**Councillors’s weekly bulletin – April 17th 2020**

This is my latest weekly bulletin, bringing you up to speed with developments relating to the COVID-19 epidemic.

This bulletin contains a wealth of information from across the District as well as links to useful websites. Everything you need should be here.If you have any questions, ideas or comments, please do let me know.

Please distribute this information electronically as widely as possible via your websites and Social media.

Regards,

Maurice

**Maurice Cook**

**Councillor for Framlingham Ward, East Suffolk Council**

**Remember STAY AT HOME, PROTECT OUR NHS, SAVE LIVES**Where to find the latest information and guidance

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

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

**Annual Meeting of East Suffolk Council**The decision has been taken to hold this year’s Annual Meeting of the Council on Wednesday, 23 September 2020 - a date currently set for a Full Council meeting.

The meeting will elect the various offices (Chairman, Vice Chairman, Committee Chairs and Members etc), with the current Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council holding their respective offices until this date. The new Chairman and Vice Chairman, when elected, will (with the agreement of the Council) continue in office until May 2022 (with a formal re-election in May 2021).

**Communities and supporting residents**

The Customer Services and Communities Teams have now taken more than 500 referrals since the Suffolk helpline was launched on Monday 30th March. The majority of requests for help are for food, followed by medicine and social isolation.

A new pathway is being launched on Monday 20th to help people in a more consistent way with access to prescriptions using our community transport providers working with the network of pharmacies across East Suffolk. A leaflet is going out across Suffolk during the week beginning 27th April to ensure that all vulnerable people who can’t access help from family, friends and neighbours know that they can get help from the Home, But Not Alone helpline.

As of Wednesday 15th April, 3,384 people have been identified in East Suffolk on the ‘shielded’ list, of which 888 have said that they need support with food, prescriptions and other basic supplies. This number will increase as more and more names are added to the list nationally – it is estimated that around two thirds of 1.5 million have been identified and contacted so far and a leaflet is going out to a further 5,500 people on the shielded list next week.

We have allocated more than £40,000 from the East Suffolk Hardship Fund to more than 30 voluntary and community groups and there is currently just over £20,000 remaining in the fund.

**Grants, funding and business matters**Business support grants:
As of 15 April, £16.7m had been issued to businesses by the Council through the Small Business Grant schemes. This means that over 22% of eligible businesses have now received their grants. ESC have received grant applications from over 50% of eligible businesses however, we are now beginning to see the rate of new applications slow and as result will start calling businesses directly to ensure that we maximise grant take up. With around 3,000 businesses to call this will be a huge task but by redeploying staff from within the Council and the LEP’s Growth Hub we hope to get through all the calls within a few days.

Economic recovery:
Work on the Suffolk-wide economic recovery plan continues. Members of the Suffolk Growth Programme Board are focusing on the following elements:

* Key sectors
* Business support
* Employment and skills
* Funding
* Planning and infrastructure
* Economic intelligence

The ESC Economic Development team are leading on the sector work for the whole of Suffolk. Sectors hardest hot in east Suffolk include Agriculture, Food & Drink, Visitor Economy and Retail & Entertainment. Progress against all these workstreams is being reported into SCOLT and SPSL and will ultimately lead to the development of an economic recovery plan for Suffolk.

The team are leading on an initiative to support the regional fishing industry which has seen prices plummet following the lockdown. The Call4fish initiative is an online platform which links fish merchants with domestic consumers in an attempt to mitigate the reduction in demand from the catering sector. It has proved highly successful in the south west of England. ESC has received financial commitments from the LEP, Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to support the initiative. Recruitment of fish merchants for the platform has begun.

ESC are partners in the proposed Visit East Anglia led tourism survey. This LEP wide survey seeks to understand the economic impact of the lockdown on the regional visitor economy. The subsequent analysis will support the sector element on the Suffolk Economic Recovery Plan.

 **Operational updates**

General operational overview:
The Norse operation is holding up well, despite higher than usual levels of staff absence. Norse Group continues to support the East Suffolk operation by transferring staff from other divisions who are unable to work – particularly HGV drivers – to support the refuse operation. This is the highest priority at present and is operating well. Social distancing requirements are being observed so that staff can be protected – for example, by ensuring that there are no more than two staff in the cab of a vehicle at any one time. We are not seeing a negative impact on collections as a result of these restrictions at present but we continue to monitor.

Some essential grounds maintenance work will continue for health and safety reasons, including emergency tree work, park inspections and burial services. Grounds maintenance staff have been retrained to be able to assist with refuse collections.

Burial fee increases:
A decision was taken by councillors last week to delay a planned increase in burial fee charges that was to be implemented in April as part of the new budget. The increase applied as part of the merger between WDC and SCDC. Burial fees were always higher in SCDC, and the council agreed that the fees would be varied over three years in order to achieve a standard set of charges by 2022/23. Due to the current Covid situation, however, this was felt to be the wrong time to be applying any increase. The current fees will therefore remain for this year.

CPE:
East Suffolk Council now has a Civil Parking Enforcement team, operating under Parking Services Manager, Lewis Boudville. During the current restrictions, the team will only be dealing with parking that presents a potential problem for those involved in essential work – for example, enforcing where people have parked on double yellow lines. Once lockdown restrictions have been lifted, the team will be working to ensure that all incidents of poor or dangerous parking are enforced.

