
Communities, Youth & Public Safety portfolio report

for Full Council – February 2021

The following is a detailed report of the recent activity within my portfolio which has taken place since my last report to Full Council on 8th December last year. Before so doing, I would just like to mention the mass vaccination centre at the Lord Butler Centre in Saffron Walden. Having attended and had my first jab I would like to thank and congratulate the small army of volunteers who have helped to make this facility such a friendly, well organised and dare I say a pleasant experience. They have all gone that extra mile and much credit for this has to be placed at the door of Clive Emmett the Chief Executive Officer for the Council for Voluntary Services in Uttlesford (CVSU) who with his small team of staff has raised this 'army'. The CVSU is of course an active member of the Community Safety Partnership.

Community Safety report

We are aware from our close working relationship with Essex Police that violence against the person continues to rise, with 40% of these offences being **domestic** related and behind closed doors. It is without doubt an issue related to the 'lockdowns' and the mental stress faced by many households being unable to socially mix with friends, other family members, having their children not being at school, loss of jobs and the fear of what the future may hold. Some of these offences have been cases of stalking and harassment which occur remotely via social media platforms or other electronic communications. To assist the Uttlesford Community Safety Partnership (CSP) with raising awareness around **domestic abuse**, I would like to urge Members to join onto the J9 Awareness Training via **Fleur Brookes** our UDC Safeguarding Officer (**Tel: 01799 510528**). If Members would like to contact Fleur directly, she will then send a link for virtual training.

Criminal damage has also seen a spike, but this was due to the damage caused to rural locations and mass reporting that was encouraged in the Broxton and Debden areas this being a good thing as it has raised awareness. (see below) It should be noted that at the end of November there were 120 extra criminal damage offences resulting in a 23.2% increase for the year. In the main this damage caused to fields planted with winter crops and the perpetrators using off road vehicles such as quad bikes, scrambler bikes and 4 x 4's to unlawfully drive over the farmland. This spike has now been reduced to 35 extra offences and a 5.9% increase which highlights what communication and partnership working with and through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) can achieve. As the current Chair of the CSP I cannot stress this highly enough, the multi-agency approach to problem solving works. Please do not hesitate to speak to me or to **Angi Greneski** our UDC Community Safety Officer (**Tel: 01799 510555**) should you wish to know more about how the CSP operates.

Reported anti-social behavior (ASB) has a 28.9% increase, much of this too is linked to Covid and the lockdowns, with 32 reported breaches of the rules in the first 7-days of the year. We are seeing residents becoming frustrated with neighbours where previously small things wouldn't have caused issues. There is also a rise in the numbers of residents reporting neighbours for breaching lockdown/Covid rules. These are all recorded as ASB.

The Community Safety Hub meetings are continuing. The Hub allows for the sharing of intelligence amongst partners and this includes our UDC Licensing & Environmental Health Officers. The intelligence can be used in identifying issues where Community Protection Warnings (CPW's) are needed to help combat problems. CPW's have been issued for properties emanating noxious fumes, as well as neighbour disputes and have recently increased again, perhaps due to the lockdowns.

A Rural Farming Communities event took place on 9th December last year within the Parishes of Chickney, Elsenham, Henham and Broxton and 15 farm/landowners were visited. In depth face-to-face conversations took place and the owners were reassured and provided with advice and contact details for the various CSP partners which include the local police community team and the Essex Police Rural Engagement Team. The **What 3 Words** app for mobile phones was promoted, and they were provided with the 3 words for each of their locations as a reminder to use them when reporting incidents to police, particularly when calling 999 if a crime is actually taking place. To pinpoint an exact location for all our blue light emergency services saves vital time and this can be a life saver. Plans to continue with these events across the district are currently on hold, until Covid restrictions are lifted, however we are looking at ways in which this might be replicated virtually.

The CSP will be funding signage which will be placed at and along the byways currently experiencing overuse by off-road style vehicles. These are print ready, and it is aimed to have these erected at the various locations within the next month.

Our Community Safety Officer is working closely with the Essex Police Fraud Officer, to produce an 'easy to follow' **Scam Awareness booklet**, which will be distributed to each household across the district. The booklet will focus on scam prevention and staying safe on-line. An increase of recent Covid related scams, have highlighted the need to reach out to all residents, not just those on social media and the internet.

