

ECC / BDC Cllr Peter Schwier report for 13th. January 2022 meeting

I am pleased to announce that the new VAS/SID application process is now available online. This policy now enables Parishes to buy signs to install on the network in places where speeding is perceived. The LHP will still install ones where a significant speeding issue occurs if a VAS is the most suitable measure.

In the meantime we have been developing an easier to use webpage and application process which can be accessed in the link [below](#).

<https://www.essexhighways.org/apply-to-install-a-vas-or-sid-illuminated-sign>

Any questions please email the Local.Highwaypanels@essexhighways.org.

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Essex residents who are unemployed, or whose employment and training prospects have been affected by COVID-19 can receive one-to-one support thanks to a new service called 'Evolve'.

'Evolve' provides free and personalised support to residents via an adviser who can help them with employment, training and personal development opportunities. The service is available until the end of March 2022. It is funded by Essex County Council and delivered in partnership with Essex Adult Community Learning and Enable East.

When facing a career change due to the pandemic, it can be difficult to know where to start. The Evolve project offers a team of highly experienced advisers across the county to provide free information and advice in order to help residents navigate their way. Advisers can refer residents to local services, social groups, wellbeing and mental health recovery courses and employment and training opportunities. You can contact the Evolve team by emailing evolve@essex.gov.uk and book an appointment with an adviser over the phone, video call or in person.

To find out more about Evolve, please email evolve@essex.gov.uk

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Essex Highways keeping motorists safe by using drone technology to inspect more than 1.500 bridges and culverts in county.

Bridge inspections by drone saves money, avoids road closures and improves repair programmes.

Camera drones are already being used in industry but, in a major innovation, drones and related tech are now helping Essex Highway engineers to carefully inspect critical structures like bridges and culverts in better, safer, and recordable ways.

Councillor Lee Scott, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, attended a demonstration of the drones in action at the bridge crossing the River Wid, located on A414 Greenbury Way, Chelmsford.

Take a look at an Essex Highways video of the demonstration here: <https://youtu.be/mXfxVFhhjZl>

Councillor Lee Scott said: "Use of advanced drone technology in this way to help us inspect and maintain bridges much more efficiently is a huge benefit to road users in Essex. We have

around 1,500 bridges and culverts across the county and if we have to close them, residents, businesses, local services, and other road users all suffer.

“The Council is completely committed to bringing this and other innovations forward quickly to help us manage all our bridges and other structural assets to help us get the maximum value from highways budgets.

“Our strategic partnership with Ringway Jacobs continues to deliver major improvements just like this one, for everyone in Essex.”

Drones can easily get high-definition airborne or waterborne views of hard-to-reach spaces and areas that inspectors cannot reach safely or easily, like the undersides or parapets of bridges over busy roads.

The equipment can also be configured to take imagery in confined spaces, such as culverts under the road and even underwater – for example for the bridge foundations in a river.

This is more efficient but also means that safety risks for inspectors are greatly reduced and significant cost savings are made by using drones in this way, by negating the need for, or cost of manned boats and safety platforms. The data that is produced is also of a far superior quality and will significantly improve our historic record of the structure, enabling changes to be identified more easily over time.

The use of drones does not in any way replace the professional judgement and calculation of a professional structures engineer – drones are rather a more efficient, safer, and sometimes more effective way of making a visual inspection. Professional decisions are then taken using the visual information gathered in this way.

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There are a couple of initiatives that I wanted to ensure you were briefed on, so you receive fuller information and are able to signpost residents accordingly.

The first relates to the Household Support Fund and the second to the Essex ActivAte Winter Holiday Activity and Food Programme:

£9.4m Household Support fund allocations announced

In October, the government allocated £9.4m to ECC in order to provide support for families over the winter. Free school meals during the holidays, food for rough sleepers and help for residents in need, with their utility bills this winter, are just some of the key areas where the money will be targeted. The below provides more information.

Allocations in full:

- £3.2m for the provision of food vouchers to those eligible for free school meals for the Christmas 2021, February and Easter 2022 school holidays.
- £2m to supporting vulnerable adults as individuals or with families with food, fuel and essential items.
- £1m for the [Essential Living Fund](#), a scheme managed on behalf of the County Council by Southend Borough Council.
- £630,000 to the [Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service](#), of which £600,000 for a one off fuel voucher to all registered families and £30,000 for food and other essential item vouchers distributed to those in the most deprived areas.

