

**ECC Audit, Governance and Standards Committee
Information Requested From Simon Harris – April 2024
Additional Information Provided – April 2024**

To whom it may concern,

Please find enclosed metrics / insights relating to the Essex Is United (previously known as Essex Coronavirus Action) Facebook page and group. Wherever it is relevant, I have added notes explaining limitations in terms of the exact information that has been requested by the committee. It is important to point out that Facebook's own insights panel only offers two years of data for pages and one year of data for groups, although I have added some historic data that I was able to locate.

In addition to this, I have enclosed a copy of the statement that I used to respond to media enquiries about myself in January 2024. The purpose of this is to try and demonstrate what the project achieved as a whole beyond the provision of numbers, although as I am sure you are aware there is detailed analysis available in three separate evaluations that were carried out by the Essex Public Health Team, NIHR and TheGovLab / NYU.

You may also be aware that Meta recognised both this work and the manner in which elements of it were adapted to assist Ukrainians arriving in Essex as a result of the war with Russia – this culminated with a presentation from myself and a colleague to King Charles (then 'Prince') at Meta's offices in London in March 2022.

Finally, I also want to make it clear that I am prepared to answer any other questions that you may have to the best of my ability, although my preference would be for these to be submitted to myself in writing so I can respond in a timely manner.

Regards,

Simon Harris

Number of post views

From 1st April 2022 until 31st March 2024 inclusive, the content posted on the Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page received 35.2m impressions. A full daily breakdown is provided in the attached spreadsheets. It is important to point out that these spreadsheets represent the raw data that has been downloaded directly from the Facebook platform.

In addition to this, I am also attaching a spreadsheet that I resent to a member of the Strengthening Communities team on 14th February 2024 after they requested historic metric data for Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action. It was originally requested by the SC team in February 2023, and as such it holds raw impressions data for the period covering 1st February 2021 until 1st February 2023 inclusive – a total of 37.6m impressions for that period. I am aware that there is some overlap here, but at the same time it is therefore possible to obtain content impressions dating as far back as 1st February 2021. Back in February 2024, I also pointed out to the SC team that there may be other data about impressions and reach in the Public Health and NIHR evaluations.

Number of likes / shares / other responses to posts

According to Facebook's insights panel, for the period covering 1st April 2022 until 31st 2024 inclusive, the content posted on the Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page received 731.2k interactions. The insights panel on Facebook defines 'content interactions' as:

'The number of likes or reactions, saves, comments, shares and replies on your content, including ads. Content can include formats such as posts, stories, reels, videos and more.'

Number of likes/shares/other responses to ECC corporate content

In order to provide this precise metric, it would involve a large amount of work as someone would need to go through the entire page's history essentially on a 'post by post' basis to identify relevant content. Even if this did happen, it is important to distinguish that some 'ECC corporate content' was shared directly from ECC social media channels, while other 'ECC corporate content' was rewritten as ECA / EIU content.

That being said, if the above is desirable, a member of the Strengthening Communities team within Essex County Council still holds 'Analyst' admin rights on the Essex Is United Facebook page, and so they would be able to carry out this analysis. Therefore, I have no intention of removing this individual's admin rights at the present time, even though our formal collaboration with Essex County Council has now come to an end.

Number of comments

This metric is 'bundled' with the above section, 'Number of likes / shares / other responses to posts.'

Number of people following the page

As of 1st April 2024, the Essex Is United page has 62,504 followers.

Number of people in the group

As of 1st April 2024, the 'Essex Is United – Your Questions Answered' group has 35,884 members.

Number of page visits

From 1st April 2022 until 31st March 2024 inclusive, the Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page received 97.6k visits. That being said, it is my belief that this metric only holds limited value as the vast majority of Facebook usage involves individual posts being placed directly into a user's news feed.

Number of unique visitors

As far as I am aware, this specific metric isn't made available to Facebook page admins. That being said, I am happy to be corrected if this isn't the case, and if so I will endeavour to find this metric at a later date.

