

County Councillor's Report: Mid-April 2020

Cllr David Finch, Leader of the Council, thanks the people of Essex for staying home and saving lives



Thank you for continuing to do the right thing during the current lockdown. Thank you for only travelling when it's necessary – traffic levels in Essex were down by 70% over the Easter bank holiday weekend. And thank you, above all, for the part you are playing to help us through this crisis. You have stayed home, and you have surely saved lives.

We now know that we have another three weeks of lockdown to come, following the government's announcement yesterday.

I can only reiterate the comments made at the press conference and ask you once again to commit again to the difficult yet essential lockdown measures. Relaxing the current restrictions too early would jeopardise the good progress we've made so far in slowing the spread of the virus. It could risk a second surge of cases which, again, may overwhelm our NHS.

Last Thursday at 8pm, I – like many of you – was on my doorstep applauding those in the frontline of this battle. I thought of carers in particular, and those working and volunteering in the social care sector. We have employees and partners offering care, support and protection to our most vulnerable people, every single day without fail. I am very proud of them and we will be sharing stories of their incredible contributions over the next few weeks.

In the meantime, thank you again for remembering to #StayHomeSaveLives – it's as important now as it ever has been.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, has announced Cllr Christopher Whitbread will be joining Essex County Council Cabinet as Cabinet Member for Finance.

Cllr Whitbread will start his duties as Cabinet Member for Finance on Friday 1st May.

Cllr Whitbread represents Epping and Theydon Bois division on Essex County Council and has great experience of cabinet matters, previously serving as deputy to Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care.

Cllr Whitbread is also currently Leader of Epping Forest District Council where he represents Epping Lindsey and Thornwood Common ward.

The post of Cabinet Member for Finance was previously held by Cllr Gagan Mohindra, who stepped down from the position following his election as Member for Parliament for South West Hertfordshire in last year's general election.

Since that time the Finance portfolio on Essex County Council's Cabinet has been covered by Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "I am delighted to welcome Cllr Whitbread to Essex County Council Cabinet. Christopher has a wealth of ability and experience which, I am sure, will secure our recognised place as one of the most productive authorities in England."

A range of other changes to the County Council Cabinet structure are also taking place.

- Cllr John Moran, who represents Saffron Walden division, will replace Cllr Whitbread as Cllr Spence's deputy from 1 May;
- Cllr Jeff Henry, who represents Laindon Park and Fryerns division, will take up a role as deputy to both Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships, and Cllr Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, on 1 May. This appointment will place extra resource to Cllr Spence's portfolio of Health and Adult Social Care, reflecting the importance Essex County Council places on Health and Adult Social Care;
- Cllr Tony Ball's Economic Development portfolio will now include Property and Housing;
- Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, will now take responsibility for representing Essex County Council in the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP);
- Cllr Mark Durham, who represents Heybridge and Tollesbury division, will now be deputy for Cllr Tony Ball's Economic Development portfolio and Cllr Mike Steptoe, who represents Rochford South division, will now be deputy to Cllr Susan Barker, Cabinet Member for Customer, Corporate, Culture and Communities.

Essex County Council ranked in England's top ten most productive councils

In November, independent consultancy iMPower, ranked Essex County Council in the top ten of England's most productive councils, achieving better outcomes for residents from a less-than-average spend per head.

The results were drawn from performance measured against seven different areas, including children's social care, older people, all-age disability, social care interface, housing and homelessness, waste and recycling and high needs.

Thousands of Essex children offered preferred primary school place



More than 14,000 pupils who are due to start primary school in Essex this year have been offered their parent's top preference of school.

Just over 16,000 parents have discovered the outcome of their primary school place application today (16 April), with those who applied online getting confirmation by email or via our website.

We have continued to invest in creating school places over the last year and 89.38 per cent of children due to start in Reception this year have been offered their parents' first preference.

A further 6.34 per cent have been offered their second preference, meaning 95.72 per cent have been offered one of their top two preferences this year.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Education, said: "I know that for a lot of parents the wait to find out about their child's primary school place can be a nerve-wracking one and with the current situation we all find ourselves in, this particular year may have been all the more worrying for some.

"However, I am pleased that a high percentage of parents have received their first preference of school place and I hope this goes some way in providing a little reassurance at this uncertain time.

