

# Caring for our County

## Annual Report from Barry Stone

### County Councillor for the Loddon Division

Given the present challenging situation my report for Annual Parish Meetings this year comprises of the actions NCC are taking to support the residents of Norfolk to help reduce the impact of Covid-19 and to assist in bringing about a swift return to normality as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, this is going to be a long, expensive and arduous task but with assistance from government grants and the wonderful work of the NHS allied with the effort of the general public in adhering to lockdown and social distancing rules we will get there in the end.

I am still here and available to help in any way I can, as I have been doing on a regular basis throughout the lockdown. I hope you are all keeping safe and well and I look forward to attending future Parish Meetings in person as soon as possible.

Kind regards and best wishes,

Barry.



## Details of Norfolk County Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

### Corporate

- Since 17 March 2020, all NCC colleagues have been working from home except for where essential services require colleagues to be on the premises (i.e. customer contact centre). Non-essential buildings were closed, and activities were re-prioritised to reflect the new reality.
- A rapid roll-out of “soft telephony” (MS Teams), Teams voice conferencing facilities and other remote working technology (such as Zoom) was undertaken and has enabled over 5000 employees to access NCC systems remotely and continue to support the organisation and the public. Systems to enable virtual council meetings have also been successfully set up. E-learning and training guidance, produced concurrently, have enabled colleagues to make best use of the new systems, which have been robust throughout this period.
- The Human Resources team mobilised rapidly to support the organisation in understanding and responding to a range of new government legislation and guidance such as health and safety, staff testing and working safely, school closures, furlough and dealing with caring responsibilities.
- New people policies were rapidly promulgated, to provide guidance to colleagues and managers on flexible working, managing remote teams, as well as new leave and bereavement support arrangements. Regular dialogue and well-trusted relationships with the union body has facilitated rapid change in our policy arrangements.
- A revised internal communications approach was adopted including clear, directional updates for all managers to support their role in managing new working arrangements and enabling their teams to keep safe and connected.

- A new “skills bank” was developed to enable the effective redeployment of colleagues to critical support roles across the organisation and workforce planning for step-down facilities. At the same time, our HR system has been enhanced to include a dashboard for daily tracking of absence, giving us a good understanding of our employees’ availability and capacity. Daily briefings to all managers have ensured that up to date, critical information reaches managers and staff in a timely manner.
- A proactive Manager Outreach service has ensured that we ensure managers are well- supported and guided in a difficult dynamic along with critical incident support should this be required.
- Our Finance team have worked hard to ensure a pragmatic approach in allocating the £27m of the government COVID-19 grant, supporting the provider market and temporarily suspending new charging policies during this period.
- Early in the epidemic Public Health and Intelligence & Analytics colleagues started work to develop an epidemiological model to predict how many cases were likely to occur in Norfolk and the level of increased need for health and social care services. The excellent work undertaken by analysts to develop the model and refine it with epidemiologists from University East Anglia and Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital, has put Norfolk SCG in a strong position to inform planning
- A multi-disciplinary expert team from Strategy & Governance, Public Health and the Leader’s Office have been working throughout to coordinate and update information and briefings for County Council elected members, the Norfolk MPs, and key stakeholders across the whole public service and voluntary sector system in Norfolk, as well as provide advice and assistance to constituents making contact via their MPs.
- Communications and Public Health lead officers have regularly responded to media requests, including Q&A on BBC Radio Norfolk with Dr. Louise Smith Director of Public Health and other members of her team. Other work includes interviews for the EDP and other media. We have provided public health advice, and psychology expertise to the communications team to produce a series of communications products:
  - Basic messaging on hand washing, and social distancing, and to provide the public with up to date information, advice and guidance on the pandemic.
  - Spearheaded a localised campaign, complementing national advice, and using behaviour change techniques to encourage Norfolk residents to practice good hand hygiene, stay home and maintain social distancing.
  - Working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), we have led a campaign to ensure that local businesses are supporting national messages and are playing their key role in ensuring key public messages are reaching our communities.

