

Select Committee Agenda



Stronger Communities Select Committee Thursday, 22nd April, 2021

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **Stronger Communities Select Committee**, which will be held at:

Virtual Meeting on Zoom
on **Thursday, 22nd April, 2021**
at **7.00 pm** .

Georgina Blakemore
Chief Executive

**Democratic Services
Officer**

R Perrin
Email: democraticservices@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors D Sunger (Chairman), J McIvor (Vice-Chairman), A Beales, I Hadley, J Lea, A Mitchell, D Plummer, S Rackham, J Share-Bernia, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley

SUBSTITUTE NOMINATION DEADLINE: 6.00PM

WEBCASTING NOTICE

Please note: this meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's internet site - at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed.

You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during this webcast will be retained in accordance with the Council's published policy.

Therefore by participating in this virtual meeting, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should ensure that their video setting throughout the virtual meeting is turned off and set to audio only.

In the event that technical difficulties interrupt the virtual meeting that cannot be overcome, the Chairman may need to adjourn the meeting.

<p>If you have any queries regarding this, please contact the Corporate Communications Manager on 01992 564039.</p>
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1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

This virtual meeting is to be webcast. Members are reminded of the need to unmute before speaking.

The Chairman will read the following announcement:

“I would like to remind everyone present that this meeting will be broadcast live to the internet (or filmed) and will be capable of repeated viewing (or another use by such third parties). Thereby by participating in this virtual meeting, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If members of the public do not wish to have their image captured they should ensure that their video setting throughout the virtual meeting is turned off and set to audio only.

Please also be aware that if technical difficulties interrupt the meeting that cannot be overcome, I may need to adjourn the meeting.”

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare interests in any item on the agenda.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE & WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 5 - 10)

(Chairman/Lead Officer) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed the Terms of Reference and work programme for this Select Committee. Members are invited at each meeting to review both documents.

6. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE (Pages 11 - 16)

To consider the update on ‘what our customers are telling us’ plus an update on our Customer Strategy.

7. UNIVERSAL CREDIT IMPACT UPDATE - ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EPPING COMMUNITY HUB (Pages 17 - 20)

To consider the progress on the establishment of a Community Hub at the Epping Civic Offices.

8. OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL RECOVERY INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS DELIVERED TO SUPPORT RESIDENTS AS A RESULT OF COVID 19 (Pages 21 - 28)

To consider the initiatives and projects that have been developed and delivered via the Council’s Community, Culture and Wellbeing service as a result of Covid-19, all of

which have contributed towards the continuing social recovery of the district.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

To note that the next meeting of the Select Committee will be held at 7.00pm on 15 June 2021.

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STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE 2019/20

Core Areas of Responsibility

- (1) To provide scrutiny for the following corporate projects:
 - Customer Excellence - Delivering services that put the customer at the heart of everything we do;
 - Behaviours and Insights - Future-proofing the Council's service provision by understanding customer needs and expectations over the next ten years and beyond; and
 - Partnerships - Working with public, private and third sector partners to deliver and develop services to our community, businesses and visitors to the district including shared and cross-border working.
- (2) To monitor levels of customer satisfaction and provide scrutiny of services that are not performing to standard and develop proposals for their improvement. This will also include matters of concern that are identified by the Stronger Council Select Committee in its review of Corporate Key Performance Indicators.

Scrutiny Role of the Select Committee

- (1) To engage in policy review and development, with a focus on improvement and how this can be best achieved;
- (2) To develop a work programme each year that effectively scrutinises the areas of responsibility outlined above;
- (3) To consider any matter referred by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder and to make recommendations as appropriate;
- (4) To look outwards and show community leadership;
- (5) To consider the effect of Government actions or initiatives that affect the Select Committees areas of responsibility and the impact on customers, residents, businesses and visitors to our district, and to respond to consultation activities as appropriate;
- (6) To establish working groups and task and finish panels to undertake any activity within these terms of reference;
- (7) To undertake pre-scrutiny through the review of specific proposals of the Council and its partner organisations or other local service providers to help develop policy;
- (8) To monitor and review relevant projects and associated closure and benefits reports; and
- (9) To engage with the community and encourage community engagement.

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Stronger Communities Select Committee

Work Programme 2020/21

Chairman: Cllr D Sunger

Stronger Communities Corporate Programme Alignment focuses on corporate objectives and Customer Excellence and partnerships

No.	Item	Deadline	Progress and Comments	Owner (Officer)	Programme of Meetings
1.	Presentation from the Loughton based group GROW Community Garden who help people who are socially isolated.	21 Jul 2020	COMPLETED	Cllr D. Wixley	21 July 2020 15 September 2020 14 January 2021
2.	Impact of Covid-19 on EFDC's Housing Communities	21 Jul 2020	COMPLETED	D. Fenton	30 March 2021 22 April 2021
3.	"What are our customers telling us?"	21 Jul 2020	COMPLETED (a) Quarter 1 report	S. Lewis/ R. Pavey	
		15 Sept 2020	COMPLETED (b) Quarter 2 Report		
		14 Jan 2021	COMPLETED (c) Quarter 3 Report		
		22 Apr - 2021	(d) Quarter 4 Report		
4	Health and Wellbeing Strategy – To consider outcomes for the district.	21 Jul 2020	COMPLETED	F. Ferrari/ G. Wallis	
5.	Universal Credit and its impact on our customers and services	15 Sept 2020	COMPLETED Initial findings and recommended actions from the officer working group	R. Pavey	

