

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 December 2015

Subject: Safer, Greener and Transport

Portfolio Holder: Councillor G Waller

Recommending:

That the report of the Safer, Greener and Transport Portfolio Holder be noted.

Community Safety

Our Community Safety Team continues to be very busy dealing with complex cases, and I would like to highlight the work undertaken in relation to one particular case. A recent investigation carried out by officers involved the successful closure of a local property that was being used for the taking of illegal drugs. This was the first 'Closure Order' obtained under new Anti-Social Behaviour tools and powers. The investigation was very complex and required liaison with our Housing, Legal and Safeguarding teams, Essex Social Care, and Essex Police. It required the eviction of the tenant subject to the Closure Order and a further urgent injunction to prevent him from having contact with a female tenant living at another Council property. This was due to the female being deemed at risk of sexual exploitation and 'cuckooing' (a crime involving a drug dealer befriending an individual living on their own). The case involved working closely with all agencies to obtain the necessary evidence and the injunction was successfully obtained with a power of arrest by the police, if breached.

It should be noted, that the Council's overt re-deployable CCTV equipment was used in this case, significantly supporting evidence for the Closure Order, and it will continue to be used to monitor any breaches of the injunction. This re-deployable system was also key to the successful identification of a male who was responsible for a burglary at a Council property and who has subsequently been arrested by police.

I am pleased to report that the Community Safety Team continues to work well across all Directorates and with our partner agencies on behalf of the public in our district.

Child Sexual Exploitation Conference

At the end of November, I gave the opening address at a very successful Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) conference that our Community Safety team organised for Council staff and partners from a wide range of organisations across the Epping Forest district, Harlow and Uttlesford.

The event, held at Chigwell Hall, was attended by around 100 people, including colleagues from Essex Police, local schools, Essex Fire and Rescue Service, and voluntary sector agencies such as The Children's Society and South Essex Rape and Crisis Centre.

Presentations were made by a range of speakers and agencies including an organisation, Safe and Sound, which works to keep children and young people safe from sexual exploitation. This presentation provided us with harrowing facts and statistics of known Child Sexual Exploitation, which can affect children of any age.

We were told that it can take children and young people many years to disclose information about CSE and that one should not assume that it only affects children from dysfunctional families and those who are looked after. They may be manipulated, threatened and controlled not only by older people than themselves, but also in many instances by those from their peer group, particularly where gangs are involved.

It was also noted that children who go missing or run away have a 70 per cent greater chance of being sexually exploited and that many families do not understand how to report concerns. However, as foster families are already linked directly to Social Care and other support mechanisms, they have a duty to report missing children. The organisation stated that they are currently working with nearly 200 children and young people in the Eastern Region and that for every child identified as being exploited, there are likely to be at least five more.

A presentation was also given by Essex Police Child Sexual Exploitation Triage Team (CSETT), which is the first point of call for all cases of suspected CSE. The role of CSETT is to consider the information that has been presented through the initial referral and then to forward this to the respective agencies who will undertake the investigatory work linked to the concern. There are currently six full time police officers within the CSETT team and they work closely with colleagues from Social Care and a range of voluntary sector organisations, to organise support for young people identified as being sexually exploited.

Other agencies that provide much needed advice and support to children and young people also gave presentations about the work they undertake, including The Children's Society (via Essex Young People's Drugs and Alcohol Advisory Service), Victim Support through Independent Sexual Violence Advisers and South Essex Rape and Crisis Centre. All of these agencies rely on funding to sustain their work and are limited in the support they can give, due to a lack of sufficient resources.

CSE is happening everywhere across the country and although exact numbers aren't known, there are certainly many cases in the Epping Forest District. CSE can take many forms and is not restricted by boundaries, as cross border trafficking of children and young people takes place across Europe.

Safeguarding

The following safeguarding cases have been dealt with by our safeguarding team during October, with several cases once again requiring intensive staff time. These have included a case of hoarding and significant self-neglect which involved collaborative working across our Neighbourhoods and Community Safety team, Princess Alexandra Hospital and the Fire and Rescue Service.

