**Councillor’s Weekly bulletin – 8th January 2021**

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

With cases rising and the country entering a new lockdown, I believe it is now appropriate to provide you, once again, with a weekly update. This will incorporate information from different service areas and how they are addressing impacts of the virus – but will also focus on specific covid-related information and facts and figures which you may find useful.

**Kind Regards**

**Cllr Maurice Cook**

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

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

Local, East Suffolk-specific information: <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/covid-19>

**Latest countywide figures and information**As of the 6 January there were 16,859 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Suffolk. In total there have been 2,214 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people.

District case rate as of 6 January 2021:A new national lockdown in England began on Wednesday 6th January for an indeterminate period. The national COVID-19 alert tiers are suspended while the national lockdown is in place.

In the week to the 6th January there were 3,849 new lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Suffolk. This number has nearly doubled compared to the previous week.

The underlying rate of new weekly cases in Suffolk has increased and is now at 448.4 cases per 100,000 people. This rate remains below the rates for the East of England region (769.8 / 100,000) and for England as a whole (579.8/ 100,000).

**Vaccinations**I understand and share concerns about ensuring our communities receive information about the vaccination roll out as quickly and effectively as possible, and it is clear that local authorities can play a role in this process. Therefore, I am pleased to confirm that the Suffolk Communications Cell, which includes representation from East Suffolk, has led on the delivery of a web resource which aims to provide clear, up to date information for stakeholders and residents.
[**www.suffolk.gov.uk/covidvaccinations**](http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/covidvaccinations)
You will of course be aware that East Suffolk straddles two separate health CCG ‘areas’ which I note can cause some confusion, particularly in the media when referring to Suffolk as a whole. Therefore, this resource will hopefully be a really useful way of sharing local information. If you have any questions about this, please email our Communications Manager, Phil Harris.

**Stay at home and stay safe**I spoke with the media earlier this week about the importance of staying home and saying safe. I personally think it is important that we are not seen to demonise people who would like to visit this part of the country, or even travel around it - however, we must be very clear that guidelines must be followed to keep everyone safe.

I said: "East Suffolk is a truly beautiful part of the country with an incredible coastline which draws millions of visitors each year. But this is not a normal situation and people really should not travel anywhere unless for absolutely essential work or care related reasons, no matter how tempting it is.

"We can't wait to welcome people back to our fantastic destinations once restrictions are lifted but for now, please stay at home and stay safe."

 **Communities and supporting residents**The Home But Not Alone phone line continues to be active and will be re-promoted shortly – 27 referrals have been received since the third lockdown started on Boxing Day. Calls were completed between Christmas and New Year to the 187 people added to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) list since the end of the second lockdown in November, to ensure that they know that support is available.

This week the Communities Team are calling all those who needed support during lockdown 2. This includes anyone who was either referred to Home But Not Alone or Suffolk Advice and Support Service, are lonely or isolated, were helped to register with the National Shielding Support Service or had other needs identified – this is just over 200 people.

Meanwhile, funding secured through our work to support the CEV group during the November lockdown has led to the purchase of 30 additional Grandpads, topping up the Covid-19 Community Fund (£25,000) and the Bounce Back Fund (£25,000).

Finally, Three Community Intervention posts (six months) are currently out to advert to pro-actively support self-isolation and outbreak management in East Suffolk.
 **Environmental Services**Food & Safety
The food and safety team are currently working with Suffolk Public Health and other agencies to respond to the high incidence of Covid-19. County and district level data and intelligence is shared via live daily briefings led by Suffolk Public Health’s Covid Response Hub. The team follows up investigations in workplace settings to help ensure businesses have controls in place to prevent the spread of disease in the workplace and to minimise business disruption.

The food and safety team are managing high levels of complaints and enquiries relating to business closures and Covid secure matters. The team provides updates to the Covid-19 section on the Council’s website where an online complaint form is available for residents <https://my.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/service/COVID_19_Health_and_Safety>. Enquiries can also be made to environment@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Environmental Protection
The emergence of the more contagious variant of covid will affect the activities of the Environmental Protection team. As a general rule the team will not be undertaking visits to premises for any purpose. This will have an effect on proactive inspections and reactive visits for all purposes including water sampling, nuisance monitoring visits, licence and permit inspections and many other site-visits involving entry to premises. They will be exploring ways of undertaking these activities remotely.

