**Councillor’s Weekly bulletin – 26th March 2021**

*(Please circulate electronically and post to your websites. Print only if necessary.)*

This weekly bulletin incorporates information from different service areas of East Suffolk Council and how they are addressing impacts of the virus. It also incorporates specific covid-related information as well as facts and figures which you may find useful.

**Kind Regards**

**Cllr Maurice Cook**

**Latest countywide figures and information**
As of 25 March there have been 29,419 total lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Suffolk. In total there have been 3,864.1 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people. This is the lowest overall COVID-19 case rate in the East of England.

District case rate as of 25 March 2021:



**Overview**

In the week up to the 24 March, there have been 267 new cases of COVID-19 in Suffolk. This is a slight increase on the numbers in the previous week.

The underlying rate of new weekly cases in Suffolk has increased and is now at 36.9 cases per 100,000 people. This rate remains below the rates for the East of England region (43.4 / 100,000) and for England as a whole (55.7 / 100,000).

In total, up to March 12 there have been 1,526 deaths in Suffolk where COVID-19 was recorded on the death certificate. There have been 25 COVID-19 related deaths in the seven days up to March 12.

The estimated ‘R’ value for the East of England is between 0.6 and 0.9. This is stable compared to the previous week and is now the similar to the estimated ‘R’ value for England as a whole which has remained at (0.7– 0.9) for this week.

**Weekly Cases and Rates**
COVID-19 cases are identified by taking specimens from people and sending them to laboratories around the UK to be tested. If the test is positive this is referred to as a lab-confirmed case.

In the week up to March 24, 2021 there were 267 new lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Suffolk. This number has risen compared to the previous week.

It is possible to calculate a case rate by dividing the number of cases by the number of people in a given population – this makes it possible to compare cases across different areas. The most recent underlying weekly case rate in Suffolk was 36.9 cases per 100,000 people.

This case rate has risen slightly compared to the previous week.
In the last week of reported data, up to March 24 there have been 17 cases in Babergh, 60 cases in East Suffolk, 110 cases in Ipswich, 25 cases in Mid Suffolk and 56 cases in West Suffolk.

**Supporting communities**
I am delighted to say that we have completed all the calls to the new East Suffolk additions to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable list and everyone has received at least three calls. The Communities Team is now pulling together a list of issues identified during the calls to feed into future work.

One of the things we could use this for is to evidence bids with voluntary sector partners to funds such as a new fund created from national donations made to NHS Charities Together at the start of the pandemic and following Major Tom’s heroic efforts. Norfolk & Waveney have just shy of £0.5m awarded to support ‘community partnership bids’; aimed at encouraging collaboration to support vulnerable communities.

The priorities for the fund are:

* Protect the most vulnerable from Covid-19
* Accelerate preventative programmes which proactively engage those at risk of poor health outcomes from Covid-19
* Support people of all ages who suffer mental ill-health as a result of Covid-19

Similar funding is available in the south of the district through the Suffolk Community Foundation for the Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG area.

Keep an eye out for our new Senior Community Intervention Officer, Sue Medley, who is now out and about at key locations in the District, sometimes with colleagues from Environmental Protection, providing advice and support on topics such as testing, self-isolation, vaccinations and sources of support.

**Supporting businesses**
**Covid Business Grants**

In total, since the launch of a plethora of new business grants in November 2020, East Suffolk Council has made over 17,800 separate payments totalling £37.2m to businesses struggling due to enforced closure or severe restrictions on trading. Since the beginning of the pandemic the Council has allocated over £103m of grants.

Following the PM’s announcement on the route map out of lockdown a further £9.4m of Covid business grant funding has been allocated to ESC to cover the period 16 February – 31 March. The majority of these payments have now been issued and in most cases automatically to all eligible businesses.

Businesses in the East Suffolk hospitality sector are also now receiving the new hospitality grant worth up to £9k per business. This is not a central government mandated grant but instead a decision taken by East Suffolk Council reflecting the severe pressure this sector had faced and its importance to our local communities and the visitor economy. Over £1.67m has now been issued to businesses in the hospitality sector through this new grant.

