

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 13 December 2022
Subject: Technical Services Portfolio Holder
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ken Williamson

Recommending:

That the report of the Portfolio Holder be noted.

Regulatory & Technical Services:

Anti-Social Behaviour

The ASB and Police teams have recently launched the 'Crimestopper Zones' initiative in Chigwell, on the Limes Estate, and Ninefields in Waltham Abbey, the first Council to do so in the county, and we have already received positive feedback from residents. The new initiative by the national charity Crimestoppers is aimed at building confidence in local communities about reporting crimes and to deterring criminals from committing offences. Many people feel reluctant to report crimes to the police or local authorities, but Crimestoppers provides anonymity to those providing information.

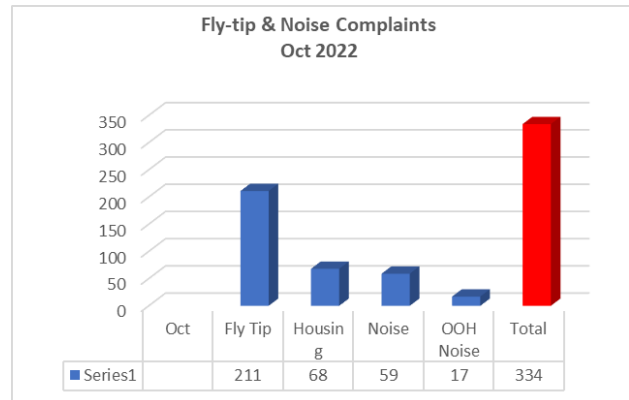
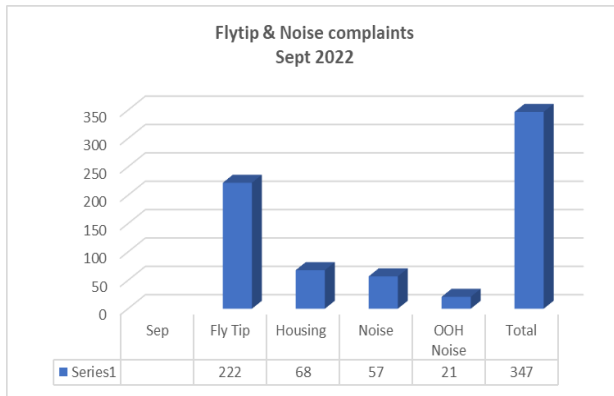
EFDC Policing Team

Epping Market on a Monday proactive patrols continue, the team have been deploying overt and covert tactics still. There was a recent report in one of the charity shops so the high visibility patrols will continue at present, the team will also cover the Christmas market.

Regular patrols are also taking place at Elgar Close, Buckhurst Hill and Vicarage Lane North Weald following reports of persistent ASB and drug possession/supply.

Enviro Enforcement

- 7 Fixed Penalty Notices issued
- 3 Community Protection Warnings issued
- 2 Community Protection Notice issued
- 1 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.80 Notice served
- 2 Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.108 issued
- 52 visits made to businesses for Environmental Protection Act 1990 S.34 Waste Duty of Care and notices issued as necessary.



Environmental Protection and Drainage Team

The recent heavy rainfall events have meant the team have been busy attending some properties affected by flooding and monitoring our own Flood Storage Areas to ensure they do not overtop.

The Private Water Supply Charging Regime has now moved from the introductory rate of 50% of sampling costs to full cost recovery as it enters the second year. A new charging scheme for Environmental Information Regulation requests for property and contaminated land searches was implemented at the start of June and has been used successfully since then.

Highway Rangers

The rangers continue to work on reported issues from both Essex County Council and those reported by Members and residents. Recent jobs completed include installing several new finger posts, hedge cutting and pavement clearances, offensive graffiti removal, installing new benches at Bobbingworth Nature Reserve and the installation of renovated built-in bench seats in Epping High Street.

A new railing has been installed at the southern end of St Johns Road in Epping as the current metal posts and rails have rusted away.

Grounds Maintenance

The unseasonably warm weather has meant that grass cutting is continuing across the district as ground conditions allow. The mowing operations will shortly cease and teams will move onto their winter works programme.

The nursery team have completed the replanting of the seasonal bedding displays located throughout the district. The winter flowering pansies, forget-me-nots and spring flowering bulbs will bring a welcome splash of colour to our towns and villages over the coming months.

Tree Team

The team have now completed its phased removal of Oak Processionary moth within the district and have moved on to the planting programme for street trees, as well as the replacement of some of the planting that did not survive the summer drought.

