
Essex County Council Meeting 14 July 2020

Answers to Written Questions

Agenda Item 10

1. By Councillor Beavis of the Leader of the Council

‘Does the Leader have a process to fully understand the extent of the ongoing job losses in Essex due to the Corona Virus and what plans does he have in place to support employers and employees during and following the Pandemic.

I am concerned particularly with the aviation and hospitality sectors in Essex.’

Reply

‘Thank you for your question to which the short answer is “yes”. Councillor Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Councillor Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance have met frequently with officers from the Finance & Technology, Communications, Economic Development and Planning Teams to share information and develop our support and recovery plans. Officers from ECC have worked with colleagues in councils across Essex to identify what the economic impact of Corona Virus could be on jobs in Essex.

As you will be aware, as a Braintree Councillor, ECC is working closely with Councillor Butland and other Leaders from across Essex to identify how we can best support businesses and jobs. This work has also been supported by officers from the Strategy and Data & Analytics Teams reviewing local and national data to identify the key sectors and localities which will be affected by the pandemic – both in terms of job losses and those sectors and locations which may be more resilient and could provide opportunities for growth.

There is no denying that the impact on jobs in Essex to date is significant. The data that we reviewed at the end of May showed that there were 40,000 newly unemployed workers and 216,000 furloughed workers in greater Essex which is approximately 29% of all employed residents and I know Councillor Ball and the Economic Growth Team are developing a robust plan for what we can do in the short, medium and long-term to create jobs and support the economy to recover in Essex, and they have already shared the early stages of their plans with Councillors at a recent Member Development Session.

The government acted swiftly and decisively to support the economy and businesses. The furlough scheme has protected tens of thousands of jobs in the county, while the grants and rates relief schemes for businesses has protected many businesses with cashflow through the crisis. We also saw the government supporting businesses to reopen through money to make our high streets safer. And with the Chancellor's announcements on 8 July including VAT cuts for hospitality and retail, the restaurant £10 off scheme, the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs for young people and the very welcome £1,000 for companies who retain furloughed staff.

These initiatives make for the most comprehensive package of support for business this country has ever seen and means that our county's major employers are in a much stronger position than they otherwise would be. We are well placed now to work with government to help carry on their good work and ensure Essex businesses thrive.

With regards to the aviation industry specifically, ECC is an active member of the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group (SASIG) which is the forum within the Local Government Association (LGA) for all local authorities to discuss strategic aviation policies, major aviation issues and advancing sustainable aviation policy on behalf of local communities. Work was already underway prior to easyJet's announcement to undertake a research project at local authority level first as a first as a response to the emergency, then to assist in the initial recovery stage, to support the industry to restore local jobs and supply chains as it re-establishes pre crisis levels of activity over what may be a 3-5-year period. Recent analysis by ECC officers suggests that we can anticipate seeing 2019 demand levels in 2023 in the aviation industry.

To support local tourism businesses - which prior to the Covid-19 pandemic was worth £3.4 billion to the county's economy - Visit Essex is urging people to explore, experience and enjoy Essex by staying local and supporting the many attractions and businesses which are starting to reopen through their recently launched Great Adventures, Close to Home campaign, which will run for ten weeks, and provide inspiration and information on what is open as well as the best times of day and safest way for people to visit.

The campaign will include Visit England's "We're Good to Go" industry standard, giving visitors confidence that businesses are adhering to Government and public health guidance. The Chair of Visit England launched the campaign at Audley End which will help visitors to understand what to expect prior to visiting.

Visit Essex are encouraging venues/attractions to use Visit England's booking platform particularly those who do not currently have a booking system to enable visitors to book specific time slots and thereby manage numbers and social distancing. There is normally a 2.5% commission on sales through this platform however at the moment this will be returned to venues so they do not lose income.

Visit Essex are supporting the campaign by asking attractions in Essex to sign up to the “Great Adventures, Close to Home” Campaign so that we can direct visitors to those venues who are open for business, adhering to best practice guidance and are in areas where we want people to visit. Visit Essex have worked with their membership and with city, district, borough and the unitary authorities to identify with them the areas of the county that they would prefer that visitors avoid and is instead focused on promoting attractions and areas for those who want to avoid crowded areas in order to stay safe.

Key messaging is don't follow the crowd, respect and protect the environment. Visit Essex are also in contact with those areas of the county which tend to be very busy, particularly during good weather e.g. Southend to understand where there are issues. In Southend for example there are 7 beaches and in busy areas there is still social distancing despite photos in the press implying that crowds are too large.

In the longer term, Visit Essex are working with their Chair Councillor Durham using knowledge built from the two online conferences they have hosted during lockdown. Visit Essex have also involved Priti Patel's office and the Tourism Minister Nigel Huddleston MP to identify the support that the tourism economy needs in Essex and will build this into the economic recovery plan being developed by the Council. They are also working with Kent and East Sussex County Councils to try to source funding from SELEP to support tourism across the South East.'

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

'The Essex Health profile demonstrates a peak in the number of the deaths due to speeding vehicles on rural roads, particularly in the north of the Braintree District.

Can the Cabinet Member assure me that every opportunity is being taken to work with Essex Police to reduce speed on rural roads in the north of the Braintree District?

Could a fresh approach be taken to promote the significance of Speed Watch, carried out by volunteers, to reduce speed on rural roads?'

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Beavis for her question.

The data used for the Essex Health profile, does not allow valid comparisons to be made between local values and the England average. This is because between late 2015 and early 2016 around half of the Police forces in England, including Essex, adopted a new collision recording system called CRASH. The CRASH system prompts the officer to input every separate injury, so provides a truer reflection of

severity. The consequence of this is that the proportion of casualties recorded as serious is much higher in Police forces that use the CRASH system than those that don't. This is further compounded by the fact that CRASH is used by different Police forces in different ways, so the CRASH-effect is not consistent across the country.

