

## **ECC / BDC Cllr Peter Schwier report for 18<sup>th</sup>. September 2021 meeting**

### Long Term Covid 19 Effects

The Leader of Essex County Council (ECC), Cllr Kevin Bentley, has announced a new, independent commission which will identify the long-term effects of Covid-19, alongside the opportunities available to Essex residents and businesses to build a better future.

ECC is the first council in the country to set-up a commission to focus on this area. The commission is part of the Essex Renewal Project (ERP) and is the result of collaborative efforts of the County Council and the University of Essex.

It will bring together independent experts who will consider the impact of the pandemic in the longer-term and make recommendations on how to improve outcomes for communities and where to take advantage of future opportunities.

The work of the commission will cover the areas of life in Essex affected by the pandemic, including the economy, education and skills, relationships with friends, family and community, our environment and surroundings, and housing and transport.

It will also consider the impacts and experiences of different groups, cohorts and places.

Cllr Kevin Bentley said: "As we and partners across the county work towards the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, we approach a unique moment in history and a period not only of renewal, but also opportunity for Essex.

"It is vital that we understand the long-term impact of Covid-19, not just the here and now. The new commission will make recommendations that will guide our work – and the work of wider partners – in tackling the most challenging aspects of the pandemic's legacy in Essex, and in building a better future for the county.

"Not only do we have a responsibility to support communities to recover, we have a duty to enable them to benefit from new opportunities that have and will continue to emerge in the post-pandemic world.

"I look forward to continuing our work with colleagues from the University of Essex and other partners as the work of the commission progresses and we deliver on our ambitions for the county."

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex Professor Anthony Forster said: "This is a moment when we need to ask difficult questions and think hard about the choices we need to make for the future of Essex. "Our academics contributed to the local and national Covid-19 response through their research and I'm pleased the University is now supporting the post-pandemic recovery by encouraging evidence-led solutions."

Professor Jules Pretty from the University of Essex, will be Chair of the Commission. Further members will be announced shortly.

Professor Pretty, said: "Through the Commission we can provide community leaders in Essex with the powerful and impartial insights they need to help them take decisions on how we respond to the many challenges we are facing in the aftermath of Covid-19.

"My aim is for the Commission to deliver robust, high-quality analysis of the long-term impacts of Covid-19 and to identify the actions we need to take as a county. We can learn many lessons from our response to the pandemic to help us rebuild our society and our economy while also supporting people to improve their health and wellbeing."

The commission will build on and complement existing work happening across various agencies in Essex to manage the impacts of the pandemic.

An initial report will be produced by the end of 2021, outlining the likely long-term impacts of the pandemic and identifying any specific challenges. A final report will be published in summer 2022 with recommendations on how local agencies and communities could manage risks and exploit new opportunities.

*This summer Essex County Council is continuing the holiday free school meal vouchers scheme it has run successfully since Christmas 2020.*

A final £3.6m Covid Local Support Grant from central government is being used to provide free school meals over the summer holidays and extra support for families hit by the pandemic.

Essex County Council (ECC) has allocated £2.6m to continue the holiday free school meal vouchers scheme it has run successfully since Christmas 2020. Vouchers will be sent direct to parents of eligible children and young people by their school, college or early years setting before the holidays start. They are worth £15 a week per child for four weeks and can be used to buy food in most supermarkets. Parents can find out more at [Free school meals - Essex County Council](#).

The rest of the grant will continue support for families who need extra help until the end of September as follows:

£200,000 to the Essential Living Fund, which provides emergency grants for food, heating, energy and water bills and essential household goods. See [Money, debt and benefits: Emergency money and food - Essex County Council](#)

£300,000 for targeted family support and childcare delivered through locally trusted organisations  
£160,283 to expand Essex ActivAte, the successful holiday food and activities programme run by Active Essex in partnership with ECC. This offers free face-to-face clubs for children and young people who are eligible for benefits-based free school meals. The clubs give children and young people the chance to socialise, join in fun and creative activities and enjoy nutritious food. See [Essex Activate | Active Essex](#).

£185,000 to support homeless people and rough sleepers who need help to get food and essential items such as toiletries.

£150,000 for grants to local initiatives nominated by Essex County Councillors that provide food or help with household essentials to vulnerable people in the councillor's division (2).

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance, said: "The future is looking brighter but the pandemic isn't over, so we are grateful to the government for this Covid support grant and to the many local groups who are helping us use it to continue to provide vital support to those who need it most.

"Through holiday free school meals, the children's food and activity clubs, help for homeless people, emergency grants and targeted support, we want to ensure children and young people can enjoy nutritious food and fun activities, alongside helping families feeling the financial strain to pay their bills and look forward with hope."

