



**East Suffolk House, Riduna Park, Station
Road, Melton, Woodbridge, IP12 1RT**

Scrutiny Committee

Members:

Councillor Stuart Bird (Chairman)
Councillor Mike Deacon (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Edward Back
Councillor David Beavan
Councillor Judy Cloke
Councillor Linda Coulam
Councillor Andree Gee
Councillor Louise Gooch
Councillor Tracey Green
Councillor Geoff Lynch
Councillor Mark Newton
Councillor Keith Robinson
Councillor Caroline Topping

Members are invited to an **Extraordinary Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee** to be held on **Thursday 26 November 2020 at 6:30pm**

This Meeting will be conducted remotely, pursuant to the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

The Meeting will be facilitated using the Zoom video conferencing system and broadcast via the East Suffolk Council YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/oiqyVZ8LE9E>

An Agenda is set out below.

Part One – Open to the Public

Pages

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- 1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**
 - 2 Declarations of Interest**
Members and Officers are invited to make any declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Local Non-Pecuniary Interests that they may have in relation to items on the Agenda and are also reminded to make any declarations at any stage during the Meeting if it becomes apparent that this may be required when a particular item or issue is considered.
 - 3 Interim Review of the response, by East Suffolk Council, to the Covid-19 pandemic (2) ES/0570** **1 - 20**
Report of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health
 - 4 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**
To consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme

Part Two – Exempt/Confidential

Pages

There are no Exempt or Confidential items for this Agenda.

Close



Stephen Baker, Chief Executive

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EXTRAORDINARY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 26 November 2020

INITIAL REVIEW OF THE RESPONSE BY EAST SUFFOLK COUNCIL TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC (PART 2)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Scrutiny Committee has asked for a factual review of the Council’s response to the pandemic. It is noted that the pandemic has not yet passed but, given that eight months has now passed, the Committee considers it appropriate to review the response to date.
2. This report is the second of two reports and provides information on the following key areas for Members to consider:
 - Communications
 - Winter preparedness
 - Emergency Planning
 - Test and Trace

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open
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Wards Affected:	All Wards
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Cabinet Members:	<p>Cllr Steve Gallant, Leader of the Council</p> <p>Cllr Mary Rudd, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health</p>
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Supporting Officers:	<p>Stephen Baker, Chief Executive 01394 444378 stephen.baker@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Nick Khan, Strategic Director 01502 523606 nick.khan@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Peter Langford, District Emergency Planning Officer 07920 139293 peter.langford@suffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Phil Harris, Communications Manager 07930 154688 phil.harris@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</p>
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic has had a profound global impact, and this effect has been felt by the communities, businesses, and people of East Suffolk. The pandemic is far from over, indeed, since the previous report, a further lockdown of four weeks has been announced, ending on 2 December 2020. However, the Scrutiny Committee has asked that it be given the opportunity to review the response of East Suffolk Council to the pandemic so far.
- 1.2 As explained in the previous report, the Scrutiny Committee has been very clear about the scope of the review and the type of report it requires. Accordingly, this report is also pithy in style, and factual in content, providing the facts about the response by East Suffolk Council so as to allow the Members of the Committee to reach its own conclusions about the response to date.
- 1.3 Given the amount of information that pertains to the response to the pandemic, the Scrutiny Committee will consider this in two parts, over two meetings. The first part was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 15 October 2020 which focussed on Community Support, Business Support and Homelessness.

2 INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

- 2.1 This is the second of two reports. The appendices attached contain information that relate to the following areas:
- Communications
 - Emergency Planning
 - Test and Trace
- 2.2 These appendices provide a summary of the activity undertaken by the Council in response to the pandemic. This response has, in many areas, been a joint response with partners, volunteers and other agencies.

3 COMMUNICATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

- 3.1 In relation to communications, the Council's Communications Team has provided a wide range of pro-active and reactive communications support as part of the multi-agency Suffolk-wide response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A Communications Cell was established as part of the county-wide Strategic Co-ordination Group in March 2020 with clear objectives and responsibilities; to disseminate critical information from key partners in health, the Police and local councils, as well as Government advice and directives, to a

range of audiences, as efficiently and effectively as possible. This Communications Cell comprised officers from all councils and agencies involved in the response.

