

## County Councillor's Report, December 2020

### Essex to move to Tier 2 restrictions

The Government has today announced that the majority of the country, including Essex, is to be placed under [new Tier 2 restrictions](#) when the current lockdown lifts on Wednesday December 2.

This week, the Government announced details of a new three tier system, which sees the tightening of restrictions involved in the tiers.

Under the updated Tier 2 restrictions, social mixing outside of individual households will not be allowed indoors and the rule of six will still apply outdoors.

Pubs and bars and restaurants can open but only serve alcohol with substantial meals.

Businesses including shops can open, in a [Covid-secure](#) manner, other than those which remain closed by law, such as nightclubs.

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care or Health, said: "In October, council leaders across Essex unanimously made the decision to request Essex be placed into Tier 2 restrictions due to the exponential growth in cases of coronavirus across the county.

"When we recommended entry into tier two, national lockdown had been ruled out as an option. Subsequently it re-emerged, so actually, the impact of our recommendation on Essex was short lived. However, the decision had a positive impact. In the weeks following entry to Tier 2 there was a significant flattening of the upward curve and regionally, Essex's case rate reduced, from being in the top three council areas to the bottom two.

"Following national lockdown, we saw infection rates in other counties respond more quickly than ours, but both case rates and hospital occupancy are now stable.

"The government's new tiering criteria are more stringent than those that we left behind.

"We recognise that there is still work to be done. We understand that going back into Tier 2 will be hard for many, but we must all work together, follow the restrictions in order to save further lives and continue to protect our NHS.

"We are committed to supporting residents and businesses through these unprecedented times.

"We have a clear incentive. Our aim is to bring the rate of transmission and covid hospital occupancy down so that Essex can be placed in the lowest tier of restrictions as quickly as possible. With the help of everyone who lives and works here we can achieve this. Now more than ever, we need people to follow the rules of hand, face, space, work from home if possible, and always socially distance."

In order to further support Essex businesses through these restrictions, this week, ECC and district, borough and city council colleagues, have launched grant funding worth over a total of £30 million, to support businesses and enable them to adapt their premises. Businesses can apply through their local district, borough or city council website.

ECC remains committed to supporting the county's most vulnerable residents. Through the Essex Welfare Service, the County Council is offering practical, emotional and specialist support. Earlier

this month the council also announced £1.5 million winter support for children, families and the most vulnerable.

### **Protective winter blanket of support for residents worst hit by pandemic**

Essex County Council is wrapping a protective blanket around the most vulnerable this winter, providing warmth, food, emergency grants and support to residents hit by the pandemic.

A government winter grant of £3.8m is being added to £2.4m existing funding to see struggling families and adults through Christmas and the dark days of winter.

The blanket £6.2m package for December to March 2021 recognises the many ways the pandemic has affected people. It includes:

- Free school meals vouchers for all eligible children through the Christmas and half-term school holidays
- Winter warmth packages for vulnerable adults leaving hospital
- Emergency grants for food, heating, energy and water bills and essential household goods for people struggling to pay bills
- Home-Start packages for parents of 0-5 year old children, targeted at the most deprived wards across the county
- Support for carers and people with learning disabilities
- Christmas food and gift hampers for care leavers
- **Grants for local community food initiatives nominated by local Essex County Councillors.** The package also provides funding to increase capacity and resource for food banks and food delivery projects, housing and debt advice, mental health, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol support. Both holiday hunger and activity programmes are set to be expanded further to reach even more vulnerable children and support their families.

In addition, an offer for school children during the Easter, Summer, and Christmas 2021 holidays is currently being developed and details will follow.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Essex County Council, said, “Winter can be tough at the best of times and every penny counts for families at Christmas. Clearly, this year more than ever, people are struggling financially or emotionally due to the pandemic. So, we are using all the resources we can to put a protective blanket of winter support around those families who need it most.

“The whole council is behind this effort to support those who are struggling this winter, with help to heat their home, put food on the table and assist with key bills. We will do all we can for our vulnerable families.”

Our website has more information about [how to access support during the pandemic](#).

## Partnership planting marks National Tree Week in Essex



More than 14,000 trees are due to be planted at a site in Chelmer Valley, Chelmsford this National Tree Week as part of a collaborative effort between Essex County Council's (ECC) Essex Forest Initiative, The Woodland Trust and Ground Control's Evergreen Fund.

The Essex Forest Initiative is ECC's commitment to planting 375,000 trees - £1million worth - over five years in order to tackle climate change and lock up 60,000 tonnes of carbon. It is part of wider efforts being undertaken by the county council to reduce carbon emissions and promote green infrastructure across Essex.

