

# District Councillors Report

June 12<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Cllr Colin Hedgley**

**Cllr Tony Fryatt**

## **Communities and supporting residents**

### Home But Not Alone Update

As of end of Thursday 11th June, the Communities Team have dealt with more than 1,500 referrals through the scheme in partnership with local community groups and volunteers. Referrals remain at less than 100 per week with the main areas of need still food, medicine, and social isolation. The team continues to make pro-active calls to people who have not received their food parcels and may need emergency food, and to those identified through the CCG Eclipse system as having additional support needs.

A total of £99,725 have now been allocated to 65 projects through the Hardship Fund and Social Isolation grants.

In other news, East Suffolk Council relaunched its Hidden Needs Grant Programme on Monday, 8 June, in a response to Covid-19, with a fund of £100,000. The scheme was originally launched in 2018 to support older people and families with limited resources who were struggling with social isolation and loneliness, but it has now been adapted to help fund projects which supports people of all ages who are particularly vulnerable during this time. Local community groups and voluntarily organisations can apply for grants of up to £10,000 through the scheme to bring to life projects which can help reduce social isolation and loneliness. More information can be found at [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/community/community-grants-and-funding/hidden-needs-grant-programme/](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/community/community-grants-and-funding/hidden-needs-grant-programme/)

## **Grants, funding and business matters**

### Response Funding:

The Economic Development and Funding team are currently supporting our 12 key towns with safe reopening plans. This includes enabling them to access a share of the £222k allocated from the 'Reopening High Streets Safely Fund' which East Suffolk Council is managing to support such activities. Each Town Council has been asked to work in partnership with local businesses to develop proposals for the safe reopening of its high street which can include local action plans, comms activity, signage and temporary public realm measure such as road closure/ foot[path widening. The teams are working closely

with the Town Councils to implement their proposed measures as quickly as possible ahead of the reopening of non-essential retail on the 15 June.

East Suffolk Council's discretionary business grants scheme has now been operational for over 2 weeks. So far, 234 applications have been received and grants totalling £230k paid out. This scheme is aimed at small businesses not eligible for the previous grants round and provides the Council with significant discretion on funding awards. In line with our permissive approach to maximise the number of business who receive grant funding only one application has been rejected so far.

Teams across the Council, led by ED&R, are responding to a call from central government for 'shovel-ready' capital projects that can be completed within the next 18 months. These projects need to be able drive economic growth and jobs as well as supporting a green recovery. The deadline for submission is 18 June and a number of projects which meet the criteria and will provide a massive boost to East Suffolk's economy has already been identified.

#### Economic Recovery:

East Suffolk Council continues to work closely to support the LEP wide Restart Plan. This is a 12-month economic plan to restart the Suffolk and Norfolk economy. East Suffolk is a major economic driver within the region and therefore targeted support for our key sectors/ places is vital for both local and regional economic recovery. We are also adopting our own East Suffolk economic development programme to respond to the economic shock caused by Covid-19 and this will include an extended and enhanced business engagement programme to ensure our plans are informed by and have the full backing and support of our business community.

#### **Operational updates**

##### **Operational buildings:** (East Suffolk Council)

A partial reopening of buildings took place this week, with small numbers of staff returning – by agreement – to Riverside and East Suffolk House. We are looking at ways in which our presence in buildings can be increased, on the basis of government advice, in coming weeks. We are also exploring how we can reopen to members of the public in time.

##### **Cleansing of high streets:**

With high streets reopening on the 15 June, street cleansing teams have been paying additional attention to ensuring that streets are in a good condition for next week. This has included additional weeding, cleaning and – in some cases – dealing with flytips

### **Grounds maintenance:**

Normal grass cutting has resumed in many areas now. Some areas that have not been cut to offer the potential to create wildlife buffers – particularly in larger areas of open space, and we are writing to town and parish councils to set out our approach to grass cutting, including maximising the opportunity to retain some areas that have become havens for wildflowers and invertebrates.

### **Housing**

Tenancy Services are starting to see an increase in sign-ups to council properties, as the allocation of properties through Gateway to Homechoice are starting to have an impact. It is positive that people with housing needs, but not classed as emergency, are starting to move again.

Additionally, the proactive approach by staff has seen a fall in rent arrears once again, after the initial increase in debt due to COVID 19, and in monetary terms the Council are in a better position than at the same time last year – which is very positive.

### **Environmental Health**

#### **Food and Safety:**

The Food and Safety Team has been trialling a new approach to food safety inspections using Zoom to conduct part of the inspection remotely. The initial feedback from businesses and officers is very positive. A significant proportion of the time spent on a food safety intervention is focussed on assessing food safety management systems and this can be achieved remotely with the business owner or manager through questioning them to assess their understanding of food safety hazards and what control measures and monitoring they have in place. Once this assessment has been completed remotely a much shorter inspection of the premises is carried out to ensure that the controls described during the interview on Zoom are being implemented in practice. This can be achieved observing social distancing requirements on the premises. Although not an appropriate approach in all circumstances or when dealing with high risk premises, the Food Standards Agency has endorsed this type of alternative approach during lockdown. Given the encouraging feedback received from businesses and officers this innovative approach may continue to feature as one of the options for a food safety intervention when lockdown is eased.

#### **Test and Trace:**

A significant amount of planning has now been carried out on the Test and Trace arrangements for Suffolk. The Suffolk Covid-19 Outbreak Control Plan is taking shape and the local governance arrangements have been discussed and agreed with the first meeting

of the Suffolk Covid-19 Health Protection Board taking place on Monday to consider the Outbreak Control Plan. Five workstreams have been established to support Test & Trace: Prevent & Respond, Testing, Data, Engagement & Communication and Governance. East Suffolk is leading one of the themes under Prevent & Respond. Suffolk will receive £2.8M of the £300M government funding allocated to Public Health Teams in local authorities across the country. Further information can be found in the FAQs here [www.suffolk.gov.uk/testing](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/testing)

Latest national information on coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

NHS advice: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Local, East Suffolk-specific information: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/covid-19>

I will continue to keep you informed but if you think I am overloading you please let me know.

Regards

Colin Hedgley