



## FULL COUNCIL

Wednesday, 25 January 2023

<b>Subject</b>	Cabinet Members' Report and Outside Bodies Representatives' Report to Council
<b>Report by</b>	Councillor Steve Gallant Leader of the Council

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is <b>NOT</b> in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable.
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Wards
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To receive the Cabinet Members' Report and the Outside Bodies Representatives' Report to Council, for information.	
<b>Options:</b> Not applicable.	

## Cabinet Members' Reports to Council

<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Mary Rudd, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health
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### Licensing Services

Licensing Services is continuing to support licensed premises and drivers during the recovery from the pandemic and global economic difficulties caused by the war in Ukraine

In terms of numbers

- (a) In relation to alcohol and entertainment, in December 2021 there were 1093 licensed premises and clubs in East Suffolk and in December 2022 there has actually been a small increase in this number, against a decrease in the number of licensed premises nationally year on year (since 2012 in the case of drink led premises and since 2017 in the case of food led premises), to 1125 Premises and Club Premises Licenses issued in East Suffolk.
- (b) In relation to taxis, there was a decrease in the number of licensed hackney carriage vehicles in East Suffolk over the last 12 months an increase in private hire vehicles. In December 2021, there were 73 licensed hackney carriage vehicles, 350 licensed private hire vehicles and 81 private hire operators in East Suffolk. In December 2022, there were 65 licensed hackney carriage vehicles, 391 licensed private hire vehicles and 76 private hire operators. It is hoped that the new fare increase of 33% for a short journey on the standard Tariff 1 for the North of the district may reverse this shift from Hackney Carriage to private hire.
- (c) In relation to gambling establishments in East Suffolk, in December 2021, there were 38 Gambling Premises Licences issued and by December 2022 there was a small reduction to 35 Gambling Premises Licences in East Suffolk.

The Christmas and New Year period has been quiet for Licenced Premises and no real issues have been reported by the Police, unfortunately there has been a further closure of a licenced premises between the Christmas and New Year Period.

Licensees in East Suffolk have had to be very resilient over the last year as the global financial difficulties have severely impacted their businesses with a significant drop in income through loss of custom coupled with an increase in expenditure. East Suffolk Council will do whatever it can to enable these businesses to grow in East Suffolk where the hospitality sector and night-time economy are of great importance to everyone who lives, works in and visits East Suffolk.

<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Letitia Smith, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Leisure and Tourism
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## COMMUNITIES

### Ease the Squeeze - Cost of Living Crisis response

Demand for support with the rising cost of living has continued to grow month by month, with over 400 referrals by the end of December – and 50% more referrals in December than in November. Just over a third of those contacting us have less than three days food left and almost 60% need help with budgeting, debt, accessing affordable credit, benefits and/or grants. The Financial Inclusion Team (within the Communities Service) are very busy, but are managing to contact everyone within 7 days of the contact (urgent food and other essentials needs are dealt with by the Communities Officers within 3 days).

In terms of the wider Ease the Squeeze programme, almost all projects are now live with key milestones as follows:

- 32 Warm Rooms funded, plus a joint grant for our network of libraries and multiple locations in both Beccles and Felixstowe
- 14 projects funded through the Cost of Living Community Grants in communities ranging from Sweffling to Felixstowe
- 13 locations offering Comfort Food – a chance for residents to access free hot food and drink at a local café/restaurant with the second phase of applications now live
- More than 250 Winter Warmth Packs distributed in East Suffolk so far
- Field to Fork Community Growing Space grants launched
- Tender process for an organisation to host a Food Network Co-ordinator live
- Cooking on a Budget and Community Pantry project launched early January
- Small stock of slow cookers, hobs and microwaves purchased for those with no means to cook hot food

We are holding an event focussing on the impact of the cost of living rises on rural communities on 26<sup>th</sup> January at East Suffolk House and will build on the 17 Help with Money roadshow events held in East Suffolk market towns between September and November 2022 with a programme of outreach at community events, schools and libraries.

### East Suffolk Business and Community Awards

Judging for the awards took place in early January, including Community of the Year and Next Big idea – both supported through the Community Partnerships. I will update on the winners following the Awards event on 28<sup>th</sup> February.

### East Suffolk Community Partnerships

Following the welcome decision by Full Council to continue to endorse and fund the Community Partnerships, the eight partnerships have been focussing on spending the

remainder of their 2022/23 budgets. A number of Community Partnership have aligned at least part of their budget to the Ease the Squeeze programme whilst others are focussing on their refreshed priorities and there are some really creative projects being developed. Don't forget that all East Suffolk Councillors are integral to the success of the Community Partnership so please try to attend whenever you can.

### **2022/23 Enabling Communities Budget**

Just a reminder that the end of the financial year is approaching fast and that all Enabling Communities Budget (ECB) applications need to be with the Funding Team by the end of February to ensure that they can be processed in time. The Communities Team will be producing the usual menu of options for Councillors who haven't yet spent all of their budget (this will be available in late January)

### **Youth Take Over Day**

On 25th November 2022 as part of the annual Youth Take Over Day, the East Suffolk Council Communities Team ran an online session with 6 schools participating on the day and one additional school participating via a pre-submitted video submission. The challenge the young people had was to put together a big idea around the environment and climate change that they could deliver in their local community to meet the vision of the world in 2070. Schools were also asked to share good practice from their school around the environment and climate change. A judging panel heard presentations and ideas from each school and decided the winner. The winners of the challenge was Benjamin Britten High School, with SET Beccles and Felixstowe School also featuring in the top 3.