National Tree Week runs between 28 November until 6 December and ECC has formed a partnership with conservation charity, The Woodland Trust and landscaping specialists, Ground Control, to carry out planting at this site.

The Woodland Trust is supplying the majority of the 14,110 trees and Ground Control is undertaking the planting which is being funded by their charitable arm, the Evergreen Fund.

The planting at Chelmer Valley is the first large-scale planting under the initiative and a celebration of the partnership between the three organisations.

Further planting is scheduled to take place during tree planting season (November-March) at Essex Country Parks and other sites across the county, and ECC is set to meet its target of 25,000 trees planted in the first year of the Essex Forest Initiative.

Cllr Simon Walsh, ECC's Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "I can think of no better way to mark this year's National Tree Week and indeed the start of this year's planting season than by coming together with partners to achieve a significant milestone within the Essex Forest Initiative.

"The initiative is a vital part of our plans to address climate change and support green infrastructure across the county and it is important that we take a collective approach to doing so.

"Although our scheduled plantings look a little different to what we had originally planned this season, we are really pleased they have still been able to go ahead and we remain on track to not only achieving, but exceeding our target for the number of trees planted this year.

"I look forward to continuing our work with partners to achieve our vision and leave a positive legacy for future generations."

Woodland Trust outreach adviser Edwin van Ek said: "The Woodland Trust is delighted to be able to support this initiative. We need new native woodland like never before.

"Government has committed to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 which will require the expansion of the UK's tree canopy cover from 13 per cent to 17 per cent. To reach that target there needs to be a huge upturn in the amount of woodland being created.

“Last month we launched the Big Climate Fightback and working at a landscape scale in collaboration with other organisations we aim to help deliver on the commitment of successfully establishing 50 million trees across the country by 2025 to help tackle the climate change crisis. The Essex Forest Initiative will be a great way to support that ambition in the Eastern Claylands.”

Chris Bawtree, Environmental Lead at Ground Control, said: "Ground Control's Evergreen Fund is excited to be supporting the project. The planting of over 14,000 trees is especially rewarding as the woodlands will provide new multifunctional habitats benefitting both wildlife and the local community.

“The two new woodlands will contribute to natural flood prevention, increased biodiversity and take up carbon, helping meet Essex County Council's sustainability goals and Ground Control's core value of caring for our environment.”

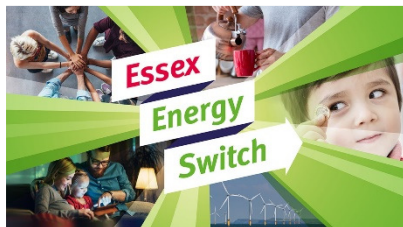
All Essex Forest Initiative plantings are being undertaken in line with appropriate Covid guidelines and social distancing is being maintained at all times.

Planning for Year 2 of the Essex Forest Initiative is also in progress, with key sites identified for planting.

Any organisations or individuals who wish to find out more about the initiative or who thinks they may have land suitable for planting are encouraged to contact [environment@essex.gov.uk](mailto:environment@essex.gov.uk).

To stay up-to-date with the latest Essex Forest Initiative news and progress, residents and organisations are encouraged to follow [EssexForest on Facebook](#).

### **Essex residents encouraged to sign-up to renewable energy and save with the Essex Energy Switch**



“The Essex Energy Switch is about local communities coming together, supporting renewable energy and saving money on their gas and electricity bills – the more people that register, the bigger the potential saving per household.”

That's the message from Cllr Simon Walsh, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment, who is encouraging residents to register for the initiative from today (Tuesday, 1 December 2020) and potentially save hundreds of pounds on their energy bills.

Cllr Walsh added: “Registering for the Energy Switch is quick, easy and helps you avoid searching for the best deals as all the hard work is done for you.

“Since the scheme launched in 2014, more than 17,500 people across the county have saved an average of £230 per household on their energy bills - more than £4.1 million across the county overall.

“This year it is an even better offer as suppliers will provide 100 per cent renewable electricity.”

“This is fantastic news and I’m pleased we can once again support efforts to help Essex residents save money.”

Registration for the Essex Energy Switch is free and only takes five minutes. Once the registration window closes, energy companies will bid at an auction to see who can offer the lowest energy tariff.

Once the winning bidder has been selected, anyone who has registered will be contacted by them directly with more details and information on how to switch.

Anyone that registered or switched their energy supplier through the Essex Energy Switch last year, will need to register again this year.

Once registered, there is no obligation to switch providers. Registering can be done online at [www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch](http://www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch) or by calling Big Community Switch registration line on 0800 048 8439 to register and receive correspondence by post. Lines are open Mon-Fri, 8:00am - 5:30pm, please have a recent energy bill to hand.