

27 January 2021

ITEM: 14

Council

Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure

Report of: Councillor Aaron Watkins, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure

This report is Public

Introduction

This is my fourth annual report as the Cabinet Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure. It continues to be an honour presenting this report to both members and the public regarding the accomplishments of the Department, the exceptional work that the staff do and the pride they take.

This year has been a hard year for everyone, but the work the Environment Team have done has been fantastic, and I thank every one of them for their continued work. The bin crews have been under exceptional pressure, with more of us at home it has meant an increase in the total amount of waste that our crews have had to collect, alongside the continued increase in blocked access issues. The teams continue to work hard to ensure all collections are met. With a 'Recycling First' focus, we will be focusing on ensuring we do our bit for climate change improvements across Thurrock. We will also be moving forward on the introduction of the separated food waste collection. This is a requirement from National Government to help with the separation of food from general waste, to help improve recycling and ensure we have improved impacts on the environment.

Our Clean and Green teams have been hard at work over this period. We have seen exceptionally strong growth in our Keep Britain Tidy scores over 2020, which continue to show how our Strive for Five continues to perform, with strong cleaning scores. We have taken the lessons learnt from previous years on where we need to see improvements in different areas as part of these scores and these are paying dividends. We will continue to strive for more over 2021 to see continued improvements. Our cemeteries have continued to see improvements over 2020, after the introduction of our cemeteries standards plan, and as a result, we have seen a substantial decrease in the number of complaints received over the year.

We continue to strive for tree planting strategies, and whilst new technology will help us deliver a better tree maintenance strategy across the borough, allowing us to be proactive with works and protection. We are also continuing to look at new funding streams to enable us to do more tree planting during 2021.

It has and continues to be an ambition of mine to ensure we start planting more trees and working with our community groups.

Which leads me onto a continued push over 2021 with engagement with our communities, both as part of the Active Places Strategy but overall improvements we will make over the coming years to our parks and open spaces, ensuring we are effectively communicating with residents and the community groups, such as Friends of Groups who give up their time to better their local areas. To ensure effective delivery, the right equipment is used, and we are not spending money for things not wanted, we work with community groups to get this right first time.

It came with great pleasure to deliver the Active Places Strategy, which is enabling Thurrock to start putting Sports first and as part of the local plan and will help to provide an improved sporting opportunity. However, whilst we have this now as a strategy we must start delivering and during 2021, the team will be working to do just that. Starting to deliver actual sporting improvements we plan to present a plan to Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the middle of 2021, showing the progress on work but also how we plan to improve consultation. As part of improved consultation, we are continuing to look at ways in which we can support sporting services but also ensure that future projects are completed with the community first mindset. We are currently looking into the setup of an Active Sports Group, which will be comprised of sporting partners across Thurrock whom will be able to provide support and feedback on the Sporting works and improvements as part of the Active Place Strategy changes in 2021 and beyond.

We look to the wider side of 2021 and how we can continue to make improvements. The following are a series of targets I expect to see achieved by the end of the 2021/22 year:

- A minimum of 5 new Wildflower sites identified and planted within the borough
- A target of 250 tree saplings to be planted by the end of the financial year 2021/22, should external funding become available for the trees, planting and ongoing maintenance costs
- A refreshed Thurrock Tree Strategy, with a roadmap of tree planting to be in place which outlines the next 5 years, subject to funding
- A refreshed Thurrock Street Cleansing Strategy and Cemeteries and Burials Strategy
- A new Missed Bin Collection Strategy to incorporate the online reporting function which will be introduced shortly and working with the Bartec system in place
- Responding to recent feedback, a need for a refreshed approach and a better system in place for residents
- A brand-new Fly Tipping awareness campaign to be designed and launched subject to funding
- Implementation of the separated food waste stream, including a communication
- Continue a recycling first focus, to work with the recycling team on introducing the new campaign 'Getting Thurrock Recycling'
- A concrete set of initial sporting improvements, as part of the APS to be brought forward by summer 2021

- A consultation strategy to go to Cleaner, Greener, Safer committee outlining the consultation process on the new sporting sites. In line with the Council's consultation process
- Aim to introduce a new resident and council led Sports group, working on any plans as part of the Active Place Strategy

The past year has been met with multiple challenges as a result of Covid-19 as well as additional pressures, but the service continue to strive forward and continue to deliver an excellent service for residents. 2021 will continue to have challenges, but as they have always done, will meet them head on.

