

ECC Report October 2020

Essex businesses encouraged to shape future business support strategy for the county

Essex County Council is encouraging local businesses to share their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic to help inform its future business support strategy.

The county council has commissioned Essex company, the Mackman Group, to carry out engagement with businesses across the county in order to better understand how they are coping during the pandemic, as well as any future challenges they may face.

They will initially be engaging with businesses via a telephone survey and looking to speak to a wide cross section of organisations over the coming weeks. An online survey is also live and is open to all Essex businesses.

The feedback received will help to ensure ECC can target specific support where it is most needed as well as better understand the challenges faced, such as the direct impact on jobs and the support needed to mitigate these risks.

Cllr Tony Ball, ECC's Cabinet Member for Economic Development, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic will have undoubtedly had an impact on most, if not all, businesses across Essex, affecting every aspect of how they operate and in some cases, whether they have been able to operate at all.

"Businesses of all shapes and sizes have kept the county going through the pandemic and it is vital that we understand exactly how they have been impacted so that we can ensure they have the right support to not only survive this uncertain period, but to go on to thrive and positively contribute to the Essex economy.

"We are absolutely committed to supporting local organisations on their recovery journeys and I would encourage all businesses across Essex to share their experiences with us."

Any local businesses who wish to take part in the survey can do so by completing the online survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PRCW2HR>

The survey will be open for responses until 16 October 2020.

Start your smoke free journey this Stoptober with free nicotine replacement therapy

Stoptober, the nationwide stop smoking campaign was launched on Thursday 1st October.

Essex County Council's Stop Smoking service, delivered by Provide, has already supported 13,000 people over the last 4 years to quit smoking.

This Stoptober, the service is working with pharmacies across Essex to offer free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) to help smokers quit.

Smokers can join the scheme at participating pharmacies where they will be offered weekly supplies of NRT for up to eight weeks.

The NRT is a part of a package which includes proven behavioural support from trained staff. This combination makes smokers four times more likely to successfully quit than going cold turkey.

One Essex resident who is currently on her smoke free journey with the support of ECCs service is Jenny White from Basildon. Jenny is now 38 days smoke free.

Jenny said: "After reading an article about a lady who had quit, I began asking myself why do I smoke, why do I not explore and access the support out there, do I really want to stop and if so why do I want to stop? I made a list of reasons to stop.

"This was the start of my wonderful journey and my divorce from cigarettes.

"The Essex Stop Smoking service was where I ended up. It was easy to find, full of information and easy to register for their services. This was my first hurdle. Registering for the service meant there would be no way back, I would be committed.

"After 6 days of thinking about it, I finally decided it was all or nothing. . I completed my online registration and just pressed send, it was that easy! Provide called me two days later and after a few minutes I was told my smoking cessation advisor, John, would call me.

"John called and explained how the process worked, told me about the smoke free app, which is great, how he would wean me off of the nicotine over the next 12 weeks, the support options available to me and he helped me devise some coping strategies should I ever feel tempted again.

"Over the following week I reduced my level of smoking by extending the time between cigarettes from 2 hours, to 3 hours then to 4 hours and made what cigarettes I had left last until quit day. It wasn't easy but I just kept telling myself to

keep my mind and hands busy. Strangely I felt a little excited as quit day approached. I am now 38 days smoke free and I feel great!"

The Stop Smoking service also work with several vape shops across the county, training them to deliver behavioural support alongside their products. The team can help those wanting to quit smoking by switching to an e-cigarette in finding a participating store and giving them the support of a trained smoking cessation advisor.

Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, Cllr John Spence said: "This year, more than any, we want to encourage anyone who maybe considering quitting, to do so.

"We know it is hard, but we will be with you every step of the way. I would like to wish everyone taking part in Stoptober the best of luck."

Director of Public Health, Mike Gogarty said: "The national lock down in March saw an increase in the number of people quitting tobacco smoking, which I hope will continue.

"Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health, especially with the threat of coronavirus leading to additional health risks.

"When you quit smoking, the benefits are endless. I would urge anyone considering quitting to join the thousands of people signing up to Stoptober this year to quit once and for all."

Smokers in Essex who want to quit should visit the Essex Wellbeing Service website www.essexwellbeing.co.uk for information on participating pharmacies and terms and conditions.

£5000 grants for householders to reduce energy bills and tackle climate change

Improving insulation and making heating and hot water production more energy efficient in homes are some of the best ways to tackle climate change, the Essex Climate Action Commission heard yesterday.

The Commission met for the fourth time last week to discuss how making changes to our built environment – such as homes, businesses, schools and hospitals – can help in the fight against climate change.

Commissioners also heard how ensuring new homes and buildings are more energy efficient and carbon neutral is much easier and cheaper than retrofitting existing properties.

Calling for bold action, the Commission set an ambitious challenge for all new build homes and schools to be net zero. Essex County Council and other public institutions in the county were called on to ensure their own estates become net zero by 2030.

Lord Randall, Chair of the Commission said: “With 40% of the UK’s carbon footprint coming from the built environment we must seize the opportunity to build back better and make sure any new homes and buildings are more energy efficient.

