

County Councillor's Report, May 2020

Please see the following digest of ECC activity.

Every Family Matters – keeping your child safe online



Technology can provide young people with a window to the world, offering them lots of different opportunities to learn new things, have fun and stay in touch with friends and family.

Staying connected is important right now and if your child is not currently at school, you might find they are spending more time online at home, playing games, scrolling through social media, or chatting to friends.

While it's important that young people maintain social contact at the moment and have regular down time to relax, it's vital that they know how to navigate the internet and social media safely, and remain aware of who they are talking to at all times.

Technology can make it easy for people to disguise who they really are and this anonymity can make it easy for young people to be taken advantage of, sometimes without even realising it's happening.

As a parent or carer, it can be difficult to keep track of the latest online trends, particularly when it comes to social media platforms, or to stay up-to-date with what your child is doing online. However, there are lots of steps you can take to keep them safe.

Start by having a conversation with your child and ask them to show you what they're using the internet for and who they are talking to. You can also use this conversation as a chance to explain some of the risks and encourage them to share any concerns they might have about anything they've seen, or anyone they've spoken to.

You can also set-up parental controls to help restrict the potential for young people to be targeted by perpetrators. This can include changing the settings on online games and social media accounts to private.

Remember, every family matters and if you need support right now, we are here to help. Visit the [Staying Well Children and Families page](#) on our website to find out more about how we can help you help your child stay safe online.

ECC's urgent call for more PPE

“Thank you for your donations but more PPE is needed” says Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, as he reiterated the call out for more Personal Protective Equipment.

Essex companies have been donating unopened and unwanted stocks of Personal Protective Equipment to the council to support those who work in adult and children social care across Essex, and while the council is incredibly grateful for any stock, much more is needed.

The council still needs all items of PPE - masks, disposable gloves, aprons, eye goggles and also any sanitising gel. This will be provided to front line staff who are caring for the most vulnerable residents in Essex over the coming days and weeks.

The council recognises there may be a variety of reasons why companies have ended up with some PPE that they cannot currently reuse or distribute and would particularly appreciate hearing from those with larger volumes.

Councillor John Spence said: “The response from local companies has been great and we welcome efforts the government is making to ensure PPE is sourced and available, but we equally recognise the challenge they face in reaching beyond the NHS into other parts of the caring system.

“Quite simply we need more stock and so if you are able to help please get in touch, particularly if you have large quantities of items.”

Essex County Council may be willing to purchase any stocks if needed. To donate or advise us of stock please email PPESupplies@essex.gov.uk with your PPE supply details including quantity and postcode, plus a contact name and phone number, and someone will be in touch.

Any items offered and suitable will be collected safely with collectors observing social distancing and hand hygiene.

Staying connected during COVID-19

Essex Youth Service has risen to the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 outbreak and is continuing to support young people across the county – developing new ways for them to stay connected.

The service has adapted many of its existing projects, including moving sessions and resources online so that young people can still access information and take part in enriching schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, within a virtual space.

The service also remains a lifeline for many vulnerable young people, young carers and those who may be at risk, who are looking for practical advice and emotional support at this time. The service undertook more than 2,700 phone and video calls with young people in just one week in April.

With support from Youth Strategy Groups (YSG), the service is continuing to support young people across key areas such as mental health, domestic abuse, sexual health, reducing anti-social behaviour, employment, education and training, bereavement and loss, and skills development.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member responsible for Essex Youth Service, said: “I continue to be astounded at how our services are adapting their usual ways of working to ensure that young people remain fully supported at this time.

“The support provided by Essex Youth Service will be vital for many young people across the county – now more than ever – which is something clearly demonstrated by the high number of calls they have had recently.

“I’m so proud of the innovative ways in which the service has met the challenges we’re all currently facing.”

A full list of opportunities offered by Essex Youth Service and how young people can get involved can be found below:

- [Online activities](#) - weekly online activities for all young people looking for something fun and quirky to do to pass the day
- [Good Man](#) and [Sisters in Strength](#) - five-week mentoring programmes for young people aged between 13-18 who are at risk of entering into abusive relationships in the future and/or who are at current risk within an abusive relationship.
- [Duke of Edinburgh’s Award](#) – available to young people aged between 13-24 who are looking to learn new skills.
- [Support for school leavers](#) - the Opportunity Ready programme will pair young people with an advisor to give hands-on, one to one support to help with finding the right training, education and employment opportunity.
- [Post-16 traineeship support](#) – young people who have left school are welcome to express and interest in the next phase of this course which is aimed at maximising a young person’s potential and preparing them for the future.
- [Year 6/7 transition](#) – online one-to-one support for any Year 6 pupils moving to secondary school.
- [Essex Young Carers Service](#) – arrangements have been made to continue supporting young carers at this time. Referrals to the service can continue to be made by young carers themselves, family members, or professionals including GPs, social workers and teachers.

