

26 January 2022

ITEM: 16

Council

Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure

Report of: Councillor Andrew Jefferies, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure

This report is Public

Introduction

This is my first annual report as Cabinet Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure, having taken over this portfolio in May 2021.

Throughout the pandemic the services within my portfolio have managed to provide a continued and effective service, flexing their schedules and operational activity to accommodate changing guidelines, ensuring welcoming and well-presented parks and open spaces, which have been vital to our residents and visitors in terms of recreation, leisure and sport.

Something I have in common with my predecessor is a continued ambition to see more trees planted in the borough. In response to Cllr Rigby's motion, to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II, I will be inviting Ward Councillors to take part in planting a tree within their ward. A list of trees recommended by the Tree Officer will be distributed and once Ward Councillors have agreed upon the species and location of the tree, our Tree Team will carry out a suitability survey on the area chosen to ensure that the tree will thrive there.

In the period April 2020 to March 2021 72 trees were felled / removed, including 20 small saplings encroaching on private gardens (which will not be replaced). 42 large trees were planted and a total of 2000 whips, 1000 whips at Oak and Ash Plantation, and at Wickham Field, with Grant funding from "Trees for Climate Change" sourced from Thames Chase Community Forest. Due to Covid-19 there was a limited availability of trees from nurseries, resulting in a reduced planting figure for large trees compared to 2019-20, however I am pleased to advise this has now improved and to date 171 trees have been planted over this winter period.

A successful bid secured funding from the Forestry Commission from the Local Authorities Treescape fund of £285k, over a four-year period enabling more trees to be planted while working alongside and engaging with our local community groups.

Volumes of refuse being presented by residents continues to be high and although there were initial delays in the flatted/community buildings recycling roll out the project is now continuing at pace. In November Cabinet approved the new Waste Strategy, linking with changes anticipated to the Environment Bill. This year we will be introducing separated food waste collections, a requirement of the Environment Bill, aimed at improving recycling and impacts on the environment. Added to this, the draft Single Use Plastics policy will be considered by CGS O&S on 20th January and Cabinet in February, all these changes stemming from the excellent work of the cross-party Waste Working Group. Work is continuing at pace in terms of procuring vehicles to accommodate the separated food waste and to ensure capacity for the increase in waste seen over the last two years. Routes are being optimised and a new communication and education strategy being prepared for residents to ensure understanding and engagement with the changes to service, with the aim of increasing recycling going forward.

Clean and Green teams have demonstrated continued efficient and effective services with Keep Britain Tidy scores remaining well within target.

The Land Maintenance Strategy, adopted by Cabinet on 8 December 2021 is in the process of being implemented and aims to:

- Ensure that all of the boroughs public open space is effectively maintained in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible.
- Inform future action plans and projects for the delivery of improvements to existing open spaces and new open spaces triggered by development.
- To facilitate the securing of funding, either internal or external, for the improvement and maintenance of Thurrock's public open space.
- Increase biodiversity and habitats.

The strategy also aims to ensure that all the boroughs public open spaces are effectively maintained in the most efficient and cost-effective way, decreasing the amount of maintenance required in some areas and allowing resources to be redirected and targeted in others, where more frequent and specialised maintenance is required, providing resilience going forward.

The Active Place summer programme attracted 1,800 participants with well-being walks; an alternative Summer Olympics; adults walking cricket; multi-sport sessions to name but a few. Additionally, the team supported the Governments Holiday Activities and Food Programme where 180 children received free meals.

Circa a million pound has been spent on parks improvements and the Active Thurrock Partnership continued to link with the County Sports Partnership and secured £60k of funding from the County wide "Find your Active Programme" to respond to the challenges of engaging people who have become less physically active due to the pandemic.

Support from Enforcement colleagues has seen some excellent results in terms of littering, flyposting, fly tipping and graffiti. Proactive work of the teams working

together has resulted in offenders receiving fines and criminal charges, reinforcing our zero-tolerance message.

We continue to engage with our communities as part of the Active Places Strategy and the overall improvements to parks and open spaces and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the community groups for their ongoing commitment, hard work and support to the improvement of the borough.

