

Cllr Finch Parish Update – Covid-19 Update

Action taken to date:

Shielding:

Within 48 hours we set up a distribution and call centre in Essex. Local government staff and thousands of the volunteers who signed up via the newly created Essex Welfare Service were the first authority to begin reaching out to and supporting people in Category B. As of today, 5444 residents have been supported by EWS and 978 Emergency Food Deliveries have been made.

Howe Green:

One of our central priorities as part of the response to the crisis has been to move older people out of hospital settings as quickly and as safely as possible for their safety and for the effective operation of hospitals across Essex.

Thanks to funding from MHCLG, within a period of just two weeks we have created a new 76 bed facility in Essex as step down care. That facility has started admissions this weekend.

Securing PPE using our strategic partners:

Thanks to a strong, 30-year relationship with colleagues from Jiangsu Province in China, we were able to secure 200,000 protective face masks to support critical need across the social care sector in Essex and neighbouring counties.

We have also been dealing with various companies in the UK who have contacted us about providing supplies of PPE.

Infection control in care homes:

We moved quickly in terms of our approach to managing infection in care homes, in readiness for government's change in approach towards tracing and containing spread of the virus, going above and beyond PHE guidance.

The county council, with the NHS and Public Health England (PHE), have stepped up prevention and outbreak management and now cases seem to be declining. We know and are aware of best practice in prevention and stopping outbreaks and are ensuring that care homes can do this - including PPE, reduced staff rotation and minimising visitors.

We have developed local hubs across Essex to ensure strong regular links with care homes.

Essex undertook a national pilot with PHE on testing all staff and residents in care homes with few or no cases. Lessons around how to deal with staff who are positive but have no symptoms have proved important. Now a national testing portal has been set up and all care homes can access this for testing. The council is supporting this by working through the local hubs to ensure the right people tested at the right time and the appropriate action is taken.

Coronavirus Community Facebook Page:

For a number of years, we have been at the forefront of community mobilisation via Facebook. Very early in the outbreak of coronavirus in Essex we activated our network of Facebook Community Group administrators and set up Essex Coronavirus Action, a page that has 36,000 people following it and posts viewed millions of times. Through this page, we've recruited thousands of volunteers for the newly created Essex Welfare Service and shared vital public health messages through our network of other community groups. Our work has been recognised by Facebook who are using it as a case study of good practice.

Care Technology:

This is a difficult and challenging time for the care sector. With vulnerable older people shielding, a depleted care workforce and limited PPE we have been forced to innovate to ensure our service users are receiving the care they need.

Alongside moving our equipment contract to 7 days a week we extended our Care Technology pilot across the whole county. This includes installing digital technology that allows care workers to 'visit' up to 2,000 service users remotely, rather than requiring a physical visit. It is of significant benefit to us during lockdown, helping us to safeguard the vulnerable even further.

Country Parks and Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC):

Essex County Council made the decision to close their Country Parks to help limit the spread of coronavirus and with the health and safety of our visitors and staff in mind. This difficult decision followed national guidance around gatherings and social distancing and was put into place after unfortunate scenes of overcrowding in our car parks, and large groups in our open spaces were unable to maintain social distancing.

Local residents can however still access nearby Essex Country Parks via public rights of way.

All Essex Recycling Centres were closed on Monday 23 March until further notice. The decision was made in response to strict government guidelines urging people to stay in their homes to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. There were issues around social distancing at the sites to ensure the safety of both staff and residents as well as the government advice to avoid unnecessary journeys.

Schools and Adult Community Learning (ACL):

Since the start of the crisis schools have remained open to the children of key workers and to vulnerable children.

The figures from Essex schools as of Monday 4 May were:

- Number of schools open: 455
- Number of students attending school: 3,729
- Essex's total school population age 5-18: 214,488
- Percentage of pupils attending school: 1.7%

In terms of schools that are open this varies from day to day. Some are open every day, others not at all, whereas some are opening a few times a week.

ACL the County Council's in-house adult education service usually delivers courses in its nine Centres, as well as in different out-centres at the heart of the communities. Due to the impact of COVID-19, ACL has been making sure that there is as little interruption to learning as possible. It has successfully moved swiftly in transferring its classroom offer to online, where appropriate. It has not currently been possible to move certain more practical based courses online so ACL tutors are engaging in other activities, such as producing video clips, blogs and articles to keep people engaged and motivated. Tutors are also keeping in contact with learners using social media and emails. These innovative approaches also importantly extend to learners on Supported Learning programmes, with learners on accredited programmes still being supported by their tutor where appropriate with regular phone calls and contact, and many engaging well with online learning.

Budget:

As you might imagine the current situation is making demands on the ECC budget. To date, we have incurred the following additional costs:

PPE	£2m
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Residential care	£18.6m
Domiciliary care –	£11.4m
Emergency mortuary facility	£10m
Home adaptations	£1.2m
Payment for increased costs for residential and domiciliary care due to Covid 19 (i.e. buying PPE)	£7m

Recovery:

On Monday, following the statement from the Prime Minister, government guidance was released about the steps towards easing lockdown. We are working on the implications of this for our services and will provide you with news on that soon.

Other news:

The first meeting of the Essex Climate Action Commission took place virtually on 12 May, when it was agreed that there was an urgency to proceed at pace and to be bold in tackling the climate challenge.

The Commission discussed the opportunity to build on the gains that have emerged as a result of Covid 19 – how the public are engaging more with the natural world, walking and cycling more (greener forms of transport) and more people are working from home, including in jobs where this hadn't been thought possible.

They also discussed the challenges arising from Covid-19 –single use plastics making a reappearance, the carrier bag being used more, and the number of home deliveries being made. The commission recognised the important of public safety while balancing the need for responsible purchasing and not losing the momentum that has been made in the fight against plastic and waste.

The Commission will consider six pillars of work, looking at how ambitious, positive solutions and behaviour change can impact on the carbon output of the following:

- Green Infrastructure
- Adapting to a changing climate
- Transport
- Built Environment
- Energy and Waste
- Community Action

The Commission also considered how planned new developments across Essex should be used to test and pilot new ways of working, particularly around waste and transport. Transport was considered to be one of the biggest challenges, but also where some of the biggest gains could be made.

The Commission will next meet in July with a proposed interim report on recommendations to the council being produced for October.

Essex Housing:

Essex Housing have announced that Air Sourced Heat Pumps (ASHPs) will be installed as part of all new developments.

An ASHP is a system that transfers heat from outside to inside a building, or vice versa. In domestic heating use, an ASHP absorbs heat from outside air and releases it inside the building, as hot air, hot water-filled radiators, underfloor heating and/or domestic hot water supply. The same system can often do the reverse in summer, cooling the inside of the house. When correctly specified, an ASHP can offer a full central heating solution and domestic hot water up to 80 °C.