



CABINET

Tuesday, 01 June 2021

Subject	Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to the Covid-19 pandemic: Recommendations from Scrutiny Committee
Report by	Councillor Mary Rudd Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health Councillor Letitia Smith Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism
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Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is NOT in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
Wards Affected:	All Wards

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to respond to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Committee review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report attached as Appendix A is the recommendations to Cabinet and the response to each of these is set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7 below.

Options:

Each recommendation has been considered in turn and a response provided on the basis of the context in East Suffolk and the wider Suffolk area as of May 2021.

Recommendation/s:

That Cabinet notes the response to the seven recommendations in the Scrutiny Committee Review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

The Scrutiny Committee has a role to scrutinise and review the action of the Council and has developed a set of recommendations to be considered as part of the review of the overall response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

The Covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented and impacted the Council's work across the board, including the five themes of the Strategic Plan.

Environmental:

No specific implications arising from the recommendations

Equalities and Diversity:

One of the Committee's recommendations is around communication with all of the District's residents without an overreliance on digital technology alone.

Financial:

The pandemic has had an impact on finances across the Board in terms of the redeployment of Council staff and expenditure on unanticipated areas of activity. However to offset that new resources have been made available through various funding streams from the Government.

Human Resources:

As outlined above, staff resource has been redirected to respond to the pandemic, with redeployments and staff offering to support other Teams, including the Communities Team, particularly during lockdown 1.

ICT:

No specific implications arising from the recommendations

Legal:

No specific implications arising from the recommendations

Risk:

Risks were managed throughout the pandemic and will continue to be managed during the recovery phase, through the corporate risk register and the Corporate Governance Group.

External Consultees:

The Joint Emergency Planning Unit and Community Action Suffolk both participated in the Scrutiny Committee meetings held in October/November 2020.

Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the Strategic Plan which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
T01	Growing our Economy		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T02	Enabling our Communities		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T03	Maintaining Financial Sustainability		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T04	Delivering Digital Transformation		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
T05	Caring for our Environment		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How does this proposal support the priorities selected?			
The recommendations relate specifically to volunteering, emergency response groups and communications.			

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1	Background facts
1.1	The primary purpose of the Scrutiny Committee review was to constructively review performance in terms of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to identify opportunities for improvement.
1.2	The Council's response was considered in two parts at two separate Scrutiny Committee meetings. At the first meeting, on 15 October 2020, the Committee received a report dealing with community support, business support and homelessness. At the second meeting, on the 26 November 2020, the Committee received a report on the emergency planning process, winter preparedness, the Test and Trace process and communications.
1.3	The report attached to this report as Appendix A is the recommendations to Cabinet and the response to each individual recommendation is set out below.

2	Current position
2.1	Each of the recommendations in the Scrutiny Committee Report is provided in full below, followed by the response.
2.2	<p>That, within six months of receipt of this report, East Suffolk Council works with the third sector, for example, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, as well as town and parish councils across the district, to build and maintain a network of current and additional volunteers available for future emergencies. The network will ensure volunteers are kept up to date on possible future needs for assistance and aim to keep them informed as to why they may not have been required at certain points in response phases.</p> <p>Through Community Action Suffolk (CAS), Suffolk Collaborative Communities Board (CCB) partners, including East Suffolk Council, have undertaken regular surveys of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector. The most recent survey went out week beginning 11th May and asks if community response groups are still active, about their current level of requests for help, intentions in terms of the future of the group, ability to support a response during further waves of Covid -19 or other emergencies, number of volunteers, who they are concerned about in their community, support required etc. The Head of Communities was on the CCB Sub-Group that developed this survey.</p> <p>East Suffolk Council worked as part of a sub-group of the CCB that undertook a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the community response and held follow-up focus groups between Lockdowns 1 and 2 i.e. July and November 2020 to capture any lessons learned in relation to the</p>

	<p>community response to the initial phase of the pandemic at Suffolk, East Suffolk and individual community levels.</p> <p>It is clear from the work done with the Tribe App that it is not effective to recruit volunteers to keep 'on ice' – they need to have a role to undertake immediately, or they quickly lose their motivation to volunteer. It is considered more effective to work through partners such as CAS to support individual community response and emergency planning groups (and our Town and Parish Councils) to recruit and manage their own volunteers and to fill gaps through work such the volunteering campaign funded through the Community Partnership Board to identify more volunteers in the Lowestoft area.</p> <p>The other important dimension is that volunteer circumstances change and therefore their capacity to volunteer changes – we had lots of furloughed volunteers during lockdown 1 but when they went back to work, we had to recruit different volunteers.</p>
2.2	<p>That, within six months of receipt of this report, the Council, in its partnership work with the Joint Emergency Planning Unit, seeks access to the emergency civil preparedness plans of the town and parish Councils across the district to ensure further robustness in future emergency preparedness.</p> <p>The Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) is working with Community Action Suffolk (CAS) and the Collaborative Communities Board (CCB) to integrate the Community Emergency Planning Groups (CEPGs) into the wider voluntary sector structure in Suffolk. This has considerable benefits: messages and updates from CCB/CAS going to CEPGs directly and Rest Centre training being offered to other voluntary organisations.</p> <p>All East Suffolk Officers with a role in multi-agency response have access to the Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF) Resilience Direct (RD) response pages. The CEPG plans are stored on these RD pages and available for viewing. Because the plans contain personal contact details for CEPGs they are stored securely and only accessible in the event of an emergency. The plans are regularly reviewed by the CEPGs and advice on the structure and content provided by JEPU. JEPU has asked all CEPGs to check and update their contact details by end May 2021.</p> <p>JEPU has created a map (attached) showing which Town / Parish Councils have CEPGs. A map covering the whole of Suffolk is also available on the publicly accessible SRF website at link: https://www.suffolkresilience.com/prepare-your-community/emergency-plans-map.</p>
2.3	<p>That, within one month of completion of the compilation of the network recommended at 1 above, East Suffolk Council works to ensure that all and any current volunteers who acted in direct response to the pandemic are contacted to acknowledge and thank them for their help.</p> <p>The Council has sent out multiple messages to the Covid-19 community response groups in East Suffolk, both through Community Action Suffolk (CAS), the county voluntary sector infrastructure organisation, and directly. The Head of Communities has sent two messages of thanks to the response group lead contacts during lockdowns one and three and asked for this thanks to be passed</p>