- 3.2 The strength of the county-wide cell has been in ensuring a consistency and clarity of messaging for local audiences during a difficult time, with often complicated and variable concepts to explain. A primary objective has been to provide reassurance, offering as much factual detail as possible (value), while reducing and avoiding unnecessary 'noise'.
- 3.3 A variety of different communications channels have been utilised with particular emphasis on local news media – print, tv, radio – and social media. Facebook and Twitter have proved to be incredibly important tools for both the dissemination and the wide sharing of important information (as well as two-way engagement and intelligence gathering). However, for those without social media, traditional news sources have been invaluable and our healthy working relationship with the local media has been important. The Communications Cell has also worked closely with the Communities Teams and other services to help ensure information is provided for 'hard to reach' audiences.
- 3.4 Communications colleagues are also engaged in Strategic Co-ordination Group 'recovery' cells which are focusing on how communities and businesses are supported in their efforts to return to some form of normality in difficult economic and social conditions.
- 3.5 Internal communications has been equally important with an emphasis in East Suffolk on ensuring that Members and Officers are fully informed of latest local developments and guidance that may affect them. Key information from the national level, such as Government departments, the Local Government Association and other agencies is 'cascaded' through the Council as appropriate. The Communications Team has provided Members with regular local, regional and national updates and has also worked closely with the HR team and senior management to consider and mitigate the impact on staff who have been asked to change their work patterns. The Leader of the Council also provided regular updates to all Members of the Council.
- 3.6 Engagement programmes have been established, including a live online staff briefing and a number of videos both to reassure and explain any latest directives. Communications has been important in establishing and ensuring staff wellbeing and, by association, productivity, as the Council seeks to continue delivering services to the highest possible standard in challenging circumstances.
- 3.7 Attached to this report, as Appendix A, are two diagrams that provide more detail about the Communications response.

4 WINTER PREPAREDNESS

- 4.1 In the scope for this review, Members of the Committee asked that consideration be given to how the pandemic has affected winter preparedness. All councils prepare for the potential disruption that may arise during the winter season and for East Suffolk this includes:
 - Preparing for a flood threat – the spring tides often coincide with severe weather, creating flood threat on the east coast during winter.
 - Severe weather events - the Council must be ready to respond to severe winter weather.

- Business continuity - the Council has to ensure that key services can continue to be delivered in the event of an event during the winter season.
- Winter illness - colleagues who deal with food safety etc are acutely aware of the impact of illnesses that manifest themselves in winter.
- Homelessness and rough sleeping – an increase in demand as the Council supports those affected. Last year the ‘Thin Ice’ project was instrumental in addressing this need.

4.2 These issues are reviewed and addressed each year. The pandemic will have an effect, such as making it necessary to follow Covid-19 hygiene measures whilst deploying a flood barrier, but at present the pandemic is not expected to undermine the Council’s winter preparedness.

5 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK STRATEGIC PLAN?

5.1 When the East Suffolk Strategic Plan was written and developed, a global pandemic was not anticipated. However, the impact of the pandemic has been taken into account as work on the Strategic Plan has continued. Strenuous efforts have been made to minimise the effect of the pandemic on the delivery of the Strategic Plan. Unfortunately, some impact has been inevitable, and this is being identified as the themes within the Plan are reviewed.

5.2 The wider and longer-term impact of the pandemic is, as yet, unknown. However, the Council will need to assess the effect on mental and physical health and wellbeing within its communities and on its role in keeping people well. The economic impact is also likely to be far-reaching and the Council will need to consider how this affects its role in maintaining inclusive growth in East Suffolk.

6 FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The financial effect of the pandemic has been significant and multi-faceted; income has reduced, expenditure has increased, and the extent of the financial impact is not yet known. The scoping report for this review by the Scrutiny Committee did not include the financial impact of the pandemic and so those issues have not been included in this report.

6.2 The response to the pandemic has required a huge collective effort by many organisations from all sectors; this has required complex governance arrangements and has tackled issues such as data management. Given that the Scrutiny Committee has focused on operational detail within the scope of its review, these issues are not referenced within this report.

7 OTHER KEY ISSUES

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That, having considered the contents of both reports, the Scrutiny Committee makes appropriate recommendations to Cabinet, as appropriate, for its consideration

