



Essex County Council

## Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

10:30	Thursday, 21 January 2021	Online Meeting
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The meeting will be open to the public via telephone or online. Details about this are on the next page. Please do not attend County Hall as no one connected with this meeting will be present.

**For information about the meeting please ask for:**

Lisa Siggins, Democratic Services Officer

**Telephone:** 033301 34594

**Email:** democratic.services@essex.gov.uk

### Essex County Council and Committees Information

All Council and Committee Meetings are held in public unless the business is exempt in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972.

In accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, this meeting will be held via online video conferencing.

Members of the public will be able to view and listen to any items on the agenda unless the Committee has resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting as a result of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined by Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

#### How to take part in/watch the meeting:

**Participants:** (Officers and Members) will have received a personal email with their login details for the meeting. Contact the Democratic Services Officer if you have not received your login.

#### Members of the public:

##### Online:

You will need to visit the ECC Democracy YouTube Channel

<https://tinyurl.com/yynr2tpd> where you will be able watch live or view the meeting at a later date. If you want to ask a question at the meeting, please email

[democratic.services@essex.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@essex.gov.uk) by noon on the day before the meeting. Please note that your question must relate to an item on the agenda for the meeting.

## Accessing Documents

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Please note that an audio recording may be made of the meeting – at the start of the meeting the Chairman will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded.

		Pages
1	<b>Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest</b>	<b>4 - 4</b>
2	<b>Minutes from the previous meeting</b>  To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020.	<b>5 - 9</b>
3	<b>Questions from the Public</b>  A period of up to 15 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions or make representations on any item on the agenda for this meeting. No statement or question shall be longer than three minutes and speakers will be timed. If you would like to ask a question at this meeting, please email <a href="mailto:Democratic.Services@essex.gov.uk">Democratic Services</a> by 12 noon the day before (Thursday 20 January).	
4	<b>Essex Housing Strategy</b>  Members to receive report <b>(PSEG/01/21)</b> alongside a presentation from Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Lee Heley, Head of Housing Growth and Daniel Baker, Housing Growth Lead.	<b>10 - 23</b>

**5 Covid Update:Passenger Transport**

**24 - 31**

Members to receive report (**PSEG/02/21**) alongside a presentation from Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and Helen Morris, Head of the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit.

**6 Date of Next Meeting**

To note that the next meeting of the Committee will take place online on Thursday 25th February 2021.

**7 Urgent Business**

To consider any matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered in public by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

**Exempt Items**

(During consideration of these items the meeting is not likely to be open to the press and public)

The following items of business have not been published on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Members are asked to consider whether or not the press and public should be excluded during the consideration of these items. If so it will be necessary for the meeting to pass a formal resolution:

**That the press and public are excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the specific paragraph(s) of Schedule 12A engaged being set out in the report or appendix relating to that item of business.**

**8 Urgent Exempt Business**

To consider in private any other matter which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered by reason of special circumstances (to be specified) as a matter of urgency.

## Agenda item 1

**Committee:** Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Enquiries to:** Peter Randall, Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

#### **Recommendations:**

To note

1. Membership as shown below
2. Apologies and substitutions
3. Declarations of interest to be made by Members in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct

#### **Membership**

(Quorum: 5)

Councillor I Grundy  
Councillor A Erskine  
Councillor I Henderson  
Councillor S Hillier  
Councillor P Honeywood  
Councillor D Kendall  
Councillor S Lissimore  
Councillor B Massey  
Councillor R Moore  
Councillor C Pond  
Councillor R Pratt  
Councillor W Schmitt  
Councillor C Weston  
Councillor A Wood

Chairman

# **Minutes of the meeting of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held digitally on Thursday, 17 December 2020**

## **Present from the Committee:**

Councillor I Grundy (Chairman)	Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor A Wood	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Moore	Councillor R Pratt
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor S Hillier	Councillor C Weston
Councillor P Honeywood	Councillor B Massey
Councillor W Schmitt	Councillor I Henderson

## **Also in Attendance:**

Cllr M Mackrory	Cllr V Metcalfe
Cllr A Turrell	Cllr M Buckley
Cllr M Garnett	

### **1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

There are no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

It was noted by the committee that this would be a joint meeting, with members of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee also invited to attend.

### **2. Minutes**

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020.

### **3. Questions from the Public**

There was one public question.

Mr Rahjam, Chelmsford, asked:

*I'm a keen cyclist and something of an evangelist for utility cycling, I'm a great advocate of making short journeys by bicycle rather than car. In an average year I cycle a thousand kilometres of utility journeys all*

*under 5 km within the city of Chelmsford. That is several hundred car journeys saved.*

*I was delighted when I saw the section of the Chelmsford growth plan which dealt with cycling on Broomfield Road. I live at the top of First Avenue and so Broomfield Road is involved in many of these journeys. I have always regarded Broomfield Road as one of the most dangerous roads to cycle on in Chelmsford and the previous narrow painted cycle lanes actually increased the risk of cycling on this road as some drivers considered that as long as they were on the road side of the line they had given enough space. This did not take into account the fact that the lane was barely wider than my handlebars in parts. The other members of my family found it so intimidating that they would not cycle on it, greatly reducing their scope for cycle journeys. I was particularly pleased that there was a physical division between the road and the cycle route as there is considerable research showing that this is necessary to achieve a significant risk reduction and that solely painted cycle routes do not significantly reduce risk.*