KSI rates for the England average will therefore be artificially lower than those for Essex, due to the number of Police forces not using the more accurate CRASH system used in Essex to record collisions. Essex Highways data shows that 24% of collisions in Braintree are speed related compared to an Essex average of 25%. Essex Police, as part of the Safer Essex Roads Partnership undertook speed enforcement in Braintree on Saturday 6 June, travelling 1,427 miles and capturing 193 speed offences. They visited several prominent villages and engaged with residents.

Of the 100 spot-speed safety camera sites in Essex, 2 are located in Braintree District. These 2% of sites account for 1.1% of offences, totaling 339 offences for the 16-month period. Of the 24 average speed systems in Essex, 6 are in Braintree District – these are all on the A12 near Kelvedon. These account for 3% of the average-speed offences in Essex.

The Partnership operates mobile “Trucam” devices across the county. These are deployed based on a strategy that combines being intelligence/data-led, with public demand and the principle of unpredictable visibility. There are 3 locations in Braintree used for Trucam, this is 2.6% of the 115 total Trucam sites in Essex. These generated 331 offences, amounting to 2.2% of the total Trucam offences for Essex.

There are 24 Community Speed Watch (CSW) Sites in Braintree, comprising 7.8% of all sites in Essex and delivering 5.3% of letters sent. This amounts to 1,500 letters sent between January 2019 and April 2020. We are unable to operate CSW at present due to Covid restrictions but the Safer Essex Road Partnership will review this on 1st Sept. A review of the service has been completed and is being reviewed to determine how this important community element of speed management can be supported in the future. The back-office support required is substantial and must be prioritised within the SERP's strategy for casualty reduction leading to Vision Zero.'

3. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care and the Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate

'The pandemic has highlighted how many lonely and isolated people we have in Essex, this ranges from the elderly to the young. There will be many who have been shielding or isolating through this time who will find it extremely difficult to open the front door and go outside, there will be many more who have no one close to them who understands their isolation and fear.

What measures are we putting in place as the lockdown eases and for the future to help and encourage our residents to feel part of our community again? With libraries, community centres and our youth facilities closed we must ensure that these places all have the help needed to re-open again for the mental health and wellbeing of Essex residents.'

Reply

'We have invested in the Essex Wellbeing Service - this provides support with daily living tasks but also additional support from Care Navigation Plus organisations including those who support people with Social Isolation and Loneliness including Community Agents, Befrienders and our Kindness Coaches – all of these services assist in supporting people to feel an increased sense of connection and belonging. Mental Health Support, Family Support, support from the Citizens advice around debt management and benefits advice.

We recruited a huge number of volunteers to support people across Essex through Essex Coronavirus Action – these volunteers are registered with the Essex Wellbeing Service and many have indicated that they would wish to continue volunteering. Volunteer tasks initially included daily living tasks, however, the scope of these roles have grown and diversified to include befriending and buddies to encourage people to return to normal life where it is safe to do so.'

4. By Councillor Henderson of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action

'There are many residents within my Harwich Division who are angry and concerned that the Dovercourt Waste and Recycling Centre remains closed when others within Essex are open.

Will the Portfolio Holder please confirm that this is a temporary measure and the date that it is anticipated to reopen, and please include where the staff who usually work there are presently working? Has the closure caused additional fly-tipping in the area, and is ECC making a financial contribution to TDC in regard to this and if so, how much, and is there any consideration to provide a temporary caged vehicle facility for waste disposal on adjacent or alternative TDC owned land?'

Reply

'The temporary closure of the Essex recycling centre network, and the subsequent gradual mobilisation, was a necessary response to the COVID-19 situation and the need to protect public health. I can confirm that as we enter a new phase in dealing with this virus and social distancing requirements change, we have been able to open the remaining six recycling centres in Essex, including the site located in Dovercourt. From the 10 July, all twenty-one recycling centres provided by Essex have been available for public use.

Our focus during this period of closure has been to get services up and running as quickly and as safely as possible. Although the use of caged vehicles was considered, this was not progressed as it would not have been able to replace the recycling centre provision or meet local demand in a safe manner.

During the period when not all sites were operating, the staff who would have ordinarily work at Dovercourt were redeployed to meet the additional staffing need at other sites in the north of Essex. Now the Dovercourt site is reopen, staff are allocated back to their normal base site.

Although fly-tipping incidences have been observed in the Dovercourt and Harwich areas during the period of recycling centre closure, this has not been noticeably higher than the usual rate. We continue to work closely with Tendring District Council to support their work in tackling the illegal disposal of waste and identifying those responsible.

In operating these services, the protection of public health remains our key priority. It is therefore imperative that users of these services continue to follow site rules and observe all social distancing measures. We also request that residents make full use of their kerbside waste services before considering making journeys to these facilities.'

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

'Some existing footpaths / cycle ways are very narrow, and do not allow social distancing, due to past design (Beside Monkwick Junior School) and due to inability to maintain widths over the years from vegetation growing into path/ cycle way limits. (Berechurch Hall Road to Gurdon Road)

With the Government indication to support cycling, which has laudable aims to get people out of buses and cars, is there any way that the maintenance of existing cycle ways be improved, widened and made more user friendly.

Some cycle ways have lost 2ft of path in my division due to overgrown vegetation, and if the priority can be turned toward these routes, this would, I am sure you would agree, get more people cycling and using the urban cycle way routes from South Colchester to Central Colchester.'

