

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 17 December 2020
Subject: Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor N Avey

Recommending:

The report of the Environmental and Technical Services Portfolio Holder be noted.

COVID-19 – Response of Contracts and Technical Services

All services continue to perform well during the Covid-19 period. Office based staff are continuing to work remotely by using Microsoft TEAMS or ZOOM. Those who need to come to office for operational reasons are taking precautions to avoid the risk of infection. Operational staff have assisted with the Council's Safer Spaces Project to keep the high streets safe.

Waste Management

The new trial of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment recycling (WEEE) bins for flats is now being rolled out. This will allow residents to dispose of small electrical items such as toasters, hairdryers etc for recycling the same as what is available for houses.

The new recycling banks are now in place. These new banks occupy a smaller footprint and can collect glass, cans and plastic bottles as well as paper and card. They are also based on 1100 Litres wheeled bins so that all our recycling freighters can collect the banks on a more regular basis. This new bank system will reduce the amount of space occupied compared to the current system, reduce/eliminate the need for specialist collecting equipment thus reducing the carbon footprint of the service and have a faster reaction time to issues including overfilled banks as we can use our existing freighters. It will also improve the appearance of the recycling sites with distinct EFDC corporate identity.

There is a reorganisation of the operational management of Biffa to allow a more individual responsibility for issues within a geographical area that can be directly linked to the council's area-based waste officers for all waste issues for ease of contact for residents and councillors.

Leisure Management

The district's leisure centres closed on 5th November under the Government's national lockdown. The centres will re-open on Wednesday 2nd December. Places Leisure are working towards getting the Centres ready and Covid-19 restrictions will be in place and a booking system as per the re-opening of the facilities in August.

The refurbishment work at Ongar Leisure Centre is on track and going well. It is anticipated to reopen the pool on 2nd January. The bulk of the new pool plant has now been installed along with the new filtration systems and air handling units. Commissioning of the new pool plant is scheduled for the second week of December. The roofing work is largely complete and the electrical & lighting upgrades are progressing ahead of schedule.

The majority of the £1.3 million budget has been spent on: fixing the roof, replacing the pool plant, upgrading electrical systems and a slight underspend has been used to improve the poolside seating area for parents and families.

Car Parking

The car parking team recently underwent a DVLA audit. The purpose of the audit was to ensure that the very strict legislative and regulatory requirements for accessing and using vehicle keeper data are being adhered to. The audit was carried out by the Government Internal Audit Agency. I'm very pleased to report that the team have passed the audit, where a high level of compliance was demonstrated.

Car parking usage is still considerably lower compared to the same time last year, therefore income from the car parks remains significantly lower than previous years. The temporary relief tariff of 20p remains popular.

Fleet Operations

MOT demand from the general public is increasing week on week and to meet demand additional MOT slots have been created by changing working shift patterns.

Servicing of the outsourced Grounds Maintenance plant has now been brought in house. This has resulted in a significant turnaround with reduced down time and reduced expenditure with external suppliers.

A new fleet of 24 motor vehicles has been provided to Qualis with new Qualis livery, additional security racking, security locks and tracking systems fitted, the new Qualis fleet will also have two new electric vehicles added to their existing fleet supported with 22 low emission, euro 6 engines and fitted with speed limiters.

The team are recruiting for a new vehicle apprentice in collaboration with Epping Forest College and have provided potential candidates with a period of work experience as a taster session.

Grounds Maintenance

The unseasonably warm weather has meant that grass cutting continues throughout the district where surface conditions allow. Occasionally heavy rain has prevented the grass cutting machinery from operating safely or to the required standards and resources have been deployed elsewhere. With the shorter daylight hours and changing weather conditions grass cutting will cease shortly. Shrub and hedge maintenance continue, with many sites now having their annual cut and the tractor & flail is operating on a scheduled route of works around the district to maintain vehicle sightlines and pedestrian access paths. The gardeners are continuing to remove and replant the flower beds with spring bedding and bulb displays.

The autumn and winter months are when the main shrub & tree planting takes place, which this year, has also included the planting of 12,000 spring flowering bulbs. These new bulb areas are located on various green spaces across the district and will provide a welcome splash of spring colour.

Country Care

The late summer saw volunteer numbers restricted to four per week plus two members of staff, unfortunately Lockdown 2 has meant they have had to be cancelled again.

The team continues to carry out their habitat management work but without the volunteer army to assist the sites are presenting challenges. A butterfly survey report has been completed which shows that butterfly numbers on two of the reserves have been increasing over the last five years. Wetland bird surveys continue.

The team are planning some environmental events to take place in the Festival of Culture 2021.

We are currently recruiting for an Arboricultural Officer due to a vacancy so we are prioritising work requests based on health and safety risk.

A portacabin has been installed at Town Mead Depot to facilitate the additional teams that are now based there including the new Highway Ranger team.

Environmental Protection and Land Drainage

The team continues to provide support to residents across the district with drainage and pollution issues. Our contractors provide support as we prepare for winter in clearing and maintaining certain watercourses, storm grills and maintaining our Council maintained flood storage areas. The team are also consulted by our planning colleagues for development management and are providing input for contaminated land, drainage and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) for key Qualis development sites as well as Housing development sites.

Drainage engineers have been providing input into Thames Water plans for surface water and drainage water management plans to reduce the surface water that enters sewers and likely to have contributed to the flash flooding in Loughton in August.

The impact of the coronavirus has meant that visits to assess less urgent drainage issues or undertake sampling of private water supplies had been reduced and only undertaken where necessary. The recent recruitment of a Principal Environmental Protection Officer, who has now joined the team and is working on pollution and private water supplies bringing the team to full strength.

Highway Rangers

The Highway Rangers have been in post for 2 months and have been working across the district on a range of minor highway works. They are working well and are proving to be a real asset to the Council. They have undertaken dozens of tasks including cutting back hedges around road signs, replacing damaged bollards and replacing damaged fences. The rangers have also been assisting with the Covid-19 Safer Streets projects and restoration of works in Epping and Waltham Abbey Town Centres. Recently the rangers completed the repair of two tree pits on Sun Street in preparation for a new tree outside the carpet shop and they have reset a number of paving slabs that were loose or causing trip hazards in Epping High Street. Please continue to report local highway issues for the rangers to consider via the EFDC website below for consideration and assessment.

<https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/environment/highway-rangers-service/>

An example of two tree pits repaired in Sun street is shown below:



Epping High Street Pavement Repairs



Chigwell Obscured sign