		22 April 2021	6 Monthly update report	R. Pavey	
6.	Customer Service Strategy	15 Sept 2020	COMPLETED Update on key objectives	R. Pavey	
		22 April 2021	6 Monthly Report		
7.	Digital Inclusion	14 Jan 2021	COMPLETED		
8.	Rough Sleepers	14 Jan 2021	COMPLETED		
9.	Loughton Broadway Report	14 Jan 2021	COMPLETED	R Smith/ D. Fenton	
10.	Health and Wellbeing	14 Jan 2021	COMPLETED Verbal update on the Whipps Cross Hospital Development Programme (meeting attended on behalf of EFDC)	Cllr D. Sunger	
11.	Presentation from the District Police Commander	30 Mar 2021	COMPLETED Annual Report	C. Wiggins	
12.	Community Safety Partnership annual report and review of the district Strategic Intelligence Assessment	30 Mar 2021	COMPLETED Annual Report	C. Wiggins	
13.	Social Recovery	22 April 2021		J. Gould	
14.	Six-month report on the work of the Council-funded Police Officers	15 Sept 2020	COMPLETED	C. Wiggins	
		30 March 2021	COMPLETED		
15.	Data insight led review of customer service outlets	Report to deferred until the next municipal year.	Options and recommendations for short, medium and long-term options		

16.	Service reviews as a result of performance concerns	TBC		L. Wade	
17.	EFDC Museum Collections	TBC	To consider the high-level action Plan for the programme of work over 3 years, sent out in the Corporate performance Reporting Q3 and requested at O&S on 19.11.20.	J. Gould / L. Wade	
18.	Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Hub (Feasibility on Epping Forest culture and community hub)	June 2021	Detailed proposal to be considered	J. Gould	

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SCRUTINY



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 22nd April 2021

Portfolio: Customer & Corporate Support Services –
Cllr Sam Kane

Subject: Customer Service Update

Officer contact for further information: Susan Lewis

Democratic Services Officer: R. Perrin (01992 564532)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the update on ‘what our customers are telling us’ plus an update on our Customer strategy.

What our customers are telling us

Overall customer satisfaction – KPI 80%

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
69%	71%	71%	74%

We have made a significant change to the website customer satisfaction survey making it easier for customers to give feedback and for our Customer Contact team to respond to comments. The survey is now on every page allowing us to discover which service area is receiving more feedback for us to deal with.

Residents and visitors to our district are telling us they would like to see more information on where they can park, as well as the cost of a parking permit and the location of electronic vehicle charging points. Our website currently contains information on our pay and display carparks and each of the locations provides a link to the MIPermit website which includes a map. Information on parking permits is also available on our website. The communications team are looking at how to improve the search facility of our website to cover third party sites to ensure information is accessible and easy to find.

With regards to electric charging points we have the second highest number of plug-in fully electric and hybrid vehicles on the roads in Essex according to the latest available Dept for Transport statistics. However, according to www.zap-map.com there are relatively few public charge points, suggesting most local EV owners have off street charging facilities at their home or workplace. Residents in flats or houses with no off street parking may be put off acquiring an EV as a result, so we are working on a pilot to install ‘rapid’ public chargers (50kW+ allowing 80% charge in 30 mins) and ‘fast’ (overnight) chargers this year, using facilities and infrastructure under our control such as car parks and some lamp posts. Public charging on the Highway is a matter for Essex County Council and there is a bid ECC has submitted which may result in public chargers in residential streets in Loughton. For further information or to submit ideas: Transport@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

For Elections, residents are asking for information on what candidates are standing. Visits to the election pages of our website usually peak in the five to six weeks leading up to the local elections in May. The Communications and Elections teams work together around a series of key dates starting with the Notice of Election in March and culminating with the publication of the results in May. 2021 is an exceptional year. In addition to the scheduled County Council

and Police Fire and Crime Commissioner elections, elections for district, town and parish councils held over from 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic are also taking place this year.

First point resolution – KPI 45%

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
49%	50%	47%	44%

The customer contact centre has been supporting Revenue and Benefits with an overflow of calls concerning business grants, Council Tax reminders and year end billing hence our highest call volume into the contact centre this year (see stats below). These queries would attribute to the slight reduction in first point resolution as some residents required further information from the Revenue & Benefits team.

Complaints - KPI 85% within SLA

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
88%	98%	89%	82%

Ninety-seven complaints were received in quarter 4. A significant increase was seen for Revenues due to grant applications declined and business owners expressing dissatisfaction via the complaints process. A number of complaints were received due to the time taken for housing repair works to be completed, Assets and Qualis are working together to complete repairs in a timely manner and resolve complaints.

Call volumes

Overall, we have seen a reduction in calls from 2019/20 to 2020/21 of 7,384 which equates to one month’s call volume. This quarter has as seen our highest call volumes however a 97% answer rate has been achieved, with average call waiting times of 1 minute 2 seconds.

A high number of calls are received for straight forward transfers to Qualis for Housing Repairs. We are looking into changing the phone options for residents to select so that they have the option to select Housing Repairs much quicker in the hope this addresses the issue.

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
27,556	28,169	21,506	30,711

What’s worked well during lockdown

Throughout lockdown we have seen many more customers channel shift to serve themselves helped by the following service improvements.

Simplification of customer email channel

We removed ‘contact us’, channelling all customer emails through our general enquiries form, encouraging customers who can self-serve to use the online forms available or for those who can’t they have the option to select a general contact form to get in touch with us. This resulted in an average of 64% of customers choosing to self-serve over the past year.

This change resulted in a reduction from December 2019-February 2020 of 4,365 emails received vs the same time period for 2020-21 with 258 emails received.

Longest wait time for calls reduced

As a result of more customers choosing to self-serve, our longest wait time for calls reduced from 11.31 minutes to 4.36 minutes on average over the past year.