Reply

'like to thank Councillor Harris for his question. Increased Government funding for highways has allowed us to earmark £200k to begin maintenance and fixing defects. This will help to improve the condition, appearance and attractiveness of cycleways.

Tranche two of the Emergency Active Travel Fund may similarly allow some scope for the measures Cllr Harris seeks.

Regarding any local overgrown cycleways, the Member is encouraged to report these via the Local Highways Panel so that the Highways Rangers based in Colchester can attend to these matters.'

6. By Councillor Harris of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action

'The staff at Shrub End recycling centre should be thanked for all the work they have done in trying to maintain opening times to access the tip, under difficult social distancing circumstances.

Would the Portfolio Holder consider changes to the entrance to Shrub End recycle centre, that would benefit workers, my constituents in Shrub end (Gladiator Way, Temple Road, off Cunobelin Way who are disadvantaged by queues outside their housing estate) and benefit users who want to recycle items in the new Covid way of working.

Would a change to the design of Cunobelin Way, with an extra lane for Shrub End tip be supported by the Portfolio Holder to aid good management of the centre, by improving queues and not disadvantaging my local constituents.'

Reply

'I wish to endorse the view of Councillor Harris and extend my personal appreciation to all staff across our recycling centre network for the hard work and commitment they have shown in providing a service during this difficult time, whilst also keeping our residents safe.

I am aware that the initial demand at the Shrub End Colchester site led to some local traffic congestion and disruption for local residents. Within the first few days a number of operational changes were made to alleviate the impact of queuing traffic on local properties. These measures included the deployment of accredited highway officers at the site, the redesign of the site operation to increase unloading and queuing capacity, and changes to site access from the highway. I am sure Cllr Harris will agree that these steps have significantly reduced the local impact of the site compared to when it first reopened.

Under normal site operations, when social distancing is not a requirement, queuing along Cunobelin Way has not been raised as a particular issue. I am therefore unable to commit my support to a permanent change of the nature indicated at this moment in time. I will, however, ask officers to explore with highways colleagues what further appropriate measures could be taken to manage highways queuing by vehicles using the site.'

7. By Councillor Reid of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

‘It has been widely reported that school closures will trigger a mental health crisis for children in the UK. Many of these children will need ‘urgent support’ when lock-down eases.

What measures are we putting in place to deal with this crisis? Children cannot wait 6 months to 1 year to receive help from a child psychologist or other departments necessary.

We know the Government has given extra money to councils, can the Cabinet Member guarantee that some of this funding will be put towards combating the impact this virus has had on these children.’

Reply

‘As lockdown measures begin to ease, we do expect to see increases in referrals in relation to mental health, but the system is ready and is planned and prepared for this.

We don’t expect to see an influx of tier 3 complex need cases, which is provided by the EWMHS service. Much of the needs of those referrals will not require specialist clinical psychological interventions. Most of these children will require low level brief solution focused therapies within community-based services at tier 2, which support children with additional needs and provides early help.

To help tackle issues early we have in place the Family Innovation Fund (FiF), and now FIF-Xtra, which has been funded through a £120k investment from the Children’s Sustainability Fund. These services will support many who become vulnerable as a result of Covid-19 at tier 2 and prevent the need for children to require a tier 3 referral.

In addition to this the CCGs have commissioned similar early help support with additional funding made available to them and the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service is also working to support those who become vulnerable with emotional health needs.

Government funding has been made available directly to the voluntary and community sector to support children and young people with emotional health needs and we have had, and continue to plan, campaigns to ensure that children, young people and families’ know where to access this support should they need it.

We are working together across the Essex system and in local areas across health, education and social care to ensure that vulnerable children and young people’s and

families' mental health needs are met as children and young people prepare to return to school.'

8. By Councillor Davies of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'The government is now encouraging people to walk and cycle more however I am led to believe that Public Rights of Way are only maintained once a year with trimming and cutting. Could this be upgraded to a more regular trim in order to keep these walks pleasant for the general public?'

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Davies for his question. As Members will be aware, Public Rights of Way are predominantly rural routes through the countryside. They are all a type of highway and came about through historic usage as routes for farm workers to get to their places of work, for people walking to church or to schools and as tracks to drive livestock to markets. These days they are mostly used for leisure purposes.

They pass through privately owned land, which is often working farmland so the Essex Highways work closely with the landowners to keep the routes accessible.

You will appreciate there are limited revenue funds to trim and cut public rights of way, over and above the annual work we do to cut the natural seasonal upgrowth on our PROW network, which is undertaken between April and October. However, the Council supports a very successful Community Scheme to cut vegetation which I would encourage you to promote locally:

- Parish councils are able to enter into a service level agreement with us to maintain the vegetation on their priority routes. We support the parishes through a grant payment.
- Community groups can volunteer through the Parish Paths Partnership scheme to clear seasonal upgrowth. See our website and Volunteering page for more information.
- Over 75 farmers and landowners also cut paths on their land or land within their control under the headland management scheme.
- To see which parishes are cutting under a service level agreement or who is volunteering under the Parish Paths Partnership scheme please see our website.

I encourage all Members to use the website which holds lots of useful information to share with constituents.'

9. By Councillor Abbott of the Cabinet Member for Economic Development

‘In his Judgment of 18th June, the Honourable Mr Justice Pepperall found that the Basildon MBT plant had "serious design errors" including that the "biohalls were seriously undersized and incapable of processing the guaranteed tonnage of waste".