Supporting our vulnerable residents



The Essex Welfare Service, Essex County Council’s new service, has been established to help vulnerable people in our community who are shielding at home and are in need of support.

It is specifically for those people who are not able to get any support from either family or friends or neighbours.

Having now signed up thousands of amazing volunteers, nearly 2,800 of these willing helpers are supporting vulnerable residents with tasks like grocery shopping.

EWS is directing volunteers to support residents each day via community hubs. So far almost 9,000 people across the county have been directly supported.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of the Council, said: “We prioritised getting volunteers who were DBS-checked up and running in the first instance and are now working our way through the rest of those

people who came forward to help. We are very lucky so many of you have stepped forward and volunteered with us.”

“We will have made contact with nearly everyone by the end of the month and want to reassure you that as further support is requested, we will still need the help of volunteers across the county to support our Care Providers, our carers, those who are socially isolated and lonely and those people in our communities with additional needs or health issues.”

ECC has been working in partnership with district councils, local NHS CCGs, the British Red Cross and other partners to ensure people who need support are able to access it.

GPs across the county have started to send messages to patients directing them to the Essex Welfare Service.

If they need support the system is simple and effective – the resident contacts the Essex Welfare Service via phone or online. Support is then provided via the network of community hubs, that have been established in each district, or directly by an EWS volunteer.

Support for vulnerable people ranges from help with shopping, medicine or day to day tasks that support them to stay healthy and well whilst shielding at home.

One grateful recipient of the service told us: “I registered with you on 7th April and just wanted to say a huge THANK YOU for all your help and support, and in particular to the person who helped me when I was distressed on the phone.

“She was so patient and reassuring that by the end of the phone call I was able to make a joke! Because of your help I have received two food boxes and am now registered on supermarket websites, enabling me to book priority slots. Thank you again.”

Another even presented volunteers with a thank-you card, writing: “I wanted to say a big thank you for being angels. Your kindness is really appreciated, and I feel so grateful to you all, giving up your time to help me in this challenging time.”

The Essex Welfare Service can be contacted by sending an email to www.essexwelfareservice.org.uk

Essex businesses urged to access Government financial support

Essex businesses are being encouraged to take action and apply for Government funding support, as figures show thousands are not yet accessing what they are entitled to.

Official records indicate that so far more than £175million* of Government business grants has been handed out to more than 14,000* businesses Essex-wide following the Coronavirus pandemic.

But there are still more than 9,000* businesses across Essex yet to receive funding which is available to them.

Borough, district and city councils across the county are doing everything they can to distribute funding as quickly as possible but in some cases the local authority does not have the business bank details to be able to transfer the funds. Local councils are struggling to contact businesses which are currently closed and are urging businesses to get in touch via their local authority websites to provide the details required.

There are also many businesses that have not applied to claim what they are entitled to. Businesses who are registered for business rates but exempt as small businesses are also eligible to apply.

The grants are not loans and businesses will not be required to pay the money back later.

Records indicate more than 23,000* Essex businesses are entitled to financial support from the Government in light of the current pandemic. Around 40%* are yet to receive any funds and Essex County Council is urging them to take action to make sure they don't miss out.

Essex County Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, said: "This is an extremely challenging time for businesses, and we want to help them to survive. Some businesses might not have ever thought they needed to rely on state support, but these are unprecedented times. We want to make sure businesses access the support they need, and I urge all businesses to visit their local council website to apply."

Businesses can apply for funding via their local authority at: www.essex.gov.uk/applying-for-small-business-grants-in-essex

The Government announced in March a business package of financial support was being made available to help businesses survive through the current imposed lockdown since the rules around social distancing and staying at home to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus have forced many businesses to close their doors or cease operating at the moment.

The aim of the funding support is to prevent as many permanent business closures and job losses as possible. Among the support available is business rates relief, a Job Retention Scheme and various other grants to help businesses stay afloat and pay their staff while not working. Full details of the support options available are published at: www.essex.gov.uk/support-for-employers-and-businesses.

Essex County Council is keen to help as many businesses as possible to survive through the current pandemic and has established a dedicated Covid-19 ECC Business Support Service to help assist businesses to understand the options available to them, signpost them to appropriate points of contact or information, and help answer questions. Businesses can contact the team online, or via Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn.

