**Councillors’s weekly bulletin – April 9th 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/>

**The Easter weekend**The Easter weekend will once again provide challenges for the police and local services, particularly when the weather is nice.

Suffolk County Council have put together a page with contact details and information on a range of related issues – from businesses failing to comply to social gatherings: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/latest-information/report-business-scam-coronavirus/>.

**Communities and supporting residents**

207 referrals were received through the Suffolk helpline between Monday 30th March and Sunday 5th April with 85 requests for help with medication and 163 requests for help with food (some people requested both). After a quiet weekend, on Monday 6th April we received a further 43 calls.

Pathways are now being worked out to help people in a more consistent way with access to prescriptions and to understand the ask of voluntary groups and communities in terms of help with low level health and care needs. From this week, we are able to ask for help from volunteers who have registered with the ‘Goodsamapp’ which was originally intended only to help those on the ‘shielded’ list – the most vulnerable 1.5 million people nationally but their support has now been made available to any vulnerable person.

As of Tuesday 7th April, 2,201 people have been identified in East Suffolk on the ‘shielded’ list, of which 582 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 only just over half of the 1.5 million have been identified and contacted so far.

We have allocated more than £30,000 from the East Suffolk Hardship Fund to our hardworking voluntary and community groups and have, this week, managed to access some supplies of hand sanitiser for local volunteers when they are out and about helping people with shopping and medication pick ups.

 **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

A number of concerns have been raised with me about the availability and use of PPE by volunteers supporting our residents who are shielding or self-isolating at home and I would like to provide some clarification of the current Public Health England guidelines and the situation in Suffolk as I know this is an area of considerable concern.

The guidelines on the use of PPE have recently been updated and set out the circumstances in which PPE such as face masks, aprons, eye protection and gloves are to be worn. This level of protection is only required in a health or social care setting where NHS or social care staff are providing close personal care and are likely to come within 1 metre or less of anyone who has tested positive for COVID19 or has the symptoms of the disease.

Our volunteers, who are doing a fantastic job in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities with food and medical supplies and someone to talk to on the telephone, have been given instructions on how to stay safe themselves. Social distancing of at least 2 metres and good hand hygiene are the simple measures that need to be adopted by volunteers when making deliveries. New supplies of hand sanitiser have arrived in Suffolk’s central stock and this is now being distributed to our volunteers to help them maintain good hand hygiene when no hand washing facilities are available.

On Tuesday 8 April Suffolk also received a delivery of 8 pallet loads of PPE including face masks, aprons, gloves and goggles and these are being distributed to those working in social care to ensure that they have appropriate protection. Any voluntary groups that have been approached to help support social care have been asked to discuss their PPE needs with the commissioning body that has approached them for support so that PPE from Suffolk’s central stock can be provided for their use. NHS staff have their own direct supply routes for PPE.

**Grants, funding and business matters**The Economic Development team are currently receiving around eight times the level of business enquiries compared to before the CV19 outbreak. As a result they have established a triage system for these enquiries.

In the first instance, businesses are encouraged to help themselves and read the latest business support information from Government. For East Suffolk businesses, the information can be found here: <https://eastsuffolkmeansbusiness.co.uk/business-support/resources/covid-19/>. If, after accessing the online information, businesses still have a general business enquiry, they can contact the Economic Development team here: economicdevelopment@eastsuffolk.gov.uk. If they have an enquiry that is specifically about the Business Support Grants, they can contact the relevant grants team here: COVID19BusinessGrants@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

Following the launch of ESC’s business grant application form on Friday the applications have been flooding in. As of 11:30 today we have received 2,337 applications and as of close of play today £8.5m will have been paid out to businesses.
<https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/covid-19-business-grant-funding>.

Meanwhile, the Council continues to support the development of the county wide economic recovery plan. We are leading on the element to determine which sectors are most impacted and how we can provide additional support now and through the longer-term recovery phase.

Unsurprisingly, the visitor economy and fishing sector appear to be the worst impacted in East Suffolk. Our energy sector is holding up well whereas the picture is more mixed for ports & logistics, ICT and advanced manufacturing.

The ED team are currently investigating a local initiative which can directly link fish merchants with consumers to mitigate the current slump in fish prices.

 **Operational updates**

Parking and CPE: The major development this week was the transfer of Civil Parking Enforcement powers to East Suffolk Council from the Police. These powers allow ESC to enforce on street restrictions – for example, issuing fines for people who park on double yellow lines. During the current restrictions, our enforcement officers will be using these powers to support the police, and the free flow of essential traffic, by ensuring that vehicles are not blocking roadways, or causing a danger by parking on yellow lines.

Refuse and other front line services: The Norse operation continues to be working well. The focus has been on ensuring that refuse is collected each week, despite pressures on crews due to sickness. In addition, we have introduced new safeguards for crews with only two operatives allowed in a vehicle at any one time (instead of up to four). Currently refuse crews have sufficient staffing to carry out rounds – and are being supplemented by HGV drivers from elsewhere in the Norse Group.