Whilst the Judgment was in favour of Essex County Council in terms of the dispute with the operators, and in terms of ECC acting as the waste authority, what implications does the Judgment have for ECC as the planning authority that gave planning permission for a plant now found to have serious design and capacity problems and which was promoted by ECC as a plant being developed to take all of the municipal waste arisings from the ECC area of Essex?’

Reply

‘As you will be aware, whilst the High Court found in ECC’s favour, the litigation surrounding this case has not concluded. I hope however that the information below is helpful.

As you state, the judgment centred on the design of the plant which caused issues around plant performance and processing.

When it came to granting planning permission – this was the responsibility of ECC in its role as the Waste Planning Authority (WPA). In reviewing the planning application, the WPA relied on information submitted by Urbaser Balfour Beatty (UBB), the owners, in support of the planning application. This did not include the internal design of the plant or the processes used to process waste as approval of the internal operations of the site are not part of the WPA’s function.

When the information was provided in support of the planning application, the WPA had no reason at that time to believe the design of the building was defective.

The WPA made a fair and correct assessment of UBB’s application in coming to its conclusion basing its conclusion on the information submitted. Planning permission would have been granted (or refused) in the same way regardless of the identity of the applicant.’

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

‘The focus of recovery planning in terms of safer access has to date been understandably in the first place for town centres in Essex, as shops and other outlets re-open. For the medium to longer term, what plans are there for safer and

more sustainable modes to be developed in our rural areas, such as Braintree District where approx. 50% of residents do not live in the towns?

Would ECC support measures such as dedicated cycling routes which could link the larger villages to the towns and railway stations, and which could unlock significant modal shift as well as helping to maintain distancing?’

Reply

‘I’d like to thank Councillor Abbott for his question. In a word “yes” and our proposals in Chelmsford to link Great Waltham to Broomfield and thence to Chelmsford TC are a good example of this as was also the case in the Wivenhoe to Essex University and Colchester route. Government funding is crucial here and although we have an opportunity for the second tranche of EFTA funding this will be aimed at attracting larger numbers of cyclists in our larger towns. The main opportunity will be later we hope when the Government launches the main part of its cycling and walking strategy.’

11. By Councillor Scordis of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

‘What action has been taken by our public health team to prepare for local lockdowns in Essex and coping with a possible second outbreak of Covid-19?’

Reply

‘Our Director of Public Health would remind us that the best way to prevent further outbreaks in Essex is to remember that the disease is still with us. The science around social distancing is clear; wherever possible, the two-metre guidance should be followed. At two metres, in ordinary conversation, there is virtually no possibility of transmission; exposure to an infected person at one metre or less is much more likely to lead to transmission and / or the need to self-isolate for two weeks.

The work of ECC and partners to quickly identify a new outbreak emerging has enabled the creation of a Local Outbreak Plan which is independently recognised to be among the best in the country. The Health Protection Board is in operation, and its work will be overseen by the Local Outbreak Engagement Board, whose membership includes the leader of ECC and leaders / representatives of other councils from across the county. Where appropriate, these Boards will liaise with central authorities to ensure necessary, immediate action is taken.

All of this work must be undertaken while recognising the wider impacts of Covid. We need to ensure that the economy progresses to minimise the economic and social impact across our population.’

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

‘Sadly, the predictions of Professor Marmot’s review “Fair Society, Healthy Lives” prepared 10 years ago warning that policies of public austerity after the 2008 financial crash would lead to a chasm in life expectancy between rich and poor has become true. The more deprived the area the lower the life expectancy due to the wider determinants of health. Austerity according to Marmot is a killer. The most deprived ward of Greenstead sits within my County Council Division, within that ward I have 4 Local Super Output Areas, the highest amount of any Colchester Borough ward. The circumstances of my division are not alone, in Tendring, Canvey Island, Harlow and Basildon we find a similar story where life expectancy between the richest and poorest areas of both men and women has widened.

My question to the Cabinet Member responsible for public health is this:

Can you make a commitment to steer this authorities’ policies towards addressing the growing inequity in life expectancy between rich and poor by restricting cuts and targeting resources to those areas that have the worse socio-economic conditions?’

Reply

‘This council is firmly committed to addressing the long-term wider determinants of health. The link between deprivation / poor socio-economic conditions, and issues such as outcomes around career achievements and life expectancy are well known.

As evidence for this, the Leader of Tendring District Council and I hosted a workshop to look at the challenges being faced in Clacton. The workshop was attended by numerous government and other agency representatives, along with Professor Michael Marmot. He recognised the scale of the challenge and was impressed by the collaboration and commitment demonstrated by those present. There are and will continue to be numerous interventions. The Local Delivery Pilot, being operated with funds from Sports England, has deliberately been focused on districts with the greatest levels of deprivation. ECC is committed to being an Anchor Institution, and we are working with all public sector organisations to obtain comprehensive commitment to these principles. We have begun lobbying for the relocation of a govt department to Tendring – this could potentially be housed in the east Colchester / Tendring development.

Ultimately the way to reduce deprivation is to increase economic prosperity and ensure that the effects of that are felt in all parts of the community. We can, of course, only do so much; national and local partners have major roles to play.’

13. By Councillor Young of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities

'We know that people have found the isolation of the Coronavirus pandemic detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing, we also know how much our libraries are valued as local centres where people can come together to access books, information and computer access. We therefore need all our libraries to be reopened.

Can the portfolio holder confirm that all Essex Libraries will be reopened and when that will be? Can they also confirm that the reopening will not be dependent on whether or not there are volunteers to staff them?'