"One day school gates will re-open for all pupils and I know that there will be many children and young people who are eagerly awaiting this, just as much as our new starters are."

Every Family Matters – supporting your child with social distancing



Social distancing is vital to stopping the spread of coronavirus and there are practical steps we should all be taking to reduce our interaction with others, including staying at home wherever possible.

However, this might be a difficult concept for some children and young people to understand. They've gone from being at school or college surrounded by their friends every day, to being asked to stay at home and not being able to do lots of the activities they are used to doing.

Social distancing is not something that the majority of parents and carers will have ever experienced before either and so while you're trying to navigate the new norm and understand the implications for yourself, you might be finding it difficult to explain to your child why social distancing is so important right now. If you are struggling to start a conversation, there is [information and advice available to help you](#).

We've also pulled together some tips below to help you help your child while we all practice social distancing.

- **Put together a daily routine** – structure is important. Many young people will have gone from having a regular routine during the week, to something completely different, which can be unsettling. It's therefore good to maintain a routine and have set times for things like schoolwork, staying active and being creative, as well as down time to rest and relax.
- **Stay in touch with family and friends** – think of some fun ways to reach out to people. This might be sending a card, writing a letter, or a virtual family games night. Try to think of something new together and encourage your child to schedule this into their daily routine.
- **Learn something new** – is there something you've always wanted to try as a family? Now is the time. You could also use time at home during the weekend to teach your child practical skills, such as cooking, using a washing machine, or changing a fuse – skills that will come in handy as they grow.
- **Stay active** – encouraging your child to move each day will help them to stay healthy physically and mentally. If they are finding it difficult to find motivation, try something together as a family, or use a free video available online.
- **Get creative** – encourage your child to use any free time to express themselves creatively. This might be painting, drawing or playing with Lego.
- **Take care of yourself** – your child is relying on you to help them navigate the unprecedented times we all find ourselves in and so as a parent or carer, it's important that you also take steps to look after yourself.

Every Family Matters – supporting your child’s mental wellbeing



Being a parent or carer can be hard at the best of times, but given the current situation, you're probably feeling more overwhelmed than usual and might be unsure of how best to support your child. However, we're here to help.

We've been working with partners to make sure you have the information you need, so that you can make the right decisions for you and your family. We'll be sharing information here across a range of subjects, including social distancing and keeping your child safe online.

This week, we're starting with how you can best support your child's mental health and wellbeing.

You might have noticed a difference in your child’s behaviour due to the current situation; they may no longer be at school, out of their normal routine and missing their friends. This may be impacting their overall emotional wellbeing, which is completely normal.

Start by having a conversation with your child. By helping them to express how they're feeling, you're taking the first step to being able to manage these feelings effectively together. Make sure this is a continuous conversation and that you regularly take time to check in with them.

As a parent or carer, it might feel like you're supposed to have all the answers, but we're living through an unprecedented time and it's completely normal not to know what's going to happen next. Do your best to reassure your child and let them know that you are there to listen and that they have the space to share.

Try to think creatively about things you can do together to help them to open up. This might be playing together, cooking or gardening. Positive activities will also help to take their mind off what's happening and may ease their anxiety.

If they would feel more comfortable speaking to someone they don't know, we commission a safe and anonymous online counselling service – [Kooth](#) – which is supported by trained counsellors and provides a secure space where they can get advice and support.

We know there is a lot going on right now, but remember, you're not alone and if you need help, visit [Livewell](#) for more links to advice and guidance. You can also follow our [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) pages where we will regularly be sharing information to help you help your child.

New arrangements for county council meetings



Essex County Council (ECC) is making arrangements to continue council decision-making and committee meetings virtually, and working with district, borough and city councils across the county who are considering similar measures.

Councils have to minimise the long-term impact to the economy of coronavirus restrictions, especially in terms of planning, garden communities and local plan processes.

ECC has already introduced virtual cabinet meetings in order to make the immediate decisions needed to keep front line services operating and to respond to the coronavirus emergency but is seeking to extend these arrangements to public committees and meetings as necessary.

The Coronavirus Act received royal assent last week and the Regulations for Local Government introduced last Friday allow councils to conduct all committees and other meetings virtually.

Previously, a meeting required a specific number of councillors to be physically present, however that requirement has been lifted to enable councils to continue their activities in a virtual space.

