



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 17 February 2022

Subject	Review of Covid-19: Update to the interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to the Covid-19 pandemic
Report by	Councillor Mary Rudd Cabinet Member for Community Health Councillor Letitia Smith Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Tourism
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Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN
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Wards Affected:	All Wards

Purpose and high-level overview

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the reports considered by the Scrutiny Committee in October and November 2020 and the Report to Cabinet in June 2021 which included six recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Committee's interim review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This report provides an update on three specific elements of the ongoing pandemic response, as per the scoping form provided:

- The ongoing role of East Suffolk Council in enabling support for individuals, families and communities in the District, including new sources of help developed through the Suffolk Collaborative Communities Board, ongoing work with community response groups in the District and current demand for support for individual and families through the Home But Not Alone Service
- A wider perspective on the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) in Suffolk and East Suffolk from Community Action Suffolk (CAS), the county infrastructure organisation, including their work to support community response groups, Good Neighbour Schemes and volunteers
- Emergency planning in East Suffolk, specifically the role of community response groups (including emergency plans) in relation to future emergencies

It is important to note that things have moved on since the Cabinet report was considered in June last year and that new needs and priorities are emerging within communities. Some of these are reflected in section 3 of this report.

Options:

As outlined above, specific areas of activity were identified as areas of focus for the update report in the scoping document, namely the ongoing support provided to individuals, families and communities in the District through the Collaborative Communities Board and Home But Not Alone service, the position in relation to community response groups and volunteers and the role of emergency planning and emergency plans in ensuring preparedness for future emergencies. However the 'response' to the pandemic is ongoing and therefore the report also highlights, in Section 3, some of the current challenges facing East Suffolk communities.

Recommendation:

That the Committee notes progress in relation to key areas of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically community response groups, volunteering and emergency planning and consider the emerging needs identified in Section 3 of the report.

Corporate Impact Assessment

Governance:

The Scrutiny Committee has a role to scrutinise and review the action of the Council and has requested an update on specific aspects of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic since it considered detailed reports in October/November 2020 and made its recommendations to Cabinet in June 2021.

ESC policies and strategies that directly apply to the proposal:

The Covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented and impacted (and is still impacting) the Council's work across the board, including the five themes of the Strategic Plan. During the pandemic, the Council has updated its Enabling Communities Strategy and made significant progress in terms of delivery of the Enabling Our Communities section of the Strategic Plan.

Environmental:

No specific implications arising from the aspects of the Covid response under consideration

Equalities and Diversity:

Many aspects of the Council's response to the pandemic related to the tenth protected characteristic group identified by the Council – namely socio-economic disadvantage. Increasingly requests for help are due to the impact of recent cost of living increases which particularly affect this protected characteristic group. Various projects have been developed to address the residual impacts of Covid-19 on specific protected characteristic groups, including those with Disabilities and Dementia (Age).

Financial:

The pandemic has had an impact on finances across the board in terms of the redeployment of Council staff and expenditure on unanticipated areas of activity. However to offset that, new resources were and are made available through various funding streams from the Government. East Suffolk Council has chosen to reinvest the funding from the Government for our work in supporting the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable cohort in lockdowns one and two in our Covid-19 Community Recovery Plan – focussed on groups identified as being of particular concern by the Communities Team through their reactive and pro-active response work.

Human Resources:

Staff resource has been, and is still, redirected to both respond to the pandemic and support the recovery across East Suffolk businesses and communities.

ICT:

No specific implications arising.

Legal:

No specific implications arising.

Risk:

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

External Consultees:

The Joint Emergency Planning Unit and Community Action Suffolk both participated in the Scrutiny Committee meetings held in October/November 2020 and have been asked to provide updates within this report and its Appendices and to attend the Committee meeting.

Strategic Plan Priorities

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

XXX	Governance		
XXX	How ESC governs itself as an authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>How does this proposal support the priorities selected?</p> <p>This report focusses specifically on the community response, volunteering and emergency planning. Our response to the pandemic is structured around our eight Community Partnerships (P06) and focusses on maintaining the health, wellbeing and safety (P08) of residents in the District. The response has been, wherever possible, data -led (P17) with a focus on identifying those residents who are most likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic (P07).</p>			

Background and Justification for Recommendation

1	Background facts
1.1	The primary purpose of the original Scrutiny Committee review was to constructively review performance in terms of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to identify opportunities for improvement.
1.2	The Council's response was considered in two parts at two separate Scrutiny Committee meetings. At the first meeting, on 15 October 2020, the Committee received a report dealing with community support, business support and homelessness. At the second meeting, on the 26 November 2020, the Committee received a report on the emergency planning process, winter preparedness, the Test and Trace process and communications.
1.3	<p>The Committee then developed a series of recommendations which were included in a report to Cabinet on 1 June 2021, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. See Section 2.7 below 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. This has been done. 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

	<p>show the voluntary and support groups in existence in Suffolk, together with the number of active volunteers they each have. Community Action Suffolk has created a map, but this does not include number of active volunteers due to the speed at which this changes. See 2.2 below for information about the most recent survey of community response groups.</p> <p>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. This has been explored but is not currently being progressed. The Warm Handover scheme and Volunteer Suffolk Portal developed by Community Action Suffolk have both progressed significantly since June 2021 – please see 2.5 and 2.8 below</p> <p>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. The Council continues to engage through a range of mechanisms, including our resident’s magazine, social media and directly through activities in town centres and attendance at community events when safe to do so, with our residents.</p>
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2 Current position