Reply

'We will be reopening all Essex libraries using a phased approach. It has been vital to plan to re-open sites in stages in order to ensure that we could carry out appropriate risk assessments and put procedures in place to ensure our customers and employees remain safe. A summary of the re-opening dates is listed below:

Tranche 1 – 16 Libraries - from 6 July

Tranche 2 – 44 Libraries – from 13 July

Tranche 3a – 6 Libraries – from 20 July

Tranche 3b – 8 Libraries – during August with confirmed dates to follow

The service offered at Essex Libraries will look different to normal in order to support new safety measures and social distancing guidelines.

Residents will be able to return and borrow books, as well as have some limited time to browse the shelves.

In line with government guidance, the number of customers allowed in a library at any one time will also need to be reduced to help people stay safe.

To help colleagues work safely, customers will be asked to use the self-service machines to issue and return their items and to pay any charges.

Public computers, printing facilities and additional services such as recycling bags will be temporarily unavailable, but these services will be reviewed frequently so that they can be offered again as soon as it is safe to do so.

The reopening of these libraries is not contingent on volunteers staffing them.'

14. By Councillor Davies of the Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities

‘Many local Laindon residents including pensioners rely upon a post office. Since the demolition of Laindon Centre, it has been agreed to place a Post Office in Laindon Library. This is an eagerly awaited, much needed service amongst residents.

Please could you provide an up to date progress report and reassure the public that a post office will be in place once the library opens in July?’

Reply

‘We have been in recent discussions regarding the Post Office moving to Laindon Library. The Post Office have placed this move on hold due to the recent pandemic. However, we are still aiming to have a Post Office in Laindon Library and will continue to hold regular dialogue with them to help make this a reality.’

15. By Councillor Buckley of the Cabinet Member for Finance

‘Given that the quarter day has now passed and apparently less than 20% of rents due on retail properties were paid on time and taking into account the significant number of retailers and investors such as Intu seeking CVA’s or other insolvency actions, can the Cabinet Member confirm:

1. What percentage of ECC’s anticipated rent has been received in the current quarter?
2. What are the forecast income figures for the full year compared with the original projections made by the Council’s advisers?
3. Given the reduction of income what is the estimated reduction in capital values?
4. What mitigation measures are being taken to minimise the medium and long term impact on capital and income?’

Reply

‘Since the outbreak of the pandemic, ECC has been working with many of its tenants to assist them with their cashflow issues while at the same time not giving any rent holidays or reductions. This is in line with Government advice and issued best practice. Such concessions have usually taken the form of switching quarterly rents to monthly rents or allowing a reduced rent for one quarter which is then repaid in the following quarters. There are currently no avenues available to landlords for formal debt recovery action until the 30 September (or later if amended by the Government).

With this in mind, the responses to the specific questions are:

1. As of the 29 June, 44% of the rents due per the lease terms had been received for the June quarter rent. Last quarter, 85% of all rents, both quarterly and monthly, were received by the end of the quarter and some further receipts are expected. The figure for this quarter will improve over the quarter due to tenants who have switched to monthly rents paying on the 1st of each month. There are also some tenants deferring some, or all, of their rent for this quarter to later quarters.
2. ECC has 16 tenants in its portfolio. To date, one tenant has started a Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA) and one tenant has announced a pre-pack administration arrangement, that sells the company to new owners.
3. The forecast income for the financial year is currently £1.7m. This remains ahead of the income included in the budget of £1.54m.
4. The portfolio is valued annually for the statutory accounts. As of March 2020, the portfolio was valued at £29.1m, a reduction of £2m. This year's valuation was impacted by:
 - Strong anti-retail sentiment in the market, although out of town shopping centres like Keighley are generally performing better than high street retailers
 - Brexit uncertainty continuing
 - Covid-19 impact & economic uncertainty
 - Leases being one year closer to expiry

However, it is important to note that a market valuation at a moment in time does not impact the owner of any property unless the owner wants to sell it. Valuations of any property move upwards and downwards dependent on many market factors. ECC did not purchase the site for capital growth purposes and do not have any current plans to sell the investment.

5. When the commercial property investment fund was set up, it was agreed that an amount would be put into a provision annually to provide prudent mitigation for such unexpected events as we are currently experiencing. As of March 2020, the provision stood at £650,000 with a further £325,000 budgeted to be added in the current financial year.

ECC's agents also are working continuously on identifying potentially interested future tenants, although this is currently a difficult task.

Despite the current economic conditions, new lease discussions are being held with tenants as they fall due and are nearing conclusion. Extending the average unexpired lease terms at sites will benefit the capital valuations in future.'

16. By Councillor Scordis of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure:

‘Essex County Council bid for £1.9 million for its walking and cycling programme and only received 50% of this funding, due to weaknesses in our application and proposals.

Can the portfolio holder confirm what weaknesses were highlighted by the government in our bid?’

Reply

‘I’d like to thank Councillor Scordis for his question. Our bid was not weak: a simple bid was requested aimed initially at achieving social distancing and we put forward a good bid which we were led to believe would be a block allocation as set out in the original announcement, rather than a competitive process with lots of detailed plans being required.

We understand that subsequent to this simple application, the evaluation of bids was subjected to a sifting process which appears to have top sliced some allocations for “rebalancing” policy reasons. We have been informed that our bid was “not as attractive as others” which I feel is missing the commitment I have made in my “safer, greener, healthier” initiative.

We have a further opportunity in tranche two. Councillor Scordis can rest assured however on the allocation of funds to Colchester with the town receiving over 35% of the funds now available.’

17. By Councillor Aspinell of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

‘Why does the Cabinet Member repeatedly present ridiculous designs and plans for modular schools to the Planning Committee for permission to erect? These plans were questioned quite vigorously by all members at the last D&R Committee and I am reliably informed that that has been the case whenever similar designs have been put forward.

