

## **County Councillor's Report August 2020**

### **Finchingfield Bridge to be closed for eleven days for essential parapet repairs**

Road users are being informed about the upcoming closure of Finchingfield Bridge (B1053) for essential repairs.

The bridge is scheduled to be closed from 5am on Monday 17 August and reopen by the end of the day on Thursday 27 August 2020 while essential repairs take place. No vehicles will be permitted to pass over the structure until the works are complete.

Advance warning signs will be in place prior to works to inform drivers, including HGVs, that formal diversions will be operational during the eleven day closure.

Work will not affect the current pedestrian route across the village pond footbridge, nor restrict access to residential properties and businesses in the village. These will be accessible via the signed diversion or alternative local routes.

During this time repairs will be carried out to the parapets, including reconstructing the northern parapet. These works are considered as an interim measure, intended to preserve the bridge's continued safe use. Additional investigations will also be carried out during the road closure to support the design of a new replacement structure and ongoing temporary works design.

Provisions are being made for an inter-connecting temporary shuttle bus service to be made available to replace the no. 9 and 16 services. Details will be advertised by Stephenson's as soon as arrangements are finalised.

For further details about these works please visit the Essex Highways website:

<https://www.essexhighways.org/transport-and-roads/highway-schemes-and-developments/other-schemes/finchingfield-bridge-b1053-finchingfield.aspx>

Should the works be delayed, for example due to adverse weather conditions, then the latest information will be updated on site signage and the above webpage.

### **County Councillors get another direct say on pothole repairs**

**Hot on the heels of last year's hugely successful 'member-led' pothole repair initiative comes another chance for county councillors to put forward their priority repairs after a major cash investment by the ECC Cabinet.**

**The new programme follows two previous schemes, in 2018 and 2019, which saw hundreds of extra road and footway problems fixed in addition to repairs completed routinely because of their immediate risk to safety.**

**Each Essex County Councillor will be using their local knowledge and working with their local Parishes and Districts so Members can nominate a list of locally important pothole locations to Essex Highways for repair. The road defects submitted will then be fixed permanently as soon as possible, using extra investment provided by Essex County Council.**

**Each county councillor will be able use a repair crew in their area for up to 10 days, working to the list County Councillors will provide. Their work will be focused on some of the most locally**

irritating potholes which may not normally be considered for immediate repair under existing maintenance policies.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: "We have proved these Member-led exercises work very well to fix extra potholes locally. I want to make sure that the money we're putting in to these additional repairs is used to maximum effect in each area. We want to repair the potholes that really frustrate people locally as well as the ones our careful safety- and asset led policies mandate. We won't be able to fix everything, but we will consider requests that our resources can deal with.

"That's why I am asking all Essex County Councillors to consult quickly as possible, with their local councils, organisations or residents and then let us have their list of local priority potholes. We'll fix them permanently with extra crews, further improving our road network and helping everyone who uses it."

#### Notes on the scheme

Depending on how close together and how large each pothole is, somewhere between 4 and 10 road potholes a day could be fixed under the scheme. Each County Councillor will have 1 gang for up to 10 working days.

Local residents or road users are invited to contact their appropriate local Essex County Councillor with the potholes that they find most problematic.

Some defects will not be able to be fixed under this particular scheme – for instance large stretches of carriageway, many types of concrete surface problem, or footways. These would be considered as part of future capital works proposals.

This scheme follows a previous successful exercise in 2018-19 fixing extra potholes and another last year where councillors nominated priority pavement repairs.

Potholes fixed on Essex roads- April 1,093; May 1,444; June 1,428. Consistent productivity despite new Covid-safe working practices.

As with all road repairs, the work will be subject to weather and any specific complexities which may emerge as the work is planned

All necessary social distancing rules will also be followed, for the safety of residents and the workforce.

## **Registration Services help mark thousands of happy occasions post full lockdown**



Since restarting some registration services on 16th June, Essex County Council Registration Services have registered over 2,800 births, received numerous Notices of Marriages and booked over 280 ceremonies for couples keen to tie the knot.

From 5 August, Essex Registration Services will also restart Citizenship Ceremonies and has written to all residents who are currently waiting to attend.

People need to attend a citizenship ceremony if they are 18 or over and have successfully applied to become a British citizen. During the ceremony, people make an oath of allegiance (or an affirmation) and a pledge. This means they promise to respect the rights, freedoms and laws of the UK.