The day included presentations from Professor Mike Brock from University of East Anglia and also Daniel Wareing, East Suffolk Council Environmental Sustainability Officer. There was also a letter read out from Sir David Attenborough to inspire students for the day. The next steps after the day are sharing the learning from schools more widely and supporting schools on how best they can pursue their ideas. Some of the students' ideas are below:

- Holding a 'Green Day' in schools to educate about the environment – with activities like making bird boxes and planting flowers around school
  - Encouraging local shops to sell items in recycled plastic packaging
  - Planting more trees and asking local farmers and suppliers to encourage more wildlife (animal and insect homes, plants and more.)
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## **TOURISM**

### **Value of tourism – East Suffolk 2021**

- 2021 volume and value of tourism report has recently been produced
- shows growth and recovery since 2020, still below pre-pandemic levels.
- to be expected since covid-related restrictions still in place during 2021.
- overall value of tourism in ES in 2021 was £466m - 57% up on 2020 but 34% < 2019

- 11,500 people employed in visitor economy - 27% higher than 2020 but 22% < 2019.

## **1. East Suffolk Visitor Economy Strategy**

- approved by Cabinet in Sept
- focus – enabling sustainable growth in the sector
- support measures to exploit the numerous opportunities to sustainably grow the local visitor economy and mitigating any challenges.
- timing of the new strategy is important as it comes after one of the largest economic shocks the sector has ever faced

The district continues to offer an extremely strong tourism product built around 5 key strengths:

- Coastline
- Distinctive Towns & Villages
- Stunning natural landscape
- Events & Festivals
- History & Cultural Heritage

Growth Opportunities include:

- The growth of the 'staycation'
- Increased participation in cycling and walking activities
- Heightened awareness of wellbeing
- Rapidly growing interest in environmental matters
- The thirst for experiences
- Increase in dog ownership and including them on holiday.

Challenges:

- Enabling sensitive and sustainable growth that protects our high quality and diverse natural environment which is a major draw for tourist
- Proposed Sizewell C new nuclear development and wider 'energy coast' developments.
- £12 million Tourism Mitigation Fund negotiated with EDF that aims to mitigate potential negative impacts on the sector.

East Suffolk Visitor Economy Strategy group was re-established in November 2022 and will be monitoring the strategies progress.

## **2. Visitor economy capital investment**

- Council has strong track record of investment in infrastructure supporting growth and development of visitor economy, examples include:
- The Kitchen@Felixstowe
  - o Opened in May, on south seafront providing a contemporary destination café housed in an iconically designed building.
  - o £1m+ development largely funded through the Coastal Community Fund secured by the Council's Economic Development & Regeneration team.
  - o complements the private Beach Street private development and is part of a wider programme to enhance the visitor offer in this area of the resort.
- East Point Pavilion, Lowestoft
  - o newly reimagined and refurbished East Point Pavilion opened in June to coincide with the First Light Festival.
  - o interior completely redesigned to provide a contemporary food and beverage offer and live music venue.
  - o £1.2m development represents a completely different visitor experience for Lowestoft and forms part of the ambitious wider regeneration and development programme
- Eastern Edge Beach Hut development, Lowestoft South Beach
  - o 72 imaginatively/ boldly designed beach huts completed in June replacing the Jubilee Terrace beach hut development.
  - o £3.5m scheme intentionally designed to provide a contemporary feel.
  - o Alongside East Point Pavilion and First Light Festival forms part of a wider strategy to enhance, expand and modernise the tourism offer in Lowestoft.

ESC also has a very strong pipeline of capital investments which will continue to support a strong and diverse visitor economy offer. These include:

#### **Beach Village and Activity Park, Felixstowe**

- Work commenced last month and will complete by July 2023

#### **Martello P Tower, Felixstowe**

- Plans to develop the Napoleonic tower into an iconic visitor destination

#### **Towns Fund Projects, Lowestoft**

ESC successfully secured £24.9m from the Towns Fund to deliver a number of transformational projects in Lowestoft. All of these have a strong visitor economy focus as they are primarily leisure led developments and include:

- The redevelopment of the seafront along Royal Plain and Royal Green to improve the public realm and upgrade the popular Royal Plain fountains, complementing the EPP development
- Transforming the station building located in the heart of the town to a modern food and drink venue.
- A brand-new cultural attraction at the former Lowestoft Post office

- The development of a Cultural Quarter in the heart of the town centre providing new leisure facilities and upgrading the Marina Theatre.

### **3. Tourism partnership working**

Alongside our direct delivery, ESC collaborates with a number of partners to achieve our ambitions for the tourism sector. We have worked with Visit East of England (VEE) to update the Destination Development Plan. The plan is a key tool used to influence government policy, attract funding and influence decision making.

#### Destination Development Plan 2022 by Visit East of England - Issuu

ESC has also been a key contributor to VEE's regional placemaking campaign which promotes the whole of the East of England as a tourism destination. With our long coastline, high quality natural and built environment and key attractions, East Suffolk continues to be a primary destination for people visiting this region. Collaborating on initiatives such as this maintains the district's positive profile.

ESC is also working closely with VEE, West Suffolk College and other partners on the £1.25m Visitor Economy Network Initiative (VENI) project. This is an industry collaboration project aimed at developing skills for the visitor economy and at a time of very high vacancy rates in hospitality is badly needed. ESC has been awarded funding to deliver a skills development project as part of the programme.