The CSP was approached in December last year by Andy Prophet, the Assistant Chief Constable of Essex Police to participate in a pilot project 'Knife Crime Violence Model' (KCVM) led by the Violence & Vulnerability partnership to tackle serious violence across the county. This started in Chelmsford, Maldon, Braintree and Uttlesford on 15th December. The KCVM is a risk assessment model that indicates the probability that an individual could escalate to become involved in knife/violent crime. The aim of the model is to support intervention to prevent identified individuals (adults) from escalating towards such knife crime/violence. The pilot will 'test the approach' of the model and will be evaluated by the Anglian Ruskin University.

49% of all UDC staff have completed the **terrorism – and national emergencies PREVENT** online training, and with the threat level having increased to SEVERE, which means an attack is 'highly likely', this is even more important to complete. It should always be at the back of your mind, especially when in crowded places that a terrorist could strike at any time and therefore I would like to take this opportunity to remind Members that they too can complete the eLearning package. <https://www.elearning.prevent.homeoffice.gov.uk/edu/screen1.html> There will be future training modules to be completed, to ensure we as a district local authority maintain our statutory requirement in assisting with the counter-terrorism strategy.

Two new two-minute animated films can be watched on the following links. <https://actearly.uk/support/reach-out-for-help/> and <https://actearly.uk/working-together/how-we-help/> The films are aimed at the general public, concerned friends and family audiences, and provide an introduction to PREVENT and to the work of Prevent officers. By improving an understanding of Prevent work and explaining the way we who are involved in public safety work with other partners, we hope that more people will be encouraged and assured where appropriate to seek help at an earlier stage.

I would briefly like to mention **Crimestoppers** and their current campaign which is based on 'Say no to people smuggling' targeting haulier drivers. Partners from the CSP have been out at Birchanger Services in recent weeks raising the awareness about this crime and the signs to look out for and how to report. <https://crimestopper-uk.org/.../say-no-to-people-smuggling> It is also worth remembering to remind your residents that information regarding crimes can be reported anonymously to Crimestoppers via telephone to **0800 555 111** I know from discussing with Members issues regarding drug dealing that residents are concerned about reporting such crime for fear of reprisals. If that is the case, please refer them to Crimestoppers as the vehicle of anonymity.

Finally, you may be interested to know that it is the intention of Essex Police in May this year to commence a recruiting drive for Community Special Constables. I am aware that Thaxted Parish Council have budgeted to pursue this in the same way as both Newport and Birchanger. Watch this space for further information.

Safeguarding

Operation Henderson, which is a Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation awareness campaign that was scheduled to concentrate on train stations, businesses and taxis had to be postponed due to the Covid restrictions and has been rescheduled to take place later in the year.

Safeguarding concerns continue to rise in our communities, probably again due to the lockdown restrictions and some of these are considerably complex.

Our safeguarding officer is now working closely with our UDC Taxi licensing team. This involves regular weekly virtual meetings. We are linking with the licensing officers to deliver training to licensed taxi drivers on safeguarding matters. This is part of our regulatory obligations to protect those people, more especially the vulnerable who use this mode of transport. It is our duty to ensure that taxi drivers are fit and proper persons to hold one of our licenses. We continue to work in forging links with safeguarding teams in other authorities. Our aim is to be a leader in safeguarding ensuring that when a taxi bearing one of our licensing plates operates outside of our district it is recognised as a safe vehicle to hire.

Youth

Hate Crime – We recently planned for Essex Police to deliver a virtual session for Saffron Walden County High School to enable 22 pupils and 2 members of staff to receive hate crime awareness training enabling them to be hate crime ambassadors. We are now working to extend this offer of awareness training to all other secondary schools in the district.

Youth Council – Although recruitment continues to be difficult during the pandemic, more especially in periods of lockdown when most young people are not in school, the youth council still has a small group of active members. They have a representative attending the Community Stakeholder forums and working groups focusing on the constitution, environment and equality and diversity. As soon as it is possible we will look to resume recruitment in schools across the whole of the district and aim to raise the profile of the youth council through some work (which hopefully will be supported by the schools and delivered through their curriculum) around environment, climate change, equality and diversity and future housing/community needs. We will also try to establish working relationships between youth councillors and district councillors to try and establish direct involvement in council projects and better links into local communities.