2.1	<p>This report focusses on three specific aspects of the pandemic response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ongoing role of East Suffolk Council in enabling and supporting individuals, families and communities in the District, including new sources of help developed through the Collaborative Communities Board at Suffolk level, ongoing work with community response groups in the District and current levels of demand for support through the Home But Not Alone Service • A wider perspective on the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) in Suffolk and East Suffolk from Community Action Suffolk (CAS), the county infrastructure organisation, including support for community response groups, Good Neighbour Schemes and volunteering • The position in terms of emergency planning in East Suffolk, specifically the role of community response groups and emergency plans
2.2	<p>Current demand for support through Home But Not Alone</p> <p>Home But Not Alone is the free helpline set up by the Collaborative Communities Board in March 2020 to provide practical support to those in need of help to access food, prescriptions, other basic supplies (including baby supplies and pet food) and to help support those who feel lonely and isolated. The report considered by Scrutiny in October 2020 provided a comprehensive overview of demand to that point and of the support provided through the Communities Team working with our amazing network of local community response groups.</p>

Between October 2020 and January 2022 (16 months), there have been a further 264 referrals through Home But Not Alone. 176 of these referrals were urgent and 88 not urgent. 142 requests were for help with Food, 34 for help to access Prescriptions, 30 for financial/other support and 12 for support with isolation and loneliness. 71 of those who contacted Home But Not Alone needed immediate help.

The table below shows the number of referrals by month between October 2020 and January 2022. Months shown in bold are when significant restrictions were in place in England, including shielding for CEV individuals.

Month	Referrals	Month	Referrals
November 2020	47	July 2021	6
December 2020	27	August 2021	9
January 2021	51	September 2021	7
February 2021	25	October 2021	12
March 2021	21	November 2021	8
April 2021	9	December 2021	12
May 2021	8	January 2022 *	18
June 2021	4	*to 22/01/22	

Committee Members will recall from the previous report that around 70% of referrals into Home But Not Alone were from the Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership area.

The table below shows the split between the eight Community Partnerships for the period between October 2020 and January 2022:

Community Partnership	Number of Referrals	% of 16-month total
Aldeburgh, Leiston, Saxmundham and Villages	16	6%
Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth and Villages	28	10.5%
Carlton Colville, Kessingland, Southwold and Villages	13	4.5%
Felixstowe Peninsular	28	10.5%
Framlingham, Wickham Market and Villages	6	2%
Kesgrave, Martlesham	21	8%
Lowestoft and Northern Parishes	133	51%
Melton, Woodbridge and Deben Peninsular	19	7%

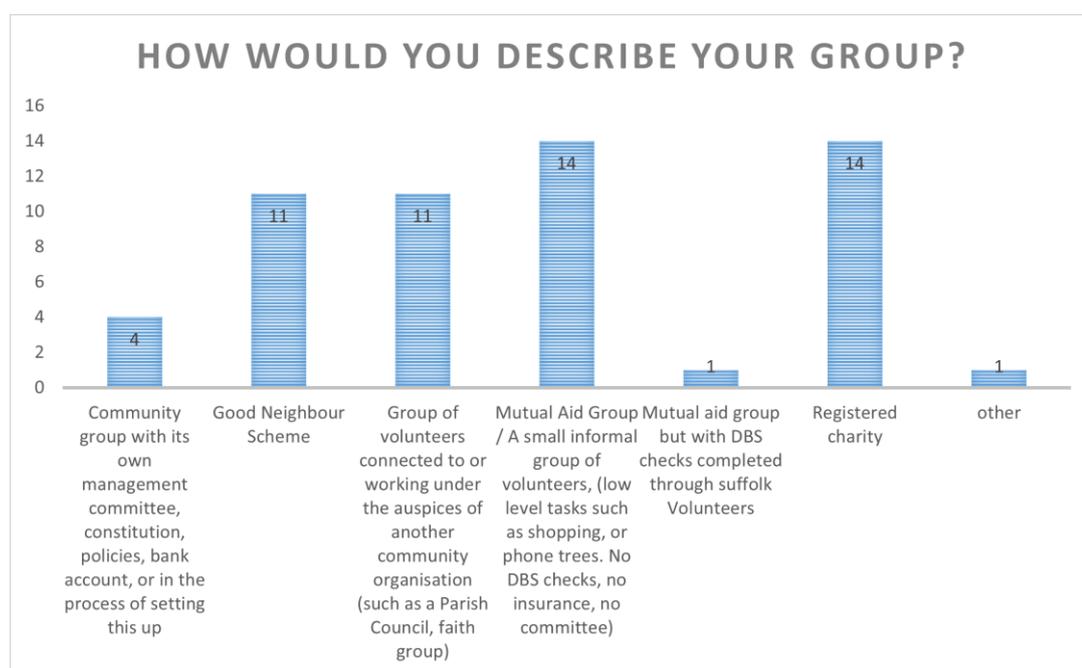
The Communities Team prepared for an increase in referrals in December 2021 due to the additional restrictions in place in England and deployed emergency food parcels around the District for use over the Christmas period. This increased/urgent demand did not materialise; however demand has increased significantly in January as the cost-of-living increases start to impact. The two key changes in terms of the nature of referrals since October 2020, and particularly over the last three months, are that they are now mainly due to lack of resources,

and many involve mental ill health, including the impact that lack of resources and financial insecurity has on people’s mental health and wellbeing.

