

## MALDON DIVISION MONTHLY UPDATE – COUNCILLOR JANE FLEMING

### FOSTER CARERS IN ESSEX

In recognition of the vital work foster carers do, Essex County Council are updating their financial and wellbeing offer. They have announced:

- foster carers fees are increasing by 16% in line with inflation
- £2,000 welcome bonus for foster carers who join in 2025
- A significant increase in the rate of pay for expenses that can be claimed

Other specialist fees are increasing too, including ambassador and buddy roles.

Most of what you earn as a foster carer is tax-free, so your "take-home pay" as a foster carer could be more than the same pay in another role.

### ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR HIGHWAYS IN 2025/26 BUDGET

An additional £12.3 million funding boost for highways has been announced as part of Essex County Council's 2025/26 budget.

The council's budget and annual plan for next year were presented to and formally approved by county council members at a meeting of the Full Council.

The extra funding for highways improvements will be allocated across several areas, including:

- £8.5 million to continue the Members' Highways Initiative
- £1.6 million increase in the road safety budget
- £1.3 million for improvements to cycle paths
- £500,000 new funding to repair damaged road signs
- £400,000 extra funding to improve drains and reduce the risk of flooding

In 2024/25 significant additional funding was invested in priority highway repairs and maintenance. This year's budget will allow much of that progress to continue, while also providing a funding boost to other areas of highway improvements.

### BUDGET 2025/26

In addition to highways, the council will prioritise the spending of its more than £2 billion budget next year across other key areas, to deliver:

- a strong, inclusive and sustainable economy

- a high-quality environment
- positive health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
- a great place for children and families to grow

The council's 2025/26 budget plans include a Council Tax increase of 3.75%. This includes a 1.75% general increase and 2% increase in the adult social care precept. For an average Band D property, this would mean an increase in the county council element of Council Tax of £1.09 a week.

## COUNTY-WIDE CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED TO REDUCE INCIDENTS AND IMPACT OF FLY TIPPING

Local councils are being supported by Essex County Council, the Environment Agency and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to jointly tackle fly tipping.

Fly tipping is the illegal dumping of waste on land which doesn't have a waste licence. This could include leaving items by a bin or outside a closed charity shop, recycling centre or donation bank.

Household waste has been found in over 60% of fly tips across the county in the past three years, costing Essex taxpayers around £1 million to clean up in 2022-23. Most reported fly tips also occur on highways or council land.

A new campaign will run for three months to equip residents with the knowledge and tools to dispose of household waste responsibly.

The participating councils will also work closely to increase visible enforcement and share intelligence across the county.

Essex residents can visit [www.loveessex.org/flytipping](http://www.loveessex.org/flytipping) to find out more about fly tipping and the new campaign.

## ACTIVE TRAVEL FUNDING SECURED

Essex County Council has secured £7.3 million from Active Travel England to improve walking and cycling across the county.

The county council has worked with city and district councils since 2020 to design a network of over 400 walking and cycling routes.

The funding will be used to deliver new walking and cycling schemes, maintain existing active travel provision and offer more community training, such as [Bikeability for school children](#).

The council will now review the detail of the funding and decide how to best allocate it to achieve the biggest impact and value for money.

## MID ESSEX ROUGH SLEEPER INITIATIVE PARTNERSHIP

A project aimed at supporting rough sleepers is set to be extended thanks to an additional £557,750 from the Government.

The Mid Essex Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) is a partnership between Essex County Council and the nine Essex housing authorities. The aim of the partnership is to remove the need for anyone to sleep rough on the streets.

In 2024, the RSI worked with nearly 400 rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The service also supported 332 people off the streets.

The additional money will support this work for another 12 months, from March 2025. It will allow the RSI to continue to fund organisations, such as CHESS, that provide support by

- encouraging people sleeping rough in Essex off the street
- providing accommodation to support ex-rough sleepers
- reducing the flow of people who become rough sleepers

The RSI service takes a hands-on approach. It takes support to individuals rather than expecting people to reach out to them. Services can often be hard to reach for rough sleepers and so the RSI tries to eliminate this.