Total no. of concerns received by the Safeguarding Team for this period:	15
No. of children-only concerns (where children were victims):	5
No. of adult-only concerns (where adults were victims):	7
No. of concerns that involved both (adult and children were victims):	3
Total no. of children involved:	17
Total no. of adults involved:	8

For information, I have included the various categories related to the concerns identified as follows:

Welfare concerns:	2	Physical Abuse:	1
Mental Health/Mental Capacity:	5	Self Neglect:	1
Neglect:	1	Emotional/Psychological Abuse:	1
Exploitation:	1	Homeless:	3

Countrycare

Countrycare has continued with its well attended regular volunteer days at locations including Roughtally's Wood, Swaine's Green, Willingale Road Allotment site, Linder's Field, Chigwell Row Wood and Norton Heath. Hedgelaying has also taken place at Church Lane and Thornwood Common LNRs.

On 29 October the Willingale Road Allotment site was transformed into an orchard. Eight fruit trees were planted as well as raspberry and gooseberry bushes donated by one of Countrycare's volunteers. This was the result of several years' hard work by the volunteers clearing the bramble from the site to make it useable. The orchard was opened by the Mayoress of Loughton and a small ceremony took place, with some local councillors and members of the Town Council attending.

Another orchard was planted on the Roding Valley Meadows in November as a joint collaboration between Essex Wildlife Trust and their volunteers, Countrycare volunteers, the Oakwood Hill Estate and Voluntary Action Epping Forest.

Trees and Landscape

Jeremy Godden, Planning Enforcement Manager, has taken responsibility for the daily management of the Trees & Landscaping team, freeing up Chris Neilan for strategic landscape work. The Section is fully staffed and very busy in its daily work around Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Area trees and development control consultations. In the last 6 months the Section has served and confirmed 14 new TPOs. A number of prosecutions for destruction and damage to preserved trees are under way and will result in court appearances in early 2016.

Conservation

Character appraisals

The Copped Hall Conservation Area Character Appraisal was adopted in August 2015.

The draft character appraisal and management plan for the Waltham Abbey Conservation Area has been released for public consultation. The document is available for download from the Council's website, along with a questionnaire to guide people's responses. A limited number of hard copies have also been made available at the Civic Offices in Epping, Waltham Abbey Town Hall, Waltham Abbey Library, and the Tourist Information Centre in Waltham Abbey. Residents and stakeholders have been contacted by letter and email to inform them of the consultation period and a public exhibition will be held on Monday 7

December (18.30 – 20.30) at Waltham Abbey Town Hall, so people can drop in to find out more. The consultation period ends on 8 January.

Following the consultation period, constructive feedback will be incorporated into the document before it is adopted.

New designation

A draft character appraisal for the new Buckhurst Hill Conservation Area (centred on St John's Church) has been produced. Full public consultation will begin once work is complete on the Waltham Abbey appraisal.

Development Control

Consultations on planning applications affecting aspects of the historic environment are an ongoing element of the team's workload, as is advice (both formal consultations and informal discussions) on proposals at a pre-application stage. Development Control officers have reduced the number of formal consultations in favour of informal discussions for the more straightforward applications in order to ease the workload; however, these consultations and pre-application discussions take up a notable proportion of the team's time. Given the rigid deadlines on planning applications, these consultations have to take priority over the character appraisals.

Assistant Conservation Officer

Frederique Caillat has been in the position of Assistant Conservation Officer since November 2014. The extra capacity created by this position has allowed progress to be made on projects, particularly character appraisals, which were previously, due to necessity, neglected. Her contract has been extended until March 2018, which will allow even more progress to be made with character appraisals and other strategic projects, some of which could arise from the Local Plan process.

Parking

Car parks strategy

Cabinet has approved funding under the Invest to Save scheme for the installation of more energy efficient LED lighting. This, along with the installation of new CCTV systems, will significantly enhance the Council car parks.

Parking Reviews

The Buckhurst Hill Parking Review scheme has now been implemented. I have met with District and County members to discuss the strategy for undertaking the Loughton Broadway Parking Review.

Free Christmas Parking

I am pleased to inform Members that once again the Council has offered free parking on every weekend in the month of December across all Council owned car parks.

NEPP

Together with officers, I met with the NEPP East Area Manager and discussed with him all aspects of the parking enforcement process across the district.