2.3 CAS Survey of Community Response Groups

Community Action Suffolk (CAS) has surveyed the community groups in Suffolk throughout the pandemic. In June 2021 it was agreed that a further survey should be undertaken to establish how the picture had changed across the county, how many groups were still going, their current status and plans for the future and to capture the positive outcomes for their community. ESC helped to design and promote the survey across the District. The headlines from the survey are as follows:

56 East Suffolk groups responded, from the total of 180 across Suffolk. The table below shows how respondents described the activities of their group:



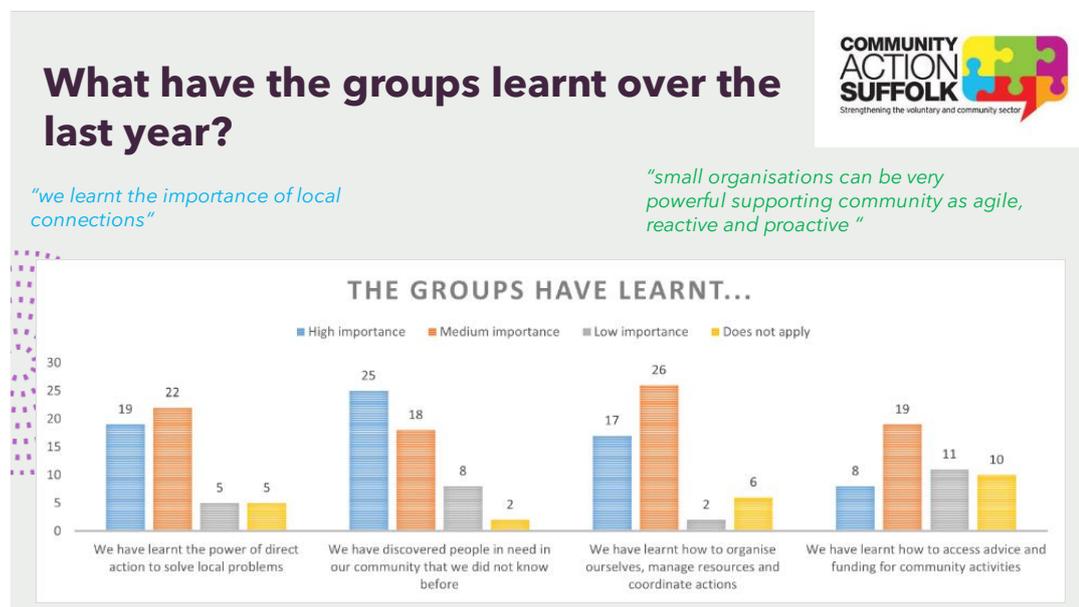
93% of those 56 groups said that they were still active or were paused but would continue as long as they were needed. 82% said that they would help with other emergencies such as fire or flood.

Most groups felt that they had enough volunteers and that they have had a positive impact on the number of people volunteering in their community. 24% said that they would like more volunteers, but 55% said that their volunteers might also be interested in volunteering elsewhere. The groups who said that they did not have enough or any volunteers were mainly facebook or mutual aid groups.

We asked the groups if they were involved with a local emergency plan, 27% (33%) said they were, with most being linked to the parish plan. However, 45% (44%) of groups said they would like to be involved in emergency planning going forward.

82% of groups felt that statutory services had been supportive and appreciative, 7% were not sure and 11% said that statutory services had not been supportive/appreciative.

25 groups felt that one of the most important things that they had learnt over the last year was that there were people in need in their community that they were not aware of previously – see table below:



Since the survey, Community Action Suffolk has contacted all groups who expressed an interest in becoming a Good Neighbour Network and all groups who needed support to recruit additional volunteers (see section 2.9 below).

Other opportunities identified in the survey were:

- building on the interest in emergency planning
- building on the positivity around community action and making local change
- working with those who are open to taking up other volunteering opportunities
- setting up informal network for those groups that not wanting to joining the Suffolk Good Neighbour Network; and
- conversations on how community groups can work together with statutory services to improve the wellbeing of those more vulnerable in our communities.

2.4 Current position – active Community Response groups

Just before Christmas 2021, the Communities Team contacted all of the groups still actively providing practical support (help with food, medication, loneliness and other practical support) to ensure that they were still operational, offer support if needed and to establish their offer over Christmas and New Year period. Those active groups across the eight Community Partnership areas comprise:

- 10 Good Neighbour Schemes
- Churches (plus church led food banks included in the line below)

- 8 foodbanks/larders/pantries
- 11 Community Support Groups

Other important sources of support in the district include Access Community Trust, our three Citizens Advice, Salvation Army and the Teapot Project. The section below provides a brief overview of sources of support currently available to East Suffolk residents i.e. that can be used to address need identified through Home But Not Alone referrals and/or local community response groups.

CAS maintains database of covid response groups in collaboration with District councils, regularly updates their mailing list and can easily communicate with them directly. There are less links now between the groups, some of the Mutual Aid Groups are paused until a need arises to step up again, others have converted in more formal groups like GNS – GNS are already well networked through this programme of work (see 2.9 below).

2.5 **New Sources Support Available in East Suffolk – funded by East Suffolk Council**

Teapot Project – further to three grants from the Covid Community Fund we have provided a fourth grant to enable the Teapot Project to purchase additional food supplies. In return we can ‘fast-track’ emergency food parcels to residents in the middle part of the District.

Food Pantries – we have provided £10,000 to support the establishment of four community pantries in Lowestoft, building on the success of the Kirkley Pantry developed by the CAS Community Enabler. ESC also worked with CAS to secure almost £20,000 for a Pantry Development Officer post. Pantries are a more sustainable route to food because people are effectively members of a club and pay around £3.50 a week for a number of food items (fresh, frozen and ambient) plus access to any donated goods.

Thin Ice – almost all Lowestoft Councillors have contributed to the Thin Ice project being run from Sam’s Café in Lowestoft. This enables individuals and families to access a free hot meal, no questions asked, if they are struggling to feed themselves and/or their children. It is proposed to roll this out to other locations in the District and Councillors are being asked to consider using their unspent Enabling Communities Budgets to support this.