- £240,000 to Community Hubs for food, fuel and essential items split across the CVS but also Nest in Harwich, Happy Hub in Basildon, Ideas Hub in Chelmsford and The Witham Community Hub.
- £200,000 to Voluntary and Community sector organisations for food, fuel and essential items.
- £200,000 to local Citizens Advice.
- £200,000 for families who are just about managing, but who could benefit from a one off fuel or essential items voucher for temporary relief can be accessed through the Essential Living Fund.
- £120,000 direct to District, Boroughs and City for the provision of food for homeless households and rough sleepers.
- £108,000 for Care Leavers for food and essential items.
- £565,000 to deliver a series of programmes focusing on holiday hunger, food education programmes, support for young carers and targeted family support and childcare delivered through locally trusted community organisations and foodbanks to support children and their families (includes money through homestart).
- £200,000 will be used for Administration costs associated with this grant
- £735,000 has been allocated through previous ECC decisions.

A large proportion of the fund has been allocated to key organisations and partners across the county to continue their work in supporting residents in need.

Community Hubs, Voluntary and Community sector organisations and local Citizens Advice will also receive allocations to support residents.

The link to the wide range of support that can be provided to residents is below. Please circulate and signpost through your contacts:

[Money, debt and benefits: Household Support Fund - Essex County Council](#)

Essex ActivAte Winter Holiday Activity and Food Programme

I am delighted that once again we will be running another Essex ActivAte programme this winter, which aims to support the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people from low-income homes, providing fun, enrichment activities, as well as a nutritious meal.

Across the entire county, there will be over 120 clubs up and running to provide a whole host of enjoyable and educational activities for children to choose from. From archery, arts and crafts, baking, and exploring nature, to animal encounters, mini golf, parkour and bath bomb creation, there's something for every child to enjoy! Every child will receive a school standard meal and nutritious snacks, with many clubs also providing an extra meal during longer sessions.

We are committed to ensuring that clubs and activities in this year's ActivAte Essex winter programme are inclusive and accessible. Active Essex will be providing training for all partners, covering topics such as: inclusive awareness, mental wellbeing, safeguarding, nutrition education and epilepsy and seizure training. All ActivAte clubs will be inclusive, with a trained SEND and Mental Wellbeing ambassador to support our club-goers. We are also working with experienced organisations to deliver dedicated SEND Hubs and Mental Wellbeing Hubs across Essex, offering tailored activities run by specialist coaches.

To get us all in the festive spirit at the most wonderful time of the year, many clubs will be hosting a unique celebration event, which may include special winter experiences such as a Christmas party, Santa's grotto, pantomime show or animal encounter. All activities will differ

from club to club, but each one will ensure a wonderful time is had by all who attend 😊

The winter ActivAte Essex clubs, which will run predominantly between the 20th - 24th of December, are free for all children who are eligible for benefits based free school meals, as well as children from lower income working families and other eligible families in need of support. Bookings are now live. Please signpost residents through your channels to the link below:

www.activeessex.org/children-young-people/essex-activate/bookings/

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Essex County Council's (ECC) Children's Social Care team has been praised by Ofsted following a recent visit focused on its care leavers service.

Ofsted reported that ECC has "created a positive environment" for care givers which helps them to "find solutions to challenges faced by the care leavers they work with".

The report also noted that the council has created a "wealth of innovative initiatives" which benefit individual care leavers, supporting them to successfully transition onto independence.

Ofsted cited that this creative culture has continued throughout the pandemic restrictions and beyond, with staff flexibly adapting their ways of working. ECC care staff working with children and families have continued to be available and to reach out to care leavers, providing "effective support in response to their needs".

This was the first focused visit from Ofsted for children's services since ECC achieved an Outstanding rating for its children's social care services in 2018.

Cllr Beverley Egan, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Early Years, said: "The findings reflect how well we know our care leavers and how high a priority they are for us.

