

Further Report to Parish Councils - 23/4/2020

Firstly, I do hope that this finds you all staying safe and staying well.

I must also, in the words of Cllr David Finch, thank residents for continuing to do the right thing, and observe the rules during the current lockdown. Thank you for only travelling when it is absolutely necessary– traffic levels were more than 70% down over the Easter bank holiday weekend. Thank you, above all, for the part you are playing to help us get through the crisis. You have stayed home and saved lives.

Another three weeks of lockdown follows the Government's announcement on Thursday, 16 April and I can only reiterate the comments made at the press conference of that day. To relax the current restrictions too early would jeopardise the good progress we have made to date in slowing the spread of the virus. It could risk a second surge of cases, which again, may overwhelm our NHS.

Tonight (23 April 2020) at 8pm, I will be on my doorstep, as I am sure many of you will be, applauding those on the frontline in this battle – in particular, those working in social care, carers, and volunteers supporting them. County Council staff and those of our partners are there every single day, offering care, support and protection to our most vulnerable and those most at risk. ECC are very proud of them and will be bringing you stories of their contributions over the next few weeks.

I have kept all the Parish Councils up to date with news and advice from ECC. There are too many updates to include within this report following my Annual Report for the year 19/20, which was sent ahead of the closure of that financial year, as some Parishes wanted to go to print with their Annual Reports. However, soon after that Annual Report for 19/20 being sent, in addition to the closure of libraries reported in it, decisions were taken to close the Essex recycling centres to ensure social distancing and likewise the Country Parks. The Government also announced the closure of schools.

I do recommend going on the Essex web site to see keep up to date with all the news, information and advice, plus changes to ECC services during these unprecedented times caused by COVID-19. The web site is:

www.essex.gov.uk

This report may be considered as a report standing alone or as a follow on from the Annual Report for 19/20.

We are now in to the 20/21 financial year. At the Essex County Council Full Council Meeting of 11 February 20, before the situation of COVID-19 and its ramifications had got a grip, the Leader presented the budget for the 20/21 financial year to the Full Council. However, as I am sure you may all appreciate currently ECC's entire focus is still on the main issue, Covid-19 situation.

However, regarding the budget I can report that the Leader in his presentation stated that the budget speech was a budget for all, a budget of hope. A budget for our most vulnerable residents. A budget for older adults, children at risk, and families who are Just About Managing, a budget for business, for people with ambition, for anyone who lives in Essex, for our environment and for our children and for future generations.

ECC have been advised that over the last few years we have gone from a very effective, very well-run authority, to one of the strongest councils in about any category you can think of.

For two years running Essex County Council has been in the top ten most effective local authorities in the country.

The Independent Chair of the Climate Change Commission was named during the budget speech. ECC are very proud to have been able to secure Lord Randall as the Commission's Independent Chair. It is a massive result for ECC, demonstrating the huge potential for the commission to make genuine change – Lord Randall's experience, reputation, connections and influence nationally gives the Commission a huge head start.

ECC recognises that it must never ignore the voice of residents, and especially the voice of youth. As a result, Lord Randall will have two co-Chairs, who are both students at Essex schools, and who have been appointed by the Young Essex Assembly.

The budget set aside £5m in a reserve for Climate Action. That is £5m to be spent on implementing the recommendations from this Commission.

The Council remains committed to improving the lives of every single resident of this county. Previously ECC pledged a quarter of a million pounds to help tackle homelessness. The money directly prevented 75 different households from becoming homeless and supported many hundreds more to stabilise their accommodation status and ECC has relatively recently secured (before the COVID-19 situation) nearly half a million pounds from Government to continue its work with rough sleepers.

The budget includes investment of additional money to support our most vulnerable this year; with millions of extra investment in our outstanding Children's Services, home to school transport and adult social care. Also, investment to increase the prosperity of those working families who are Just About Managing.

ECC knows the importance of community safety and the protection of our residents, young and old, from gangs and county lines. Half a million pounds was invested for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to help tackle this major issue through our violence and vulnerability partnership. This has proven a great success. The budget is to commit another £500,000 to continue to trial new approaches to supporting children at risk of exploitation from gangs.

An extra £5m in the budget for improving road and footpath condition in the county this year was announced.

Believing in localism and that nobody knows more about their local community and its challenges than the local councillor. We are therefore providing a fund of £750,000, a grant

of £10,000 to each Essex County Councillor, to spend on local community initiatives in our own ECC division in 2020/2021. This will enable local councillors to tackle some of the local issues in his/her community that they know about – quickly and efficiently. Providing local solutions for local problems. Councillors have now been briefed on this with respect to criteria etc.

But I state again that currently ECC's entire focus is still on the main issue; COVID -19 situation.

Also, that regarding changes to our services the ECC website includes information on what you should do, the latest changes to our services and how you can get help in your community.

Again, I send my thanks to you all in continuing to do the right thing and observe the rules during the lock down.

Stay Home Save Lives.

I hope that you Stay Safe and Stay Well