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*Essex residents are reminded to remain cautious and Keep Covid in Check as the country enters Step 4 of the Government's Roadmap out of the pandemic.*

Remain cautious and continue to take sensible steps to Keep Covid in Check, is the latest message from Essex County Council's (ECC) Director for Public Health, Dr Mike Gogarty.

The advice comes as today (Monday 19 July) marks the first day that all legal Covid-19 restrictions on social contact that have been in place for most of the pandemic, are removed.

Instead, they are being replaced by recommended guidance from the Government. This is aimed at supporting people and businesses to make informed decisions about how to manage the risk as the country learns to live with the virus. This includes continuing to:

meet in ventilated areas where possible, such as outdoors or indoors with windows open

wear a face covering when seeing people you don't normally meet in enclosed and crowded spaces

wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitiser regularly

cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze

stay at home if you are unwell to reduce the risk of passing on other illnesses

consider individual risks, such as clinical vulnerabilities and vaccination status

Individuals who have not yet taken up the Covid-19 vaccine are also encouraged to do so and reminded to have both doses to ensure maximum protection.

The vaccine has significantly reduced the number of hospitalisations and deaths due to Covid-19.

However, it does not replace the need to [self-test regularly](#). People can still catch and spread the virus after having both doses.

It will remain a legal requirement for people to self-isolate if they test positive or are told to do so by NHS Test and Trace.

Dr Gogarty, said: “The legal restrictions are no longer in place, but common sense must be. This latest milestone does not mark the end of the pandemic, but rather a cautious step that has been made possible largely due to the success of the vaccination programme.

“Covid-19 cases in Essex are continuing to rise, although the rate of hospitalisations and deaths thankfully remain low. However, it shows that we cannot let down our guard. We must all learn to live safely with the virus, remain considerate of others and take sensible steps to Keep Covid in Check.” Cllr John Spence, Essex County Council’s Cabinet Member for Health, said: “I am sure that many people will be excited at the prospect of today. For others, they may understandably feel daunted given the events of the past 18 months.

“There is no right date for removing all legal limits, but we must learn to manage the risk ourselves. Therefore, we need to go cautiously into this next step, practice safety first and continue to follow the recommended guidance so that we can protect ourselves and each other. As I have said elsewhere, we don’t need a law to tell us to look both ways before crossing the street.”

Residents can read more about the [Government’s Covid-19 response this summer](#) and what it means for them.

More information about the support available to Essex residents and businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic can be found on [ECC’s Coronavirus Hub](#).

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***Essex Highways’ crews have surfaced over 110 miles of road, the equivalent of a journey across Essex from border to coast and back, in the seven months of 2021 so far.***

Crews used a variety of different surfacing techniques appropriate to each road section.

Various processes were used, including:

Fast Coverage Surface Dressing, where machines quickly cover the road with sticky “binder” tar layer and then spread stones on top

Intensive micro-surfacing which is finished by hand

Full resurfacing where heavy machines grind off the existing road surface and the crew then lay new asphalt.

Councillor Lee Scott, Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, said: “This is good news for drivers and cyclists in Essex that despite COVID-19 restrictions and tighter budgets, we’ve still managed to keep to so much of our road surfacing programme, with positive effects for years to come.

“Our engineers carefully inspect and record the condition of all our roads, and plan surfacing with the right technique according to how worn, how busy and how fast the road is.

“For example, if we do Surface Dressing at the right time we can efficiently future-proof long stretches of rural roads for years, preventing potholes forming. If we just stuck to fixing potholes, we would have thousands more and the costs would be prohibitive.”

“In order to complete full resurfacing, we often work at night. We understand that night works can cause delays and possible disturbance to sleeping residents.

“However, they are completely necessary to allow longer working sessions avoiding peak traffic, thereby enabling the work to be completed more quickly with minimal delays for drivers.”

**Surface dressing** is used when a road surface is in reasonably good condition, but needs some quick, overall improvement. The work can last up to ten years.

Essex Highways’ surface dressing programme is now coming to an end with 84 miles worth of work on 59 road sections completed, using 1,300 tonnes of tar “binder” and 12,000 tonnes of stone chippings.

**Micro-surfacing** gives more durable results, but is more intensive and more expensive, putting a thin layer of new surface on the road. It takes longer to cover a given area than Surface Dressing but is used where roads are busier. So far, Essex Highways has carried out over 12 miles worth of micro-surfacing.