1. Clean and Green

- 1.1 The Clean and Green service have worked throughout the Covid-19 pandemic continuing to deliver the very successful Cut It, Clean It Programme. This has included carrying out spraying of street furniture within town centres when this was requested and ensuring that any discarded public PPE was cleared.
- 1.2 Street Cleanliness had received an excellent Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) score for littering over the last 3 tranches with an average of 4.83%; this is well below both the national and London benchmarks. The team have also done well with low scores for instances of graffiti. This has been down to the combined action of both the Enforcement team (Asking private property owners to clear their premises of Graffiti), and the Clean and Green staff carrying out large scale area clearances.

<i>NI195-style scores</i>	<i>Litter</i>	<i>Graffiti</i>
<i>Thurrock 2020/2 Tranche 2</i>	5.00%	1.33%
<i>London Benchmark 2019/20</i>	8.90%	4.83%
<i>National Benchmark 2019/20</i>	9%	3%

The service are putting together an action plan to address the tranche 1 and 2 scores, this in preparation for the Tranche 3 inspection.

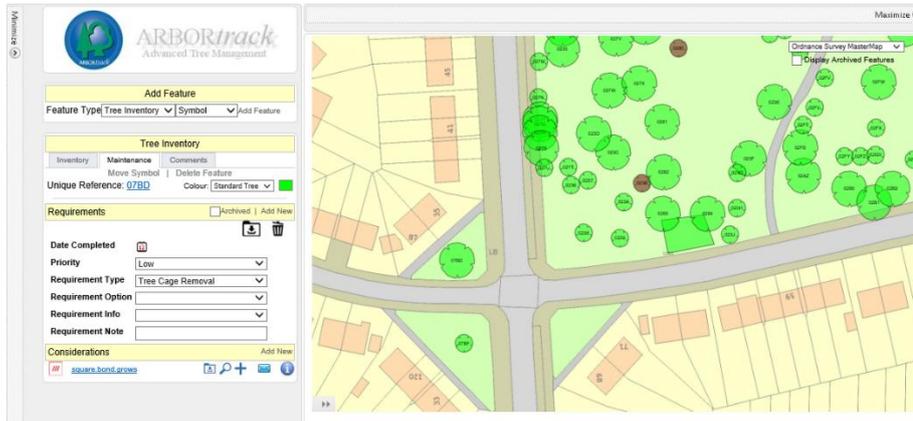
<i>NI195-style scores</i>	<i>Litter</i>	<i>Graffiti</i>
2020/21 Tranche 2	5.00%	1.33%
2020/21 Tranche 1	3.67%	6%
2019/20 Tranche 3	5.83%	6.33%
2019/20 Tranche 2	5.83%	4%
2019/20 Tranche 1	8.00%	3.67%
2019/20 All Year	6.56	4.67
2018/19 All Year	10.06	4.28
2017/18 All Year	9	2.78

- 1.3 The level of cleanliness of the streets within the Borough is assessed by KBT against a nationally recognised standard, with three tranches of inspections being undertaken each year. Litter levels within the Borough continue to achieve excellent performance, which are better than the national and London benchmarks.
- 1.4 To continue with the improvements in our street cleanliness we will be preparing a new Thurrock Street Cleansing Strategy and associated action plans to give a more formal direction to the street cleansing staff, and to address our areas for improvement. We will look at the usage of our mechanical sweepers and the possibility of supplementing the sweeping provision by being more commercial.
- 1.5 Over the last year, the presentation standards within the Cemeteries have been meeting or exceeding the standards that is expected. The Technical Team have been using seasonal staff to ensure that there has been sufficient amount of resource to achieve compliance with the maintenance schedule, resulting in an improved appearance of Thurrock's burial grounds. The improvements are evidenced by the low numbers of complaints and enquiries that have been received. A new Thurrock Burials and Cemeteries strategy

and associated policies are being created to help ensure that there is adequate burials space, looking towards having a new Crematorium and effectively regulating the current cemeteries.

