

Report to the Council

Committee: Council

Date: 29 October 2020

Subject: Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio – Covid19 Responsibility

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Aniket Patel

Recommending:

That the report of the Commercial and Regulatory Portfolio Holder be noted in related to Covid19

I am pleased to report that most Council services continue to operate normally, but with some restrictions as necessary in order to maintain distancing and the safety of staff and residents. The safety of residents and staff remains our top priority.

However, I am sorry to report the looming second spike means that the role of the Council has once again shifted back to preparing to support Response actions, whilst at the same time still working on economic and community Recovery.

I would like to acknowledge this is a trying time for the District's residents and for the Council's members and officers alike. I would like to thank everyone for their continued co-operation and support, without which I am sure the infection rates would be much higher in this area than they are today.

But despite the effort everyone is making, we have continued to see the rate of new infections rise in Epping Forest District. Whilst still well below those of the national hotspots, the Council's infections have been elevated for some time and are still some of the highest in the wider Essex area. This represents an area of significant concern and so, our focus is on reinforcing adherence and the clear messaging to the community of the Government's safety messages.

If not already announced, it seems inevitable that greater restrictions will be introduced in the Essex area in the not too distant future. In preparation, the Council is revisiting the arrangements made last time and the revisiting the learnings we took from the way in which these worked. We are also making sure that we have the resources and capacity ready to respond at short notice, should this be required. However, community support infrastructure is much better developed than it was back in March and so we expect the demands made of this Council will look different this time around.

We are responding to the additional responsibilities the Government is placing on every Council, such as the administration of the Government's Isolation Support Payments, which were implemented by the Revenues and Benefits Team in a matter of weeks and ahead of the deadline.

Through our Environmental Health Team and by working closely with partner agencies, we are enforcing the rules on curfew, track and trace and distancing measures within the District's licensed premises and providing support and advice to businesses where appropriate.

We are also continuing to make progress on implementing protection measures within the District's high streets.

Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) is also playing an active part in the coordinated Greater Essex response, via the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG), comprising all public sector bodies operating within the County.

We are working closely at a County level on co-ordinating communication messages and on enforcement activities, to make sure there are consistent messages being given to the residents.

After a brief respite during the summer months I am again meeting regularly with the Covid-19 Portfolio Holder Advisory Group members (to whom I am extremely grateful for their ongoing support) to discuss the current position and emerging issues. This includes both the Response and the Recovery actions of the Council.

Furthermore, the Covid19 Response and Recovery actions of the Council have recently been discussed at both the Stronger Place Select Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet, at its meeting last week, considered the progress made by officers on the Cabinet's key priority economic recovery actions. Considerable activity and effort are being invested in this space as we recognise the enormous impact the Pandemic has had on the lives of residents and the economy of the Epping Forest District area.

At the same time, we are considering the Social and Wellbeing impacts on our communities, by engaging with community groups, the voluntary sector, partner agencies and the youth council, thereby recognising that the impacts on the residents of Epping Forest District may be long lasting and are much more than just financial.