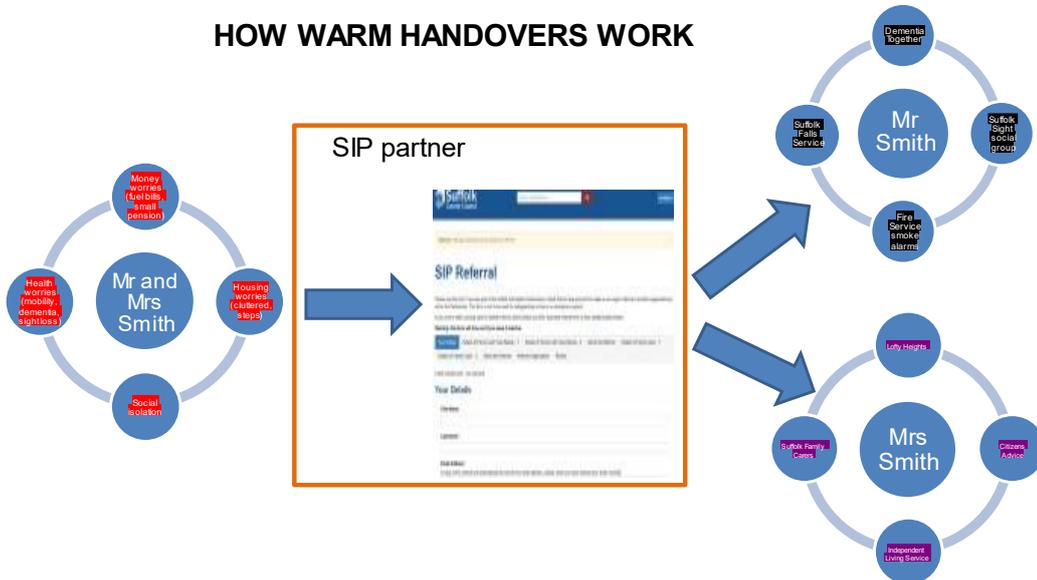
Boost Grants – Boost is a new fund set up to support project that benefit some of the communities that have been most disadvantaged by Covid 19 – people with dementia and with disabilities – and the priority themes of keeping active and sustainable food. In Round 1 we funded eight projects across the four themes and 15 applications have been received for Round 2.

Mental Health and Wellbeing – we have now run a second round of our free courses for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in East Suffolk on ‘An Introduction to Mental Health First Aid’ and ‘Working with People in Distress’. We have also sponsored 12 places on the full Mental Health First Aid course and are working with Suffolk Mind to explore rolling their Your Needs Met training and Emotional Needs Audit out to VCSE organisations. We are planning three mental health and wellbeing roadshows in March and April in the north, middle and south of the District and to launch a new Boost Grant focussed on Mental Wellbeing.

	<p>Community Restart – building on the East Suffolk Bounce Back grants, Community Restart is a Suffolk-wide project delivered jointly by the County Council, Community Action Suffolk and ESC. By the end of the programme in March, we will have allocated £131,000 to community groups and sports clubs across the District to enable them to get up and running safely again. CAS have delivered a wide range of workshops, surgeries and training to help groups to develop their application.</p> <p>Community Intervention Team - in March 2021 we employed four Community Intervention Officers to support health colleagues around outbreaks, testing and vaccinations. These officers have visited 334 shops, 78 restaurants/takeaways, 150 accommodation providers and local tourist attractions. They work with our most excluded communities, including homeless shelters, car wash employees, ethnic minorities and those with learning disabilities, to increase their access to healthcare services. We support vaccination outreach programmes, with a particular focus on the LSOAs and communities of interest with lowest levels of vaccine take up.</p> <p>Voice of a Friend Befriending The Communities Team set up a befriending scheme for Lowestoft residents during the first lockdown using ESC staff and councillors as befrienders. This project was passed over the Citizens Advice North East Suffolk with funding from Lowestoft and Northern Parishes Community Partnership. The Team is currently exploring a new project which provide a more informal ‘coffee and chat’ (virtually or face to face depending on the preference of the individual) through Community Partnership Board Mental Health and Wellbeing funding.</p> <p>Buddy Up Buddy Up is a CAS project working alongside community groups including Good Neighbour Schemes in Suffolk to equip their volunteers to be Buddies to help people to connect more to their community either to help them through self-isolating or to tackle loneliness and isolation that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. ESC has provided funding to ‘boost’ the Covid Buddy offer in East Suffolk through the Community Partnership Board.</p>
2.6	<p>Suffolk-wide support</p> <p>Warm Handover Scheme The Communities and Customer Services Teams, along with a wide range of other public sector and VCSE organisations in Suffolk, are now part of the Suffolk Warm Handover Process which sits under the Suffolk Information Partnership developed by Suffolk County Council.</p> <p>Warm Handover is all about making the customer journey as smooth as possible, reducing handoffs and ensuring the problems are resolved as soon as possible. Multiple warm handovers can be made through one form to a range of organisation in the public and voluntary sector (see diagram on following page).</p>

CAS, with additional resource, has a potential role to play in getting VCSE organisation signed up and onto the Warm Handover platform. There are so many benefits with the Warm Handover - from safe handling of data to small amounts of funding passing with the referral - however there may also be some pre-work to build capacity of organisations around their policies before they can sign up.

HOW WARM HANDOVERS WORK



Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS)

ESC is a Gateway partner for LWAS. LWAS can provide

- **Fuel vouchers** (for gas and electricity meter top ups) redeemable at East of England Co-ops (list attached) increased from £15 to £50 per household. A reminder that these cannot be used by British Gas customers.
- **Cash payments** towards utility/food costs are increased from £25 per person to £30 per person to a maximum of £120 per household.
- **Essential household furniture and large kitchen goods** including cookers, fridge freezers and washing machines – 1 item.
- **Supermarket vouchers** £25 per person to a maximum of £100 per household.

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE EXPERIENCING HARDSHIP?

The Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) is set up to help those in Suffolk who are in need of essential household items or financial support

• **HOW CAN SOMEONE RECEIVE SUPPORT?**
Applications can only be made by a professional known as a gateway partner, applications are not accepted direct from the public. Professionals must complete this online referral form: [LWAS Application](#)

• **IS THERE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA?**
Yes, if you are a professional you are required to assess need and eligibility before making a referral. There is guidance available to help support you make an application: [Read the LWAS Guidance](#)

• **HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION ON GATEWAY PARTNERS?**
You can find a list of gateway partners on the Suffolk County Council website: [LWAS List of Gateway Partners](#). If you are a professional who is not already a gateway partner, you will automatically become one when you submit your application and the team will be in touch with next steps.

