



## CABINET

Tuesday, 01 June 2021

<b>Subject</b>	Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to the Covid-19 pandemic by the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Report by</b>	Councillor Stuart Bird Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Supporting Officer</b>	Katherine Abbott Democratic Services Officer Katherine.abbott@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
-------------------------------	------

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

## Purpose and high-level overview

### Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to set out the results and recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee's interim review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The primary purpose of the review, and therefore of this report, was to constructively review performance and identify any opportunities for improvements. The interim review was conducted in two parts. The first part was undertaken when the Committee met on 15 October 2020 and received a report on the Council's interim response to the pandemic, dealing with community support, business support, and homelessness. The second part was undertaken when the Committee met on 26 November 2020 and considered a report about the emergency planning process, winter preparedness, the Test and Trace process, and communications. The Committee then met informally in December 2020 to draft its recommendations to Cabinet; these are set out in this report.

### Options:

The Scrutiny Committee having received and agreed a suggested scoping form on this matter decided it wished to proceed with the review. No other options were considered relevant, the Committee having considered both reports, raised questions on them, debated them, and formulated their recommendations.

### Recommendations

**In its consideration of the following recommendations, and in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Cabinet is asked that where it is proposed that a recommendation be accepted, Cabinet provides a clear published explanation as to how the recommendation(s) will be delivered and to what timescales. Similarly, where it is proposed that a recommendation be rejected, Cabinet publishes its detailed and substantive reasons as to why this is so.**

1. That, within six months of receipt of this report, East Suffolk Council works with the third sector, for example, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, as well as town and parish councils across the district, to build and maintain a network of current and additional volunteers available for future emergencies. The network will ensure volunteers are kept up to date on possible future needs for assistance and aim to keep them informed as to why they may not have been required at certain points in response phases.
2. That, within six months of receipt of this report, the Council, in its partnership work with the Joint Emergency Planning Unit, seeks access to the emergency civil preparedness plans of the town and parish Councils across the district to ensure further robustness in future emergency preparedness.
3. That, within one month of completion of the compilation of the network recommended at 1 above, East Suffolk Council works to ensure that all and any current volunteers who acted in direct response to the pandemic are contacted to acknowledge and thank them for their help.

4. That, within one month of receipt of this report, East Suffolk Council starts to explore, with partner organisations such as Suffolk County Council (SCC) and Community Action Suffolk, options for the creation of an interactive map to show the voluntary and support groups in existence in Suffolk, together with the number of active volunteers they each have.
5. That, if, as heard during the review, East Suffolk Council decides to create and use a local app that will link local requests for support to local volunteers, it not be introduced until there is robust assurance that it will be fully operational and effective.
6. That East Suffolk Council continues to maintain its usual methods of communications, in addition to digital opportunities, to ensure and enable all residents (including those who may prefer or are unable to utilise the Council's website or social media) remain fully informed and provided with specific and up-to-date local information during emergencies, for example, about the changing requirements of the local restriction tier system.
7. That Cabinet shares the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations, and its response to these, with the three local MPs for the East Suffolk district and Mr Robert Jenrick, MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

## Corporate Impact Assessment

### **Governance:**

The Scrutiny Committee has a role to scrutinise and review the actions of the Council.

The COVID pandemic has been a major national emergency, and the Council has played a significant role in responding to it. It is of interest, value, and merit for the Scrutiny Committee to review aspects of the Council's role. To that end, the Committee has looked at aspects of the Council's response and has made recommendations to the Cabinet which it hopes will be well received.

It is noted that the response to the pandemic has required alternative governance arrangements for emergency situations, too. It is proposed to review this governance separately, at a later point, as these issues were not covered within the scoping for the review to which this report refers nor, therefore, the two earlier reports received by the Committee.

### **ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:**

Clearly, a global pandemic was not foreseen when the Strategic Plan was developed and written. However, from both written reports submitted to Scrutiny Committee it was noted that this has now been considered as work on the Plan continues. Those reports also acknowledge that efforts were made to minimise the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of the Strategic Plan but as also stated some impact was inevitable.

