

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 26 July 2016

Subject: Environment

Portfolio Holder: Councillor W Breare-Hall

Recommending:

That the report of the Environment Portfolio Holder be noted.

Fly tipping

Incidents of fly tipping continue to be a problem across the county, with a number of areas in our district targeted by repeat offenders. Recent incidents in North Weald prompted residents to contact BBC Essex. This resulted in the Council's Environment & Neighbourhood Manager, Richard Gardiner, participating in a live studio interview to discuss fly-tip enforcement and prevention.

Mr Gardiner emphasised the need for all of us to take responsibility for our own waste and to always "Check, Challenge and Record" whenever we transfer waste to somebody else for disposal. Businesses and householders alike have a "duty of care" to ensure their waste is handed to an authorised person.

The Environment & Neighbourhoods team have a number of ongoing fly-tip investigations, and recently had three fly tipping cases in court, resulting in substantial fines and costs being awarded:

Mr. Samee Ullah, of Blackhorse Road, Walthamstow, was fined £1200 and ordered to pay the Council's prosecution costs of £1987 together with a Victim Surcharge of £120 after pleading guilty to a waste duty of care offence in relation to a large pile of fly-tipped waste found in Sewardstone Road, Waltham Abbey. He had handed waste materials from refitting of his restaurant to another person without exchanging a written description of the waste, known as a Waste Transfer Note. The Magistrates found that he had a reckless attitude when arranging for the disposal of the waste.

Fly-tipping in Pick Hill, Waltham Abbey, resulted in fines and costs of over £2200 for The Bathroom Fitting Company Limited, whose registered office is recorded as being at the Seedbed Centre, Langston Road, Loughton. Employees of the company had handed waste materials from a job they were working on in Waltham Abbey to another person without asking whether that person was authorised to transport waste and without exchanging a Waste Transfer Note.

Mr. Jamie Rolt, of Monksgrove, Loughton, who trades under the name JCR Decor, pleaded guilty to fly-tipping and was fined £483 and ordered to pay the Council's prosecution costs of £913.95 together with a Victim Surcharge of £48. Sacks of waste from his business were found in Highwood Lane, Loughton, near a bin store and close to a sign stating "No rubbish dumping".

Off-road motorbikes

There has been a recent spike in complaints about the use of motorbikes being used off-road, illegally, without the permission of the landowner, often in public areas. The noise from these incidents and danger to other users of the land has caused concern. Complaints also refer to the motorbikes being driven dangerously around estates and the nearby highway. The police have powers to seize motor vehicles that are being used to cause alarm, distress or annoyance, and the Council may also be able to take noise nuisance action. Officers are considering new powers to introduce Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) to prohibit motorbikes from sensitive public areas. However, whilst a PSPO may act as a deterrent, catching offenders is still a difficult process.

Food Safety

Although there was no response from businesses to the Essex County Council-funded "Tuck In" project reported in June last year, businesses in the Loughton area were approached as part of the Debden Festival of Healthy Living and several signed up to the project to reduce the use of salt and sugar in takeaway foods. Officers also attended an event to answer questions on this year's FSA Food Safety Week, which aims to reduce the amount of food wasted by the public. They answered questions on "Best before" and "Use by" dates and the safe storage of food.

Health and Safety at Work

The project to monitor Carbon Monoxide emissions from indoor charcoal grill cooking was successfully completed and a similar project is now underway in Indian restaurants and takeaways using charcoal-fired tandoor ovens.

A number of items on laser equipment used in the beauty industry have been found with falsified or incorrect safety documentation. Cases have been passed to the Health and Safety Executive to investigate the importers.

Pests

The number of complaints about rats has reduced since last year, but the heavy rain of recent months has forced rats from their usual nesting sites into areas where they have not previously been seen regularly.

Waste Management

Members will be aware that it has been a long standing aspiration of the Council to provide a commercial waste collection service to businesses in the District. I am pleased to report that progress has been made on this front. I have asked officers to carry out some further work on the prices that will be charged for commercial waste collections and the operational and resource impact. I am keen that the service is provided on a cost neutral basis to the Council whilst offering a better value choice to businesses across the District.

There remains a significant proportion of food waste in the residual stream and it would appear that some residents are reluctant to avail themselves of the recycling opportunities available. It is very important that we increase our recycling and reduce landfill waste as much as possible so I have asked officers to prepare strategies for addressing this issue and I intend to ask the Chair of the Neighbourhoods Select Committee to consider these.

I am sure Members will be pleased to hear that we will shortly receive the new gum cleaning machine. After testing and staff training we will be able to carry out cleansing of our high streets in the next few weeks.

I am pleased to report that the Civic Offices will soon benefit from a new recycling scheme. The scheme is currently being developed with a view to commence in September. I have asked officers to provide more information to all Members via the Bulletin.

In order to further encourage recycling and to engage the next generation of recyclers, the officers of the waste team ran a recycling initiative with all the local schools in the District. Students were asked to produce recycling campaign material and some excellent designs were submitted. I have asked officers to display these entries in the front foyer of the Civic Offices and on the Council's website.

Drainage

With the arrival of the English summer the officers of the Engineering Drainage & Water Team have inevitably been extremely busy, dealing in particular with two recent significant rainfall events. Whilst scattered around the district, upwards of 20 homes in total were affected by flooding from a variety and combination of sources. Officers attended sites on the days in question to assist where practically possible and offered advice and guidance where intervention was ineffective. A number of sites have required follow up visits to help residents understand where redress and potential solutions may lie, and it is clear that, despite changes in legislation over recent years designed to give clarification as to what organisations are responsible for the various assets involved, residents' first port of call in flooding circumstances is still their local council. As such, visits to both advise and inform residents has on the whole been welcomed by those in the unfortunate position of having to clear up their homes.

Officers have continued to contribute from a drainage, flooding and water quality perspective to the important work being undertaken by the Planning Policy Team on the Local Plan preparation. Site selection sifting and policy formulation have been topics of late and early input, particularly on the latter, will hopefully pay dividends post the eventual adoption of the Plan.

Grounds Maintenance

The Grounds Maintenance gardening teams are being kept very busy with their mowing operations in order to maintain our verges and open spaces. The extremely wet weather experienced this year has produced some exceptional growth rates and difficult mowing conditions. However, all machines and staff are working hard to complete this task, with the focus turning to shrub and hedge pruning in due course.

The Grounds Maintenance section has started to move some of its equipment into the new depot at Oakwood Hill. However, with some weeks to go until final completion, the main workforce will still be operating from Langston Road depot for the time being. The staff have been given a tour of their new home and positive feedback was received, with everyone looking forward to the final move.