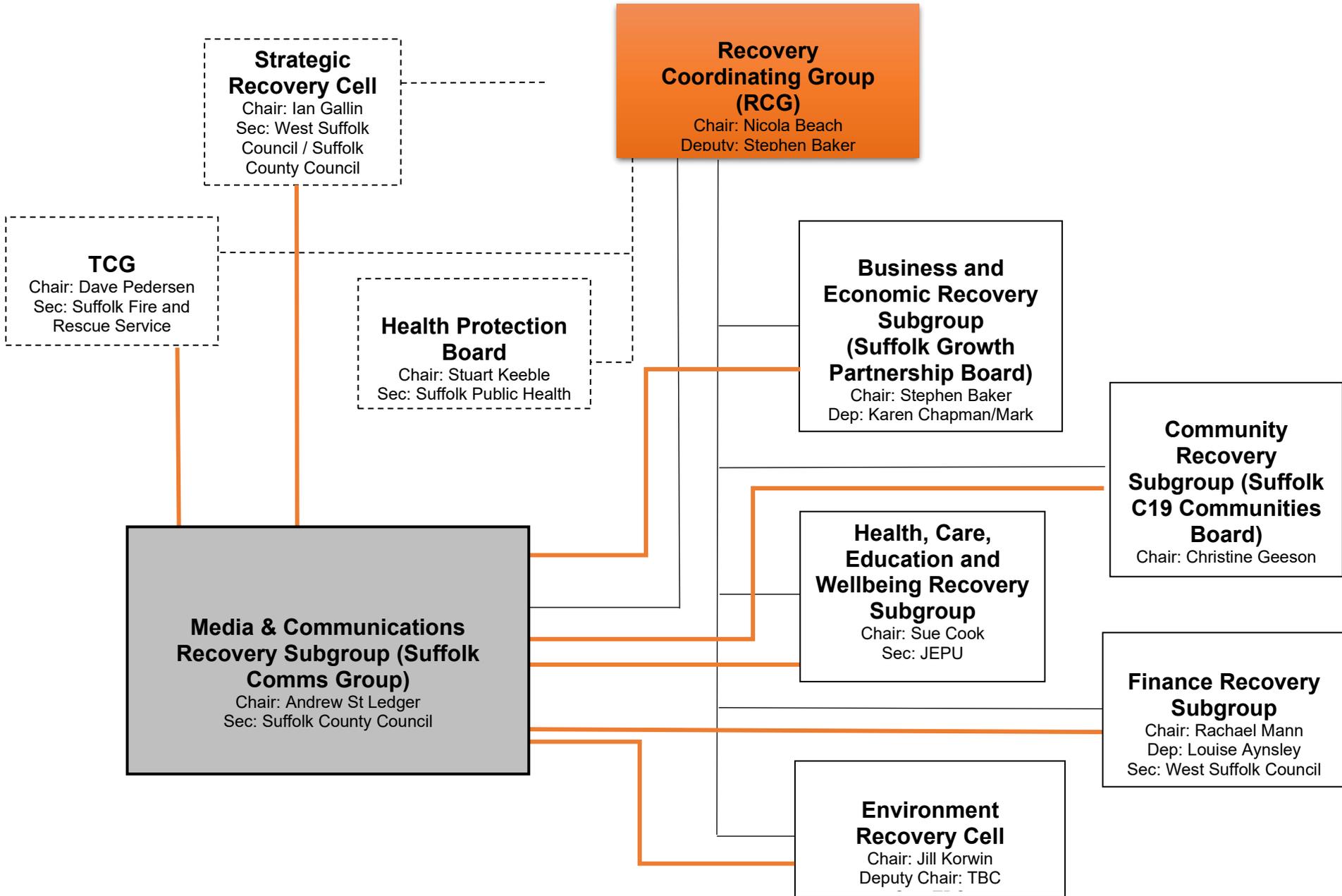
Appendix A

Diagrams providing detail about the Communications response

Appendix B	Emergency Planning
Appendix C	Test and Trace
Appendix D	Questions from Committee Members and answers

BACKGROUND PAPERS None

APPENDIX A - Diagrams providing detail about the Communications response



Emergency Planning

Introduction

This report, prepared jointly with the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU), provides a summary of the events and activities undertaken by East Suffolk Council (ESC) in response to the Covid 19 (C-19) pandemic between March and the end of July 2020. It also outlines the main learning points from the event, to date.

Background

The global crisis associated with the C-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges. The pandemic has required the most enduring emergency response in modern times, with the UK Government updates providing a grim reminder of the toll placed on communities and individuals. ESC operates as part of the multi-agency Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF), which declared a Major Incident in response to the pandemic on 20 March 2020. The formal declaration of a Major Incident requires all responders (defined by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004) to collaborate, share information and co-ordinate response activity in Suffolk.

In response to the classification of a Major Incident, ESC established its local governance structure including the Tactical Management Team (TMT), chaired by the Chief Executive, to co-ordinate activities and decision making. This ran several times a week, remotely, throughout the lockdown and included the Council's Corporate Management Team, Communications Manager, JEPU representative, HR representative and the Leader of the Council to ensure political oversight and provide input on the impacts of C-19 on communities.

Impacts

Overall case numbers and case rates in Suffolk remained low compared to the East of England and England as a whole. Up to 31 July 2020, 881 people in East Suffolk tested positive for C-19; a rate of 355 people per 100,000 (the equivalent rate for England was roughly 500 people per 100,000). The average death rate (taken from the Office for National Statistics) between 1 March and 31 July 2020 was 90.9 deaths involving C-19 per 100,000 people in England. Over a same period, the death rate for the East of England was 77.8 and 57 for East Suffolk.

Findings

When the lockdown measures were eased, JEPU sought feedback from those involved in order to improve and inform future responses.