First point resolution

The automated scripts developed to support our customer online forms are also used by our Call Centre Officers to resolve customer queries and this has resulted in our first point resolution increasing from an average 38% 2019/20 to 47% for 2020/21.

What hasn't worked so well

What hasn't worked so well is for those customers reliant on face to face contact primarily for making payments. Whilst the cash office at the Broadway has been closed and the Waltham Abbey library for access to the payment kiosk our payments team have continued to support this group of customers taking payments over the phone.

What has worked well

Covid-19 and lockdown has seen the use of digital technology for customer interaction accelerate. Many service areas have transitioned to online contact with customers with the use of teams and zoom where possible and this will continue once the Civic Office re-opens. Face to face customer interaction will still take place for those customers who require this support.

Customer Strategy

Last year our strategy focussed on fixing the basics and introducing a customer shoes culture. We now need a greater understanding through data analytics, personas and customer engagement of their needs from us as a council so that we can meet these expectations. Bridging the gap between us, customers and our colleagues in other service areas will be key. We will continue to drive one point of contact through the transition of remaining service areas 'customer' function into the contact centre.

In summary our strategy this year will cover;

- Gaining a better understanding of our customers and their needs
- How they contact us and why
- Utilising modern technology to enhance the customer contact experience
- Service delivery improvements
- Customer shoes cultural training
- Digital buddies support for residents

Note. Resourcing is still an issue and a resolution is currently being worked to enable us to fully deliver our service plan. The priorities will be the launch of our new welcome lounge and partnership hub, continued service delivery improvements plus transition of the remaining service areas customer contact into the Customer Contact Centre.

What's coming up in quarter one

New welcome lounge and partnership hub

We are working with partners coming into our new community hub to understand their requirements, process mapping the customer journey and ensuring our partners needs are fully supported.

For the welcome lounge our Receptionists/Floor Walkers will be smartly dressed in a uniform of a white shirt and navy bottoms plus a 'Here to Help' lanyard so that they are easily recognised by visitors.

Our new Visitor Management kiosks will be in place for the building re-opening. Phase 1 will

enable customers to self-check in and alert Officers to their arrival (this is for customers with pre booked appointments) those without will be assisted by our welcome team. Officers will also be able to book meetings and interview rooms. The next stage planned for Quarter 2/3 will see customers able to book venues themselves such as the Limes Centre.

The customer contact element of Community, Culture and Wellbeing has 95% transitioned to the contact centre. The remaining part is for the ability for customers to self-book venue hire. Work is being carried out in quarter one in preparation for this.

‘Customer Shoes’

Following the successful pilots of this behavioural training we are taking the learnings to develop staff webinars with the training company, in addition we are looking at developing our own in-house videos to support the ‘customer shoes’ culture we will continue to embed.

Service Superstars

Our ‘Service Superstars’ initiative proved very popular when launched during National Customer Service week and as a result is now a quarterly initiative via Perkbox. Daniel Ragen, Business Support Officer was Q4’s Service Superstar with four votes, he was nominated for his excellent customer service. In particular he was recognised for his work in Local Land Charges, supporting the delivery of a new electronic process that allowed the team to work from home without accessing paper files. Improving efficiency and level of service to customers.

Going forwards nominations will be based on our values and behaviours with Innovation the theme for quarter 1.

Cash Office re-opening

The Broadway Cash office will re-open on 12th April enabling those customers who are reliant on cash to make payments. The payment kiosk at Waltham Abbey library will re-open on 12th April and the kiosk at the Civic with the building re-opening on 21st June once the building has been fitted out for EFDC occupation and made Covid safe for external customers.

We have been looking at long term solutions for cash paying customers and a report on this will follow in due course.

Webcasting

Regardless of whether Members and Officers are in the office or attending virtually new hybrid webcasting capability will ensure a seamless webcast. We will also be extending our current webcast contract for a further two years.

Digital buddies

Epping Forest Census Support Helpline

In conjunction with Voluntary Action Epping Forest a dedicated helpline has been set up for residents in Epping Forest to contact if they need assistance filling out the census form.

Epping Forest support line: 01992 56420
Monday, Tuesdays and Fridays between 9:30am and 3:30pm

The support line is in operation from 1 March 2021 till 26 June 2021.

Epping Forest Census Digital Support Drop-In Centres

We have supported VAEF to identify suitable venues to host drop-in digital support centres which began early March and continue until the end of April.

Mondays 9:30 am – 3:30 pm (April 26) Oakwood Hill Community Centre, Longcroft Rise, Loughton, IG10 3NB will be open Mondays 9:30 am – 3:30 pm.

Tuesdays - 9:30am-3:30pm (April 13 / 20 /27) Waltham Abbey Leisure Centre, Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, Essex, EN9 3EL

Fridays - 9:30am-3:30pm (April 16 / 23 / 30) Ongar Leisure Centre, Fyfield Road, The Gables, Ongar, Essex, CM5 0

Internal Digital Buddies

Discussions are taking place with colleagues in Community, Culture and Wellbeing to agree a plan going forwards to re energise, the following actions are already happening;

- Digital buddy support to residents via the Community, Culture & Wellbeing doorstep visits, these could not take place face to face due to Covid, some support has been given over the phone. We hope to provide doorstep support when coronavirus restrictions are lifted
- Support line for residents in sheltered accommodation – residents received a flyer with a number to call to request support from our digital buddies, this line also provides access to a befriending scheme. There hasn't been much take up, during February only one call was received for help with a laptop.

