

## **February 2021 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks**

### **Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service praised for its work throughout the pandemic**

On January 22, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was recognised nationally for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) was praised for its positive contributions to the local community and commitment to the welfare of its staff. In August 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was commissioned by the Home Secretary to examine how fire and rescue services are responding to the pandemic. In her report, Zoë Billingham, HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services, said of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service: "We were impressed with how the service adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively. The efficient use of its staff was notable, utilising extra capacity and providing support and resource for remote and home working. It provided support to Suffolk County Council (SCC) and the LRF, including advice, resources and effective command and control frameworks to co-ordinate its response."

"The service communicated well with its staff throughout the pandemic, including issues relating to staff wellbeing. It also made sure all staff had the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively, including extra information and technology, and it put in place additional flexible working arrangements. Staff wellbeing was a clear priority for the service." SFRS has continued to respond to emergency calls since the beginning of the pandemic, with over 4,500 emergency calls since the first lockdown was announced in March 2020. In addition to this, staff across SFRS have been redeployed to support other departments in Suffolk County Council, in response to the pandemic.

These include:

Providing additional resource to colleagues in the Coroner's Office

Setting up and administering the first booking system and phonenumber for testing key workers

In April 2020, around 30 firefighters volunteered and trained to work alongside paramedics to drive frontline emergency NHS ambulances, in turn freeing up paramedics to care for patients

Teams have also helped deliver food, essential items and medicine as part of the Home But Not Alone scheme

### **New recycling campaign aims to get Suffolk's recycling right**

On the 25 January, a new campaign was launched in Suffolk to help people get their recycling right. Each year more than 10,000 tonnes (about 20%) of recycling from Suffolk homes is rejected due to the wrong items being placed in Suffolk's recycling bins. This is the same as 1 in 5 lorries full of recycling going to waste. The cost of sorting and disposing this spoiled recycling is more than £1million. The new awareness campaign launched by the Suffolk Waste Partnership is called Together We Can Get Our Recycling Right. It includes a leaflet to all households with the do's and don'ts of what can easily be recycled at home, plus tips on how to recycle other items not accepted in home recycling bins. The campaign will be supported on the Suffolk Recycling website and social media channels.

There are three simple steps that householders can take to improve the quality of their recycling. These include:

Put glass in a bottle bank, not in your wheelie bin. No bagged items. Keep your recycling empty, clean and dry

Keep all food out of your recycling bin. Put any food you cannot eat or compost in your rubbish bin.

You can recycle the following items in your recycling bin at home: plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays, metal cans, aerosols and foil and paper, card and books. The worst offending items incorrectly found in recycling bins include glass, black sacks, food waste, cartons and nappies.

### **Help us shape ambitious new Dementia therapy initiative using virtual reality experiences**

On the 28 January it was announced that as part of its work in supporting local care home providers and the ongoing care of residents with Dementia, Suffolk County Council is launching an exciting new initiative to develop virtual reality content, helping people recall and access positive memories that they hold dearly. Such experiences help to complement the support offered on a day to day basis, providing a variety of positive stimulus to those using the equipment and valuable respite for their carers. In recent years, a number of international academic studies have demonstrated proven successes in using such technology as a reminiscence and therapeutic aid to help people access memories and positive emotions, despite facing the effects of experiencing Dementia. Some care providers already use theme rooms in their settings and show archive films to residents with positive effect. Developing the use of virtual reality will support and complement the great experiences that local care providers use. The intention is to produce a range of local, Suffolk-based films and interactive materials that people can enjoy and experience whilst sat in comfort in their usual care setting, with the support and input of their carers or family members. A set of equipment, each consisting of a headset and connecting equipment will be made available to support different areas of the county, supported by the Council's Adult Social Work Teams. A budget of £80,000 has been granted for

this project through Suffolk County Council's Suffolk 2020 Fund, which is all about developing a range of community-focussed initiatives to support residents across the county. This money covers the cost of developing the films and materials, carrying out supporting academic research, the purchase of the equipment and the management and resourcing required to deliver the project in coming months. As part of getting the ball rolling, the council would like to hear from people who have ideas about what kinds of films and experiences they may like to see produced. The project team would also love to hear from care providers, service users and their family carers across Suffolk that may be potentially interested in helping to trial and take part in using the technology in months to come and take part in a service user group to drive the success of this project. Those who are interested in taking part and/or sharing the ideas for possible content should contact the team in the first instance by emailing: [suffolk2020vr@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:suffolk2020vr@suffolk.gov.uk)

This initiative is part of the digital revolution that is happening across the care sector at the moment. Given the extremely challenging period everyone has experienced through Covid-19, it has been essential to find ways to innovate and adapt to the changing circumstances and make the most of technology and supportive aids where possible to continue supporting our most vulnerable residents alongside the amazing work of our committed care providers and their staff. The virtual reality experience may seem a strange choice to some, but there is a great deal of evidence to support the research demonstrating that residents with Dementia who use the technology are able to often access memories and experiences, triggered by particular places, colours and sounds. Where it has been used elsewhere, the technology has offered positive outcomes including improving wellbeing, behaviour, and even cognition in some cases. This type of therapy also supports inter-generational shared experiences between older and younger family members.

### **Suffolk 2020 fund project embraces love of the great outdoors – Discovering Suffolk**

On January 20, as part of the Suffolk 2020 fund, the Discovering Suffolk project was launched. The aim of the project is to raise further awareness of the range of great walking routes, areas of interest and variety of landscapes that form Suffolk's beautiful countryside through public rights of way and points of access. Given the experiences many people have faced over the last year living through the pandemic, it is recognised that exercise and wellbeing is a fundamental element in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and whilst we continue to live within Government guidelines at present, Suffolk's countryside offers a freely accessible means for many of us to experience nature and stay healthy. The key element of the Discovering Suffolk project is the development of a smartphone app alongside a range of supporting QR codes fixed to rights of way signposts located along different routes to promote walking, cycling and exploring Suffolk's countryside. Discovering Suffolk builds on our changing behaviours when visiting the countryside, as people become ever more interested in local exploration and taking short walks and cycling exercises during the pandemic. The project will continue to promote the Discover Suffolk website as new content, information and advice continues to be added to the current offer, promoting walking routes and cycle rides through local communities. The project seeks to actively engage new audiences who are not aware of the options available on their doorstep or have perhaps only begun to explore the local countryside beyond their neighbourhood.

Work will shortly start on developing the Discovering Suffolk App and setting the sites for the QR code points around the county. After development, the new, free App will provide access to the full range of Discover Suffolk outdoor guides with over 100 walks across the county. The App and QR codes will include audio, video, imagery and fun activities to further enhance people's enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of Suffolk's natural and built environment. As part of our investment this year through the Suffolk 2020 fund, we wanted to find new ways to support and encourage access to our beautiful Suffolk countryside, particularly amongst residents and communities who may have not considered local walks, cycling or exploring public rights of way, close to where they live. This new smartphone App will provide an accessible platform for people to find out what's available and where they can begin to enjoy healthy walks, peaceful spaces and explore nature. During these challenging times, we all need to continue to abide by the Government's latest guidance relating to exercising safely within our local communities, keeping to social distancing rules and protecting families and friends. As part of this we can all find ways to enjoy the natural environment and countryside that surrounds us by considering the impact we have on the environment and considering others. At the moment this means staying local to where we live, but in time as the situation improves, there will be greater opportunity to explore further, as long as we continue to adhere to the guidelines in the short term.

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