

Dear Residents

I do hope that you and your families are keeping safe at this time

Remote working has become the new norm at Essex County Council, holding Zoom meetings with Cabinet colleagues to conduct business and now Parish and Town meetings too. There have, of course, been changes. We have closed Libraries and Civic Amenity sites and our formal Country Parks. We are hoping very soon to reopen the Country Parks and The Civic Amenity sites but ensuring that social distancing is observed. These are outdoor spaces; but indoor spaces such as Libraries are likely to reopen rather later and likely to be for book borrowing only. Again social distancing will need to be in place as well as rules around book handling. . We have a duty to protect the public and the staff. We have seen a 10,000 increase in the number of residents using our Libraries on line where we have vastly increased the number of e books and comics, as well as making Story and Rhyme times available.

The majority of ECC staff in my area of work are working from home and have adapted swiftly to the new norm. This includes customer services, financial services, the registration service, legal services and business support. The registration service has been under a lot of pressure although the government did move swiftly to allow the registration of deaths by phone rather than in person. One particular area where there are difficulties is weddings, where there are restrictions in place on the number of attendees allowed. Many couples who had planned to get married this summer have had to change those plans. To give you an idea there are around 600 weddings planned in August alone ...so a lot of reorganising.

We have furloughed a few staff such as those involved in Essex Outdoors and our Music Teachers but the majority of staff are working normally. (Councils can only furlough staff who earn their salary through fees) .Many who are unable to work (such as front line Library staff) have agreed to retrain to other positions and taken up work within the registrations service and the Essex Welfare Service, supporting those who are shielding and do not have support.

Many of you, I know will be helping neighbours and relatives who cannot go out and many thousands also signed up with Essex County Council to volunteer. Some days more than 1000 requests for help have been made and all of these picked up by a volunteer in under a minute. So much kindness. Thank you to each and every one of you.

Our road contractors initially ceased work but as of the start of May are back working and we are expecting an allocation from the Governments pothole fund to help clear some of the backlog. Across the area from Little Hallingbury to Dunmow there are road surface dressing schemes planned, including the total resurfacing of the High Street from the Braintree Road roundabout to the Queen Vic roundabout. The majority of the work will be done overnight and the latest date I have is early September. Follow the link for more details <https://one.network/?tm=116724650>

Other Highways schemes that will progress in the New Year include the long awaited build out at the bottom of Rosemary Lane in Dunmow, the extension to the 30 mph speed limits in Rands Road, High Roding and Stortford Road Leaden Roding. Works to improve signage in Sawbridgeworth Road Little Hallingbury and Ongar Road Great Dunmow where drivers frequently come off the road. The installation of railings outside High Stile School and the designing of a pavement widening scheme on the hill from Barnston to Dunmow.

My portfolio at Essex includes many back office functions such as IT, where the procurement of new systems, and supporting staff working remotely carries on. A new Library management system is being procured which will enhance the Library experience online and in branch.

As you will be aware many retail shops and pubs have been able to claim a grant from Government of £10,000 or £25,000 depending on their rateable value. This grant is also available to some Village Halls, sports clubs and similar who receive a rates bill (even if this is Zero). To apply go to

<https://www.uttlesford.gov.uk/covid19-business-grants-fund>

For other help with funding ... I have a £2000 Uttlesford grant pot and a £10,000 ECC grant pot please do get in touch. So far I have allocated money to High Easter Parish Council towards a playground project, £500 towards beekeeping in Great Hallingbury and £400 for materials to Roding ladies who are making scrubs for Broomfield Hospital. Well done ladies!

Please do get in touch if I can help in any way

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