Members Technology & Members Contact process review

Feedback was captured from Members and Officers on the use of the Members Contact process. Short term the decision has been made that all new Members enquiries are to be raised via Members Contact. Once Members are in discussion with Officers the conversation will continue on a one to one basis with confirmation back to Members Contact once a query has been resolved. Longer term this process will feed into the development of the Members Portal.

As for ICT issues, we are publishing a weekly reminder of the agreed process in the Members bulletin which is for Members to email Members Contact who will raise on their behalf. Customer services are receiving a daily live update of open IT issues and ensuring pro-active speedy resolutions.

A review of Members technology requirements is also underway to ensure the tools provided are fit for purpose and meet Members' needs. We are pro-actively contacting Members to identify and address ICT issues or concerns plus check their level of digital adoption.

A working group has been set up and recommendations will be provided in due course. This will also allow us to plan appropriate training on the right topics and in the right format.

A review of Members induction process is taking place to look at how equipment is issued and returned to improve efficiency of this process. In addition, the Induction pack is being reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and Members are aware of their IT responsibilities.

Reason for decision: None

Options considered and rejected: None

Consultation undertaken: None

Background Papers: None



Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 22nd April 2021

Portfolio: Customer & Corporate Support Services

Subject: Universal Credit Impact update – Establishment of the Epping Community Hub

Officer contact for further information: Rob Pavey (01992 564211)

Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note the progress on the establishment of a Community Hub at the Epping Civic Offices.

Report:

1. Members of this Committee will be recall that as a result of the work of the Universal Credit Impact Working Group a Multi-Agency Hub was developed at the Museum in Waltham Abbey in early 2020. This Hub was established to bring various agencies and relevant EFDC services together to help customers who had been impacted by welfare reform and particularly those with more complex needs. Such customers could work with different organisations in a single visit to find solutions to their problems. Sadly, the advent of Covid-19 curtailed this work relatively early in its life and during 2020 a virtual signposting resource was developed bringing the outcomes of the Universal Credit Group's work and aligning it with the new challenges presented by Covid, particularly with extensions to Wellbeing and Employment initiatives.

2. In 2020 the Cabinet approved the concept of a Community Hub at the Civic Offices. The new Hub will pick up the lessons learnt from the former Universal Credit Impact Working Group and the new impacts on customers that Covid-19 has brought but also recognising the opportunities that the newly refurbished Civic Offices can offer to make it a true community asset.

3. The vision for the Community Hub is to be a place where:

- Better and more connected services are provided to our customers;
- There is an inclusive multi-agency approach to delivering customer services;
- The focus is on real customer needs and to improve people's lives by engaging with a range of services with a single visit to the Hub;
- Customer journeys are mapped to achieve excellent touchpoint and handoff arrangements for customers;
- Community organisations can come together to meet specific needs whether it be activities or events to strengthen community bonds;
- Partners collaborate for the benefit and enhancement of the individual services they all provide;
- There are benefits for all partners that will lead to service improvements that are understood and acknowledged by all;
- Community Insight Data and engagement will identify community need and inform future service delivery;

- There are complementary aims and activities with other community hubs within the district.

4. Work on the establishment of the Community Hub has been taking place in two ways. Firstly, there is the physical creation of the Hub space as part of the Accommodation Programme within the Civic Offices. Secondly, there has been engagement with partners who wish to come and work with us in the Hub and establishing practical arrangements built around customer service journeys. The design and on-going delivery of the Hub is being managed by a Steering Group, chaired by the Customer Service Director involving key EFDC services and Partners. Those having representation on the Steering Group are:

EFDC Services: Customer Services
 Business Support (Concierge)
 Community and Wellbeing
 Housing and Homelessness
 Revenues and Benefits

External Partners Essex County Council – Library and Registration Services
 Citizens Advice
 DWP/Job Centre Plus
 Epping Forest Foodbank
 Voluntary Action Epping Forest
 Chess
 Full Circle Service
 Family Solutions
 Changing Pathways
 NACRO

The intention is to have a customer representation on the Steering Group to also help inform the Hub's development and priorities.

The principal objectives of the Steering Group are to:

- Agree and review customer journeys within the Hub to maximise customer satisfaction and benefits;
- Agree and co-ordinate future plans and activities to meet customer needs in the most effective manner;
- Review customer feedback and community engagement outcomes;
- Resolve any operational difficulties or issues that have escalated to the Steering Group;
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to demonstrate the benefits of the Community Hub;
- Agree how best to integrate other partners into the Hub.
- Ensure that the work of the Epping Hub is complementing other Hubs within the district and also other community groups.