**Full resurfacing** is where the existing surface of a road is removed, and a completely new depth of surface is laid as a replacement. This treatment is used where the road is badly worn and takes heavy traffic. Crews have completed 14 miles using 30,000 tonnes of asphalt. Essex Highways aims to resurface 31 miles before winter, which will require a total of 65,000 tonnes of material.

Surfacing programmes include Joint Sealing and Fine Milling to restore concrete road surfaces, which is just starting now and recycling these surfaces from September.

For more information about our Road Surfacing programme and to view upcoming works, please visit: <https://www.essexhighways.org/roads-and-pavements/renewing-surfaces>

## **New funding for Safer, Greener, Healthier travel in Essex**

Essex County Council has been successful in winning £352,249, one of the highest awards in the UK, to encourage more cycling and walking across the county.

The grant funding from the new Local Authority Capability Fund, is one of the highest allocations in the country and will be used to develop a rural cycling plan and provide cycle training for Essex residents who want to try cycling but are unsure of road rules and basic techniques to keep themselves safe on the road.

Travel challenges will be set to encourage more pupils to cycle and walk to school. The funds will also be used to deliver workplace cycle challenges, active travel events and other engagement encouraging change in travel behaviour toward walking and cycling.

The funding will also be used to support engagement surrounding the visit of the Women's Cycle Tour to Colchester and Clacton on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

Welcoming the announcement, Cllr Lee Scott, Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport at Essex County Council, said: "More and more of our residents are recognising the benefits of walking and cycling especially for those shorter journeys where in the past, we've automatically jumped into our cars.

"If we are to meet our climate commitments – we need to encourage even more residents to explore active travel options.

"Active travel improves health and wellbeing, reduces air pollution and congestion on our roads. This funding, as well as many of our other active travel initiatives, will help us achieve our ambition to make Essex the walking and cycling county."

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## **ECC New system for over the phone payments**

A new system for residents calling Essex County Council to make payments, will be launched this month.

The new system, which will be provided by PCI Pal, the global provider of cloud-based secure payment solutions, will reduce the need for any sensitive payment card information to be entered from within the County Council's IT infrastructure.

Residents making over the phone payments will now be able to input payment information using their telephone keypad, the most safe and compliant way to do so. County Council employees will remain on the line to offer assistance if needed. For the majority of card payments, no payment card information will enter the County Council's systems and will instead be sent directly to the payment merchant for processing.

The new system integrates with the Council's existing telephony and contact centre systems, in addition to its existing payment gateways.

Cllr Christopher Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs said: "We have always ensured the highest level of security for our customers when making payments online and over the phone and this will continue as we move to this new system."

"We have excellent teams with over 250 employees who take telephone payments and are on hand to help residents with a range enquiries and assist them with making payments should they need it."

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*Essex Highways remains on track to install an additional 5,000 LED streetlights across the county by the end of the month.*

Essex Highways' LED rollout is well underway with 800 old streetlights currently being replaced across Essex each week.

The move to LED will bring benefits for residents and the environment as the lights are more efficient, saving on average around 60% energy usage and thousands of tons of carbon emissions involved in generating electricity.

The lights also contain negligible toxic materials and are expected to last 20 years, whereas half of all sodium lamps fail after five years and must be replaced.

Replacing the current lights with LEDs will mean a better service and more effective use of taxpayer's money. After 25 years it is estimated the net savings for ECC will be around £39 million.

Over 5,000 replacements will be made by the end of the month and Essex Highways plan to complete 25,000 by Christmas.

The LEDs will be installed area by area until completion in 2024. Work began in May this year in Chelmsford and Basildon with plans to move on to Colchester and Tendring soon.

Councillor Lee Scott, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport, said: "I am so pleased that we're pressing ahead with the LED rollout. Not only

are LEDs more environmentally friendly and efficient, but they will also make our streetlights more effective and reduce the number of repairs we'll need to do.

This three-year rollout is the final phase of Essex Highways' LED replacement scheme, with 82,000 lights to be replaced in total on residential roads across Essex.

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*Applications open for dynamic programme of specialist business support, delivered by expert business coaches*

Let's Do Business, in partnership with Essex County Council, today announced the launch of a dynamic new program, Group2Grow.

ECC has provided significant funding over two years to support 'Backing Essex Business,' which consists of a comprehensive portfolio of free business support for Essex businesses of all sizes and types. Group2Grow is a part of the Backing Essex Business portfolio and is fully funded for Essex businesses.

Backing Essex Business builds on the existing help ECC has funded over the last year, which has assisted more than 700 businesses and safeguarded and created more than 600 jobs.

Group2Grow is targeted to build upon and continue support for businesses impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic; enabling recovery and ongoing growth; and in turn helping to create jobs and increase the prosperity and productivity of Essex.

