

ECC Report August 2020

Essex Leaders come together to discuss the future of Local Government

On Friday 31st July Leaders and Chief Executives of all councils, county, city, district, and unitary in Greater Essex, alongside the Police, Crime & Fire Commissioner, met to discuss the future of Local Government across the county.

The meeting took place following recent Government announcements around the future of Local Government. The Government has made clear its intentions for Local Government Reform with a White Paper due to be published in the autumn which will set out the criteria and process for how this will work.

Although this was a Manifesto pledge included in the December 2019 general election, it had obviously overtaken by the Covid 19 outbreak.

Today's meeting, held virtually, was the first opportunity for Leaders and Chief Executives to come together to discuss the government steer and consider the opportunities for improving the Local Government system and discuss how to progress and next steps.

Attendees agreed that throughout the last few months there has been a collective effort across organisations in addressing the key challenges that Essex has faced during the COVID-19 crisis and there is commitment and ambition to build on this and consider how much more can be achieved with a simplified local government system that enables work to progress at pace and scale.

Essex County Council Leader Cllr David Finch said: "Across Essex we have one of the most complex political and organisational geographies in the UK – 1 county council, 12 city, borough and district councils and 2 unitary councils. We all agree that a sustainable solution for Greater Essex is needed and the opportunity Local Government Reform presents us with can help us unleash our reform potential, deepen community engagement, have more control over funding and streamline processes for residents.

"It is important that we act now and progress with developing proposals so that we are taken seriously by Government and aren't left behind and ensure that Essex is well positioned for future opportunities which see all residents and businesses benefit."

The meeting was Chaired by Cllr Neil Stock, OBE, Tendring District Council Leader and Chair of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Group.

Cllr Stock said: "It was a pleasure to chair the meeting today and bring my colleagues together to begin our collective journey to respond to the Government's

reforms.

“Councils in Essex deliver excellent services to residents, both independently and collectively, and we have the opportunity to now capitalise on this opportunity and our recent experience of working as a strong partnership to deliver for the residents of Essex and present to government our ideas around the future of Local Government.

“Talking about reforming local organisational structures can be difficult and challenging, but attendees were all committed to keeping the residents and businesses at the heart of our thinking and ensuring we get the best possible deal and local government structure for them.”

As a group there was agreement to progress with further exploring all possible options and to come together again in September to considering these, with the ambition to having proposals that can be submitted following the White Paper being published.

It is unclear however at this stage what plans the Government has for the very first tier of Local Government, such as Parish or Town Council, but it has been hinted that if there will be any changes, these will also be included in the White Paper.

Statement from Cllr Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure

This is a statement from Cllr Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, in response to Friday 31st announcement by the Prime Minister of £2bn investment in cycling and walking infrastructure.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure said: “The Prime Minister’s announcement yesterday about investment in cycling and walking mirrors the thinking we have in Essex about being safer, greener and healthier.

“We should all have the right to healthier streets, access to safe walking and cycling networks and the ability to be able to enjoy cycling and walking. Cycling and walking is at the forefront of our decision making. If walking and cycling is easy, safe and fun it will become the default option for those shorter journeys. The sustainability and environmental impacts cannot go unnoticed if we can help people move to active travel.

“In Essex we have a list of schemes we want to take forward to transform the county; we are assessing our cycling network identifying areas of best practice and areas that need improvement and investment. This funding announced today will help local authorities plan in a long-term way and help us ensure sustainable travel is the first choice for journeys – great news for our environment, for public health and for our Essex communities.”

Once full details of what schemes will be considered for Tending I will share them with you all.

For more information on the Prime Minister's announcement visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-kickstarts-2bn-cycling-and-walking-revolution>

Registration Services help mark thousands of happy occasions post full lockdown

Since restarting some registration services on 16th June, Essex County Council Registration Services have registered over 2,800 births, received numerous Notices of Marriages and booked over 280 ceremonies for couples keen to tie the knot.

From 5 August, Essex Registration Services will also restart Citizenship Ceremonies and has written to all residents who are currently waiting to attend.

People need to attend a citizenship ceremony if they are 18 or over and have successfully applied to become a British citizen. During the ceremony, people make an oath of allegiance (or an affirmation) and a pledge. This means they promise to respect the rights, freedoms and laws of the UK.

Usually, people must attend a Citizenship Ceremony within three months of receiving an invitation from the Home Office., However due to COVID19 this time is currently extended to six months.