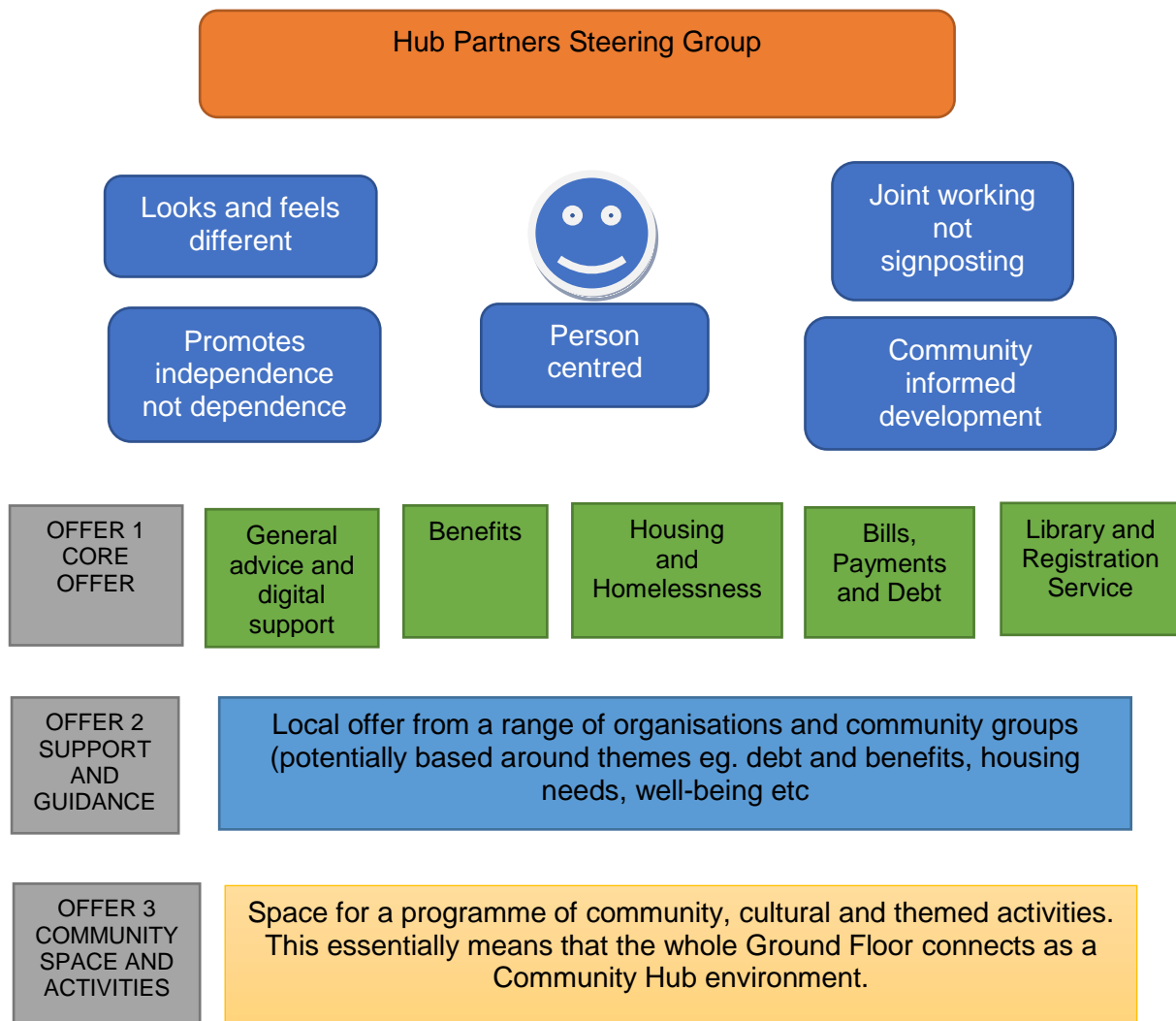
The Steering Group will aim to make sure the Hub remains relevant to on-going events, particularly with the continued effects of Covid-19. An example of this will be the end of the Government's furlough scheme and an anticipated rise in unemployment, where early intervention will be needed to help customers in acute need.

5. The actual design of the hub is underpinned by a set of principles:

- Looks and feels different to traditional service delivery
- Centred on the customer not the service
- Promotes independence not dependence
- Focused on joint working and not signposting

- Developed with local community engagement and needs in mind

The diagram below brings the design together:



The activity of the Hub provides three key offers to its users and customers:

Offer 1: A core offer of advice

The core offer of advice will be delivered through a dedicated team of EFDC services and hub partners. This includes general advice and guidance, housing, homelessness and rough sleeping, welfare and housing benefits and council tax support, well-being, financial inclusion, digital support and social isolation.

This will centre on prevention and supporting the most vulnerable, identifying opportunities to make an impact through intervening earlier and tackling issues more quickly to prevent escalation and reducing the likelihood for repeat need for services in the future.

Offer 2: Access to a range of information, support and guidance

The core offer will be enhanced by a range of information, support and guidance tailored to local need and delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations and community groups, as well as local residents volunteering their time. As a growth model, this is expected

to change and grow with time and create a location for enabling individuals to build new skills through self-serve, assisted self-serve and confidence building.

Offer 3: A community space and programme of community activities

The hub will also offer space to deliver activities and events for the community, reflecting the specific interests of local people.

6 The next steps in the implementation of the Hub building up to its opening on or about the 21st June 2021 (dependant on Covid-19 restrictions) are to be discussed at the next meeting of the Steering Group on 21st April 2021. This will include communications and publicity around the Hub and its opening and ensuring the Hub can operate in a Covid-safe way. Appropriate risk assessments will be carried out in conjunction with the Council's Health and Safety team.

Reason for decision:

To make the Committee aware of the progress of the Epping Community Hub.

Options considered and rejected:

To delay the report until the Hub has opened in June 2021.

Consultation undertaken:

Consultation has taken place with the services and partners working within the Hub.

Resource implications:

The Hub is established on the ground floor of the Epping Civic Offices.

Background Papers:

None.

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 22nd April 2021



SCRUTINY

 **Epping Forest District Council**

Portfolio: Housing & Community Services – Cllr Holly Whitbread

Subject: Overview of social recovery initiatives and projects delivered to support residents as a result of Covid 19

Officer contact for further information: Gill Wallis, Service Manager – Community, Culture & Wellbeing (01992 564557)

Democratic Services Officer: Rebecca Perrin (01992 564532)

Recommendation:

That the Stronger Communities Select Committee notes the initiatives and projects that have been developed and delivered via the Council's Community, Culture and Wellbeing service as a result of Covid-19, all of which have contributed towards the continuing social recovery of the district.