*Figures quoted are as of 19 April 2020

Together we can Keep Essex Active

Whilst the government has expressed the importance of completing 30 minutes of activity per day for adults, social distancing restrictions remain in place.

Active Essex is therefore continuing to support people in staying active safely during lockdown with the "Keep Essex Active" campaign, with over 50 ideas and resources for people to stay well and active at home.

In addition, Active Essex has created an exciting new livestream YouTube channel which features live and FREE online workouts throughout the day.

The live sessions are delivered by top instructors from Essex, featuring a range of activities to suit everyone, from high-intensive, to Yoga, to seated exercise, to football drills and karate.

The daily live sessions also include sessions in meditation, breathing, and personal wellbeing. The livestream videos will be saved on the YouTube channel if you were unable to make the session.

Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health Essex, said: "Active Essex's new campaign helps signposts ideas for everyone to keep active at home, provided they are well enough and are following the latest government guidelines. Physical activity is vital during this period, now more than ever."

Jason Fergus, Head of Active Essex added: "It is important to remember that you should be active in a way that is right for you. Continuing to move will improve your physical health, help manage illness, stress and anxiety and generally make you feel better.

"Building in a small amount of time into your daily schedule each day to stay active will benefit your health and wellbeing during this tricky time."

Essex sport offered financial lifeline

Over 120 sports clubs and community organisations in Essex participated in three live webinars delivered by Active Essex and Sport England, to hear about what emergency financial support is available to them in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Each webinar focused on the Sport England Community Emergency Fund, a £20m support package aimed to help community sport and physical activity organisations experiencing short term financial hardship or the ceasing of operations due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

Clubs can request a grant up to £10,000 to provide emergency funding until the end of July. The webinars provided useful tips on how to apply, who was eligible and what costs the fund could cover.

Cllr Ray Gooding said: "Supporting the sport and physical activity sector to get through this difficult period is a priority for Essex. The Active Essex webinars were just one way we are doing this. We are dedicated to ensure that as a sector, we emerge from this challenge in a strong position and can hit the ground running when restrictions are lifted.

"Sports clubs, community groups and their volunteers are typically excellent fundraisers, but those without large reserves are already feeling the pinch of losing vital revenue which could affect their long term sustainability."

Active Essex has created a new [one-stop-shop webpage](#) to support the sport and physical activity sector which is full of important information and ideas from both Active Essex and partner organisations.

Information includes funding opportunities, E-learning and business continuity resources. You can contact Lee Monk from Active Essex on lee.monk@activeessex.org or call 07917651667 if you require 1-2-1 support.

Every Family Matters – staying connected with Essex Youth Service



“The sessions run by Essex Youth Service have been a tremendous boost for my daughter as she deals with her anxiety. The youth workers have all been friendly and encouraged her to talk...I really appreciate this resource being in place and have now recommended my other daughter to start using the service too.”

At a time when we’re all being asked to practise social distancing, staying connected has never been more important, especially for young people. Those that are no longer at school will be missing social interaction with their friends, taking part in their usual clubs and activities, as well as the normal outlets to express themselves that they might normally have access to.

This will leave some young people – like the daughter of the Essex parent quoted above - feeling worried and anxious, and potentially unsure of how or where to share their feelings.

However, Essex Youth Service has risen to the unprecedented challenge of helping young people during the COVID-19 outbreak – introducing new ways to stay in touch and adapting lots of their existing sessions so that they can continue to support young people and help them to manage their mental health, within an online space.

The service is currently offering advice across a range of subjects for young people aged 13-19 years (up to 25 years for young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities), including how to stay motivated during lockdown, how to manage family relationships and where young people can access safe, online counselling.

The service also offers one-to-one support to those young people that need it and continues to work collaboratively with schools, specialist education services, social care and youth offending services to ensure young people get the right support, at the right time.

Find out more about how [Essex Youth Service could help your child’s mental health](#) at this time and check out the [Staying Well Children and Families resources](#) for more information on supporting your child’s overall wellbeing.

£1million funding boost for children in care

Essex County Council, in partnership with Hertfordshire and Norfolk County Councils, is set to receive an additional £1.1million from the Department for Education (DfE) to continue work to support young people in care and their families.

The project – Inside Out – which originally launched as a pilot in Essex in 2018, is aimed at improving stability for children and young people in residential care and supporting them to return home, or successfully ‘step down’ to less intensive care wherever appropriate and possible.

The three organisations received £3million from the DfE's children's social care innovation programme fund to roll out the new model in 2017. It involves young people working with a dedicated coach, flexibly and on their own terms.

The coaches - provided by The Children's Society - provide a consistent and prolonged point of contact for young people, and remain with them throughout their journey in care, regardless of where they are living.

