

From County and District Councillor David Ritchie

Dear all,

As soon as lock down started the communities' team at East Suffolk Council started work contacting and delivering to the vulnerable and the isolated. The finance team very quickly started contacting businesses and has now sent out over fifty million pounds in emergency grants. (Possibly a record response). These teams are working flat out and have been joined by other council officers. Much of the rest of the councils' work has continued with all officers working from home where it is possible to do so. The green bin service which was discontinued so that we could guarantee black and blue collections will now start again at the end of the month.

At the County Council much work also continues fairly normally, albeit as much as possible is now in the virtual world. The adult social care team is under particular pressure and has had a critical role in continuing to provide services. We supply PPE - personal protective equipment - in vast quantities to some of the care homes. At the moment all our supply channels are flagged as 'green'. We are keeping up! We are grateful for the work of all the carers across Suffolk, family members, volunteers, and professional staff. Some of our fire fighters have trained as ambulance drivers so that they can help a service that is always under pressure, even in normal times. Household waste sites are opening shortly, albeit on an appointment only basis to start with (this is to avoid long queues). There is information on the SCC website.

For the first two weeks of lock down, most council meetings were cancelled, and other than assisting with community help schemes in parishes I had less to do. I was able to get some work done in the garden! However, as the weeks have gone by the work has built back up to normal levels. Working on line means that I no longer spend between ten and fifteen hours a week travelling to meetings. I am now able to use Zoom, Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams (not always very well). Some of this work will stay on line, saving us all time and money.

At East Suffolk Council I have overall responsibility for planning and coastal management. The planners are all working from home. Planning applications continue to come in, reports are written and decisions are made. Some planning officers and most building control staff have volunteered to go over to the frontline and are driving vans delivering supplies and prescriptions. On the coast we have had unprecedented lowering of beach levels across the whole of Norfolk and Suffolk. This has largely been caused by prolonged east winds and has led to serious problems. The staff at Coastal Partnership East is working flat out consulting with coastal communities to find ways to do all that is reasonably possible in a difficult situation. At least the winter has passed and the threat of another tidal surge has receded.

At the county Council I am working on cycling policy. The cycling policy development panel, which I chair, has its final (virtual) meeting tomorrow. I will report the findings to (virtual) Cabinet in June. Work on cycling and walking is now vital we respond to the crisis. Money was announced last weekend to put in place temporary measures to make more space for walking and cycling in our towns.

I am very fortunate to live in a small village in an old house with a large garden and a couple of fields. We have five new lambs! So, I have plenty to do, and it's been a beautiful spring. For me lock down has not been too arduous. However, my wife is over seventy and not very well.

We all have to keep safe and keep alert,

very best wishes

David Ritchie

**One of your two District Councillors for the Bungay and Wainford Ward.
And County Councillor for the Bungay Electoral Division**