- 1.6 The registrar of Burials and the Burials team have answered the need of the local community for a dedicated Muslim Burial within the cemeteries. Working with the local Muslim community an area in West Thurrock Cemetery was specifically identified for Muslim burials and has had the local Imam read prayers undertaken in preparation for the service offer to commence. The grave spaces within this area will all be orientated correctly for Muslim Burials and the team has a specific on call arrangement over the weekend to allow burials to take place outside of the standard working hours to accommodate the needs of the Muslim faith.
 - 1.6.1 The Burials team are working with the Technical Support team on the implementation of the newly procured Plotbox software that will replace the old Epilogue system for the management of burials records. Apart from having a far more modern user experience, the new system gives far more functionality including mapping of the grave spaces, planning new cemetery sections and the ability for funeral directors to book online. This is expected to go live in June 2021.
- 1.7 Winter maintenance work will be carried out over the next 5 months, with a view to enhance the appearance of these sites. The winter maintenance will include path edging and shrub & hedge pruning. There is a programme in place to ensure that our parks, open spaces and cemeteries are looking their best. The Shrub pruning winter maintenance programme commenced at the end of November, ensuring that all shrub and hedged areas across the borough are maintained.
- 1.8 The team have continued the scheduled inspections and maintenance of all of the war memorials, which has become an all year-round activity. Even though the memorial and remembrance events were sadly cancelled this year due to Covid-19, the team continued to ensure that all of the memorials were to a high standard for anyone wanting to carry out individual acts of remembrance. In addition, the team has been instrumental in commissioning and the maintenance of the new memorial in Grays Town Park. The team have also worked with our contractor Henderson and Taylor to paint poppies on the footway at the memorial locations. Subject to funding we will be looking at further ways in which we can promote this year's Remembrance Sunday event including:
 - Refresh of the poppies painted on the footways near the memorials.
 - Large painted poppies on grass areas.
 - Lamp column mounted poppies.
 - Feature planting at the Grays Town park memorial.
- 1.9 The Arboriculture Team now have software that shows all of the boroughs trees, following all of the trees being surveyed and catalogued onto a new

database of all public trees. This enables the team to more effectively deal with enquiries and complaints. The system has a general inspection cycle of 3 years. This system is a database that manages the tree work, with each tree being allotted into a High, Medium or Low Priority for work. This has meant that an effective programme of ongoing tree maintenance has been started, with all of the trees identified as high priority having now been addressed



- 1.10 The team are working closely with planning and local charities (Thames Chase) to identify areas where we can plant trees as part of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The team have also put in for funding through the Lower Thames Crossing project for additional tree planting.
- 1.11 The service are working with colleagues in Children’s and Adults services to provide work placements for SEND young people through the governments “Kickstart” Programme. This will not only give these young people essential work experience but will also give extra staffing within the service to assist in keeping up the required standards.

2. Sports and Leisure Development

- 2.1 One of the most significant pieces of work that the Recreation and Leisure Team have been working on is the development of a Thurrock Active Place Strategy. These studies provide the evidence base for the local plan and compose of four independent but interrelated strategies that have been developed simultaneously to ensure connectivity. The four strands of the Active Place Strategy are indoor built sports facilities; outdoor sports facilities; open space and play standards; and active travel. The studies are long-term plans, which cover the length of the local plan and have been developed using best practice and relevant planning and Sport England guidance. This includes an assessments of existing quality, quantity and accessibility of existing facilities as well as an assessments existing and future supply and demand. The strategies long term vision for sports and Leisure is ***“To create a network of high quality, accessible and sustainable sport and leisure facilities, which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by***

participating in sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being”.