Number of posts per month

The following totals apply solely to the Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page:

April 2022 – 134

May 2022 – 166

June 2022 – 160

July 2022 – 146

August 2022 – 129

September 2022 – 143

October 2022 – 130

November 2022 – 140

December 2022 – 129

January 2023 – 112

February 2023 – 107

March 2023 – 128

April 2023 – 119

May 2023 – 145

June 2023 – 135

July 2023 – 113
August 2023 – 110
September 2023 – 90
October 2023 – 111
November 2023 – 120
December 2023 – 95
January 2024 – 175*
February 2024 – 208*
March 2024 – 166*

*All numbers in the above table are taken directly from the Facebook page insights panel, and for these three results in particular the marked increase may be explained by a decision to increase the amount of content sharing from other Facebook pages – both those run directly by Essex County Council and others.

Number of link clicks per month

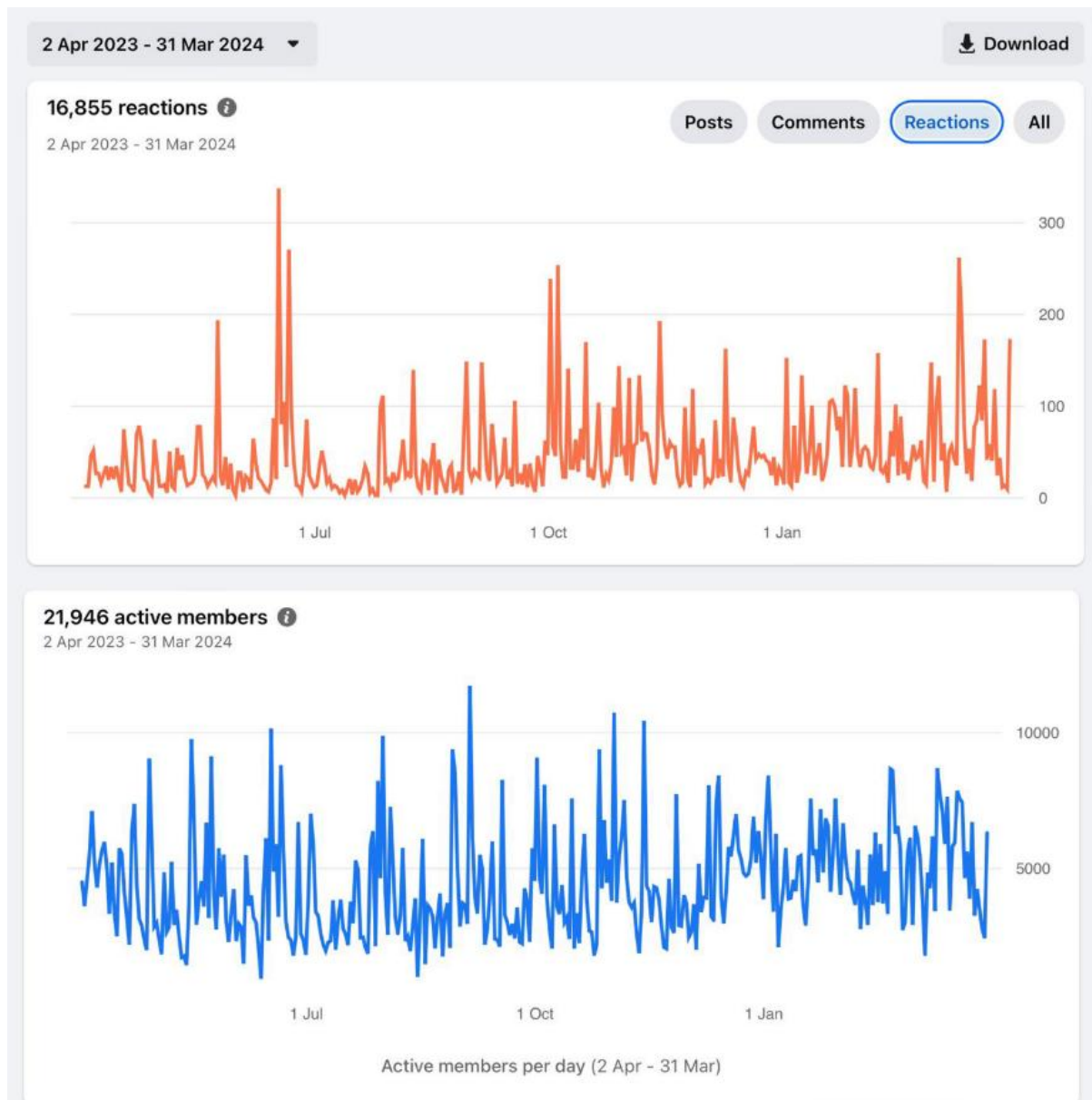
From 1st April 2022 until 31st March 2024 inclusive, the Essex Is United / Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page received 62.5k link clicks.