• **TOP TIPS:**
When submitting an application, please provide a brief explanation for why each form of support is needed, and how the applicant is facing financial hardship, including a brief summary of household income.

Support types shown: Essential Household Furniture and Large Kitchen Goods (1 item), Supermarket Vouchers, Fuel Vouchers for Gas and Electricity Top Ups, Cash Payments towards Utility Costs, Food Boxes.

If you are a professional you can contact the team by emailing: localwelfareassistance@suffolk.gov.uk

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	<p>Pinkorange Access Community Trust secured funding through the County Council for a new four-week pinkorange delivery service tailored for age and cultural needs and including 4 household meals per week delivered direct to the client for up to 4 weeks www.pinkorange.co.uk. Each box contains supplies/ingredients for 4 meals for up to a family of 4 to prepare/cook. Also included are recipe cards, cooking instructions and access to online cooking videos.</p> <p>Surviving Winter Helpline Support is available through the Suffolk Community Foundation Surviving Winter Scheme for those who are in fuel poverty. Those who are eligible for support will receive a contribution towards their gas/electricity or oil heating costs. The process to access support is simple and quick, with eligibility based on the household or individuals' circumstances, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income and savings • Debt or arrears on an energy bill • Disabilities and long-term health conditions <p>The programme is administered by Ipswich's Citizens Advice. The Surviving Winter Helpline is 01473 298634.</p>
2.7	<p>Update from Community Action Suffolk – The VCSE sector in Suffolk</p> <p>State of VCSE (CAS) Survey (CAS) CAS published the first ever State of the Sector report in 2020 from research conducted in late 2019: State-of-the-Sector-2019-Report.pdf (communityactionsuffolk.org.uk). There will be a refresh in 2022.</p> <p>During Covid, CAS conducted 67 surveys to understand the challenges, risks and opportunities that were facing the sector. Early in the pandemic there was much anxiety about organisational resilience and impact on service delivery. However, the sector proved to be very adaptable, and many charities moved services and activities online to enable support to their service users to continue and digital transformation happened very quickly for many. One notable exception is that Age UK Suffolk ceased operating early in the pandemic leaving some gaps in services for older people.</p> <p>There has been a slight reduction in the number of registered charities in Suffolk over the last two years, the next State of the VCSE sector report will drill into this more.</p> <p>Financial resilience concerns were eased somewhat with emergency funding streams from lottery, Local Authorities, Suffolk Community Foundation and other trusts, along with the access to government business support schemes such as retail hospital and leisure grants, furlough scheme and bounce back loans. However the ability to fundraise through charity shops, events and activities has negatively impacted the income of some organisations. The biggest challenge that continues is around volunteering in that large numbers of volunteers have not yet returned to their pre covid roles.</p>
2.8	<p>Update from Community Action Suffolk – Volunteering - Volunteer Suffolk CAS moved to the new Volunteer Suffolk platform in June 2021 and since then they have seen 73 new organisations sign up with their volunteering opportunities</p>

and 107 new volunteers register an interest. To attract and support volunteers, CAS use Volunteer Suffolk, press releases, social media and run campaigns e.g. Suffolk Action Week and Volunteers Week. They provide advice, guidance, training and support to volunteer managers including on recruiting volunteers. CAS support individual groups with recruitment through newsletters and/or targeted approaches and a recent example is DANES in Lowestoft who urgently needed additional trustees.

Volunteer Passport Scheme (CAS)

The pilot volunteer passport work, initially funded by East Suffolk in 2019, very much continues. The funding enabled a volunteer passport programme to be developed, adopted and implemented with training provided. The new Volunteer Suffolk platform enables easier and safer passporting of volunteers between organisations. The Suffolk Volunteering Strategy approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board in July 2022 identified this as a key priority area and there is now a Volunteer Passport task and finish group, where the experience and learning from East Suffolk pilot have been invaluable to the conversations. CAS have incorporated the Volunteer Passports learning and resources into their new Volunteering Pathways project, so that participants will be able to gain a volunteer passport certificate of attendance.

Volunteering Campaign in Lowestoft

The East Suffolk Volunteering Campaign ran from October 2020 – May 2021, but this included time in lock down during Jan – March. The campaign included a tailored East Suffolk leaflet:

#VolunteerSuffolk
BE AMAZING. BE A VOLUNTEER

East Suffolk is a beautiful place to live, work, visit and volunteer

Have you considered volunteering?

"My confidence is growing, the skills and practical experiences I'm gaining are priceless!"

"The roles and opportunities are endless, whether you have an interest in fundraising, befriending, food, families, young people, remote volunteering or even becoming a trustee, there is an opportunity for you."

Experience the beauty and caring nature of East Suffolk by becoming a volunteer

www.volunteersuffolk.org.uk

Today, volunteering has never been so important: people from all walks of life, ages and backgrounds are giving their time to help others.

Volunteers are at the very heart of our amazing Suffolk charities and groups. By giving their energy volunteers are helping to build strong, sustainable communities.

Can you help support a Suffolk family as they navigate through difficult circumstances?

HOME START
In Suffolk

Home-Start in Suffolk is a Family Support Charity working with families with children aged 0-12 years.

Our network of over 200 fully trained, compassionate and non-judgemental volunteers support families as they navigate life challenges, providing weekly 1:1 support, through home-visiting, telephone or video calls.

Click here to find out more >

Want to have an impact on reducing reoffending and preventing homelessness?

your own place

Become a Volunteer Mentor for a resident at HMP Warren Hill. Mentoring enables people leaving custody to thrive, to avoid reoffending and to live independent lives. Your Own Place has a proven track record of running successful and impactful mentoring projects and will support you every step of the way.

