

# Essex County Council

## 13 October 2020

### Answers to Written Questions

#### Agenda Item 14

**1. By Councillor Maddocks of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care**

‘During the COVID-19 crisis what extra help has ECC given to the providers of care homes throughout Essex, and what provisions are in place during a second wave of COVID-19 especially in the winter months ahead?’

#### **Reply**

‘Overall ECC has taken a significant number of urgent decisions totalling over £74m enabling additional expenditure or services to be available, in the Council’s response to COVID-19. This included specific provision of some £18.6m for the residential care market, £11.4m for the homecare market and £5.6m to support day services.

In addition we committed some £2m for the provision of PPE to ensure council staff and care providers had immediate access to PPE while supplies were under pressure and allocated a further £7m to cover the additional cost of PPE associated with complying with the new national guidance as it emerged during the peak.

Throughout we have worked closely with our providers and I would like to pay tribute to their work and the bravery and resilience of them and their staff who have responded magnificently during this very difficult time

Care homes have felt the impact of the pandemic very acutely with the cost in human terms being impossible to overstate. We recognised these challenges and working with our providers we have established multi-disciplinary Care Home Hubs to support homes where outbreaks have occurred to get them under control and to assist care homes in implementing effective infection prevention regimes.

We have also actively worked with providers to ensure they are aware of, and can take advantage of, the Infection Control Fund money made available by the government, which for Essex was over £16m, to help providers meet the additional costs associated with providing effective infection control.

In anticipation of an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases over the winter period, as preparation for a possible second wave, and to help support providers with wider winter pressures, such as seasonal flu, we have put in place additional measures, including focused risk reporting, to ensure that we are actively monitoring trends in infection and hospital admission and taking coordinated action to help reduce onward transmission.

Care homes remain vulnerable and the work of our Care Home Hubs will continue. We have sufficient stockpiles of PPE to ensure providers and adults using Direct Payments will have immediate access to the necessary supplies should their own supply chain fail, and we will continue to work flexibly to ensure access to social care support is available when required.

We are committed to doing all we can to support our providers and will continue to work closely with them as the pandemic continues to unfold.'

**2. By Councillor Grundy of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'I have had a number of residents complaining of vehicles short circuiting queues at the Army and Navy by using the Bus Lane – currently we do not have enforcement cameras there. In view of this current abuse and future plans for more sustainable transport in that area, could this be reviewed?'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for Stock for his question on the Bus Lane at the Army and Navy Junction in Chelmsford.

I sympathise with residents who must be frustrated to see individuals break the rules. We have monitored the bus lane previously to see if there is a significant level of contraventions that would warrant the installation of cameras. However, the level of contravention is low and therefore given that this a bus lane and not a bus gate, the number of cameras would be needed to enforce would be greater than warranted at this location, for a significant cost to taxpayers. While not all bus lanes and bus gates have enforcement cameras, Essex Highways monitor sites and look at where the need for enforcement may present itself alongside the ability to self-fund the site (fines income covering investment costs). Even given the previous monitoring, we will continue to note this specific site for consideration in future camera rollout programmes.'

**3. By Councillor Sheldon of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'The overrunning of the latest phase of the Sadlers Farm Roadworks by Balfour Beattie has caused misery for thousands of Castle Point residents. Appreciating that the works are taking place under an existing contract and at no further cost to the taxpayer, what pressure can the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, and Essex County Council Highways, place on Balfour Beattie to ensure they stick by their final deadline for full completion of scheduled works by the end of December?'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for South Benfleet for his question on the Sadlers Farm road works.

The works requiring the closure of Sadlers Farm Bridge and the A13 on slip road to the Sadlers Farm Roundabout were completed and the road reopened on the 21 September at no cost to the taxpayer.

There are still some residual issues that Balfour Beatty need to address. That will require lane closures in the underpass once the solution has been agreed. However, from experience this traffic management set up does not cause an issue and maintains free flowing traffic from the A13 to the A130. A date for this has not been set and will need to be agreed with ECC; it is unlikely that Balfour Beatty will complete all the required works by Christmas. However, ECC officers are continuing to put pressure on Balfour Beatty to undertake these remedial works as soon as possible and to safeguard future maintenance costs to this authority. These structures should have a design life of 120 years and we are seeking to ensure this is achievable with acceptable levels of maintenance to ECC.'

**4. By Councillor Scordis of the Leader of the Council**

'Given reports of the way that Uyghur Muslims have been treated in China, will this council terminate all relationships and interests we have with China as well as oppose the Bradwell B plans until these humanitarian issues are addressed and resolved?'

**Reply**

'This is a question of Foreign Policy. By law, local authorities do not have foreign policies and we must work within the policies of national government. We work within, and will continue to work within, whatever parameters are set by national government.'