The Facebook insights panel defines 'link clicks' as:

'The number of clicks, taps or swipes on links within your content, including ads. Content may include formats such as posts, stories, reels, and videos that led to destinations or experiences, on or off Facebook.'

Insights / Metrics For Essex Is United – Your Questions Answered

All of the following information has been submitted by my colleague Neel Mookherjee, who has been responsible for running the main Facebook group since the point when Emmy McCarthy ceased to be the main group admin. Some further metrics are also attached in a spreadsheet.



2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Download

3,215 comments

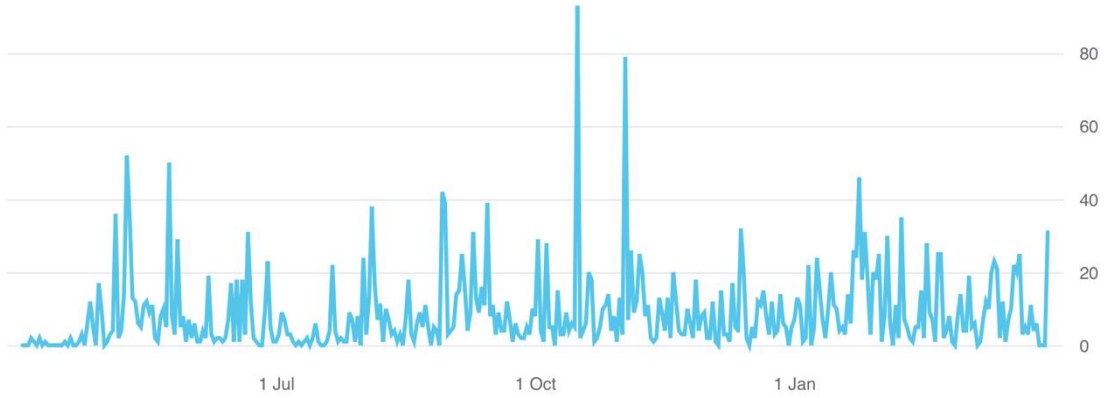
2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Posts

Comments

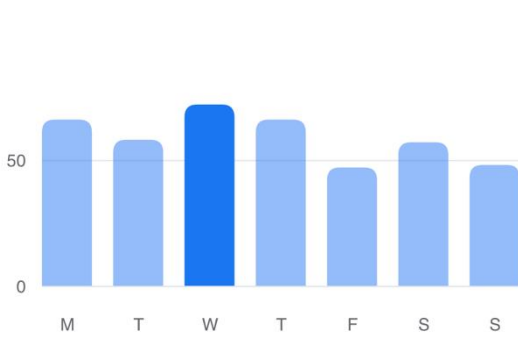
Reactions

All



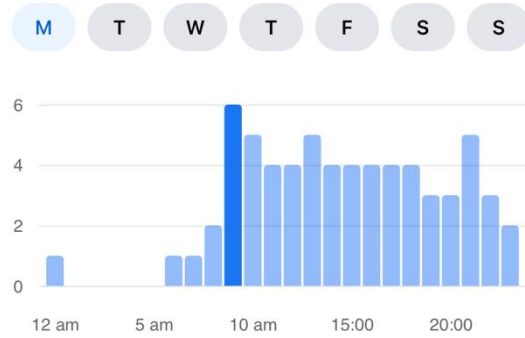
Popular days

The average number of times that members post, comment or react on a given day in the specified date range.