As a designated 'Category 1 responder' under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, ESC assumes specific civil protection duties such as assessing the likelihood of certain risks, undertaking contingency planning (eg providing shelter, waste collection and public information), setting up business continuity plans and advising local communities and businesses about these plans. This planning is done through the SRF, which brings together local authorities with other responders, such as the emergency services, utility companies and health care providers. They have a duty to maintain plans on how to continue to perform their normal functions while responding to emergencies.

All ESC services have plans for dealing with emergencies, or business continuity interruptions, including arrangements for managing large-scale staff absences. These are adaptable and provided a helpful starting point for responding to the pandemic. However, the challenges of social distancing and working remotely are new concepts to all services and organisations, and so did not feature in business continuity plans. This will now be addressed as plans are revised and updated. The regular business continuity and emergency response exercises, to test how plans function in practice and how

organisations work together, afforded invaluable experiential learning for staff facing uncertainty, coupled with wide-ranging and complex demands.

ESC has to be ready for emergencies such as flooding events, and so benefited from the existence of a well-developed command structure that enabled quick decision making. Key decisions, alongside changes to legislation and the possible implications to businesses and the local community, were all recorded in an electronic log (available separately). The TMT structure was activated and was crucial to the dissemination of information and instructions to staff, Members and the wider community, particularly in the early stages of the crisis. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, as was the allocation of individuals to the various multi-agency co-ordination structures and working groups.

The breadth and intensity of the pandemic, combined with the the levels of local government in Suffolk, social care providers and voluntary organisations made it challenging to quickly identify vulnerable individuals, who needed to be shielded, particularly those not already receiving formal support. The sheer number of voluntary organisations and community volunteers was a powerful resource, but also made distributing information to them, and gathering intelligence from them, difficult. The strenuous efforts of the Collaborative Communities Board, staffed by all councils and agencies, improved inter-organisation co-ordination and understanding during lockdown and these relationships should be developed and maintained.

With the Government implementing wide-ranging emergency powers to protect the population, the ICT staff worked hard to set up virtual working arrangements that allowed the majority of staff to work from home and provide services remotely. Existing flexible working policies and the prevalence of ICT hardware made the transition relatively quick, with additional support and equipment being provided to maintain core services. Skype and Zoom have been used extensively to host virtual meetings or to conduct 'visits' remotely, with guidance on the use of video software and protocol for remote meetings developed by ICT.

Staff have adapted to working from home very well; homeworking has proved popular with many staff, allowing a flexible work-life balance. However, it must be acknowledged that some staff have suffered detrimental effects, depending on home circumstances and different demands on time. Furthermore there are several issues to consider, and the situation can change; the prolonged uncertainty of the pandemic, the pressures of responding to C-19, coupled with self-isolation and social distancing, increased anxiety, can all cause mental health problems, depending on personal circumstances. In response to this, a number of measures were put in place, such as:

- Mental Health First Aiders - trained points of contact
- Employee Assistance Programme - free counselling service
- Staff surveys - asking colleagues to reflect on their experiences of working through C-19 in order to help ESC consider the longer-term effects and impacts of the experience
- Survey to gauge homeworking requirements i.e. ICT kit
- Individual work pattern meetings to give reassurance and a degree of certainty
- Training for managers on working and managing staff in a virtual environment

Each service area had enough staff to respond effectively to the pandemic during the initial lockdown, although key workers undertaking essential roles, as defined by the pandemic, had not been identified in business continuity plans. Some staff were redeployed to services in need of additional capacity although some staff who volunteered to support those in the community were not required as there was sufficient voluntary help available.

Access to appropriate PPE was arranged, with stocks provided by the Government allocated and distributed by the SRF's PPE cell. PPE advice, based on the latest Government guidance, was made available for staff, alongside basic hygiene precautions for those interacting with the public.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the C-19 pandemic has inevitably caused disruption and long-lasting impacts to communities. Council services have been on the front line of the response to the emergency and have adapted well to the constraints or limitations imposed on them. Staff have coped admirably, showing dedication and perseverance in the face of difficult and unpredictable circumstances. ESC was able to draw on extensive plans, the experience of exercises or responding to emergencies and well-understood command structures, to maintain public confidence and support the most vulnerable residents.

In the event of a second peak of infections or local lockdown, ESC is now better prepared and more resilient, with a greater ability to deliver essential services in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors.

Test and Trace

Introduction

The impact of the UK's public health emergency as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the volume and type of work the Food and Safety Team has delivered, and will continue to deliver, until there are significant advances in Covid-19 control. The team's work broadly falls into one or both of the following:

- Promoting compliance with regulations made under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 that reduce interaction and therefore slow the spread of Covid-19, thus easing NHS capacity and ensuring that the health system is not overwhelmed. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020 are a recent example.
- Using Suffolk's Local Outbreak Control Plan to assist and support Suffolk County Council and Public Health England in relation to outbreak control of Covid-19 in Suffolk, such as assisting with the investigation and management of outbreaks, providing guidance on infection control and management generally at settings where outbreaks may occur, contributing to the Suffolk-wide strategy on outbreak control, identifying outbreaks and managing their impact, including an out of hours call support.