Norse are carrying out an ‘essential tasks only’ grounds maintenance service. This means that roadways will be cut where visibility is important to maintain safety – but the majority of verges will not. Bins in parks and gardens will be emptied and trees will be inspected for potential damage. If councillors are aware of any safety issue relating to grass cutting, please contact Kerry.Blair@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

CCTV: The Lowestoft CCTV service transferred back to ESC from Lowestoft Town Council this week. In its first week of operation, the service assisted police in dealing with an incident involving firearms.

The CCTV crew received thanks from the Tactical Response Team for their work: “I just wanted to call to express my thanks for the good work tonight, I cannot tell you how much easier you made my job, it was a serious situation that with your help was dealt with safely, carry on with the very good work”. This shows how important maintaining business as usual where we can during this time is to our partner agencies and our residents.

**Housing**

Stepping Home has supported over 45 people out of hospital since the Covid 19 pandemic hit the heath and care system. Supporting simple measures like the provision of key safes to allow carers access to homes, fitting grab rails and bannister rails to reduce the risk of falls and supporting people to move into temporary accommodation whilst more major works are carried out so they can return to a safe environment.

The project is bringing a further two units of temporary accommodation online to prepare for a period of increased pressure. These units have been loaned temporarily, free of charge from Havebury Housing, and Anchor Hanover housing. A great example of partners working together when the system needs it the most.

In a response to the public health emergency and the government’s request, East Suffolk Council have placed 26 homeless people in emergency accommodation to prevent them from sleeping rough at this unprecedented time. The emergency accommodation consists of social housing stock, self-contained hotel rooms and private housing which has been furnished with the essentials, including furniture, white goods and food parcels.

The quick response to the government’s request was made possible by the Council’s Housing Needs, Tenancy Services and Repairs and Maintenance teams, who worked together closely, supported by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, to ensure that homeless people were allocated vacant accommodation at short notice. All teams continue to work closely with public bodies, partners and organisations to ensure that those placed in emergency accommodation will continue to receive the support they need.

Meanwhile, 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/>. If Cllrs are aware of residents who are having difficulties with making online UC claims, please be aware that normal office hours are the busiest for the web site, so if they can try and go online outside of normal office hours this may give them a shorter wait time.

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

 **Planning matters**Emergency powers put in place to determine planning applications have been enacted this week with the Advisory Panels North and South consisting of Members advising the Head of Planning and Coastal Management how they consider he should determine the applications. The next meetings of these panels take place on 14th April.

The Coastal Management team continue to work with our Repair & Maintenance contractors in Suffolk for 2-3 more weeks. It’s imperative we maintain our assets and deal with public Health & Safet where we can so, post-virus, our beaches are safe for public use and our defences are in good order for next winter

**Environmental Health**

All routine food and safety work remain on hold while most food businesses remain closed. The team has provided guidance for businesses that are looking to diversify and set up food delivery services so this can be done safely. The Food & Safety Team continues to focus on priority complaint work and the enforcement of new regulations around business closure and social distancing. We are represented on the countywide working group that has been set up to ensure a consistent and graduated approach to enforcement and I am pleased to report that the vast majority of businesses in the district are complying with the new requirements.

We continue to get a very small number of complaints and enquiries about businesses that are still trading in breach of the regulations and these are being followed up by officers. Officers were also out last weekend assessing how takeaways are managing social distancing requirements and followed up with advice where necessary. The work was undertaken safely making sure that social distancing was observed.

The new working arrangements at Port Health are bedding in and staff numbers across the two teams at Felixstowe remain strong. Trade in food consignments remains strong and the team is extremely busy but have prioritised the tasks and are keeping on top of the workload and food supply lines moving. The Easter weekend is traditionally a busy one with an increase in food such as New Zealand lamb and this remains true this Easter.

The Environmental Protection Team are also focussing on essential elements of the service following up complaints about noise, fly-tipping and other anti-social behaviour. Additional work on public health burials where individuals have died at home and have no relatives to make funeral arrangements is expected.

 **Law and democracy**

We have now had two sets of Regulations made by the Government, to do with Local Authority meetings, and elections. The Regulations are;-

*The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*.
In summary, these Regulations allow all types of local authorities to hold meetings remotely. They apply from now and to meetings held before 21 May 2021. They also exempt local authorities of the requirement to hold an Annual Meeting this year, or until that date, if they wish, due to the current COVID19 pandemic. We are considering the implications of the Regulations right now, and are looking at technical solutions that will allow us to hold meetings remotely, which the public can also hear, and possibly see, too.

*The Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.*These Regulations postpone all scheduled elections for this year until May, next year. It includes all types of election, so, the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, local by-elections and neighbourhood plan referenda.

Our first remote Cabinet meeting took place this week having been arranged before the regulations mentioned above were received. The Cabinet considered three reports which have been exempted from publication due to their confidential nature. So, the actual business part of the meeting would have excluded the public, in any event.

**Finally I hope that everyone can enjoy a restful and healthy Easter break. This weekend more than ever, please remember STAY AT HOME, PROTECT OUR NHS, SAVE LIVES.**

**Maurice**