

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: February 2021**

**Subject: Housing and Community Services Portfolio**

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Holly Whitbread**

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing and Property Services Portfolio Holder be noted**

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### **Executive Summary**

The following report provides an update on progress in the following areas:

#### **Housing Information, Strategy and Policy**

##### **Tenant newsletter**

The Housing Information, Strategy and Policy Team have recently published a newsletter for council tenants living at our new development at Burton Road, Loughton. It features news and helpful information for tenants regarding their new tenancies. Of course, they will also receive our usual six-monthly tenant newsletter, which is due in the spring, but we felt a one-off special newsletter would address some of the issues at Burton Road.

##### **Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Code**

As stated in the recent Members' Bulletin, we completed the self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Code which is a requirement of the recent Social Housing White Paper. From March 2021, the Housing Ombudsman will publish online reports for each landlord with full details of complaints in a 'name and shame' format for those in non-compliance.

##### **Consultation – Domestic Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms**

We completed and submitted the MHCLG's consultation on domestic smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, this is also a requirement of the recent Social Housing White Paper.

Other requirements from the White Paper, such as new regulatory consumer standards and performance measures, are due to be released by the Regulator from March onwards. As soon as these are released, we will work to implement them. Some may be included in the annual Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) question set, which is due for release in April.

#### **Housing Needs**

##### **Norway House (temporary accommodation)**

Christmas was a huge success at Norway House and once again we were blown away by the generation of stakeholders and local residents. Upper Clacton Rugby Club ensured that every child at Norway House received a Christmas present and Epping Forest Food Bank provided a Christmas Food Hamper for every family.

We have already been successful in securing over £300 to buy Easter eggs for the children at Norway House, thanks to a Just Giving campaign by Kelsey Taverner.

We have also started looking at plans for the small garden at Norway House, which is due to be improved this year. Helen Palmer from the Culture and Community Team has sent us an excellent first draft of the design which we are very excited about.

### **Homelessness**

Along with the CEO of Chess, our commissioned rough sleeping service, the Homelessness Team Manager delivered a presentation to Buckhurst Hill Parish Council last Thursday evening on homelessness services for rough sleepers. We talked about the work that both the homelessness team within EFDC, and Chess do to engage and support rough sleepers within the District. We provided an overview on projects currently being undertaken, the funding behind the projects and shared information on how members of the public are better able to help rough sleepers and support their local homelessness charities in the work that they do. The presentation was well received, and a subsequent article will feature in the Parish Council newsletter.

### **Community Culture and Wellbeing**

#### **Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Centre**

Following Cabinet approval in December 2020 to develop a business case for the Waltham Abbey Community & Cultural Centre, architects are being appointed to develop the scheme, and the business case will be reported at April Cabinet.

Meetings have taken place with Essex County Council regarding the ongoing management and operation of the library service, along with Essex's capital contribution to the scheme. Consultation on plans for the Centre is currently taking place with Council members, Waltham Abbey Town Partnership and local residents.

#### **Epping Forest District Festival of Culture 2021**

The first Epping Forest District Festival of Culture was launched on 28<sup>th</sup> January with a fantastic talk on "The Wildlife of Copped Hall and Surrounding Areas" by Dr Peter Warne via Zoom.

The Festival is being hosted via the Visit Epping Forest website:

<http://www.visiteppingforest.org/> and runs through until the end of April. The virtual festival provides a platform for diverse, community led cultural activities across the district. Events during the coming months encompass; a photography competition, music, drama, dance, art, crafts, history, horticulture, wildlife and much more. All local community and cultural organisations and individuals involved in such activities within the district are invited to use the event as a platform to raise awareness of their activities.

Bookings for all talks and activities can be made by visiting either the EFDC or Visit Epping Forest websites <https://eppingforestdc.bookinglive.com/>

During the first week of the Festival there were 788 initial online views.

#### **MiLife C19 Mental Health Project**

Continuing the Youth Council lead project work with The Red Balloon Foundation, MiLife C19 resources will be added to the award winning MiLife website this month. Additionally, a menu of 10 workshops, facilitated by the Council's Community, Culture & Wellbeing officers, will be presented remotely in the district's 7 secondary schools from March to pupils in Year 9 and above. The project addresses the impact of stress on young peoples`

mental health and provides excellent tools, strategies and signposting to wider support services. The MiLife website can be accessed via: [www.milife.org.uk](http://www.milife.org.uk)

### **Epping Forest Youth Council**

The High Sheriff of Essex, Julie Fosh, met with Youth Councillors and Portfolio Holder Cllr Holly Whitbread on 19 January. The High Sheriff took questions from the Youth Councillors and talked about her role. Additional guest speakers have included; Fran Edmonds - Climate Change Officer, David Burt - Active Travel Officer, Angela Cohen - Essex Police and BBC Film Maker David Vincent who spoke about Judge Rinder's family history and its links to the Holocaust.

Youth Councillors have participated in the Essex Council Voluntary Youth Services (ECVYS) survey into issues around violence and vulnerability and accordingly received a donation of £200 towards local project work.