**5. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care**

'The Government has lifted the restrictions from the NHS Trusts regarding partners or a loved one being able to participate in pregnancy appointments, scans and during labour. Can we be assured that Essex NHS Trusts are complying with these guidelines as it is reported that not all Trusts are?'

**Reply**

'Unfortunately, we only received notification of this question at the end of last week and so have not had time to get a full response from the various Essex Trusts. However, having contacted the Trusts on Friday, we have, at the time of writing, had confirmation from Mid and South Essex that they are allowing partners into all areas of maternity services (at Basildon, Broomfield and Southend hospitals). There is currently a small exception for some pregnancy scans at Basildon Hospital due to some of the ultrasound rooms being very small. The Trust is working with the

sonography team to try and make some further adjustments so we can facilitate access for partners consistently.

I will be happy to update you on any response from elsewhere in Essex as soon as we receive them.'

**6. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care**

'It has been reported that Councils are to get additional National Resources to help them reach more people with COVID-19. Can some of these resources be put towards more mobile testing units within the Essex County, maybe in schools and universities where there is a density of population. There have been some schools which have had to close year bubbles or classes due to COVID-19 cases.

To enable us to get on top of this virus we need an efficient Test, Track, Contact and Support system to be put into place now, not in six months' time.'

**Reply**

'The Council received £5.8m to set up and run a local Test, Trace, Contact and Support system. This money was not expected to cover testing which is separately funded nationally.

The Essex programme is delivered across a wide group of system partners and is seen as one of the best nationally. We have been given additional responsibilities by PHE, recognising we can offer a more complete contact service than most areas. An example of this recognition came when we were asked to lead on the response to the recent Norfolk poultry outbreaks, helping the Norfolk system. Regional Assurance feedback is consistently positive, and we are seen as robust and thorough in managing the outbreak.

The national test system is under pressure - while testing capacity increases, so do the demands as the case numbers increase. However, we recognise the importance of everyone who experiences symptoms seeking a test, and we would encourage all to do so.

We recognise the need in Essex to support the system further exactly as suggested. We set up an innovative system with NHS and private sector colleagues to specifically allow bespoke rapid access to testing of teachers and their families to minimise the need for these key workers to be absent from work.

We have worked with the national system to establish testing sites on the university campuses at Essex and Anglia Ruskin University. In addition, we are working with the University of Essex and using our resources to ensure rapid access to testing for students through NHS pillar 1 services.

We have worked with national testing services to ensure that testing is in the right place at the right time in Essex. This has included increased testing in Epping Forest, where we have seen more cases and the very rapid, urgent deployment of a unit to a specific local outbreak.

Ultimately, however, the overall availability of testing capacity rests with NHS. We are market-leading in our drive for collaboration, as seen by what is outlined above, but decisions on deployment are only partially in our gift.'

**7. By Councillor Harris of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'Regarding the 20mph Policy for Essex, would the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet review the current arrangements and policy, to give consideration to residents who wish to put in a zone or limit, without the need for costly and time-consuming traffic surveys?

Residents in older, smaller estates would like 20mph on their estates, regardless of speed surveys and in many cases are frustrated in trying to influence in a positive way their communities.

Many 20mph have been put in place on newly built estates, and even planning applications seem to include for future areas being built, so it is those older estates that now need to catch up with the current design for local roads where estates have single or dual entrances.

Examples in South Colchester who have 20mph already are

- 1) Lethe Grove
- 2) Solus Estate
- 3) Marlboro Place
- 4) Quarters Estate
- 5) Oakapple Estate
- 6) Willows Estate
- 7) Birch Glen estate

Local highways budgets are used on surveys when overwhelming resident support a speed change, so a County Council review to policy and conditions would be a cost saving and democratic step.

With the COVID-19 pandemic in place, now more than ever residents views on 20mph for their local estates being put in would facilitate safer walking, safer cycling, and would actually save costs of Local Highways budgets, and leave just the design and signage to be put in as budgets allow.'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for Maypole for his question on 20mph Speed limits in newly built estates.

The two locations that are Willows Estate and Birch Glen Estate were installed by the Local Highway panels last year period of 2019/2020.

Speed surveys are currently being undertaken to determine if a 20mph speed limit or zone is appropriate in the other areas you have listed. When average speeds are

above 29mph then a 20mph limit is not appropriate as drivers will not adhere to the new limit. If the average speeds are below 20mph then spending public money on introducing a 20mph speed limit could be considered as counterproductive. Officers therefore believe that assessing the existing situation has merit when determining if a 20mph speed limit or zone is appropriate. To install a 20mph zone requires traffic calming features within 50m of any given point which need careful consideration before installing, one of those considerations is the existing average speed of drivers before any measures are implemented.

