

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 17 December 2019

Subject: Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Commercial and Regulatory Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

Introducing the Essex Energy Switch 2019

I am pleased to report that for another year Epping Forest District Council will be part of the Essex Energy Switch (EES) 2019. This is a county-wide collective energy switching campaign launched in 2014 and designed to help Essex residents cut their gas and electricity bills. The scheme is run in partnership with iChoosr, a national company, who manage the online registration, auction and offer. Essex County Council (ECC) is responsible for promoting the scheme each winter to Essex residents.

The Council recognises that some householders across the District are struggling to pay for their energy supplies and this scheme, in partnership with ECC, is one way of addressing this and is in keeping with Councils commitment to help more residents benefit from cost effective energy and reduce our carbon emissions.

The EES is a collective switching process. Collective switching occurs when a group of like-minded consumers band together to negotiate a better deal – the more people that register, the bigger the potential there is to save. The iChoosr approach to collective switching is less complex and less time consuming than ‘going it alone’ and it’s all without any obligation. The key dates for the winter campaign 2019/20 are:

3 December 2019 – Registration launch

11 February 2020 – Auction

25 February 2020 – Offers

24 March 2020 – Closure

Registration is open from 3 December 2019 to 10 February 2020; the auction takes place on 11 February 2020 and the offer letters to registrants are sent out from the 25 February 2020.

Once registration has closed, energy providers will bid against one another to obtain the custom of those who have registered. The winning bidder will be whichever company offers the best prices.

Rogue Private Sector Landlords

I am pleased to be able to inform you about some effective investigative work and enforcement carried out recently by our Private Sector Housing team against certain

landlords in our district that have been operating licensable HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) illegally and putting the occupying tenants safety at risk.

The Private Sector Housing team has been investigating two cases of unlicensed Houses in Multiple occupation (HMO) in Loughton. The owners of the properties were invited in for a formal interview conducted under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) and they admitted the offences of operating an unlicensed HMO and for HMO management regulation failures. The local authority has the option to prosecute the landlord or issue a civil penalty notice. In both cases it was considered the most appropriate course of action to issue the civil penalties. One landlord was given the maximum £30,000.00 for failure to licence and £9,300.00 for management regulation offences. The other landlord received civil penalty notices for £24,000.00 for failure to licence and £18,000.00 for the failure to comply with HMO management regulations. If the penalties are paid within 28 days, a 50% discount is applied.

Both landlords were very surprised regarding the severity of the fines, but the Government is very clear regarding cracking down on "rogue" landlords. This sends a strong message to landlords and the team continues to use intelligence available to uncover more unlicensed properties.

In a separate case, a rogue landlord from the London Borough of Redbridge thought he could avoid scrutiny and operate under the radar by setting up an HMO in our district. Reports were received regarding a large unlicensed HMO operating in Chigwell. Residents commented that the property had been recently renovated and there were no other issues, apart from the fact the landlord did not appear to have a licence.

Following detailed investigation and after several attempts to gain access, officers finally got in to the property to discover that it was an unlicensed HMO and it was advertised for rent in Lithuania. A notice in Lithuanian, translated to say "do not let anyone in and do not speak with anyone official." It also had the landlord's mobile telephone number on it.

The owner immediately applied for licence and claimed that he had not been renting out the property, but his wife's cousins had been staying there and had invited some friends, whilst he was on holiday. He said the sign was for his elderly parents who could not speak English and to remind them not to let strangers into the house. He was full of apologies and said he wanted to comply with everything the Authority wanted him to do. He installed a top of the range fire detection system and the property was of an excellent standard. He was invited to attend a PACE interview but declined. Unfortunately, despite the circumstances, there was insufficient evidence to meet the prosecution threshold of "beyond reasonable doubt".

However, he underestimated the Teams investigation powers, as they discovered he had committed 16 offences relating to 5 HMO properties in Redbridge and determined that he was not a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

He then reapplied for, but was refused, a licence in the name of a management company incorporated that month which named his wife as the director - this was clearly a front. He was advised that a licence would only be issued to a legitimate management company who is a member of a recognised property redress scheme. He will only be issued with a 1-year licence and strict conditions will be applied. He is now clearly aware that Epping is not the "soft touch" Council he had expected it to be.

North Weald Airfield

Masterplan

The preparation of a Master Plan for the land identified as site NWB.E4 in the Submission Version of the Local Plan dated December 2017, along with the aviation land to the western side of the runway and associated new access point has commenced.

National Police Aviation Service (NPAS)

A small number of local residents continue to complain about the police helicopter night time operations.

The Neighbourhoods Team will be installing noise monitoring equipment in 2 properties as the next step in escalating the complaints.

Since NPAS become operational in September they have been tasked to at least 1052 missions directly from NWA. This figure does not include the missions they attend once airborne.

Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust

EHAAT have now got their planning approval meaning that works can start on their new base at NW.

The anticipated start date for construction is the new year.

HMRC

The HMRC site is now operationally ready and being staffed by security personnel.

Epping & Ongar Roundtable Fireworks event November 2nd 2019

The Epping & Ongar Roundtable Fireworks display was very well attended with around 4000 visitors.

Staffing

Colin l'anson has been appointed as the new Airfield Manager. Colin has worked at NW for the past 12 years and has been promoted from a Duty Officer position.

Building Control

The LABC Partnership scheme has been extended with the signing of two new partners; one local builder and another architects practice.