## **Public Health Norfolk**

- Norfolk County Council has a duty to improve the health of our residents and protect them from risks to their public health with a function supportive but distinct from Public Health England.
- This unprecedented public health emergency has graphically demonstrated the value and effectiveness of a council based public health team providing rapid and effective local leadership and specialist support to the council and across the system both here in Norfolk and regionally, complimenting and supporting the work of Public Health England across the eastern region.
- Taking full advantage of its unique role within the health & social care system and utilising the strong relationships already established, Norfolk County Council’s Public Health team have worked tirelessly to provide a wide range of critical functions from specialist public health advice on issues such as PPE, testing and mortuary management, data modelling and analysis to support the NHS, supporting our providers to re-configure public health services to maintain safe critical support to those in need whilst relieving the pressure on primary care and so protecting the NHS. Working

closely with our Communications team, they have provided clear messages and advice to the general public and members with the Director of Public Health providing regular radio interviews and press articles.

- Planning for a pandemic was started well before Covid19 was discovered. In September 2019 Norfolk tested, under exercise, a Flu Pandemic Plan, enabling the Norfolk Resilience Forum to draw up emergency plans for pandemic flu, and for other system functions such as the management of mass deaths.
- Norfolk County Council's Public Health played the lead role in establishing the emergency planning response prior to the first cases in the UK. The flu pandemic plan and excess deaths plan were reviewed in early February 2020 as the Covid19 epidemic developed in Asia. Emergency planners, along with community NHS providers and Public Health stood up and chaired the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) and Tactical Coordination Group (TCG) by 12 February to support implementation of the national strategy that initially focussed on containment. Support cells to address mortality pathways, epidemiological modelling, and communications were established at this stage also.
- Subsequently, across Norfolk, enhanced case identification with community testing (led by the NHS and in line with Public Health England guidance), isolation and contact tracing was implemented. At this stage the general public were asked to take measures such as hand washing, reporting symptoms linked to key risks such as travel, and change travel plans. These principles of basic communicable disease control remain our key messages and the bastion of management of control of infection spread.
- With this transition from the containment to a delay phase of the strategy, the council's public health staff have established a 7-day rota system providing public health technical advice, interpreting scientific evidence and legal regulations, supporting commissioning and business continuity actions to Norfolk County Council (NCC) Gold & Silver command. This included advising the resilience forum, SCG and TCG, the NHS incident response and Infection Control Groups. Our team also supported many vulnerable people – providing public health advice, guidance and support to drug and alcohol services and the multi-agency group for homelessness and vulnerable people across Norfolk.
- Our staff have led a re-prioritisation approach to maintain vital public health frontline services and have worked closely with all our providers to develop innovative responses to maintain these services. As a result all commissioned services have implemented new operational models for critical services and agreed which services could be temporarily withdrawn focused on easing the pressure on NHS primary and hospital care.
- Non urgent, preventative activity in primary care has been suspended for the peak of the epidemic to allow GPs to focus on acutely unwell patients, again protecting the patients most in need and the NHS.
- Significant partnership work has enabled us to procure and set up a temporary mortuary centre at Scottow, and to develop a mortality pathway, ensuring people are treated with respect and dignity in death.

## **Education and schools**

- The Council's Education department rapidly re-shaped the role and function of the local education system, moving from a universal model to a focus on support for families of keyworker staff and continued provision for vulnerable children. To achieve that, the Council brokered the creation of a cluster model - supporting schools and settings to work together, to share resources and maintain resilience and continuity of provision. A bank of support staff has been identified, including supply teachers, who are available to supplement school staffing teams where this is required. Social care

teams continue to work with schools to put in place support measures to enable vulnerable children (those with a social worker) to attend school.