Group2Grow is a new and exciting rapid results business support program, that harnesses the power of facilitated virtual peer group sessions, combined with one-to-one support, delivered by a professional Business Coach.

Successful applicants will benefit from 8 x 2-hour facilitated online group sessions (typically every fortnight) as well as a total of three hours of one-to-one support from a business coach.

This combination of group and one-to-one business support is proven in producing outstanding results with positive economic impacts.

Graham Marley, Chief Executive of Let's Do Business Group commented: "We are extremely excited to launch Group2Grow. Essex is the county of Entrepreneurs and we expect some dynamic results from this program. We've hand-picked the Business Coaches because they have a track record of helping businesses grow- moreover, they've each 'walked the walk' of running a business. Group2Grow is a perfect fit for the Essex business community and together with the other services delivered under Backing Essex Business, we are confident that this program will become fully subscribed very quickly."

Councillor Lesley Wagland, Essex County Council, Cabinet Member for Economic Renewal, Infrastructure and Planning at Essex County Council, said: "Group2Grow is another fantastic scheme to help businesses develop and thrive in Essex, by offering them the opportunity to seek advice and guidance from those who have previously overcome similar challenges or obstacles.

"Group2Grow will complement the work that Essex County Council is already doing on economic renewal, in supporting and strengthening businesses across the County, and I am delighted to see this exciting programme moving forward. I would encourage businesses of all sizes to take advantage of the support that this scheme has to offer."

There are a limited number of spaces available on Group2Grow which is open now for application registration at <https://backingessexbusiness.co.uk/peer-groups>

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*Residents invited to engage on the principles guiding the service.*

Two online sessions are taking place on Monday 20th September for residents to discuss their views and ideas with the Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Cllr Louise McKinlay.

In these sessions Cllr McKinlay will outline ideas for key principles to help guide the service and its future development. Residents will be able to discuss these, as well as make suggestions and offer feedback.

The County Council has firmly positioned the development of library services as a priority for the new administration, recognising their importance not only as places to encourage and support reading and learning, but also as community spaces used by all sections of local communities.

The ambition is to enhance and upgrade the library service and ensure it reflects the needs of local communities. All libraries in Essex will remain open and opportunities for training and upskilling libraries staff will be a key priority.

Important improvements have already been made, such as the recent landmark move to a new Libraries consortium, providing access to an additional six million items of stock, and the hugely successful Summer Reading Challenge which 17,153 young people took part in.

Cllr McKinlay said: "I want to see libraries at the heart of our communities. That is why we plan to invest in, enhance and protect the library service. Talking to residents and library users about the key principles for the service is the first stage in our commitment to making this happen.

"It is really important that we engage with our residents on the key principles driving the strategy. I would like to hear from residents who are current library users but also from people who are not presently using the service, so we can better understand what they want from the service.

"All feedback and suggestions will be taken on board. This really is an opportunity for residents to help mould the future of our library service."

Residents wishing to attend the sessions can register their interest via the following links. They will then be contacted by email with full joining instructions prior to the event they have registered for:

Morning session 11:30-12:30, 20<sup>th</sup> September: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/have-your-say-on-the-library-service-tickets-169622719119>

Evening session 18:00-19:00, 20<sup>th</sup> September: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/have-your-say-on-the-library-service-tickets-169624544579>

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*Essex Energy Switch offers county residents chance to fix costs and sign up to renewable energy.*

"The Essex Energy Switch is about local communities coming together, supporting renewable energy and taking the hassle out of 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 Peter Schwier, Essex County Council's Climate Czar and Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader, who is encouraging residents to register and potentially save hundreds of pounds on their energy bills.

Cllr Schwier 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 21,065 people across the county have saved on their energy bills.

"And as all Energy Switch suppliers must provide 100 per cent renewable electricity, this has already saved an estimated 4,334 tons of CO2 being released by households who took part in the Energy Switch.

"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. Energy companies will bid at an auction to see who can offer the lowest energy tariff.

The last year has been very unusual for the energy markets with persistently rising wholesale prices meaning they are now at a 10-year high. This has resulted in some standard variable tariffs being cheaper than some fixed tariffs. The tariff cap, which limits standard variable tariffs, is increasing by £139 as of 1st October 2021.

This means that whether you switch or not you are likely to see your energy bills going up. A fixed tariff will offer peace of mind that your rates won't go up anymore for a year.

Once the winning bidder has been selected, anyone who has registered will receive a personal offer, there's no obligation to switch – but if you do, we take care of everything.

Anyone that registered or switched their energy supplier through the Essex Energy Switch before, 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.