Cllr Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Development said: “Many developers have understandably closed construction sites and ceased new homes sales while the lockdown is in place. Activities here can easily be resurrected when the time is right.

“The planning process, however, is different. It is a long pipeline which if interrupted can impact months and sometimes years down the line. Delaying local plans, planning applications and determination processes will reduce housing supply later, at a time when new housing continues to be greatly needed.

“This change to the regulations will enable local planning authorities to continue with their local plan processes and determining planning applications to maintain that pipeline.”

ECC is putting in place arrangements to hold its next Development and Regulation Committee, on 24 April, online. The Committee determines applications for schools, some roads, waste and minerals.

Staff at planning departments around the county have been largely working from home. Many had suspended committees temporarily due to the previous regulatory requirements.

With the new regulations, business can re-commence with decisions on local plans and planning application being progressed remotely and virtually.

Several councils around the county are making special arrangements and trialling new technology to support their processes. For example, Chris Whitbread, Leader of Epping Forest District Council, reports that his council is trialling holding cabinet meetings virtually next week with a view to rolling this out to other meetings, including planning, thereafter.

Braintree Council are working similarly. Cllr Gabrielle Spray, Cabinet Member for Planning, said: "For some years now Braintree District Council has been webcasting all Planning Committees. We are pleased that the government has relaxed restrictions and is allowing virtual meetings. To this end, we are exploring ways to make the best use of the good technology we already have in place to hold virtual Planning Committees as soon as possible."

Harlow Council has already reinstated planning decision-making using a combination of delegated powers and a remote-working committee. It is looking to set up virtual development management and licensing committees which will come into operation in May.

Other councils will publish details for future meeting arrangements on their websites in due course.

New service to support vulnerable adults



A new service to help vulnerable adults stay physically and mentally active during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, is now live.

The Stay Connected service is being funded by the county council and is being delivered through Essex-based Sport For Confidence. Sport for Confidence works with vulnerable adults, providing activity-based programmes in leisure centres throughout the county.

Following the Government's closure of all leisure facilities until further notice due to the COVID-19 outbreak, all venue sessions have been temporarily suspended.

The organisation is now bringing together occupational therapists and sport coaches to deliver telephone sessions for people with learning disabilities, autism, mental health issues, dementia, physical impairment and other complex health needs. Users will receive a highly personalised home workout video.

Jess Stewart, head of commissioning for adults with learning disabilities and autism at Essex County Council, said, "We are in extraordinary times and our primary focus is on our most vulnerable communities, ensuring they stay safe and healthy.

"This has become more challenging in the current climate so we felt a new service was required to help keep people in Essex with additional needs stay happy and healthy in their own homes.

"The Stay Connected service is an excellent specialist programme for the many people who are in isolation due to COVID-19 and need support now."

The Sport For Confidence team comprises eight occupational therapists, five sports coaches, a trained behaviour advisor and a skills expert. The new contract will support all the existing users of the service plus individuals self-isolating in Supported Living accommodation.

Referrals are being made by learning disability and autism social work teams and Supported Living providers. Updates to the service and other services for people with a learning disability or autism during the COVID-19 outbreak will be shared on the [Meaningful Lives Facebook page](#).

Essex Libraries eAudio and eBook users rise during COVID-19 lockdown



The number of people accessing eAudio and eBooks from Essex Libraries has risen during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Book lovers accessing Essex Libraries eAudio and eBook service Borrowbox have increased by 22 per cent over the last two weeks, with several thousand more residents using the service while they follow Government advice to stay at home to avoid transmission of the virus.

Essex Library service has worked hard to ensure its online services are as open as possible. New users of the library service are no longer required to register at a library in person, instead access to e-books, e-audio and e-newspapers has now been granted to those who have joined the service online.

In response to demand, a selection of e-audio books has been added to Essex Libraries eMagazine and eComic range. The number of e-comics available has also been increased from 238 to over 1,500, all with unlimited access.

Ancestry and Find My Past has been made available for customers to use from home and the valuable research tools Times Digital Archive and British Library 19th century Newspapers are now available to library members who have just joined the service online.

At a time when many parents are trying to keep young children happy in their homes, our online rhyme time service is now proving immensely popular.

Cllr Susan Barker, Essex County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Essex Libraries, said: "These are extraordinary times and we are seeing online demand which has never been seen before in the history of the library service.