ESC is also collaborating with the Suffolk Growth partnership who have commissioned a review of Accessibility and Inclusion for the Suffolk Visitor Economy. ESC will be participating in a working group to develop the recommendations and actions from the review.

A key area that will be progressed is the development of accessibility guides, itineraries, destination information and how this is promoted to visitors and residents with accessibility needs.

### **4. Visit Suffolk Coast DMO**

ESC jointly established the DMO in 2015 and has been a core financial contributor ever since. Funding is agreed based on three-year business plans setting out how the DMO will:

- Promote and market the Suffolk Coast to visitors
- Support the sector's recovery from the pandemic
- Grow advertising and membership
- Engage with regional/ national tourism bodies

Through direct engagement with the sector (the DMO has over 200 industry members) it monitors the health of the local tourism economy. Overall feedback during 2022 has been mixed with accommodation bookings generally down but last minute bookings being prominent. The DMO has created a 'special offers' section on its website to support businesses promoting their offers and to take advantage of the last minute booking trend.

The DMO has developed a Festival and Events Marketing Support Fund and has supported the following festivals this year:

- First Light Festival – June 2022, Lowestoft
- Maverick – July 2022, Easton
- Vessels Festival – July 2022, Lowestoft
- FolkEast – August 2022, Glemham
- Aldeburgh Food and Drink Festival – September 2022, Snape

The DMO works with festival organisers to deliver digital marketing campaigns to promote the events. This enables the DMO to demonstrate the power of digital marketing, so that in future the organisers can develop this type of marketing activity and make provision for it within future budgets.

The DMO's website [www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk](http://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk) is its primary mechanism for promoting East Suffolk as a tourism destination. It continues to outperform almost all other tourism sites across Norfolk and Suffolk. Users and page views have been down compared to 2021, however they continue to be significantly higher than in the comparable periods in 2020 and 2019. London and towns in the wider East of England area continue to be the most popular places the website audience comes from.

Social media continues to be an increasingly important tool for tourism promotion. Since 2019 the DMO's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts have all displayed huge growth.

The Suffolk Coast launched their latest campaign on the 26th December, with a Google Display Ad campaign which will run for 30 days, and a Facebook Ads campaign which will run over a 2 month period. An in-depth analysis of page engagement, location data and demographics on [www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk](http://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk) has identified specific target audiences that offer greater potential for bookings and visits.

The new experiences section on the website went live at the end of 2022

<https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/experiences-suffolk-coast>.

The Suffolk Coast continues to be an active member of the regional DMO coalition in the East of England. The group is currently working on a placemaking exercise to establish a brand that can represent the East of England. A brand that crosses the visitor economy requirements and offers benefits to all business sectors. "Naturally" is the focus and the coalition are in discussions with agencies to develop the collateral that will support this theme prior to rolling out the campaigns for Autumn, Winter and 2023.

## **5. The Suffolk Coast Tourism Conference**

East Suffolk Council were one of the key sponsors, speakers and exhibitors at the conference which was held on 29 November 2022. Over 160 DMO members and wider tourism industry representatives attended.

The packed programme covered:

- Year of the coast and industry insights
- Practical steps to reduce costs



- Updates from TSC DMO
- Social media
- ESC Digital Springboard Programme
- Energy Projects Update
- Updates from ESC on Felixstowe and Lowestoft developments
- Success on the Suffolk Coast – First Light Festival, Market Place project and the EPP

Feedback received has been extremely positive with 54% rating the overall event as 'excellent', 40% as 'very good' and 6% as 'good'.

For more information on the event [The Suffolk Coast Tourism Conference 2022](#)

## 6. East Suffolk Tourism Digital dashboard – t-stats

In September 2022, East Suffolk Council Cabinet approved the council's new Visitor Economy Strategy 2022 – 2027, which has recognised the importance of the visitor economy to the district and identifies clear strategic priorities and an action plan to deliver these.

ESC has appointed a supplier to provide a real-time data platform solution to monitor and track the visitor economy in the area that can provide live updates and incorporate data from the council, local businesses and national, regional and local data indicators that relate to the visitor economy.

This comes at a critical time for East Suffolk, with the need for real-time data required to measure the impact of a number of major energy/infrastructure projects will have on the district's visitor economy sector. This real-time data platform will act as a pilot project for East Suffolk for a two-year period. There is interest across Suffolk to expand this data platform solution should the pilot be a success and other local authorities can see the benefit of having such data available. Suffolk Growth are part funding the pilot.

## 7. Year of the Coast

[Year of the Coast 2023](#) is for everyone living, working and involved with the coast – including visitor-facing coastal businesses and destinations. ESC is working with TSC DMO to promote 2023 as the Year of the Coast, to maximise visibility and to raise awareness of our coastline and inspire new audiences to love, visit and protect it.

<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Richard Kerry, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing
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There has been a significant amount of work being carried out by the Housing Service over the last few months, which I wanted to highlight.

## Housing Needs

### Housing Advisers Programme – Local Government Association 2022/23

The Housing Needs team was awarded £25,000 in May 2022 following a successful bid under the Housing Advisers Programme. The Housing Advisers Programme is designed to support councils seeking to innovate in meeting the housing needs of their communities.

The project involved commissioning an external review of East Suffolk Council's existing temporary and emergency accommodation (TA and EA) provision. The review required a detailed analysis over the district's geographical spread of accommodation and financial models associated with existing provision. The review has also looked in detail at the risk factors associated with the current model and provide advice on how confident we can be in relying on existing accommodation for successful service delivery.