Usually, people must attend a Citizenship Ceremony within three months of receiving an invitation from the Home Office., However due to COVID19 this time is currently extended to six months.

Essex County Councillor, Cllr Susan Barker Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture & Communities said "I know the team from Essex Registration Services have been keen to start booking in those all important dates for our residents. I'm delighted that so many registrations have taken place already in just under a month! I'm pleased to announce that Citizenship Ceremonies will begin from 5 August, at which people have the opportunity to formally acknowledge and celebrate their British citizenship."

For further information on Citizenship Ceremonies please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/british-citizenship>

## **Essex Leaders come together to discuss the future of Local Government**

Today Leaders and Chief Executives of all councils, county, city, borough, district, and unitary in Greater Essex, alongside the Police, Crime & Fire Commissioner, met to discuss the future of Local Government across the county.

The meeting took place following recent Government announcements around the future of Local Government. The Government has made clear its intentions for Local Government Reform with a White Paper due to be published in the autumn which will set out the criteria and process for how this will work.

Today's meeting, held virtually, was the first opportunity for Leaders and Chief Executives to come together to discuss the government steer and consider the opportunities for improving the Local Government system and discuss how to progress and next steps.

Attendees agreed that throughout the last few months there has been a collective effort across organisations in addressing the key challenges that Essex has faced during the COVID-19 crisis and there is commitment and ambition to build on this and consider how much more can be achieved with a simplified local government system that enables work to progress at pace and scale.

Essex County Council Leader Cllr David Finch said: “Across Essex we have one of the most complex political and organisational geographies in the UK – 1 county council, 12 city, borough and district councils and 2 unitary councils. We all agree that a sustainable solution for Greater Essex is needed and the opportunity Local Government Reform presents us with can help us unleash our reform potential, deepen community engagement, have more control over funding and streamline processes for residents.

“It is important that we act now and progress with developing proposals so that we are taken seriously by Government and aren’t left behind and ensure that Essex is well positioned for future opportunities which see all residents and businesses benefit.”

The meeting was Chaired by Cllr Neil Stock, OBE, Tendring District Council Leader and Chair of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Group.

Cllr Stock said: “It was a pleasure to chair the meeting today and bring my colleagues together to begin our collective journey to respond to the Government's reforms.

“Councils in Essex deliver excellent services to residents, both independently and collectively, and we have the opportunity to now capitalise on this opportunity and our recent experience of working as a strong partnership to deliver for the residents of Essex and present to government our ideas around the future of Local Government.

“Talking about reforming local organisational structures can be difficult and challenging, but attendees were all committed to keeping the residents and businesses at the heart of our thinking and ensuring we get the best possible deal and local government structure for them.”

As a group there was agreement to progress with further exploring all possible options and to come together again in September to considering these, with the ambition to having proposals that can be submitted following the White Paper being published.

### **Essex Care Homes to re-instate visiting arrangements**

Essex Care Homes have been given the go-ahead to decide whether to allow visitors, after the Government published a recent update on visiting arrangements.

Arrangements were temporarily paused in care homes across the county in order to prevent further spread of COVID-19. The government recently updated guidance around care home visits and delegated decisions around local arrangements to Directors of Public Health.

Having reviewed the guidance and examined the local data Dr Mike Gogarty, Director for Public Health in Essex has determined that the level of infection is now low enough that in care homes where there is no current outbreak and where the home is not rated ‘red’ by the local care home hub, care home managers can now decide to re-instate visits, in line with appropriate safety measures.

Homes will be required to carry out a full risk assessment prior to allowing visitors to return and where visits do go ahead, they will be limited to a single, consistent visitor, per resident, wherever possible in order to minimise the risk.

If an outbreak is suspected at any time, visiting arrangements will be stopped and reviewed immediately.

Cllr John Spence, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, said "I know this will be welcome news for a lot of Essex residents who have spent the past few months unable to visit their loved ones.

"We cannot underestimate the emotional toll not being able to see elderly relatives will have taken on many families during this time, and indeed for the residents themselves, and I would like to thank anyone in this position for the sacrifice they have made."

Mike Gogarty, Essex County Council's Director of Public Health, said: "This update from the Government marks another step forward in our journey to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and I'm confident that the conditions are right for care homes in Essex to decide how they might reinstate their visiting arrangements.