- The Council's Children's Services has supported the work of schools to enable families to access Free School Meals, and, following the launch of the new National Voucher system, has played a key role in helping schools navigate the system, and reporting issues to the DfE. Full FAQs for schools and parents have been produced by the Children's Services Learning and Inclusion team, also available on our website. The process for parents accessing the vouchers has been complex, and the Council's Customer Service Centre has been supporting parents as required.
- Special schools have remained open for key worker and vulnerable children, one of which has extended provision to mainstream school children with ASD. A strategic plan has been agreed with all the Special Schools and shared with the Department for Education to ensure that families and children are appropriately supported. All but one are planning to open for some children from the start of the summer term.
- For children and their families with special education needs and disabilities, the Children's Services SEND team have agreed revised approaches to the Education Health and Care Plan process. Parents' forums have been consulted, as has the Department for Education, so that the new system is fully supported.
- The Council has also been providing additional support to early years providers to remain open for the children of key workers. This has included a similar level of coordination and support to that for mainstream schools, as well as financial, staffing and catering support.
- Engagement with Norfolk's Further Education colleges has also been led by Children's Services, to enable appropriate educational provision for key vulnerable learners post-16. This has included ensuring high risk children are jointly assessed with social workers to ensure the right provision is being made. Weekly welfare checks have been put in place, for all 16-18 year olds who are not in employment, education or training, and we continue to monitor those children who are not on a school roll.
- Children's services have had a departmental-wide focus on vulnerable children. This has included a strategy to re-engage those after the Easter school holidays in coming back into school, or having a robust plan around each child to ensure their welfare and safety.
- Planning has been put in place by Children's Services to ensure that there is a robust worst-case scenario plan in the event of capacity across the county becoming insufficient to provide care for early years and school-age children of key workers. This provision is sited around the three acute hospitals and extended to Norfolk's Cottage hospitals where they are identified as possible field hospitals.

## Children and Young People's Social Care

- Faced with a significant reduction in safeguarding referrals, the Council has launched a new campaign to protect children during coronavirus lockdown. [See Something, Hear Something, Say Something campaign](#) has been launched to keep children safe, as families face pressure of staying home. The county-wide campaign encourages everyone to look out for the county's children, and has focused on protection from harm within the family, online exploitation, as well as children's and young people's mental health.
- Strategically all our partnerships around children have combined to ensure safeguarding is the focus of everybody's business.
- Critical safeguarding and family support services continue to be delivered, albeit provided in different ways. Face to face visits are still taking place for those with highest need. Child Protection

Conferences, Looked after Children reviews, Fostering Approval Panels, Adoption Panels, and Court Work and Contact are all now virtual.

- The fostering service continues to support foster carers in their home through a range of technology. Staff are in regular contact with foster families as needed and can continue to provide clinical psychology support and advice through the Foster Care Hub.
- We remain in contact with our care leavers using many different social media platforms and technology to ensure they are safe and well
- We have also worked with partners to launch a new web page [www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/mentalhealth](http://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/mentalhealth). This is now the single place to find out how to access mental health advice and support for 0 -25 year olds in Norfolk & Waveney.
- Our residential children's homes have remained open and fully functioning despite some staff absence.
- Children's commissioners have continued to be in regular contact with providers as part of monitoring their capacity to maintain essential and critical services and at this point, and whilst the style of service delivery is changing, most are able to adapt and continue to support children and families. Many of the services we commission have moved their support for children, young people or families onto telephone or online channels, in line with the current social distancing restrictions.
- Our children community partnership teams are working together with partner agencies reaching out to families in need of additional support before a crisis occurs at this very difficult time. Very importantly we have maintained and are building our direct engagement with children and young people to inform our communication and changes to service delivery.

## Adult Social Care

The department and our dedicated staff have flexibly and efficiently responded to the health crisis. We have seen:

- Proactive contact that has ensured 7000 people have been risk assessed to ensure contingency planning in place
- Dedicated work on waiting lists and review lists to ensure prioritisation
- 7 day a week working across all operational areas, (funded through over-time)
- A switch to mobile working and call centre arrangements to enable flexible and safe working.
- Strengthened Emergency Duty Team arrangements in place, in partnership with Children's Services to ensure urgent response arrangements 24 hours.
- Formation of leadership arrangements with Norfolk and Waveney CCG to oversee integrated health and social care arrangements, and to mutually agree commissioning, delivery and quality arrangements.
- Social work and occupational health teams have, with health, fundamentally re-designed hospital discharge processes. Based on the Home First principle, this has helped to ensure there is capacity in all three hospitals and that people do not stay longer than is absolutely necessary
- Mental health and learning disability teams ensure weekly and 2 x weekly phone contact across the entire caseload.
- Teams have called around 2,100 people who receive their support as a Direct Payment (a payment directly into their bank).