The Officers leading on this project, Andy Gale and Anna Whalen, are two of the best-known names in the field of homelessness, allocations, and temporary accommodation. Both are recognised throughout the UK as leading a leading authority on all areas of Housing.

This project which is due to be finalised in January 2023 has provided incredible value to the services. The report includes a detailed analysis of the Housing Needs Service, a Temporary Accommodation Position Statement and a Predicted Temporary Accommodation Model that will allow us to look at the current demand and predict the likely increase over the next 2 years.

The purpose of the final report is to assist ESC with reducing the financial impact of placements into TA, which are anticipated to be significantly higher as a result of rising inflation and interest rates over the last 12 months and a predicted economic recession which may last for 2 or more years.

### Rough Sleeping Initiative 2022/25

East Suffolk Council was awarded £2,434,258 under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) in June 2022 after a successful period of co-production with DLUHC. This included a considerable amount of work, and we are extremely pleased that this time government has awarded funding over a longer period of time from 2022 to 2025 giving the Council the ability to plan for services longer term rather than on an early basis.

This funding will allow ESC to continue to deliver existing and new services under RSI that will focus on reducing rough sleeping, addressing the needs of clients, offer supported accommodation to low and high need clients that otherwise would not be able to be housed and address rough sleeping through a partnership response aimed to reduce the number on the streets, encourage engagement and focus on homelessness prevention through a system of support that allows for recovery and community integrations.

One element of the bid, which is incredibly exciting is the funding to enable the creation of a Housing First model, which aims to support the most complex and entrenched rough sleepers to exit the cycle of rough sleeping for good.

### Gateway to Homechoice

In 2022 ESC was the lead authority as part of the gateway to deliver the procurement of the CBL software as the contract was due to expire.

This was supported by the Legal and Procurement teams at ESC and has taken a significant amount to deliver given the procurement timeline for this project, from February 2021 to December 2022. This included a lengthy process including planning and scoping to ensure the software was able to meet the requirements of all LA forming part of the Gateway.

East Suffolk Council managed and facilitated the bidding process, moderation, and consultation with partners as well as contract discussions, negotiations with the service provider, quality assurance and legal contracts.

The implementation process has now come to an end, and we are proud to have been part of such a successful project that not only benefitted ESC but all those authorities that form part of the Gateway.

We currently have 4,514 people registered for housing on the Gateway to Homechoice, of which 1,691 are assessed as having a housing need, so are in Bands A-C. This is equivalent to 37% of the Housing Register.

#### Housing Needs Team Restructure

For the first time since 2016/17 the team has gone through a full-service restructure. The proposed restructure will align resources with demand placed on the service, as well as ensuring compliance with the Fixed-term Employees by replacing Fixed Term Contracts with permanent employment contracts. This excludes externally funded posts and those funded under the Rough Sleeping Initiative. The proposal will bring to a close the temporary arrangements which had been put in place to employ more costly agency staff due to the difficulties recruiting officers under fixed term arrangements.

The new structure will also see the creation for new roles within the team offering a greater level of resilience and allowing the service to meet current and future demand. The Local Government landscape has changed significantly in recent years and new challenges and ways of working had to adjust to enable us to meet the service demands.

The new structure was unanimously approved by Members at the Cabinet meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and we are currently going through the 30-day consultation process with the team before a recruitment exercise can commence in order to implement the new structure.

#### Asylum Dispersal and Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy scheme and Homes for Ukraine

In April 2022, an announcement from DLUHC set out the proposed introduction of 'full dispersal'.

One key driver behind the reform of asylum dispersal is to reduce/eliminate the need for contingency hotels; nationally there are over 31,000 people in contingency accommodation with 1,231 in 12 such hotels in the East of England.

ESC held a 'hot mapping' meeting with Serco, and the Housing Needs team have been leading on checking property suitability to progress any property proposals. We are therefore responding to the Home Office ask and will continue to work with Serco and other Local

Authorities in the region by ensuring expectations are realistic given the many challenges we face when finding suitable properties in the district.

Since this was put in place, we have approved eight properties in Lowestoft, in consultation with key partners to ensure suitability.

In addition, a three-bedroom home was provided for housing 3 single males from Afghanistan under the Afghan Resettlement Accommodation Programme. Both Housing Needs and Tenancy Services have supported other Register Providers in the district to help provide suitable accommodation to families that have fled the war in Ukraine.

Our Private Sector Housing Team has also provided an immense amount of support and resources inspecting properties under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and Housing Needs has worked closely with Suffolk County Council to ensure guests and hosts are aware of their housing options, how to gain the support from the Local Authority if needed as well as offers of financial assistance in the private rented sector.

#### Homelessness – Prevention and Relief update

There continues to be significant demand for housing advice and homelessness prevention services. The table below sets out the demand in the first half of 2022/23:

<b>Homelessness Advice and Prevention/Relief</b>	<b>April to September 2022</b>
Number of applications taken	620
Number of Prevention Duties Accepted	356
Number of Relief Duties Accepted	264
Number of successful Prevention Duties Discharged (existing or alternative accommodation)	187
Number of successful relief duties discharged	74

#### Private Sector Housing

##### Stepping Home

In June, the Stepping Homes from hospital service that supports residents to return home from hospital was Highly Commended in the National LGC (Local Government Chronicle) Awards.

The service resolves a huge range of housing issues that prevent a safe return home from hospital by working with a growing range of partners and if necessary, can accommodate patients in a halfway home hub until works are completed. This reduces pressures on health services, gives better outcomes to patients, provides a long-term safe home environment and saves money.

#### Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) Project

Central Government Funding for a Suffolk wide project, led by East Suffolk, delivered an innovative educational and enforcement programme, tackling rented properties that have poor energy efficiency. The campaign saw targeted tv adverts on SKY and social media to raise awareness of the rules around renting our very poorly insulated homes. This was combined with information on grant funding for landlords to assist with improvements.

Overall, the programme reached 369 properties in ES and directly facilitated energy efficiency improvements to 74.

The work continues although the funding has finished.

#### Empty Homes Programme

In April, Cabinet approved a Business Case to enable a dedicated resource to be employed to ensure a dedicated focus on returning Empty Homes into use, which is an incredibly time intensive task. In August, the Council appointed an Empty Homes Officer on a 3-year programme to tackle some of the long-term empty homes in the District. In January, the policies to create a streamlined and clear approach were adopted by Cabinet and work now begins to make a difference.

#### Romany Lane Traveller Site

In January 2023, the Romany Lane traveller site returned to East Suffolk management and work has begun on a major refurbishment of the site to improve conditions and create a site fit for the current use and size. A new Site Manager was appointed in late 2022 and will be now be on site working with residents, to oversee the improvements and ensure the effective day-to-day running of the site.

#### Successful Funding and Delivery of the Green Homes Fund Local Authority Delivery

The Suffolk councils working together have secured over £20M of financial support for low-income household to insulate or add other energy efficiency improvements to their homes. The funding has been in separate phases and runs until March 2024. Current funding focusses on 'off-gas' properties but the previous phases delivered 512 measures to 444 homes, including those on mains gas. The service is delivered through the Warm Homes Healthy People service a partnership with all the Suffolk councils, which is hosted by ESC.

#### Ease the Squeeze Support

The Warm Homes Team have also been supporting the cost-of-living crisis and have supplied winter warmth packs to 230 households across Suffolk since the end of November. The packs include blankets, duvets, hats, scarves, hot water bottles, and chair warmers.

#### **LANDLORD'S SERVICE**

##### **Housing Regulation: Rents Standard and Homes Standard**

In April 2022 East Suffolk Housing self-referred to the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) for potential breaches of regulation. Further information was provided to the Regulator, who confirmed the breaches and issued a Regulatory Notice in May 2022. The Notice specifies breaches of the Rent Standard and the Homes Standard.

The Service has undertaken a tremendous amount of work to resolve the issues identified and a lot of progress has been made. A dedicated report has been prepared for Full Council, which provides a full update and lays out recommendations for key decisions and policies that will allow the Council to transition to full compliance in 2023.

#### New Safety Regulations during 2022

Housing Revenue Account assets are subject to new Regulations, which came into force in 2022; the Building Safety Act 2022, Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022 and the Fire Safety Act 2021. These new pieces of legislation place additional obligations on building owners beyond those of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Our response to these changes includes the creation of new, permanent building safety roles in the housing maintenance team, and the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in all homes.

#### Social Housing (Regulation) Bill

The Bill aims to deliver the proposals set out in the Social Housing White Paper, by introducing a number of measures to give tenants greater powers, improve access to swift and fair redress, and enhance the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing. The Bill was introduced to Parliament in June and has received broad support in both Houses. It is at the Report stage in the House of Commons and is expected to make rapid progress. East Suffolk is evaluating the Bill and planning the necessary changes to ensure we are compliant. These include new measures for Tenant Satisfaction, an Annual Report for tenants and a new model for tenant engagement so that services are 'co-produced' with tenants.

#### Damp and Mould

On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022, a coroner published a report on the tragic death of 2-year-old boy who she determined had died of a severe respiratory illness caused due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home environment. Following publication of this report, a project team was created to conduct a thorough review of damp and mould cases in homes owned by East Suffolk Council. We are actively reviewing recent cases in 21 homes and reviewing a further 40 cases where tenants have provided feedback on damp and mould in the last 3 years. This work is ongoing.

Following the Coroner's findings, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) instructed the Regulator for Social Housing to undertake an assessment of damp and mould in social housing. ESC is providing information to the Regulator from our review of damp and mould cases.

DLUHC also wrote to all Local Authorities requesting information on their approach to tackling damp and mould in private homes, which ESC has responded to.

There is an interaction between this work, and the current cost of living crisis because instances of condensation and mould are aggravated when tenants cannot afford to adequately heat their homes.

We have recently published more information on our website around how to address damp and mould effectively in the home.

More information can be found here: [Mould removal and prevention » East Suffolk Council](#) and [Damp » East Suffolk Council](#)

## **Tenant Services**

### **Rent Arrears and the cost-of-living crisis**

The cost-of-living crisis has significantly impacted on our tenants as it has many households across the UK. Our rent arrears always increase between Q1 – 3 of the financial year, so we track how they compare year-on-year for the same week. Since August 2022, for the first time in 3 years, we have seen arrears increase from the same point the previous year.

We have further invested in our predictive analytics software and are currently implementing a Daily Processing module. On average the module reduces the number of cases for Rent Officers by 10%, allowing them to complete more cases per week.

We have allocated a proportion of the HRA Hardship Reserve for a 2-year fixed term Financial Inclusion Officer (FIO) who will work closely with the Financial Inclusion Team based in the Communities Team, alongside our permanent HRA FIO. Together they will support our tenants by identifying opportunities to increase incomes, provide budgeting advice and signpost for debt management services where appropriate.