Report:

1. Establishment of Covid Community Hub

Following the first national lockdown in March 2020 the responsibility fell to Epping Forest District Council to swiftly establish a multi-agency Community Hub in order to provide emergency support for the district's most vulnerable residents. Led by the Council's Community, Culture & Wellbeing (CCW) service, an effective and efficient Hub was mobilised at pace and, working with local Third Sector partners, services including; shopping, emergency prescription collection and befriending were made readily available to those in need.

In line with national guidance, at specific points over the past 12 months, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) residents were required to shield. Numbers on Epping Forest's CEV list fluctuated over the year but, at its height, around 5,300 residents in the district were actively shielding for specific health reasons. Council staff, latterly supported by the Essex Wellbeing Service, proactively contacted every shielding resident by telephone to ensure they were safe, well and had ready access to wider support services. When it was not possible to make contact by telephone, staff from CCW carried out doorstep welfare checks. District-wide, 195 socially distance welfare checks were undertaken. These visits also afforded staff the opportunity to engage with residents who were particularly isolated or feeling lonely and, in dozens of cases, staff were able to link residents to befriending schemes, virtual clubs, activities or special interest groups.

2. Community initiatives and projects

Having established a robust multi-agency framework to respond to emergency need, attention quickly moved to focus on the wider social recovery of the district. Without doubt, the fact that Epping Forest already had a well-established Health & Wellbeing Board and excellent working

relationships with key partners, gave the Council a strong platform from which to begin to address social recovery. Three overarching themes were identified; **Positive Communities, Positive Activity** and **Positive Mental Health**.

3. Place-based engagement – Paternoster & Shelley

Following the easing of restrictions after the first national lockdown, the CCW team commenced an extensive engagement project in the wards of Shelley and Paternoster in line with the “place-based approach” agreed by the Board. The aim was to build a picture of the needs of residents as they emerged from lock-down and to lay the foundations for tackling health inequalities in these wards, developing a model of best practice that could then be replicated in other parts of the district.

The first consultation phase saw the team undertake doorstep conversations with 339 households. Residents articulated the following four overarching needs which, if addressed, would support them to feel healthier, happier and able to cope post-lockdown:

- Wider participation in positive activities, both physical and cultural
- Improved community cohesion and resilience
- Support for those struggling with poor mental health
- Enhanced local environment, including tackling anti-social behaviour

A comprehensive programme of socially distanced activity ensued including; doorstep sports, arts and reading challenges. Community litter-pick events were organised and sustainable community allotments were established in both localities with volunteers ranging in age from 2-74 years involved. Plans supporting the development of a sensory garden on Ninefields estate, a Shelley Community Mindfulness Meadow project and “grow your own zones” were established.

Overall, 600 “activity attendances” were recorded in both wards and insight was gathered from an additional 270 households. In both localities the percentage of residents who reported achieving the recommended physical activity levels on a typical day increased; Shelley residents from 74% to 88%, Paternoster residents from 76% to 87%. Baseline data was also collected prior to interventions in respect of residents’ wellbeing scores. Data collected after residents had engaged with activities showed an improved sense of wellbeing by at least 5 points using the accredited Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale. Significantly, ongoing engagement identified 63 residents requiring additional support from wider partner agencies. A pilot digital inclusion initiative involving the provision of 11 Alcove tele-video devices to residents in the Jessop Court Sheltered Accommodation was also undertaken in order to tackle issues of loneliness and isolation. The success of the devices continues to be monitored but early feedback has been extremely positive with one 92-year-old resident revealing; *“I do not feel so cut off from my family now and it’s so lovely I can actually see them. It has made me very happy”*.

4. Disability Inclusion Project

It was recognised that children and young people with disabilities and their families, were significantly impacted by Covid and feelings of loneliness and isolation as a result of the requirement to shield. Through the Disability Inclusion Project staff engaged with a total of 187 families over the year. The programme delivered 110 virtual hours of activity, 260 hours of face to face socially distanced delivery, 128 hours of additional support including welfare calls to support families and online training for families providing strategies to cope with the pressures of lockdown. The school holidays saw the delivery of SEND specific “Food in the School Holidays” (FISH) provision for families struggling financially. The success of the Council’s inclusion work has been recognised by Essex County Council and the project has subsequently received additional funding of **£43k** to continue for the next 18months.

5. Falls Prevention – Social, Active, Strong Project

The West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) funded the CCW team to deliver a falls prevention programme throughout 2020-21. The Social, Active, Strong Project engaged with 106 participants, both in socially distanced class settings and virtually during lock-down periods. The 12-week falls prevention programme captured data evidencing the clinical and social benefits to participants and the following testimonial highlights the impact of the initiative for one local resident:

“I had chemotherapy first 7 years ago, and have had neuropathy in my feet, and mild in my hands ever since, after 2 more rounds of chemo over the next 3 years, things hadn’t improved, and I asked many times what I could do, no one had any answer. Last year I had nerve conduction tests as things felt they were getting worse, as ankles were numb and it felt it was going up to my calves, it was very worrying, I went 3 times for different tests, they said I had to have B12 injections, I did, they said that showed no improvement, so I was left with progressive Sensorimotor Axonal Neuropathy and no other treatment. So, I made inquiries into walking frames and wheelchairs as I could not walk 100 yards. Then I saw an advert for Strength and Balance classes online. I got in touch to find out more, and you came back very quickly with information and suggested I came to the class, I did the exercises gently at my pace and now, after only 6 classes, I am just so amazed I have some feeling in my feet and definitely feel my ankles and calves. I can walk around home without grabbing everything and go upstairs without a struggle. I don’t know how it has worked so quickly. These exercises and the calm friendliness of each class has changed my life, I feel lighter, and the family say I am much more upbeat and chatty on the phone, they have their mum back.”