*I was, therefore, greatly disappointed when I saw the route under construction to see that it was a demarcated only by a line and a colour change. I was unable to find any material relating to this change on the council or Essex highways website.*

*My questions are:*

- 1. are there any plans to add wands or other physical demarcation before the project is finished?*
- 2. Was the cost benefit analysis of the project revisited in light of the reduced benefits due to lack of physical demarcation and what was the result?*
- 3. What risk assessment was done of the change?*

It was noted that the question was outside of the scope of this particular meeting, but that the Cabinet Member was happy to take the question offline and share the answer with the committee.

#### **4. Update on Ringway Jacobs Contract**

Members noted report PSEG/15/20. Members also received a presentation outlining a high-level update on contract performance, the impact of the pandemic on maintenance services and a recap on the decision to extend the contract in early 2020.

Key points raised included:

**Covid implications:**

- Most highways functions have continued to operate throughout the pandemic.
- Responding to the pandemic has driven innovation – e.g. online NDORS courses and VISALA inspection technology.
- Significant reductions in income as a result of reduced applications, developer activity and traffic volumes.
- Preparations in place for increased Winter Maintenance resilience.
- Significant push on sustainable and active travel as a result of increased levels of use prompted by COVID.

### **Contract Extension:**

- Evidence gathering took place throughout 2018/19.
  - Benchmarking for value for money highways services, ECC scored 7th highest out of 21 authorities assessed.
  - Current contractual model assessed and deemed most favourable
  - ADEPT survey identified RJ as the 2nd highest performing Tier 1 supplier in the marketplace and the most improved since 2015.
  - £2.3m market testing conducted – 75% of work through RJ delivered better value for money.
  - Market conditions considered – levels of instability and innovation.
  - Engagement with 20 other local Authorities to review options.
  - Scrutiny task and finish group assisted with the process.
  - Thorough supply chain audit – good work in place and improvement opportunities identified.
  - RJ demonstrated forward plan for innovation.
- Roundtable discussions took place in November.
  - £5.029m saving target (20% of commissioned budget) agreed.
  - Other contractual considerations including red claims and payment mechanism revised.
- Decision to extend taken at January Cabinet Meeting.
- Since extension, key contract updates include:
  - Savings board established to track delivery of the identified cost reductions.
  - Regular Member chaired technology & innovation board reporting to Strategic Partnership Board.
  - Contractual documents progressed including complete re-write to schedule 4 (payment mechanism) and HoT for contract amendments to facilitate the extension.
  - Long running red claims disagreement resolved and contract amended to provide clarity for future claims.
  - Lean review commenced across the service to drive transformation and cost reductions.
  - Various income streams developed to increase the current circa £12m of income the service relies upon on an annual basis.
  - COVID has delayed some progress on extension related activity while the service focused on responding to the pandemic.

Following the presentation, members of the committee were invited to ask questions. Key points raised by the committee included:

- Escooter pilot schemes – Members raised concerns regarding escooter pilot schemes greenlit for areas of the county, including Basildon. Members were assured that the safety of pedestrians, drivers and scooter users was central to proposals. Local accessibility groups have been engaged when drawing up the bid to central government and the routes and areas in which the scooters will work have been geofenced to prevent them from leaving designated pilot areas.
- Public transport – members were assured that every effort was being made to encourage passenger transport use and cement congestion gains made during the pandemic. The safety of passengers was obviously the central concern though.
- Scrutiny of renewal process – members were reminded that the contract was extended, not renewed. When the time came for full reprocurement or renewal, members were assured that every effort to involve scrutiny would be made.
- Works carried out by utility companies – members raised concerns around the ‘like for like’ repair of roads damaged by utility works. Members were invited to share examples of poor repair works when they arise to ensure that work is carried out effectively and to a good quality. The Cabinet Member assured members that sample tests of utility work are carried out as standard to ensure that work was effectively quality controlled.
- The buddy system – the cabinet member was praised for the rollout and effectiveness of the buddy system. Members did note, however, that there was some inconsistency with the responsiveness of staff. The Cabinet Member agreed to take this away and look into it.
- ‘Make safes’ – members raised concerns around the quality of makesafe work. Members were assured that all make safe work did exactly that, it made the imminent issue safe for a much longer time. Issues raised with regards to signage were also addressed, with the Cabinet Member outlining how communication had improved in this area.

**ACTION:** Members requested that a future session be scheduled for the Cabinet Member to update members of the committee on the recommendations presented by the Ringway Jacobs Task and Finish group in 2019.

**ACTION:** Members requested a discussion on the future role of the Task and Finish group with regards to ongoing scrutiny of the Ringway Jacobs Contract.