"Our Personal Advisers are exhibited as highly valued by the young people they work with, as well as caring, persistent, hardworking and willing to go that extra mile. Our managers have also created the right environment for practitioners to be creative in their solutions to challenges faced.

"There are some areas we need to improve on including ensuring education, employment and training opportunities are consistent across the county. However, we are aware of this and are already working towards meeting this ambition for our care leavers.

"I would like to thank all members of our Children and Families teams for their amazing work, the relationships they have made and the strength they bring to those relationships."

The full Ofsted report can be found at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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From today, Friday 26 November, residents can have their say on Essex County Council's (ECC) draft vision for libraries as the 'Everyone's Library Service 2022-2026 draft plan' is published.

Helping children and adults improve their literacy, encouraging people to enjoy reading for pleasure and increasing the range of online resources available to customers are just some of the commitments in the plan.

It also commits to keeping all 74 libraries open with investment in training and development for library staff.

The plan also sets out three key aims for the next four years and details how these will be achieved.

Library Service and Literacy

- Books, e-books, digital and online.
- Supporting children to be school ready and helping adults to improve their literacy.
- Building people's confidence in reading.
- Nurturing people's love for books.

Infrastructure and Communications

- Improving the Library infrastructure (Buildings and IT).
- Creating welcoming, accessible places that also provide more opportunities for communities to use.
- Thinking of new ways to communicate and engage with residents so they know what is on offer.

Supporting our communities and levelling up

- Making sure all residents have the same access to the support and skills they need to achieve their aspirations, regardless of where they live in the county.
- Improving opportunities for everyone, locally and countywide.
- Encouraging new users and thinking of new ways to attract them.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance, Cllr Louise McKinlay said: "We want to give our residents a Library service that everyone can be proud of and one that will enhance lives and help communities to thrive. The draft library plan sets out how we aim to do this.

"The pandemic has made us see things differently, it's shown us how flexible our libraries can be but has also shown us there is a wealth of opportunity for the service and our library buildings.

"We don't want to just rebuild to where we were before the pandemic, we want to go further and create a service that is modern, vibrant and sustainable, with improved access, better facilities and more opportunities for local people. The libraries are a key tool in helping us to deliver our Levelling Up agenda, right across Essex.

"However, before any decisions are made, we want to hear what residents think of the proposals in the draft plan. This is everyone's opportunity to help mould what libraries in Essex

will look like in the future and I hope you will take the chance to make your views known so these can be considered ahead of plans being finalised.”

Everyone is welcome to give their views and can do so online from 1pm today, in person at one of the engagement events we are planning early next year or via our customer service centre by calling 0345 603 7633.

The draft plan and survey can be found at www.essex.gov.uk/everyoneslibrary

Feedback can be submitted between 1pm on 26 November 2021 and 1pm on 21 January 2022.

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The Essex Lottery is celebrating four years of helping local charities access funding from residents who want to support their county community.

The Essex Lottery is an online lottery created by Essex County Council to support local causes across the county.

Since the Essex Lottery launched four years ago in 2017 over £340,000 has been donated to good causes in the county. This is thanks to the thousands of players who buy a weekly £1 ticket – with 60p of every ticket they purchase going to good causes.

Many of the good causes supported by the Essex Lottery have done great work supporting communities during the lockdown, but at the same time are now struggling due to events being closed down by social distancing protocols.

Currently more than 314 charities and good causes are signed up to benefit from The Essex Lottery – supporting a diversity of causes across Essex from animal welfare, education and arts groups to organisations supporting children, disadvantaged groups and the elderly. Local good causes include community groups, sports clubs, brownies or scout’s and school PTAs. Players are able to select the good causes they wish to support.

Now is the time to support these charities and good causes by buying tickets for the Essex Lottery.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance, said: “For four years the Essex Lottery has grown - more residents than ever are making the choice to buy a weekly ticket and support charities and good causes within Essex. Many thanks to all the players who have supported the lottery from the start.

“The rising number of people who are playing the Essex Lottery each week proves that Essex people want to help. The lottery is making a difference, please sign up and make every penny of your lottery ticket money count!”