Workloads and activities

The food inspection programme of medium/lower risk food businesses has largely been put on hold, in line with Food Standards Agency guidance. This has reduced footfall to limit the risk of spreading Covid-19. However, the team has delivered a high volume of reactive and proactive Covid-19 work summarised below.

A mailshot was sent to food businesses advising them on, and signposting them to, Government social distancing criteria:

Table 1. March 2020 mailshot	No. of businesses emailed
27 March 2020 mailshot via email to food premises on database	2,753

Officers surveyed those premises offering a takeaway service to monitor social distancing in place and followed up with advice where necessary:

Table 2. Drive by surveys of takeaways: March 2020 to September 2020	No. of businesses surveyed
First weekend: 3-5 April 2020	156
Second weekend: 11-13 April 2020 (Easter weekend)	292

In conjunction with the Communications Team, a customer poster was designed for takeaway food businesses to display at the front of their shop giving information to customers on safe methods of ordering, paying and collecting takeaway food:

Table 3. May 2020 distribution of social distancing poster for takeaways	No. of businesses contacted
Drafted and distributed to premises offering takeaways a letter and poster promoting social distancing and ad hoc ones identified	194

as reopening via social media/drive-bys and new premises registering etc	
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Officers in the team have been authorised to enforce many of the regulations relating to business closures and restrictions. Complaints alleging non-compliance and requests for advice and enquiries are recorded as service requests:

Table 4. Service Requests	
Service Requests: March 2020 to 04 November 2020	No. of Service Requests
Complaints alleging businesses remaining open that should be closed, inadequate Covid-19 controls, and notifications etc	425
Covid-19 request for advice/enquiry	332

The Head of Environmental Services and Port Health has jointly led, with Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards service, the Suffolk Test and Trace Workstream (Complex Workplaces) Group. This Group coordinated the Suffolk local authorities' contact with higher risk workplaces to collect information and give advice on businesses' Covid-19 controls:

Table 5. Complex workplaces business contacts (East Suffolk): March 2020 to September 2020		
Activity	Meat/fish/poultry/ approved establishments	Food manufacturers/ agricultural premises
Initial mailshot – July 2020 (letter)	27	30
Questionnaire completed via the telephone	26	27
Second mailshot – August 2020 (email)	26	0
Follow up email – September 2020	26	27

The Food and Safety Team liaised with the Licensing Team ahead of the reopening of hospitality businesses to send a letter giving advice on making businesses Covid-19 secure and other information eg funding and pavement licences etc:

Table 6. 26 June 2020 Hospitality letter	No. of businesses contacted
Joint Food and Safety Team/Licensing Team letter sent to hospitality businesses ahead of reopening on 4 July 2020	1,035

Ahead of the reopening of non-essential shops, the Food and Safety Team hand delivered letters signposting businesses to advice on making their business Covid-19 secure. They also distributed a poster to support businesses to give customers advice on social distancing:

Table 7. 12-14 June 2020 Re-opening non-essential retail shops	No. of businesses contacted
Hand delivered letter and poster	483

The Food and Safety Team contacted businesses providing close contact services advising of a change in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidance:¹²

Table 8. August 2020 Close contact services	No. of contacts
Close contact mailshot advising change in PPE guidance – email 21 August 2020	330
Close contact mailshot advising change in PPE guidance – letter 24 August 2020	450

Table 9. Website and e-forms	Activity
Published and updated a webpage – food https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/food-safety/covid-19-food-safety-guidance-for-businesses/ 29 May 2020 to 2 November 2020	387 web hits
Published and updated a webpage – health and safety https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/business/covid-19-health-and-safety-guidance-for-businesses/ 21 May 2020 to 2 November 2020	2,719 web hits
Developed an e-form to assist residents reporting concerns	69 reports received via this channel

Table 10. Incidents and outbreaks
<p>Working with Suffolk County Council’s Public Health team and Public Health England to ensure the spread of Covid-19 in maritime and other workplace settings was controlled, including taking action to control the spread in the community.</p> <p>Members will be aware of outbreaks in food processing businesses, as reported in the media. Officers worked as part of the team that responded to these out breaks, supporting the resolution process.</p>

Table 11. Ships Sanitation Inspections, extensions and Maritime Declarations of Health, Lowestoft Port Health - March to October 2020	Activity
Ships Sanitation Inspection certificates and extensions issued	46
Maritime Declarations of Health received and assessed	453

Table 12. October 2020 hospitality mailshot	No. of contacts
Hospitality mailshot advising change in face covering guidance – email 13 October 2020	633 businesses emailed
Hospitality mailshot advising change in face covering guidance – letter 16 October 2020	88 letters sent (those without email addresses)

Table 13. 22 October 2020 retail mailshot	No. of contacts
Retail mailshot advising change in face covering guidance – letter	1367 businesses contacted by letter

Other work supporting the control of Covid-19

Directions

The team liaises with Suffolk County Council on direction powers under Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No.3) Regulations 2020.

