

**CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL - 15 FEBRUARY 2010**

Agenda Item 11(i)

**CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Roger Walters****CABINET PORTFOLIO: Environment & Sustainability****Portfolio covers:**

- Clean & Green Strategy
- Waste Strategy
- Environmental Strategy
- Climate Change/Energy Strategy
- Street Management (parking, signs, etc.)
- Regulatory Functions (licensing, building control, environmental protection)
- Emergency Planning

**REPORT COVERS ACTIVITY DURING PERIOD COMMENCING 1 DECEMBER 2009 AND ENDING 2 FEBRUARY 2010.****CLEAN & GREEN**

I am pleased to report that our partnership with Colchester Borough Council for joint cleaning of the A12 is working successfully, with over 9 tonnes of litter collected from Braintree's stretch of the A12 from January to December 2009.

Work on the allotment extension at Cut Throat Lane, Witham, is now complete, with 30 new plots available for rental from 1 February 2010. Officers have been investigating options to increase capacity in the Braintree area and Braintree Local Committee has agreed to develop the former allotment site at Station Field, which will provide a further 30 plots. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to addressing the ongoing demand for allotments.

Planned works at Halstead Cemetery to repair the historic flint wall have been delayed due to the adverse weather over the Christmas/New Year period (lime mortar used on this wall will not 'go off' at very low temperatures). The scope of the work has been extended to take into account some further damage. Revised date for completion is mid-March 2010 (originally end Jan 2010).

Orders have been placed for the refurbishment of the play areas at Rivenhall, Witham and Bridport Way, Braintree, taking into account feedback from public consultation. Work is due to complete by February 2010.

A new healthy living project is underway to install 'Outdoor Gyms' on 2 open spaces at Braintree and Witham, as agreed by the Local Committees. The local Primary Care Trust donated thirteen items of equipment for each site, with a total value of £40k. Installation was completed at Meadowside, Braintree, in January and work has now commenced at Spa Road, Witham. These 'gyms' will complement the Council's play area refurbishment programme and encourage users to exercise while they play.

Funding of £18,000 has been donated by Witham Town Council for surfacing and fencing work around the new concrete skate bowl facility installed at the Spa Road open space. The works are due to complete by end March 2010.

Representatives from the local Muslim community have requested a meeting with Cemetery Services staff to investigate their burial needs at the Council's cemeteries.

Our CHIP Fund bid for major restoration works to Witham Park was unsuccessful. An application for "Playbuilder" funding of £100,000 is now being prepared by our Landscape Architect to refurbish and enhance the play equipment in the park.

## **STREET MANAGEMENT**

### **Highways**

Our Street Scene Teams were extremely busy over the recent cold spell, supporting the County Council's contractors with clearing snow and gritting footpaths and roads across the District. This is yet another example of where we have worked successfully in collaboration with the County Council at a local level. Our response prompted a significant number of compliments from grateful members of the public and businesses who acknowledged the efforts of our staff.

I was very pleased and proud to be able to sing the praises of our staff on how flexible they were in switching duties to help our community with snow and ice, particularly as other districts did not seem to be able to get their act together in the way that we did.

The Highway Ranger Service has now been operating for 2 months, in partnership with Essex County Council. In that period they have been busy undertaking various minor works across the District that has ensured a rapid response to the problems reported.

A120: The Leader has been in correspondence with the Minister for Transport regarding on how we can ensure a collaborative approach with the Highways Agency to improve cleanliness standards on the A120. A meeting is being arranged and I will report back once the meeting has been held.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

As at 1 January 2010, we ceased providing grounds maintenance for Greenfields Community Housing Association. This resulted in 6 of our staff transferring to the new service provider from that date. The Council's own grounds maintenance service has been reviewed and working arrangements amended to reflect the change.

### **Verge Maintenance**

Officers have been in discussion with Essex County Council for the District Council to assume responsibility for the verge cutting programme from the start of the new season. The primary purpose of this is to ensure a more coordinated approach with our own grass cutting activities and, of course, increased income for the Council.

### **Review of off-street car parking**

Feedback on the public consultation was received in December and this was reported to the Local Committees in January and to Cabinet on 1 February. A second period of statutory consultation will take place in relation to the new charges, so that these can be introduced from 1 April 2010.

## **WASTE STRATEGY**

### **Recycling Performance**

The Council is carrying out a trial, in partnership with Uttlesford District Council, of recycling street sweepings. This has been approved by ECC and the gate fee will be offset by the Recycling Credit and there will be a cost saving on haulage as the company will collect the street sweepings from our depot. Uttlesford will also deliver their street sweepings to Cordons Farm. It is estimated that this will improve our recycling performance by approximately 2% per annum.

Our projected year-end outturn for refuse and recycling is in line with our target of 48%. However, like all Essex authorities, we have seen a reduction in the volume of waste generated across all waste types (due to the economic downturn) which is good news for us as it means less waste to landfill.

## **Refuse & Recycling Collections**

Members will be aware of the difficulties encountered by the collection crews over the Christmas/New Year period as a result of the adverse weather. In common with many other authorities, this caused significant disruption to the service and the prolonged cold spell meant that it took longer than in previous years to resume normal service. Nevertheless, all scheduled collections were completed (albeit some days later than planned), including those collections due on the one day that the service had to be suspended. Over this period, there were greatly increased volumes of recycling to collect due to the increased waste produced at this time of year.

I am pleased to say that the majority of residents acknowledged the difficulties caused by the weather and, in fact, we received a large number of compliments for the crews from grateful members of the public. As a Cabinet Member, I am exceedingly pleased with the way in which our staff worked and how they delivered a good service, with a good attitude, in very difficult circumstances.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE/ENERGY STRATEGY**

**British Gas partnership scheme:** Our good work with British Gas partnership scheme for loft and cavity wall insulation has received recognition in Central Government. We have been invited to be a case study in a presentation by the Director General of DECC (Department of Environment & Climate Change) at the LGA Conference this month.

**Grant schemes:** The climate change team have issued 3 Renewable grants: one for the installation of an air-source heat pump; one for a solar heating system; and one for a photo-voltaic system to provide an alternative energy supply. It appears that residents are now seriously considering alternatives to fossil fuels.

**Carbon Management Programme:** Installed additional timers on equipment in Causeway House to reduce electricity consumption.

**Reports:** The team have been heavily involved in providing information on carbon reduction to the project team looking at the Council's accommodations needs.

**Bids for Funding:** An application has been submitted for Low Carbon Communities Challenge for improvements in Silver End. If the bid is successful, the grant money will be spent on energy efficiency measures throughout the community.

**Engineering:** Some of the interesting projects the Environmental Engineering team have been involved in:

- Braintree Town Centre – **Tree Planting Project.**
- Town End Field to Dengie Close **Cycleway Link**, Witham Phase II – Construction Phase starts In February 2010.
- Malyon Close, Braintree – **Proposed Cycleway Phase II** – Preliminary design in progress.
- Halstead Cemetery – **Cemetery wall reconstruction.**

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING**

Officers in the Emergency Planning & Health and Safety team have been involved in talking to local businesses, encouraging them to draw up Continuity Plans should a major disaster occur.

## **REGULATORY FUNCTIONS**

**Environmental Health:** The Council's dog wardens were successful in court last month. One owner was fined £420 and served with a control order; her German Sheppard dog had bitten 2 people on two separate occasions. Another owner was fined £175 for allowing their dog to be in a public place without a collar and identification tag (the dog is a regular stray).

**Building Control:** Income for the last quarter has shown a small improvement once again, even though this winter is having a severe impact on the construction industry (worst winter for the last 15 years).

### ***FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING:***

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