Of course, it is my ambition to focus on a safer, greener, and healthier transport network for Essex and our speed limit policy is one I plan to review. However, there is no guarantee of funding in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic nor should the funding be used in any way other than the government's intention.'

#### **8. By Councillor Henderson of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'The Portfolio Holder will be aware of serious concerns being raised with reference to the possibility of the Government breaking its promise with UK residents to secure a BREXIT deal with the EU by the December deadline.

Concerns for this County Council include:

An increase in Heavy Goods Vehicles using Essex Highways and Harwich International Port, due to substantial delays to thousands of freight vehicles using the Port of Dover.

Information needed to provide the exact locations of the 'inland clearance sites' (lorry parks) relevant to hauliers in Essex and Harwich International Port with a progress update on their preparedness with timescales.

The provision of facilities to carry out offsite border checks on goods arriving at Harwich International port – These checks could require increased resources, including the Port Health Authority and Essex Trading Standards.

Can the Portfolio Holder please publish and supply urgently to all members, all correspondence, including advice, plans and any reports received from all Government departments with reference to the above listed concerns.'

#### **Reply**

'I thank the member for Harwich for his question on BREXIT deal outcomes for Essex.

Government released its EU Transition Reasonable Worst Case Scenario (RWCS) for borders online on 23 Sept -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reasonable-worst-case-scenario-for-borders-at-the-end-of-the-transition-period-on-31-december-2020>. This is a worst-case scenario to test contingency planning rather than a prediction. The planning assumption is based on the reintroduction of full border controls by EU member states at the end of the Transition Period combined with a significant proportion of HGVs not being "border ready" for travel to France. The RWCS identifies that for

other ports that there is unlikely to be significant sustained disruption as a result of operators denying boarding to freight vehicles that are not ready to clear controls at destination, but it does identify a risk of queue and delays.

Government published proposals for reintroduction of inbound UK controls for EEA goods in its Border Operating Model which was updated 08 Oct 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-border-operating-model>. This proposes the phased introduction of inbound controls with no inspections at Border for most EU goods until 1 July 2021. This document identified government's proposals for Inland border clearance sites and HGV facilities (section 0.5). There are no HGV holding sites proposed in Essex. The document does confirm HMRC's intention to use North Weald as an Inland clearance site along with a potential site at Thames Gateway.

HMRC intend to use the North Weald airfield site for deferred duty transit arrangements – CTC or ATA carnet - for some Kent port traffic. HMRC do not intend to provide HGV parking at the site. The site will operate alongside other multi-purpose sites in Kent which offer a wider range of facilities and North Weald will only take a proportion of traffic flow which wishes to use the duty deferment schemes. ECC officers have been informally engaged and provided data to support traffic modelling by HMRC's contractors. We expect that a formal 14-day engagement process will start imminently prior to HMRC's planning application. Engagement materials are not yet available, but we anticipate operation to be similar to that given planning approval for no deal - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2019/1228/contents/made>. In their engagement response ECC officers expect to raise matters concerning the site operators' proposals to control and balance flow to the site to match available capacity and funding for available traffic mitigation measures. ECC has not been notified of any other inland border sites within our council area.

The government is consulting with individual ports on the introduction of infrastructure needed for 1 July 2021 and has opened bidding for ports to apply for funding for on-port facilities under the Ports Infrastructure Fund. Bidding closes 31 October 2020 for delivery of facilities by 1 July 2021 (or 1 Jan 2021 for early delivery) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/200-million-port-infrastructure-fund-opens-for-bids>.

At Harwich, ferry operators operate a pre-booked service and there are a limited number of ferries that can use the route and so the potential for significant increases in traffic in the short term is limited. The port itself has previously indicated that it has significant holding space for outbound vehicles, limiting the risk of disruption outside the port. On 14 Sept 2020 through the Essex Resilience Forum, ECC officers met with DfT and Highways England who are responsible for management of the Strategic Road Network which includes the A120, to understand traffic modelling and contingency plans. Verbal feedback from DfT at that meeting was that modelling did not raise concerns of significant queues for Harwich.

The central government departments responsible for funding and tasking Trading Standards operations have not asked that ECC increase its staffing for additional

checks post 1 Jan 2021. Along with other councils in engagement with Border Delivery planners and via the Local Government Association, ECC officers have highlighted the potential for an increase in inspections at border sites, or inland, due to the requirement to inspect EEA goods, the potential for changes in sourcing of products after transition to new suppliers and more broadly due to proposed changes in the UK Internal market. ECC officers and those of other councils have also highlighted the recruitment and training timescales needed.'

