



## District Councillors Report for June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020

Cllr Colin Hedgley

Cllr Tony Fryatt

### Communities and supporting residents

The number of referrals dealt with through Home But Not Alone now stands at 1,303. Just over 57% of these have been requests for help accessing food, 30% to help accessing prescriptions and 6.5% of people have said that they are isolated and lonely.

The Council has now supported 52 projects through the Hardship Fund totalling £97,790 – including Good Neighbour Schemes, Town and Parish Councils and small community groups. The Hardship Fund has also been used to support individuals with food, toys, fuel, baby equipment and to pay volunteer expenses for shopping and prescription collection and delivery.

### Grants, funding and business matters

Local Authority Discretionary Fund:

Officers from Economic Development and Finance have now finalised the East Suffolk guidance for the Local Authority Discretionary Fund, and the East Suffolk scheme was launched. The scheme is primarily aimed at small businesses who were unable to access grant funding from the previous grant scheme, and those not eligible for other government business support schemes, with the exception of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme and the Job Retention Scheme. East Suffolk has developed its guidance to be as flexible as possible in order to maximise the number of businesses who can access this funding. Small and micro businesses are the life blood of the East Suffolk economy and will be vital as we move into the recovery phase, so this funding comes at a crucial time. See more at [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-business-grant-funding/](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-business-grant-funding/).

Reopening High Streets Safely Fund:

With the planned opening of non-essential retailers due to take place on 15 June, the Government has recognised the need to support towns with their return trading albeit within safe guidelines. East Suffolk Council has been allocated £222k from this new fund (the largest allocation within Suffolk and Norfolk due to the size of our population) to support the safe reopening of these commercial centres (including beach fronts) and to provide communications to reassure both businesses and customers that as long as the appropriate safety measures are adhered to this will be a safe environment. East Suffolk Council will be working closely with each Town Council, town centre businesses and other stakeholders to put in place plans to ensure appropriate health and safety measures and allow the safe reopening of these centres.

The funding will cover the following areas:



- Development of action plans to begin the safe reopening of local economies
- Communications and public information activity to ensure the reopening of local economies is managed successfully and safely
- Business-facing awareness raising activities
- Temporary public realm changes

#### Business Grants:

Last week, the Finance team made its 5000th business grant payment as East Suffolk Council continues to step up its support during the pandemic. So far, the Council has received 6,625 applications from businesses, however, some of these have been ineligible and some duplications. In total, £57,990,000 has been paid out to 5,061 businesses to date – this is the equivalent of 99.8% of eligible applications.

#### ICT

The Council has really tested the capabilities of its IT provision over the lockdown period, and ICT are keen to gain an understanding of how the working from home experience has been. Therefore, they have launched a staff survey and are asking ALL users who have been issued with East Suffolk laptops to complete the IT Homeworking Survey . This will give the team valuable information to assess the needs going forward and help identify any issues and areas that needs to be addressed.

#### Operational updates

##### Garden waste collections:

Garden waste collections recommenced on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May. This is being managed with reduced crew numbers, in order to support social distancing in vehicles. The first few days of collections have gone reasonably well. Bins have been – as anticipated – significantly heavier, with over double the ‘normal’ daily tonnage collected on the first Monday.

##### Signage on buildings and open spaces:

East Suffolk has ordered and is installing ‘keep your distance’ signs and other public advisory signs in our public conveniences, car parks and promenades. These eye-catching signs are intended to provide reminders to the public to behave responsibly and keep their distance.

##### Operational buildings:

Plans are underway for a limited reopening of East Suffolk House, Riverside and The Marina Centre in the first half of June. The Council is closely following government advice on how to safely re-open facilities for staff and members. A range of safety measures will be put in place, including signage, additional cleaning and hand washing facilities, one-way systems, and a process of limiting the number of people in the building at any one time.



## Housing

### Gateway to Homechoice:

Properties will start to be advertised again through the Gateway to Homechoice scheme on 4 June 2020, but East Suffolk will have the opportunity to make 'direct lets' in the initial instance to ensure the best use is made of our housing stock. The number of phone and email enquiries coming in for the team now is almost back to pre-lockdown levels.

### Rough sleepers:

A spot check on rough sleepers was carried out yesterday morning and found 7 people, all of whom are in touch with housing officers who are engaging with them about their housing and support needs.

The team is continuing to work closely with those rough sleepers already housed to source suitable move-on accommodations for them. They are also working with health services, MHCLG and partners to consider how East Suffolk Council can redesign our offer to rough sleepers going forward to comply with the Government's social distancing and 'Covid secure' guidance.

## Environmental Protection

### Fly-tipping:

The Environmental Protection Team is closely monitoring and responding to fly-tipping complaints. We have seen a rise in the number of incidents over the last few weeks and although domestic waste incidents declined last week, there were more incidents involving construction and demolition waste which may be linked to an increase in DIY activity during lockdown or from builders who are starting to return to work. There has also been a small increase in the fly-tipping of green waste which may be alleviated following the resumption of the garden waste collection service.

### Noise complaints:

Lockdown is also resulting in a steady stream of noise complaints, some from the playing of loud music in public spaces. One such incident involved an outdoor karaoke event at a care home resulting in noise that was audible half a mile away, causing significant disturbance to neighbours for several hours. The current COVID-19 restrictions make gathering evidence of noise nuisance very challenging, particularly in the case of complaints from adjoining domestic premises. The team has been exploring whether recent developments in smartphone apps could be used to help gather evidence when the opportunity to visit the complainant's premises is limited.

## Port Health

The recovery of the Port Health Service is underway following changes to the way the service was being delivered following lockdown. The transition from two teams working one



week on and one week off to protect staff and the service back to a pre-COVID three shift system took place last Thursday. This follows the completion of a comprehensive risk assessment of the Port Health environment and the introduction of appropriate control measures in line with guidance recently published by the Government and HSE to help ease lockdown. The separation of workstations, provision of plastic screening, enhanced cleaning regimes and guidance for staff on the safe occupation of the office is enabling the team to gradually restore the level of service whilst protecting the staff and this critical service.

### **Test & Trace**

The Government and Public Health England have launched the Test & Trace Service in England from Thursday 28 May. This will be essential to controlling the spread of the virus following the easing of lockdown and the opening of schools and more businesses in June. 25,000 contact tracers have been employed to telephone people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to help identify and follow up close contacts who might have become infected and provide advice and, where necessary, require them to self-isolate for 14 days. A Suffolk-wide working group has been established and is meeting regularly to plan actions that will need to be taken locally. The Public Health Team, with support from the multi-agency working group, are preparing an Outbreak Control Plan specific to managing COVID-19 and will be setting up a COVID-19 Health Protection Board to oversee activity. The Government has recently recognised the important role that local authorities will need to play in managing local outbreaks in school, care home or work settings using the expertise of Environmental Health staff and their local knowledge. Localised lockdowns may be necessary to control the spread of the infection.