

July 2020 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

New plan sets out how Suffolk will prevent and respond to COVID-19 outbreak

A plan which sets out how Suffolk would prevent and respond to a localised outbreak of COVID-19 was published on 30 June. Suffolk's Local Outbreak Control Plan will be triggered where there are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks in any setting or community within the county. The plan, a requirement of Government of all local authorities, outlines measures to prevent, manage, and contain outbreaks of Coronavirus and protect the public's health. It builds on existing relationships and processes in place with partner agencies across Suffolk. The plan outlines how complex cases will be managed in more than 30 high-risk places, locations, and communities, particularly care homes and schools. It also outlines local testing capacity, use of data to identify and proactively manage outbreaks, and contact tracing in complex settings. An outbreak is defined when there are two or more cases in high-risk settings, or a greater than expected occurrence of COVID-19 compared with the usual level for a particular place and time. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all of our lives and, sadly, we will be living with the threat of the virus for many months to come. Whilst this plan outlines how Suffolk will best respond to outbreaks, prevention of the virus is absolutely vital in making sure the number of new cases continues to decline in Suffolk. We must all continue to follow social distancing guidelines and ensure we wash our hands regularly, to avoid a second wave of the pandemic. If you develop symptoms of coronavirus, make sure you get a test and isolate at home. Delivery of the Local Outbreak Control Plan will be co-ordinated by the Suffolk COVID-19 Coordination Centre. All information (including outbreak notifications) and national guidance will be received here, which enables a co-ordinated response and allows tasks to be allocated to the most appropriate partners. Suffolk has received £2.79million from a £300million Government fund to support delivery of the Local Outbreak Control Plan. For more information visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/suffolks-response/

Suffolk's resilience partners continue to provide PPE equipment where most needed

As Suffolk's response to the Covid-19 pandemic enters its fourth month, the team set up in March to source and distribute personal protective equipment (PPE) to support service providers across the county continues to operate from Suffolk County Council's offices in Ipswich. To date, this PPE 'cell' of the Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF) has distributed over 2.3 million items of PPE across Suffolk. Over 1.9 million of these items have been distributed for use in the care sector to support some of Suffolk's most vulnerable residents. This equipment is directly supporting a range of staff every day, providing them with the masks, gloves and other disposable protective items needed to ensure safe working and effective infection control in care settings, social care, special schools, emergency services, and health organisations. As service providers increase contact with residents and reopen, or plan for buildings to reopen in weeks to come, Suffolk's PPE team will continue to purchase and distribute equipment where there is a shortfall in supply, or where organisations identify an urgent need. As the pandemic really took hold in late March, it was vitally important that we quickly established a team to source and distribute PPE where it was needed most. This was especially important given the increased demand for personal protective equipment across the UK, and the world at that point. Suffolk's team continues to operate and the SRF is keeping a close eye on levels of demand to understand if, and when, we need to scale back operations.

Temporary relaxation of concessionary travel arrangements in Suffolk to end next month

As more people return to work, public transport operators face the challenge of meeting this extra demand and ensuring adherence to Government guidance. Passenger numbers are highest at the beginning and end of the day, so people who need to make essential journey for shopping, care or health reasons are being encouraged to travel after 9.30am when buses are currently quieter. Suffolk County Council and bus operators in the county have agreed to end the temporary relaxation of concessionary travel rules from Monday 6 July 2020. The relaxation was introduced across Suffolk in late March and allowed those with concessionary passes to travel on buses for free before 9:30am. The aim was to provide more flexibility for older people, and those with disabilities, to visit supermarkets during the lockdown. Now that more people are returning to their workplaces and children are going back to school, it is important that we take steps across the county to protect passengers. It is vital we help bus operators balance the need to get people to work and children to school, while maintaining social distancing and adhering to Government guidelines, so this means staggering the times when passengers travel. The relaxation of the concessionary travel scheme was a temporary measure to address the situation at the time. The situation has changed, and we are now facing a new set of challenges. Therefore, I urge people to only use public buses for essential journeys and to travel after 9:30am where possible. From Monday 6th July concessionary bus passes in Suffolk will only be valid Monday to Fridays 9.30am to 11pm, and all day on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. Also, all passengers are now required to wear a face covering on public transport. For more information about concessionary travel in Suffolk, visit suffolkonboard.com. An alternative travel option for elderly and vulnerable passengers is the county's Connecting Communities demand responsive services, which operate Monday to Friday 7am to 7pm. Further details can be found at communities.suffolkonboard.com or by calling 0345 606 6171.

Better Broadband for Suffolk reaches 100,000th customer as 3rd phase contract is agreed

More than 100,000 households across Suffolk are already using faster broadband, thanks to the council-led Better Broadband for Suffolk programme. The partnership - between Suffolk County Council, Openreach, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) and local councils – has made faster broadband available to around 150,000 premises since being launched in 2010. It means the current total superfast broadband coverage in Suffolk stands at more than 96 per cent, with plans currently in place to reach 98 per cent coverage before the end of the year. The team has plans to go even further, after announcing, on 3 June, an additional phase of work to provide connectivity to approximately 5,000 more premises, including over 550 businesses, in some of the most rural parts of Suffolk. The work will be carried out by Openreach – operator of the UK's largest phone and broadband network, used by the likes of BT, Sky, Plusnet, and TalkTalk – and is set to start as soon as deployment under the current contract ends. Work will continue until September 2022. Faster broadband provides many benefits including staying in contact with friends and family through video conferencing services, easier web browsing and online shopping, the ability to stream high definition video, and work from home. Covid-19 has led to many of these benefits becoming even more crucial during times of social distancing and will have a large part to play during the recovery phase.

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