This clearly goes against County’s own policies regarding reduction in carbon emissions and green renewable energy initiatives, and as a retired firefighter, the thought of placing children in a flat roofed, wood cladded box fills me with dread.’

Reply

‘When designing new school buildings ECC follows national guidance in relation to the size of all the elements required in a school; providing sufficient space for the

number of pupils, the correct placing and relationship between classrooms, halls, kitchens, office and staff accommodation and playing fields. The DFE publish a number of generic, efficient designs that provide a template to be used for delivering effective school buildings. These designs are relevant to whatever form of construction is utilised: either modern methods of construction, modular or traditional. The member may be interested to view the “template” designs on the government’s own web pages, as they provide a context as to what is nationally recognised as efficient design.

ECC, in its education document “meeting the demand for school places in Essex” has demonstrated the need to provide 20,000 new school places by 2029. The latest data published by the DfE again shows ECC is delivering the largest school expansion programme in the country, to ensure all children can access a school place.

The funding for these places will be met by s106 contributions from housing developers and ECC “basic need” grant from the DFE. These sources of funding need to finance our school building programme. Any cost of building schools above these funding streams has to be met by Essex taxpayers. My intention is that the impact of our school building programme on Essex taxpayers is as low as possible and I am constantly challenging officers to ensure the designs are efficient and the costs are as low as possible, without reducing the quality of the education environment. Even with this focus on value for money, ECCs new school buildings are regularly nominated for and win awards, which is a credit to the work undertaken by ECC officers who ensure that we provide the best school buildings possible.

ECC utilises the DFEs own performance specification in relation to the quality of school buildings that are promoted by ECC. This performance specification applies equally to permanent and temporary school buildings and is applied to whatever form of construction is appropriate for the needs of each project. This performance specification is of course, completely compliant with the requirements of building control in all cases. ECC are vigilant to ensure that all our school buildings meet the quality standards, as this requirement ensures our new buildings provide schools with high quality learning environments that support better learning outcomes for all pupils. Of particular note are the importance ECC places on lighting, thermal performance, ventilation and acoustics, all of which are specified to a high standard and have a significant positive impact on the learning of school children.

I am glad that you have mentioned the need for carbon reduction in our building programme. Our performance specification for school buildings has an emphasis on achieving passive efficiencies in school building and operation, to minimise energy requirement from the start.

All projects that have been commissioned since the start of this year, have included a requirement for enhanced initiatives towards meeting ECCs ambition of a zero-carbon authority. We have commenced this journey by requiring all new school projects to include photovoltaic energy creation on the roof. I am pleased to be able

to report that on the 8th July, ECC D & R members approved the planning application for the rebuilding of Harlowbury School on a new site. this design has extensive PV on the roof of the building, which incidentally is flat. I anticipate that we will be able to bring forward further initiatives to demonstrate our commitment to carbon reduction in future school projects.

Members may also be aware that currently the DFE are building an entire new secondary school in Harlow from modular components constructed in a factory and delivered to site on the back of lorries. The DFE are committed to delivering as many free schools as possible using Modern forms of construction (modular), and ECC are expecting further schools that will be delivered in Essex by the DFE to be modular.'

18. By Councillor Mackrory of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'The successful introduction of 20mph speed limits in our urban centres to facilitate safer walking and cycling is welcomed. Will the cabinet member therefore review the current policy for 20mph speed limits in residential areas so that there is a presumption in favour of their introduction which will enable safer walking and cycling in those areas too?

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Mackrory for his question. Permanent 20mph zones will require substantial changes to the environment if they are to be self-enforcing, but such changes will support more sustainable modes, including electric bikes and scooters and will support 'Vision Zero', the Council's desire to have no deaths or serious injuries on Essex roads by 2040.

The Cabinet Member has asked for a review of all the current Speed Policies this financial year to ensure they reflect current best practice.'

19. By Councillor Mackrory of the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care

'Can the Cabinet Member supply the following for the period 20 March to 30 June:

- How many people were transferred from hospital to Care Homes in Essex
- How many of those people had been tested Covid-19 positive on discharge
- How many of people in Essex Care Homes died of Covid-19
- What is the number of deaths in Essex during this period as compared to the five year average ie the excess deaths?'

Reply

'It is not possible to provide a full / accurate figure of how many people were transferred from hospital to Care Homes in Essex at this time. The issue is more complex than may at first appear as Essex hospitals discharge out of the county, non-Essex hospitals discharge into the county and Essex County Council is not informed of private funders who come through the system. In addition, there have been emergency discharge processes during Covid that mean discharges have been funded by a national NHS Covid-19 budget and we may not have been made aware of all discharges.

We do not hold information concerning the numbers of people had been tested Covid-19 positive on discharge from hospital. As mentioned above, Essex County Council would not be informed where the person is a private self-funder. In addition, the national guidance and requirements on testing (and the scale of testing) has evolved and expanded throughout the crisis and there was not, at the outset, a requirement for people to be tested in hospital settings unless they were symptomatic, meaning that the data would be incomplete.

The number who are known to have died of Covid-19 in Essex Care Homes is 229, either because they have been tested and / or on the death certificate.

The number of excess deaths in Essex over this period is 1,229. This is 32% above the five-year average for this period. For the last seven weeks of this period, from the week ending 15 May up to the 30 June, there were 1,707 deaths in total, with net zero excess deaths. This evidences the speed and thoroughness of the actions undertaken by ECC and partners.'

20. By Councillor Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families

'What action is Essex County Council taking to address the serious problem of domestic violence? What funding is the County Council providing this financial year and going forward for investment in early intervention, prevention programmes and community-based support to tackle this issue?'