"However, it is vital that these visits are managed carefully in order to mitigate any potential risk; appropriate social distancing and hand hygiene will continue to be integral to how successful these arrangements are. We will be monitoring the situation carefully and will not hesitate to take action if needed."

It will be down to individual care homes to determine arrangements and any family members wishing to visit a loved one should contact the home for more details.

Find out more about the [updated guidance around care home visits](#).

### **Return to normal hours of use for Essex Concessionary Bus Pass Holders**

The hours of use for Concessionary Bus Passes in Essex will return to normal on Tuesday 1st September 2020.

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Essex County Council (ECC) extended the hours of operation for Essex bus passes to all day from the usual off-peak times to help people make use of early hours opening for high risk groups.

Now businesses and shops are starting to return to normal, with schools preparing for a September return, social distancing requirements on bus services mean that during the peak morning travel period there will be additional pressure on bus capacity for school children and workers.

As a result, ECC has agreed with bus operators that the times of operation for Essex concessionary bus passes will return to normal hours - 9am to midnight on weekdays and all times on weekends and public holidays from Tuesday, 1st September 2020.

If you are a pass holder and want to travel outside the hours of operation of your bus pass you will need to pay the full fare for your journey from this date.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Passenger Transport, said: "I'm pleased bus transport arrangements are moving back to normal from the changes we brought in to help vulnerable passengers access shops at the height of the lockdown.

"This return to a normal service will help bus passengers and drivers observe social distancing protocols by spreading out the volume of passengers across the morning.

"I will take this opportunity to emphasise to all bus passengers that when using bus services, please follow the guidance from Public Health England, including the need to wear a face covering and

reducing personal contact, while maintaining social distancing and personal hygiene measures, particularly sneezing or coughing into disposable tissues, avoiding touching your face and regular thorough hand cleaning.”

All bus passengers are asked to note the availability of bus services is likely to continue to change over the coming weeks.

Bus passengers are strongly advised to check the bus operator’s website, social media and phone apps to see what bus services will be running before starting their journey.

### **Getting Building funding secured for Essex**

Essex has secured £26m of Government funding for infrastructure projects to help the county’s economy bounce back from COVID-19.

The funding is part of an £85m package awarded to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) from the new £900 million Getting Building Fund announced today (4 August 2020).

The Fund is for ‘shovel-ready’ schemes that will provide much-needed jobs, growth and the groundwork for further investment at this critical time. South East LEP has secured the largest award for any LEP in the UK.

Projects to be funded in Essex include:

- Town centre improvements in Chelmsford to help retailers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- New workspaces and markets in Harlow, Braintree and Jaywick to attract new businesses and create jobs
- Cycle network infrastructure improvements in Tendring to encourage green travel
- New facilities at Harlow College to deliver the new technical based T-level qualifications, providing residents with the skills required in the construction, digital, education & childcare and health & science industries
- Refurbishing Harlow Library and relocating ACL to provide an expanded library and adult learning centre in the town centre and free up the former ACL site for potential housing.
- Modernisation of a seafront car park at Canvey Island to reduce local flooding, improve the public realm, aid green recovery and boost the local economy
- A new modular housing factory in Basildon to produce up to 1,000 new homes a year.

Also included is £2.5m to improve digital connectivity in rural areas of Essex.

This adds to the ongoing Superfast Essex programme which is already planning to spend a further £13.2m to improve broadband connectivity over the next 18 months.

The 14 Essex schemes are expected to create more than 2,800 jobs, support more than 4,000 new learners and provide more than 20,500 square metres of new commercial space.

Essex County Council Leader, Cllr David Finch said: “This £26m from the national Getting Building Fund is a much-needed shot in the arm to Essex’s economy. Essex businesses are amazingly resilient but the pandemic has taken its toll so we’ll use this for schemes that can be delivered rapidly and

stimulate further investment. We're targeting the funds to areas and industries hardest hit by the pandemic and sectors that will most help the economy to bounce back."

South East LEP Chair, Christian Brodie said: "We are delighted that government has recognised the excellent projects and potential that the South East has to drive forward our economy at this challenging time. These projects have been carefully selected to target those areas and industries particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and those that can progress, at pace, to support economic recovery. The South East LEP has a proven track record of delivering successful projects and has been working really closely with our local areas to understand what our businesses need and where investment will have significant impact.