### **Dedicated Telephone Line and ‘One-Front-Door’**

ESC Council Tenants have a dedicated phone line to report repairs, ASB and connect with their Housing & Rent Officer. Under the Council’s One-Front-Door project, this phone line has been transferred from our Support Services team to Customer Services. After completing a comprehensive 6-week training programme, Customer Services officially went live on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022. We are continuing to support Customer Services with any queries they may have. The successful transfer of the phone line will ensure Tenants can not only deal with their housing queries but also the many other services delivered through Customer Services, ensuring we deliver the best service we can to our tenants.

Our Support Services team now have increased capacity to support their other workstreams including administration of compliance tasks, Right-To-Buy's, Invoicing (40% of all invoices into the Council are administered by this team) and tenancies.

### **Voids**

The re-let time of HRA assets, referred to as ‘voids’ is a significant area of focus for the whole landlord service at present. We not only need to turn properties around quickly to minimise rent loss, but we also know there are many people living in acute housing circumstances awaiting suitable accommodation. Therefore, a Voids Improvement Project was launched in November alongside a new voids process aimed at making significant improvements. There is an initial 12 week intensive project aimed at making significant improvements, after which, a review will be conducted and further consideration given to other elements of the process, which could be improved. We already have other improvements planned in the last quarter of 2022/23 to help improve our performance, including a more extensive set of metrics to ensure we can effectively manage the voids and understand the timescales of each part of the process.

### **Housing Officers & Anti-Social Behaviour**



Our Housing Officers are extremely busy. Their workloads have increased due to both the new workstreams that we are required to deliver as well as increased enquiries from tenants. We will be reviewing capacity in this area in 2023 to ensure we can deliver the level of service our tenants need.

Our ASB cases have reduced back to pre-pandemic levels, which saw a significant increase with everyone at home more, leading to increased complaints on both new cases and existing ones. We have welcomed a new ASB Officer in January 2023 who will continue to deliver excellent levels of service to complainants of ASB against Council Tenants.

#### Retired Living Service

Our Retired Living Service (RLS) Scheme Managers support our tenants in RLS's to live independently. Following the lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions we have been able to re-instate all the activities enjoyed by our residents at their schemes, these include Bingo, coffee mornings and cheese and wine events.

Some of our Retired Living properties can be harder to let, so we are currently considering how we can promote these. If you have any residents in your wards who are considering retired living, please contact Jayne Sissen and her team will arrange a visit to one of our 13 schemes. Retired Living is open to over 55's and we can even consider homeowners if they have insufficient capital in their existing home to fund a property suitable to their needs.

#### Housing Maintenance

The Housing Maintenance team have had a busy year with the new compliance work streams that have been introduced. Approximately 15 contractors have been procured to support delivery of these works. The Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) are also offering support. The DLO have resumed delivery of our kitchen replacement programme and a new kitchen unit supplier has been procured where they are now delivering on site, in a premade form. Not only are the units of a superior quality but there is a reduction in the Operatives non-productive time.

A new Maintenance Inspector has been recruited. This appointment followed a successful training shadowing programme, which was completed by four Operatives who had expressed an interest in the role. Additionally, a seconded Clerk of Works has been recruited. They will be assisting with the monitoring of the compliance works from this pool of Operatives. Feedback was very positive from both successful and unsuccessful candidates.

We have been carrying out improvement to our stores provision and increasing the items stocked, to reduce the need for operatives to travel to different locations to collect stock. This creates efficiencies and maximises the time to be spent on repairs and maintenance of our stock.

We are currently recruiting to a new Cyclical and Servicing Team, which will provide the support required for the compliance work programme, which includes Asbestos, Fire Safety, Gas Safety, Lift Safety and Water Safety. They will also have oversight of the Electrical Compliance work, which is completed by our in-house team. It is expected that those successfully recruited will be in post by April 2023.



We are currently developing a new Asset Management Strategy, which will be presented to Cabinet in March. This will set out the standard we expect our properties to meet. In April, we will be commencing a stock condition survey project, which will ensure 20% of stock is surveyed annually. This information will be compared against the standards set out in the Asset Management Strategy and enable us to develop capital improvement programmes to bring properties up to the standards agreed.

### **Housing Development**

The Housing Development Programme has had another busy year identifying potential sites, developing business cases and seeking planning permission to enable ESC to increase its affordable housing provision.

So far in 2022/23, 1 Project consisting of 15 Homes has received planning permission with a further 2 Projects consisting of 16 Homes due for determination by end 2022/23.

ESC Cabinet has approved the potential development of 40 additional homes so far this year, subject to planning permission.

### **Overall Metrics:**

- Currently we have 125 homes within the programme.
- Secured £277,654 commuted sums.

The current projections, taken from our live programme, are shown below. Completions in 2021/22 were significantly reduced and projections for 22/23 have dropped due to delays from Covid volatility in the construction sector and an on-going review of the HRA Business Plan, which will prioritise across redevelopment, new build and retrofit. As a reaction to construction sector volatility, we have taken the decision to absorb a programme delay while Employers Requirements and scopes are detailed further, and procurement strategies redesigned to better protect the council from risk of significant overspend.