Reply

'We supported Essex Police's DA Campaign that was issued in April, as well as launching our own online DA e-learning and developing bite-size online domestic abuse learning workshops. We have issued a video aimed at providing professionals with useful information about the resources across the sector and signposting into domestic abuse services.

Essex MARAT continues to meet daily to consider cases identified as 'high risk' using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and 'honour'-based violence

(DASH) risk model and develops a coordinated safety plan to protect each victim. These meetings have been held as conference calls since March 2020 and agency engagement and commitment to safeguard domestic abuse victims has continued uninterrupted with the new processes put in place proving to be effective and efficient.

Essex County Council invests £1.6m per annum in domestic abuse community services and with a further £500k contribution from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner we have seen a substantial investment in commissioned services with the aim to keep victims safe. There is one central helpline via which victims can access free support, advice and guidance as well as access to specialist community-based services. Those community services provide specialist help and support for victims in their homes, or, when necessary, within refuge accommodation.

Essex CC works within the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Strategic Partnership Board with a range of stakeholders concerned including police, health and probation. Essex is also one of the few local authority areas that commissions services to work with perpetrators and aiming to stop the cycle of domestic abuse. There are a range of other initiatives that have been put in place with the aim of intervening early, including the Essex wide Risk Avert Programme, the Goodman and Sisters in Strength programmes. These programme support young people who have been exposed to abuse and support them to understand and form healthy relationships.'

21. By Councillor Kendall of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action

'What detailed plans does Essex County Council have in place to create more green jobs across Essex?'

Reply

'We fully recognise both the importance of creating new jobs in Essex and the increasing emphasis on green technologies and the associated employment for residents of Essex.

For our Economic Development Team, the green sector is a key area of focus - they are currently exploring the opportunities in this area and also what the skills pathways are, which need to be developed to enable residents of Essex to fill newly created green jobs in the region.

Following the government's recent announcement of the £40m Green Recovery Challenge Fund, which aims to support the creation of thousands of new jobs to kick-start the nation's green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are keenly

following the publication of further guidance to see how we might be able to utilise this new funding.

The new Essex Climate Action Commission will also consider the importance of creating green jobs as part of each of the agreed core workstreams.

In addition, Councillor Ball I know has spent time (prior to lockdown) visiting several construction firms in Essex who are using sustainable working practices, which involved hydrogen fuel powered generators (these are already used by our Highways Team), as well as timber and recycled steel framed homes.'

22. By Councillor Turrell of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'I have found out that Essex, along with other Highways Authorities. has not had its full allocation of the Active Travel Funding from the Government. Is Essex actively chasing the £1 million they are short?'

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Turrell for her question. Further to the response to Councillor Scordis on this same issue (question 16): our focus is on developing a successful bid to Tranche Two of the fund which has an indicative allocation of over £7m, subject to eligibility criteria. The council has worked closely with Colchester Borough Council to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Colchester and therefore we should be well placed for future funding opportunities.'

23. By Councillor Wood of the Cabinet Member for Finance

'Could the portfolio holder please advise the council with Covid-19 affecting the country and the fact that we have been in lockdown, how has this affected the shopping units we have in Leeds and elsewhere, with regard to the Council's investments.'

Reply

'Since the outbreak of the pandemic, ECC has been working with many of its tenants to assist them with their cashflow issues while at the same time not giving any rent holidays or reductions. This is in line with Government advice and issued best practice. Such concessions have usually taken the form of switching quarterly rents to monthly rents or allowing a reduced rent for one quarter which is then repaid in the following quarters. There are currently no avenues available to landlords for formal debt recovery action until the 30 September (or later if amended by the Government).

As of the 29 June, 44% of the rents due per the lease terms had been received for the June quarter rent. Last quarter, 85% of all rents, both quarterly and monthly, were received by the end of the quarter and some further receipts are expected. The figure for this quarter will improve over the quarter due to tenants who have switched to monthly rents paying on the 1st of each month. There are also some tenants deferring some, or all, of their rent for this quarter to later quarters.

Trading is difficult, particularly in the retail sector. Two retail tenants (out of eleven) have started procedures to restructure their businesses, which will have a negative impact on this year's rental income. However, the budget of £1.54m of income is still currently expected to be delivered.'

24. By Councillor Wood of the Leader of the Council

'Will the Leader end this Council's relationship with China immediately in the light of the appalling abuse of human rights perpetrated by the security forces on the people of Hong Kong, now compounded by the passing of the new security law which is a clear and serious violation of the Sino-British joint declaration which protects the freedoms of Hong Kong citizens until 2047.'

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. The Council works to support Essex businesses and find them opportunities. We work within, and will continue to work within, whatever parameters are set by national government.'

25. By Councillor Deakin of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'With the potential increased home to school transport costs if social distancing is still in place in September, what are the financial implications for this council?'

In addition, if parents aren't able to return to work full time by September, there will be added bus pass applications which the child then remains entitled to until the end of school, even when the parents have returned to work. Has this council looked at the potential forward cost that could arise from Covid-19 if this is the case? What is the anticipated financial impact?'

Reply

'The Department for Education issued guidance on the re-opening of schools, including home to school transport on 2 July.'

Full social distancing requirements will not be required on dedicated home to school transport services. Most children who are entitled to taxpayer funded home to school transport travel on these services. We are not therefore expecting any additional cost for these services as a result of social distancing. Some entitled children travel on commercial services and we will work with operators to ensure their journey to school is supported. Social distancing measures in some form are, however, likely to continue to be in place for commercial services. Many children use these services for their journey to school and capacity will clearly be reduced.