Prize draws take place every Saturday night when a 6-digit winning combination is picked. Prizes will be given to players with tickets that match the first or last 2-6 numbers from the winning combination. Match all 6 and you win the £25,000 JACKPOT.

Every week there are prizes to be won of free tickets and cash prizes of £25, £250, £2,000 and £25,000 - to players whose numbers match the winning number combination.

Currently, national store chain Decathlon are also supporting the Essex Lottery with an offer 'Tis The Season To Make A Difference Today'.

One lucky winner will receive £1000 to spend at DECATHLON, a retail store that provides equipment for over 70 outdoor and sporting activities. This offer will run from the 1st of November to the 1st of January 2022.

To play the Essex Lottery, or apply for Essex Lottery funding, visit: www.essexlottery.co.uk or call the Essex Lottery support team on 0300 302 32 32

A total of 20p from each £1 ticket goes to the prize, with 60p going towards funding good causes (nominated causes receive 50p from each £1 ticket brought via their page on the lottery with a further 10p funding local good causes and initiatives via the Central Fund). The remaining 20p is used to administrate the lottery.

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The county council has formally responded to the Essex Climate Action Commission's report [*Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral*](#).

Published in July, it contains over 100 recommendations on what organisations, communities and residents across Essex need to do to tackle the climate crisis.

At its meeting on Thursday 24th November, Essex County Council's Cabinet declared its support for the Net Zero report and unveiled its £200m climate action plan.

This details how the Council plans to do its part to implement the Commission's recommendations to reach Essex's net zero targets and deliver on its Everyone's Essex commitment to a High-Quality Environment.

Essex County Council has also committed to track progress and will be producing annual reports on greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilience measures for both the Council and the county of Essex.

The Essex Climate Action Commission will be continuing to meet during its second year, and it will also be monitoring and supporting the progress made by the Council to implement its recommendations.

Speaking at the Cabinet meeting, Essex County Council's Climate Czar Cllr Peter Schwier, said: "Today marks the point where we recognise our early momentum, acknowledge the journey ahead of us and take those steps to power resolutely forward.

"We at Essex County Council can and will lead, but we will need to work closely with others, not least, district colleagues, health, police, the voluntary and community sectors, businesses and residents alike. We must all play our part for this to have real impact."

Prof. Jules Pretty, Chair of the Essex Climate Action Commission, said: "On behalf of the Commission I strongly welcome the comprehensive plan put forward by Essex County Council and it's very constructive that you have accepted our recommendations.

"This is the key moment for actions, leadership and implementation. It is a chance to show that we can get on top of this issue."

The Essex Climate Action Commission was set up to advise the county of Essex on how best to tackle the climate crisis and become a net zero emissions county.

The Commission met nine times over the course of its first year, where it discussed solutions to climate problems in the following key areas - transport, built environment, energy, waste, land use and green infrastructure and community engagement.

A full list of the recommendations is available in the report [Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#) which can also be found online at www.essexclimate.org.uk/.

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Residents are encouraged to Love Local and support local businesses on Small Business Saturday which falls on Saturday 4 December 2021.

It will be the 9th annual celebration of Small Business Saturday which promotes small business success and the difference it makes to the local community and economy. Last year an estimated £1.1 billion was spent across millions of different small businesses across the country on Small Business Saturday.

Essex residents can show their support for Small Business Saturday in many ways including looking for unique Christmas gifts at an independent shop, leaving a positive review of a local business, eating in or ordering a takeaway from a local restaurant or simply helping to spread the word about the campaign on social media.

For those who like shopping from the sofa, there is also [Click It Local](#). This Essex-based shopping site gives you the chance to browse local shops, order from different retailers and have items delivered to your home in one package.

Supporting your local businesses supports local jobs, helps the local economy to thrive and bolsters local supply chains. It can also help to cut your carbon footprint by reducing unnecessary travel and making the most of locally sourced products and ingredients. When out visiting independent retailers, just remember to take a face covering to help stop the spread of Covid-19.

Local businesses can get involved by tagging #SmallBizSatUK and #LoveLocalEssex

Councillor Lesley Wagland, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Economic Renewal, Infrastructure and Planning said: "It has been an incredibly difficult period for many of our small businesses due to the ongoing impact of coronavirus and the uncertainty it has brought. I would encourage you all to support the local businesses that we love, as shopping locally helps to retain money within the local community."