Year	Target	No. units	Affordable provision	New Build S106 purchase, or ESC delivered	Redevelopment Refurbishment / conversions of existing assets or acquisitions.	Percentage Certainty Planning permission obtained	Comments
2016/17	50+	11	11	9	2	100%	
2017/18	50+	5	5	5	0	100%	
2018/19	50+	33	33	24	9	100%	
2019/20	50+	38	38	36	2	100%	
2020/21	50+	12	12	9	3	100%	
2021/22	50+	30	30	18	12	100%	
2022/23	50+	1	1	0	1	N/A	
2023/24	50+	29	29	28	1	79%	1 project consisting of 6 units does not have full planning permission however it does have a positive pre app

2024/25	50+	96	73	92	4	36%	3 projects consisting of 20 units do not have full planning permission however they do have a positive pre app
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### Strategic Housing Sites

**Kirkley Waterfront** – With further site due diligence, the team have continued to assess the viability of development for land holdings within the Kirkley Waterfront. This is a priority area for residential development in Lowestoft and one where ESC has actively intervened to become landowners. Following the 2020 viability report, efforts were made to progress a multiple site collaboration with other neighboring and adjacent landowners. After several months the decision was taken to progress ESC in isolation (a recommendation noted within the 2020 report). We are currently investing both time and funding to create a deliverable development opportunity. This will be achieved over the next 2/3 years by securing funding (internal and external), decontaminating / remediating the land and commencing work on a deliverable consent. Liaison with Homes England has seen additional external funding secured to assist with site investigations work. The team are currently working on a grant application under the Brownfield Land Release 2 scheme, which will be determined in April 2023. The current work programme intends to de-risk the site, ensure it is deliverable, by minimising ESC capital spend and utilising 3<sup>rd</sup> party funding.

**North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood** – Working with ESC Regeneration and Planning colleagues, Housing have recruited two posts to coordinate and deliver the NFGN master plan. Recruitment via the Homes England Public Practice route has seen private sector expertise brought in to help progress a strategic site with a significant number of homes for the district.

### Sustainability and Environmental ambition

The Council's Housing Development Strategy 2020-2024 identifies 'Environmental Sustainability' as an essential element in the creation of homes and communities in which people want to live and work. It notes that lowering the whole-life carbon footprint of properties will help tenants save money and deliver lasting environmental, social, and economic benefits. Housing, both our existing stock and new build programme, has a huge role to play in the current environmental challenges we are facing.

Extensive research into greener development was undertaken in 2020-21. Reports to Scrutiny Committee concluded the Council is committed to leading by example in a movement towards delivering more sustainable housing as standard. Following a period of market research and stakeholder engagement, it was recommended this could be achieved initially by progressing pilot 'green' build schemes utilising fabric first principles. Research and learning from these projects would then be used to inform the future development proposals withing the programme. Some examples of this work are outlined below:

- **Deben Fields** – ESC first passivhaus scheme continues to progress, with Kier Construction being appointed as the successful main contractor in November. The project team are working to discharge all pre-commencement planning conditions for an intended start on site later this year.
- **Design Guide for ESC Development** – Having progressed from a Housing Design

Guide, Officers are now looking to extend this to include all ESC Developments. The purpose is to create a core guidance document, detailing the Councils vision, principles, and process of what is 'good design'. The guide will outline what ESC are committed to, and will be doing, to address 'good design', Provide overarching vision, intentions for development and processes that should be followed. Having a central document, which provides a firm steer on the Councils aspirations and expectations for design and development is incredibly useful to the Council but also to the public and applicants in being consistent in expectations. The project is currently awaiting CMT approval in early 2023.

- **Monitoring** - Alongside the Council's new build and redevelopment programme, it is recognised that the Council's existing HRA portfolio has a significant role to play in reducing the Council's carbon footprint. In line with ESC's ambition to reach carbon neutrality by 2030, the wider housing team are assessing the council's existing housing assets. Data driven decision making is assisting in preparing detailed programmes of work to ensure Council homes positively contribute towards this ambition, whilst also provide truly sustainable and affordable homes for our tenants. Monitoring systems have been installed in a number of properties and will be part of the standard spec for new build properties.

#### Asset Reviews and Data:

Evidence-based data is used to support the building of the right homes in the right locations. Demand for housing is high and prioritising what and where to build has previously been driven by planning policy and insights from our Housing Needs Officers, who manage our Housing Register and our Choice Based Lettings Scheme.

In 2021, the Housing Team commenced work with the East Suffolk Data Analyst to develop a more data-led approach. Whilst this project is on-going, the data will help to better understand and measure the demand for properties from Applicants on our Register. The software enables Officers to visualise and analyse historical data (2016-2021) and identify locations and property types, which have a high level of unmet demand.

This work has developed a new metric called 'bid ratio'. If this ratio is high, then a high number of applicants have bid for the available properties (and if the ratio is low then only a small number of applicants have bid for the available properties). Analysis of these bid ratios identify specific locations and property types (e.g., number of bedrooms) for which there is a high demand, and this information can inform our development programme.

If this data-led approach proves to be successful it will be shared with the Suffolk Office of Data Analytics (SODA), who will share the learning with other stock-holding Councils in Suffolk to rollout a data-led approach. SODA is a collaboration of all local authorities, Suffolk police and other public sector organisations to share valuable data about the communities within Suffolk.

In addition to this, the Housing Team have commenced a formal Asset Review of particular multiple dwelling properties. This looks at the physical condition of the property, the financial viability of its future use and inclusion within the HRA portfolio. Following the formal adoption of the HRA Asset Management Strategy, further asset reviews will be commenced, and an active asset management / investment programme established.

#### Handover and Management

With a growing pipeline of housing development projects 2022 has seen the development of a formalised Handover Procedure ensuring properties are handed over with all relevant documentation and approvals. This enables early engagement with the Landlord service reducing void times on new properties and allowing them to be added to Gateway to Homechoice ready for occupation on or very soon following completion.