## **5. Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the next committee activity day is scheduled for Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January

## **6. Urgent Business**



None received

## **7. Urgent exempt Business**

None received

### **Close of meeting**

The formal meeting was closed at 11.52

<b>Report title:</b> Essex Housing Strategy		<b>PSEG/01/21</b>
<b>Report to:</b> Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee		
<b>Report author:</b> Daniel Baker, Housing Growth Lead		
<b>Date:</b> 21/01/21		<b>For:</b> Discussion
<b>Enquiries to:</b> <a href="mailto:Daniel.baker@essex.gov.uk">Daniel.baker@essex.gov.uk</a>		
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex		

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on the draft Essex County Council Housing Strategy consultation.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 In January 2020, the Cabinet Member and the ECC Housing Growth team attended PSEG to update committee members on plans to consult on a new housing strategy.
- 2.2 It was agreed that the team would return to the committee once the consultation had ended to present on findings and outline proposals for the new strategy.

## 3. Session Aims

- 3.1 Members are asked to discuss proposals with the Cabinet Member and officers, providing feedback and asking questions.

## 4. List of Appendices

- 4.1 Appendix A: Draft ECC Housing Strategy update January 2021

# Draft ECC Housing Strategy update January 2021

Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee January 21<sup>st</sup> 2021

# Purpose of presentation

- To provide an update to the Committee on progress to develop an ECC Housing Strategy

**Slides 3 - 4**      Background and context

**Slides 5 - 8**      Summary of engagement and consultation responses – *text in blue shows response/proposed changes to be made*

**Slides 9 - 11**      Proposed strategic goals and outcomes from the strategy – *draft actions being considered are included as blue text*

**Slide 12**          Proposed next steps

- Work to refine the strategy and action plan is ongoing and will be informed by comments received at the session on 21<sup>st</sup> January
- The wording of the goals/outcomes (slides 9-11) is subject to change with a view to simplifying and improving readability in advance of publication
- A copy of the consultation version of the strategy has been shared for information.