We will be supporting those children that can, to walk and cycle as alternatives; or to use our Park and Ride services for Colchester and Chelmsford. For those children that need to use the bus, we will be working with operators to identify how we ensure they are able to do so. At this stage it is too early to make an assessment of potential cost, although we have raised the issue of funding any additional costs with central Government.'

26. By Councillor Buckley of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

'The Cabinet Member is aware of the long-standing wish of myself and Councillor Ball for the closure of Wickford High Street on Saturdays to accommodate the expansion of the market.

Given that Basildon Council has temporarily closed the market for an indefinite period 'to accommodate social distancing', will the Cabinet Member set out a robust timetable for the relevant order to be made in order that plans can be made to ensure the continuation of over 120 years of market trading in Wickford?'

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Buckley for his question. I am indeed aware of his long-standing wish for the High Street to be closed on Saturdays to facilitate a market. We have met and discussed the topic and I have indicated my support to do just that, once we have overcome the difficulties inherent in closing a High Street.

I can promise Councillor Buckley a robust timetable as soon as I am able, as he alludes to this has been somewhat impacted by the social distancing measures introduced. I can confirm that an engineer has now been to Wickford and is working hard to finalise the designs, and in the meantime, we are actively pursuing the funding required. Once that's done, subject to successfully agreeing diversion arrangements with bus operators, a closure could be implemented later this year.'

27. By Councillor Robinson of the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

'In order to help Essex reduce its carbon emissions, and for hard-pressed school budgets to save money, will the Cabinet Member for Education propose that all new school buildings should have renewable energy (such as solar panels and ground source heat pumps) included in their design?

Will he encourage existing schools to follow that example and indeed help them to via the ECC bulk-buying scheme for solar panels?'

Reply

'We have already commissioned several school projects of net-zero specification and new projects coming forward all include solar as a minimum, so we are already doing what Councillor Robinson is requesting. In parallel we're now developing a carbon neutral school solution for Essex, with the aim being to demonstrate how we can affordably commission all our new school buildings as carbon neutral.

In regard to existing schools' sites, we are working with Mitie Energy and Mitie Lighting on Energy and Waste Audits and LED Lighting surveys. These audits and surveys will be presented to the schools with the aim of undertaking invest-to-save projects that would resulting savings for the schools as well as reductions in carbon emissions. It is expected that these projects would be financed by either interest-free loans from Salix Financing, School internal budgets and European Regional Development Fund grants or a combination of all three.

We have undertaken a total of 6 energy and waste audits and 2 lighting upgrade and solar PV surveys. An additional 6 schools have signified interest in undertaking lighting upgrade and solar PV surveys. We are working with the Essex Schools team in aligning the programme of capital improvement works to schools. Whilst this improvement relates to new build schools and extensions, we are seeking to achieve efficiencies by applying the same expertise and delivery management resources towards improving the energy efficiency in existing school buildings.'

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

'A further accident and this time a tragic incident took place on Staneway on Saturday 4 July. This location shares a boundary with Orsett Ward of Thurrock close to the beauty spot of Westley Heights, the highest point in Essex which is used by scores of people every day.

Last year, I made a request to the Basildon Local Highways Panel to reduce the speed limit on Staneway/High Road from 50 to 40 MPH which was rejected as it didn't meet the criteria and therefore was given a red RAG rating.

Will the Cabinet Member please meet with me and the elected members for the Wards of Langdon Hills and Orsett Ward onsite to discuss safety measures such as reducing the speed limit on Staneway/High Road from 50 MPH to 40 MPH?'

Reply

'I'd like to thank Councillor Smith for his question. My condolences are with the man's family and friends following his tragic death while riding a motorcycle on Staneway on 4 July. As you know, until the police-led investigation into the incident is complete, we should not speculate as to any causes. Depending on what the police find, our road safety engineers will be involved and if appropriate recommend any safety improvements to be made.

Once the collision investigation report is finalised, or sooner if the Basildon Highway Panel so decides, it might be appropriate to revisit their previous surveys and decisions on matters regarding the speed limit on this stretch of the road. I will await any representations made by the Panel as that is where Councillors with local knowledge take an informed view with expert advice from officers.'

29. By Councillor Smith of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action

'As Essex County Council has now chosen to embrace the cult of "man-made climate change", how does an incinerator in Basildon burning up to £150,000 tonnes of rubbish a year in Basildon fit in with this newly found concern? Will the Cabinet Member stand by the people of Basildon and whole heartedly object to this proposed incinerator?'

Reply

'I must first disagree entirely with the comments on climate change you have made in your opening statement, which are ill-founded.

As you will be aware from information sent to Basildon Council in June 2019, a planning application is being prepared by Clearaway Recycling Ltd for two energy plants to be installed on land south of Archers field each of which will be capable of processing up to 75,000 tonnes of pre-prepared Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) and other non-hazardous residual materials each year to produce electricity for the National Grid, something which is becoming increasingly important as the UK moves towards electrification of vehicles.

As an experienced local and County Councillor, you will be aware that my role as the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Action is entirely separate from the work of the Waste Planning Authority (WPA), which operates independently of the council.

Any concerns the local community may have about the burning of waste materials would need to be addressed by the applicant, especially given the site is adjacent to the clean air zone identified by Essex County Council and Basildon Council.

At Essex County Council we take the threat of Climate Change very seriously, and we prioritise action over words. As well as the formation of the Essex Climate Action Commission, we have already undertaken a raft of work in this area. By working with staff, partners, businesses, residents and communities, we are aiming to lead on reducing emissions, energy usage and waste across Essex, while also increasing the amount of green infrastructure we have.'