1. Sports and Leisure Development

1.1 Leisure and Recreation

1.1.1 The ongoing COVID pandemic has resulted in a renewed sense of value and appreciation of leisure, recreation and green open spaces. Many residents have been telling staff how important these facilities are for their physical health and mental well-being.

1.2 Active Parks

1.2.1 The Active Parks Team have had a busy final year working on a two-pronged approach to get residents out and active and enjoy Thurrock's parks and open spaces. The first approach organising or supporting a broad range of park activities for all ages and at various locations within the Borough. The summer programme attracted around 1,800 participants with such activities as: well-being walks; an alternative Summer Olympics; adults walking cricket; multi-sport sessions and arts and craft activities. Additionally, the Team delivered part of the Governments Holiday Activities and Food Programme where 180 children received free meals.

1.2.2 The second approach has been working with the community and local parks groups to make physical improvements to the parks which encourage greater use. Examples of these projects with a value approaching a million pounds include:

- Grays Beach Park. In partnership with the Lightship Café, a new splash pad and with funding from the Grays Towns Fund Board, a new play ship and castle feature as well as improvements to pathways and a new parkour area.
- Elm Road Open Space. In partnership with the friends of group, new play equipment and the planting of new trees.
- West Thurrock Memorial Park. In partnership the Welcome Forum, new play equipment.
- Grays Town Park. In partnership the Friends group, landscaping and the refurbishment of the shelter.
- Tilbury Daisy Field. In partnership with Active Tilbury and with funding from the Tilbury Towns Fund Board, a new running track, outdoor gym, parkour area and BMX track.

1.3 Impulse Leisure

1.3.1 Leisure Centres faced a difficult start to the year with a third lockdown period closing facilities until April 2021. However, the council continued to work with Impulse Leisure who implemented a sensible phased reopening of facilities and activities which has seen a steady rise in participation and customer confidence. The phased return has also been affected by a national shortage in leisure staff. Despite these challenges the Charitable Trust has managed to make a positive impact on the health of the Borough. In addition to the normal leisure offering, they have increased the number of post and long COVID recovery sessions to help those suffering from the lasting effects caused by COVID. The re-introduction of their Condition specific health schemes supporting those suffering from Cardiac conditions, Alzheimer's, COPD, Parkinson's, Back pain, Diabetes, Stroke and Weight management. Each 12-week programme also provides Carer respite, which meet in the Café. A brand-new Cancer programme targeting prehab and rehabilitation delivered both, face to face and by virtual sessions, launched in July as part of a ground-breaking pilot scheme. Career opportunities have been opened to Local Residents through the Retrain opportunities offered to become Lifeguards and Swimming Instructors with multiple qualification courses being run at Blackshots by the Trust. Four new Leisure Apprentices have been employed and will undertake multiple qualifications. The Civic Hall has had a welcome return with performances from Jimmy Carr, Diversity and Pzaz, as well as a range of local and cultural events. The positive affects Leisure is playing on Mental Health as well as physical wellbeing is evident through the partnership with MIND and its referrals. Re-investment back into the facilities has also recommenced with improvements to the Main Studio at Blackshots and planned improvements to the Pool changing toilets at Blackshots.

1.4 Active Thurrock

1.4.1 The Active Thurrock Partnership continued to link with the County Sports Partnership and teamed up on the County wide "Find your Active Programme". The partnership secured £60,000 of funding for Thurrock's sports clubs and organisations to respond to the challenges of engaging people who have become less physically active due to the pandemic. This included funding for well-being initiatives such as the Active Minds Project where over 100 people who used physical activity facilities and programmes at Impulse Leisure and Grangewaters Activity Centre to help improve mental health.

2. Waste and Recycling

2.1 Waste Services

2.1.1 Waste Services have worked hard to recover from both COVID over the past year and more recently the period of industrial action that adversely affected domestic-waste collections. Collections have been above the target of 98.5%

of all collections being carried out as per schedule and have continually been above 99% from July-21.

- 2.1.2 The level of tonnages being collected from the kerbside have remained higher than seasonally expected, although have remained within manageable levels for most of the year, these continued high volumes have been considered when procuring vehicles for the changes in the refuse service.