Ella Martin, co-founder of Table Coffee Shop based in Earls Colne said: "It is so important to shop small and local now more than ever before as we are coming through the turbulent period of the last few years. We are lucky that our hard work and loyal customer base has kept us alive; we launched in lockdown but we continue to go from strength to strength.

"The consumer has the influence and the power to support and keep independent businesses alive, which in turn keeps the high street unique and buzzing. Please choose to support all your locals."

For more information visit smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com and www.essex.gov.uk/love-local

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Across Essex there are a growing number of people who are taking on caring responsibilities for their relatives and friends who are disabled, ill or older and who need additional support.

The pandemic has had a massive impact on the lives of carers, affecting access to services, their ability to juggle work and care and much more. It's more important than ever that the voice of carers is heard.

Essex County Council has launched two carers' surveys – one for carers aged 18 and over and one for young carers.

The survey will ask about the experiences of carers, how they have coped and continued to provide vital support to loved ones.

The information gathered from the survey will be used alongside feedback from in person meetings with carers and used to help shape future plans.

Essex County Council will publish its plans to support carers in early 2022 which is an important part of the Council's ['Everyone's Essex 2021 – 2025 Plan'](#).

Councillor John Spence, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care said: "Improving the wellbeing of all those who care for family and friends across the county is one of the critical aims of the Essex County Council Health and Care Strategy over the coming four years. I urge everyone receiving this survey to give us full and honest feedback. Only by knowing where we are now and where the gaps are, can we have the ability to fulfil our ambition."

The surveys are open now and will run until 23 December 2021.

Carers survey - <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/commissioning-delivery/carers-survey>

Young carers survey: <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/commissioning-delivery/53572379>

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Whether you're an absolute beginner or just want to boost your confidence on the road, Essex County Council is offering free adult cycling training across the county up until the end of March 2022.

Working in partnership with the Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP), the training is delivered by qualified cycling instructors. The beginners' course comprises four 45-minute sessions and the confidence-boosting and advanced training comprises one two-hour session.

Cycling offers an excellent low carbon transport solution as well as being a great form of exercise, improving both physical and mental health.

These courses are designed to help adults who may not have cycled before or have not cycled for some time and will take in techniques to help unsure riders stay safe while cycling on Essex roads.

Cllr Lee Scott, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, said: "Here at ECC, we're working on a number of safer, greener, healthier initiatives to encourage residents to get cycling, especially for shorter journeys.

"Whether you're travelling to work, school or the shops, our message is to get on your bike! And our training will help you do just that."

"The health benefits of cycling are well-documented. But if every car owner in Essex did just one less one-mile journey by car, that alone would save 13,000 tonnes of CO2 a year."

Sign up at <https://essex.cycleready.co.uk/registerinterest/registerselectcoursetype>

or email SaferEssexRoads@essexhighways.org for more details.

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Hedingham Division

With the Business Adaptation Grant scheme due to end on 31 December 2021, Essex County Council is urging any small and medium-sized businesses that have yet to bid for funding to apply. Businesses can receive up to £5,000 to adapt how they operate and help to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading.

Essex County Council's business grants have proved highly successful, with over £10m of the allocated £14.4m funds being awarded to over 4,000 businesses to date.

SMEs are encouraged to [apply through their city, district or borough council](#), before the funding runs out.

In the run up to Christmas, more businesses, particularly those requiring additional support in the crucial hospitality sector can apply for funding, to invest in seating, shelter, and lighting, to enable outdoor trade.

Ella Martin, co-owner of the coffee shop Table in Earls Colne, received the Business Adaptation Grant. She commented: "We used the grant to buy tables and chairs for outdoor seating, a protection screen for the counter area and a bespoke Perspex screen for our main doorway, which has a takeaway hatch."

Other businesses have used the grant to:

- Install signage and sanitation equipment
- Promote outdoor dining, including tables and chairs
- Set up contactless payments
- Enable home working

- Increase an online presence

Cllr Lesley Wagland, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Economic Renewal, Infrastructure and Planning, said: "We are so pleased that so many businesses have benefited from this grant programme, with many reporting that the funding has helped them to safeguard and create new jobs.