Popular times

The average number of times that members post, comment or react at a given hour of the day in the specified date range.



2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Download

All

1,352 posts

3,215 comments

16,855 reactions

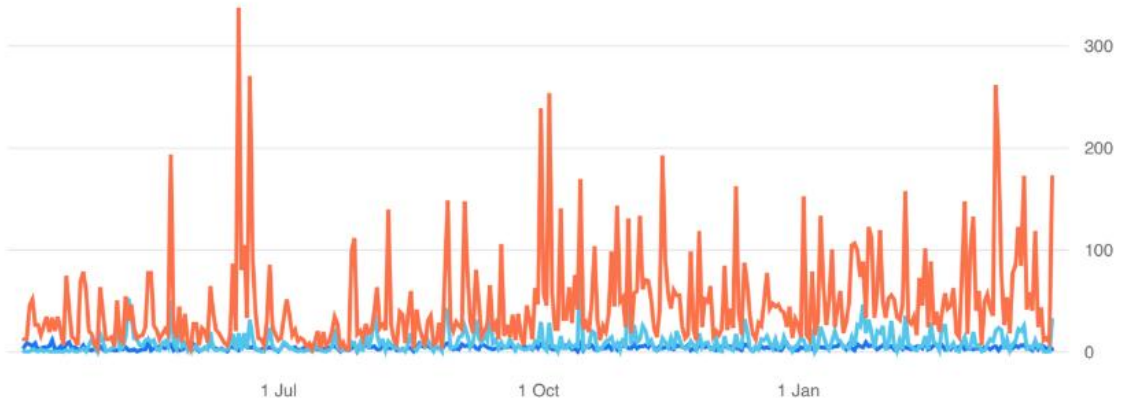
2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Posts

Comments

Reactions

All



2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Download

1,352 posts

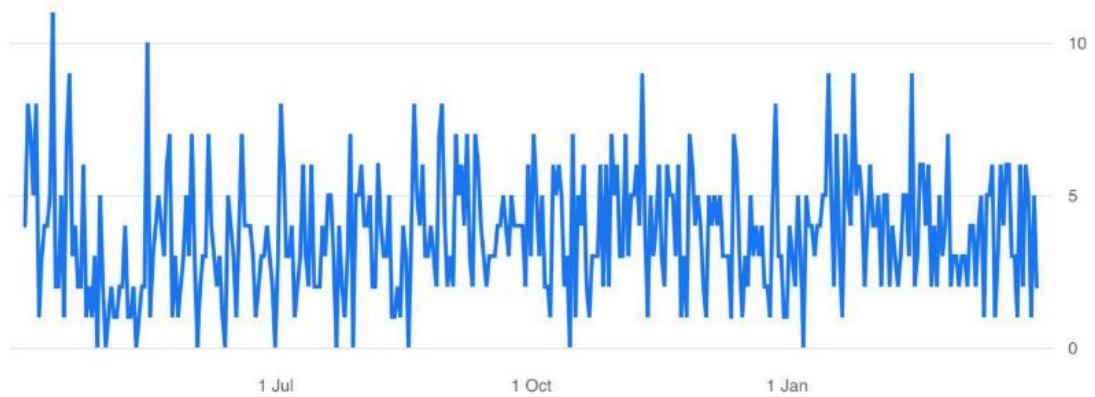
2 Apr 2023 - 31 Mar 2024

Posts

Comments

Reactions

All



Essex County Council Covid Work And Funding Statement
Wednesday 10th January 2024
UPDATED: 25th January 2024

The funding in question was for running the Essex Coronavirus Action Facebook page that started in March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. This was set up as a collaboration between Essex County Council, local public health officials, and Facebook admins including myself.

Initially, it provided information about helping to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and how the most vulnerable could get the help and support that they needed, and over time it evolved to become a recruiting tool for volunteers, both to help the vulnerable and then to support vaccination centres. We recruited and processed around 5,000 volunteers to support Operation Shield and Vaccination.