**9. By Councillor Henderson of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'Can I ask the Portfolio Holder, given the government's announcement this week that hauliers will require Kent Access Permits to drive lorries into Kent, what will be the impact of this for the Essex-Kent border, including implications for the costs of infrastructure and additional policing as well as any possible consequences for residents and commuters?'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for Harwich for his question on lorries crossing the Essex/Kent border.

Department for Transport issued a consultation for Operation Brock Enforcement - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/enforcing-operation-brock-plans-in-2021> which included proposals for Kent Access Permits. These would be required for any haulier using designated roads in Kent leading to Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, rather than all Kent roads. The permits are proposed to be issued via a Smart Freight app which would validate if the freight traffic is border ready. The measures are proposed to reduce the risk of queuing traffic in Kent caused by traffic not being able to pass border checks in France.

The consultation closed on 23 August and final arrangements have not been announced. ECC responded to the consultation and raised points over the requirement for the permitting system not to unreasonably disrupt domestic freight traffic and the need to avoid disruption outside Kent e.g. through vehicles waiting for clearance.

The Border Operating Model issued 8 October clarifies that HGV drivers doing domestic journeys that start, travel through, or end in Kent, will not need to obtain a KAP, but advises that all drivers transporting goods domestically, carry paperwork detailing their journey so any possible delays can be minimised. (section 4.1.7)

The costs of infrastructure and additional policing are matters for DfT and Police Authorities upon which I am unable to comment.'

**10. By Councillor Young of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**



Essex planning authorities work hard to keep pace with existing Government House Building targets, the proposed changes the Government have consulted upon are eye watering for some of our districts.

	Avg delivery (last 3 years)	Current Standard Method	Proposed new Standard Method	Actual Change	% Change
<b>Essex</b>	<b>7,302</b>	<b>10,683</b>	<b>13,242</b>	<b>2,559</b>	<b>24.0%</b>
Southend-on-Sea	498	1,181	1,324	143	12.1%
Thurrock	623	1,147	1,483	336	29.3%
Brentwood	191	453	393	- 60	-13.2%
Maldon	250	308	623	315	102.3%
Braintree	439	857	776	- 81	-9.5%
Chelmsford	1,089	946	1,557	611	64.6%
Colchester	1,045	1,078	1,612	534	49.5%
Tendring	713	866	1,141	275	31.8%
Basildon	364	1,001	820	- 181	-18.1%
Castle Point	160	354	386	32	9.0%
Rochford	226	360	586	226	62.8%
Epping Forest	380	953	868	- 85	-8.9%
Harlow	432	473	442	- 31	-6.6%
Uttlesford	892	706	1,231	525	74.4%

Can I have an assurance that the Portfolio Holder will lobby Government to resist such an over inflation of house building in Essex which would result from these figures being endorsed?’

## Reply

‘Thank you for your question Councillor Young, and I hope you will be pleased to find that we agree. As you have highlighted, Essex continues to have a key role to play in contributing towards the Government’s ambition of 300,000 new homes a year. However, as result of the proposed revised standard method, there will be a county net increase in the local housing need (LHN) requirement of 25%, up from 8,355 to 10,435 per annum which will require Essex local authorities (in the majority of cases) required to plan for significant uplifts in housing need.

This will lead to difficult decisions on future spatial strategies where districts may need to seek assistance from neighbouring authorities to meet housing need, which will prove difficult if the duty to co-operate is to be revoked and without any clear replacement process identified in the Planning White Paper.

Furthermore, as the Green Belt remains protected, it is difficult to envisage how the housing numbers from the new standard method for assessing local housing need will be implemented, particularly prior to any local plan policies being in place and sites identified to deliver the housing uplift.

Meeting housing existing levels of growth are already challenging and, and these potentially significant increases will further increase pressure on existing towns and villages, the natural and historic environment, community infrastructure (including schools) and transportation networks. We feel that there needs to be further

consideration in conjunction with proposals being put forward as part of the Government's Planning White Paper – Planning for the future.'

**11. By Councillor Davies of the Cabinet Member for Finance**

'Councils in England including Essex face a huge funding gap due to the unexpected spending on the pandemic. Could the Cabinet Member update the council on what representations ECC has made to government for more funding to meet the extra cost pressures?'

**Reply**

'The Council recognises and welcomes the additional funding that Government has made available to support COVID-19 related costs incurred by local authorities. For ECC to date these have included Covid Emergency funding of £72.8m, Test and Trace funding of £5.8m, Adult Social Care Infection Control funding of £30.7m, Hardship Assistance funding of £1.4m, Home to School Transport funding of £1.3m, Sales, Fees and Charges loss support grant of £1.6m and £1.1m via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. It is currently estimated that ECC costs will exceed these funding streams by around £10m in 2020/21, however we have significant concerns that there could be greater financial impacts in 2021/22 as a result of ongoing response requirements together with tax funding shortfalls as a consequence of the economic downturn. It is not expected that the 2021/22 financial settlement for local government will be announced before December, leaving little time for the council to take action if the funding from government falls short of modelling assumptions.

