

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SERVICE PLAN 2023/2024

Council – 25 April 2023

**Report of:** Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services

**Status:** For Comment.

**Also considered by:**

- Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee - 14 March 2023
- Cabinet – 16 March 2023

**Key Decision:** No

**This report supports the Key Aim of:** Meeting a statutory duty of the council.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. McArthur

**Contact Officers:** Colin Alden, Ext. 7186, Nick Chapman, Ext. 7167

**Recommendation to Cleaner & Greener Committee:**

Recommend that Cabinet approves adoption of the service plan.

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Recommend that Council adopts the Environmental Protection Service Plan 2023-2024.

**Reason for recommendation:** This Environmental Protection Service Plan outlines how the Environmental Health Team intends to meet and discharge its statutory obligations in respect of Statutory Nuisance, Animal Welfare and Licensing and Environmental Permitting Regulation.

## Introduction and Background

- 1 This Service Plan details the work undertaken by the Environmental Protection Team. It also provides an overview of current demand on and performance of the team with details of service improvements and innovation since the dissolution of the Environmental Health Partnership with Dartford Borough Council in July 2021. The plan has an overview of future challenges, including new areas of work, areas of increased demand and new statutory duties.
- 2 The Environmental Protection Team aims to improve the lives of those who live, work and spend their leisure time within the Sevenoaks Council areas also to protect the environment and public health with this service plan.
- 3 The objectives of the plan outline how the aims of the team are implemented and how those objectives link to the Council Plan on environment, economy, housing and community safety. The service plan also has strong links to Better Together – A Community Plan for Sevenoaks District 2022-2032.
- 4 This is the first Environmental Protection Service Plan produced since the dissolution of the Environmental Health Partnership at the end of June 2021. It identifies current workloads and our priorities going forward. This has been a steep learning curve for three new members of staff with staff development being a key element of the service plan to allow for specialist functions to be undertaken and an element of resilience incorporated into the team structure. The team has worked hard to meet our objectives with the flexibility to address seasonal demand and increasing numbers of service requests. Current data indicates that in 2022/2023 customer service requests may exceed 2600.
- 5 The service plan includes a breakdown of service requests in our key areas since 2019. It can be seen that the team's work is very diverse and often undertaken in partnership with other council departments and external agencies.
- 6 New and emerging issues that this service plan will address includes unlicensed animal activities, an increase in stray and abandoned dogs, increased concern for animal welfare, illegal waste sites and dump sites, new requirements of the Environment Act 2021 on PM<sub>2.5</sub>, lack of suitably qualified EP officers and the challenge of net zero and Carbon reduction. This increase in workload is being addressed within existing resources as incorporated within the service plan.
- 7 The demands on service and emerging issues identified have required service improvements and innovation in a number of ways. We are developing our own talent by identifying necessary, specialist training and experience for individual officers to enable them to eventually become our required subject

matter experts across contaminated land, air quality, private water supplies and acoustics.

- 8 We are expanding the use of electronic inspections with the use of the 'Safety Culture App' on the iPad to save time, improve accuracy and providing greater efficiency in animal licensing and risk assessment of private water supplies but are also exploring the benefits of expanding its use in Environmental Permitting and service request investigation.
- 9 We are acquiring new noise nuisance recorders to replace existing sound level meters that are reaching the end of their operational lifespan. This includes associated analysis software. Other software improvements are the expansion of our use of Enterprise for Uniform for more powerful functionality and launch of NoiseApp 2 with additional features to aid service request investigation.
- 10 Process redesign has ensured wherever possible that administration tasks have been moved from Environmental Protection Team officers to our Technical Administrators generating additional capacity. We are working to the knowledge and experience of these officers so that, with the support of experienced Environmental Protection officers, they are able to respond to basic enquiries and requests allowing improved response to customers.
- 11 The Environmental Protection Team receive a large number of complaints associated with social housing and whilst we work closely with some providers, we believe there is an opportunity through the provision of proactive information, advice and guidance to reduce the number of complaints we receive. Working with these organisations should allow operational efficiencies.
- 12 We have developed a customer feedback survey to identify trends and help drive improvements. We continue to utilise our website as a source of information for residents and businesses. The work of the Environmental Protection team is subject to scrutiny by senior management, councillors, internal auditors, DEFRA, Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We therefore ensure that all officers delivering environmental protection interventions meet an appropriate qualification criterion and demonstrate knowledge and competency across a number of skill sets.

## **Key Implications**

### Financial

Minimal cost as undertaken within existing resources.

### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The Environmental Protection Plan is a document that sets out how several statutory and non-statutory duties will be met within the wider legal framework of the district council.

### Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Environmental Protection Service Plan 2023/2024

**Richard Morris**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer – Planning and Regulatory Services**