Events

The team worked with Suffolk Public Health and other Suffolk local authorities to adopt a Standard Operating Procedure and liaises with Suffolk County Council and Safety Advisory Groups in relation to large events. Organisers of events attracting large crowds have postponed their events when asked to explain their Covid-19 controls eg motor sports.

The team has visited sporting venues permitted to allow spectators and worked with them to ensure they meet their national governing body’s guidelines to protect players and fans.

The team has worked with Town Councils to support them in relation to Remembrance Day activities and produced county-wide guidance for these events as part of the Workplace Safety Cell.

On 8 October 2020, the East Suffolk Safety Advisory Group met with organisers of a proposed large fireworks event. The Group discussed the Covid-19 controls, and the organiser changed the type of event to a drive through event in order to control the spread of Covid-19.

Health and Safety Executive spot checks

The team works with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on their Covid Spot Checks project. The purpose of the project is to ensure businesses are aware of the Covid-secure guidance that applies to their business and that they are acting on it. The guidance recommends adjustments that need to be made, and steps required to make a business Covid-secure in order to protect staff, customers and visitors from the virus. A variety of methods are being used to conduct this activity such as telephone calls and site visits.

The team is taking a collaborative approach to spot checks. The HSE is delivering Covid spot checks over the telephone in two stages; an initial assessment of the level of Covid awareness the business has and the control measures in place. For businesses where there are concerns, a follow up call is conducted by the HSE to assess those concerns and, where required, passed over to the Food and Safety Team to carry out a stage 3 follow up eg visit where necessary. The types of business in this scope include hospitality, warehouses, care homes and close contact services such as beauty salons, hairdressers, tattooists etc:

Table 14. HSE/LA Spot checks Service	
Business type	No. of businesses submitted to spot checks service
Hospitality	734
Warehouses	18
Close contact services	456
Care homes	59

The HSE reports to us twice weekly on their spot checks, including any businesses requiring further follow up work. Since their reporting began, we have received the following numbers to do a stage 3 follow up:

Table 15. HSE/LA follow up work requested to date	Businesses to follow up
Hospitality	22
Warehouses	0
Close contact services	11

Care homes	Stage 1 and 2 calls not yet started
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The team has also undertaken the following:

- Instigated the Corporate COVID Secure Working Party
- Piloted remote inspections using video apps
- Reported daily to the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy on business closure data
- Reported weekly to the Health and Safety Executive on Covid-19 related activity

Engagement with National Test and Trace programme

Members will be aware that the Government has also launched a national Test and Trace programme. This is led by the NHS, supported by resources from the military, and is structured around testing facilities, a network of laboratories and a smart phone app that supports the tracking of people who may have been in contact with other people who have the virus. At the local level, councils provide this national scheme with support as and when required, through the Director of Public Health, Environmental Health and other local support structures.

Questions from Committee Members and answers

Q1: Communications

Cllr Louise Gooch

- (a) How did ESC and the team ensure that the communication to residents was clear and without jargon? Was any kind of 'plain English guide' used?
- (b) What was done to combat the dis/misinformation and conspiracy theories that circulated around the pandemic and its causes and treatments?
- (c) How was communication standardized across all the community groups (e.g.: Pakefield Community Group)?

Cllr David Beavan

- (d) Is there a policy on communications of cases to the public? ONS data at a local level is always a week out of date and people need to know if there is an outbreak, or when it has subsided.

A1:

- (a) One of the key elements of good communication practice is ensuring that an organisation's messaging is targeted and adapted effectively for all audiences. With this in mind, the East Suffolk Communications Team, working with Members and officers, always seeks to remove jargon or terms that may not be understood and simplify language where it may cause uncertainty or confusion. In relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, all messaging - regardless of its original source - was assessed and, where required, amended appropriately prior to issue, to ensure any instructions, requests or advice for communities was clear and simple to understand. The use of 'Plain English' lies at the heart of this approach and, by using social media interactions as a guide, we are confident that residents and communities have understood what is expected of them.
- (b) Working in partnership with other Suffolk local authorities and public sector partners, our priority has been to ensure the clear, consistent and timely dissemination of truthful information, advice and instruction. Communications leads have taken the view that it is important to always correct factual inaccuracies when presented, but also that it would not be appropriate to proactively engage with individuals who propagate unhelpful or conspiratorial ideas. Indirectly of course, we do combat misinformation by reminding people of the importance of following guidelines and also by presenting a range of facts and figures which back the 'science' behind the national and regional decisions which are taken.
- (c) Engagement with community groups, as with volunteers and town/parish councils, was broadly led by the East Suffolk Communities Team who developed and built on critical relationships with local communities. These networks were particularly important during the earlier stages of the pandemic and the establishment of the countywide 'Home But Not Alone' support scheme. Communication with different groups therefore reflected 'local' activity and requirements and engagement was very much a 'two-way' process throughout - as it continues to be. There was, however, a consistency of approach and messaging in relation to advice and guidance and this also continues to be the case. The East Suffolk

Communications Team, in partnership with communications leads from partners throughout the county, provided colleagues and lead officers with 'anchor' detail which reflected the national and regional position and always ensured a consistent baseline level of information which all communities would receive and understand about the pandemic and our local response.