"Essex Libraries have responded marvellously to this challenge. Our work to create a modern libraries service to meet the demands of the 21st Century has proved vital to meet this demand."

To join Essex Libraries online services go to <https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/>

Essex recycling centres closed to ensure social distancing



Essex recycling centres will remain closed to ensure social distancing rules are observed.

Recycling centres have been shut throughout the current lockdown, to deter people from making unnecessary journeys. The centres are also spaces which make social distancing difficult.

Cllr Simon Walsh, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "If we are following the Stay Home, Save Lives message, then I am afraid a trip to the tip really doesn't count as an essential journey, and the police would not view it as such.

"We cannot put the public or our staff at unnecessary risk, however I am keeping this under review and as national restrictions are relaxed, we will reassess the risks."

For green waste and cuttings, home composting is an excellent option while the current restrictions are in place.

If you were planning to carry out DIY, please ensure you have enough storage space to hold onto your waste items until recycling sites reopen. Residents are asked to act responsibly and not to place items such as DIY waste or recyclable material into your kerbside general rubbish collection. This will take up space in the collection vehicles needed for general household rubbish and place additional strain on collection crews.

There is an expectation that green waste collections will resume soon across the County, which will reduce the need for using the recycling centres.

You can find out more about ways to reduce your waste during the lockdown [here](#).

.....and below:-

[View in browser](#)



Latest News



[This monthly newsletter brings you all the waste and recycling news in Essex.](#)

Keep up to date with your waste collections



Now that recycling centres are closed and some waste collection services have been changed due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak it's important to stay informed. You can keep up to date with changes to waste services in Essex on [the Love Essex website](#), and on the Love

Essex [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts.

Also, if any individuals are asked to self-isolate they should follow [this advice to get rid of their household waste](#).

Thank your waste collection crews

As a frontline service, recycling and waste collection crews are continuing to work tirelessly every day, despite a reduction in staff levels, to ensure your bins, bags and boxes are collected. Although some services have been suspended, the staff able to work have done so with dedication to ensure your vital services are maintained.



Next time you see them, please acknowledge them with a smile, wave or even a clap. Find out how [you can do your bit to help](#).

Food storage tips to make your food last longer



It's more important than ever to make the food we have last longer. Where you store your food makes a big difference to how long it lasts. Did you know storing apples in the fridge makes them last two weeks longer than in a fruit bowl? Visit [the handy A-Z guide by Love Food Hate Waste](#) for hints and tips on how best to store your food.

Win a cloth nappy hamper

Do you want to give cloth nappies a try this spring? Not only will they save you money, you won't need to keep going to the shops to buy more nappies. For your chance to give them a try, we're giving away a cloth nappy hamper with a selection of birth to



potty nappies, liners and reusable bamboo wipes. It's the perfect way to get started. To be in with a chance of winning our competition, [simply fill out our survey](#).

An alternative way to get rid of your garden waste



As the weather improves our gardens are wonderful places to be. [Composting at home is a great activity in the spring](#) and an alternative if you find that your garden waste collections have been suspended.

Whether you want to [buy a subsidised compost bin](#) or [build your own heap](#), you

can start turning your garden waste into quality soil improver for your garden in less than a year.

Tasty seasonal recipes

Spring is a great time of year to start growing your own fruit and veg. You can really make the most of your garden, whether you're planting potatoes in the ground or sowing carrot, beetroot or cauliflower seeds in pots. Why not try growing [easy lettuce leaves](#)?



You can also make the most of seasonal foods with these great recipes:

[Red onion, goat's cheese and lettuce bites](#)

[Crispy broccoli and rocket salad](#)

[Rhubarb and custard cake](#)

Solar Together scheme postponed



Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak [the current Solar Together Essex scheme](#) has been postponed. We will publish the new dates once they have been agreed.

Mythbuster: What to do with your waste if you're having a clear out

Many of us may be making use of the time at home to have a sort out. But what do you do with your unwanted items if charity shops and recycling centres are closed?



- Keep good quality items to one side ready for when charity shops, bring banks or furniture projects re-open. (but please don't place items on the ground outside shops or banks as this is fly-tipping).
- Post your items on [Freecycle](#) ready for when in-person collections are allowed again.
- Store any items that can't be passed on until recycling centres re-open.