Click here to find out more >

Citizens Advice is always looking for volunteers. You can help...

- ✓ To train as Advisers
- ✓ Help with fundraising
- ✓ Office admin support
- ✓ Digital and online expertise
- ✓ PR and communications expertise

Click here to find out more >

Do you desire to share your enjoyment of nature with a captive audience? Are you willing to be outside in all weathers?

Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Foxbarrow Farm welcomes enquiries from people interested in volunteering with their learning team.

Help with family activities & visiting school groups experience nature and the outdoor world throughout the year at Foxbarrow Farm, Rendelham Farm or at another local green space. Volunteers can help as often or as infrequently as suits them.

Click here to find out more >

In 2021 there are so many ways you can get involved, this will benefit East Suffolk AND you! Volunteering is known for its benefit to health and wellbeing.

“My business has an Employer Supported Volunteering Policy and I have volunteered 2 days this year through work, for charities I didn't even know existed.”

“Once a week I phone a gentleman, we chat about the weather and all sorts. We reflect on life and we have made each other smile in a difficult year for everyone.”

Get involved in a variety of roles with St Elizabeth Hospice and directly help those in need where you live in East Suffolk.



Volunteering roles range from complimentary therapy, spiritual care, counselling as well as ambassadors to talk to local groups and schools to raise awareness about the hospice's work.

St Elizabeth Hospice also offer Duke of Edinburgh and work experience placements for those aged 14+ in one of their 30 shops, including 7 in the Great Yarmouth and Waveney areas.

[Click here to find out more >](#)

Would you like to help people from your community and be a part of a network of advice-giving charities?



Citizens Advice North East Suffolk has a new telephone service 'Voice of a Friend'. Support the many lonely and isolated people in our community through regular chats. We are looking for people who have excellent listening skills and enjoy a chat.

[Click here to find out more >](#)

Helping communities in Suffolk to become even friendlier, more supportive and kinder places to live!



The Suffolk Good Neighbour Network is open to all voluntary community organisations, who are committed to developing a safe and sustainable community support group or Good Neighbour Scheme in their area.

What is a Good Neighbour Scheme?
A voluntary initiative run by a group of local residents who want to help people in their community to enjoy a better quality of life by offering them support with everyday tasks. This helps to build a stronger and more resilient community where people know each other and help out where needed.

Could you volunteer with your local scheme or help to create a group in your community?
[Click here to find out more >](#)

Want to help inspire women and girls to participate in physical activity and sport?



Active Suffolk supports the This Girl Can campaign locally and have a team of female ambassadors whose role is to help inspire other women and girls to participate in physical activity, regardless of their size, shape, age and ability.

Ambassadors help to increase knowledge, act as positive role models and promote local opportunities. For this role you need to be female, over age of 18 and a Suffolk resident.

[Click here to find out more >](#)

Want to log volunteering hours in return for rewards & recognition?



Are you aged between 12-19 years old, currently volunteering or are looking for sport and volunteering opportunities in Suffolk? Then Top Leader is for you.

The volunteering hours can be logged on the app, these hours include any leader contributions to the sport and physical activity workforce within Suffolk.

This is not limited to just coaching, refereeing or more traditional involvement, this also includes other skills such as promotion, photography, social media, journalism, event running/assisting and much more.

[Click here to visit the Top Leader website to see how to download the app and get involved! >](#)

**EAST SUFFOLK.
BE AMAZING.
BE A VOLUNTEER.**

www.volunteersuffolk.org.uk



There was also an online recruitment event held in partnership with seven other organisations in April 2020. Feedback from potential volunteers in terms of what they took away from the event included: “Presentations were interesting”, “a good introduction to charities you can support” and “discovering new charities”.

Feedback from the organisations presenting included: “Was well organised and flowed through each organisation nicely. Great opportunity to meet other charities and understand what they offer for volunteers. A good variation of roles”, “Helped me to practice talking about what we have to offer before a big scary face to face presentation. Also picked up ideas from other charity presentations” and “Keep up the good work and thanks for including us”

VOLUNTEERING INFORMATION EVENT
THURS 15TH APRIL 10.30AM

Are you thinking about volunteering?



Join us online & meet local charities to find out about volunteering in **East Suffolk**

[Book:volunteering@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk](mailto:book:volunteering@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk)



	<p>Community/Volunteer Response Structure</p> <p>CAS is the Lead Infrastructure Organisation for Suffolk for the National VCS Emergency Partnership (VCSEP), funded by DCMS to bring together local and national organisations to deliver a more coordinated response to emergencies. The VCSEP recognises and demonstrates the value and impact of VCSE engagement in an emergency response, which has been well proven and documented with COVID. CAS has improved its relationship with the Suffolk Resilience Forum predominately through the work of the Collaborative Communities Board. Chris Abraham, CEO of CAS, now has a place on the SRF TCG and occasionally attends SCG/RCG as deputy Chair of CCB when the chair is unavailable.</p> <p>Health and Vaccination Volunteers</p> <p>CAS supported vaccination volunteers in a variety of ways. They developed a toolkit to help PCN and Vaccination sites to have good volunteer recruitment and volunteer management processes in place. They have specifically helped with the recruitment through Volunteer Suffolk, Facebook pages (CAS/Volunteer Suffolk/community pages), used twitter and other social media, went on the radio and prepared press releases to promote the need for volunteers.</p> <p>More recently for the boosters, as there was little time to plan, CAS worked with ICS Workforce team to create a simple volunteer sign up form which was shared widely and placed onto Volunteer Suffolk.</p>
2.9	<p>Update from Community Action Suffolk – Good Neighbour Schemes and Community Response Groups</p> <p>Good Neighbour Schemes (GNS)</p> <p>There are 18 formal GNS groups in East Suffolk that are part of Suffolk Good Neighbour Network. CAS supported these groups during the pandemic to respond to community needs and to adapt their activity where needed including with safeguarding, cash handling, volunteer management, funding and financial resilience, policy and procedures.</p> <p>There is currently some funding available from the Suffolk Community Foundation for converting community response groups to GNS. CAS have been very proactive in contacting all the Mutual aid and informal community response groups to promote this as an approach to build resilience for the future around emergency response but also for more support generally for those in their communities that need a little bit of extra help and support to remain living independently.</p> <p>Pakefield has converted and is now on the network, as is Bungay and CAS are now working with Sutton. The new GNS Development Officer, Alice Sim, will contact other groups such as Bealings, Woodbridge, and Bucklesham, who have expressed an interest. The CAS external evaluation report will be looking at the space between mutual aid and formal GNS and make recommendations for expanding the network with more informal groups that follow good practice. We are developing relationships with GNS co-ordinators across the country to look at how we engage with mutual aid groups.</p>

