

MALDON DIVISION MONTHLY UPDATE – COUNCILLOR JANE FLEMING

BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS AVAILABLE TO LOAN FROM ALL 74 LIBRARIES ACROSS THE COUNTY

Essex Libraries are helping residents take control of their heart health this February, as new figures show strong take-up of free borrowable blood pressure monitors.

To mark Heart Month, Essex Libraries has shared the latest impact of its blood pressure monitor lending scheme. This was launched in September during 'Know Your Numbers' week – the UK's biggest blood pressure awareness campaign.

Between September and the end of January, there were 1,354 loans and renewals of monitors across 72 of Essex's 74 libraries. Brentwood recorded the highest number of loans (135), followed by Chelmsford (95) and Shenfield (78).

Each loan pack includes a monitor, cuff, diary and guidance leaflets. Monitors can be borrowed for up to two weeks, with no booking required. They are available on a first-come, first-served basis at all Essex libraries.

In addition to the loan scheme, 15 standalone blood pressure monitors have been installed in libraries across the county. In just over three months, these machines were used more than 9,200 times.

Due to the scheme's success, Essex Libraries plans to roll out additional loanable monitors and standalone machines.

Essex Libraries is also supporting library services elsewhere to implement a similar scheme.

The figures have been released to coincide with [Heart Month](#), which takes place every February and is organised by the British Heart Foundation.

The campaign raises awareness of heart and circulatory diseases and promotes heart-healthy lifestyles through education, fundraising and community support.

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET PROPOSALS

Essex County Council has set out budget proposals for 2026/27 which focus on protecting essential services, supporting the most vulnerable and investing in the county's future - while keeping council tax as low as possible, through one of the lowest increases any council has proposed.

Plans, published ahead of the Full Council meeting, outline how the council intends to spend more than £2 billion across the services it is responsible for. At the heart of the proposals is a commitment to keep pounds in residents' pockets, while continuing to deliver the services people rely on and investing in long-term growth for Essex.

More than 1,300 residents took part in the council's recent budget consultation, helping to shape the proposals. Once again, the condition of Essex's roads and pavements was identified as a top priority. Residents also highlighted support for vulnerable people, improvements to infrastructure and the creation of good jobs as key areas for investment.

Reflecting this feedback, the council is proposing an additional £82 million of investment across key portfolio budgets in 2026/27.

The budget has been developed against a challenging national picture, with high inflation, costs of living pressures and rising costs for services.

Government policies, including the increase in the National Living Wage announced in the Autumn Budget, will also place further pressure on council finances.

During the consultation, more than 70 per cent of respondents said they would understand if council tax were to increase next year.

Despite an expectation from the Government council tax would increase by the full amount allowed this year, 4.99%, the council is limiting the increase as much as possible.

The council is proposing a 3.95% increase in council tax for 2026/27, made up of:

- 1.95% general increase
- 2% Adult Social Care precept

For an average Band D property, this would mean an increase in the County Council element of council tax of £1.20 per week, or £62.37 per year.

To help manage ongoing pressures and future funding gaps, the council will deliver £41 million of savings in 2026/27, while continuing to protect frontline services.

If the budget proposals are approved, the Essex County Council element of Council Tax for all bands in 2026/27 would be:

Council Tax Band	2025/26 (£)	2026/27 (£)
Band A	1,053.06	1,094.64
Band B	1,228.57	1,277.08
Band C	1,404.08	1,459.52

Band D	1,579.59	1,641.96
Band E	1,930.61	2,006.84
Band F	2,281.63	2,371.72
Band G	2,632.65	2,736.60
Band H	3,159.18	3,283.92

CONNECT TO WORK PROGRAMME

Essex's £30.7 million Connect to Work programme has reached a major milestone in its efforts to break down barriers to employment, with three specialist providers now on board.

Connect to Work offers personalised employment support to residents with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or those in priority groups.

Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the scheme is being delivered in partnership with local authorities and expert providers across Essex, Southend-on-Sea, and Thurrock.

The three providers confirmed to be delivering the programme in Essex are:

- Shaw Trust
- Essex Cares Limited (ECL)
- Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT)

From one-to-one coaching and skills training to job-matching services, the programme is designed to give people the confidence and opportunities they need to secure meaningful, sustainable work.

[Shaw Trust](#) is a leading employment charity which helps people who face barriers to work to achieve their full potential.

[ECL](#) supports people with learning disabilities, learning difficulties, or neurodivergence overcome barriers to work. Its supported employment services are available across Greater Essex.

EPUT has been part of Essex's Connect to Work programme since August 2025 and has already started supporting 190 people with long term mental or physical health conditions.

Find out more and get involved in Connect to Work today

at: <https://www.essexopportunities.co.uk/connect-to-work/>.

Connect to Work is also open to employers across Greater Essex, helping them build more inclusive workforces and access motivated, job-ready candidates.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships let you earn while you learn, gain real-world experience, and achieve nationally recognised qualifications. Whether you're starting out or looking to upskill, there's opportunities for everyone.

[The Apprenticeship Hub](#) is a free service by Essex County Council designed to help 14 to 25-year-olds understand the apprenticeship pathway, connect with employers and receive advice from qualified careers professionals.

It is part of the [Essex Year of Opportunity](#), a £1.33 million campaign by the council for 2025/26.

Through projects and partnerships with organisations, the campaign removes barriers into work and education for all ages by providing access to essential skills.

The Apprenticeship Hub also supports businesses looking to hire apprentices and grow their workforce.

Events taking place around National Apprenticeship Week include:

1-to-1 Apprenticeship Support Sessions, 16 to 20 February

During half term, Year 11 to 13 students and their families can meet with one of the Apprenticeship Hub's specialist careers advisors - in person or online - for personalised, impartial advice.

More information and details on how to attend these events can be found

at <https://www.essexopportunities.co.uk/events/>

For adults, Adult Community Learning (ACL) offer apprenticeships in a range of sector such as business, health and social care and early years and education. [Discover upcoming ACL apprenticeship events](#) and vacancies online.

GET FREE SEND SUPPORT & ADVICE

If you feel like your child needs extra support, Essex Local Offer's free SEND roadshows are a great place to start. SEND roadshows offer the chance to:

- meet friendly practitioners from across education, health and social care
- chat with other parents
- discover local support

In March, there are five roadshows running across Essex, including a weekend roadshow in Braintree. [Visit the Essex Local Offer website for dates and locations.](#) We'd love to see you there.

ACTIVE ESSEX PARTNERSHIP WITH MIND IN ESSEX

Powered by Essex Public Health, Active Essex have partnered with Mind in Essex to promote healthy lives and communities. Together, they are encouraging communities to Find Your Active: Move for your Mind, highlighting the link between physical activity and mental wellbeing. Movement stimulates the release of endorphins – your body's natural happiness boosters – leaving you feeling more balanced and energised. It can help lift your mood, reduce stress and improve your sleep. Whether it's a gentle walk, yoga, or an online workout, there's something for everyone. [Use the Find Your Active activity finder](#) to discover sessions and events in your area today.

ACCESSIBLE BUS TRAVEL CONSULTATION

Essex County Council want to understand what is preventing people aged 66 or over, and those with certain disabilities, from using bus services. [Share your views on traveling by bus in Essex](#) and what changes could encourage more people to use the bus service.

ESSEX ROADS RECEIVE A GREEN RATING FROM CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Essex County Council has welcomed the news that the county has received a 'green' rating from the Government for its road maintenance and repair.

The rating reflects the hard work that's gone into repairing more than 5,000 miles of roads, thanks to the additional funding provided by the Department for Transport and the County Council.

The council has invested an extra £49 million, in addition to the annual highways' maintenance budget, to repair potholes and other defects since 2024. Additional funding was also secured from the Department for Transport, which has confirmed Essex County Council would receive over £168 million for road repairs until 2029/30.