The work is about reducing isolation and connecting people, and it is a way to provide direct information and guidance to the public. It is a community engagement and development platform that also offered Mental Health and Resilience training at various stages.

The success of the work meant that other areas of the local authority and the NHS commissioned the model across a range of themes, including everything from reducing health inequalities to climate action, and operating peer support groups around these themes.

The page was also utilised by local NHS services to amplify their own messaging about a variety of topics, and this has continued until the present day. In its current form, Essex Is United continues to be a collaboration between Facebook admins, Essex County Council, public health and local NHS services. It acts as an outlet for updates about statutory services, community-related news, and other general Essex content.

Our inbox is always open for any statutory organisation in the county to get in touch when they have content or messaging that needs to be shared, and this work has included a significant amount of consultancy with officials of these statutory organisations.

The nature of the work meant that during the most serious stages of the pandemic, I was providing services seven days per week, and at a variety of times of the day and night - as were the team of community managers we had supporting the project.

Because of the impact of the page and the fact that a number of posts had a very positive reception beyond the borders of Essex, during the

height of the pandemic the page generated between 3m and 5m impressions per month.

For instance, one post in April 2020 that took a slightly comedic approach towards encouraging people to not travel too far from home for their daily exercise led to more than 1m impressions in a single weekend, and it was designed to reflect the more serious stance taken by Essex Police making it clear that people risked getting a fine and spreading the disease further if they ignored this advice.

A Facebook group was also set up called Essex Coronavirus Action Support, giving Essex residents a place to ask questions about both anything pandemic related and also other statutory services. This was operated by a team of professional community managers at all times, and public health officials also used the group to respond to queries as and when they came in. This group continues now under the Essex Is United banner as a place to ask questions about any statutory service. I also wish to point out that a number of evaluations about Essex Coronavirus Action (the Facebook page and the group) have now taken place. These have been carried out by NIHR (National Institute For Health and Care Research), local public health officials, and TheGovLab / New York University. These are freely available online.

Regarding the specific allegations that have been made relating to the funding of this project, I need to make it clear that there is only a certain amount that I can say at the present time. This is because I had to make a report to Essex Police in July 2023, not about the allegations themselves, but the manner in which they were being shared with organisations that I work with and also other parties.

There were serious consequences on a personal level beyond social media and the Internet, and so for my own safety I was compelled to report it as a police matter. The process of contact with the police is ongoing, including submitting material that has come to light in the last week, and I hope this explains why I temporarily removed most of my social media presence.

I am aware that other individuals who have been impacted by this have made similar reports.

That being said, I am prepared to confirm that the funding, the majority of which was clustered during the most serious stages of the pandemic, was not only for my services as detailed above. It also supported the following:

Professional community managers and other admins / moderators for the main Facebook group and others linked to the project.

Local Facebook group mapping by individuals on an ongoing basis to ensure that important messaging was not only reaching as many people as possible, but also the right people, in the right places, at the right time. This resulted in over 700 place-based Facebook admins and over 11,000 communities of place being mapped and activated.

Climate action work to support the Essex Climate Action Commission and their aims.

Content creation from a number of different individuals, from social media influencers right up to very famous individuals who provided their own spin on Covid-19 guidance from central government. This content hasn't only been Coronavirus-related, but it has also covered a number of other areas under the banners of 'strengthening communities' and 'tackling health inequalities.'

Fundamentally, I must draw attention to, and insist upon the publication of the following section of the statement issued by Essex County Council on Wednesday 10th January 2024:

It is important to note the payments covered more than just social media content, and included activity to directly support others doing similar work across the county.

Such payments were also made through Simon Harris for expediency.

Additionally, I also draw attention to the following that was published in a follow-up by Essex County Council on their website on Wednesday 24th January 2024:

We understand from records given to us recently by Mr Harris that he passed on at least £163,190.95 to others involved in the campaign. These may be regarded as sub-contractors.