- 2.2 The Active Place Strategy was approved by Cabinet in January this year and Officers will be working with the many stakeholders to develop the actions plans required to deliver against the recommendations. Examples of the key recommendations include.
- Developing a network of new modern sports facilities aligned multi agency facilities such as Education and Health provision
 - To increase community use of schools and ensure that any new schools or improvements to sports facilities are accompanied by a community use agreement
 - Expanding on a comprehensive consultation strategy based on the individual needs of residents
- 2.3 To help deliver against the Sport Strategies, Recreation and Leisure has established a working group of the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGB') and Sport England to advise and assist with the development of Sports in Thurrock. These NGB's link the National agenda and opportunity with the local Thurrock Sports Clubs collectively the group will drive investment and improvement.
- 2.4 In addition to the NGB group, Thurrock has advanced its Active Thurrock Network during the year and now brings together those involved in delivering sports and physical activity to work collectively and share information and best practice. This group has representatives from across the Council, Thurrock CVS, Thurrock Sports Council, MIND, Impulse Leisure and Active Essex. The network will expand its impact during 2021 by organising wider network meetings for all those in Thurrock who are involved in organising Sport and Physical activity and provide information on such things as new initiatives and potential funding streams.
- 2.5 The objective of the Park Engagement Officers is to encourage “getting people active” and use of the parks and open spaces, supported by the programme of parks improvements. The ability to organise activities has been extremely difficult throughout 2020 due to COVID 19 restrictions and apart from some targeted work with Special Educational Needs Children, very limited. However, the team have been focusing on park improvements and this includes:
- Bonnygate Park – Solar lighting
 - Purfleet Garrison estate – new play equipment
 - Gobians Park – new skate park and solar lighting
 - Grays Beach – new water feature, new play ship to replace old galleon, new Parkour area fitness area
 - Grays Town Park – New war memorial, funding secured for new café and wheelchair / buggy friendly access path from Bridge road

- King George Playing Field, Tilbury aka Daisyfield – New Parkour and 1km walking / running trail

- 2.6 Nationally, it has been an extremely difficult time for Leisure Centres with COVID 19 restrictions closing facilities for some considerable time. This has deeply affected the industry with many leisure operators facing significant financial challenges or even collapse. Impulse Leisure, the Charitable Trust who manage the Council owned three leisure centres have of course been similarly affected but have managed to keep the facilities open for Thurrock's community where permitted and have been working tirelessly to overcome these challenge.
- 2.7 It has similarly been a very difficult time for Sports Clubs and groups and the Recreation Leisure team have supported Thurrock clubs with over £80,000 of funding applications to help them through COVID 19.

3. Waste and Recycling

- 3.1 **KPI's** - Work on bringing the KPI's back to pre-Covid levels is ongoing at present. The situation remains that as more residents are at home for most of the day/week it has resulted in more waste being generated and presented for collection, which has put a continued and sustained pressure on the collection service for both refuse and recycling. This had meant that some roads not being collected due to vehicle capacities being reached, particularly on Recycling collections where the vehicles cannot be emptied locally to allow crews to then continue collecting their work.
- 3.1.1 The increased amount of residual waste being presented is decreasing the percentage of waste being recycled as it is proportionately more, the increase in recycling being collected is by volume, due to the increase in cardboard packaging being presented, which by nature does not compact sufficiently and therefore vehicle carrying-capacities are reached, alternatively with the load-weights appearing lower than the known carrying-capacity of the vehicles.
- 3.2 **Route Optimisation** - The Route-Optimisation software procurement has been finalised and data-information has been provided to the supplier, for them to build a design-file from which the Service can start working on creating new collection rounds. This will determine where further capacities can be found, in which to absorb the first tranche of additional recycling containers rolled out to council-managed flats across the borough, as part of the Flats-Recycling project. The remaining capacity will be required in preparation of the roll-out of Phase II from the New Year, to privately owned flats.
- 3.2.1 The Route Optimisation software will then be used to determine similar remaining capacities within the Refuse and Garden-collection rounds, with which the ever-increasing number of new-build developments across Thurrock can begin to be included within the Service as they come on line.