	CAS could have a role in supporting both emergency volunteering and also supporting the network of VCSE organisations that can be emergency response groups. This could be a legacy of covid with the support of the VCSEP.
2.10	<p>Covid Review: Community and volunteer responses and society resilience in the future.</p> <p>The document attached to this report provides an overview of Community Emergency Planning Groups in East Suffolk. Community Emergency Planning Groups (CEPGs), mainly centred on Town or Parish Councils, were contacted at the start of the pandemic by the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) and directed to provide support through the Collaborative Communities Board (CCB).</p> <p>With support from a Lottery Grant, JEPU has worked to establish additional groups in Suffolk; with presentations to SALC to promote the scheme and briefings to councillors to encourage uptake in their wards.</p> <p>A large amount of information on Community Preparedness together with advice, planning resources and templates together with details of the training available is on the Suffolk resilience Forum website https://www.suffolkresilience.com/prepare-your-community. To date, in East Suffolk there are 57 CEPGs and the majority have Community Emergency Plans (see map at Appendix A). These plans are updated at regular interval, held securely on the Government’s Resilience Direct (RD) platform and accessible during an incident.</p> <p>In the future it is proposed to assemble CEPGs (and other community alliances such as neighbour schemes or residents’ associations) under the wider CCB programme. This would align them to wider community support activity, not just responding to emergencies. Local knowledge is key in providing support to vulnerable people, but the details change constantly, and lists become out of date very quickly. The main support agencies hold the details of vulnerable people however these cannot be shared under GDPR regulations except during an emergency, when the sharing of information between agencies is permissible. These details would not be extended to voluntary groups even in an incident, but responders need to accept that communities may have a better understanding about their vulnerabilities and local needs.</p>

3 How to address current situation

3.1	The sections of the report above identify the current position in relation to the response to the pandemic with a specific focus on demand for support, available sources of support, community response groups, Good Neighbour Schemes, volunteering and emergency planning/preparedness for future emergencies.
3.2	<p>Emerging Needs</p> <p>The demand for support from individuals and families in our communities is changing. The ongoing impact of the pandemic is being manifested in increased levels of people seeking support with their mental wellbeing, ongoing challenges around isolation and loneliness – with specific sections of the community being of concern including young people, carers, people with dementia, those with</p>

	<p>disabilities and those with existing poor mental health. There is also rapidly escalating demand for help with finances, greater use of food banks (with many more first-time food bank users), increasing levels of debt and tough choices for some families between heating and eating.</p>
3.3	<p>Financial Insecurity</p> <p>The Council has just set up a Task and Finish Group of its Corporate Management Team, which includes the Head of Communities, Head of Housing and Strategic Director, to focus on the issue of financial inclusion. This group will feed into the Community Partnership Board Task and Finish Group focussing on Inequality (agreed at the December 2021 Board meeting). We are shortly to appoint a one-year financial inclusion post funded through our Covid-19 Community Recovery Fund to complement the work of our Citizens Advice and an equivalent role supporting ESC tenants. We intend to hold a focus group in February for some of our key community response groups to understand the issues that they are dealing with on the ground and how we can best support them to do so.</p>
3.4	<p>Sustainable Food Pathways</p> <p>Work is ongoing with a wide range of partners at a county and local level, including Suffolk County Council and CAS, to develop a more sustainable food model to address the increased use of food banks and emergency food provision across the District by working to establish more sustainable food pathways, including community pantries and fridges and 'grow and eat' projects. A number of our Community Partnerships are supporting pilot projects around sustainable food.</p>
3.5	<p>Isolation, Loneliness and need for 'Community'</p> <p>We know that the impact of covid has been increased levels of loneliness and isolation (leading to declining mental and physical wellbeing). During the first lockdown in 2020, many community groups, social connection groups, sports activity groups etc had to cease running and it is only through the help of the Community Restart Programme that CAS, working in partnership with SCC and the District Councils, have been able to support the majority of these to reopen.</p> <p>However there are still some challenges and not all groups have reopened or reopened fully due to a number of reasons including lack of volunteers, participant and organiser confidence, available venues etc.</p> <p>Suffolk Mind in their most recent Emotional Needs Audit data on has found that individual needs around 'community' are recovering far slower than other aspects of mental wellbeing, indicating that this should be an area of concern and that there is still more we need to do collectively.</p>
3.6	<p>Volunteers</p> <p>The picture changes constantly in terms of volunteering to support community response groups – volunteers come and go due to their personal circumstances, some groups have struggled to find enough volunteers now that furlough has ended and others are keen to do more, and the challenge is finding ways to connect them to needs. The Covid Buddy model developed by Community Action Suffolk is something that could be built upon as a way to engage volunteers in direct support, as is ongoing work to develop Good Neighbour Networks across the District.</p> <p>More generally, it would be good to get more groups and more volunteers signed up to Volunteer Suffolk - it is an intuitive system, can be used by a volunteer to</p>