"Over the last few months, we as a LEP have been providing support to local businesses. Our Growth Hubs have been providing advice to struggling businesses and directing businesses to funding support. We have also been reworking our own existing funding pots to create new COVID-19 funds for businesses, infrastructure investment and skills training.

"We truly believe that the South East will help lead the country out of the crisis and into recovery. The Getting Building Fund provides the next phase of financial stimulus to restart our economy."

LEPs were asked to put forward proposals for shovel-ready projects that could be delivered within the next 18 months. You can read more about [SELEP's bid to Government here](#).

### **County Councillors get another direct say on pothole repairs**

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The new programme follows two previous schemes, in 2018 and 2019, which saw hundreds of extra road and footway problems fixed in addition to repairs completed routinely because of their immediate risk to safety.

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Each county councillor will be able use a repair crew in their area for up to 10 days, working to the list County Councillors will provide. Their work will be focused on some of the most locally irritating potholes which may not normally be considered for immediate repair under existing maintenance policies.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: "We have proved these Member-led exercises work very well to fix extra potholes locally. I want to make sure that the money we're putting in to these additional repairs is used to maximum effect in each area. We want to repair the potholes that really frustrate people locally as well as the ones our careful safety- and asset led policies mandate. We won't be able to fix everything, but we will consider requests that our resources can deal with.

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### **New funding to support those in fuel poverty**

Even though the sun is shining across Essex, for many the prospect of a cold winter and affording heating will be a year-round worry.

However, new funding announced will see even more people in Essex who are at risk of fuel poverty, supported with paying their energy bills and keeping their homes warm this winter.

Essex County Council, alongside the Citizens Advice Service launched “Warm Homes Essex” earlier in the year. This initiative sees a team of specialist energy advisers operating across the county who work with clients identified as being in “fuel poverty” and help them to improve their financial and physical circumstances.

The £775,000 funding comes from the £150m Warm Homes Fund, established by National Grid and administered by Community Interest Company, Affordable Warmth Solution (AWS).

The funding is designed to support local authorities, registered social landlords and other organisations working in partnership with them, to address some of the issues affecting fuel poor households.

Cllr Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities, said: “No one in this day and age should be suffering because of the cold. The Warm Homes Fund is another way that we can ensure we are helping those most in need during their most challenging months, so we welcome this funding.

“Even though we are seeing a lovely warm summer on the horizon, we must think ahead and act before the cold weather kicks in to ensure people are prepared and supported.”



Fuel poverty is when a person's energy costs represents a high percentage of their income, this might be because of very high energy costs arising from an energy inefficient home, or a low income but more commonly a combination of these factors.

The focus of the project is to support those whose health is adversely affected or at risk from living in a cold home. This includes older people, people with illness or disabilities or families with children with asthma.

The advice provided by the service is intensive and personalised, taking place over an extended period in order to ensure everything that can be done to improve the householder's circumstances is done – such as maximising benefit entitlements, resolving disputes with energy suppliers, addressing debt problems and applying for grants to improve the energy efficiency of the home.

Citizens Advice is keen to reach out to people who might be struggling, and who could benefit and not reaching out.

Martin Lord, Director of Development from Citizens Advice Essex, the consortium body for the Citizens Advice service in the county said:

“We are delighted to be working in partnership with Essex County Council in order to deploy this new funding. It's enabling us to deliver a package of services that will hopefully make a big difference for people.”

“In the current climate many households on low incomes are struggling to afford their energy costs and although it seems a way off, as the winter approaches, we want as many people as possible to contact us because we can really help.”

Jeremy Nesbitt, Managing Director of Affordable Warmth Solutions, said:

“We are excited about this investment from National Grid and are delighted to support Essex County Council to fund the scheme to address fuel poverty across the region.”

“Solving the issues associated with Fuel Poverty continues to challenge many of our stakeholders and the feedback we've already received provides evidence of how the Warm Homes Fund will make a positive difference to thousands of homes throughout Great Britain.”

For more information and to see if you are eligible, please contact the Warm Homes team on 0300 3033 789 or by submitting their enquiry online through their website [www.warmhomesessex.org.uk](http://www.warmhomesessex.org.uk)

## **Essex County Council Locality Fund 2020/21**

***A reminder that I would like to receive applications from eligible organisations***

### **What are Locality Budgets?**

For the 2020/21 financial year the Council will make available the sum of £10,000 for each single member division, and £20,000 for divisions served by two councillors.