ECC has been updating MHCLG on its COVID-19 related financial impacts on a monthly basis in addition to responding to the Comprehensive Spending Review. ECC has highlighted projected 2021/22 funding shortfalls and cost pressures to Essex MPs and civil servant and has supported representations made via the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association on the potential impacts on council finances. Officers participate in the Essex Finance Officers network and ECC has initiated a Finance Portfolio Holder meeting to identify common areas of concern where we can work together to make the case for additional funding to support extra cost pressures.'

**12. By Councillor Davies of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care**

'Public Health England have found that children's immunisation jabs fell by 20% during the pandemic. Could the Cabinet Member advise what measures have been taken to urge families to contact health centres to ensure children's vaccinations are up to date?'

**Reply**

'It is not clear where the figure for a 20% reduction in childhood immunisations during the pandemic comes from but happily it has not been experienced by us in

Essex. Our local NHS England / Public Health England Immunisation Team have supplied me with the latest figures. Comparing the immunisation for July to September 2019 to April to June 2020 (the most recent quarter for which we have data) the routine immunisation rate in children up to five-year-olds did reduce, but that reduction was only 1% from 94.9% to 93.9% of five-year-olds. In two-year-olds the rate increased fractionally by 0.2% (from 93.3% to 93.5%), and in one-year-olds it increased by half a percent (from 93.5% to 94.0%). Our local immunisation team has been working to support general practice to continue to offer this service.

Immunisations remain one of the most effective preventative measures known to mankind. The immunisation service is not complacent and continues to strive to increase levels of immunisation but in the midst of a pandemic it is clear they have done remarkably well.'

### **13. By Councillor Scordis of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families**

'With a record number of young people unemployed and a recession expected as we recover from COVID-19, what are we doing as a council to support our care leavers to provide them with the tools to find employment?'

#### **Reply**

'Thank you for your question. You will also be aware that I have identified care leavers as a priority for the service in terms of support and have introduced measures and a programme of work in this regard. You will be aware that the areas of housing, employment and Council Tax obligations were identified as key concerns for care leaver. In April 2020 in partnership with our district, city and borough councils, we agreed to exempt care leavers from paying council tax up to the age of 21. This removes a financial burden which care leavers find difficult to afford whilst they start to find their independence. We are continuing to work across the Council to identify further employment opportunities and crucially to develop schemes to support sustainability in work.

Each quadrant has a targeted Youth Advisor (TYA) who is placed in the leaving care teams and works specifically with care leavers to help them identify appropriate education or employment opportunities, including help with applications and coaching skills for interviews.

This has obviously been more difficult during the COVID-19 crisis, but they continue to have virtual contact if face to face is not possible. In addition, we have two employability workers who work closely with the TYA's and employers to support young people in work. They have identified job/ apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers with many local companies and partners and maintain links to support the young people.

Essex County Council is working with partners across Essex to identify how we can best support employment opportunities for residents aged 16-24. This includes opportunities as part of the Kickstart scheme and various others to provide apprenticeships and training to young people so that they are able to access employment and get on a career path during these difficult times. All these

opportunities will be made available for and promoted to those in care and those who are leaving care.

Finally, additional work is underway to support young people once they are in employment to ensure that they have the best chance of sustaining their positions.'

#### **14. By Councillor Harris of the Leader of the Council**

'With the government proposals about relaxing planning laws to a free for all, and a dramatic watering down of residents' ability to comment and influence, would the Leader of the Council represent Essex residents' views by joining me in writing in opposition to the relevant government ministers to express concerns?'

#### **Reply**

'Thank you for your question. The Planning White Paper (PWP) has already been the focus of significant attention and debate since it was published. Essex County Council Officers and Cllr Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, have met regularly with Planning and Housing Officers and Portfolio Holders to try to understand all the potential impacts of the PWP from a county council and local authority perspective (in our differing roles).

We are keen that we are consistent in our messaging to Ministers and civil servants about our concerns and where we see opportunities to improve the current system for the benefit of residents and our businesses. Essex County Council supports housing growth, but it is crucial that increased housing supply is not delivered at the expense of quality, sustainable infrastructure and quality of life for Essex residents. We support well planned, good quality, sustainable forms of development, built to the right standards and in built in the right places.