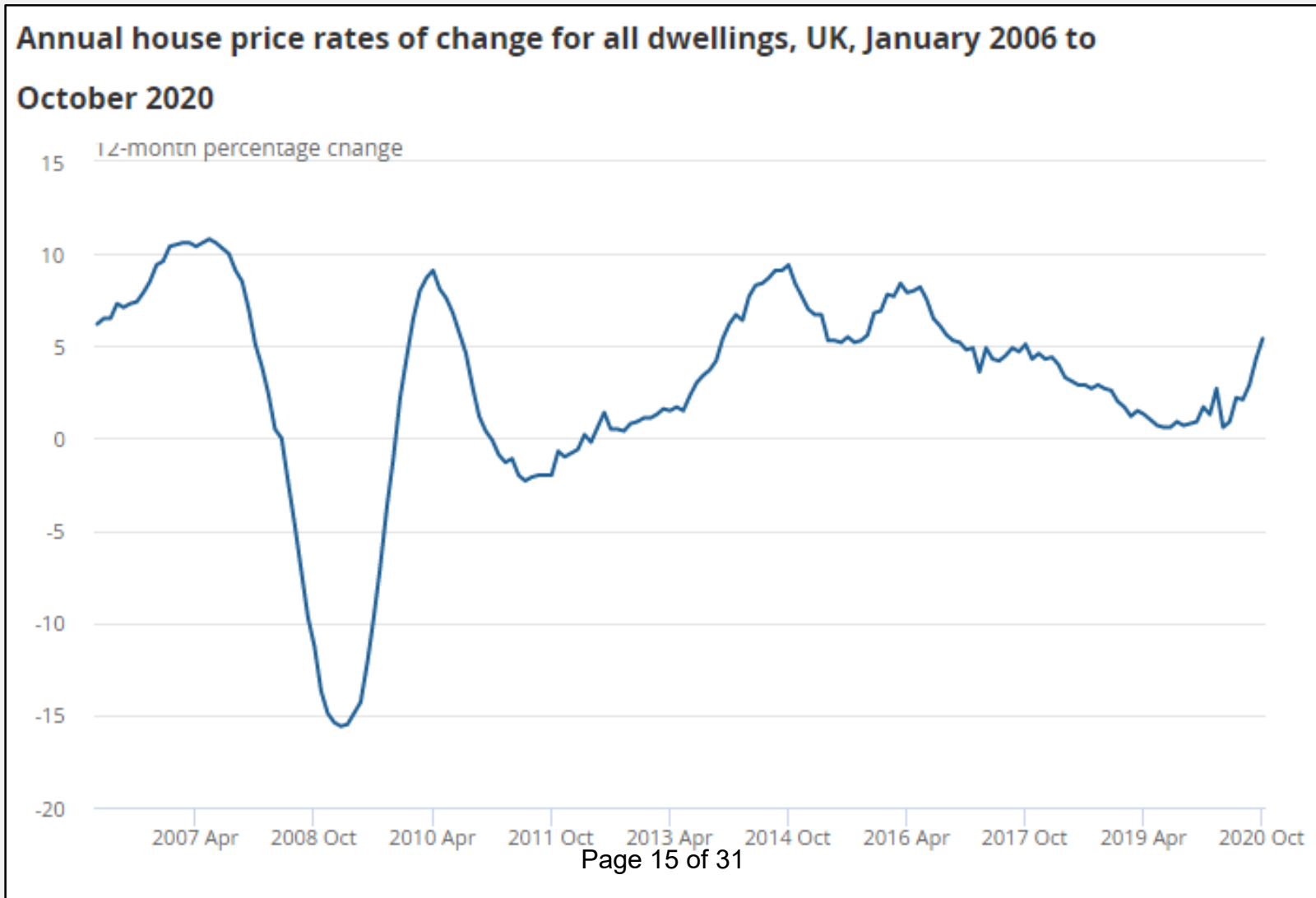
# Context

- The draft ECC Housing Strategy was presented to the Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020
- A revised consultation document setting out the proposed focus, goals and high-level actions of the strategy was subject to a 12 week public consultation from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. The document set out three Strategic Goals:
  - **Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county;**
  - **Enabling people to live independently throughout their life;**
  - **Supporting people to have a stable home**
- We have and continue to engage directly with key partners from Essex Borough, City and District councils, Housing Associations and Developers
- Following a short pause during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic the strategy has been updated in line with the outcomes of the consultation

# Housing through the pandemic

- Local Housing Authorities in Essex moved around 200 rough sleepers into accommodation working in close collaboration with partners, including ECC, Police, Health and voluntary sectors to provide necessary support
- Temporary ban on evictions and mortgage holidays
- 2019-20 saw highest number of affordable housing completions in Essex since 1995. New build crashed in lockdown then sprang back in summer 2020.
- Housebuilding will play an important part of post-COVID economic recovery work in Essex with research suggesting each new home built supports over 3 jobs
- The housing market has defied economic gloom during the pandemic so far, but many uncertainties in 2021:
  - Economic outlook;
  - When will COVID restrictions end?;
  - Working practice and lifestyle changes;
  - Changes to Help to Buy and end of Stamp duty holiday;
  - Planning reforms; and
  - Investments in improved energy performance, accessibility and fire safety.

# Housing through the pandemic (2)



**Source:** HM Land Registry, Registers of Scotland, Land and Property Services Northern Ireland, and Office for National Statistics – UK House Price Index

# 'You Said, We did' (1) Feedback from the Committee in January 2020

- Changes based on feedback from the committee in January 2020 have been incorporated into the strategy :

## **Partnership working on housing issues essential**

- 12 week public consultation, further round of engagement with partners planned ahead of publication. Aiming to co-develop strategy action plans for each Essex district to reflect specific ECC activity in that area

## **Provision of necessary infrastructure**

- Increasing infrastructure investment included as specific outcome in the strategy

## **Influence of ECC over housing needs**

- Using evidence and influence to increase the proportion of accessible new homes built included as a specific outcome in the strategy

## **Empty Homes and keyworkers**

- Work to assess options of how ECC can support Local Housing Authorities to bring empty homes back into use to be included as an action in the strategy. Keyworker homes to be considered alongside plans to support increase affordable housing delivery



# 'You Said, We did' (2) Public consultation

- The strategy was subject to a 12 week public consultation from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020.
- 36 responses were received:

## **Seven from housing partners Districts and housing associations**

- All partners highlighted the need for close partnership working to realise outcomes including maximising the use of existing fora
- A number of suggestions were made for actions that ECC could take to support housing growth which are considering through development of the action plan
- One housing partner disagreed with the draft strategic goals and actions requesting greater clarity on ECC role and tangible actions to be taken to support delivery of district partners statutory responsibilities

*We will continue dialogue with district partners and provide greater clarity on ECC's role and activity through production of the action plan. We aim to co-develop district-level action plans to reflect local context*

- The need to reference work on the regeneration of existing housing and infrastructure was raised

*Reference to locally-led regeneration activity in which ECC is a partner has been added*

# 'You Said, We did' (3) Public consultation

**29 individual responses, 26 respondents suggested changes to the goals and outcomes;**

## Changes based on feedback

- Highlighting the role that housing and development of new places plays in meeting wider environmental goals around climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss. *A separate outcome on climate change and actions arising from the Essex Climate Action Commission has been added*
- The need to deliver infrastructure alongside housing growth. *Infrastructure is included as a distinct outcome in the strategy with actions to increase investment in infrastructure generated locally and from government*
- The importance of affordable housing to those who cannot access properties to rent, or buy. *We are working with districts to investigate ways to increase affordable housing delivery in Essex*

# 'You Said, We did' (4) Public consultation

**29 individual responses, 13 respondents disagreed with the goals;**

## Other concerns raised

- 12 respondents from Braintree and Colchester focussed their response on opposition to garden community proposals especially with respect to North Essex. *The concerns are noted, but ECC support delivery of new housing growth which meets garden community principles and as progressed by local planning authorities via Local Plans*
- Concerns from residents over the planned level of housing growth in Essex and whether this was responding to local needs. *ECC will continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to deliver housing targets informed by government methodology on housing needs and as per adopted Local Plans*