- All individuals with learning disabilities whose services, such as day opportunities, have been reduced/curtailed due to social distancing requirements have been contacted by telephone to offer support and check on welfare.
- Staff normally employed to deliver building-based day opportunities are being deployed to support individuals/their families in different ways – for example, to accompany someone with learning disabilities who needs to go for a walk for their daily exercise.
- Urgent respite to prevent care breakdown (urgent respite) has been commissioned and it will be for people with learning disabilities and / or autism.
- New resources for mental wellbeing for the whole population are also available to support people with autism,
- Working the CCG and Norfolk Constabulary to produce a letter that people with a learning disability or autism can have to explain the specific social distancing guidance in place for them enables them to leave the house more than once a day, if part of a care plan
- Working with district councils, responding to the Government directive to home everybody living on the streets by securing temporary accommodation for around 200 people including hotels, BnBs and community centres
- Safeguarding focus maintained, through video conferencing to speak to providers and families; focus on scam awareness; extended weekend availability for safeguarding consultations; development of overview arrangements with Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board.
- **Norfolk Assistance Scheme** developed to be able to provide white goods and money transfer via Paypal to deliver money to peoples phone when in emergency need. Other electronic process of money exchange created to avoid cash and people visiting offices
- We are currently forecasting that the overall response to coronavirus will cost adult social care services over £22m in the first quarter of this year. This is through additional costs faced by the care market, changing needs of individuals, new and expanded services, including supporting community services and changes to approaches affecting level of income and plans for the year. Both internal and external staffing remains a challenge with people redeployed to meet pressures. A national and local recruitment campaign is underway to attract more people into adult social care.
- Our Commissioning Team have been working determinedly to ensure we are supporting our provider market and their workforce to remain sustainable in providing care to vulnerable people in Norfolk.
- Ensuring our providers are well supported, with easy access to current guidance and advice, we have maintained extensive and sustained support for the care market through our Quality Assurance team, their expertise and advice. This has included:
  - Collating and updating a comprehensive web page [found here on the NCC website](#) to support our commissioned service providers
  - Establishing a dedicated and single point of contact Provider Hub, for providers to raise questions, issues and concerns
  - Regular and proactive phone calls with residential and domiciliary care providers to pick up and anticipate issues and challenges
  - In collaboration with Health, writing weekly correspondence to residential, nursing and domiciliary providers to keep them updated of the steps Norfolk are taking to support them

- Twice weekly meetings with system partners including the CQC to address emerging issues and build a collaborative approach to assist PHE to assist care homes in their response to outbreaks
- Conducting virtual Quality Monitoring Reviews of care services Action Plans to ensure they're continuing to meet their improvement points.
- Advising care homes on making admissions from acute hospitals by thinking creatively about how to accommodate people in care homes who need to be isolated. This has seen some difficult to place people be successfully discharged into care homes because of our engagement with care home managers.
- We have been completely managing PPE allocation and distribution from central govt sources to providers and giving support around the ongoing challenge of securing and sustaining PPE:
  - Whilst providers are expected to source their own supplies, the council has provided a backstop. Up to the week beginning April 27th, the Quality Assurance Team had ensured about 305,000 items had been provided out of emergency stocks.
  - In a BBC survey, 8 out of 8 Norfolk care homes have been satisfied with NCCs response to urgent PPE requirements
- We are working with the care market to make sure that providers have continuity of income.
  - For those continuing to deliver care we have agreed a premium payment of 6% over the next 12 weeks to help sustain providers with the additional costs of continuing to operate at this time. This has resulted in payments of £3.5m to providers to date.
  - In addition, we know that different providers will be facing different challenges and therefore we are asking care providers to contact us via the Provider Hub to discuss any additional financial issues that they are facing.
- Continued collaboration to secure extra capacity in the market:
  - In response to modelling information, commissioners have secured additional capacity in care homes and in the community - 90 block beds and an additional 550 hours a week enhanced home care
  - A new step-down facility is being created at Cawston Lodge, a former care home. This has required buildings and facilities management, the sourcing of equipment, recruitment and re-deployment of staff and appropriate social work leadership and oversight.
  - Additional beds for people with complex dementia and mental health issues have been open at Carlton Court near Lowestoft. This will help support flow of people out of acute hospitals.
- In alignment with national announcements we have communicated the arrangements made by the local NHS for our staff and their household's to be tested for Coronavirus.

