

# District Councillors Update 27 May 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 1,264. Just over 57% of these have been requests for help accessing food, 30% to help accessing prescriptions and almost 7% of people have said that they are isolated and lonely. Although the number of referrals over the last week has fallen, the complexity has increased. The Communities Team are now doing more pro-active calls, contacting people who have been identified as being most likely to be vulnerable due to health conditions, financial hardship and need for social care support.

Our community groups continue to offer a brilliant service to their residents, with many now turning their thoughts to recovery and ongoing support for the most vulnerable. So, a massive thank you to them and also to the individual volunteers that are supporting both the Council response and these community groups. A really good example of individual effort from the last week is below:

The Communities Team took a call on Friday from a very upset Mrs C whose husband was being asked to attend hospital in Norwich for some tests on Monday morning. Transport had been arranged but the hospital needed someone to accompany Mr C as he has early onset dementia and can become confused. Mrs C is shielding and was strongly advised by her GP against putting herself at risk by accompanying her husband. Their only daughter lives a 7 hour drive away (and herself has a son with severe asthma who is shielding).

Having tried various avenues without success, one of the volunteers already supporting the Lowestoft response, Sally, offered to go with him. Mrs C and her daughter were very relieved and Mr C got the support he needed thanks to Sally generously giving up a day of her time.

## Grants, funding and business matters

### Local Authority Discretionary Fund

The Finance team have been working closely to develop East Suffolk guidance for the new Local Authority Discretionary Fund. This is a further government funded business support grant scheme aimed at small businesses who were not eligible for the previous grant schemes. Grants of up to £10k will be available and Govt has requested that we focus on businesses in shared accommodation, regular market traders, B&Bs who pay Council Tax rather than business rates and small charitable properties. As the name suggests there is an element of discretion with this scheme and we have developed criteria which, will maximise the number of small and micro businesses in our district who can access these much-needed funds. We anticipate that the scheme will be launched next week.

### Grant Recipients Survey

A Suffolk wide (except Ipswich) survey of businesses who have received business support

grants has recently taken place with almost 800 businesses in East Suffolk responding. The key headlines are:

- 60% of surveyed businesses have temporarily ceased trading, significantly higher than the Suffolk figure of 51%.
- At current levels of support 36% businesses will permanently cease trading in our district within 6 months
- A third of furloughed staff will lose their jobs in the next 3-6 months equating to around 800 employees.

The levels of business support have changed since the survey was undertaken so a further survey will take place in June to provide a more up to date picture on the economic impact of the pandemic. This and the recent tourism survey will be used to inform district, county and Economic Partnership wide economic recovery plans.

#### Unemployment increase

The latest Universal Credit data shows that between March and April East Suffolk experienced a 51% increase in claimants. This was the biggest rise of any district in Suffolk and reflects our small business structure and concentration of visitor economy businesses. There are now currently almost 16,000 people in East Suffolk claiming Universal Credit.

#### **Operational updates** Car Park Charging

ESC has taken the decision to reintroduce car park charging with effect from Monday 25th May. The reason for this is that it will assist in regulating car parks and managing demand. An offer of free parking in the lead up to the summer, in a destination such as East Suffolk could encourage people to congregate – as has been seen recently at weekends – and the reintroduction of charging, as well as the delivery of on street enforcement under CPE will allow the council to manage our environment.

#### Garden Waste

Garden Waste collections resumed on Monday 25th May. All subscribers have been emailed or written to with details of their new collection day. The subscription renewal service has also re-started, and in the first week, East Suffolk has processed 3000 subscription renewals for the service.

#### Public Conveniences – Cleaning

All public conveniences in East Suffolk are open. ESC is working with Norse to ensure that their cleaning regime is operating in line with government advice. This means that high-volume PCs will see additional cleaning, and that it will be targeted at specific parts of the facility (handles, sinks, taps etc) where there is a higher level of hand contact. Cleaning products have been checked against government advice. Staff have been issued with protective disposable overgarments for use while they are cleaning. And a new cleaning method statement has been prepared which provides guidance for staff when cleaning PCs. This includes temporarily shutting the facility whilst cleaning takes place, to promote social distancing.

## Complaints – Norse

For the first time, Norse recorded no 'justified' complaints in April. In addition, they received several compliments about their service delivery – in particular about the refuse service. Complaints are an important part of helping the council understand where we need to focus our attention. However, the dropping off of complaints is a sign, managers feel, of the level of public support for Norse and council services during the challenges of coronavirus.

## Grass cutting

Norse are still – under instruction from ESC – focussing grass cutting on areas where safety is an issue. We will be liaising with town and parish councils before recommencing cutting to identify where the main 'problem' areas are – and whether there are areas in which conservation of wildlife and a reduced cutting regime may be acceptable to local residents.

## Housing

This week we can advise that we have now called over 1000 of our vulnerable tenants and 17 referrals have been made as a result of these calls into Home but not alone. Our tenants have been very appreciative of these calls and that we are thinking of them. We are already on our second round of calls and will continue to call every couple of weeks.

In addition to this, we have called 400 households known to us as potentially vulnerable throughout 'warm homes, healthy people' programme. The vast majority of these residents are coping well but an officer has spoken at length to those few who are struggling and have made referrals or signposted as appropriate.

## Environmental Health

The 'Safer Places Support Cell' was set up at the end of March to share information and develop an effective and co-ordinated approach to the enforcement of coronavirus restrictions. All the Suffolk LAs, Police, County Highways and HM Coastguard are represented. Local authorities have now been asked by the group to identify the risks arising from the progressive relaxation of restrictions, and what the impact of these changes are likely to be. East Suffolk will probably have the greatest challenges in the County, as a tourist destination.

With this in mind, we are setting up a corporate working party to identify the risks and challenges for East Suffolk and the action to be taken to mitigate them. The group will include officers from: Communications, Business Development/Tourism, Leisure, Parking Services, Street Cleaning/Maintenance, Public Toilets, Parks/open spaces/amenities, Environmental Protection, Private Sector Housing (caravan parks etc), Emergency Planning and Licensing. The group will convene for the first time on Tuesday May 26.