Youth Initiatives Working Group – This group continues to meet quarterly via virtual meetings and occasionally more often to facilitate expeditious grant allocation or the recruitment of volunteers into youth work. The table on the next page is a breakdown of funding awarded and outstanding bids still to be considered for payment. Given the current situation with the lockdown it is planned as a group to meet with the match funding partners to consider whether the remainder of this year's match funding and next year's allocations might be better used in some district wide projects to address the emerging issues and needs of young people as we transition back to some form of normality.

YOUTH INITIATIVES WORKING GROUP FUNDING 2020/21		
Organisation	Project	Bid
Funded		
Saffron Walden Town Council	Match Funding	£10,000.00
Stansted Mft Parish Council	Match Funding	£7,500.00
Great Dunmow Town Council	Match Funding	£5,000.00
Open Door	Counselling	£5,000.00
SWYOP	Youth Info & Resource Centre	£3,409.00
Accuro	Special needs groups funding	£0.00
Create Walden	Radio Play	£5,000.00
District Guides	Covid Support	£3,865.00
Newport Youth Club	Cricket Project	£4,515.00
Outstanding		
Swans Netball Club	Coach Training	£1,975.00
Accuro	Special needs groups funding	£5,000.00
Stansted Hall & Elsenham CC	Cricket Project	£1,200.00
Garden Project	Music Project	£2,575.00
Funding Available £55,000		£55,039.00

The Young Citizens of Uttlesford – a vision for the future

I recently wrote to Stephen Miles our UDC Local Plan and New Communities Manager to say, as the Cabinet portfolio holder for Communities, Youth and Public Safety it has given me the opportunity to look closer at the issue of our young people and how we communicate with them. I spoke of being particularly keen on promoting their “voice”. I am not wholly convinced we have picked up on this in the early stages of our wish to involve all in producing the new Local Plan. We must not lose sight of them being the future of Uttlesford. Essentially, I would suggest ***the young people today are not the young people of yesterday*** and with this in mind we should do our very best to reach out to them.

During the past twelve months we have been forced by the deadly virus to enter uncharted waters with the need at times to think outside of the box, not only adapt to changes in the here-and-now but to consider what the future may hold for us when we come out of this dark tunnel. As I have already stated, my thoughts and concerns are to focus on young people in our district.

I very much hold the view we are but temporary custodians of Uttlesford and therefore I would advocate it is incumbent upon us to ensure we pass on to the next generation the legacy of this wonderful part of Essex in which we all live and work. Put simply, **we love where we live**, and we want to know if our youngsters agree with that. This was of course the battle cry used by the R4U party during the district council elections in 2019 and I would suggest remains true today.

I would hope all who read this report will agree that as a result of the three lockdowns during this health emergency; the mental health and well-being of our children and young people has been placed at considerable risk through the loss of meeting friends, the lack of physical activity and the inability to attend school to learn, all of which may well affect them for many years to come. For some, the greater risk of domestic abuse and poverty, especially with reduced parental income through loss of work and the need for parents to look after children in the home, has resulted in childhood depression and feelings of hopelessness. Interestingly, to back this up, *a recent survey by the Prince’s Trust has found that 1 in 4 young people are just not coping; they are feeling unable to cope with life, due to disrupted education, a shrinking jobs market and the isolation from their friends and loved ones. This is expected to lead to a*

‘devastating toll’ on young people’s well-being with half of those who were surveyed (2,200) saying their mental health has worsened since the start of the pandemic. The National Youth Agency says, the pandemic has hit young people the hardest, now and for their future. However, just at the time they need it most, youth services are being hollowed out.

I appreciate that as a district local authority we are not responsible for youth services – it is Essex County Council. ** I will come back to that later. It is my contention that we as a planning authority have the ability to lead and play a big part into taking notice of the needs of our young people and have asked Mr Miles if he and his team would consider this going forward with the Local Plan. I also copied Councillor Geoff Bagnall as Chair of the Local Plan Leadership Group to seek his support. We all must understand that the impact of the pandemic will be rippling through our communities for years to come and for this reason I would strongly argue these matters must be engulfed in our new thinking around the LP.