- 3.3 **Vehicle Procurement** - Work is now ongoing for the creation and circulation of vehicle-tender specifications in preparation for the purchase of a new fleet of collection vehicles for the planned rollout of a new separate food-waste service, as part of the Waste Strategy for Thurrock. These new vehicles will be designed to allow the collection of both food-waste and dry recyclable waste on the same vehicle, which enables the council to provide this new service without the need to introduce further collection vehicles onto the roads.
- 3.4 **Disposal Contracts** - Work is continuing on the preparation for the re-procurement of the current waste disposal contracts for the council's waste streams. Officers are looking at options for these contracts over the coming year to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose and allows for any changes necessary to facilitate the Waste Strategy for Thurrock. These changes include a separate food-waste contract, and a garden-waste only contract, as well as ensuring the Strategy's planned move towards a zero-waste-to-landfill policy while working to increase the council's recycling performance.
- 3.5 **Changes within the Service:** The Covid pandemic affected the staff resources available to the Service as staff levels fluctuated considerably over the period. As staff levels reduced the service was compelled to recommend that garden collections were temporarily stopped and residents advised to dispose of their food-waste in the residual bins, as while the service was valued by residents, the impact of garden-bins not being emptied for a time would not pose environmental issues.
- 3.5.1 As staff were able to return to work and the Service was again allowed to utilise external agency staff the garden-collections were recommenced in April on a two-weekly basis. This was well received by residents, who also broadly accepted the revised collection regime over no service at all. By January 2021 the Covid situation affected staff levels once more and the garden collections service was again suspended and remains so to date.
- 3.6 In September 2020 the Service started the roll-out of a new Flats Recycling scheme which looked at such locations with the aim of introducing new signage in bin-store locations, providing in-home storage options for many residents and new waste containers for both the existing residual waste and new containers for recyclable materials. The scheme was roll-out to around 2,000 council-owned properties over an 8 week period.
- 3.6.1 This introduced a further 200 four-wheeled containers for recycling collections. This increase in containers for collection has been accommodated in the short-term by utilising a single garden-waste crew that was already stood down as the growing season came to an end. The Service is now exploring accommodating the increase in containers as part of the route-optimisation process scheduled in the coming months.

3.6.2 Phase II of the Flats Recycling roll-out will introduce the scheme to the remaining privately-owned properties around the borough, expected to begin in February 2021. As part of the Waste Strategy for Thurrock a borough-wide communications campaign is planned to focus on improving recycling rates in Thurrock. Alongside this work preparations will be made in readiness of introducing a separate food-waste collection service. This service will require the procurement and distribution of food-waste containers for residents as well as vehicles for collection. It is envisaged the new food-waste service and the existing recycling service will utilise the new vehicles as both services will operate on a weekly basis.

3.7 Work continues regarding the Cross-Party Approved Waste Working Group Waste Strategy. The only current plans of change over the future months are for the separated food waste collection to be introduced, whilst other aspects of the strategy continue to be reviewed. We have extended our existing collection cycles as part of the need to renew contracts.

4. Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC)

4.1 Although the development of the Household Waste and Recycling Centre has been delayed due to Covid and the temporary pause on capital expenditure. The site has remained mainly open during COVID and the team have adapted to ensure that the site remains COVID safe. One of the restrictions implemented was the suspension of trailers coming into the site due to limited vehicle space. From Thursday 7th January, Trailer Thursday would be introduced at the site, which will allow access for vehicles with trailers only from 8am – 12pm. This will be monitored over the coming weeks and amendments made where needed.

5. Environmental Enforcement

5.1 Although covered in greater detail by the Cabinet Member for Public Protection, it seems appropriate to revisit some core areas specifically in relation to fly tipping and littering fixed penalty notices, both of which have an impact on overall levels of cleanliness within the Borough.

5.2 The Environment Enforcements Teams efforts to make the streets a clean and safer place to live, work and play has continued to significantly increased and improve. The team has delivered the below between January 2020 to date:

