

7. The Council's Internal Audit Team carried out an Audit in September 2016. This identified a number of weaknesses, principally:

- Lack of formal written agreement between WATC and EFDC;
- Lack of Fire Risk Assessment for the Depot;
- Lack of knowledge of the materials stored at the Depot;
- Presence of asbestos in the buildings;
- Lack of corporate oversight for the depot;
- Lack of management of ingress and egress resulting in unauthorised access; and
- Inadequacy of the toilet facility.

8. The Audit made two recommendations, to enter into a formal agreement with WATC and an Action Plan be drawn to address the health and safety issues identified in the Audit report.

9. As recommended by the Audit Report in September 2016 a Fire Risk Assessment was carried out and their recommendations made in March 2017. The delay in implementing recommendations of the Risk Assessment arose because the Council does not have a dedicated resource for management of its depots and officers have to action the

recommendations alongside their day to day responsibilities. Having said that after the initial delay significant work has been carried out to comply with the recommendations of the fire safety risk assessment.

#### Progress against the Audit Report of September 2016

10. Following the Audit an officer working group, headed by the Assistant Director Technical, was formed which consisted of the Health and Safety Officer, Countryside Manager, Facilities Manager and other key officers. The Group set out to address the issues identified. Meetings were held with WATC, who have extended full support and cooperation, to address all issues.

11. The Council made available additional budget to facilitate essential health and safety works, these include: a new robust perimeter security fence, enhanced CCTV systems, emergency repair works and commissioning an external fire risk assessment.

12. The Council does not have a dedicated Depot Manager and given the skill sets required the Council's Fleet Operations Manager has been helping to address safety issues. Since early 2016 a number of actions have been carried out:

- Regular safety audit inspections, sample report attached;
- Action plan for ongoing monitoring attached;
- Hazardous materials identified and removed, location plan attached;
- Flytip and general litter clearance and routine sweeping ongoing;
- Access to all parts of the depot has been obtained and all areas have been inspected;
- Working closely with WATC to ensure safe operating practices;
- Estates and Valuations department working on a form or legal agreement with WATC;
- Facilities Management have installed new boundary perimeter fence improving site security;
- New enhanced CCTV systems have been installed;
- Out of hours emergency response arrangements have been put in place;
- The Council has recently appointed a new Health and Safety and Emergency Planning Officer who will be starting their employment in February. The new appointee has been responsible for carrying out fire risk assessments at their previous employment and has considerable skills and expertise in this area.

#### Fire Risk Assessment Action Plan

13. An Action Plan for implementing recommendations of the Fire Risk Assessment of March 2017 is attached. Warning signs have either been installed or are in the process of being done. Fire Log Book and associated information is being collated. Owing to the nature of the operations on site, it is not occupied all the time and operational staff require regular access, it is necessary to identify key personnel who will take the lead in implementing fire evacuation procedures.

#### Relocation of Nursery Service

14. The Council's plant nursery and landscaping service currently operates out of a site in Pyrles Lane in Loughton. That site has been identified as housing development land. Design feasibility work is currently being carried out to modify Town Mead Depot such as to enable the Nursery and Landscape Service to be relocated here. The Service will consist of three members of staff and associated equipment that will need to be accommodated on site.

15. The new site will provide secure storage for machinery used by the Grounds Maintenance Service that is unable to be kept at its main depot in Oakwood Hill, due to the limited space and the need to relocate the Council's Housing Repairs team from their current location at Epping Depot. It will also provide the outside space required to hold shrub & tree stock and associated materials.

#### **Resource Implications:**

£75,000 was made available to deal with the urgent health and safety issues. A further £100,000 has been allocated for the relocation of the Nursery service from Pyrles Lane in Loughton.

Once the Nursery Service is relocated to the Depot and given the more extensive use of the site it will be necessary to allocate additional resources to stay on top of the health and safety requirements.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

The Council owns the depot however it shares it with WATC. Owing to the operational nature of the services it is necessary to agree formal arrangements with WATC and avoid any ambiguity in responsibility of health and safety matters.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

Safe and efficient operations of the Depot are necessary to enable effective service delivery of some of the key front line services in Waltham Abbey and the surrounding area.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

Waltham Abbey Town Council.

#### **Background Papers:**

Previous Committee meeting and Internal Audit report of September 2016.

#### **Risk Management:**

This is a mixed use, multiuser site consisting of mostly operational teams. Frequent vehicular movements and a mix of plant machinery access is required. In recent months, owing to the redevelopment of Langston Road Depot, storage of small items of street furniture and waste and recycling materials has been necessary. The Council plans to operate the Nursery Service from this Depot. All these activities will require close coordination and management to ensure safe and effective operations.

#### **Equality Analysis:**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided at Appendix B to the report.