**Councillors’s weekly bulletin – April 3 2020**

As you will know, during this unprecedented and rapidly evolving situation, I think it is important that I communicate with you more regularly – and here 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 as well as links to useful websites. Everything you need should be here. However, if there is additional support required in your Town or Parish area, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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/>

Some additional links which you may find useful are:

Public Health England’s guidance about coronavirus (COVID-19) for health professionals and other organisations:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

Residential care, supported living and home care guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance>

Guidance for educational settings: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

The latest travel advice can be found here:  <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

**Grants, funding and business matters**

The distribution of the small business grants is now underway and Finance focus is on getting letters out to all businesses that are eligible. Full details here: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-business-grant-funding/>Communications is going to be important across all channels to ensure as many eligible businesses as possible access this money. Town and Parish Members will have a role to play too by getting the message out to your local small businesses.

The East Suffolk team is a major contributor to the Suffolk-wide economic recovery group (includes LEP, Chamber, SCC & districts) which is assessing economic impacts across the county and how collectively we can support the longer term recovery programme.

Meanwhile we have suspended all events applications until the end of June. For the July- September period all event organisers are being advised to risk assess against CV19. Discussions are ongoing with larger events due to take place in the summer – although we are conscious that there may be a reluctance for people to attend large gatherings for some time which will have a longer term impact on our visitor economy and will require some form of mitigation.

**Council Tax Hardship funding**

We have received £1.9m from the Government so we can apply up to £150 to all Local Council Tax Relief claimants bringing their bills down to zero (Band A to D properties). The Anglia Revenue Partnership is awaiting system scripts from Capita to be able to apply these amounts, which may be Easter. ARP will ensure that the 8,000+ LCTRS claimants are not chased for payment and will issue new council tax bills as soon as the amounts have been applied.
 **Communities and supporting residents**

The Suffolk helpline ‘Home, but not alone’ (freephone 0800 876 6926) has now been operational for a week and is a real team effort between the County and Districts, with support from Community Action Suffolk, SALC and Suffolk Community Foundation. 194 calls had been received through our Customer Services Team as of 6pm on Tuesday and of these, the Communities Team has dealt with and closed 77 cases.

Most of the calls that we are getting through are about food, prescriptions and money and the team have been out delivering shopping to people without access to support from family or friends, many of whom have health issues are feeling lonely or, as one 94 year old put it ‘very adrift’.

Alongside ‘Home but not alone’, the Tribe volunteer app was launched to try to identify individual volunteers who may be able to plug the gaps in terms of coverage by community schemes. Volunteers can download the free app, called Tribe Volunteer from Apple App Store and Google Play Store. More than 100 volunteers have come forward. This is separate to the GOODSAMAP which is focused around health and care needs and featured in my last update.

Food parcel deliveries have started to those of the 1.5 million in Suffolk in the shielded group who are most vulnerable and therefore isolating for 12 weeks. The Team was involved in delivering emergency shopping over the weekend to a few people who had no food left. Everyone on the list who has registered for support should get a weekly food parcel from next week onwards and this group are also being given priority for supermarket online delivery slots as the majority of them can afford food, they just can’t access it.

We have provided initial funding of £15,000 to our foodbanks and Hardship Grants to individuals for food, heating and baby food as well as groups in Aldeburgh, Beccles, Corton, Earl Soham, Framlingham, Leiston, Lowestoft, Kesgrave, Southwold and Woodbridge. These groups are underpinning our response in East Suffolk and are funded from the contributions all District Councillors have made from their 20/21 Enabling Communities Grants.

 **Operational updates**

Refuse arrangements have changed temporarily. Most significantly, we took the decision to suspend the garden waste collection service. The reason behind this was because of the need to reduce the number of crew members in a cab to a maximum of two. As a result of this, the decision was taken to pause garden waste collection so that all crews can focus on essential black and blue/grey bin collections.

Staff are being re-trained in support of the focus on waste collections. Grounds maintenance activity has been reduced or temporarily suspended in some areas so that crews can support refuse collection. In addition, Norse Group have been helping East Suffolk’s operation by redirecting HGV drivers from other divisions to assist with refuse collections; four school bus drivers from Ipswich joined the operation this week.

Public conveniences are currently open across the district, and staff are being deployed to clean them. We keep this under review; if government guidance suggests that we close these facilities, then we will do. At present, they continue to operate.