# Refreshed outcomes – Strategic Goal 1

## Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county

- a. **The number of new homes delivered – including affordable homes - meets local needs**  
*Actions inc: Local Plan support, Essex Housing, Affordable housing project*
- b. **Supporting infrastructure is funded and delivered to enable sustainable development of new communities and meet existing communities' needs**  
*Investment in viability/CIL, HIF delivery, Government bids*
- c. **Locally led regeneration schemes deliver economic, social and environmental benefits in key localities** (*new outcome*)  
*Partnership projects in Colchester, Clacton, Harlow, Jaywick*
- d. **New homes are built and existing homes retrofitted to meet net zero carbon requirements** (*new outcome*)  
*Energy efficiency projects, Climate Action Commission actions*
- e. **New housing developments create beautiful homes and places helping to meet wider ECC aims** (*new outcome*)  
*Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy, Essex Design Guide*
- f. **New high-quality homes and places are built across planned new garden communities in Essex**  
*Dunton Hills, Harlow Gilston, N Chelmsford, Tendring Colchester Borders*

# Refreshed outcomes – Strategic Goal 2

## Enabling people to live independently throughout their life

- a. **Mainstream housing that enables residents to remain in their homes and live independent and healthy lives**

*Influencing through planning process, lobbying government*

- b. **Access to high quality specialist and supported accommodation for those who require it**

*ECC Independent Living programme, evidence on need to market*

- c. **Adaptation and digital technologies widely adopted through co-design with residents to support people to live independently and healthily for longer and allow people to remain in their home**

*Use of Disabled Facilities Grants, technology pilots*

# Refreshed outcomes – Strategic Goal 3

## Supporting people to find and maintain housing stability

- a. **Partnership working to end the need for people to sleep rough in Essex, in line with the government's national ambition**  
*Joint funding bids, Coordination of housing and support services*
- b. **Partnership working on homeless prevention and support to minimise the need for temporary accommodation**  
*Protocols to support joint working, conversation with London Boroughs*

# Next Steps

- Updating document based on comments from the Committee
- Refinement of strategy and action plan with officers across ECC responsible for delivery (Jan/Feb 21)
- Draft strategy shared with partners for final engagement & feedback (Feb 21)
- Final strategy drafted and presented for sign-off (Feb-Mar 21)

*\*Once strategy agreed*

- Monitoring of action plan implementation and co-production of district specific action plans (Apr 21-Mar 22)
- Refresh action plan for financial year 2021-22 (Nov 21 – Feb 22)

<b>Report title:</b> Covid Update: Passenger Transport		<b>PSEG/02/21</b>
<b>Report to:</b> Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee		
<b>Report author:</b> Peter Randall, Senior Democratic Services Officer		
<b>Date:</b> January 21 2021		<b>For:</b> Discussion
<b>Enquiries to:</b> <a href="mailto:Helen.morris@essex.gov.uk">Helen.morris@essex.gov.uk</a>		
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex		

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update PSEG members on the impact of the pandemic on county-wide passenger transport services.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. At the November Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting, members received a written update outlining the impact of the pandemic on county-wide passenger transport services (Appendix A).
- 2.2. Members agreed that a full scrutiny session should be scheduled for January 2021 for the Cabinet Member to properly update the committee.

## 3. Session Aims

- 3.1. Members are asked to discuss the report and provide feedback/recommendations to officers.

## 4. List of appendices

- **Appendix A:** PSEG/13/20: Covid Update: Passenger Transport



<b>Report title:</b> Covid Update: Passenger Transport		<b>PSEG/13/20</b>
<b>Report to:</b> Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee		
<b>Date:</b> 26 November 2020	<b>For:</b> Discussion	
<b>Report authors:</b> Helen Morris, Integrated Passenger Transport Unit		
<b>Enquiries to:</b> <a href="mailto:helen.morris@essex.gov.uk">helen.morris@essex.gov.uk</a>		
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex		

## Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the passenger transport network during the current pandemic and to highlight issues and risks.

## Background

2. Passenger Transport has been significantly impacted by the ongoing Covid pandemic. It has also operated as a key service, enabling key workers to get to work; children to get to school; people to access healthcare, to shop and to exercise and to socialise within social distancing rules.
3. Both central and local government have put significant resource into supporting the network and there is an in-principle commitment to continue to do so while social distancing requirements remain in place.

## Update of current issues

4. This section of the report provides updates on the key services.

## ***Commercial and supported bus network including registration and information***

5. The first period of national lockdown from end March to end May saw an extremely challenging period for the bus network with stringent 2m social distancing requirements on services and a strong 'avoid public transport' message from central Government. This was followed by a slight relaxation in social distancing requirements which provided further capacity for the re-opening of non-essential retail in June and introduced the mandatory wearing of face coverings.
6. Due to social distancing and other Covid restrictions the bus network remains in a state of wholesale market failure with no prospect of a return to commercial operation while social distancing remains in place. In order to ensure continued running of the network Central Government put in place Covid Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) for both commercial and supported services. They also continued to pay Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) at pre-Covid rates and asked that local government continued to pay Concessionary Fares, supported local bus; and home to school contracted rates at pre-Covid contractual levels. ECC took a series of decisions to meet these commitments. ECC has also administered the local authority element of CBSSG and undertook a liaison and network approval role with operators to ensure appropriate service

coverage within the operating constraints.