2.2 Vehicle Procurement

- 2.2.1 Work was completed on the procurement of new waste-collection vehicles that are expected to arrive between January-22 and August/September-22 in readiness for the September roll-out of the new waste collection regime. Ten of the new vehicles will be larger 8-wheeled versions of the existing single-compartment fleet, with an increased carrying capacity over current vehicles. This increased capacity will help address the increased tonnages over the last two years causing capacity issues, build in an element of resilience for the refuse-service and will ensure the service is able to accommodate a period of increasing numbers of properties being added to the collection rounds.
- 2.2.2 The new vehicles have been purchased for the collection of food-waste and dry-recyclable materials on the one vehicle. This allows the separated-collection of food-waste to be added to the service without increasing the number of vehicles being utilised around the borough. The Service will increase the number of staff on each food/recycling vehicle to allow the additional collection of food-caddies at the same time as recyclables. These vehicles although larger will incorporate the rear-steering option, as do existing vehicles, and are the first of their kind to be built in this country.



- 2.2.3 A new bespoke collection vehicle is also being purchased that will allow properties in remote areas to be collected using wheeled bins instead of bags, making the collection operation safer by removing an element of manual handling of bags, and be also used to support the food/recycling service where necessary. This vehicle will be a smaller size and the collection-body made of plastic that is sealed for food-waste collections.



2.2.4 The new fleet will be delivered with new livery to reflect and promote the new services being rolled-out in September-22. All of the large collection vehicles will be fitted with 'electric' bin- lifting equipment which help the vehicles be more fuel efficient and are quieter when working.



2.3 Route Optimisation

2.3.1 The Route-optimisation software procurement was finalised and the system from 'WebAspx', a widely known system within the waste industry was purchased. Work is now under way to ensure all the data within the software accurately reflects the current 'as-is' services, from which will provide a sound basis to begin remodelling the new collection schedules for roll-out in September-22. As part of this work, the collection-capacities of the fleet of new collection vehicles expected through the course of the year will ensure the Service is ready to introduce the new collection regime. This data-cleansing exercise will also ensure all current new-build properties built within Thurrock over the last year are included.

2.4 Disposal Contracts

2.4.1 The procurement and award of new disposal contracts is partially completed with some new contracts coming into effect during this year, including new food-waste and separated garden-waste disposal contracts in preparation of

the new collection regime in September-22. These contracts have included both waste-transfer for all Thurrock's waste collections fleet to deliver household waste for bulking in readiness for onward transport, and disposal. This also includes the transportation and disposal of waste from the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Linford.

2.5 Changes within the Service

2.5.1 The deferred roll-out of Phase I of the Flats Recycling Project has been completed and provided recycling collection to all council-owned flats within the borough. Phase II commenced in late November and is progressing well. New recycling containers, adjustments where necessary to the numbers of residual containers, new signage in bin-store locations as well as literature-guidance and individual recycling bags are being provided to all privately-owned flatted-properties over the coming months.

2.5.2 A tender and procurement exercise has been concluded for the supply and household-delivery of both small, internal-use and larger, external-use food-caddies has been awarded. Preparations are now under way to provide storage space for the caddies that will arrive in bulk and then be distributed locally from September. This distribution will include literature on the new food-waste collection scheme for residents to fully engage with the new scheme. It is anticipated that the distribution process will take around two weeks for each collection day, around ten weeks in total.

3. Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC)

3.1 Although the development of the Household Waste and Recycling Centre has been delayed due to the pandemic, 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. Trailer Thursday was successfully introduced at the site, which allows access for vehicles with trailers only from 8am–12pm, and through successful adjustments in the Covid-monitoring measures around the site, this was later extended to include Tuesdays.

4. Clean and Green

4.1 Clean and Green

4.1.1 This year has been a challenging one for the teams carrying out Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance throughout the borough, not only with the challenges presented by the ongoing COVID Pandemic but also with an unprecedented year for grass and shrub growth. The teams also supported the waste service during the period of industrial action, carrying out a variety of tasks to ensure our roads were not heavily littered and supporting the very heavily used "bring sites".