"I would encourage any small and medium-sized businesses, particularly those that have not applied for the scheme previously to find out more and make the most of the funding on offer."

Businesses that have previously been awarded a grant from ECC's Business Adaptation Grant scheme can apply again, provided they have not received a grant within the last two months.

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Essex Highways is reminding landowners and people with gardens next to county roads to do their part to help minimise highways flooding this winter by clearing private drains and ditches.

Over 300,000 known drains and related drainage assets are situated on Essex roads.

Using specialist gully pumps and jetting tools, Essex Highways work teams move around the county area by area carrying out routine cyclical cleaning, as well as ad-hoc responses to problems, in order to alleviate the effect that rainfall has on flooding.

In October alone over 9,000 roadside gullies and catchpits were cleared by the busy cleansing teams.

However, a team effort is needed to minimise the flooding before it occurs. Essex Highways appeals to people responsible for private drainage and ditches to ensure they are cleared and draining properly - ditches in fields and on boundaries are critical for stopping water simply flowing into the highway. Ditches also limit the amount of soil and stones that can wash onto footways and roads.

Gardeners can play their part too – by clearing leaves, twigs and branches from front gardens, less debris will be washed into drains and gullies, helping them stay clear.

Councillor Lee Scott, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, said: "Flooding is an issue that has to be dealt with, not just in the county but globally. Whilst we work hard to try and reduce flooding where we can, it is important that we work together as partners to help alleviate the problem for the good of the community."

Despite all this work some roads will still flood under the heaviest downpours or after prolonged rain or snow. It can take several hours for even recently cleared drains to evacuate a large volume of water, because the drains simply move water from the road to somewhere else such as streams, rivers, and utility water systems that may already be full. Close to the coast, high tides can make things worse. So, after heavy rainfall, Essex Highways ask that you please wait a few hours before you report flooding on a road.

Essex Highways' ability to manage their owned gullies, catchpits, channels, and pipes is increasing. With nearly seven years data on flood risks, silt levels found in each drain other reported issues such as tree roots growing through pipes collected, it means the most troublesome drains receive more attention. Working together is key to keeping roads flood free.

Please report highway drain/flood issues online at <https://www.essexhighways.org/tell-us/flooding-drainage-and-manhole-covers>

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A new £1 million fund which will provide support to the county's art and culture sector over the next five years is to be launched by Essex County Council (ECC).

Opening on Tuesday 4th January 2022, the ECC Arts and Cultural Fund will offer artists and cultural organisations grants from £2,500 to £30,000 to deliver projects to help support and rejuvenate the Essex arts and culture sector, as well as the county's towns and city high streets.

The Arts and Cultural Fund is open to individual artists and co-operatives, as well as community groups, charities and trusts, community interest companies, social enterprises and private and public organisations.

Prior to the pandemic, Essex had the third largest creative industry sector in the UK* - employing over 25,000 people throughout the county - with the arts and culture sector worth an estimated total of £2.6 billion.

Councillor Graham Butland, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Devolution, the Arts Heritage and Culture, said: "We are delighted to announce the launch of the Arts and Cultural Fund which will support arts and culture organisations across the county.

"We believe that a thriving creative sector is part of a strong economy and one which will rejuvenate our high streets. It is my hope that the Arts and Cultural Fund will support the diverse and vibrant communities we have throughout the county."

Applications for those interested in applying to the Arts and Cultural Fund can be made from Tuesday 4th January 2022 until the closing date of Monday 28th February 2022. Successful grant submissions will be announced at the end of March 2022. Expressions of interest can be made now.

For more information and to view the full guidance of the Arts and Cultural Fund please visit www.explore-essex.com/arts-culture-fund.

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I am delighted to share Essex Community Foundation's latest [Annual Review](#) and [Grant Supplement](#) for our financial year 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

As a Cllr, I would ask you to please encourage local charities and voluntary organisations working in your area to contact our grants team on 01245 356018 or e-mail grants@essexcf.org.uk to discuss their funding needs. Also, if you know of individuals or companies who might want to support local charities, but are not sure how best to do it, please share our Review with them or suggest they get in touch with us. We are always happy to start a conversation about our work in local communities.