7. Ensuring that existing payments have continued to be made in an appropriate way; and that new payments are also made appropriately and from the correct budget have meant additional work in the Delivery Unit. Ensuring that financial information is as up to date as possible, so we have visibility of emerging Covid pressures or falls in income has been critical. Work included delivering financial returns for year-end whilst working from home during the first lockdown, unexpectedly using systems and networks and working with colleagues in ways that had not been originally envisaged. The team also worked to ensure that providers could be paid promptly to support businesses during the turbulent early lockdown period. This has included managing payments of £3.4m of Central Government Funding to support local bus, the return to school, the commercial market and additional capacity.
8. Due to the level of service change, ECC suspended its Realtime information services because of the high number of errors that would have occurred and directed bus users to operator's websites where the most up to date information was available. The screens were also used to remind bus passengers about wearing face coverings and to thank key workers.
9. Between April 2020 and September 2020 ECC extended the hours of operation of the Essex bus pass scheme were extended from the usual times of 09:00 to 23:00 Mondays to Friday and all times at weekends and on public holidays to 24/7 operation. This was to allow older people and people with disabilities to make use of dedicated opening hours in supermarkets and other shops. Following the relaxation of the initial lockdown restrictions and the return to school and work, passenger numbers began to grow. Operators began to be concerned that with continued restrictions on the number of people who can be carried on buses, they would not be able to cope peak period travel demand. This would risk students and key workers being left at the roadside. As a result, it was agreed that bus pass times would revert to normal from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020
10. In recent weeks ECC has worked with operators as they increase network provision and the Realtime system has been reactivated as information has become more robust. Bus passenger numbers across the network are back up to around 50% of what they were pre-Covid from a low of around 23% at the start of lockdown.

Report:	Normal Running	May	June	July	August	September	October
Item:							
Services running as normal	N/A	18%	20%	28%	36%	46%	49%
Services currently closed to public		41%	40%	35%	31%	26% (19% closed school and 7% suspended)	23% (19% closed school and 4% suspended)
Services running to special arrangements	N/A	39%	38%	35%	32%	26%	25%
DaRT services operating as/when needed	N/A	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%
		% of network operational					
Mileage (miles)	671,656	331,446 49%	455,912 68%	522,520 78%	550,972 82%	582,295 87%	594,459 89%
Trips	58,365	29,401 50%	40,035 69%	45,839 79%	48,622 83%	51,888 89%	53,124 91%

11. The main issue for the future of the network is how ongoing financial support is provided once social distancing requirements are removed; but while there is a lag in passengers returning to bus use. ECC continue to work closely with Daft and have emphasised this point. A large-scale withdrawal of funding before passenger numbers have returned to pre-Covid levels would leave many (and probably most) services unable to operate commercially.

12. ECC is looking at setting a new strategy to support the bus network through a period of recovery, refresh and re-shaping.

### ***Home to School Transport***

13. The lockdown requirements, including the position for schools, were announced nationally on the evening of Thursday 19 March for introduction on Monday 23 March. This included the provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers to continue to be able to access schools. ECC worked urgently with operators to agree an approach which could guarantee ongoing provision of transport for entitled children attending school. This included liaising with schools and operators on individual requirements.
14. The return to school in September posed a huge challenge for the bus network and home to school transport. In August local authorities were asked by DfE to take on an additional role to ensure there was sufficient capacity on the commercial bus network to ensure children could get to school. Given social distancing requirements reduce the capacity of a bus by over 50% this was a significant challenge. DfE grant funded ECC £1.2m to enable sufficient additional capacity to support those existing journeys. ECC worked closely with operators to deliver a range of solutions including 'closing' certain journeys so they are available to school children only; adding duplicate vehicles; and/or replacing single deckers with double deckers. Additionally, ECC has worked across transport, education and public health to ensure children with specialist health conditions have been supported to access school where the school can accommodate them. ECC's operators and the drivers, passenger assistants and office staff who work for them have been fundamental to the success of this approach and their commitment to transporting children, working quickly to resolve issues and manage uncertainty have been critical. This was supported by a communications campaign regarding government guidance on face coverings, social distancing and travel. The guidance was also included with 11,000 letters sent to eligible passengers.
15. A second significant risk was a large-scale switch to car away from bus as parents chose to drop their children at school. Through the Stop.Swap.GO! digital behavioural change campaign, ECC launched a '[Getting to School or College Information Service](#)' that provided a one stop shop for information on walking, cycling and bus use. This included all the advice on travelling by bus and bespoke Park and Stride maps for schools. Overall, the initial return to bus for school journeys appears to have been around 70% which is a significant achievement in very challenging circumstances.

### ***Park and Ride***

16. Park and Ride services were shut shortly after full national lockdown was introduced and passenger numbers dropped significantly. ECC worked with suppliers to ensure the work to site a temporary mortuary there was able to proceed successfully. The ECC P&R manager re-deployed to the wellbeing service to support vulnerable people through the lockdown.
17. With the easing of restrictions on social distancing and the re-opening of non-essential retail requests for P&R services to resume started to come in and the sites re-opened in August running to reduced services. The re-opening also saw a first step towards a Park and Pedal service with the provision of quality bike storage. Further work is

planned to seek funding for good quality routes and wayfinding. Passenger numbers are currently at 20% of pre-Covid levels but have been growing steadily since re-opening. P&R services have also been used by school children for the journey to school as there is a £1 day fare for children up to 18 years. Diversification opportunities continue to be delivered within Covid rules and have included high performance car meets, car boot sales, a temporary COVID testing clinics and an outdoor church service.