## **Community services:**

- The staff in Norfolk Library and Information, and Adult Learning Services have done an amazing job of proving virtual services to our residents, from online Bounce and Rhyme and story-times, to a whole range of learning opportunities – the innovation and dedication to get these offers up and running so quickly has been incredible and will help so many people who are isolating at home.
- Working closely together with Norfolk Museums Service, Norfolk Arts Service and Active Norfolk, this shared digital offer and re-thinking of how we deliver some of our existing work streams and

activities means that more people can engage with virtual school games, online exercises, adult education courses, and digital museum learning programmes for our school age children

- Trading Standards have been working hard to ensure public safety with information on scams, and ensure the business community have the right advice (and sometimes enforcement) to allow them to comply with new rules.
- Customer Services have completely refocused their efforts to ensure people are able to receive the help and support they need whilst isolating. In addition to still having to be physically based at County Hall and implement stringent social distancing, the team have responded to requests from the Norfolk Resilience Forum to be open 7 days a week.
- The corporate web team have not only been developing a vast suite of resources related to Covid-19, but also still diligently pushing ahead with the new myNet project which was launched on 15 April and ensures better communication with all our remote workers.
- The post and fulfilment team have redirected all the County's post and have worked hard on a digital solution ably assisted by the CS project managers.
- The shift in the type of work required of officers in Community and Environmental Services has in many cases been fundamental, in particular when working closely with district colleagues and other partner organisations
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service staff have provided logistics support directly for the NHS and in support of the SCG arrangements. They have also deployed staff to drive ambulances helping to extend the number of the ambulance shifts.
- Our transport team have helped the Clinical Commissioning Group to free up beds for Covid-19 patients, as well as working with local bus operators to ensure enough services are provided so that key workers, key workers children and vulnerable children can get to work and schools.
- The Highways teams have continued all planned maintenance and repair work across our network of roads, keeping the County moving and enabling key workers to reach their destinations safely.

### **Food and medicine distribution:**

- NCC and South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils have led the Community Resilience Delivery Group in charge of the distribution of food and essential medicines across the County.
- The Group have undertaken a significant data reconciliation exercise, ensuring that the right people are identified and supported. This has been a challenging task, achieved through strong partnership working across the whole local government system and key voluntary organisations.
- The Group has ensured that over 500 emergency food packages were deployed to district help hubs to help the shielding population. A central food distribution hub has also been established and there is a daily two-way communication with all District Councils to understand and meet demand.
- The Norfolk Community Foundation set up the Covid-19 Community Response Fund to support our local charities working hard on the ground to keep vulnerable people safe and well. With a contribution of £100k from NCC, the fund currently stands at over £700k, and the Community Resilience Delivery Group are working with the Norfolk Community Foundation to ensure the funds are allocated where most needed.

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

- Despite a global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), Norfolk County Council has been able to provide its staff with PPE in accordance with Public Health England (PHE) guidance. This has been achieved through a combination of not undertaking non-essential visits and sourcing essential PPE.

- Guidance has continued to develop and shape over the period, requiring a pacey and dynamic response to guide employees appropriately, remove anxiety and give clarity.
- The council has been able to source hand sanitiser locally, including through working with the University of East Anglia (UEA) to produce sanitiser to the World Health Organisation specification, and more recently working with local distilleries.
- Recognising that masks would be a particular issue, the council joined an aggregated procurement with ESPO and placed an initial order on 20 March. The council has since sourced masks from a variety of providers and has been able at all times to provide them to staff.
- A donation of 5000 FFP2 masks from a local business has been allocated to the Fire and Rescue service.
- Recognising the broader system-wide requirements for masks, the council has ordered large quantities from a variety of sources. This includes importing 300,000 masks via a local agent, and working with Essex County Council to source a further million masks from China, both for Norfolk and Essex's own requirements.
- The council has resourced the Norfolk Resilience Forum's efforts to distribute equipment to all organisations suffering from an immediate shortage. In addition to distributing PPE sourced from central government, the NRF has also distributed equipment sourced by the County Council – in particular hand sanitiser which the government has not been able to provide.
- Over the Easter bank holiday weekend alone, over 500,000 PPE items and 800 litres of hand sanitiser, were distributed by an NCC team on behalf of the Norfolk Resilience Forum to primary care and social care organisations with the most urgent needs.
- All this has been achieved through the extraordinary efforts of the sourcing and logistics teams who have been able to obtain necessary equipment in the face of quite exceptional circumstances.

