

Cllr Finch Parish Update – May 2021

Essex in top 10

Essex County Council continues to be ranked in the Top 10 most effective top tier authorities in the country, as independently ranked by iMPower. Since 2018 we have been in the top ten in terms of productivity, demonstrating how we achieve better outcomes for residents from a less-than-average spend per head.

Over the last decade we have invested heavily in transformation for long-term sustainability and as a result we have been able to improve the quality of the services we provide, putting the resident, not institutions, at the heart of our services.

- 89% of our children now attend a school that is rated as Good or Outstanding
- We have improved our Adult Community Learning offer to nearly 11,000 students.
- We have an award-winning broadband team, enabling over 150,000 Essex homes and businesses to access superfast broadband.
- We engage 32,000 young people through our nationally recognised youth service.
- The condition of our roads is now among the best in the country.
- We have invested billions in improving and maintaining our infrastructure.

Council Tax

This year, for the sixth time in the last ten years, we announced no increase in council tax, and only a 1.5% increase in our social care precept this year. Very few authorities across the country are in a position to act with this level of confidence. Most are increasing their rates by two or three times this amount.

In fact, since 2010, while inflation has increased by around 35%, the cumulative impact on council tax has been much less, at around 22%.

Climate Commission

The Essex Climate Action Commission is looking to get the views of Essex residents on a selection of the recommendations the Commission will make which will help Essex become a net-zero county by 2050.

Since its inception in May 2020, the Commission has been developing recommendations for ways in which Essex can tackle climate change.

Through the Commission's [consultation](#), launched on 16 March, it hopes to find out how much public support there is for its recommendations, whether residents think the focus is on the right areas, and if the recommendations have the right level of ambition. Residents have until 27 April to have their say.



Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme works underway

The first energy efficient home upgrades under the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme have been completed.

John Davies of Clacton has had external wall insulation which has raised his Energy Performance Certificate from E to D.

The Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme is a government-funded initiative which is being managed by Essex County Council in conjunction with seven city, district and borough councils. The purpose of the scheme is to install energy efficiency measures in Essex homes which help to reduce heating bills and cut carbon emissions.

Residents can follow Mr Davies' lead by [visiting the Essex County Council website](#) to find out more about the scheme and how they could also make potential savings to energy bills. To be eligible for up to £10,000 funding residents must own a home in Essex with an EPC rating of E, F or G, and have a household income below £30,000.

Funding is also available for private landlords, local authority-owned properties and social housing, however a 33% contribution from the landlord is required and the maximum funding per property is £5,000.

COVID-19

1) It is a tribute to the residents of Essex that we have gone from having some of the highest case rates in the country to among the lowest.

2) As we move from lockdown, the need for testing becomes more important. As a result, we have created possibly the most extensive self-testing availability in the country, using libraries as collection points.

3) We had concerns about the clarity and effectiveness of Essex's payment scheme for people who have to stop work to self-isolate. Therefore, this has now been standardised and re-launched.

4) Care homes have again experienced an extremely tough time over the last few months. We are pleased to see care home visiting resuming, and we are working to ensure quality and capacity in all parts of the county.

5) Essex County Council have played a critical role in supporting the NHS vaccination programme by recruiting volunteers to help at sites and assisting with communication via our channels.

ECC Budget

At Full Council on 23 February we approved our budget for the next year. We also announced some additional initiatives

- An additional £2million investment in economic development to ensure a successful reopening of the Essex economy.
- £1.5million to support the Educational Recovery Task Force which will lead and oversee the educational recovery of all Essex children.
- A further £1million investment in mental health support for children and our health and care workforce.
- A further £1million community action fund for environmental initiatives to help communities create less waste, travel sustainably, use renewable energy and produce less carbon.
- A further £500,000 to break the cycle of violence and protect young people from gangs.
- A further £7.2million of capital funding for Local Highways Panels (LHP) - £200K more for each panel, each year, for the next three years.
- An additional £180,000 added to LHP revenue budgets for smaller highways projects.

Major Capital programmes

In March we agree the unlocking of grant funding worth over £200 million for Chelmsford North East By-pass and a new rail station at Beaulieu Park.

In total 14,109 new homes will be built through these two projects. By securing the funding, ECC has delivered an Infrastructure First approach whereby the infrastructure schemes will be brought forward earlier than would otherwise have been the case and existing residents will see the benefit as early as possible.

This funding is in addition to the £99m secured by ECC to support a new Link Road and Rapid Transport System to the east of Colchester. The Chelmsford and Colchester funds combine to over £300m, which will help drive economic recovery from Covid-19 by supporting thousands of construction jobs in Essex and adding 10bn to the economy.

Freeports

Felixstowe/Harwich and the Thames Freeport proposals have been chosen by the Chancellor as two of the 8 new Freeports in the UK. This will be a huge boost to the wider North and South Essex economies, and the county and country as a whole. Again, Essex County Council's work supporting and influencing these outcomes has paid off.

Essex and the East of England will play a leading role in powering local and national economic growth. We can drive the regional recovery from the challenges of Covid-19 – while helping lead the rest of the nation down the path of increased prosperity.

Outstanding Childrens Services

We have one of the best children and families services in the country, with some of the lowest spend, rated by Ofsted as outstanding. We did this by investing heavily in the right leadership, early intervention, and innovation in practice.

Education Recovery and Young People

Laptop Scheme

Last Summer, we launched an initiative called “Closing the Digital Divide” which provides laptops to young people who need devices. Clearly, with the advent of home schooling and remote learning, this has become a very prominent issue.

As part of our response to the COVID 19 pandemic, Essex focused its efforts on supporting young people to gain access to ensure they could continue with their education. The “Closing the Digital Divide” scheme involves ECC working with partners to donate redundant devices to the scheme, which are then refurbished and sold to fund the purchase of new chrome books for school children who require them. The initial focus was on providing the equipment to colleges for students in need and was later expanded to include Secondary and Primary Schools. In total we distributed in the region of 5,000 laptops (1,000 of which were purchased by ECC) and continue with the scheme. As we emerge from the COVID 19 crisis, we will once again be taking donations of devices from the wider population and business as we further expand the scheme.

The next phase of the programme will see us extend support for larger families. Even with the schools now back, access at home is crucial for young people’s education.

Easter Holiday Camps

Essex ActivAte is the new holiday activity and food programme run by Active Essex in partnership with Essex County Council and funded by the Department for Education. Working with a network of holiday club delivery partners the programme provided FREE face to face clubs for young people who are eligible for benefits based free school meals, as well as young people from working families who would benefit from this extra support. Clubs included fun activities, including sports and arts & crafts, for at least 4 hours per day over 8 days of the Easter holidays.

In total over Easter we have provided 22,125 spaces over 8 days. This includes 20,845 spaces on the Essex ActivAte programme, 1176 SEND specialist spaces, and 640 spaces on mental wellbeing hubs. Within that offer we have provided around 420 spaces per day for working families - over the 8 days that is 3360 spaces available.