### **Environmental:**

Not applicable

<p><b>Equalities and Diversity:</b></p> <p>Recommendation 6 seeks to ensure that all the district’s residents are communicated with and that this be achieved by diverse methods and not, necessarily, an over-reliance on digital alone.</p>
<p><b>Financial:</b></p> <p>The financial effect of the pandemic has been significant and multi-faceted; Council income has reduced, its expenditure has increased, and the extent of the financial impact is not yet fully known.</p> <p>There will be cost implications of the recommendations above; there will be resource implications to formulate and maintain the recommended network, however, the Scrutiny Committee does not consider these to be onerous.</p>
<p><b>Human Resources:</b></p> <p>Not applicable</p>
<p><b>ICT:</b></p> <p>Not applicable</p>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p> <p>Not applicable</p>
<p><b>Risk:</b></p> <p>It is hoped that these recommendations will help to achieve emergency preparedness which is even more robust.</p>

<p><b>External Consultees:</b></p>	<p>The Joint Emergency Planning Unit was involved in the preparation of the report and a representative attended the second meeting in November 2020.</p> <p>The Chief Executive Officer of Community Action Suffolk also attended the first meeting in October 2020. Both participants were asked questions and provided responses to the points of enquiry; these are recorded in the respective minutes.</p>
------------------------------------	---

## Strategic Plan Priorities

Select the priorities of the <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a> which are supported by this proposal: <i>(Select only one primary and as many secondary as appropriate)</i>		Primary priority	Secondary priorities
<b>T01</b>	<b>Growing our Economy</b>		
P01	Build the right environment for East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P02	Attract and stimulate inward investment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P03	Maximise and grow the unique selling points of East Suffolk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P04	Business partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P05	Support and deliver infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>T02</b>	<b>Enabling our Communities</b>		
P06	Community Partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P07	Taking positive action on what matters most	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P08	Maximising health, well-being and safety in our District	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
P09	Community Pride	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T03</b>	<b>Maintaining Financial Sustainability</b>		
P10	Organisational design and streamlining services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P11	Making best use of and investing in our assets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P12	Being commercially astute	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P13	Optimising our financial investments and grant opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P14	Review service delivery with partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T04</b>	<b>Delivering Digital Transformation</b>		
P15	Digital by default	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P16	Lean and efficient streamlined services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P17	Effective use of data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P18	Skills and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P19	District-wide digital infrastructure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>T05</b>	<b>Caring for our Environment</b>		
P20	Lead by example	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P21	Minimise waste, reuse materials, increase recycling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P22	Renewable energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
P23	Protection, education and influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>XXX</b>	<b>Governance</b>		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How does this proposal support the priorities selected?</b>			
<p>These recommendations are made in constructive support of the Council's ambition to take continued and positive action to protect and support its communities, in this case specifically through future emergencies.</p>			

## Background and Justification for Recommendations

<b>1</b>	<b>Background facts</b>
1.1	<p>The Scrutiny Committee met on 15 October 2020 and received part one of a two-part report on the Council's interim response to the pandemic. This report provided information on community support, business support, and homelessness. The Committee met again on 26 November 2020 to receive the second part of the report and this concentrated on the emergency planning process, winter preparedness, the Test and Trace process, and communications. In between the two meetings, a further lockdown of four weeks was implemented, ending on 2 December 2020. The Scrutiny Committee met, informally and remotely, in December 2020 to draft its recommendations to Cabinet.</p>
1.2	

	These recommendations were agreed by the Scrutiny Committee in December 2020.
1.3	The minutes of the two meetings held in October and November 2020 provide detail of the Cabinet Members. Council Officers and representatives of other interested bodies who participated in the preparation of the two reports and in the two meetings themselves. In total some 63 written questions were submitted by members of the Scrutiny Committee in advance of each meeting and these, together with the written responses, were appendices to reports ES/0531 and ES/0570. The further questions posed at the meeting, the responses provided, the debate and how these helped the Committee identify its priority recommendations are all recorded in the related minutes of both meetings (at appendices A and B).
1.4	It is fully appreciated by the Scrutiny Committee that the response to the pandemic has been and remains a rapidly moving and changing picture and, therefore, some aspects of these recommendations may have been superseded by events. However, the Committee believes the recommendations do make a positive contribution to the Council's preparedness for future emergency events.

<b>2 Current position</b>	
2.1	This was an interim review, some seven and eight months into the pandemic. As has been stated earlier in this report, the pandemic is still not yet over and consequently the response to the pandemic has been and remains a moving and changing picture.
2.2	It remains the Scrutiny Committee's aim to conduct a further, final, and comprehensive review once the pandemic is - if not over - much reduced in its impact.

<b>3 How to address current situation</b>	
3.1	It is believed that the recommendations within this report will be helpful in terms of approach to any future emergency. The recommendations aim to constructively add value, with the benefit of fresh eyes and of course hindsight, in terms of taking positive action in the event of future emergencies and to help protect the district's communities. The recommendations were formulated based on the information in the written reports X and X, the responses to the written questions posed by the Committee in before each meeting, and the questions and debate of matters which became evident at the two meetings.
3.2	In respect of the other areas covered within the reports the Committee was content with the evidence provided in the reports and received at the meetings. Paragraph 4.1 also refers.