The team had begun to make some headway in tackling the backlog off work caused by the first lockdown which led to 15% to 20% increase in reactive work from for example, noise complaints, bonfire nuisance complaints, fly tipping etc.  However, they have not reached the stage yet of turning work away, since there is traditionally a seasonal lull in reactive work at this time of the year. Whether or not the situation continues depends upon progress of the pandemic and whether we will be in a better situation by the time the weather improves in the spring.

Meanwhile an outbreak of Covid 19 was identified and managed on the Romany Lane traveller site from early December with seven confirmed cases but no new cases apparent in the week before Christmas.

There has unfortunately been a resurgence of cases following the holiday period, with 8 new confirmed cases as of today. An incident team led by Suffolk Public Health has been re-established and the residents are being offered on-site testing today with support from the site managers, the police, the Norfolk and Suffolk Gypsy, Roma Traveller Liaison service and the CCG to reinforce the importance of social distancing and hygiene and the need to remain on the site to prevent spread to the wider community. No linked cases have yet been identified in the wider community and containing the outbreak will be the main focus of the activity today and over the coming days.

**Operational update**There has been no impact on refuse collection or other Norse services, however we will continue to work with partner organisations who deliver council services on our behalf to monitor sickness too and will work with them to minimise any disruption. Leisure centres closed on Boxing Day until further notice as part of the original Tier 4 regulations and the Caravan site at Southwold is also closed.

All East Suffolk Council tennis courts, outdoor gyms and sporting locations under the management of the council will have signage put up saying that they are closed.

We await the guidance for skateparks (as there is no specific mention in the government guidance) but at this time they will remain open as are the playgrounds.
 **Grants, funding and business matters**
Response
On Tuesday, the Chancellor announced further support for businesses as we entered the new national lockdown. In addition to the current Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) and the Additional Restrictions Grant (discretionary funding aimed at those businesses without a rateable value) £4.6bn is being made available via Closed Business Lockdown Payment. This is aimed at retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and provides a one-off payment of up to £9k dependent on the businesses RV. There is also a further £500m being made available to top up the ARG scheme. As soon as the details of these new schemes are made available ESC will go live and promote these new funding streams in addition to the existing grants.

In terms of current grants, ESC has received 2,132 applications for the LRSG scheme and paid 1,873 of these totalling £2.8m. We also paid 136 applications for the ARG scheme totalling £127k. For both these schemes take up by businesses had been low (this is a nationwide issue with applications around 7%) due to the relatively low amount of funding being made available, businesses adapting to the restrictions and confusion around the plethora of schemes available. ESC will be clarifying what funding is available and to which businesses in updated comms which will be issued across all channels. We will also be making direct contact with those businesses we know are eligible.

As the LRSG scheme is a rolling fund we are now making automatic payments to eligible businesses that have provided current bank details. These payments will cover the period 26 Dec – 15 Feb ie the current lockdown period. This will allow ESC to rapidly make substantial payments to those businesses in need. On top the above ESC has made ‘wet led pub’ payments to 45 pubs totalling £45k.

Recovery
The ED and Regeneration team continue to pursue their long-term economic growth programmes which will ensure we are well placed to recover strongly and build back better and greener from the Covid downturn.

This includes the Towns Revitalisation initiative, Smart Towns Programme, Lowestoft Town Investment Plan, Sizewell C Economic Development Programme, exploring opportunities for an ES hydrogen economy, Freeports initiatives, delivering the Felixstowe Vision and supporting the new Felixstowe BID.

In addition to these programmes, we are also developing specific business support schemes to enable start-up businesses, introduce a full fibre voucher scheme to enable businesses to connect to new ultrafast network in Lowestoft and looking at capital investments to support our ambitions to develop an energy campus linked to SZC and the emerging hydrogen economy.

We also continue to work with partners at the LEP and across the county to dover Suffolk and region wide economic recovery programmes that build on our existing sector strengths and emerging economic growth opportunities.

**Customer Services**Our service remains unaffected as measures are already in place with a remote call centre, maintaining staff resilience to reduce absences and alternative channels of access for customers. We are encouraging people to access our services and information online where possible.

Public access remains closed; however emergency access / support measures are in place if required. The Marina Customer Services Centre will now close entirely for the remainder of this period of restrictions. This will not only help reduce running costs at this time but also reduce the risk of transmission and we will of course continue to support those staff who need to access offices.

The team absolutely recognises the needs and expectations of our customers will continue to evolve during this period and we are responding with a revised service delivery model, which has already seen careful planning of our response and resources which has enabled front-facing staff to take on new duties. Positively, for example, our present mailbox queries are being answered much quicker than previously and we do of course remain accessible to our customers despite the restrictions.

STAY SAFE.