Youth Council remote training continues. This includes topics such as; Mental Health & Wellbeing, Respect & Professionalism and Diversity.

### **Shelley & Paternoster Digital Inclusion**

A pilot project involving the roll-out of a number of Alcove devices to residents in sheltered accommodation settings, and wider geographic localities, is going well. Data gathered pre and post installation will be used to inform the further development of wider digital inclusion initiatives. The following quote from a 92-year-old resident sums up the impact of the project so far; "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".

### **The Reading Agency and Arts Packs**

Working with 'The Reading Agency' and Costa Coffee, Community, Culture & Wellbeing staff delivered 600 free reading packs to homes in Shelley and Paternoster wards and vulnerable residents across the wider district. The packs contained award winning fiction – one child's book and one adult book – coffee, an activity sheet and a bag of chocolate coins!

Additionally, in partnership with Arts Council England and the Royal Opera House Bridge Association, staff delivered 150 free quality art packs to young people from the Ongar Academy, King Harold Academy, Hill House Primary School and Staples Road Primary School. Working with the Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service, art resource packs were also delivered to identified vulnerable families within the district.

All packs were supplied to the Council free of charge, following successful applications by the team's Cultural Engagement Officer.

### **Community Gardening Projects**

Community Gardening Projects are progressing well in Waltham Abbey and Ongar.

A 12ft x 8ft poly tunnel has been purchased for the Longfield allotment plot in Waltham Abbey and will be placed on site when safe to do so. Local community volunteers will soon be able to enjoy seed sowing and growing exotic fruits and vegetables inside.

At Hill House in Waltham Abbey a variety of sensory plants have been reserved to create two new garden spaces in the square on the current fenced grassed areas for the residents. Local school children will be actively involved in schemes.

In North Weald a new 'grow your own food' community allotment plot is currently being set up which will help benefit residents' health and wellbeing. Cllr Anthony Jackson supported the idea and a Locality Fund award £1,000 has helped with set up costs.

### **Older Peoples` Engagement**

Following the success of the 'Stay Well This Winter' Programme, where 920 information and resource packs were delivered to the community, a follow up Senior Safety Programme called 'Stay Safe, Stay Aware, Take Care' will shortly be rolled out.

Partners involved include the Safer Communities Partnership, Essex Police, Crime Stoppers and Essex Road Safety. Information packs will contain valuable information on how to stay safe in and around the home and include topics such as; bogus callers, scams and fraud as well as home adaptations and safety.

### **Community Champions**

Community Champions continued to support their communities over the festive period, with many delivering Christmas care packages. Feedback from recipients was extremely positive and the Community Champions continue to help residents feel connected.

The focus for Community Champions network meetings during 2021 will be on training and development with an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. A talk from Nat West's Scams Teams and a session with the EFDC Grants Officer are also planned.

### **Dementia Friendly Schools Award**

Working with the Council's Dementia Action Officer and Epping Forest Dementia Action Alliance, (DAA) Coopersale & Theydon Garnon C.E. Primary School has become the first school in the district to achieve an accredited Dementia Friendly Schools Award. The school's intergenerational partnership with Ashlar House Care Home provides an excellent example of best practice for other schools to see how Dementia awareness can be weaved into curriculums at the crucial age when children develop caring attitudes towards their own families and the wider community.

### **Museum Movers (Arts Council England Funded dance project)**

The Museum Movers Project blog has been launched at [museummovers.com](http://museummovers.com). There are over 30 dance films on the blog for all ages with explanations of how to take part.

13 dance films have been shared on the Facebook pages and these have been viewed a total of 3,476 times.

Many older members of our community have embraced technology and are regularly attending Zoom dance classes (known as the 'Mighty Movers') every Friday morning.

### **The Boys: Holocaust Survivors in the Epping Forest District Education Resource Pack**

Epping Forest District Museum launched a new education resource pack "The Loughton Boys: Holocaust Survivors in the Epping Forest District" on Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2021.

The pack contains profiles of 27 of the boys who came to stay at Holmehurst, the hostel in Loughton from December 1945 to January 1947 as part of their recovery. A set of learning resources including PowerPoints, worksheets and background information supports teachers to deliver sessions to children and young people. Comments from teachers

include, 'First of all, thank you so much for the resources. They are excellent and I cannot wait to use them in a classroom again.' 'This all looks really good and wonderful to have a local history link.'

### **Reminiscence Resources for Barchester Ashlar House Care Home**

During the first lockdown, residents at Ashlar House, Epping were able to enjoy using Museum resources in a Covid secure way to commemorate VE Day. This excellent relationship has continued, and the Museum Team have recently supplied resources to celebrate National Radio Day on the 13 February.

### **Creativity Challenge 2020**

Epping Forest District Museum chairs the Epping Forest Creative Network, a partnership of local cultural providers and schools. The 2020 Creativity Challenge has recently been completed by 26 pupils at Staples Road Primary School. The feedback reveals not just how much the children enjoyed being creative and what impressive skills they have, but also just how important creativity is for their mental health and wellbeing, especially at this time. Comments included 'The best thing about being creative is letting your mind and imagination go free' and 'the best thing about being creative is how relaxed it makes me feel.'