From 1 April Restart grants will be launched aimed at supporting the reopening of non-essential retail and hospitality/ accommodation providers, leisure, personal care and gyms. For non-essential retail grants will be worth up to £6k and for hospitality etc will be worth up to £18k. These will be one -off payments and only for businesses who are on the ratings list. For businesses who are not rated a top up to East Suffolk Council’s allocation from the ARG fund will be made available – we are still awaiting details of the size of the Council’s allocation. The current allocation of £7.2m has to be fully distributed to businesses by 30 June.

This week has seen the announcement of the ‘Welcome Back Fund’ - £56m being made available to Councils to safely welcome back residents and visitors to high streets and coastal resorts. The funding can cover items such as signage, public realm improvements, promotional campaigns and support for events. East Suffolk Council has been allocated £287k and the Economic Development team will now work with Town Councils to develop plans for the effective implementation of this fund.

In order to simplify the process for businesses there is now a streamlined application process which can be found on the Council’s Covid business support webpage [COVID-19: business grant funding » East Suffolk Council](https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-business-grant-funding/). Once completed ESC will determine which grant businesses are eligible for and make the appropriate payment. In a further bid to simplify and make the process more efficient businesses who have successfully applied for previous Covid grants will receive automatic payments from the current grant schemes.

**Business Support**

East Suffolk Council will shortly be implementing longer-term business support measures to support local businesses through the reopening and recovery period. The Economic Development team have developed draft business support proposals that are in line with our current economic growth priorities and build on the District’s economic strengths. The areas of support cover:

* Digital Transformation
* Town Centre Recovery
* Business Start-up

Cabinet recently approved these new business recovery support programmes and they will be fully developed and implemented in the Spring.

**Environmental Services**

Two teams in Environmental Services and Port Health are bracing themselves for when restrictions begin to ease for very different reasons.

Food & Safety have had a constant relationship with hundreds of businesses on Covid-19 matters for the past 12 months, working with the Health & Safety Executive and LA partners to support and advise businesses on the frequently changing rules.

Meanwhile, Environmental Protection have received more nuisance complaints as a result of more people working from home, whilst noise issues from retail and leisure sectors have diminished due to many places being closed.

The backlog of inspections is building for both teams because Covid-19 rules prevented access in some instances, for example. Fishing vessels, shop and retailers, animal breeders, pollution permitting to name a few.

And now both teams are looking ahead to when restrictions begin to ease.

The Food & Safety Team will need to learn about the new regulations required for businesses getting ready to reopen – and how best to communicate these so ensure as many businesses as possible understand what is required of them.

The Environmental Protection team is however bracing itself for an expected surge of celebration events, such as people being allowed to socialise in domestic gardens, pub gardens reopening and having later hours, windows being left open in homes and businesses when summer arrives etc. The team need to figure out where to draw a line on what is a noise nuisance and what isn’t, given that everything will remain a little different to usual still.

If all goes to plan, pubs will be able to reopen ‘outdoors only’ from 12 April and with many venues planning to turn their car parks into makeshift outdoor seating areas to maximise revenue, the team might be a little busier than usual if those who live nearby are not as keen to celebrate!

**Housing**
East Suffolk Council launched its myHome East Suffolk Portal on 1 February and since then, 196 tenants have signed up and use it to manage their accounts online, enabling them to check their rent account, make payments, set up direct debits, log repairs and message their Rent or Housing Officer.

The portal has been advertised via the Council’s social media channels, tenant magazine, annual rent letter and over the telephone with Tenants Services and Customer Services. Building maintenance operatives are also promoting via leaflets when they visit tenants and the team are also looking at the option to use vinyl decals for their vans and designing a short video to introduce the service.

The team is really pleased with progress and will continue to promote the service to tenants and expand the portal to include booking repair appointments later in the year. The portal is so good that even 8 people who are not tenants have tried to sign up to it!