“I would also encourage Essex residents to take advantage of the government funding which opens today and is available until March to make improvements to our existing homes which could save them up to £600 a year.

“Tackling climate change cannot be done by a single organisation – the public sector, the private sector and Essex residents – we all have our part to play.”

The government’s Green Homes Grant means Essex residents can now apply for up to £5000 government funding to make homes low carbon and more energy efficient.

Grants are available to make improvements such as installing cavity wall or loft insulation, upgrading windows or replacing old boilers with a heat pump.

All the information residents need can be found on the Simple Energy Advice <https://www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/pages/green-homes-grant>

The Essex Climate Action Commission will make its full set of recommendations on a range of matters - transport, energy, waste, land use, green infrastructure and the built environment - to Essex County Council cabinet for consideration by the end of March 2021.

In a press release issued earlier today by the [Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy), <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy> and Energy Secretary Alok Sharma said:

“Our plan to upgrade the nation’s buildings and help build back better is good news for jobs, the environment and people’s back pockets, as we reduce emissions and help cut energy bills.

“I urge everyone to visit the Green Home Grants website to see how they can make the most of this fantastic scheme.”

Residents encouraged to share their priorities for COVID-19 recovery

With the world facing challenges on an unprecedented scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Essex County Council is continuing to put plans in place to support local communities, public services and the Essex economy to recover from its impact.

It is anticipated that ECC will spend over £2bn on essential services next year. However, like many other public sector organisations, COVID-19 has placed significant pressure on ECC's resources.

It is therefore vital that future plans are informed by the experiences of Essex residents so that ECC can respond appropriately to meet local need within the resources available.

A consultation has been launched on Tuesday 29th September, so that residents can share their aspirations, anxieties and priorities for recovery.

This will inform ECC's plans for the next 18 months, its 2021/22 budget, as well as longer-term strategies.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of ECC, said: "I am proud to say that ECC has a strong track record of financial management, with over £370m saved over the past five years. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic this year have truly reinforced that we must never be complacent and that it is vital to continue to carefully manage our resources now and in the longer-term.

"We are facing some big decisions over the coming months, with additional costs of over £90m* expected this year alone due to the pandemic. As we plan for next year and beyond, we can expect further pressures from COVID-19 itself, the longer-term impacts of lockdown and school closures.

"We know that lots of residents have and are still facing challenges they could never have planned for because of the pandemic and some of the impacts are still yet to be felt in full.

"This is why it is so important that we hear from you, the people of Essex, to understand exactly how the crisis has changed your priorities – for yourself, your family and your community – so that we can ensure we are responding in the most appropriate way."

The consultation is divided into two parts: part one focuses on priorities for recovery across Essex and the challenges faced by the county.

Part two focuses on the financial pressures facing the county council itself – it invites views on how ECC should allocate resources to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and sustain public services

The consultation will remain open until Friday 6 November and can be accessed here: <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/budget-consultation-2021-22>

- Some of this unexpected cost is funded by Central Government
- Further information on how ECC spends its money, and where it gets its money from can be found https://assets.ctfassets.net/knkzaf64jx5x/36XfRcNTNqMoEzgpQFPsYh/df5c6042b089cf8b6fee99c09f8efb54/2020_2021_Council_Tax_Leaflet.pdf
- ECC has been independently rated by as one of Top 10 most productive councils in England for two years in a row <https://www.impower.co.uk/insights/top-10-most-productive-councils-in-england-2018>

Essex Trading Standards team issues warning of test and trace scam

Essex Trading Standards has been made aware of a telephone scam whereby callers claiming to be from the NHS Test and Trace service are calling unsuspecting residents asking for payment for tests.

Those being called are told that they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus and are then told they must purchase a test over the phone.

If you've been in close contact with someone who has coronavirus and need to self-isolate, you may get an email, text or phone call from NHS Test and Trace, however no one would be advised to get tested unless they had symptoms, and if they do, they would never be asked to purchase a test or give their bank details.

People may also get an alert from the NHS COVID-19 app as part of test and trace. Children under 18 will be contacted by phone wherever possible and asked for their parent or guardian's permission to continue the call.

NHS Test and trace will never;

- ask for bank details or payments
- ask for details of any other accounts, such as social media
- ask you to set up a password or PIN number over the phone
- ask you to call a premium rate number, such as those starting 09 or 087

At present, Essex Trading Standards haven't received any calls on this but is aware of reports circulating on social media.

Chris French, Head of Essex Trading Standards said: "Absolutely no-one officially contacted by the NHS test and trace team would be asked for payment over the phone or to pay for a test.

“We would ask residents to be vigilant if they receive a call such as this, not to give any personal information and report it to us straight away. Please also make sure older or vulnerable family and friends are aware of this scam so they don't fall prey to it.”

Director of Public Health, Dr Mike Gogarty said: “The NHS Test and Trace service is a vital element in helping us stop the spread of coronavirus. I am disgusted that scammers are using this crucial service as a way to scam people, potentially putting people's health at risk.

“People should not be discouraged from giving their contact details as part of test and trace, however I would ask that they remain vigilant when receiving calls, check the telephone number and not give any information such as bank details if asked.”