Outreach workers build relationships and offer support to help people navigate the housing systems and on their journey into sustained accommodation.

All support is offered on an individual basis depending on a person's needs. It includes mental health, help with substance abuse, as well as education, training, and employment.

The service is not just about supporting those who are currently rough sleeping but also trying to prevent further people becoming rough sleepers.

Anyone sleeping rough or who has seen someone sleeping rough can find local support through [Streetlink](#).

## **BUY WITH CONFIDENCE – ADVICE FROM ESSEX TRADING STANDARDS**

If you're planning home improvements, maintenance, or repairs, a trader recommendation site (TRS) can help you find suitable professionals. While these sites can connect you with a trader, it's important to understand how each site operates and what checks they perform to ensure traders will meet your expectations.

Don't rely solely on claims of 'trustworthiness' from the TRS. Many use terms like 'trusted', 'reliable', or 'expert' to describe their members. However, it's important to check what the site does to verify these claims. There should be clear information on their website, but if you have any other questions contact the TRS to ask about their vetting process.

Choose a TRS that verifies trader details. Look for a site that goes beyond self-assessment and has an effective vetting process including:

- verifying the trader's identity, experience, and qualifications
- ensuring the trader has the necessary licenses, insurance, and certifications for tasks such as electrical work or gas installation
- providing information about how frequently they check traders' credentials and qualifications

Make sure the TRS has a strong complaints process that's easy to use and sanctions poor performance. Check how complaints are handled and whether the site offers support in resolving disputes. Look for TRS's that have systems in place to identify poor performing traders and act promptly when issues arise, including suspending or removing members that fall short of required standards.

Be cautious about online reviews. If the TRS includes customer reviews, check what steps are taken to ensure reviews are genuine including whether reviews are flagged as being from verified customers and that there's a process in place to remove fake or misleading feedback.

Trading Standards recommends using the Buy With Confidence approval trader scheme that's operated solely by local authority Trading Standards services. This means all checking and monitoring of businesses is done directly by them, not by third parties or private companies <https://www.buywithconfidence.gov>.

## DEVOLUTION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Essex has been chosen as one of the areas to be front of the queue for devolution.

The Government notified on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February that Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council have had their request to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme confirmed.

This follows the councils writing to the Government on Friday 10 January requesting inclusion on the programme and committing to local government reorganisation.

The Government has also confirmed that the elections scheduled for May this year for Essex County Council and Thurrock Council will be suspended.

## ESSEX AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

A public consultation on a new [Essex Air Quality Strategy](#) is now live and we want your views. More than one in 20 deaths in Essex are estimated to be linked in some part to air pollution and it is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK.

The new strategy has been jointly developed by councils across Essex, Southend and Thurrock through the Essex Air Quality Consortium. It sets out actions to improve air quality and help reduce the impacts of air pollution on people's health. [Have your say on the draft Essex Air Quality strategy](#) before Sunday 2 March 2025.

## NATIONAL BUS FARE CAP

As of 1 January 2025, the national bus fare cap in England has increased from £2 to £3 per single journey. This adjustment, announced by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, aims to maintain affordable bus travel across the country.

In Essex, this fare cap applies to numerous bus services, ensuring that passengers pay no more than £3 for a single trip.

For a list of [transport providers and routes taking part](#) in the scheme, please refer to the official government website.

This initiative is part of the government's ongoing efforts to support public transport users and encourage bus travel by keeping fares reasonable. The £3 fare cap is set to remain in place until December 2025.

## FREE PAINT

In need of FREE paint? Or have leftover tins cluttering up your shed? Join the [Community RePaint](#) scheme at Witham Recycling Centre, where you can pick up free paint for your decorating ideas.

Drop off your unused paint for reuse in the community.

Residents and groups can collect free paint by [booking a slot](#) and speaking to staff on arrival. Sponsored by Dulux, this UK-wide network redistributes leftover paint to benefit those in need. Each year, 50 million litres of paint go to waste, but over 50% is still usable. The network, with over 70 schemes, redistributes over 315,000 litres annually.

[Follow Love Essex on Facebook](#) to keep an eye out for more recycling centres joining the scheme in 2025!

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