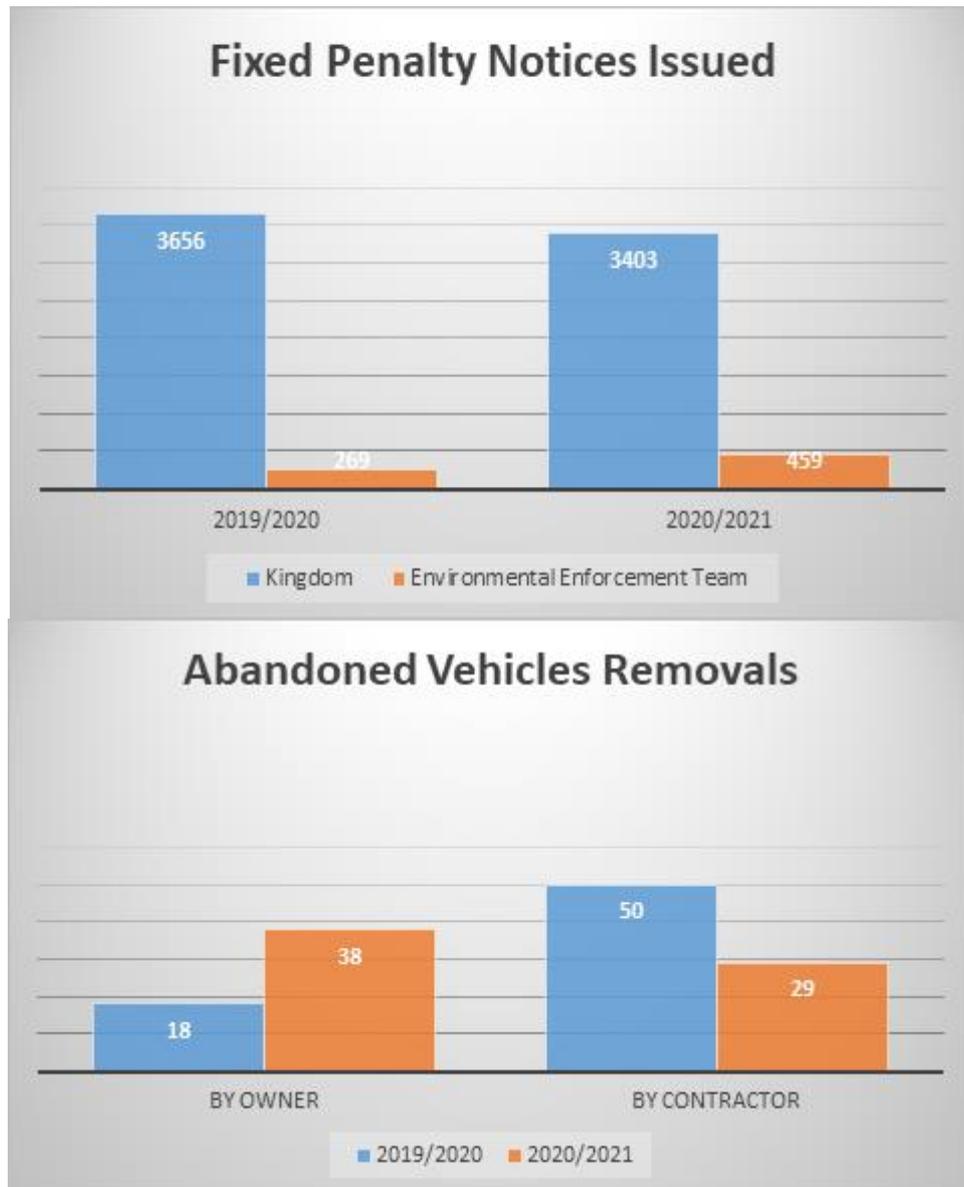
- A borough-wide interim injunction on both public and private land against unauthorised encampments meaning residents are assured that action can and will be taken immediately by both the Police and the Council in partnership with an agreed signed protocol. The council intend to make this interim injunction permanent at the High Court in London
- Increased partnership patrols between the council and police leading to added high visibility, deterrent against crime and public reassurance

