

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 22nd April 2021



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