4 Reasons for recommendations	
4.1	Having considered the two reports and the information provided to it, the Scrutiny Committee wished to make constructive suggestions on certain areas of the Council's response to the pandemic, as of December 2020. These certain areas being how the role of volunteers has been handled, a local track and trace app, and communications.
4.2	In conducting the review, it was, as always, the Committee's intention to challenge in a positive way that might also add value to the Council's continued response to the pandemic, and its impact in East Suffolk specifically.

## Appendices

Appendices:	
<b>Appendix A</b>	Confirmed minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 October 2020
<b>Appendix B</b>	Confirmed minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2020

Background reference papers:		
Date	Type	Available From
	None, save the two published reports for the meetings on 15 October and 26 November 2020 (ES/0531 and ES/0570)	<a href="http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk">www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk</a>

**Confirmed**



**APPENDIX A**

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via Zoom on **Thursday 15 October 2020 at 6:30pm**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Caroline Topping

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Richard Kerry, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Steve Wiles

**Officers present:**

Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Stephen Baker (Chief Executive), Karen Cook (Democratic Services Manager), Cairistine Foster-Cannan (Head of Housing), Anita Humphrey (Communities Manager), Andrew Jarvis (Strategic Director), Fern Lincoln (Housing Needs Service Manager), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Sue Meeken (Political Group Support Officer (Labour)), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities), Paul Wood (Head of Economic and Regeneration)

**Others present:**

Christine Abraham (CEO Community Action Suffolk)

---

**1**

**Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Keith Robinson. Councillor Colin Hedgley acted as Substitute.

**2**

**Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.



### **Interim Review of the response, by East Suffolk Council, to the Covid-19 pandemic (1)**

The Committee received **ES/0531** by the Cabinet Members with responsibility for Community Health and Communities, Leisure and Tourism, respectively. Councillor Rudd advised that the report highlighted the work that the Council had undertaken with a wide range of partners, including health partners. This included the partnership with Norfolk and Waveney CCG where referrals from their Covid Protect programme for people with long term conditions who needed help with food, medication or isolation had been received by the Council. The Connect for Health social prescribing providers in the Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG area took referrals from the Communities Team for more complex cases in need of additional support. In terms of tackling isolation and loneliness, which Councillor Rudd said was the number one priority for the East Suffolk Community Partnerships and a clear mental and physical health priority, the Council had initiated a befriending scheme in Lowestoft and piloted the innovative Grandpad programme to support those who were feeling isolated and were digitally disadvantaged. Councillor Smith advised that the first part of Appendix A of the report provided an overview of the Home But Not Alone community response in East Suffolk. Home But Not Alone (HBNA) was a Suffolk-wide initiative delivered in the District by the Council's Communities Team. The appendix outlined the level and location of demand for support during the eighteen and a half weeks that people were 'shielding' and the role that Home But Not Alone had played in supplementing the national support available to those who were 'shielding', including doorstep food deliveries. Councillor Smith added that HBNA had supported anyone in the District who was vulnerable, not just those who were 'shielding'. The appendix also considered the response by the eight Community Partnership areas, with a particular section on Lowestoft, which had 70% of the referrals. In conclusion, Councillor Smith said the report celebrated the work of community groups across East Suffolk and highlighted how this work had been enabled through the Council's Hardship Fund, which included contributions from all Councillors.

The Head of Communities advised that a request had been received from Councillor Gooch for information related to incidents and trends for domestic violence during the pandemic. In response, the Head of Communities said that although there had been an increase in reported Domestic Abuse Crimes of 24.9% on the three year average, there had not been the sustained spike that some had feared as lockdown measures were eased, She said that whilst the impact of Covid-19 could be a contributory factor in the escalation of abuse and risk, local specialist support had good capacity locally and was coping with demand. The Committee was advised that the Domestic Abuse Outreach Service delivered by Anglia Care Trust to medium risk victims had seen a 26% increase in referrals and the Independent Domestic Adviser Service for high risk victims had seen a 29% increase – demand for the services of both had peaked in July. A new 24/7 freephone Domestic Abuse Helpline had been launched in May and information about DA shared through pharmacies, HBNA call handlers, GP text messages, supermarkets, midwives and health visitors during the pandemic. There were 300 trained DA champions in Suffolk who had access to the most up to date information on services/trends and advice. The White Ribbon campaign in November would focus around libraries in Suffolk being safe spaces for victims to seek support.