- 4.1.2 The Grounds Maintenance teams have commenced routine winter maintenance work which will be carried out until the end of March 2022, with a view to enhance the appearance of these sites. The winter maintenance will include path edging, shrub and 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
- 4.1.3 Following on from our inspections of the play areas, we identified the requirement for additional play bark, the team have renovated the play surfacing with additional play bark or sand at the following locations: - Hathaway Road, The Daisyfield, Hardy Park, Nutberry Field, Rainbow Road, Balstonia Park and South Ockendon Rec, these works have dramatically improved the appearance of these sites, more importantly making these sites safer for the children that use them.
- 4.1.4 The team have continued the scheduled inspections and maintenance of all the War Memorials, an all-year-round activity. The team ensured that all of the memorials were looking their best for the Remembrance events within the borough.
- 4.1.5 This year the Arboriculture Team were successful in their application for funding from the Forestry Commission from the Local Authorities Treescape Fund, this award funding is to the value of £285,101.66 over the next 4 years. The Tree officer submitted an excellent submission for this funding and will be pivotal in our delivery of tree planting over this period. For the first planting season we have purchased:
- 410 Trees
 - 3420 Whips
- 4.1.6 Sites set to be planted with new trees include:
- Wharf Road Cemetery in Stanford-le-Hope,
 - Chadwell Cemetery and Orsett Heath
 - Runnymede Road Rec in Stanford-le-Hope
 - Dilkes Park and Bonnygate Woods in South Ockendon
 - Belhus Recreation Ground
 - Nutberry Playing Fields in Grays
- 4.1.7 Since Tuesday 16th November 2021, the team commenced the smaller planting with all other planting taking place over the coming months.
- 4.1.8 Trees will be planted over the course of the winter, tree planting season, dates for tree planting are flexible / provisional as the team also respond to urgent tree work and weather issues. The whips and fruit trees are expected to be delivered later in the season. They will be bare rooted, so it is essential they are planted quickly. The trees for the larger sites will be delivered as soon as

the current deliveries are planted, and storage space is available. The target date to complete the planting of these trees is by the end of April 2022.

4.1.9 The presentation standards within the Cemeteries has continued to meet the standards expected. The Burials Team have implemented the use of seasonal staff, resulting in an improved appearance of Thurrock’s burial grounds, 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 produced to seek to further improve the presentation of the cemeteries and ensure adequate burials space in future years.

4.1.10 Implementation of the new Plotbox software, replacing the old Epilogue system for the management of burial records, providing a far more modern user experience. The new system provides far more functionality including mapping of grave spaces, planning new cemetery sections and the ability for Funeral Directors to book online.

4.2 Street Cleaning

4.2.1 Street Cleanliness remains within the target of 8%, with the Keep Britain Tidy results for each tranche set out below:

<i>NI195-style scores</i>	<i>Litter</i>	<i>Graffiti</i>
<i>Tranche 2 2021/22</i>	7.83%	3.83%
<i>Tranche 1 2021/22</i>	6.17%	3.33%
Tranche 3 2020/21	5.17%	3.67%
Tranche 2 2020/21	5%	1.33%
Tranche 1 2020/21	3.67%	6%
All Year 2020/21	4.61%	3.67%
Tranche 3 2019/20	5.83%	6.33%

4.2.2 Last year’s inspections took place during the national COVID lockdown, when there was less footfall and therefore less litter being generated.

4.2.3 The service are working with colleagues in Children’s and Adults services providing work placements for SEND young people through the governments “Kickstart” Programme. The teams currently have 3 young people working with them gaining essential work experience, and also adding resilience to the service, with succession planning considerations.

4.3 Graffiti

4.3.1 The Teams continue to carry out large scale clearances of graffiti, working closely with the Enforcement Team to address this ongoing issue. Clearances are both from service requests coming into the teams and also through proactive site visits identifying graffiti.

5. Environmental Enforcement

5.1 Environmental Enforcement

5.1.1 The Environment Enforcement Teams efforts to ensure the streets are clean and safer place to live, work, play encourages growth within the community and greater prosperity for the borough. The team has delivered the below between November 2020 to date:

5.1.2 The borough-wide interim injunction remains in place on both public and private land against unauthorised encampments. The council are taking steps at the High Court to make the injunction permanent, to enable action which can and will be taken immediately by both the Police and the Council in partnership with an agreed signed protocol.

