
Communities, Youth & Public Safety portfolio

- report for full council, December 2020

While this year has been, and continues to be, one of great challenge and change, there has been a truly herculean effort from all sections within the District Council in ensuring we deliver the essential services to our residents. The Officers in the Community Section are no exception to this. They were, prior to the second lockdown in the middle of planning a return to 'business as usual' albeit still with some restrictions in place. They were so much looking forward to getting back onto the streets with the intention of meeting residents again. In normal times we would have been out and about in our Towns and villages offering advice and support, particularly so during the summer months. This was not to be. That said, we have not been sitting on our hands; far from it.

The following is a detailed account of our recent activity and I hope it gives you some idea of the very many varied activities and roles we have undertaken since my last report to Full Council on 8th October.

Community Response Hub

The Community Response Hub is open and available for those who need it. The hub is staffed on Mondays to Fridays between the hours of 9.00am to 4.00pm. It is effectively a call centre whereby residents can obtain assistance with shopping, prescription collections and befriending, as well as signpost them to other statutory services where this is required. The telephone number is **03333 408218**. Residents can also email communityresponse@uttlesford.gov.uk. We were much better placed when this second lockdown came into being. We were up and running immediately because we had our data base of volunteers from the first lockdown already in place. We are most grateful to Volunteer Uttlesford and the Council for Voluntary Services Uttlesford (CVSU) for their assistance in galvanising together the very many groups of volunteers and individuals who have offered to help in the crisis. "The Dunkirk spirit" has been remarkable and the enthusiasm, hard work and commitment has to be applauded.

We continue to work with the Government and Essex County Council to ensure that we have the details of our CEV's (Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) and that we make regular contact to ensure they all have access to support services where needed.

Funding for essential supplies has been used in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau, Essex Children and Families Welfare service and the Essex Boys and Girls club, through projects such as 'Holiday Hunger'. Vouchers have been made available for families to access food which links up with the foodbank service. The Christmas period is fast approaching along with the school holidays and at this stage we are aware funding will be made available from Essex County Council but we have not as yet had guidance as to what this may entail. We do know however that the 'Holiday Hunger' programme is to be extended with further funding and we are working with the Essex Boys and Girls clubs to identify areas and venues where this will take place. We will distribute details on social media and on our Website when information becomes known.

The Hub will be distributing 1,000 Christmas gift bags to residents in our communities who have been affected by loneliness or isolation because of the pandemic. This will take place between 1st and 18th of this month.

Safeguarding

We have continued to offer Safeguarding training and it has been delivered to Day Centre staff throughout the district, with CV-19 secure conditions adhered to. We have also delivered Covid secure advice to businesses across the district. Safeguarding visits and the number of referrals are on the increase and we are closely monitoring the situation. This is in addition to other cases that we were already dealing with. Cases are complex and are not a simple fix.

We continue to work closely with Officers in our Licensing and Environmental Health team, particularly in respect to the taxi and private hire trade, being part of our commitment in promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk.

Youth

Since the first lockdown organised Youth activity throughout the District has been almost non-existent. The gathering of groups of young people inside buildings was seen to be too much of a risk. That said, in between lockdowns Youth clubs began to carry out risk assessments and subject to the layout of the buildings they began again to operate with social distancing and limiting the numbers allowed to attend. Organisations such as the Scouts and Girl Guides had received instructions by their governing bodies not to operate and their activities remain on hold. The Army & Air Cadet Corps and the Essex Volunteer Police Cadets are in a similar position.

We have an established Youth initiatives working group, which is made up of representatives from youth organisations, parish and town councillors across Uttlesford, our UDC community development officer and myself. At a recent meeting it was decided we should use the opportunity of the lockdown to try and recruit some new volunteers to assist in youth work. A social media campaign was undertaken and resulting from this 6 good volunteers have been found. Each have been offered Essex Youth Service induction training, free DBS checks and a variety of opportunities for future volunteering positions.