The Housing Needs Manager added that a review of 2019 figures had shown that the Council's Housing Needs team 36 clients presenting as a result of Domestic Violence for the period from March 2019 – October 2019 compared to 48 cases for the same period in 2020. This was a slight increase in presentations of 13%. Currently, the Housing Needs Team had 20 active domestic violence related cases the team are working on and was actively engaged with support providers across the County to ensure the right support and safeguarding measures and interventions were put in place at the different stages.

Before inviting questions from members of the Committee, the Chairman reminded the Councillors of the topics to be reviewed at the meeting on 26 November 2020 within part two of the report - these being winter preparedness, emergency planning, track and trace and communications. The Chairman asked that when posing their questions, members of the Committee try to avoid straying into those areas of discussion.

Councillor Topping referred to the £60 million to be made available across the police and local authorities for compliance and enforcement activities and that East Suffolk Council had been allocated £121,000 from that fund. Councillor Topping noted that the funding was ringfenced for compliance and enforcement activity but that there was flexibility on how it was used so long as it was for the purpose of controlling the spread of Covid-19. The Government had encouraged local authorities to consider using the funding to deploy marshals to support compliance and Councillor Topping asked what the Council intended to spend the funding on. The Chief Executive said the £121,000 was yet to be received and that early discussions suggested the use of marshals in an extensive, largely rural district would not be the most effective use of the money. Instead, the enhancement of current services through environmental health and the overall support to effect positive behavioural change were more likely. He added that the money had not yet been fully allocated but would be used creatively and to best effect to maximise its benefits including the reinforcement of safety and containment messages.

Councillor Back advised the Committee that he had previously volunteered to be a befriender of those who were 'shielding' and, unfortunately, had not been called upon to assist; he asked if this might have happened to other volunteers. Councillor Rudd replied that the Council had been contacted by a large number of volunteers but, if a community response group was already active and fully manned in an area, there had been a wish not to duplicate efforts but rather to fill gaps. Councillor Rudd said the previous scheme was being reviewed in order to improve it in case it were necessary to implement it again. Councillor Rudd apologised for Councillor Back not having been contacted.

Councillor Coulam referred to the table within the report which indicated the groups which had been received funding from the East Suffolk Hardship Fund and highlighted the £975 allocated to the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association. The Head of Communities advised that the Association had received funding to provide advice and support in particular languages to a specific group of people. The Association had since returned unspent funds.

Councillor Beavan said his experience of the Tribe Volunteer app was that it had not worked. He stated that the Council needed to ensure such apps do work and he asked for an update on how this was being approached and also if there was the potential to have an ESC app. The Head of Communities replied at the start of the pandemic in the UK a lot of elements had been required quickly and the Tribe app had appeared to provide the solution the Collaborative Communities Board had sought in terms of volunteers. The Head of Communities agreed that in the analysis of how the app had performed it had been identified that it had had limited success and that work was in hand to see how it might be adapted and improved. The Chief Executive Officer of Community Action Suffolk added that the extent of the positive response to the call for volunteers had been overwhelming; she said that had that not been the case the app would have been helpful. There were, she said, teething issues with its use. The Council's Chief Executive Officer said that national apps were not always under the control of local authorities or local bodies. He added that an ESC app had been considered but, currently, the work required to ensure it was finessed and sufficiently focussed to do the job meant it was not feasible.

Councillor Deacon said the early intervention of many community groups had been amazing and welcome. He said many of these groups were treated as charities and asked what arrangements were for independent groups to receive donations. The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Tourism said the communities team had encouraged such groups (who might wish to do so) constitute their membership and so formalise their status through the inclusion of DBS checks, safeguarding training, increased governance etc. The Chief Executive of Community Action Suffolk said the diversity of the community response had been immense and her organisation was aiding the informal groups to set up a more formal infrastructure, if they so wished.

Councillor Green referred to the trial of Grandpads; she asked if there were plans to roll out the pilot more widely in the district under the digital inclusion scheme. Councillor Green also asked if there was evidence the devices were being actively used. The Head of Communities said the Council had funded 25 Grandpads, the Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG in the south of the district had undertaken to fund a further 50 and a further 25 for the north of the district would be funded by the Community Partnership Board's funding. The use of the Grandpads was monitored through reports to show how much they were used and the categories accesses; a follow-up telephone survey of users was also planned. The users of the Grandpads were encouraged to use them to access GP appointments, online shopping, prescription ordering etc. Councillor Green asked if the two CCGs within the district worked together in sharing information with the Council and if they fed back to their equivalent of a scrutiny committee. The Head of Communities said that, clearly, the CCGs would work in different ways and with differing priorities, however they did work closely. Councillor Green, with reference to the information about domestic abuse provided earlier in the meeting, asked if it would be Council staff or library staff who would provide this help. The Head of Communities clarified that the library would be signposted as a safe space from within which victims could report issues or call for specialist services.