- (d) Public Health Suffolk are responsible for the publication and dissemination of data related to the virus and any potential outbreaks. East Suffolk Council's Communications Team then supports the distribution of any specific information which may be pertinent to local communities in as timely and efficient a manner as possible. With the more recent advances in test and trace and improved monitoring of the virus, the communications approach changes if a community sees a marked increase in cases or, in the case of Bernard Matthews for example, if there is an outbreak within a local business. Public Health Suffolk will seek the support of the council communications function and the countywide communications cell to quickly disseminate information and guidance. This 'local alert' scheme has already been utilised in Suffolk where increases in cases were seen, for example in Hadleigh, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

Q2: Winter preparedness

Cllr Louise Gooch

Community Emergency Planning Groups (CEPGs)

- (a) There were community/rest centre training programmes in place to educate volunteers to help in community emergency planning. Clearly, these have had to be put on hold; when might these programmes be reviewed, please?

Cllr David Beavan

- (b) What arrangements are being made for vaccination?

A2:

- (a) The Covid-19 pandemic has affected normal working practices. The Government guidance on use of communal facilities and maintaining social distancing, plus the focus on Covid-19 response activities, has curtailed our ability to undertake face-to-face training. The Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) has produced Covid-19 guidelines to complement the Suffolk Resilience Forum plans for evacuation and shelter. The local authority facilities used as Rest Centres have all been risk assessed to ensure that staff, volunteers, and evacuees comply with the latest Government Covid-19 guidelines on social distancing and remain safe. Personal Protective Equipment has been procured and is available as part of the emergency response equipment. A training programme to update all existing local authority staff that are Rest Centre volunteers on the Covid-19 compliant procedures is underway. This is being delivered remotely by JEPU team members using Microsoft Teams, with the aim of updating all local authority volunteers by the end November. Thereafter, and subject to staff availability and resources, JEPU will look to expand the Rest Centre training to Community Emergency Planning Groups and voluntary organisations. JEPU is also engaged with Community Action Suffolk to facilitate the Groundwork volunteer programme, that includes Rest Centre training, in Suffolk.
- (b) There is no Covid-19 vaccine currently approved for use in the UK. Once a vaccination is approved, it will be delivered to those most at risk, or where it will be most effective, in accordance with NHS guidelines. In Suffolk, the delivery of the Covid-19 vaccine is being

led by the NHS and they are in the process of identifying locations where the vaccination can be delivered to the general population. The Suffolk Resilience Forum has established a Mass Vaccination Cell, led by Suffolk clinical commissioning groups, including the Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group, representatives from the Ministry of Defence, all local authorities, the emergency services and Suffolk Public Health. This group is supporting the NHS in identifying locations within Suffolk, as well as the necessary support structure that will be required.

Q3: Health and Safety Executive spot checks

Cllr Louise Gooch

- (a) What guidance is being provided by the Government on the execution of these in the second lockdown now that some businesses might be more resistant to closing (as we have seen regarding reports of private gyms being fined)?
- (b) Many 'food processing plants' have contractors' buses transporting large numbers of workers back and forth; how are these being monitored for practising social distance and PPE measures, please?

A3:

- (a) Health and Safety Executive/local authority spot checks are carried out to ensure open businesses are Covid-19 secure. These checks do not identify businesses that are open that should be closed under the lockdown. A nationwide lockdown was imposed from 5 November, for a period of 28 days, in order to slow the spread of Covid-19. Government guidance on the national restrictions, including what they mean for working from home and business closures, why they are being introduced and the financial support available is provided on the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/closing-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england>

The guidance explains how an owner/manager carrying out a business (or a person responsible for other premises) who fails to fulfil the obligations placed on them in law, without reasonable excuse, commits an offence.

In England, Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers monitor compliance with these regulations, with Police support provided if appropriate. Businesses and venues that breach restrictions will potentially be subject to prohibition notices, and a person who is 18 or over, who carries on a business in contravention of the Regulations, may be issued with a fixed penalty (fine).

With the support of the Police, prohibition notices can be used to require compliance with the Regulations, including requiring that an activity cease. It is also an offence, without reasonable excuse, to fail to comply with a prohibition notice.