EFDC continues to be the nominated lead authority on behalf of Harlow and Uttlesford Councils for the West Essex falls prevention programme. The West Essex CCG has re-commissioned the CCW Team to deliver the service for a further 12 months from April 2021 through an additional funding award of **£91,560**. This initiative has been recognised as a model of best practice by the One Health & Care Partnership and is likely to be replicated across Hertfordshire.

6. Physical Activity Programmes

A plethora of district-wide physical activity programmes continued to run over the past year for residents of all ages. When necessary, sessions were quickly adapted to be delivered virtually or, when permissible, facilitated in real life adhering to strict social distancing guidelines. Activities have included; Walking Football, Athletics, Tennis Activators, Wild Cats Girls Football, Get Active sessions and the Active Living Programme for older residents.

When LifeWalks group sessions were suspended during the first lockdown, participants remained engaged by taking photos on their daily exercise. Over 14 weeks 120 photographs were sent in from 34 LifeWalkers and these were shared extensively on social media platforms. Participants commented on how this project had benefitted their mental wellbeing during this period. The LifeWalks programme temporarily resumed on 1st September 2020 with 696 attendees over September and October. The ever-popular Cycling for Health Programme resumed on 12th April 2021. Older People’s Officer, Karen Murray, was nominated for a County award by regular service users and received the Essex Activity Heroes Award for her outstanding contributions to the community throughout 2020.

Over the summer of 2020 the CCW team delivered family “Play in the Park Take-Away” activity sessions, providing fun activity packs to children. Adhering to strict Covid guidelines, 48 separate sessions across 18 different locations across the district were facilitated enabling staff to engage positively with 829 children and 358 adults.

7. Cultural Activity Programmes

The first ever Epping Forest Festival of Culture was launched virtually on 28th January 2021. The Festival was hosted on the Visit Epping Forest website and provided a platform for a vast array of diverse cultural activities across the district. There were 3,285 recorded online views up to the end of March 2021 and over 20 partner organisations involved. The CCW team delivered its own extensive programme of innovative cultural events throughout the Festival.

The CCW team secured an Arts Council England grant of £20,134 to deliver an inclusive community dance initiative called Museum Movers in 2021/22. The project included the development of an associated blog accessed via the museummovers.com site, and over 30 dance films were uploaded to help all ages stay active and boost their mental wellbeing. 13 dance films were shared on the linked Facebook pages and, to date, online resources have been viewed a total of 3,476 times. A new cohort of older residents were supported to embrace technology and now regularly attend Zoom “Mighty Movers” dance classes every Friday morning.

Further to the £4,500 grant from the Royal Opera House Bridge’s Learning Offer Development Fund in 2019/20, CCW received two additional pots of £1,000 in 2020-21 to continue delivering the Arts Award initiative and an associated teacher training package in schools in the district. Pupils received accredited qualifications and participating schools had the opportunity to achieve Arts Mark status. Additionally, working with Arts Council England and the Royal Opera House Bridge Association, CCW delivered 150 funded quality Art Packs to vulnerable young people across the district. Linking in with the focused work in Shelley and Paternoster wards, resource packs were provided to nominated young people from the Ongar Academy, King Harold Academy and Hill House Primary School, as well as Staples Road Primary School. Working with Essex Family Support Service staff also delivered packs to identified vulnerable families from across the wider district.

A Community Collage was designed using hundreds of rainbow artworks sent in by local families during lockdown. The mural will be installed in the Princess Alexander Hospital Pediatric Unit when Covid restrictions allow. Additionally, 1,000 copies of a ‘Book of Hugs’ were given out during the Shelley and Paternoster consultation visits and to Epping WI, local Care Homes and through doors around Epping. The book was written and produced by CCW’s Community Writers’ Group during lockdown and is full of uplifting poems. The book continues to be available to download at Princess Alexander Hospital for patients, visitors and staff.

8. Epping Forest Youth Council and MiLife C19 Mental Health Project

The bi-annual Epping Forest Youth Council elections took place in March 2020 despite Covid. Following remotely delivered induction training, the new cohort of 25 democratically elected local teenagers launched themselves into their roles with enthusiasm and swiftly set about producing a peer-led film encouraging young people to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Youth Councillors then undertook a survey, which they called #YourSay, to find out how Epping Forest’s teenagers were feeling generally about their health and wellbeing. Responses were received from 383 young people with key findings highlighting significant concerns relating to poor mental health and anxiety around falling behind with schoolwork.

Following a report to Cabinet in October 2020, the Youth Council was awarded £3K for a mental health project for young people in the district.

Building on the success of the national award winning MiLife Project, a new iteration of the project was developed and named MiLife C19. Co-designed by the Youth Councillors, working with CCW staff and in partnership with the Red Balloon Foundation, refreshed resources to support young people with their emotional and mental health were uploaded to the MiLife website. A further key element of the project will be the delivery of up to 10 workshops to the district’s 7 secondary schools between May and July 2021 targeting 5,000 pupils in Year 9 and above.

9. Older Peoples` Resource Packs

Covid restrictions resulted in CCW`s regular older peoples` “Stay Well This Winter” and “Senior Safety Day” events being suspended in 2020. However, resources from partners were quickly assembled and 1,920 reusable tote bags were delivered by staff to older residents across the district. In particular, the free “Little Book of Big Scams” which was included in packs was well received as reported by one older resident *“I sat down and read through the book yesterday afternoon and it was really interesting, the next day I got a phone call and knew straight away - that’s a scam and put down the phone, all because I read the book. Thank you so much.”*

10. Epping Forest District Museum and Educational Outreach

Covid restrictions resulted in the Museum having to close for periods of time over the last year, however, staff were able to put together an excellent exhibition displaying objects linked to the Emergency Services. Over 1,500 visitors came along to view this exhibition during the period when the Museum was able to reopen with strict social distancing measures in place.

