

## Open for Business During COVID-19

### **Opposition Priority Business Paper**

#### **1.0 Executive Summary**

- The Opposition is concerned that despite the fact we may face new restrictions that the Administration missed the opportunity to provide as full a service as possible within COVID-19 regulations when the national lockdown was eased.
- The Civic Centre front doors have remained closed since March.
- Since July only four libraries have been open.
- The Barrowell Green, Household Waste and Recycling Centre was closed in March and was reopened on 11<sup>th</sup> May but has not moved on from an appointment only service.
- The slow reopening of Council services has had a detrimental effect on the local economy, especially retail outlets.
- Enfield Council needs to ensure that if restrictions are re-imposed it is flexible and efficient in responding when easing occurs so that it provides as full a service as possible within the necessary COVID-19 guidelines.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- Announce a set date for the reopening of the Civic Centre front doors if lockdown restrictions are not re-imposed and if they are a new date.
- Review the appointment system for Barrowell Green, HWRC to deliver at the very least a no appointment necessary service for some days of the week in line with COVID-19 regulations.
- Establish COVID secure advice/help points as soon as possible in Ordnance Unity and Palmers Green Libraries and a timeline for all libraries to reopen.
- Abolish the requirement to book to browse, and control numbers in the libraries in line with COVID-19 like other boroughs have done.
- If another lockdown occurs and front facing services have to stop a review needs to take place during that time to learn why some boroughs and industries were able to reopen services quicker and more comprehensively when restrictions were lifted the first time than Enfield Council.
- Create an action plan so if another lockdown is implemented Enfield Council can be quicker and more flexible with reopening affected services when restrictions are lifted.

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### **3.0 Background**

- The United Kingdom has been experiencing the worst pandemic in a century.
- We thank all staff who have contributed to Enfield Council's response to COVID-19.
- The Prime Minister announced initial lockdown measures on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.
- On 15<sup>th</sup> June retail owners were given permission to reopen.
- On 4 July, the following premises were allowed to reopen provided they are COVID-Secure:
  - hotels, bed and breakfasts and self-contained holiday accommodation;
  - caravan parks and campsites;
  - places of worship and libraries;
  - restaurants and cafes;
  - bars, pubs and social clubs;
  - cinemas and bingo halls;
  - museums and galleries;
  - hair salons and barbers;
  - outdoor playgrounds and outdoor gyms.

### **4.0 Civic Centre**

- The Civic Centre closed its door to residents and visitors in March.
- Staff were advised to work from home if possible, via an email from CEO on 20<sup>th</sup> March.
- The Civic Centre at the time of writing remains closed to visitors' months after retail, eateries, museums and libraries first reopened after COVID-19 rules were lifted.
- Residents have visited daily for months only to find the Civic Centre doors locked to the very people who pay for it to be open.
- The signage at the Civic Centre informing residents of this has been inadequate. The result being that people ended up banging on the entrance doors with conversations through the window if they were lucky enough to do so when someone was in reception.
- Advice has been available at two out of the four libraries that have been open. However, there are not any help points at either Ordnance Unity or Palmers Green libraries leaving large parts of the borough some distance away from socially distanced Covid secure face to face customer advice.

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- There have been works in the reception of the Civic Centre during September that might not be complete until October. These improvements should have been completed sooner so the front doors were open prior to when local lockdowns started to happen. The Civic Centre has lost weeks of front facing business opening time.
- The closed doors have given the impression that the council has been closed for business since March. The Civic Centre is the flagship building of the authority and the fact its front doors have been locked with cones outside for months when other places were able to open has given a negative impression of the council. Enfield Council has looked closed for business when it should have been open.
- If the country goes into lockdown again or strict local restrictions are imposed Enfield Council needs to be speedier than it was the first time at opening its Civic Centre front doors and presenting an open for business vision. Enfield Council needs to ensure that when the rules ease it does not miss valuable opening time again to serve our community.