Members are able to make recommendations as to how the money is to be spent.

### **What can the money be spent on?**

Money must be spent in a way which benefits the division. There are three main ways of spending it:

- making a grant to a registered charity, a parish council or a properly constituted community or voluntary association for the purposes of a specific service or project in the Division(s);
- buying goods or services; or
- commissioning services from ECC.

### **Is there anything that the money cannot be spent on?**

We have tried to have as few rules as possible, but we do need some rules to ensure that everything is lawful, consistent with our standards and that Councillors are protected.

Money cannot be spent on or with:

- an organisation in which the Councillor is involved, unless the Leader agrees otherwise and makes a formal decision to that effect;
- an organisation which is political or undertakes any political campaigning activity or on a councillor's constituency business;
- anything which has a significant ongoing maintenance or support liability which ECC would be required or expected to bear – unless there is a separate agreement to bear the cost with funding identified;
- anything which benefits a particular individual, business or 'for profit' organisation;
- any organisation which does not operate on an inclusive basis – services must be available to the community without discrimination (recognising that some services are only useful to certain groups);
- any organisation which has previously misused public money;
- anything which is unlawful

### **Can money be spent outside a councillor's Division?**

Yes, if it benefits the division or people living or working in it.

### **Is there a deadline for spending the money? When is the money required to be spent?**

Money must be spent during the 2020/21 financial year and usually within 6 months of the award

Recommendations about spend will not be progressed during the ECC pre-election period and no recommendations may be made by anyone involved in an election.

**Do councillors have to invite competing bids to allocate funding?**

No. Some councillors may choose to work in this way for all or part of the money, but the budget recognises that councillors know the needs of their division. If a councillor does hold a competition, it is important that the rules are clear and that the competition is fair.

**Does the money for a division have to be spent on one project?**

No. There is no limit to the number of projects if the overall spend is within the budget for the division.

**Can Councillors work together to 'pool' funds?**

Yes, provided there is agreement, the money benefits all divisions represented by those councillors and is within the overall budgets for the divisions.

**What if Councillors for a two member division don't agree how the money can be spent?**

The default will be that they are each entitled to make recommendations about half the budget.

**Is there a deadline for the scheme to be delivered?**

We expect all projects to be completed within six months of the award.

**Is there any advice available to councillors?**

The ECC Strengthening Communities Team have much experience in allocating money to projects. This advice could be really helpful to councillors and they are ready and able to provide the advice needed. They can help by advising councillors on:

- ideas on how to maximise community benefit
- how to run a competition - if a councillor decides they wish to do this.
- how to use the money to leverage in funding from other sources

**Can I spend the money on highways?**

In principle, yes but please note that designing a highways scheme can be expensive and may have ongoing maintenance implications. Councillors can speak to their 'buddy' in the first instance if they want to investigate such a scheme.

**What is the process to be followed?**

We have tried to make the process as simple as we can:

**Stage 1:** The Councillor makes a recommendation as to how the money is to be spent. In reaching this recommendation the Councillor may do so in any way they wish.

**Stage 2:** The Councillor submits an application for funding to the ECC Democracy Team

a. the proposal is supported by the relevant councillor(s); and

- b. if the proposal is for ECC to buy goods or services or provide them directly then the service which will be responsible confirms the scheme can be implemented within the proposed funding
- c. the proposal is otherwise eligible for funding
- d. there is enough money available to meet the cost.

**Stage 3:** The application will be checked to ensure that the proposal/recipient meets the criteria for funding:

**Stage 4:** Decision is made by relevant officer after consulting Councillor(s) concerned.

**Stage 5:** If scheme is agreed for delivery then any necessary permissions (such as landowner or planning permission) must be obtained by the Councillor or the Beneficiary before things can progress further. If the proposal is to pay a grant then a grant letter will be issued for signature by the beneficiary.

- money will normally be paid after the expenditure is incurred unless this will prejudice the delivery of the proposal in which case we may agree to pay in advance; and
- grant recipients are required to complete a monitoring form: i. within one month of payment of grant; or ii. six months of payment if money paid in advance

Simon Walsh

August 2020