The Museum Education Service was able to swiftly adapt to allow for virtual delivery as required over the past year. Socially distance delivery and the provision of loan boxes were also offered. Education staff delivered 24 virtual sessions to 8 schools reaching 625 pupils (with a further 16 classes booked) and 21 socially distanced sessions in 6 schools reaching a further 625 pupils. 31 loan boxes went out to 8 schools and a local care home setting, reaching a total of 754 individuals.

A project involving residents “Documenting the District” proved both engaging and fascinating. Local residents were encouraged to document their personal experiences of living in the district through the Covid pandemic year. A number of participants also took part in oral history interviews as part of this important work. All contributions will become part of the Museum`s collection going forward and form a picture of a unique period in time in the history of the Epping Forest district.

Over the past year, 10 dedicated volunteers have continued to engage with the Museum service. Newsletters and research and training sessions have been made available.

11. Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Centre Project

Plans to establish a new Community & Cultural Centre in Waltham Abbey are central to both the economic and community regeneration of the area. By combining the existing Museum site at 39-41 Sun Street with the Library site at 37 Sun Street a multi-purpose visitor attraction and community hub will be provided at the heart of the Town.

The opportunities this innovative scheme will afford in relation to a wider health and wellbeing offer for the community are extensive and will contribute significantly towards addressing key health inequalities. (See associated project reports for further details.)

12. More Than Bricks & Mortar

Working closely with Housing & Property Services, CCW staff will support the community engagement elements of the More Than Bricks & Mortar initiative in priority estates across the district. By working directly with residents and placing “community voice” at the centre of decision-making in respect of the Council`s capital investment programme, the aim is to create places where people want to live. (See associated project reports for detailed information.)

13. Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board

The multi-agency Epping Forest Health & Wellbeing Board and its 3 associated Action Groups

have continued to meet throughout the pandemic. Chaired by Cllr Aniket Patel, and championed by Portfolio Holder Cllr Holly Whitbread, the Board has set the vision and goals in relation to the health and wellbeing of the district's residents. Led by data and insight from a range of sources, partners have reviewed priorities and developed and implemented a range of projects and initiatives to address key needs. Many of these work-strands will continue to be delivered in 2021-22:

Start Well Action Group (Pre-birth to 19):

- Youth Projects (Place-based focus Shelley, Paternoster & beyond)
- Skills for School Project (school-readiness programme)
- MiLife C19 Youth Mental Health Project (website and secondary school delivery)
- Child & Family Healthy Living Project (nutrition and physical activity programme)

Be Well Action Group (19 – 65 years):

- Workplace Health Programme (In-house for EFDC staff and wider for local business)
- Multi Agency Outreach Projects (Advice and guidance one-stop shop provision)
- Inclusion Buddies (supporting adults and young people with disabilities)
- Communities Supporting Mental Health (Broad place-based offer involving MHFA)

Age Well Action Group (65 years +)

- Building Dementia Friendly Communities (Dementia Action Alliance model)
- Connecting Older People's Accommodation (Linking sheltered Scheme residents with the wider community)
- Befriending (Multi-faceted project to tackle loneliness and isolation)
- Digital Inclusion (Multi-faceted project to tackle loneliness and isolation)

14. West Essex Health Inequalities & Prevention Committee

Epping Forest District Council is a member of the One Health & Care Partnership which is the strategic body covering a West Essex and Hertfordshire footprint with the responsibility for delivering transformational plans in respect of integrated health and social care. The Council's Service Manager - Community, Culture & Wellbeing, Chairs the associated multi-agency West Essex Health Inequalities & Prevention Committee. Short term priorities for the Committee have focused heavily on the vaccination programme over the past 12 months. Moving forwards, the following four thematic medium-term work strands have been formed, all of which are supported by a Data and Insight Group to ensure planned interventions are needs and evidenced based:

- Healthy Behaviours – Physical exercise, smoking, drugs & alcohol, sexual health etc..
- Socio-Economic – education, employment, family, community safety
- Clinical care – Access to care and quality of care
- Built environment – Natural environment, housing and built environment

Through leading this strategic work, Epping Forest District Council has been at the fore-front of key decisions in relation to, for example, recent Containment Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) totally **£500K**.

15. Review of Monitoring and Evaluation

It's universally acknowledged that whilst it is reasonably easy to capture quantitative performance data (attendance figures, numbers of resource packs distributed etc.) and qualitative performance data (case studies, "story-telling" etc.) it is an extremely complex challenge to fully evidence the direct impact of the Council's health, wellbeing and social recovery work. Officers are committed to continuously improving ways in which to capture Social Return on Investment (SRI) information and will work with the Council's Strategy, Delivery & Performance team in 2021 to identify and implement appropriate models and toolkits

to address this.

Conclusion

The ethos and methodology adopted by the CCW team continues to be that of a whole-systems approach with the Council, as a core anchor institution, being central to the success of far reaching partnership initiatives and “place-shaping”. Residents themselves continue to be placed at the heart of the health and wellbeing agenda with staff using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) techniques to support the social recovery of the Epping Forest district, building strong, resilient, cohesive and healthy communities in Covid-19 times and beyond.

Reason for decision: To note the initiatives and projects that have been developed and delivered via the Council’s Community, Culture and Wellbeing service as a result of Covid-19, all of which have contributed towards the continuing social recovery of the district.

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Consultation undertaken: Ongoing resident engagement Paternoster & Shelley wards

Resource implications: There have been no increases in budget required from the Council.

Background papers: N/A

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