### **Museum Rationalisation Project**

To date the Rationalisation Project team has reviewed and researched all items currently stored at the North Weald site. These items have been through the first two review phases of the project and, following Steering Committee and Portfolio Holder sign off, will be ready to move onto the final rationalisation phase. 80% of items have been assessed from Store 1 at the Museum which means a total of 1400 items have been through phase 1. Of these, 360 items have been researched at phase 2. The team has been nominated for the Collections Trust Award 2020-21 – 'Celebrating Collections Management' which highlights collections-based work achieved in difficult circumstances.

### **Museum Anniversary Programme**

2021 is an important year for Epping Forest District Museum as it will be celebrating some significant milestones including; the 40th anniversary of the Museum at its current site, the 5th anniversary of the re-opening of the Museum after the completion of the National Lottery Heritage Funded building refurbishment and The Boys exhibition will mark the 250th temporary exhibition ever held on site.

Each anniversary will be celebrated through exhibitions (including online), events and projects.

### **Social Active Strong – Strength & Balance Programme**

Essex County Council and the West Essex CCG have confirmed a further £90K of funding to continue the West Essex Strength and Balance service for another 12 months. The programme was developed, implemented and is led by the Community, Culture & Wellbeing team.

The following compliment is testament to the positive impact of the initiative; "As you know 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, wheelchairs as I could not walk 100 yards even with help legs very weak.

Then I saw an advert for Strength and Balance classes on line, 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 them as you suggested 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, and can walk around home without grabbing everything and going 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."

### **Community Resilience**

The team changed management reporting lines and now sits alongside the Contracts and Technical and Commercial and Regulatory Services. This new arrangement is working well, there are clear synergies with Regulatory, Waste and Environmental Protection teams. The ease of collaborative working show positive results for the benefit of residents.

The team is continuing to work on updating policies and introducing new processes where required. Workloads remain high but steady across the ASB and Enviro sections of the team.

### **Environmental Enforcement**

Fixed Penalty Notices served; one for littering in Waltham Abbey (evidence supplied by resident's Ring doorbell) and one for breach of a Community Protection Notice for dog barking at Orchard Gardens. One Community Protection Notice served for light pollution at a property in Theydon Bois, two Noise abatement notices served on a licenced premise for excessive loud music. one successful prosecution for fly tipping heard at the start of December, for an incident which occurred in June 2019, against two defendants. Delay primarily due to Covid and courts being shut. Both the defendants were ordered to pay fines and Council's prosecution costs, a total of £3,891. Continued support is being provided to the Public Health team with Covid Compliance Checks. 30 visits were carried out in the first 2 weekends of December between the CR team and Licencing.

Dealing with an ongoing traveller encampment in Waltham Abbey – started in Darby Drive, and we obtained a possession order to move them on (Possession order granted 24/11/20 but only served on the travellers on 03/12/20 due to delay in getting papers from the court). The travellers then moved to the Royal Gunpowder Mills, on private land, and then moved onto Quaker Lane Car park, and have now settled at Cornmill Carpark. Possession order being sought again, however due to the recent lockdown, not sure how this will progress. However, ongoing partnership works with GTRET (Police Gypsy & Traveller Rural Engagement Team) to monitor the site. The travellers are mostly tidy, and are not causing any known issues in the area. We are in court this week to seek a further possession order.

I wrote letters of commendation to Sergeant Neil Ross who leads the EFDC funded Police Team. Two of the officers attended an incident where a dog walker had discovered a male hanging from a tree. Our officers arrived together with a colleague and were first at the scene, they cut the victim down and started CPR. Although the male was unresponsive, they continued until paramedics arrived who then managed to get output and ultimately keep the victim alive. There is no doubt that following their actions they gave the victim a fighting chance until medics arrived.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

Over the last months 25 ASB complaints have been dealt with. One investigation around a complaint of cannabis odour and general ASB led to Court decision against one resident on grounds of breach of CPN (Community Protection Notice) and was given a financial penalty. Joint work with Police and EFDC at Broadway, looking at different crime prevention materials to stop the youth nuisance in the area. Parkguard service continues to be utilised in hot spot areas e.g. Loughton, Broadway etc

### **Safeguarding**

There were 30 new cases and 11 that rolled over (Tier 4 has once again delayed visits to hoarders). Out of these there was one child, 16 adult only; 13 both adult/children concerns. There were 35 opportunities for children to be harmed; and 31 opportunities for vulnerable adults to experience harm.

### **CCTV**

There have been 20 CCTV request forms submitted over the past month, which is 4 more than last month. Police requested 10 download requests while internal EFDC services made 9 requests. There are currently three Rapid Deployment Cameras operating out in the field at present. The team has worked with the Police to identify suspects which include: suspected accosting young female in Epping High Street, Knife related assault on Broadway Debden, Identifying vehicle involved in burglary, High Road Loughton and Robbery suspect threatening staff with knife, High Road Loughton.