	<p>on to the other members of the group.</p> <p>The Communities Officers in the Communities Team have regular and ongoing contact with the community response organisations in their Community Partnership area.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council has agreed that we should hold a thank you event for East Suffolk community response volunteers when it is safe to do so.</p>
2.4	<p>That, within one month of receipt of this report, East Suffolk Council starts to explore, with partner organisations such as Suffolk County Council (SCC) and Community Action Suffolk, options for the creation of an interactive map to show the voluntary and support groups in existence in Suffolk, together with the number of active volunteers they each have.</p> <p>A map of response organisations was created for Suffolk by Community Action Suffolk on behalf of the Collaborative Communities Board during lockdown one and updated during the November 2020 and January to March 2021 lockdowns. This mapped all active groups playing a role in the Covid response.</p> <p>This map does not include the number of active volunteers (although we do know how many volunteers each group had at specific moments in time). The May survey (see response to Q1) of community response groups asks again about current volunteer numbers and we will continue to update our information and ensure that it is as current as possible.</p>
2.5	<p>That, if, as heard during the review, East Suffolk Council decides to create and use a local app that will link local requests for support to local volunteers, it not be introduced until there is robust assurance that it will be fully operational and effective.</p> <p>This is still being considered at a Suffolk level by the Collaborative Communities Board. Tribe was the best available app when the pandemic started and served a purpose, although clearly did not achieve the full functionality that Suffolk partners were hoping for.</p> <p>There are various other products available, but there may be more benefit to focussing on more bespoke approaches in the areas where additional volunteers are needed and/or on software that enables local groups to more easily allocate and manage tasks such as that developed in Ipswich. One local community group received offers of help from more than 300 volunteers but only used around 10% of these which caused frustration amongst those volunteers who were not called up to help.</p>
2.6	<p>That East Suffolk Council continues to maintain its usual methods of communications, in addition to digital opportunities, to ensure and enable all residents (including those who may prefer or are unable to utilise the Council's website or social media) remain fully informed and provided with specific and up-to-date local information during emergencies, for example, about the changing requirements of the local restriction tier system.</p> <p>The Council will continue to communicate with its residents in a timely fashion and in the most appropriate way through a wide range of existing and emerging channels. We will continue to utilise new/social media and, as part of our</p>

	<p>commitment to digital transformation, we will seek to ensure a wide awareness and understanding of online services and information, while not leaving behind those who finds it harder to access.</p> <p>Community engagement is critically important in this regard and with this in mind, the Council's Community Intervention Team (CIT) is now in place – a Senior Officer and three (two part time and one full time) Officers. They are out and about in our communities, particularly where there are outbreaks in schools, businesses and community settings but also more generally in key places e.g. town centres, food banks, supermarkets in a reassurance role, working alongside the Council's Environmental Protection team.</p> <p>The CIT have produced a simple one-page handout which provides an overview of their role/work and they use the Suffolk Message Cascader one-page overviews (which they also print and distribute) to provide information about specifics e.g. Vaccine Reassurance, Self-Isolation etc.</p>
2.7	<p>That Cabinet shares the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations, and its response to these, with the three local MPs for the East Suffolk district and Mr Robert Jenrick, MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.</p> <p>Noted</p>

3 How to address current situation

3.1	The responses to each of the individual recommendations above have been developed in the context of the position in May 2021 – six months has elapsed since the Scrutiny Committee considered each of these issues (in October and November 2020). Since then we have had two further lockdowns and we are now moving through the different milestones of the national Covid Recovery Roadmap.
3.2	It is therefore considered that some of the recommendations made have been overtaken by more recent events/developments.

4 Reason/s for recommendation

4.1	Each recommendation has been considered and the response, including updates on the changing context in relation to that issue is set out in section 2 above.
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Appendices

Appendices:

Appendix A	Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to the Covid-19 pandemic by the Scrutiny Committee
Appendix B	Map displaying Town and Parish Councils with CEPGs

Background reference papers:

None.