### ***Ugobus, Adult Social Care and Community Transport***

18. Ugobus are ECC's in-house fleet and primarily deliver adult social care transport but also some local bus and home to school transport. Reductions in demand from these core transport services during Covid has seen Ugo bus deployed to support other activities. This has included supporting the distribution of food parcels; distribution of PPE, distribution of IT and sports equipment and supporting the movement of deceased. This involved Ugobus drivers working significantly outside of their normal working patterns and arrangements.
19. As the demand for adult social care transport has increased, Ugobus has upgraded the vehicles with safety screens to protect the drivers and has reverted to delivering its core services, working closely with the day care centres to ensure passengers only travel within their 'bubble'. The service again stands ready for requests as we move into the next phase of the tiered lockdown.
20. Additionally, there have been complex needs for transporting adult social care clients over the last seven months. This has included various moves for individuals, obviously at a time of high risk, including moving Covid positive passengers, those in at risk groups but also more challenging issues such as needing to move all residents from a closing care home. There has also been the challenge of understanding novel transport issues such as PPE requirements and ensuring providers are able to access appropriate provision.
21. Our Community Transport schemes across Essex have been unable to carry out their usual essential services for our most vulnerable members of the community. They have however continued to make a valuable contribution from the start of lockdown. This includes providing deliveries of hot meals, click and collect shopping, medications, parcels and making important welfare phone calls to prevent isolation. Some funding has been made available from Parish Councils to maintain essential shopper buses and the schemes have supported both ECC and the NHS to provide transport for key workers. Vehicle adaptations to include Perspex screens, PPE, hand sanitising on buses, and deep cleaning vehicles via "fogging" has ensured the services are safe to use during this time. Inevitably there have been some redundancies and a difficulty to retain volunteers along with some staff being furloughed.

### ***Travel Training***

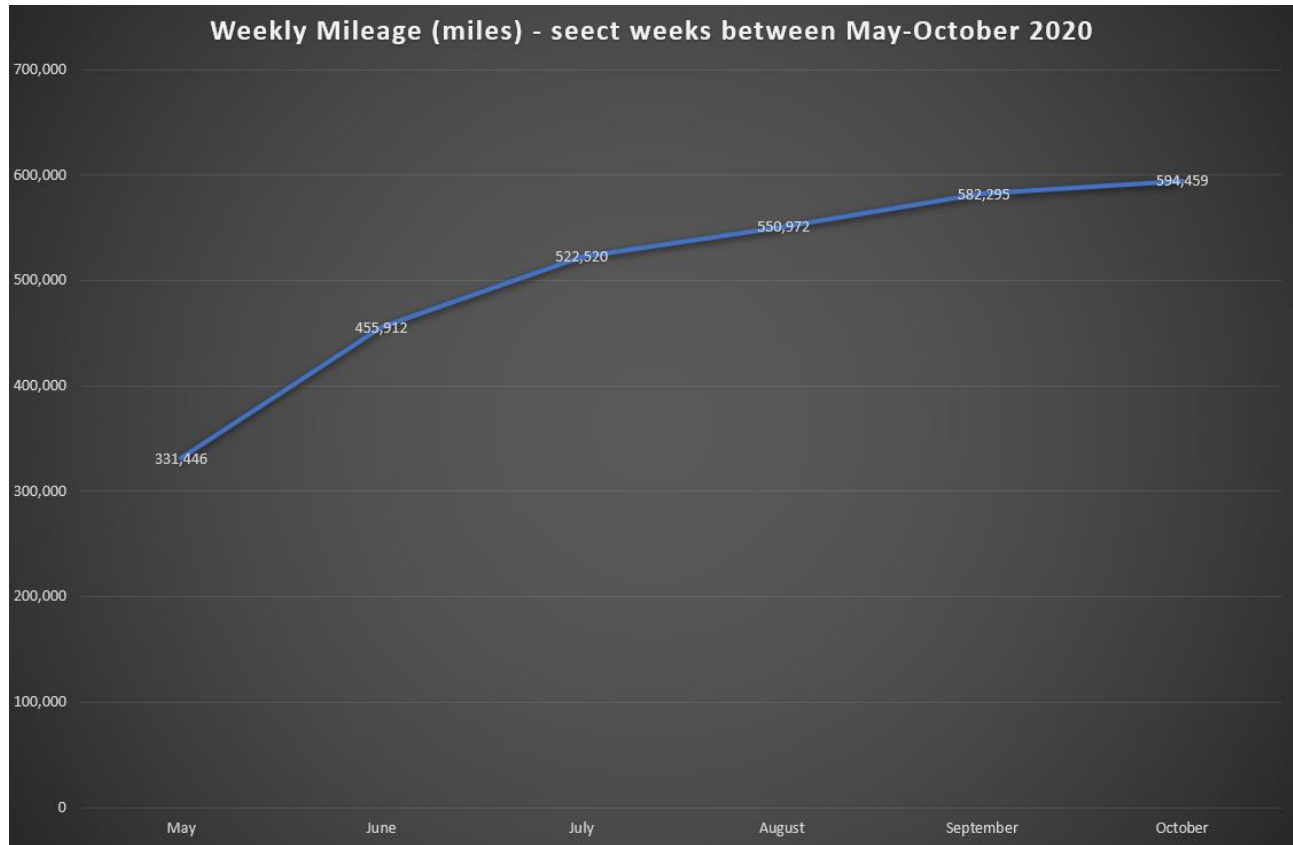
22. Travel Trainers provide training mostly, but not exclusively, for children with special education needs giving them the skills and confidence to travel safely on the bus network or in another sustainable way, such as walking. This gives them key life skills and is often a transformative experience for them and their families. In the first phase of national lockdown Travel Trainers re-deployed to support the death registration process.