We share details of our work and funding programmes in different ways so please follow us and also encourage others in your area to do so too:

- Sign up to receive our monthly [E-newsletter](#)
- Visit the [Community Spotlight](#) area on our website to find out which organisations in your area are receiving support

If you have any questions, I would be pleased to speak with you and can be contacted on 01245 355947 or by emailing jo@essexcf.org.uk

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I would like to draw your attention to the following update that has been published on the ['Future plans for Finchingfield Bridge'](#) webpage as this may be of concern to local businesses and residents.

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People living in Essex, who have no means of transport, can now get help to attend pre-booked appointments.

People who are struggling to attend their booster jab appointment because of transport issues can now get help from Essex County Council.

The Essex Wellbeing Service is now able to organise transport for Essex residents who are finding it difficult to organise a way to attend their vaccine appointment. Transport will be provided by taxi service.

This service is free of charge and can also be used if you need transport to get to your first or second dose appointments.

Essex residents who would like help getting to their appointments can email provide.essexwellbeing@nhs.net or call 0300 303 9988. The phone line is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays. Callers' needs will be verified, and they will be asked to provide their booking reference or a screenshot of their appointment confirmation.

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care said: "We don't want anyone to be left behind in receiving their Covid-19 booster jab.

"If getting to an appointment is an issue because someone doesn't have access to transport for whatever reason, please don't hesitate to call or email the Essex Wellbeing Service.

"Book your appointment and contact them, it's so important that everyone is protected."

Alternatively, in some areas of Essex there are Community Transport routes which residents without transport can contact directly. These are also for pre-booked appointments.

Braintree Community Transport: 01376 557883.

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Everything Covid Essex

You may have lots of questions about different variants, the vaccine and why we keep being asked to get boosted and tested.

Essex County Council, along with NHS, has all your questions answered on one website: [Everything Covid Essex](#).

The website is designed by young people for young people aged 18-39, with all information verified by the NHS.

Vaccine experts and NHS professionals provide advice and guidance, debunk vaccine myths and share what young people might want to consider before getting the jab. They address concerns including fertility, side effects, boosters and variants, and answer all the commonly asked questions about Covid-19 and the vaccine.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Director for Public Health in Essex said: “With so much misinformation out there, it’s important there is one place for people in Essex to go to find the all the facts about Covid-19, vaccines and boosters.

“I would encourage anyone hesitant, or with questions to visit the website and ask the experts if they are still unsure.”

The website features a range of videos, TikToks and Instagram Reels from experts and young people to help alleviate any concerns and hesitations about the vaccine.

You can also hear why they chose to get vaccinated, why they are self-testing and what their experience was like at vaccine clinics and after the jab.

If you have a question, you can submit it and the NHS will answer it for you. You can also visit the site to book your vaccine when you are ready and find out how to order self-tests.

Whether you or someone you know is feeling unsure about the vaccine, [Everything Covid Essex](#) can help you get answers.

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Essex County Council and Essex Area Ramblers (EAR) have teamed up to ensure crossfield public paths, that are being illegally obstructed by growing crops, are cleared to be enjoyed by walkers.

Essex has an extensive network of just under 4000 miles of Public Rights of Way (PRoW), enabling all of us to freely enjoy active travel in some fresh air amid the natural beauty of the county’s landscapes.

Sometimes, however, footpaths across arable fields are unwalkable because they have been ploughed or are obstructed by crops. Farmers are legally bound to reinstate them but occasionally neglect to do so. Essex Highways has been dealing with and enforcing such issues on crossfield paths for years, but in some instances the response time has been rather slow for what is obviously a time-constrained problem. This can be particularly frustrating in cases which involve the same paths year after year.

Simon Taylor, Essex Highways’ PRoW Enforcement & Liaison Officer, and members of the EAR agreed a streamlined process, involving greater EAR involvement in reporting and monitoring issues on crossfield footpaths. Members would identify a longstanding problem path, report the issue on our existing public ‘Tell Us’ online tool but at the same time forward the report with a photograph to the EAR Area Footpath Secretary, who would in turn copy this direct to Simon.