Meanwhile, East Suffolk is working with emergency planners, the NHS and other agencies to look at how our assets can support the emergency response. We have made available several of our car parks, leisure centres, areas of open space and other buildings to planners for potential use as testing facilities, food distribution points or foodbanks.

East Suffolk Council has suspended car park charges during this period, specifically to support essential workers delivering the response to COVID without charge.

Meanwhile, in line with other Suffolk authorities, planning continues to adopt powers to enforce on-street parking – and we anticipate being able to operate these powers in April. All enforcement districts have agreed to only focus on areas of enforcement that support the COVID response. CPE staff will not be issuing tickets for issues such as overstaying in a one-hour bay.

**Housing**

A huge amount of hard work has been going on within our housing teams. All ‘official’ rough sleepers have now been found temporary accommodation, as per the Government’s directive. Additionally, teams are working round the clock to bring void properties back in to use as the demand for housing ramps up.

Colleagues are also increasing the ‘stepping home’ work to relieve pressure on hospitals - and we are negotiating for another property with Hanover in Woodbridge for this purpose.

The Gateway to Homechoice scheme has been temporarily suspended in a response to the Covid-19 outbreak. There are a number of reasons why this decision has been taken, including:
All landlords using the scheme have stopped the process of works to properties that are vacant as this cannot currently be undertaken safely on a routine basis,

The organisations are concerned for the safety of staff and members of the public for the process of viewing and signing up to properties,

It is not practical or desirable, during a period of lock-down for people to move from one property to another and support services (such as removals) are likely to be unavailable

**Planning matters**

Detailed arrangements have been put in place during the current Coronavirus pandemic in relation to planning applications that would ordinarily be determined by one of the Planning Committees. The Council’s Head of Legal and Democratic Services agreed, on Friday, with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Planning, Chief Executive and Planning Committee Chairs, to temporarily increase the delegations to the Head of Planning and Coastal Management (HPCM), so that he can decide planning applications, in consultation with Advisory Panels (APs).

If you have any questions or comments please email either Liz Beighton – Planning Development Manager: liz.beighton@eastsuffolk.gov.uk or Philip Ridley - Head of Planning & Coastal Management: philip.ridley@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

**Environmental Health**

All routine programmed work has been suspended and the teams are focusing on the essential reactive elements of Environmental Services & Port Health.

Staffing levels at Port Health are still good and daily reports suggest that we're keeping on top of the work. The FSA and Defra have set up teleconference calls with Port Health Authorities and we are expecting further guidance on what areas we need to focus on as a priority.

Food & Safety are focusing on the new legislation covering business closure and there is a county-wide working group looking at proportional and consistent enforcement and the sharing of intelligence. We continue to receive complaints and enquiries about businesses that are open.

The Environmental Protection Team are feeding into the Excess Deaths Working Group as they will need to deal with any public health burials where individuals have died at home and have no relatives to make funeral arrangements. We are anticipating a three-fold increase in activity but it could be more.

**Law and democracy**

Our Democratic Services Team are helping to establish and organise Planning Advisory Panels, to support the determination of planning applications and are organising the Cabinet meeting, to be held remotely, on 7 April.

The Elections Team are responding to queries from town and parishes about using the Electoral Roll to identify vulnerable residents-lots of queries this week.

The Legal team are supporting the Council with ongoing advice on all aspects of Council work, particularly contracts, land transactions, any litigation, housing and governance.

While the Licensing team are offering lots of advice, support to taxi drivers, and the licensed trade, generally, with day to day enquiries. In addition, there has been lots of work/liaison with the police to ensure that licensed premises are closed.

Temporary Events Notices have been granted to Tescos to support NHS workers and arrangements made with Norwich garage to allow taxi drivers in Lowestoft to access MOT checks there, as garages are closed in Lowestoft.
 **And finally…**

Guidance on disposing of waste is available for people with coronavirus symptoms who must remain at home until they are well, and for those living in households with someone who shows symptoms: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#cleaning-and-disposal-of-waste>

Suffolk Constabulary is reminding people to stay alert to criminals looking to continue to exploit the vulnerable during the coronavirus outbreak: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/news/stay-alert-to-covid19-scams/>

Above all, keep good care of yourselves during these difficult times. Social isolation can have an adverse effect on us all. Keeping in contact with others is important so take advantage of platforms such as Skype, Teams, Facetime and WhatsApp video to maintain contact with your colleagues, friends and family. Exchange pictures of you working from home and let us try to keep smiles on our faces!