## **Volunteering**

- Nearly 3000 people across Norfolk have volunteered to help within their communities. The volunteer effort has been developed with Voluntary Norfolk, the Districts and leadership from the Libraries service and HR. .
- NCC HR are leading on the process for validating and running appropriate checks to ensure volunteers deployed in our name meet appropriate standards and can be deployed within the community through the districts, supporting vulnerable people.

## **Redeployment of our staff**

- A large number of staff across NCC have been released and deployed from their normal job role to support the Norfolk Resilience Forum, quickly adapting to set up vital work streams using their expertise, knowledge and specialist skills. This includes analysis of data that helps us provide support for the most vulnerable people in Norfolk; the coordination, vetting and recruitment of volunteers; offering support to our District Council partners; making outbound calls to vulnerable people; planning essential food deliveries; packing and distributing PPE – in short, ensuring that we all act as one system.
- Members of Public Health and the Complaints team have been supporting a range of critical activities across NCC, making welfare calls to vulnerable residents, triaging need and making referrals as required, supporting the Brokerage service, to update and record information on our social care systems. They have also been involved in sourcing food supplies for the emergency food

boxes for residents. These activities will continue throughout the whole period of “shielding” of our vulnerable people.

- Over 500 of our staff signed up for the skills bank, launched specifically to ensure that front line and critical services are supported as needed. A number of our staff have assisting with undertaking assessments, assisting brokerage, and recording information on finance systems (CONTROCC).

## Supporting Norfolk’s businesses and workforce

- The Employment & Skills Team have worked with the District Councils and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) to develop and launch a portal advertising job vacancies across the region: <https://newanglia.co.uk/employment-opportunities/>, while in terms of apprenticeships, they issued a survey, in conjunction with New Anglia and Suffolk County Council, to gauge the impact of Covid-19 on providers, employers and apprentices. The team are also increasing their social media presence and keeping our network up to date on the support available during the pandemic.
- To support the Norfolk economy, it is vital that partners continue to work together to support SMEs and key sectors. Through joined up working with the NALEP, Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses, we have been ensuring consistent messaging across all of our websites, with the New Anglia Growth Hub acting as the primary source of information, advice and guidance for businesses. The County Council’s website also continues to enable them to sign up to NALEP, Chamber and FSB support newsletters, as appropriate, from our [COVID-19 business support page](#).

## Keeping the County moving

- Disposal of around 4,000 tonnes of rubbish a week continues to run smoothly, meaning that the collections from households are unaffected.
- The Norfolk Record Office continues to provide a service for those urgently requiring copies of birth, death and marriage certificates
- The closed landfill team continues to ensure the safety and environmental aftercare of landfill sites we are responsible for across Norfolk, making sure that gas and leachate control systems remain effective and that we keep using landfill gas to generate electricity where we can.
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service have maintained response capability and their availability of “on call” appliances.
- Fire inspections and Community safety activities have been restricted, but continue to be delivered to “High Risk” groups.
- Planning Officers have continued to process planning applications in line with the Secretary of State’s expectation that planning decisions will not be delayed as a result of the lockdown.
- Museums continue to deliver key projects including *Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England* and *Kick the Dust Norfolk* with project teams working remotely and developing new opportunities for people to engage through digital content
- The Environment team are providing key advice to the public and are developing promotional campaigns to help promote the visitor economy, post closedown. The work on the Council’s Environmental Policy continues positively