	<p>manage and record their volunteering and by Volunteer Managers to support their volunteers. There is also potential to work with a community so that they can create their own 'group' on the portal e.g. Lowestoft, Wickham Market and to encourage groups to work together and to be a presence online for people to get involved with volunteering. This may encourage some of those who have not yet returned to volunteering to do so and also attract new volunteers.</p> <p>Whilst the Tribe app was used during the first year of the pandemic, it did not prove to be fit for purpose and local groups had varying views of the usefulness of an app to match volunteers to jobs, given that each has developed their own systems. Volunteer Suffolk should be seen as the go-to platform for matching volunteers with volunteer roles and further work will be done with community response groups and Good Neighbour Schemes to explore the need for something additional to match volunteers to jobs.</p>
3.7	<p>Emergency Planning</p> <p>In terms of emergency planning, we should continue to build and develop community resilience by sharing knowledge and harnessing public (individuals, businesses, community networks and voluntary organisations) capabilities and integrate them into our planning for emergencies and responding to emerging threats, such as climate change and improving health and well-being. In the future it is proposed to assemble CEPGs (and other community alliances such as good neighbour schemes or residents' associations) under the wider CCB supervision to align them to wider community support activity, not just responding to emergencies.</p> <p>CAS could have a role in supporting both emergency volunteering and also supporting the network of VCSE organisations that can be emergency response groups. This could be a legacy of covid with the support of the VCSEP.</p>

4 Reason/s for recommendation

4.1	The report is intended to provide an update on key areas of the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic and includes some thinking about current challenges and areas of emerging need in the District.
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Appendices

Appendices:

Appendix A	Emergency Planning Overview and Map
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Background reference papers:

Date	Type	Available From
01-06-21	Interim review of the response by East Suffolk Council to the Covid-19 pandemic by the Scrutiny Committee	CMIS

APPENDIX A

Covid Review: Community and volunteer responses and society resilience in the future.

Throughout the Covid pandemic East Suffolk Council has worked within the multi-agency Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF) and alongside partners and volunteers to minimise the impact on individuals and communities. The emergency has been unprecedented, both in its impacts and longevity. From the outset it was recognised that all agencies and organisations - across parish and town councils, businesses, the voluntary, community and enterprise sectors, council staff, councillors and members of the public – would be required to work together to make sure that vital support and services would continue to be provided to the most vulnerable in society.

Community Emergency Planning Groups (CEPGs), mainly centred on Town or Parish Councils, were contacted by the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU) and directed to provide support through the Collaborative Communities Board (CCB). The programme to promote community emergency planning has been running since 2007 but received a significant boost in 2010 following the launch of the 'Big Society' by central Government. JEPU has worked to establish groups in Suffolk; with presentations to SALC to promote the scheme and briefings to councillors to encourage uptake in their wards. Formed CEPGs have been encouraged to share their experience with neighbouring villages and offer support, acting like 'ink blots' on a map, to establish new groups.

A large amount of information on Community Preparedness together with advice, planning resources and templates together with details of the training available is on the Suffolk resilience Forum website <https://www.suffolkresilience.com/prepare-your-community>. There is also a map of existing groups. This information is also signposted on District websites. To date, in East Suffolk there are 57 CEPGs and the majority have Community Emergency Plans (see map at Appendix A). These plans are updated at regular interval, held securely on the Government's Resilience Direct (RD) platform and accessible during an incident.

The CCB network has been a superb example of agencies working together to coordinate all volunteer efforts, both established and spontaneous, to support the whole community in Suffolk. Under the CCB umbrella, organisations like Community Action Suffolk (CAS), Suffolk Foundation alongside the national voluntary groups, have successfully engaged with individuals and communities during the response to, and recovery from, the crisis. We should continue to build and develop community resilience by sharing knowledge and harnessing public (individuals, businesses, community networks and voluntary organisations) capabilities and integrate them into our planning for emergencies and responding to emerging threats, such as climate change and improving health and well-being.

The Government has produced guidance¹ on the development of community resilience and sets out the benefits of 'working with civil society to create social value'. It suggests that specific activities to achieve community resilience are agreed and managed through the local resilience forum (LRF) structure, with local authorities having a statutory duty² to provide advice and assistance to the public and support the continuance of, not for profit activities, in the event of an emergency. The Government has also consulted on a new National Resilience Strategy³, with Community (a whole-of-society approach will be central

¹ HM Government Community Resilience Development Framework dated June 2019.

² Statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

³ National Resilience Strategy: Call for Evidence ran from 13 Jul to 27 Sep 21.

to strengthening the UK's resilience, with a revived effort to inform and empower all parts of society who can contribute) being one of six themes. The SRF is fully committed to this programme and has been engaged in the discussion.

In the future it is proposed to assemble CEPGs (and other community alliances such as neighbour schemes or residents' associations) under the wider CCB programme. This would align them to wider community support activity, not just responding to emergencies. Co-ordination of their activities in the event of a widespread incident will remain under the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representative at the multi-agency Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG). The representatives are drawn from Suffolk County Council (SCC) Communities team, Community Action Suffolk (CAS) and members of Suffolk Voluntary Organisations Group (SVOG); a grouping of voluntary agencies (British Red Cross, Salvation Army, RNLI, etc.) that might operate with oversight from the resilience forum.

Local knowledge is key in providing support to vulnerable people, but the details change constantly, and lists become out of date very quickly. The main support agencies hold the details of vulnerable people however these cannot be shared under GDPR regulations except during an emergency, when the sharing of information between agencies is permissible. These details would not be extended to voluntary groups even in an incident, but responders need to accept that communities may have a better understanding about their vulnerabilities and local needs.

JEPU will continue to look at the lessons from the pandemic to identify how voluntary organisations, including CEPGs, can be more engaged in the integrated response to emergencies alongside wider community support activities.

Annex:

A. Map showing Community Emergency Planning Groups (CEPGs) in East Suffolk.