Stansted Parish Council have had some success in recruiting 6 young people to become members of their Parish Youth Council as well as finding adult volunteers to help run the venture. There is with regards to our own district youth council (the YC) an ongoing process of engagement with the schools with the intention of recruiting more members. The YC has been meeting fortnightly by Zoom. We are also working in the schools to deliver further Hate Crime awareness training [one is planned in January at Saffron Walden County High] and to help find support for those young people struggling to cope through Covid, placing into position a means of enabling them to ask for help. We also have a youth council representative on the local plan community stakeholder forum and plan to have additional attendees at some of the upcoming meetings such as climate change, leisure and healthy lifestyles which are subjects they have particular interest in.

The Youth Initiatives working group is currently considering funding bids for this financial year and most projects will be working [where they can] to mitigate against the effects of the pandemic. Projects under consideration include Open Door counselling, Accuro special needs, Saffron Walden District Guiding, Saffron Walden Youth Outreach project, Newport Youth Club and Creative Walden. The Stansted and Great Dunmow Youth centres are funded through a slightly different scheme of match funding.

I am keen to develop the theme of 'the voice' of our youth and their needs. I have asked our Officers to see how best we can engage with them. At present this is limited but as and when we escape into some form of normal activity we will need to reach out. If we are to be able to say that we have genuinely consulted young people, either immediately through the local plan consultation or more long term through the youth council, I think we must make a big effort to involve many more people in the process, starting with our senior management team here at UDC and working down through officers and district councillors to the towns and parishes. Their support will be paramount.

Hopefully the needs of our youth can be built into the new local plan, with facilities such as community and 'drop in' centres and other recreational amenities. I am sure you all appreciate that not all of our young people want to participate in organised activities and we need to acknowledge their needs. This will I'm sure be a long and winding road but if there is a will then I am sure there is a way. We are somewhat limited at the moment but I am hopeful that as the situation improves we will be able to advance this agenda. We must remember the young people today are not the young people of yesterday. So we can no longer focus on old models and approaches rather we should be adapting new models and approaches to meet the needs of children and young people now and beyond.

Grants

The Voluntary Support Grant is to be re advertised for 2020-21. We are urging voluntary and charitable organisations within the District to apply for funding to help with the costs of providing essential services to local communities due to the pandemic. The grant is for revenue expenditure only and cannot be used towards capital projects such as refurbishment of buildings. This page is now on the website (Community Grants) along with the application form and the closing date, which is 15th January 2021.

Myself and Officers recently met to discuss 22 applications received for financial assistance under the community grants scheme. I am pleased to report we supported the majority of these and as a result a total of just under £38,000 will be distributed.

Community Safety Report

Our UDC Safety Hub meetings are continuing, albeit via the platform of 'Microsoft Teams'. Intelligence is shared with 'partners' along with UDC colleagues, such as licensing and environmental health. This has assisted in the issuing of Community Protection Warnings across the district. These have been issued for properties emanating noxious fumes, as well as neighbour disputes. Police Officers, local authorities and police community support officers can issue Community Protection Notices (CPN's) so long as a written warning has been issued. These are essentially used to control anti-social behaviour.

Police have reported there were a total of 36 criminal damage offences in Uttlesford during the month of October, whereby vehicles were driven over farmland / fields and crops causing damage – in most cases these offences are believed to be linked to hare coursing. As a result of concerns expressed by some farmers at what they perceived was a lack of police activity in the Broxted, Elsenham and Debden areas the subject was discussed at a meeting of the Uttlesford Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The Chief Inspector in charge of the Essex Police Rural Engagement Team (RET) was invited to attend. He was made aware of the concerns expressed by the farming communities and it was agreed action from the police was required and he gave an assurance that his team would assist the local community policing team. This resulted in an awareness campaign being carried out on social media by Essex Police and ourselves.

Our UDC community safety officer held discussions with the local district councillors and as a result attended a meeting of the Broxted Parish Council to talk about options available which might assist in reducing the criminal activity. Following these conversations our safety officer applied the process of sharing the problem with other partners such as Essex Police, the Essex 'Watch' liaison officer, Essex Highways (public rights of way) and with the local farmers themselves. This is an excellent example of how the 'Partnership' and multi-agency approach comes together to form a unit to tackle matters such as this which affect our communities. This has now progressed to local farmers establishing a communications network and we hope this will lead to them having a Farm Watch operating in the not too distant future. The CSP has also produced and funded a postcard in the form of a miniature poster which contains information for the public on the subject of hare coursing and to report cases actually taking place by using 999 and also encourages the use of the "What 3 words" App which accurately pinpoints the location; even if in the middle of a field. As this outreach develops we will engage with other Parish Councils and their farming communities to assist them in protecting their property. We hope to be able to use Broxted as an example of best practice when we reach out to other rural locations.