The PWP proposes that community engagement is front-loaded in the local plan stage and we would want to understand how this would operate, to ensure that residents can put their views forward. The PWP also proposes that enforcement powers and sanctions will be strengthened to provide community confidence as the system moves to one that is 'rules based' and again we would want to understand how this might affect communities.

The move to a digitalised system as highlighted in the PWP could be transformative for the user experience and public engagement but requires significant investment, both in terms of technology and upskilling within the industry and whilst the PWP seeks to promote community engagement in the up-front plan-making stage, it appears that the Government is moving to a top down approach on matters such as limiting consultation at the planning application stage, and assigning new nationally set housing numbers which will prove challenging to allocate in a condensed local plan preparation period.

Like all other local planning authorities Essex County Council is a consultee on the White Paper and we are setting out in detail our response through the already-agreed process, as I am sure most other authorities will be doing.

We have shared our initial thinking with the Place and Sustainable Economic Growth Scrutiny Board and are planning an All Members Briefing on 16 October where we will have a chance to hear members' views on how the proposed changes have the potential to impact positively and negatively on their residents.'

**15. By Councillor Young of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'It has been good to see the SGH (Safer, Greener, Healthier routes) coming into Colchester Town Centre. Residents in my Division want to see radical change within their neighbourhoods and want to see more space for cycling and walking.

When can my residents in Wivenhoe and Greenstead see SGH coming into these neighbourhoods?'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for Wivenhoe St Andrew for her question on Safer, Greener and Healthier measures.

Colchester's immediate priorities are centred on north south and east west routes and this is the subject of the EATF (Emergency Access Travel Fund) phase 2 bid. However, there is also a bid made earlier this year which we are awaiting government response. This was for PinchPoint (PP) funding to ease congestion through a range of measures including sustainable transport. The County Council has put forward a bid for £9M to make a start on its LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan) routes and listed those routes in its bid. This includes LCWIP route no 8 which includes the Greenstead area. All significant funding for Transport schemes comes from Government and we bid whenever there is the opportunity. We expect to hear the results of both the EATF and PP bids later this autumn and we also expect further opportunities in the new year through the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment programme which has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Wivenhoe is not in the LCWIP set of proposals we would be happy to investigate the priorities within the town. Wivenhoe does have a relatively new route to the University as well as the NCN route to Colchester.

Unfortunately, Wivenhoe does not currently form part of tranche 1 or 2 of the bid to central government for funding to improve walking and cycling for Essex County Council. The latest bid put forward needed to concentrate on areas where there is the largest movement of walkers and cyclists in the first instance. The information on the bids put forward can be found on the website.

<https://www.essexhighways.org/transport-and-roads/getting-around/safer-greener-healthier.aspx#documents>

However, it is certainly my ambition to extend the Safer, Greener, Healthier routes to as many parts of Essex as soon as funding and resources allow.'

**16. By Councillor Abbott of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

‘The Cabinet Member, in answer to previous questions at Council meetings, has confirmed his support for efficient ways of working when highway repairs are carried out, including ensuring that groups of defects are repaired when sufficiently close together to do so.

Can he therefore explain why it sometimes continues to be the case, as with 3 recent examples in Rivenhall, where repairs have been carried out on some defects yet within the immediate vicinity other reported defects have been left?

Whilst I welcome the work that has been done recently in the village to the road surface in Church Road at two locations and to a footway in St Marys Road, does the Cabinet Member not agree that it would have been more efficient to repair all the reported defects that were close together, thereby avoiding the need for more system reporting, more inspections and further visits by repair crews to the same locations?’

**Reply**

‘I thank the member for Witham Northern for his question on road repairs.

We would always look to include other similar work within the immediate vicinity so that these can be delivered at the same time. We would expect that this is the case where the other recorded defects are within the same traffic management and permit that is being used to fix the primary defect. We find that not all sites are the same and each particular location needs to be assessed.

By way of background we currently have 17 crews working across our 12 districts on carriageway or footway repairs and patching, and a backlog of over 13,000 recorded carriageway defects and over 130,000 recorded footways defects including kerbing. We look to target recorded defects when organising repairs and plan to group defects where possible to minimise travelling time and maximise efficient use of resources where possible. There is currently no direct ECC revenue funding allocation for reactive pothole repairs, we rely solely on DfT annual infrastructure funding to deliver this aspect of service. We also have to set some intervention limits for our teams for the scope of works, as they would simply not cover the geography of Essex without them. We utilise the 17 crews to attend to worst first, or high-profile defects due to safety issues or members enquiries for example. In reality, these crews are increasingly being directed to address follow up repairs where barriers have been used as a make safe.

Those defects that are reported but sit below our investigatory levels in the maintenance strategy are not included in the numbers above and are perhaps more accurately described as cosmetic damage. We cannot seek to include cosmetic or reported damage in our thinking as this would mean that we are leaving recorded

defects elsewhere for longer and this may have a negative impact on safety of our highways.