Councillor Topping stated that the Council's communities team had done brilliant work during the pandemic; she asked if there were sufficient staff and if the Council would be able to respond as well to a spike in infection rates. Councillor Topping also asked

for more details on the Volunteer Passport Scheme and if the demise of Age UK Suffolk had resulted in an increase in enquiries to the Council. The Head of Communities advised that some Officers from other teams within the Council had helped the Communities Team and provided additional resource through temporary redeployment. The Committee was informed that the corporate management team had looked at resources which would be required in the event of another lockdown, particularly because of the additional responsibility for local authorities to distribute food; these discussions continued but the redeployment of some Council officers would be used again. The Head of Communities said that the demise of Age UK Suffolk had had an impact on the Council; it was working with and seeking funding for 'chin wag' groups to support elderly residents. In addition, a bounce-back fund had been established to help other such voluntary and community organisations which were also struggling. The Chief Executive of Community Action Suffolk said that the volunteer passport scheme had been in use for several years; it enabled volunteers to be 'passed' between organisations as seamlessly as possible and to minimise duplication of effort. A pilot was being undertaken in east Suffolk to provide training in basic volunteering; this was fully accredited and included first aid, safeguarding, diversity etc. The volunteer passport also provided a pathway to employment for some people. (*Clerk's note: Information on the volunteer passport scheme was circulated to the Committee after the meeting*).

Councillor Gooch referred to Dame Louise Casey's statement, that day, on child poverty and hunger; she asked if the Council had sufficient resources in place to take responsibility for the distribution of food as this was additionally important as this was sometimes one of the contributing factors in incidences of domestic abuse. Councillor Gooch suggested that if the causes of domestic abuse were identified as food related, for example, would the Council be able to respond quickly with support. The Head of Communities said that, with Community Action Suffolk, a study of how well-equipped the Collaborative Communities Board was in terms of food provision and capacity to support people had been undertaken. Hunger was a huge issue and the Council, with partners, worked hard to try and identify those most vulnerable in order to try and support them. She added that there was a joined-up support service in place but the need that would be encountered in the coming months was not underestimated. The Head of Housing added that the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) software was being used to provide predictive analytics that proactively identified households likely to experience economic hardship and rent arrears in order that they could be assisted to apply for discretionary housing payments. The software did provide an opportunity to look at other indicators of deprivation and disadvantage within a corporate project to best support vulnerable residents.

The Chairman asked if the recent cessation of the eviction moratorium had resulted in an increase in clients asking the housing team for assistance, if there were indicative figures of the likely demand and if there were sufficient staff to manage the response. The Head of Housing said that a gradual rise over a longer period of time was anticipated because of the long process to be followed before eviction took place. Only certain cases were being prioritised to court and the first hearings were not scheduled until mid-November. The Housing Needs Manager said that approximately 70 clients had presented to the housing team having received a six-month notice of eviction; 17 of these had presented since the lifting of the moratorium. She added that there was sufficient resource to deal with the cases and that officers worked with people to

resolve issues, where possible, and to support.

Councillor Gooch asked if there was an intention to provide school children with food parcels to take home, as had been done in Birmingham. The Head of Communities said that several alternative sources of healthy food were being explored such as community fridges, community pantries, community supermarkets etc. The Chief Executive of Community Action Suffolk said several organisations were looking at food waste generally, a good example of this in East Suffolk was the 'teapot project'. Work was in hand to engage with food banks, some of which were schools, but not all had registered with the Trussle Trust yet. In addition, in partnership with churches, food parcels that provided ingredients rather than prepared food were being explored to help people to have healthier food and learn basic cooking and nutrition skills.

Councillor Hedgley asked if, during lockdown, accommodation had been found for all the district's rough sleepers. The Head of Housing advised that the number of rough sleepers had peaked at 38 during the lockdown; all had been housed in self-contained accommodation. Each person had been assessed by a housing needs officer and a personal housing plan devised to meet their needs, including any health matters, and solutions put in place. At the present time, 5 people remained in the accommodation provided; the remainder had moved on to more suitable accommodation as a permanent solution, including supported housing, education or training needs. In response to a question, the Head of Housing said that some of the rough sleepers had claimed benefits to sustain their permanent accommodation. There were some newly identified rough sleepers in the district and the housing needs team was working intensively to engage with them; some clients required intensive support and assistance. Councillor Hedgley asked if there were sufficient resources. The Head of Housing said that grant funding was available until the end of the financial year; it was anticipated that a new bid for further funding for one year would be possible. The team's core staff were funded until the end of the financial year.

