

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 30 July 2020

Portfolio: Housing and Communities

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Holly Whitbread

Recommending:

That the report of the Housing and Communities Portfolio Holder be noted.

Communities & Partnerships

I would firstly like to acknowledge the tragic loss of our Community Resilience Service Manager, Richard Gardiner, who passed away at the end of May after a year-long battle with cancer.

Although I did not have the opportunity of working with Richard, he had been with the Council for over 20 years and I understand was an extremely dedicated and experienced member of staff, who was held in very high regard by Members and his many work colleagues. The Council has lost a real asset and his colleagues have lost a great manager and friend.

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Community Resilience:

Over the period of Covid 19, there has been a significant rise in the number of crimes in general, youth nuisance, anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance complaints. More recently and since the Lockdown restrictions have eased, we have also seen an escalation in the number of fly-tips across the district both in urban and rural areas.

The following bullet points provide information only about the most significant issues and work areas that the Community Resilience Team have been dealing with over this period:

- Currently progressing a Closure Order on a property in Roydon, following a series of serious incidents, including a drive by shooting which resulted in a fatality
- Four Community Protection Warnings served and two Noise Abatement Notices, including one for a former Reality TV star.
- An increase of 7.9% in fly-tipping from this time last year
- A 56% increase in Noise from this time last year - Overall combined complaints up by 12.9%
- Installation of Epping High Street's new Flagship CCTV system, which includes 31 cameras from the Civic Offices to Tesco's. (The system has already captured a number of incidents from targeted criminal damage, person injury and road traffic collisions along the High Street)

- Higher than normal number of Safeguarding Cases many of which are very complex involving Mental Health colleagues and Housing teams
- EFDC funded Policing Team leading Operation Moonstone which is targeting criminality around Land Rover thefts in the district.
- Regular weekend working to coordinate efforts to address serious criminal activity and re-opening of Bars, Pubs and Restaurants
- Significant amount of work to support City of London (CoL) and Essex Police with visitor issues at High Beach including working with CoL to renew the delegation of powers with regard to Littering and Dog control orders
- Working with Police, Fire Service and Housing Providers in response to a series of arson incidents in Waltham Abbey.

This has all been delivered whilst the team have been short staffed and have been backfilling posts across the service area.

Members will be aware of the murder at the Wake's Arm Roundabout which has had significant media attention and caused traffic problems whilst the investigation was carried out, although the victim and perpetrators are not from the district, there have already been 5 people arrested in regard to this.

Community, Culture and Wellbeing

Staff from our Community, Culture and Wellbeing team have been extremely busy over the Covid period delivering Operation Shield, which has required delivery of food parcels; making over 1500 telephone calls and undertaking over 200 doorstep visits to vulnerable people in the district. This has been achieved whilst also providing a wide range of virtual classes, activities and support for children and adults of all ages across the district.

The following bullet points again provide an overview of activity over the last few months:

Health & Wellbeing:

- Working with Action for Children and Essex County Council, our Disability Inclusion programme has maintained engagement with children and their families via a variety of means including a well-received programme of social sessions, social media videos and online classes
- The Crucial Crew programme has been provided through a comprehensive online resource via our website and has been distributed to schools in the district for sharing with their pupils and their families
- The Epping Forest Health and Wellbeing Board and Action Groups have been relaunched to work collaboratively on Covid recovery
- A new programme of work has been launched in Paternoster, Waltham Abbey and Shelley, Ongar, designed to reduce health inequalities and discover what support people need as we exit lockdown.
- Strength and Balance Service: £90K has been secured from Essex County Council and West Essex CCG to deliver a Strength and Balance Service in West Essex. The

service will be available to any resident of West Essex who is 18 plus and requires strength-based activity to improve their mobility, strength and independence

Culture, Community & Museum:

- Youth Council: EFYC are currently conducting a #yoursay survey about how young people are feeling post lock down. The survey will identify the top 5 issues facing young people in regard to their mental and physical health & wellbeing. Our target is to survey 300 young people in the district.
- We have adapted our programmes and activities to be delivered at a social distance; virtually or on social media. This includes the Community Collage project, where children have emailed pictures of their rainbow artwork to us and a digital collage has been created from these to go out on social media each week. The collection of three months' worth of images will be displayed at the Princess Alexander Hospital
- The 'Grow Your Own' project has enabled residents of all ages to grow their own food produce indoors. Around 400 'grow packs' have been distributed across the district in the last month as part of our Health and Wellbeing initiative and our Community Champions have played a huge part in the promotion of these.
- The EFDC Community Writer's group have written a 'book of hugs' to reach out and share positivity during times of need and to uplift the reader and promote positive mental health. These have been given to all households currently taking part in our Health and Wellbeing Community Consultation.
- A £4,500 grant has been secured from the Royal Opera House Bridge's Learning Offer Development Fund 2019/20. This has enabled us to work with schools to develop and deliver an 'Arts Award Explore' resource with accompanying teacher training opportunities.
- Work has begun on the Museum Collection rationalisation project, a 2 year project to help reduce storage revenue costs
- A bid has been submitted to the Art Fund for £39,000 for 'Bringing the Museum to You', a project to engage care homes, schools and general visitors through providing an innovative digital APP and programme to enable visitors to access and interact with the museum at home and on site in a fun, creative and safe way
- During closure of the District Museum we have seen a 30% increase in online interactions during this time and have provided a range of children and adult's activities for all ages and abilities. We are now preparing for re-opening under safe conditions on 1st August, when visitors will have the opportunity to see the recently refreshed People Gallery.