Flytipping:
There have been some examples of flytipping in parts of the district recently, and some suggestion that – as county operated Recycling Centres are closed – some people are choosing to dump items illegally. In addition, there are cases of charity ‘bring banks’ (for example, clothing collection banks commonly located in supermarket car parks) being full, as they are not being collected by charities. As a result, some people are leaving bags of clothes at the base of the banks, which is starting to create an issue of wider flytipping. Officers have been in touch with supermarket managers and have arranged for Norse to collect this material in order to discourage wider flytipping. Norse are increasing their monitoring of flytipping – however if councillors become aware of any issues in their wards, please can they inform James.Mallinder@eastsuffolk.gov.uk or Kerry.Blair@eastsuffolk.gov.uk and they will arrange collection.

Capital Projects:
At the April Cabinet meeting, members agreed a number of important capital projects, including the strengthening of cliffs on the South Beach in Lowestoft, and a major refurbishment of the East Point Pavilion. In addition, Bungay Pool and Gym is a major construction project that is approaching its final stages. East Suffolk Council is keen to deliver these projects – where current safe working restrictions allow – and as a result, we will be working with contractors to try to deliver these schemes. These are important local projects and are an opportunity for East Suffolk Council to contribute to supporting the local economy during difficult times, and to help support the recovery of local communities, post-virus.

**Housing**

Further to our ongoing work, to ensure urgent housing needs are met during the pandemic, all those clients that have been placed in accommodation have been allocated a case officer within the Housing Needs team to ensure their needs are being met and wrap around support is in place. We have been exploring all available options to enable a planned move into accommodation that is suitable and affordable as we progress and as part of the recovery period.

We have also started work and will been concentrating and triaging clients that are likely to need housing support, in particular people that are currently residing in Hostel type accommodation, sharing facilities and in need to shield. We will be liaising with colleagues in Health as this will need a coordinated approach.

We continue to prioritise void work to maximise he number of units of stock available to us to meet accommodation demands from various sources, emergency reports, and minor adaptation works which will enable patients to be discharged from hospital or prevent admissions.

• 1,560 vulnerable ESC tenants who have been identified

• 820 clients in our Warm Homes Healthy People database who are all likely to be vulnerable to some extent

A reminder that support is in place for tenants who are finding it difficult to make rent payments due to Covid 19 and the details can be found here: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/rent-and-rent-arrears/>.

 **Planning matters**The Planning Team are now issuing a regular bulletin, detailing their activity and response to COVID-19: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Covid-Planning-Newsletter.pdf>

In addition you can also watch a video which includes Head of Planning Philip Ridley, talking about our approach: <https://youtu.be/wDeaKaYHzy4>.

The Advisory Panels for determining planning applications that would otherwise be determined by committee are operating ahead of the new regime for hosting remote meetings. There was a panel this Tuesday and the next one is next Tuesday. All details, including the outcome of meetings that have already taken place, are available on CMIS to review. **Staying Connected**IT systems continue to perform well and all staff including Customer Services, are now enabled to work effectively from home. An upgrade of the corporate internet went ahead on Wednesday, this will improve connectivity & performance.

There has been a notable increase in web traffic to the ES website but it is performing well:

o Users up by 47% in last 30 days, compared to previous 30 (69,429 vs 47,288)

o Number of new users up by 53% (58,536 vs 38,142)

o Pageviews up by 51% (279,162 vs 184,255)

ICT meanwhile is working with Finance on the implementation and operation of the new business grants process and with Communities on the extraction and supply of data to support Suffolk CCB. Also, work continues with Democratic Services on ‘virtual’ council meetings.

**Environmental Health**

Takeaways and social distancing:
Strictly, following social distancing criteria to safeguard themselves and others, officers from the Food and Safety Team were out over the Easter weekend observing and assessing implementation of social distancing requirements at many takeaways and other premises providing a takeaway food service throughout East Suffolk.

This work is being followed up by sending information posters to takeaways for them to display and help them and their customers know how to manage social distancing requirements.

Coronavirus – hotel quarantine unit:
Over the Easter weekend, the Food and Safety Team worked with a hotel owner, Public Health England and a company involved in the offshore energy market to enable a hotel, that would otherwise be closed, to open as a 14 day quarantine unit to allow 34 offshore workers to be isolated from the risk of exposure to Coronavirus and any of the group incubating Covid-19 to be identified before leaving for a spell offshore working for National Grid on the windfarm projects. This should ensure that those working offshore are protected from becoming ill and transmitting the infection to others.

Lowestoft Port Health:
Under the International Health Regulations (2005) vessels visiting foreign ports need a ship sanitation exemption certificate every 6 months. This usually requires the Officer to board the vessel to assess any potential adverse health conditions. Since the COVID-19 restrictions Officers in the Food and Safety Team have had to change how these inspections are undertaken (following Government guidance). Adapting to conditions officers have undertaken documentary checks on vessels where there is a history of compliance and there are no reported illnesses on board. Current advice has changed again so that only month-long extensions to existing Ship Sanitation Exemption Certificates will be issued.

 **And finally…**

A huge thank you to all Town and Parish Councillors for the massive difference you are all making in your local communities.

**Remember STAY AT HOME, PROTECT OUR NHS, SAVE LIVES**