If prohibition notices are not complied with, or a fixed penalty notice not paid, the owner/manager carrying out the business may also be taken to court, with magistrates able to impose potentially unlimited fines.

Businesses can be fined by local authorities or the Police if they fail to fulfil the obligations placed on them in law. Fines can be issued as follows:

- £1,000 for the first offence
- £2,000 for the second offence

- £4,000 for the third offence
- £10,000 for the fourth and all subsequent offences

Individuals can also be issued with a fixed penalty notice, starting at £200 for those who participate in illegal gatherings. The Police also have the power to take action against those holding, or being involved in, the holding of an illegal gathering of more than 30 people. This includes issuing a fixed penalty notice of £10,000.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards issues regular Official Sensitive classified guidance to local authorities on the business restrictions and local authority enforcement tools relevant to the Regulations. The scope of this guidance covers a summary of national business restrictions and obligations, local authority enforcement tools and Police response to business non-compliance.

- (b) During a recent outbreak, assessments were made of the controls in place in the community, on transport and in the workplace. The assessment of the transport included early morning officer visits to bus pick up points to assess social distancing and the use of face coverings and liaison with the Police who also carried out monitoring and engagement. The food processing plant appointed their own on-board bus marshals with responsibility for ensuring that the company's rules were followed. Monitoring was also carried out by a senior manager from the plant. The officer also monitored passengers disembarking buses at the workplace and markings were put down at busy pick up points to promote good social distancing and visits were also made to bus depots to assess bus signage, cleaning and disinfection arrangements.

Q4: Test and Trace

Cllr Caroline Topping

- (a) With reference to Appendix C, Table 4, Service Requests - how many of the 425 should have indeed been closed?
- (b) Was further action necessary?
- (c) What was the result of the non-compliance, i.e. those that should have been closed, did they close?
- (d) With reference to Appendix C, Table 5, Complex workplaces business contacts - There is a 0 in the second mailshot/food manufacturers' box. What should the number be please?

Cllr David Beavan

- (e) Bernard Matthews outbreak. The Government's advice was not to test people who do not have symptoms which meant that other workers in the factory were not tested for weeks. Is this a sensible policy? Can we change the policy for future workplace outbreaks so that all contacts – symptomatic or not – are tested?
- (f) There was an outbreak of a few cases in my ward. I informed the local Councils of this outbreak on 14 October. At what stage were we informed by national track and trace? Precisely what track and trace measures were subsequently taken, when and by whom?

A4:

- (a) 15 service requests related to open businesses that should have been closed.
- (b) No further enforcement action was considered necessary.
- (c) All 15 open businesses closed following the first intervention.

- (d) The correct figure is 0 because there were two initial mailshots on different dates in July, one to meat/fish/poultry approved establishments and a later one to food manufacturers/agricultural premises. The information to give businesses changed after the first meat/fish/poultry approved establishments' letter, but we were able to include it in the letter to food manufacturers/agricultural premises.
- (e) A multi-disciplinary Incident Management Team (IMT) informed decision-making during the Bernard Matthews' outbreak. All IMT meetings were chaired by Suffolk County Council's Director of Public Health, with expert contributions from Public Health England, national Joint Biosecurity Centre, the Health and Safety Executive, East Coast Community Healthcare, East Suffolk Council's Food and Safety Team, Bernard Matthews Foods Limited and government bodies etc. The management of the outbreak did not follow a policy of not testing asymptomatic contacts.
- (f) NHS Test and Trace does not inform East Suffolk Council of cases directly. If people test positive, the NHS Test and Trace service will contact them with instructions on how to share details of people they have had close contact with. This will apply to contacts made, and places visited, two days before and seven days since the onset of symptoms. The tracers contact people to tell them that they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive, but they will not provide the name or details of this person. The alert will usually come by text, email, or phone call, but they may also come by post if needed. The contacts will be told to begin self-isolation for 14 days from their last contact with the person who tested positive.

Cases are sometimes escalated via Public Health England to Suffolk's local Public Health Contact and Trace Service e.g. where the person who has a positive test result works in or has recently visited:

- a health or care setting, for example a hospital, GP surgery or care home
- a prison or other secure establishment
- a school for children with special needs
- any setting where there is a risk of a local outbreak
- where it is identified local input is needed and/or
- if the national team has failed to contact the individual

The cases linked to this situation were all contacted directly by the national team to undertake contact tracing. When the situation was alerted to the Suffolk COVID19 Coordination Centre, the local contact tracing team undertook some additional calls to check on their health and wellbeing and to attempt to ascertain if there were any additional links or connections between these cases and other cases in the area. No additional links or concerns were identified from a contact and trace perspective.

East Suffolk Council has supported the Suffolk Contact and Trace Service e.g. responding to occasional requests to call on addresses of hard to reach cases and contacts.