Housing Needs and Older People's Services

Sheltered Housing:

Communal areas in all 12 sheltered housing schemes have been closed since March in order to safeguard residents and discourage social gatherings that do not adhere to social distancing measures. Sheltered Housing Officers have been deployed from home until now, keeping contact with residents via frequent phone calls (in some cases daily). However, in the last week and in response to the growing needs and wishes of sheltered housing residents, officers

are now attending schemes at intervals throughout the week to test fire alarms and careline cords and provide advice, assistance and support that reassures residents. Officers are well briefed on risks, adhering to social distancing guidance and robust risk assessments are in place.

Sheltered housing residents have been kept up to date with the evolving guidance on safeguarding against Covid-19 and have recently all been provided with a helpful booklet which includes advice, details on other support agencies as well as a comprehensive set of FAQs.

In the meantime, officers within the Older People's Team have been integral in supporting residents across the district and a summary of their activity between March and June is as follows:

W/C	Help to obtain shopping	Help with obtaining Medication	Called GP/ambulance	Called Care Agency	Rent queries	Other	No. Telecare clients called
30.3.20	108	7	4	1	5		627
6.4.20	39	11		2	2	16	695
13.4.20	12	4			7	22	648
20.4.20	14	3	2	2	3	12	682
27.4.20	11	6	4	2	5	28	667
4.5.20	5	2	1	2	1	16	628
11.5.20	9	2	2	3	3	44	758
18.5.20	7	2	1		1	51	645
25.5.20	1	6	5		3	32	448
1.6.20	2		2	1	2	48	573
8.6.20			4			33	590
15.6.20	3		1	4	1	31	526
22.6.20	0	4	2	1		32	445
29.6.20	2	2	2	2	3	38	529

Telecare:

Telecare activity has put on hold in March and we have not resumed activity as this requires attendance in the homes of often vulnerable people. We will review the decision to hold telecare activity at the beginning of September.

Telecare Officers continue to support the Covid line providing cover throughout the week.

We have had confirmation from ECC that the county wide tender for telehealth services is likely to be awarded in August with a delayed mobilisation date of December 2020. Cabinet have agreed to the ceasing of EFDC's telecare service as a result. Possible TUPE of Telecare Officers is being explored and a meeting arranged with ECC for September.

Housing Needs Service

Rehousing

Between 27th March and 30th June 58 properties have been let. Work to void properties experienced significant delays as suppliers shut down, materials were unavailable and some jobs impossible as a result of social distancing. Guidance was also in place that prevented any move that was not considered essential. This will have significant impact on void times

and limit our ability to meet agreed void targets certainly within the first two quarters of this year.

Normal service has now resumed although void works are still experiencing delays as materials are in difficult to obtain while supply chain regain momentum.

Rough Sleeping

Since 27th March, 15 different individuals have been accommodated as a result of the *Everyone In* initiative which required local authorities to make offers of accommodation to all those rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. This has had a financial impact and is costing c£4k per calendar month currently. The team are working extremely hard to source more permanent, sustainable housing solutions for clients with 9 having already left B&B/nightly let accommodation.

We are working with Chess, ECC and our local authority partners to be ready with a bid for a share of the £105m announced but for which MHCLG has still not yet produced a bidding prospectus.

Homelessness

During lockdown we have experienced a lull in homelessness presentations – unsurprising given the moratorium on evictions and the advice on essential moves only. However, there is anticipation that homelessness will increase as a result of the pandemic and we are working with ECC and colleagues around the county on a homelessness recovery plan. Internally we are also looking to launch activity to encourage early intervention to maximise prevention. For example, 'call before you serve' campaign encouraging landlords to contact us prior to serving notice on tenants.

The Homelessness Team responded to a fire at Woodland Grove on 21st June that involved a block of 22 privately owned/rented flats. 12 households have been temporarily accommodated at the Harlow Hotel on a bed, breakfast and evening meal basis with others staying with friends and family.

The Homelessness Team Manager has been liaising with the households affected, the building owner, loss adjuster and insurance company securing commitments from each as appropriate as to the help, advice and assistance each household will receive to secure alternative housing.

All households have also been given the opportunity to make a homelessness application should they wish to do so with some currently being progressed.

Temporary Accommodation (TA)

The team at Norway House are in attendance on a rota basis to allow for social distancing and continue to provide comprehensive advice and assistance to TA residents. All TA residents have been kept abreast of evolving guidance and recently received a booklet explaining current guidance and including a comprehensive list of FAQs.

We have recently been working with Environmental Health colleagues to manage the return of some TA residents who have gone to countries such as Turkey and the Ukraine in the last week or so to visit family. This poses significant issues around self-isolation given the make-up of the Norway House provision.

Since the start of the pandemic a number of additional food donations have been made to Norway House and FoodforAll are supplying 50 hot meals on a weekly basis to residents.

Housing update

The Income team have experienced a significant increase in the number of residents requiring assistance during the covid-19 outbreak. The increase in the number of applications for Universal Credit has increased by over 100%. Staff have taken a sympathetic however fair approach to those residents who have found themselves in arrears due to the pandemic. Additional support has been provided, particularly supporting vulnerable people, this will continue as we see the impact of the pandemic on the local economy and jobs.

Asset Management

Excellent progress is being made on the accommodation programme, the asset team have handed over the Civic Centre to the contractors and works have begun. The internal layout is currently being planned with consideration being given to maximise the opportunity for space to be let on a commercial basis, this fits well with our post covid-19 recovery plan.

Development

Work continues on phase 4 of the Council's development programme, the overall impact of covid-19 has been approximately 4 weeks. Officers are in early discussions on the Council's approach to phase 5 of the programme which will centre around 'creating places where people want to live'. The team will be taking much more of a collaborative approach with officers and residents particularly when considering parking and aesthetics.