Post occupancy procedures including defect reporting and leaseholder management for Shared ownership properties has also been developed this year. Formalising a workflow for dealing with repairs, maintenance, or defects for new build properties provides a valuable data set used to inform the specification of future properties.

We have also commenced post occupancy surveys for tenants to generate feedback on the properties we are providing. Additional questions have been added in relation to affordability and occupational comfort. The feedback will be collated and reviewed annually to inform any proposed changes to development priorities and specifications.

### Team and Training

Housing Development have successfully recruited an additional Support Officer in 2022. Members of the team are currently enrolled on both internal and external training courses to improve capability. This includes Project Management and Construction Technology qualifications.

With a notable increase in the number of mixed tenure projects, we are investing in new appraisal software (ProVal) to give more accuracy and allowing detailed sensitivity analysis for development appraisals. This information will allow Officers to provide Members with detailed breakdowns of individual development opportunities in more detail than the current payback model.

### Housing Accommodation

Proposals for a new logistics hub for Housing have continued to progress in 2022. A site at Barnards Way in Lowestoft has been identified as a potential operating base for the Housing Service. Alongside the logistics hub, the site will provide additional industrial units to generate an income for ESC. Site investigations have commenced and proposals for the site are being progressed with input from Housing as the sites end user. A project governance structure has been established and will be used to guide the strategic direction of the project and approve project decisions.

### Housing Strategy and Enabling

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team has continued to support local communities and their representatives in the delivery of affordable housing for local residents. SouthGen, the Community Land Trust group in Southwold, have delivered a scheme in partnership with Hastoe that was completed in the Spring 2022, delivering 4x2 bed flats for affordable rent and 5 homes as shared ownership (1x2 bed flat, 1x2 bed bungalow and 3x3 bed houses).

The Peninsula Villages Community Land Trust scheme at Bawdsey is expected to be completed by March 2023 delivering 4x2 bed houses in partnership with Orwell Housing Association.

Throughout the year, several workshops and events were held, highlighting the benefits of Community Led Housing and how local communities can commission such housing. Discussions are ongoing with officers on how local communities could bring forward their ambitions.

In addition, discussions with Housing Association Partners and Parish Councils have resulted in proposals for new affordable housing through the Rural Exception policy across sites throughout the district. Pre-application discussions with planning colleagues are ongoing.

Policy and Strategy work has included supporting planning colleagues on various planning documents: Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) with draft S106 clauses; the Healthy Environment SPD; Self and Custom Build SPD, as well as providing advice to Neighbourhood Plan groups, developers and Parish/Town Councils on housing policy and need. In addition, frameworks for future Housing and Older Persons Housing strategies have been completed and Members will be consulted on during 2023.

## Outside Bodies Representatives' Reports

Coast and Heaths AONB Joint Advisory Committee	
<b>Representative:</b>	Councillor James Mallinder
<b>Contact Details:</b>	<a href="mailto:james.mallinder@eastsoffolk.gov.uk">james.mallinder@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</a> Tel: 07810 815879

I was delighted to attend the latest Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership meeting

Interesting to hear the updates on various projects and consultations. From the RSPB suggestion of better protection of our landscapes to impact of the new coastal path.

Important committee though it is, it is always good to make sure we steer away from political influence or overtly supporting one group but to remember the principles of the AONB of championing and supporting our incredible biodiversity as an independent body.

Suffolk Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Panel	
<b>Representative:</b>	Councillor Judy Cloke
<b>Contact Details:</b>	<a href="mailto:judy.cloke@eastsoffolk.gov.uk">judy.cloke@eastsoffolk.gov.uk</a> Tel: 07825 386561

The most recent Flood Risk management Scrutiny Sub Committee took place on 18 October.

There is one rep from County and one each from the Districts and Ipswich Borough. I have attended previously as sub; this was my first meeting since being appointed the ESC rep.

At a previous meeting in 2020 (at which I was not present), the Committee had made a number of recommendations, as follows:

- a) A need to recruit more specialist officers to plan and manage reactive flood maintenance work.
- b) A need to ensure that there was sufficient resource to enable the collation and mapping of flood related highways data held by the Council.
- c) A need to engage more actively with the planning system as it related to new developments and strategic planning, and to review potential external sources of funding that could be matched with Council budgets.
- d) A need to work more effectively with utilities to ensure that work on highways verges such as grip cutting was safe and that utilities cables were located and buried to sufficient depth.
- e) A need to ensure that equipment was upgraded when necessary to cope with current larger and more complex drainage assets.

- f) f) A need to establish a longer-term more stable funding strategy to enable the council to plan and implement flood remediation measures effectively.
- g) g) A need to assess whether it would be possible to strengthen the enforcement mechanisms the council employed when inadequate maintenance of privately owned drainage infrastructure or inappropriate land management results in flooding of the highway.

As a result of these recommendations, in 2021 a further £10m was allocated to Highways maintenance. I think we would all agree this is welcome news.

We received a presentation from a Suffolk Highways team on how this extra funding allocated for Highways' drainage will be spent. This funding would increase the number of highway flooding sites resolved, providing a highway network that is more resilient and accessible during heavy rain and severe weather events. The responsibility for the approval of annual programmes of work relating to this investment has been delegated to the Cabinet Member for Ipswich, Operational Highways and Flooding in conjunction with the Head of Operational Highways.

## Appendices

<b>Appendices:</b>
None.

<b>Background reference papers:</b>
None.