Councillor Gee asked about the support available for arts and culture during the pandemic. The Head of Economic Development said the Council was working closely with the Marina Theatre to support them in developing ideas to generate revenue; the theatre had also applied for a £300,000 grant from the Art Council's Cultural Recovery Fund. More widely, East Suffolk Council had established an arts and culture forum which was examining the scale of the issues and how best to help venues through shared learning and, possibly, the lobbying of central government. Councillor Deacon asked about the Spa Pavilion in Felixstowe. The Head of Economic Development said that this theatre had a different governance structure which made applying for government funding more difficult. The theatre had approached East Suffolk Council around supporting different business models which would help it to remain viable and these discussions were ongoing. The Council was unable to provide direct funding support but had offered support and assistance where it could. Councillor Deacon asked about the Two Sisters Arts Centre in Trimley. The Head of Economic Development said he did not believe they had approached the Council for assistance but undertook to check and advise Councillor Deacon outside the meeting.

Councillor Gooch asked if the geography of the community volunteer groups had meant that "social engineering" had been necessary to ensure hamlets were included and any gaps in provision addressed. The Chief Executive of Community Action Suffolk

said her organisation had worked closely with local authorities to map community groups and identify any gaps. She had been astounded that only 40 very tiny parishes had not been "covered" by an emergency response; these parishes had on the whole already aligned themselves with a neighbouring parish for mutual aid and so there had not been a need to socially engineer. The Committee was also advised that a survey had been undertaken to identify how community groups were managing and, more recently, if they remained in existence and able to step up again if the need arose. The initial responses had been very positive. The Head of Communities said the Council would be contacting any groups which had not yet replied.

Councillor Bird said that the report indicated a deficiency of volunteers in Lowestoft and asked what actions were being taken or were proposed to try and address. The Head of Communities said that Lowestoft did not have as many community response groups; the Council had met with Lowestoft Town Council and representatives of Lowestoft Rising and was planning to work, with Community Action Suffolk, on a volunteering campaign focussed on Lowestoft in an effort to build some volunteer resilience.

Councillor Back referred to national media reports of bogus companies claiming grant funds; he asked if there had been incidences of this in east Suffolk. The Head of Economic Development said the Council's fraud team reviewed any applications that raised concerns and payment withheld.

Councillor Gooch asked if the Council had been asked to formally respond or provide feedback to Ministers or the Secretary of State on local experiences. The Chief Executive said he was not aware of such a request, however, collectively Leaders of Councils had written to express concerns and views.

Councillor Topping urged the Chief Executive to ensure there was sufficient staff resource to deal with any local surges in infection rates and that the well-being and safety of staff was fully considered. The Chief Executive said the second report to the Committee, in November, would include emergency planning and one of the Council's core duties was to respond to any emergency when it happened; he wished to reassure the Committee that it was within the ethos of all the Council's staff that they would get involved in emergency situations in order to allow a flexible approach. He also emphasised that the well-being of his staff was foremost at all times.

There being no matters raised for debate, the Chairman suggested that the provisional recommendations from the meeting be carried over to the second meeting in the review to be held on 26 November. This was agreed. It was also agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would meet, informally, to draft these recommendations

## **RESOLVED**

1. That, having considered the contents of the first report, the Scrutiny Committee would, at its meeting on 26 November 2020, formulate appropriate recommendations to Cabinet from the two Extraordinary meetings in order that these be considered as part of the continuing response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

8.33pm There was a short adjournment for five minutes. The Meeting reconvened at 8.38pm.

4

#### **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Committee received and considered a draft scoping form submitted by Councillor Cloke on car parking enforcement. The scoping form was approved and an extraordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on 26 November 2020 to undertake the review.

The Chairman advised that the various strategic financial reports scheduled to be received in December and January would not be available to the Committee in advance. This was because of the additional complexities due to the on-going pandemic.

The Chairman reminded the Committee of the topics for review currently scheduled on its work programme.

The meeting concluded at 8:50pm

.....

Chairman

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via Zoom on **Thursday 26 November 2020** at **6:30pm**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Steve Wiles

**Officers present:** Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Stephen Baker (Chief Executive), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer), Phil Harris (Communications Manager), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Mark Sims (Food and Safety Manager)

**Others present:** Peter Langford, Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU)

- 
- 1 **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gee. Councillor Cooper acted as Substitute.
  - 2 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.
  - 3 **Interim Review of the response, by East Suffolk Council, to the Covid-19 pandemic (2)**

The Scrutiny Committee received report **ES/0570** by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Community Health, respectively. The report was the second of



two reports requested by the Committee - the first having been received at the meeting on 15 October 2020 - provided information of communications, winter preparedness, emergency planning and Test and Trace. The report and its appendices summarised activity undertaken by the Council in response to the pandemic and noted that in many areas this had been a joint response with partners, volunteers and other agencies. The report was introduced by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Community Health made some opening remarks in praise of the hard work of the teams within her portfolio.