I think it is worth mentioning at this point the three priorities for 2017 to 2020 of the Uttlesford Community Safety Partnership, which are. I) To protect vulnerable people. Ii) To reduce crime, re-offending and the fear of crime. Iii) To continue effective partnership working, to meet emerging local threats and issues.

Our UDC Community Safety Team (CST) continue to work on the broader issues of rural crime. In so doing we will carry on supporting Essex Police, who themselves have called upon other agencies to seek ways of best tackling the off-road

issues of damage to the land/ crops and the local byways. Our local community policing team have together with their colleagues in RET have put into place an operation to hopefully combat and reduce this form of anti-social behaviour on the byways in the Debden, Wimbish and the Widdington areas. I am pleased to report this is taking place. It sees a focus on increasing uniform police patrols on the byways and the surrounding areas. Where appropriate police will use their powers under the Road Traffic Act and issue CPN's to deter this behaviour. The RET team have been in contact with the Green Lane Association and the Byway Action Group, both of whom promote the proper use of byways. Essex County Council Highways Agency have also been asked to assist by imposing temporary closures of the byways. These closures will see substantial physical barriers/ locked gates erected and traditional road traffic act regulation signage placed at the side of the barriers. Hopefully with everyone working together the situation in the locations effected can be resolved. The CSP have been instrumental in funding and will have warning notices, which contain their logo displayed at the entrances to and along stretches of these byways advising perpetrators of prosecution and the penalties that can be imposed.

Finally, on the subject of rural crime it is our intention to hold a Rural Farming Communities event on 9th December, subject to CV-19 rules allowing us so to do. This will concentrate on the parishes of Broxton, Elsenham, Henham, Chickney and the north section of Takeley. If considered a success our wish will be to extend such events to other areas. Our ultimate objective will be to visit each farm in Uttlesford within the next 12 months. We encourage communities in urban areas to set up Neighbourhood Watches and we will try and persuade the more isolated areas of the district to follow suit or establish Farm Watch groups.

Scam and fraud awareness matters are distributed weekly to all Town and Parish clerks and the Uttlesford Crime Alert Facebook page, as well as the Neighbourhood Watch Steering Group for them to further distribute. These are also sent to the UDC media department for publicising to our communities and all members.

'Frontline' is a large community project where organisations and services sign up to improve people's knowledge and access to local services. It is essentially an online service that helps the public to find details of local health and wellbeing services via a mobile telephone App. Uttlesford Council for Voluntary Services assists in running the service and we promote and support the initiative. Interestingly all Essex Police officers in Uttlesford have this facility available to them on their mobile telephones. This has enabled officers to have this data base at hand when attending incidents that require intervention by other agencies. Referrals by the police in the month of October were numerous and varied and the second highest recorded month for them since having the facility in the last 15 months.

A Community Safety leaflet, was distributed to all households by Royal Mail at the end of last month. Local businesses have advertised within this leaflet enabling a saving in printing costs. The leaflet explains who the Uttlesford CSP are and what they do, as well as provide key safety messages, how to report crime and how to join various watch schemes.

It has become noticeable that the lorry parks at the Birchanger Services, M11 junction 8 has become a target area for thieves to steal from HGV's parked and unattended. A funding request from our local Essex Police community policing team was received by the Community Safety Partnership. The committee agreed to support the crime prevention initiative at that locality which consists of a message translating into 13 different languages and advises lorry drivers to report any suspicious activity. The signs will be attached to lampposts and affixed to notice boards within the public areas of the 'services'. In simple terms they warn of thieves operating in this location.