Officers have reviewed the sites that were identified by yourself. Church Road was a carriageway patch delivered under three-way traffic signals, there appears to be an adjacent older patch that is showing signs of failure but may still be below investigatory levels. No other recorded defects are on our system related to Church Road. It needs to be appreciated that driven safety inspections have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic meaning that the inspectors are only recording safety related defects. The operations crew would not have been able to attempt to repair the failure identified above on the day as this would have needed a full road closure. We are also not clear if the signs of failure that we noted this week were evident when the repair was delivered in August, it is possible that this has happened since this date.

The footway in St Mary's Road was a three-day job delivered as a follow up to a make safe when a lorry caused extensive rutting to the footway. A further defect was logged by the highways' inspector nearby, but this was after the follow up job was prepared and programmed. The operations team would not have been able to address this immediately on site as this would have needed substantially different traffic and pedestrian management as the position of the new defect was directly on a T-junction with the main road.'

## **17. By Councillor Kendall of the Leader of the Council**

'If Essex County Council is keen to promote diversity, what steps can it take to improve our residents' awareness, knowledge and understanding of the different cultures and religions that are now practiced by the population of Essex?'

### **Reply**

'Essex County Council is committed to making Essex a cohesive and welcoming place for everyone. With this in mind, ECC runs or supports many initiatives that seek to improve residents' awareness, knowledge and understanding of different cultures and religions.

Some recent examples of this activity include the following:

- The Essex Faith Covenant brings together faith communities and public services, with the aims of removing mistrust and promoting open, practical working. Collaborations to date have supported adoptive parents in Rayleigh, homeless people in Colchester and refugees in Braintree. The Covenant is currently exploring how faith-based organisations can support social prescribing and will oversee a faith and dementia action plan.
- Manage the Faith and Communities Tactical Coordination Group, part of the Greater Essex strategic response to coronavirus. This has strengthened relationships between faith groups (including Christian, Muslim, Reform and Orthodox Jewish including the Haredi Jewish Community on Canvey Island, Hindu and Buddhist, Essex Humanists, Essex Inter-Faith Network), and

public services. It has published coronavirus safety advice for [people of faith](#) and for [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people](#) (BAME), a bereavement support directory and targeted information for employment sectors with higher proportions of workers at risk from COVID-19.

- The [Essex Cultural Diversity Project](#), supported by ECC, works to stimulate participation and engage new audiences in cultural activities. It leads on Black History Month, currently underway with events throughout October, and promotes a host of initiatives showcasing and celebrating diverse cultures and communities.
- [Essex 2020](#), a year-long, county-wide celebration of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), included among its many activities, celebrations on the contributions of pioneering and creative women in science.
- We are currently delivering Snapping the Stiletto: “Campaigning for Equality”, a community heritage project recording the lives of working-class, BAME and LGBTQ+ women whose stories and life experiences are missing from local museums. The project will work with four museums and targeted communities, preserving women’s experiences and encouraging donations of objects and ephemera to Essex museums from underrepresented communities. We will be working with at least 100 volunteers and aim to reach at least 25 000 people. This project builds on the success of a previous project Snapping the Stiletto: “Revisiting Essex Collections,” which was a two-year project where ECC worked with 11 museums to study existing museum collections and research the impact of the lack of representation of women’s history in museum collections.
- Our Strengthening Communities Team have launched ‘Essex is Inclusive,’ a digital platform using social media channels that aims to raise Essex resident’s awareness of both visible and invisible disabilities, whilst also not being afraid to ask difficult questions and cover challenging topics. In the last month, posts from ‘Essex is Inclusive’ have reached over 500,000 social media newsfeeds.
- ECC has support networks for BAME, Disabled, LGBTQ+, Women and Christian employees. Over recent months, senior leaders, working with the BAME Network have started a series of conversations to build a relationship with the difficult and uncomfortable subject of racism and understand how it can manifest within our society. In listening to and understanding the experiences of employees first, we can use that insight to inform what further steps and actions we and our partners can take.
- [Active Essex](#) offers funding and encouragement to BAME communities to get physically active through its ‘Let’s Do This!’ better health campaign and Lottery funding for groups to run activity sessions.
- Leading Greater Essex’s new programme will include projects focused on inclusion and cultural awareness.
- This week it is Hate Crime Awareness Week. We stand together with the organisations and communities across Essex to denounce all forms of hate crime and emphasise the importance of being respectful to one another.
- We are currently recruiting to our residents’ panel and are keen to include a more diverse range of residents to help make sure future services are relevant to our communities.’