- Continued seizure of vehicles used in the commission of fly tipping offences
- Increased partnership operations to tackle graffiti, ASB and enviro-crime such as littering including, nitrous oxide canisters
- The team have 303 Prosecutions utilising the single justice process, which streamlines the process for prosecution meaning those blighting the lives of residents can be brought to justice faster
- Daily distribution of intelligence between internal and external partners regarding offenders and hot spots resulting in more cohesive and robust enforcement
- Increased enforcement linked to domestic duty of care fixed penalty notices in accordance with DEFRA guidelines
- Additional early morning patrols as well as high visibility patrols in known anti-social behaviour hot-spots resulting in 3 x Community Behaviour Orders
- Continued target hardening project, protecting vulnerable pieces of land from unauthorised encampments and verge encroachment
- Working with partners promoting an anti-engine idling campaign for improved air quality around schools
- Applying to the Home Secretary to adopt further powers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for highways offences
- Operation Abercombe aimed at identifying criminal “tags” graffiti compiling a graffiti index and working with Police to issue fixed penalty notices
- Conducting weapon sweeps in partnership with the police
- In partnership with the councils contractor removed 271 untaxed and 29 abandoned vehicles
- Increased operational support to partners:
 - Joint parking enforcement school patrols
 - Identifying, preserving the scenes of crime on finding 3 bodies at Thames foreshore.
 - Identifying, preserving the scenes of crime on finding cannabis factories.

Other highlights include:

- Leading operations with Essex Police linked to illegal waste carriers, stopping and inspecting over 150 vehicles, resulting in 34 x FPNs for noncompliance, 2 uninsured vehicle seizures, 2 drivers reported for cannabis use, alcohol seized for duty evasion offences
- Proactive patrols and engagement with over 5,000 groups during Covid-19, ensuring compliance with social distancing rules during the pandemic
- Our Street Cleansing Team have continued to be trained by the EE team to be more enforcement focused to capture and protect evidence, before cleansing to avoid duplication of attendance at site
- Supporting Police during Halloween and Bonfire night tackling ASB and Disorder

5.3 Figures for Fixed Penalty Notices issued and actions relating to Abandoned Vehicles are detailed in the tables below:



5.4 In partnership with Essex police, following the introduction of the Town Centre teams. The Joint working aims and objectives of the teams are to:

- Combat ASB and disorder within the town centre
- Educate officers in the processes of how to understand and enforce the PSPO
- Conducting visible and engaging patrols, which include joint patrolling
- Working with the council and all key partners within the town centres to run joint operations and working approaches to all problems

- 5.5 The team have consistently delivered and led on partnership operations aimed at delivering long term sustainable solutions utilising education, enforcement and engineering solutions, including:
- **Operation Anglesea** - joint patrols with police to reduce ASB surrounding schools and colleges.
 - **Operation Agnes** - Targeting rogue waste carriers.
 - **Operation Adaminaby** - Targeting ASB linked to nitrous oxide canisters and littering.
 - **Operation Abercrombie** - Target and reduce graffiti offences
 - **Operation Abermain** – Target and reduce Section 34 EPA 1990 - duty of care offences.
 - **Operations Balpin** - Covid-19 social distancing support patrols and identifying premises in breach of the special measures.
 - **Operation Belgrave** – Licencing and duty of care initiative linked to night time economy and fast food outlets.
- 5.6 The officers are fully trained and CSAS (Community Safety Accreditation Scheme) accredited, enabling the team to deliver the wide range of devolved powers from Essex Police, e.g. seizing and confiscating alcohol, demand of names and addresses in respect of ASB making them even more effective in tackling ASB
- 5.7 The Team has led and delivered a proactive approach to combat the blight of graffiti across the borough.
- 5.7.1 **Operation Abercrombie** is a joint partnership with Essex Police and the cleansing team which to date has recorded over **2000** graffiti tags and removed over 4000 pieces of graffiti across the borough.
- 5.7.2 To date, 3 prolific offenders responsible for over **205** graffiti tags across the borough were identified as part of this operation. 2 resulted in arrest and received community resolutions for the criminal damage. 1 was issued an Agreed Behavioural Agreement which was attached to his Thurrock Council Tenancy Contract.
- 5.7.3 The success of this operation was evidenced in the recent Keep Britain Tidy inspection, tranche 2 as it was noted that the graffiti rate for the borough had fallen from 6.0 to 1.67

6. Budget

Service	Budget 19/20 (£000s)	Outturn 19/20 (£000s)	Revised Budget 20/21 (000s)
Cleaning and Greening	5,460	5,460	5,304
Recreation and Leisure	846	846	964
Waste Services	12,830	12,830	13,354
Enforcement	(43)	(43)	0
Total	19,093	19,093	19,622