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service have started carrying out targeted fire prevention interventions. These will be, in the main, in areas that are on the outer boundaries of where our fire stations are located. These will predominantly be our smaller villages and hamlets, those which are probably located 10 minutes or more from the nearest fire station. Free fire alarms have been distributed to residents to either fit themselves, or if unable arrangements were made to install them. Every household in Birchanger was visited on 12th November. Clavering will be visited on 3rd December. The following are the results for Birchanger. Doors knocked **314**, Face-to-face engagements **184**, Properties without smoke alarms **59** (109 alarms issued). These figures illustrate that **32%** of homes in this area were without smoke alarms or had defective and old alarms that needed to be replaced.

I do not wish to sound alarmist but we should be ever mindful that the UK faces a real threat from terrorism with crowded places remaining an attractive target. Crowded places include shopping centres, sports stadia, bars, pubs and clubs which are easily accessible to the public and attractive to terrorists. Such attacks could happen anywhere as the

terrorist ventures away from targeting our major cities. Of course lockdown has removed many such venues from our daily routines. However, as the restrictions start to ease and we return to some normality so does the risk of attack. Our current threat level stands at SEVERE. The National Counter Terrorism Security Office have produced a considerable amount of literature on the subject and online training is available to help us understand the threat we all face and of the ways we can mitigate it and by so doing help to keep us and others safe. I am pleased to say that 49% of all UDC staff have completed the PREVENT online training. Members are reminded that they too can complete the eLearning package and I would encourage everyone to do so by following this link. Remember to be forewarned is to be forearmed. From personal experience I have been involved in many terrorist attacks in London and I was more than grateful for knowing what to do in such an occurrence.

<https://www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen1.html>

A Saffron Walden Business Watch is to be launched in Shire Hill on 10th December, which has materialised in response to an increase in catalytic converter thefts.

Operations / initiatives supported

Road Safety Week was held between 16th and 22nd November. This is the UK's biggest road safety event and was co-ordinated by Brake, the road safety charity. Statistics show that speed contributes to one in five fatal crashes in the UK so this year the charity highlighted the issue of speed in their campaign 'no need to speed'. Why is speed so important? The formula is simple: the higher the speed the longer the stopping distance, the harder the crash and the greater the risk of death and injury. 'No need to speed' is a reminder to everyone of how the speed they travel affects other people. We supported the event on social media and sharing posts during this week.

National Adult Safeguarding Week took place between the 16th and 22nd November. The first ever National event was held in 2018 by the Ann Craft Trust, who used such a week to raise awareness of safeguarding adult's issues. The Ann Craft Trust is a national charity which exists to minimise the risk of abuse of disabled children and adults at risk. For the third year running, the Essex Safeguarding Adults Board (ESAB), along with ourselves and the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner supported National Safeguarding Adults Week. This year focussing specifically around the theme of **Financial Abuse**. ESAB hosted a week of virtual activity where professionals who work with adults supported the campaign through listening to podcasts and booking onto webinars that featured a range of guest speakers from a number of organisations across Essex. We supported ESAB on social media and sharing posts during the campaign week.

We assisted in 'Operation Henderson', this being a Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation awareness campaign. The intention being to focus on train stations, in businesses and with Taxi drivers. This was carried out digitally during the week of 23rd November. Our outreach work, safety conditions permitting will be moved to January. This again will be undertaken at train stations, in businesses and with Taxi drivers, giving information as to what signs to look out for that could constitute Child Sexual Exploitation. This will be in the form of leaflets, posters and direct conversation. This project will be undertaken with partners from the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB).

Operation Aidant - This is co-ordinated by the National Crime Agency. It is run nationally every year and involves local police forces working alongside partner agencies such as ourselves to tackle Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. It took place between 25th and 27th November. Human Trafficking is a type of modern slavery and is defined as when individuals are moved, either internationally or domestically, so they can be exploited. Victims of Modern Slavery are viewed as a commodity to be traded or exploited, which may be for criminal purposes, forced labour, domestic servitude or for sexual exploitation.

To sum up. I am confident you will agree our small team of Officers in the Communities' section have been working exceedingly hard to ensure we continue focussing on an effective set of partnerships and in so doing this will enable us to meet emerging local threats and issues. I thank them for this.

Colin Day

District Councillor and Cabinet Member for Communities, Youth, Public Safety & Police and Fire Service liaison