Fleet

The new electric fleet of vehicles are now in service, which has resulted in a large reduction in repairs to the older diesel fleet of vehicles.

The team will be offering a free winter vehicle check to staff/councillors/stakeholders in pre booked slots across December.

Countrycare

Twelve sites have been visited amounting to 134 volunteer days a saving of approx. £7000 to the Council. Fungi finds were good this autumn, in one visit to Church Lane LNR and Thornwood Common LNR Parrot Waxcap, Witch's Hat, Snowy Waxcap and Shaggy Inkcap were all found.

A new pond is planned for Epping Green Millennium Garden, this will be dug by staff and volunteers over two days and a fence will be erected. This will add to the biodiversity of the site that presently has no water bodies.

October saw site furniture checks on all sites for health and safety and a programme of maintenance is planned. In September Countrycare ran a bat walk in partnership with the Essex Wildlife Trust on the Roding Valley Meadows, the event was well attended and three species of bat were observed. More events are being planned to run in partnership with EWT next year.

Building Control:

Income and budgets

Income through fees and charges by the end of October (Month 7) was at approximately £315,000 – remaining on track for the full year budget of £540,000. Performance was strong and consistent through April to July but was typically quiet through the August holiday period.

New projects starting on site in September were much reduced compared with previous years, however there has been some recovery through October and November. The national economic picture with high inflation on building materials and high business and home energy costs, together with recent upgrades to expected building performance through changes to the Building Regulations are expected to reduce demand over the winter.

The cost of delivering the Building Control Service is currently tracking marginally below our budgeted expectation. (Full year budget £732,000 – current forecast of £717,000).

Recent market share analysis by volumes of applications show a continuing increase in Approved Inspector's Initial Notices. The balance has tipped from a small majority of applications being submitted to the Council rather than Approved Inspectors in 2019/20, down to 48% in 2020/21 and 42% in 2021/22. We will continue to closely monitor, accepting that the means of measurement by application volumes does not necessarily equate to a realistic picture of the market share.

Cases requiring enforcement when referred to the Council by Private Approved Inspectors remain to be on the increase. This work is often resource intensive – Approved Inspectors are frequently reverting cases to the Council with very limited supporting information or case notes as a way of offloading the risk from their own licencing audits.

Legislative Change

The Health and Safety Executive wrote to all Section 151 Officers in October requesting the authorities position on charging hourly rates for the supply of staff to support the Building Safety Regulator. The Government expect Local Authorities to supply suitably qualified and competent Building Inspectors to support the Building Safety Regulator deliver Building

Regulations supervision and enforcement to all in scope buildings (typically high-risk and complex buildings).

Supporting the existing establishment of Surveyors with their own professional development to prepare for regular competency validations and licencing remains the priority for the service. There is a high risk that many of those employed in the sector will leave the industry before April 2024 resulting in a serious staffing deficit across both public and private sector Building Control.

Service Improvements

Building Control have undertaken an internal audit and are expecting external audit by either LABC or Alcumus Isocar prior to April 2023. I am pleased to report overall improvement on our 2021 audit in key areas such as Key Performance Indicator reporting, public protection and efficiency with statutory obligations.

Planning - Development Management

SAC Backlog

The Service continues to make good progress in releasing planning decisions delayed due to environmental legislation and caselaw relating to the Habitats Regulations and the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As of 23 November 2022 we have issued **202** decisions, delivering 328 dwellings. 24 Applications have been withdrawn and 29 applications have been refused. A number of applications (13) are awaiting the completion of S106 agreements and issuing of these decisions are imminent, resulting in permission for a further 21 dwellings.

Service Improvements

We recently published a new publicly searchable interactive planning mapping solution on the EFDC website.

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/planning-and-building/interactive-planning-map/>

The map allows members of the public to see the most common planning and other constraints for properties within the district, such as Conservation Areas, Listed buildings, flood zones and Tree Protection Orders. Past and present planning application reference numbers are also shown. The publication of this information means a telephone call to the Council to check on the constraints will no longer be necessary.

Planning Enforcement

On 17 November 2022 the Council issued a Temporary Stop Notice relating to land at Tile Hill Farm, Pynest Green Lane in High Beech, requiring the cessation of unauthorised engineering works to create hard standings, moving earth, bringing aggregate onto the land and bringing of motor vehicles onto the land. The expediency of further enforcement action is currently under consideration.