- Increased partnership patrols between the council and police leading to an added high visibility, deterrent against crime and public reassurance.
- Increased partnership operations to tackle graffiti, ASB and enviro-crime such as littering, including nitrous oxide canisters.
- The team have 270 prosecutions utilising the single justice process, which streamlines the process for prosecution ensuring 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.
- 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.
- Continued operational evidence and quickly removing criminal “tags” graffiti compiling a graffiti index and working with Police to issue fixed penalty notices.

- In partnership with the council's contractor, removed 122 untaxed and 25 abandoned vehicles.
- Increased operational support to partners.
- Joint parking enforcement school patrols and anti-idling issuing 36 warnings to offending drivers.

5.1.3 Other highlights include:

- Leading operations with Essex Police linked to illegal waste carriers, stopping and inspecting over 70 vehicles, resulting in 21 x FPNs for noncompliance, 2 uninsured vehicle seizures, and vehicles being seized for being in un- roadworthy condition.
- Increased partnership working with Street Cleansing Team to jointly patrol hotspot areas and operatives to be further trained, by the Environmental Enforcement, to be more enforcement focused to capture and protect evidence.
- The Environment Enforcement Team, working in partnership with Thurrock Farmers, cleansing teams and police, targeted local fly tip hot spots in Operation Cape Jarvis resulting in the detection of 20 fly tipping offences, 13 littering offences and the seizure of 4 vehicles for fly tipping.
- The Twilight Team enforced to address HGVs parking on the grassed area and footpaths in Manor Way, in total Community Protection Warnings (CPW) issued x 98, Community Protection Notices (CPN) issued x 47, Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued, linked to breach of CPN x 98.

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

Number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued

Kingdom from 2020 to 2021	3403	Environment Enforcement 2020 to 2021	459
Kingdom from 2021 to date	4156	Environment Enforcement from 2021 to date	1007

Abandoned vehicle Removals

Removed by Contractor 2020 to 2021	29	Removed by contractor 2020 to 2021	25
Removed by owner 2020 to 2021	38	Removed by owner 2021 to date	38

5.1.5 In partnership with Essex police, following the introduction of the Town Centre Teams, 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.
- Conduct 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.
- Increased community engagement and the introduction of shop safe radio system enabling better communication and increased collaborative working to make Grays a safer place.

5.1.6 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 Agnes** - Working in close partnership with Essex Police to address environmental offences such as fly tipping and unlicensed waste carriers.
- **Operation Abercrombie** - To target and reduce graffiti offences, to evidence and quickly removing tags.
- **Operation Cue** – Supporting Essex Police operation Caesar targeting garages being used to store stolen vehicles or vehicles concerned in Anti-social behaviour of quad bikes and motorcycles.
- **Operation Cape Jarvis** – working closely with Essex farmers and Rural Engagement Team to tackle fly tipping on rural land.
- **Operation Croydon** - To tackle anti-social parking of moped users in Grays Town centre.
- **Operation Canberra**- To address the anti-social parking on grass verges of HGVs.
- **Operation Collie** – To conduct community clearing of un-adopted alleyways in Grays Town Centre to reduce the opportunity of ant-social gathering and improving the neighbourhood environment.
- **Operation Lions** – Enforcing Public Space Protection Order addressing the issue of Anti-Social car racing in West Thurrock.
- **Operation Capel**- Joint patrols with the Clean and Green Team targeting early morning fly tip hot spots.
- **Operation Cobram**- Patrols with Parking Enforcement and police addressing the issue of anti-social parking and vehicle idling around our schools.

5.1.7 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. The officers now have direct access to the Police National Computer to assist in their enforcement of environmental crime.

5.1.8 The Team has led and delivered a proactive approach to combat the late night offences and the introduction of the Twilight Team has had the following results:

- 735 Fixed Penalty Notices in relation to fly tipping, littering, urinating, fly Posting, Duty of Care and for breaching CPN
- 16 x Notice in relation to Duty of Care (commercial waste s34)
- 1 x male arrested for possession of a bladed article
- 1 x male arrested for racist graffiti
- 76 Community Protection Warning Notices
- 39 Community Protection Notices

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