The Landowner or farmer can then be contacted and take whatever action was necessary to ensure the footpath was suitably reinstated. EAR members also agreed to help with the follow-up, checking paths that the landowner/ farmer had stated were clear but failed to provide photographic evidence, or where there had simply been no response.

Councillor Lee Scott, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, said: “I am thrilled with the collaboration we have created with the Essex Area Ramblers. It has meant that this summer we were able to enforce 30% more cropped crossfield paths than previous years.”

“PRoW routes can help the people of Essex introduce healthier, more enjoyable activity into their lives. And it also lets people explore more of the beautiful and interesting outdoor space we have in the county. By ensuring these routes are clear and safe we are one step closer to a safer,

greener and healthier Essex. All we ask is that walkers stick to the routes and [follow the countryside code](#).”

EAR members have praised both the collaboration and the results and by working with Essex Highways, EAR members have been able to bring real benefits to all walkers.

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A budget for Everyone in Essex - investing in services, providing opportunities for communities, protecting and enhancing the environment

Proposals contain a below-inflation council tax increase and ambitions to invest in and protect services, renew the economy and create a fairer Essex in the post-pandemic era

Essex County Council's budget proposals, revealed today (Tuesday, 11 January 2022) feature investment in families, communities, the economy and environment but also peg a proposed council tax increase to below the current inflation rate.

The agenda set out in *Everyone's Essex – the plan for Levelling Up the County* is at the heart of proposals, which also deal with rising demand for key services, particularly social care, as a result of the pandemic.

Plans include investing £1.3 billion over the next four years on major infrastructure projects, such as new schools and large road improvements, a scaling up on previous years. The spend in 2022/23 is set to be £284m, money which also supports local contractors and their workers.

Real action is to be taken on climate change and carbon reduction through responding to the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendations, including a £200 million spending commitment toward Essex's net zero targets and achieving the *Everyone's Essex* commitment to a high-quality environment.

Support for businesses will continue through the *Backing Essex Business* programme, supporting business growth across the county, promoting economic growth and creating jobs, as well as continued investment in skills to help people progress and get back into work.

Libraries will also be at the heart of supporting communities, alongside £10 million in funding for Levelling Up including £500,000 for new Community Challenge Fund and help for families in managing finances, alongside encouraging businesses to be more family friendly.

The proposals amount to a council tax increase of 4.49 per cent. This is made up of a 2.99 per cent council tax increase (including 1% specifically for adult social care), plus a further 1.5 per cent for Adult Social Care that was deferred from last year during the pandemic.

This would mean that for an average Band D property household, the ECC element of council tax will increase by £60.21 next year, or £1.16 per week.

Despite a strong track record of financial management and one of the lowest County Council tax rates in England – delivering savings of over £45 million a year for the past 13 years - the council is not immune to current inflation pressures and rises in utility prices.

Inflation has added £32m to next year's bill for services, with interest rate rises increasing the cost of borrowing for the Council's capital spending programme.

Demand for Council services which protect the most vulnerable has also risen – particularly in adult social care.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said: “This budget will allow us to commit to Everyone’s Essex, our plan to improve the economy, the environment and life for children and families and promoting health, care and wellbeing for all ages.

“We are responsible for ensuring that we renew our economy, provide equal opportunities for all and ignite ambition for the people and places we are privileged to represent. This budget is a crucial step on that journey.”

Cllr Chris Whitbread, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs, said:

“We have a stark choice – either we propose an increase, or we face unacceptable reductions to services.

“For all of us the last few years have been especially tough, and recently we’ve seen the price of energy rise and our fuel bills go up and increases in the price of goods and materials. All of which has been compounded by the pressures of Covid.

“Councils, just like any business or family, are affected by inflation and price rises for goods and services. The increase in the national living wage, while welcome, means we will have to pay our contractors more.

“I am proud of the work we have done on these proposals in difficult circumstances. We are not willing to compromise the level of service residents receive. We are committed to making sure vulnerable residents receive the care they need, that the roads we travel on remain safe, that we continue to invest in communities and that our environment becomes greener, cleaner and healthier.”

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