

1 October 2018

Dear Colleague

Highways – improvements in progress

I am very pleased to write to you today to introduce a number of highways related improvements, which you will experience in the coming weeks and months. As I said at Full Council in May I understand that highways issues are one of the biggest concerns that residents raise with you.

We are investing to help improve roads across Essex and I am working to give you, as a County Member, more information, access and control over highways matters that are of importance locally to you and your constituents. The improvements we have underway cover five areas:

1. Improved communications.

- a. a new newsletter called 'Highways Highlights', designed to provide elected representatives with a steady stream of highways news and information, including the defect repair numbers by District. You should have received issues by email already.
- b. Improved tone and nature of our customer and member responses, to provide a more-customer-centric approach.
- c. Member Briefings to improve understanding and enable questions to officers. Also, a highways briefing to EALC members in November and discussions to deliver briefings to Districts.

2. **Local Pothole Repair Programme.** We are using the previously announced additional £2.4m investment in repairs to empower you, as County Members working with your Districts and Parishes, to list your '**20 worst carriageway potholes**' (10 as soon as possible, and 10 more in the Spring) in your division, to get them repaired using a 'once and done' approach. This is in addition to our existing asset-led repair approach. *Please see additional sheet for more information on this programme.*

3. **Devolution.** Very productive discussions with the EALC have revealed an appetite at Parish-level to take on additional responsibilities. We are therefore working with the EALC to identify volunteer Parish Councils whom we could help as they take up more tasks leading to a greater level of autonomy and community engagement, bearing in mind Health & Safety and legislative requirements. We will also be talking to colleagues in District Councils to see to what extent we can work collaboratively with them on delivery of highways services.

4. **LHP Improvements.** In May we announced £1.2m of match-funding. To date, a number of districts have responded positively. Also, we have:

- a. Introduced a 'direct delivery gang' for some LHP works, reducing lead-in times and overheads
 - b. Changing Panel make-up to better reflect the role of the County Members
 - c. Changes to pricing structures
 - d. Wider improvements to reduce governance and lag-times to be delivered
 - e. Included a voting Parish Council Representative on each panel (where appropriate)
- 5. Member 'Relationship Leads':** As a local Member myself, I share your frustration that the highways service has become less accessible over the years, particularly when you have a seemingly intractable issue to discuss. As a result we have identified a number of senior Essex Highways officers, who have been allocated to each County Member on a geographic basis. Typically each officer will have about three members to link with. These relationship leads have three roles:
- a. Gaining local intelligence to improve service delivery
 - b. Dispute resolution
 - c. Proactive communications with Members on key highways topics and issues

Your nominated officer will be in touch with you shortly to arrange an initial meeting locally with you to introduce themselves. **Please note that the existing defect reporting, Members Enquiries and Highways Surgery processes should still be followed for routine problems.**

Alongside this letter you will find longer guidance documents which describe how we would like you to get involved with the Local Pothole Repair programme. Please read them, as we need your personal involvement to deliver a productive outcome for your area. I am also writing to parishes via the EALC to let them know of the additional pothole repair programme, so where appropriate they are primed to help you.

I hope that you can see that I have taken a number of steps already to improve the highways service, and the service to you, for the benefit of everyone in our great county.

As always, if you have any comments or questions, please do email me.

Cllr Kevin Bentley

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