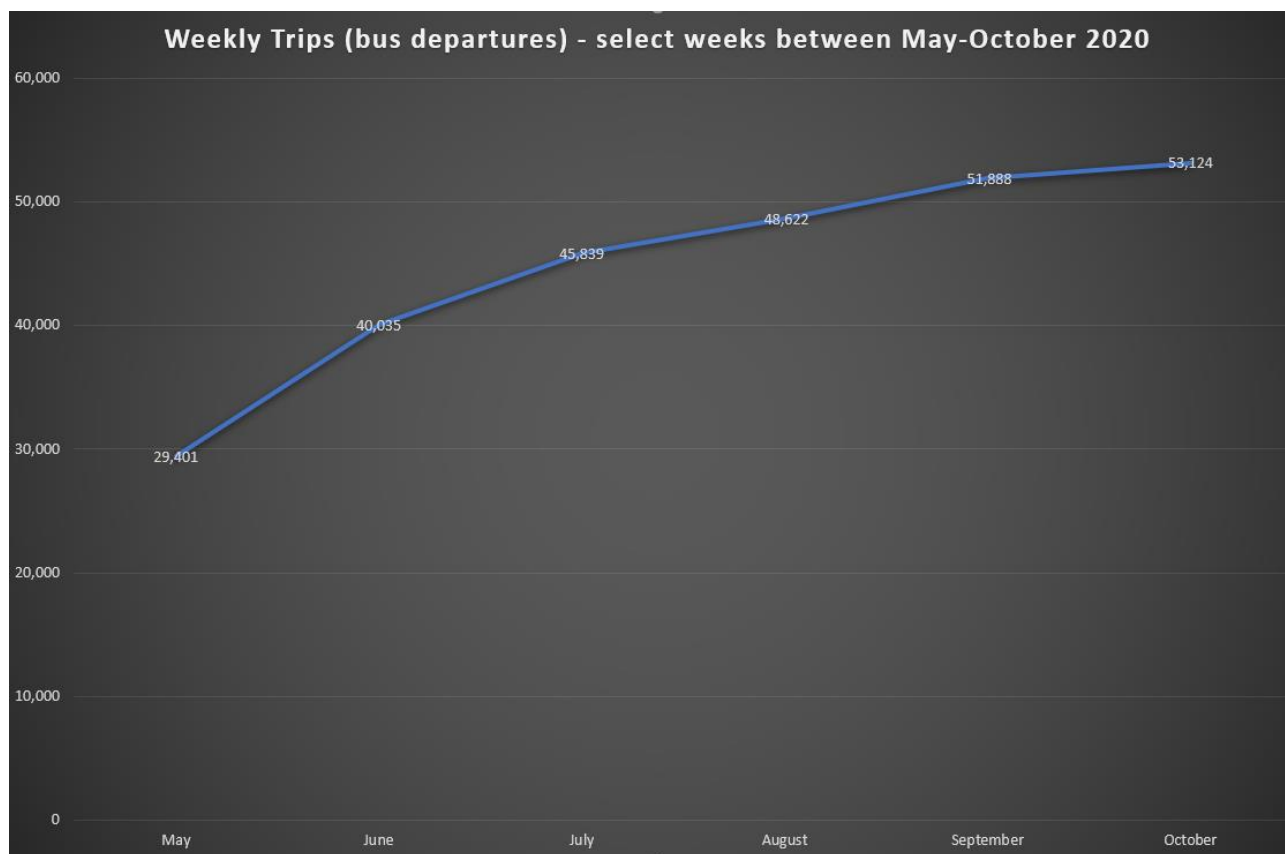
With the re-opening of schools and the expansion of the bus network, they have largely returned to delivering their core service.

### **Next Steps and future issues**

23. Given the uncertainty over future demands on services, ECC are seeking to remain as flexible as possible – supporting additional Covid work and addressing Covid specific issues while seeking to run as much ‘normal service’ as possible shaped around demand. The key risks ahead are:
- Significant long-term damage to the bus network and a slow return to pre-Covid patronage
  - A significant financial pressure across the commercial network resulting in service curtailment or withdrawal

## Annex A – Network Performance





### ESSEX BUS NETWORK OPERATIONS - MAY-OCTOBER 2020