### **5.0 Libraries**

- The Government removed the restrictions on libraries on 4<sup>th</sup> July.
- Enfield Council announced that it would be reopening libraries from 13<sup>th</sup> July. Over a week after they could have been open.
- Enfield Town and Edmonton Green hub libraries would be the first to reopen.
- Ordnance Unity and Palmers Green hub libraries reopened on the week beginning 14<sup>th</sup> September leaving the residents of Southgate and North East Enfield for months without access to a local library when they should have been able to.
- Ordnance Unity and Palmers Green libraries opened without an advice/help facility.
- Enfield Town and Edmonton Green libraries for weeks just provided a click and collect service with no opportunity to browse.
- At the time of writing visitors are able to browse but you must make a prior appointment.
- Essex, Wandsworth, Bexley and Norfolk's libraries managed to open libraries for browsing without the requirement to book.
- The libraries that have opened in Hertfordshire have allowed each person to browse for 15 minutes without needing to book an appointment.

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- If we need to close our libraries again due to COVID-19, we need to ensure that we reopen all our four hub libraries sooner and as comprehensively as possible within the guidelines set.

### **6.0 Leisure centres**

- The delay in opening Enfield Council owned leisure centres caused inconvenience to residents.
- The Government lifted restrictions on leisure centres on 4<sup>th</sup> July.
- Enfield's leisure centres partially reopened for business on the week beginning 17<sup>th</sup> August meaning our centres were not open for business for over 6 weeks. During that six weeks residents visited the sites expecting them to be open only to find them closed for business.
- Albany and Southgate Leisure Centres would initially only be for dry-side activities e.g. gym.
- The swimming pools at Edmonton and Southbury Leisure Centre would be opened as well as other activities.
- Southbury Leisure Centre's pool reopening was delayed for 24 hours due to an unforeseen issue.
- Staff found a problem with Edmonton Leisure Centre's swimming pool boiler so it could not open on the original date publicised.
- Arnos Pool has not reopened.
- There was a dispute between Enfield Council and its contractor Fusion which was one of the reasons given for the delays, but any problems should have been dealt with as soon as the Government announced the date when restrictions would be lifted.
- Barnet had all its leisure centres open on 4<sup>th</sup> July.
- It is essential that Enfield Council's contractor Fusion is left in no doubt that if restrictions are re-imposed on the leisure industry again that it expects it to be quicker at being open for business when they are lifted than it was before.

### **7.0 Barrowell Green – Household Waste and Recycling Centre [HWRC]**

- Barrowell Green was reopened on 11<sup>th</sup> May with an appointment only system.

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- Bromley opened its sites on 4<sup>th</sup> May with an appointment system similar to Enfield. However, within weeks the requirement to book was removed.
- Essex and Hertfordshire did not require visitors to book an appointment to use its recycling centres.
- The Barrowell Green appointment system over the last few months experienced over 100 cancellations per week (sometimes more) and that does not take into account the number of people who did not turn up.
- Enfield Council failed during this time to work with its contractor towards removing the appointment system like Bromley even a few days a week prior to the COVID-19 infection rate increasing to where it is now.

### **8.0 Concerns**

- Enfield Council's key priority is to serve the needs of residents. However, as an organisation it was slower than other sectors to open customer facing services within COVID-19 guidelines when lockdown was first eased.
- The Opposition acknowledges the complexities with COVID-19 restrictions, but other boroughs were quicker than Enfield in being open for business delivering as normal as service as possible within the rules.
- Council staff are an important driver for the local economy and so many buildings being closed during a time when they could have been open has not encouraged residents to use our high streets and as one of the largest employers in the Borough our staff contribute a lot to the local economy.
- We are now facing potential restrictions being placed again. If these occur Enfield Council needs to be flexible and work at pace to ensure it is ready to respond when restrictions are lifted with the reopening of buildings and services again to support our local economy.

### **9.0 Conclusion**

- Enfield Council currently has looked closed for business even though officers are working over the last few months.
- Residents cannot understand why services such as libraries, the front desk at the Civic Centre and Barrowell Green have been closed or appointment only when so much of the economy has been open for business even with the recent announcement regarding six people meeting.
- Enfield Council has failed in its duty to support the local economy over the last few months due its delay in encouraging staff back to office buildings within COVID-19 rules even on a flexible working basis.

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- The Opposition fully recognises that infections have risen and that we could face further lockdowns either local or national by the time councillors discuss this paper.
- The Opposition hopes this is not the case but if another lockdown occurs and front facing services have to stop a review needs to take place during that time to learn why some boroughs and industries were able to reopen services quicker and more comprehensively when restrictions were lifted the first time than Enfield Council.
- A plan of action needs to be drafted taking into account things learnt in the review so that we can be ready and agile to be open for business when restrictions are lifted.