The repair programme has been delivered through the Priority One programme over the last year and the ongoing Members' Highways Initiative, which have ensured thousands more additional repairs have been carried out in the last two years.

Priority One focused on proactive maintenance such as road resurfacing, vegetation clearance, white lines and replacing broken signs.

The Members' Highways Initiative gives County Councillors the opportunity to have dedicated crews carry out smaller road and pavement repairs in their divisions every few weeks, alongside £300,000 to carry out repairs caused by winter weather conditions and address concerns of local residents.

Crews are currently managing the winter service and keeping the roads safe for travellers in wintry weather. This includes driving the gritters in icy conditions and carrying out make safe repairs where the weather is causing damage.

However, larger scale resurfacing and repair works will resume in the Spring to carry out further repairs and maintain the condition of the county's roads for even longer.

MORE FUNDING FOR BUSES

Essex County Council has secured more than £68 million to support and improve local bus services across the county over the coming years.

The government funding will support initiatives to improve reliability, strengthen local connections and encourage more people to travel by bus. It will also help ensure services remain accessible and responsive to local needs.

The government's new consolidated bus funding framework combines Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding with the Local Authority Bus Service Operator Grant (LA BSOG). Essex will receive £10,778,248 annually from 2026/27 to 2028/29. This totals £32,334,744.

Alongside this revenue funding, Essex County Council will receive £36.26 million in Local Authority Bus Grant capital funding between 2026 and 2030.

Essex County Council currently subsidises bus services where there is no commercial service, but there is a need to help residents stay connected. These make up around 15% of the bus services in the county.

The funding follows the government's 2025 Spending Review. In this, it was confirmed areas outside London would receive more than £1 billion a year in long-term bus funding. This includes both capital and revenue support for local transport authorities.

SOCIAL BROADBAND TARIFFS

At a time when living costs are reaching record highs, several broadband providers are offering special discounted deals to help people receiving benefits to stay connected.

If you're a low-income family receiving Universal Credit or other benefits, you could be eligible for a social broadband tariff and save up to £202 a year on your broadband bills.

Who's eligible for a broadband social tariff?

If you receive one of the following benefits, you may be eligible for a social tariff:

- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support

What's on offer?

Several broadband providers are offering low-cost broadband deals to eligible residents in Essex.

These include:

- [BT Home Essentials](#) – starting at £15 a month, plus £9.99 P&P
- [Connect Fibre Basic Essentials](#) - £20 a month
- [Hyperoptic Fair Fibre Plan](#) – starting at £15 a month
- [NOW Broadband Basics](#) – £20 a month
- [Sky Broadband Basics](#) – £20 a month
- [Virgin Media O2 Essential broadband](#) – £12.50 a month
- [Virgin Media O2 Essential broadband plus](#) – £20 a month
- [Vodafone Essentials Broadband](#) - £20 a month
- TalkTalk – free broadband for six months for jobseekers on Universal Credit who don't have an internet connection (contact your Jobcentre Plus work coach)
- [YouFibre 50](#) - £15 a month
- [County Broadband's Essential broadband tariff](#) - £15 a month
- [VOXI For Now](#) - £10 a month
- [EE Basics](#) – £12 a month

Please be aware that some offers may not be available at your address. For full details of each deal, visit the provider's website.

If you're not eligible

If you don't meet the criteria for a discounted deal, but still want to save money on your broadband, we have some great tips to [help you find a cheaper broadband deal](#). There are also [free skills courses and other digital support](#) available across Essex.

FOSTER WITH ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

Now is the perfect time to [start your fostering journey](#) and make a life-long difference to a child's life. Experience exceptional support, award-winning training and a competitive financial package when you foster with us.

There are children of all ages within your community that need loving homes. We're with you every step of the way and can help find a fostering option to suit you. Every child deserves a brighter future.

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