For further information on Citizenship Ceremonies please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/british-citizenship>

Essex County Council awarded COVID-19 funding from Youth Endowment Fund

Essex County Council has been awarded a grant of £56,758 from the Youth Endowment Fund to support young people at risk of being drawn into violent crime through the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECC will use the funding to launch a new online programme of support to help vulnerable young people access mentoring from a trained youth adviser. The programme has been developed to reduce stress and anxiety felt by young people who have not been able to access regular support due to social distancing and stay-at-home measures. It will be delivered online in two distinct activities for 10-14 year olds.

The first is an activity for those who are at risk of being in an abusive relationship, or who are at risk of entering into an abusive relationship in future. It will educate young people about the value of respect and the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. It will equip them with the necessary skills to develop and maintain

healthy relationships and help them recognise how to break away in an appropriate way.

The second activity is aimed at young people susceptible to being drawn into criminal activity. It explores better decision making and the realities of crime, dispelling the myths surrounding it. Those attending will gain an increased knowledge of the impact criminal activity can have on their lives, not only in the present, but in relation to their future opportunities.

Councillor Ray Gooding, ECC Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, said: “We’re delighted to have been awarded funding for this initiative. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased pressure on vulnerable young people while simultaneously decreasing contact from those supporting them. This programme will bolster the work we’re already doing and can make a huge difference to the lives of many young people and families in Essex.”

Jon Yates, Executive Director at Youth Endowment Fund, said: “It has been too easy to forget vulnerable young people during this crisis. The pandemic has removed much of the critical support that many of them rely upon – from teachers to youth workers. This funding will help us find the best way to reach and support these young people when they most need it.”

The Youth Endowment Fund is an independent charitable trust set up by the Home Office. It funds, supports and evaluates projects in England and Wales which work to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violent crime.

ECC is one of 130 organisations to share part of a £6.5m grant pot from the Youth Endowment Fund to help at-risk young people impacted by COVID-19.

ECC’s scheme launches Essex-wide on 3 August 2020. For more information about the service, if you know someone who would benefit or would like to make a referral into it, please visit the Youth Services website at youth@essex.gov.uk or email youth.work@essex.gov.uk

County Councillors get direct say on pothole repairs

This new programme follows a previous scheme in 2019, which enabled footway problems to be fixed in addition to repairs completed routinely because of their immediate risk to safety.

Each Essex County Councillor will be using their local knowledge and working with their local Parishes and Districts so Members can nominate a list of locally important pothole locations to Essex Highways for repair. The road defects submitted will then be fixed permanently as soon as possible, using extra investment provided by Essex County Council.

Each county councillor will be able use a repair crew in their area for up to 10 days, working to the list County Councillors will provide. Their work will be focused on some of the most locally irritating potholes which may not normally be considered for immediate repair under existing maintenance policies.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, said: “We have proved these Member-led exercises work very well to fix extra potholes locally. I want to make sure that the money we’re putting into these additional repairs is used to maximum effect in each area. We want to repair the potholes that really frustrate people locally as well as the ones our careful safety- and asset led policies mandate. We won’t be able to fix everything, but we will consider requests that our resources can deal with.

“That’s why I am asking all Essex County Councillors to consult quickly as possible, with their local councils, organisations or residents and then let us have their list of local priority potholes. We’ll fix them permanently with extra crews, further improving our road network and helping everyone who uses it.”

Notes to Editors:

1. Depending on how close together and how large each pothole is, somewhere between 4 and 10 road potholes a day could be fixed under the scheme. Each County Councillor will have 1 gang for up to 10 working days.
2. Local residents or road users are invited to contact their appropriate local Essex County Councillor with the potholes that they find most problematic.
3. Some defects will not be able to be fixed under this particular scheme – for instance large stretches of carriageway, many types of concrete surface problem, or footways. These would be considered as part of future capital works proposals.
4. This scheme follows a previous successful exercise in 2019 fixing extra potholes on footways where councillors nominated priority pavement repairs.
5. Potholes fixed on Essex roads- April 1,093; May 1,444; June 1,428. Consistent productivity despite new Covid-safe working practices.
6. As with all road repairs, the work will be subject to weather and any specific complexities which may emerge as the work is planned
7. All necessary social distancing rules will also be followed, for the safety of residents and the workforce