Before inviting questions, the Chairman referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report which stated that the scoping report for this review had not included the financial impact of the pandemic and so those issues have not been included within the report. He explained the original and continued intention of the Scrutiny Committee had been to undertake a full review of the financial impact of the pandemic once it had subsided and that the two reports received to date were part of an interim review of the response to date.

Councillor Beavan, with reference to communications, expressed concern that perhaps people in areas where there were a number of infections were not being made aware of this and offered advice. He also referred to the local dashboard which indicated the number of tests undertaken within the district, by location, which, he said, differed from the figures on the Government website and queried the effectiveness of the technology. The Leader of the Council agreed that communication was important but of equal importance, he said, was the delivery of consistent messages, linked to those of other involved agencies, in order to minimise confusion. He added that these messages were delivered as part of an organised local system, or cell, which echoed messages. In addition, he said, statistics and numbers were quickly out of date. He suggested that a reasoned approach was needed and that the announcement of outbreaks, as defined by Public Health England and the Outbreak Board, was not the role of the Council or its communications team. The Communications Manager said that the communications cell was an effective means of two-way communication of local intelligence on issues related to the pandemic; it enabled communications to be targeted appropriately and to keep local communities up to date with local public health advice. In response to a request by Councillor Beavan that his points be referred on to Public Health, the Leader of the Council suggested that Councillor Beavan was best placed to raise these issues directly.

Councillor Beavan asked if it was possible to have an update on the vaccination programme. In summary, the Chief Executive said that a vaccination programme was being compiled and the logistics of its delivery fully explored. This was being led by the NHS, supported by Public Health England and local Councils; he added that the dates and specific requirements of the vaccination programme were awaited but he was confident that full and sufficient preparations had been made.

Councillor Gooch referred to the announcement of the local restriction tier system earlier that day and asked about the arrangements for neighbouring counties allocated to differing tiers. The Leader of the Council said the Government's advice was not to travel to a location with a different tier, but, if this was necessary it was required to abide by the requirements of the tier where you permanently resided. The Communications Manager added that, at the heart of the communications cell

messaging approach, was consideration of each potential individual occurrence based on local intelligence and evidence. It was, he said, crucial to achieve the right balance that meant messages were sensible and moderate.

Councillor Gooch referred to the management of pools, gyms, health centres during the pandemic and suggested that, in the first lockdown this had perhaps been erratic and confused and asked if detail on how the operators' requirements for the use of showers and the application of regulations was being applied. It was agreed that this would be provided outside of the meeting. The Leader of the Council said that he was confident that the district's leisure providers were fully compliant.

Councillor Coulam asked if mass testing was proposed for any area in the district. The Leader of the Council said this was proposed in those areas which had been put in tier three of the local restrictions system where, it was hoped, the greater benefit would be achieved.

Councillor Deacon asked which bodies were responsible for the policing of those who did not comply with the regulations and who would prosecute in such instances. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health said that the Council's Food & Safety team worked in conjunction with the police; she referred to an establishment in Pakefield. The Chief Executive added that the Council's Environmental Health officers worked with Trading Standards, as did the Food & Safety team, but stressed that the Council was not responsible for checking every property.

The Food and Safety Manager referred to information within the report that explained the Council's work with the Health & Safety Executive (HSE); he continued to refer to how details of premises considered to be of higher risk of non-compliance were provided to the HSE which contacted the premises and undertook checks to assess compliance through various means including the use of open questions to test awareness of the regulations etc. If a premises was considered to be non-compliant, the Food and Safety Team would undertake further visits to give advice, undertake further assessment and, in certain circumstances, take enforcement action.

Councillor Topping asked if the Council was confident in its preparedness for the requirements of testing. The Leader of the Council said that the Council would maintain its positive messages - i.e. face, hands, distance - and hope that local residents would continue to act responsibly to keep the R rate down. He added that, beyond that and until the Government issued further guidance, the Council was as prepared as it could be and prepared to undertake any further requirements. Councillor Topping was concerned that the R rate could spike and the impact this would have on the Council's staff who might be asked to respond. The Chief Executive said some of the Council's staff would be on standby, as usual over any holiday period, as part of the Council's normal emergency preparedness response.