Those of you who attended and took part in the discussions at the recent ‘Local Plan All Member Briefing’ will recall I raised the subject of engagement with young people, those **aged 14 years to 25 years**. In the discussions I spoke of my concern whereby I felt we were not focussing specifically on speaking with this age group. I appreciate there is a member of the Youth Council who sits on the Community Stakeholder Forum. That said, I am not convinced the representation gives sufficient input for those in that age range. The Youth Council in its current form is very much Saffron Walden focused, in the main made up of the more academically minded pupils from the County High School. There is no representation south of what one might describe a north/south boundary line at Newport. I therefore pose the question, **“how do we know the wants, the needs and the aspirations of young people in the south of Uttlesford?”** I also believe we need to reach out and listen to the less advantaged youngsters. There were several Members present at that briefing who supported my views. I recall Councillor Mark Lemon suggesting involving the head teachers of our four secondary schools to seek their support and identify a wider diversity of pupil. I am aware that Councillor Alex Armstrong, as the Cabinet portfolio holder for Sports, Leisure, Education, and the Arts has been in dialogue with the Head Teacher at Helena Romana Secondary School in Great Dunmow. From his discussions it is apparent they have a form of council made up of pupils. I dare say that Cllr. Armstrong may well outline in a separate discussion the need to look at sports facilities across the whole of the district in the LP, particularly considering the governments thinking on such provision as we come out of the pandemic. I will leave that to him but of course it does concern young people and what they consider should be made available and where. Councillor Arthur Coote touched upon that at the all member briefing where he spoke of the need to have discussions at ‘grass root levels’ with football, cricket, and hockey clubs etc to understand their needs for tomorrow. Again, we need to involve our younger residents in these discussions.

The following is an example of a lack of facilities for young people - About 15 months ago in Great Dunmow there was considerable concern about groups of youngsters acting unpleasantly in and around the centre of the town making life something of a misery for older residents using the library and nearby supermarket. This resulted in the UDC Safety Officers conducting a joint operation with the local community policing team to try and put a stop to this anti-social behaviour. Over a period of days, the officers spoke with the youths involved. It became clear these young people were essentially “home alone” – their parents were at work all day, their homes were cold with no heating whilst the parents were away and they wanted to meet with their friends but had no ‘safe place’ to meet or to get a warm drink. Put simply it highlighted the fact that Great Dunmow (as a growing town) has no community centres or safe places for youngsters to meet. There is a youth club but not open every night and the age group for membership is quite restrictive. Some of the young people causing the anti-social behaviour also made the point of the youth club not providing the kind of activities they wished to be part of. Their requirement being more for a ‘drop-in’ centre rather than a place for group activity. ** I spoke earlier about the County Council having responsibility for providing youth services which would include youth clubs. Over the years the County Council has seen the need to cut back on those services to save money as a result these cutbacks have meant the facilities are just not there to cater with the growth in housing development. Put simply this is yet a further example of a void in the much-needed infrastructure.

Following the withdrawal of the previous emerging Local Plan, the East of England LGA pier group made a few recommendations to us on ways to progress the new plan. Community engagement was one of the specifics. They placed considerable importance on this. The primary purpose being to talk to and hear from individuals and organisations about their concerns, ideas and ambitions. I can remember in the various workshops both consultants

making the point of the need to try to get everyone involved (and their voice heard), **particularly those who traditionally do not get involved or those who find it hard to become involved**. I believe within those groups are our younger residents and I am extremely focussed on the importance of the need to engage with them but at the same time understand it is not an easy task. I do not have the answers and it probably requires some form of brainstorming session between our experienced teams of officers in the communities and planning sections to take this up. I also believe we will need to involve town and parish councils to sign up to the need to encourage youngsters in their communities to become involved in being part of making responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change and to involve them in planning and in making decisions that affect not just themselves but their communities. We are essentially setting out on a journey to define the future of Uttlesford over the next 20 years. We should remember that a 14-year-old child by that time will be 34 years of age. Would it not be somewhat arrogant of us if we did not involve them in what will be their future? I am a truly great believer of the saying, if ***there is a will there is a way***.

I have managed to persuade my fellow Members of the Executive to support a change in the **Corporate Plan**, which is before you tonight. This is a relatively small change being proposed under the theme: **Putting residents first**, whereby item 1c (which currently reads 'Increase the reach of the Youth Council') is to be changed to '***Provide opportunities for young people***'. The intention being to broaden the work undertaken to support young people, which will continue to include supporting and encouraging the Youth Council but may also include doing things that provide positive opportunities for young people to be able to engage with the local community and to do things that interest them, keep them safe, makes them happy and supports improved mental well-being. This if approved illustrates the intention by UDC to work for and with our young citizens and for them to have a greater say in what is to be provided. I do hope Members will support this proposal.

Colin Day

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