## **18. By Councillor Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families**

‘Will Essex County Council accept the challenge of becoming the top Council in the country for meeting the needs of Essex families whose children have Aspergers and Autism? If it will what specific steps will it take to achieve this goal and what will be the timescale?’

### **Reply**

‘ECC and partners have set out ambitious plans and have set ourselves challenges within the All Age Autism 5 Year Strategy which was launched in April this year. Endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board, our Strategy vision is that Essex is recognised as an autism inclusive county in which people with autism, including children with Asperger’s and Autism, can live fulfilling and rewarding lives.

We want Essex to be recognised as an autism inclusive county. We are working to ensure that people with autism live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. This means they can get a diagnosis if they choose to, access support if they need it, and have positive experiences with universal services.

The Strategy commits partners across the Health and Wellbeing partnership to work together and with individuals, families and communities to deliver our vision and aims. The full strategy can be found on the Living Well Essex website: [https://www.livingwellessex.org/vision/commissioning-intentions/all-age-autism-strategy-\(1\)/](https://www.livingwellessex.org/vision/commissioning-intentions/all-age-autism-strategy-(1)/)

The strategy is underpinned by seven key principles which set out an all age, person-centred, whole system approach which focuses on early intervention.

The Strategy priority areas include:

- Awareness
- Diagnosis, assessment and support
- Accommodation
- Employment
- Education and Training
- Physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing
- Criminal Justice
- Planning

Essex has an All Age Autism Partnership (AAP) which was established under the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board. The AAP provides a championing and leadership body for autism in the county and a place from which the system can be viewed from the perspective of people with autism. The All Age Autism Partnership facilitates positive partnership working and collaboration by creating a network of people with the responsibility, expertise and passion to take forward the challenge together to improve outcomes, services and lives in relation to autism, including Asperger’s.

The Partnership consists of the All Age Autism Coordination Group which meets quarterly and the All Age Autism Wider Network Group which meets every six months. The All Age Autism Coordination Group monitors the progress of the Strategy. A Strategy action plan has already been developed to support delivery and is regularly reviewed and refreshed as matters evolve and we make progress. Partners are assigned to and lead on specific priority areas in accordance to where their position can have the greatest impact.

ECC recognises that to fully integrate change across the system and ultimately meet the needs of families living with autism we need to align work with the delivery of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) implementation plan and as such, the SEND implementation plan is aligned to the Autism Strategy through the priority area of Education and Training.'

**19. By Councillor Smith of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure**

'From an email (Members Enquires dated 03/12/19) sent to Cllr. Kerry Smith, it was agreed to re-surface Valence Way in March 2020 and now the works have been put off until possibly the 2021/22 financial year. The reason for cancelling these promised works was that highway crews couldn't keep two meters apart. However, in March 2020, Durham Road (Laindon Park and Fryerns Division) was re-surfaced instead of Valence Way (Westley Heights Division).

Will this commitment be kept, to finally re-surface the badly damaged highway surface of Valence Way during the spring of 2021?'

**Reply**

'I thank the member for Basildon Westley Heights for his question on road resurfacing.

Valence Way was originally planned for Micro surfacing. At the outset of COVID-19 it was reassessed and decided that, as it would be difficult to maintain social distancing and maintain the safety of our workforce and residents, it should be removed from the programme for 2020/21. Our intention is to deliver these works early in the new financial year 2021/22. This is of course subject to any future COVID-19 restrictions.

Durham Road was resurfaced using a different technique, Surface Dressing, which meant that the workforce was more able to maintain social distancing as it is a more mechanised process, and this allowed works to proceed.

Although both roads are fairly similar in road widths, Valence Way has many more parking areas and residential properties immediately adjacent to the working area. Also, the difference in structure of the existing carriageway surfaces determined which treatment was most suitable for each location. Valence Way was not suitable for a surface dressing and was therefore withdrawn from the programme.

On a general point, now we are more familiar with restrictions due to COVID-19 we are revisiting and reassessing all sites removed from the current year's programme.'

**20. By Councillor Smith of the Leader of the Council**

'To date, how much has Essex County Council had to spend on combating and dealing with COVID-19? Has the Government fully paid these costs and if not, how much is still owed to Essex County Council?'

**Reply**

'The Council has been proactive around its response to COVID-19. Since March 2020, approved decisions have agreed that £76.1m of reserves can be drawn down to meet the cost of COVID-19 related actions. The welcome Emergency funding from central government has totalled £72.8m to date and in addition we have recently claimed £1.6m via the Sales, Fees and Charges loss scheme to support income losses during April to July. However, despite these funding sources, there is an estimated residual cost pressure of £10m. The Council has also where relevant used the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme where staff have been furloughed and our total claim for the duration of the scheme is estimated to be £1.1m.'