Councillor Lynch praised the Council's communications to date and asked if these were shared with partner organisations. The Leader of the Council said he was confident ward members would cascade messages to their town and parish councils and would encourage that to continue. He was, he said, also confident that communications within the network of partner organisations was working well. The Communications Manager added that regular communications were sent direct to town and parish

councils; he referred to two-way engagement led by specific requirements that ensured consistent messaging but, equally, allowed targeted messages to certain audiences too. It was noted that social media was a valuable tool in countering inaccurate messages.

The Chairman asked if the Council was confident its messages were also reaching the districts black, Asian, and minority ethnic residents. The Communications Manager referred to continuous liaison with the Council's communities team to facilitate links with a variety of different groups and to ensure that, where appropriate, the right message for the audience was created.

Councillor Beavan referred to the written response to his written question on the Bernard Matthews factory and was pleased that testing of workers who were not symptomatic had now commenced. Councillor Beavan referred to a number of infections within his ward and raised a question about the efficacy of the test and trace local arrangements. The Food and Safety Manager stated that, in the scenario referred to by Councillor Beavan, there had been no failure in the system. It was agreed that a comprehensive response to the specifics of this be provided outside the meeting. The Chief Executive added that test and trace had been evolving throughout the pandemic and that local public health staff were achieving a success rate in excess of the national scheme. He emphasised that there was no one definitive approach. The Leader of the Council urged caution in referring to a small number of cases as an "outbreak".

Councillor Green wished to record her praise for the Council's communications throughout the pandemic which she considered to have been exemplary. Councillor Green asked about the variety of communications channels, including traditional news sources which were being used, for example for those without social media, and asked if these could be improved. The Leader of the Council endorsed the compliments of the communications team and agreed that Council needed to continue to consider access to positive messages by those who did not use social media. He referred to broadcasts on Radio Suffolk, links to national campaigns in local newspapers and to suggested all ward members might encourage town and parish councils to utilise their noticeboards and parish publications for disseminating Covid-related messages. The Communications Manager said he was very happy to provide ward members with advice on the best means of delivering communications, including bespoke messages if needed, and advised that he and the communications team was there to support ward members in that endeavour. The Strategic Director added that the Council's communities team was proactively contacting the clinically extremely vulnerable individually by telephone and had done so repeatedly.

Councillor Wiles asked what sort of reach the communications of the Council had and if lessons learnt from the first lockdown had been applied to the second lockdown. The Communications Manager said the key lessons were ensuring that information was disseminated swiftly whilst also being mindful of the need to have effective internal communications. In terms of the reach of the communications outside the Council, the Communications Manager said that analytics did not always make this easy to measure, but there was reliance on feedback, the number of followers on social media and this increasing etc. The most important aim, he said, was to ensure that information was heard by the right people first and that this was followed swiftly on social media; the aim was to add value and not noise. The Leader of the Council added

that communications needed to be both reactive and proactive. The impact of Covid-fatigue and the reaction of people to messages was a real issue but the echoing of important "stick at it" messages was intended to be reassuring and supportive.

The Chairman asked for an approximate figure for the number of residents who had been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable in the district. The Strategic Director said there were approximately 13,000. Councillor Byatt asked if there were specific issues with communicating the Council's messages to those who were blind and/or deaf. The Strategic Director said the communities team would be working hard to contact these residents and to provide them with additional information. The Leader of the Council said the various disability for a across the district were also providing assistance in this regard.

The Chairman referred to the multi-agency coordination arrangements for response and recovery provided as an appendix to the report and suggested this was very complicated for a fast-moving situation. The Chief Executive agreed that the arrangements in a complex environment with numerous stakeholders necessitated intricate coordination which helped to ensure coherent working. He added that it was important for each part of the team to understand its role; the Suffolk system had proved to be successful and was looked to by other counties as an example of good practice.

There being no further questions the Chairman moved to debate.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Scrutiny Committee for its work and the useful and interesting discussion of aspects of the pandemic and the impact. He welcomed Scrutiny's review of what had been done and its suggestions for what could be improved upon going forward, if within the powers of the Council to influence. The Leader of the Council said the communications team could look at appropriate media to cover the return of university students.

Councillor Beavan wished to remind all present that under the Council's Constitution the Committee could consider any matter affecting the district. The Chairman agreed but did stress that matters discussed needed to be within the Committee's jurisdiction.

There being no further matters raised for debate, the Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members and Officers for attending the meeting.

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would meet informally to formulate its recommendations and that these be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

#### **4**

#### **Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme.

In addition, the Scrutiny Committee drafted and agreed its final recommendations following the review of Civil Parking Enforcement and Parking Management at the meeting held on 16 November 2020. These would be incorporated into a formal report to Cabinet in due course.

The Meeting concluded at 9:18pm

.....

Chairman