Inside Out has already achieved positive outcomes for young people, providing stability at what can be a worrying time. The additional money will allow the three organisations to extend and consider expanding the current offer, to help even more young people at this challenging time.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, ECC's Cabinet Member for Children and Families, said: "Family stability is so crucial to secure positive outcomes for young people, especially at this time and the additional funding will allow us to build on the successes we've seen across the Inside Out project to date.

"The funding is fantastic news for all three partners and a true testament to the hard work of everyone involved in the project. It shows that even during the circumstances we all find ourselves in, our commitment to protecting and supporting children and their families never wavers."

Following an initial pilot in Essex, the Inside Out model was rolled out in Hertfordshire and Norfolk in 2019.

Cllr Teresa Heritage, Hertfordshire County Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families said: "Hertfordshire County Council is proud to be a partner in the Inside Out project and we have been very pleased to see the positive outcomes.

"The additional funding is very welcome, not least because of the current lockdown situation where coronavirus amplifies the need for family stability and reassurance. We hope to see our teams continue to build upon the success to date to provide the best futures for our children, young people and families."

Cllr John Fisher, Norfolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services, said: "This has been a tremendously positive project for young people in Norfolk and it will be fantastic to be able to extend it further to support more young people who need it.

"Inside Out works alongside our transformation work in Norfolk, with a focus on supporting placement stability and children and young people moving back to being cared for within a family.

"Young people have told us that they feel supported and listened to by those working for the project and really value the help it has given them."

A recent evaluation report, compiled by the Tavistock Institute, concluded that Inside Out has had a positive impact both in respect of short to medium term outcomes for young people, as well as financially. The DfE plans to publish the report later this year.

Essex County Council and Public Health England piloting new whole-home testing strategy to bring down COVID-19 related deaths in care homes

Essex County Council, in partnership with Public Health England (PHE), is piloting a new approach to minimise deaths due to COVID-19 in care homes in the county.

Care homes are especially vulnerable to infection due to the frailty of residents and social distancing struggles to be effective in a close-knit care home-setting.

Figures issued this week from Care Quality Commission (CQC) has been confirmed that up to and including 27th April 2020, 263 deaths due to COVID-19 have occurred in care home in Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

To combat these rising figures, Essex County Council and PHE are piloting a new approach to care home infection across the county.

Cllr John Spence, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, said: "Our policy is to intervene early to prevent outbreaks but, where they occur, contain them at the earliest opportunity. Protecting the NHS was obviously the first priority during the first phase of the outbreak, but now the focus needs to shift to prevent the spread of infection in care homes.

"Our Adult Social Care and Public Health teams have worked at pace to come up with a new approach to combat this issue which is now being piloted. It is one of the first approaches of its kind in the country and goes further than the existing guidance because we will act at the point when a single case is identified."

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex County Council Director of Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities, said the new approach was based on early testing, swift intervention and support for homes.

Dr Gogarty said: "We are taking this action because infection is often established in care homes before we have been able to intervene. Now, we will act at the earliest point when a single infection is identified and at this point we will test every resident and worker in the home to establish how far the virus has spread.

"We are proposing to phase in new processes for testing and infection control and although this will take time to embed, we believe it is the right approach."

The pilot approach involves:

- Any home with one suspected case should contact ECC and PHE within 24 hours. ECC will arrange infection control support from NHS infection control teams.
- All staff and residents in the identified home will then be tested. This is because in a study elsewhere the numbers with no symptoms and positive tests was substantial.
- Homes will be able to contact a rapid response team at Essex County Council, or Public Health England's response cell.

For homes with no cases, the new approach under discussion is to regularly test staff and residents. Essex County Council is now developing a strategy to shield homes with no cases, and shielding will need to go on for some months.

For homes with established outbreaks Essex County Council will work with the homes to establish best infection control practice advised by PHE and NHS infection control teams.

Essex Outdoors chefs serve up meals for the local community

A meals on wheels service in Mersea has proved so popular it is being rolled out to the villages in the surrounding area.

Set up by Essex Outdoors (which is run by Essex County Council) and West Mersea Town Council, the service is open to all and is currently delivering more than 150 meals a week to over 30 senior citizens and vulnerable families living in Mersea.

Due to its success, Essex Outdoors is also working with local care agencies, to extend the service to pensioners and vulnerable families living in the surrounding villages of Peldon, Abberton and Fingeringhoe along with Great Wigborough and Little Wigborough.

All of the meals provided are cooked and prepared by the chefs at Essex Outdoors - which has onsite facilities at the activity centre to cater for up to 500 people - and are collected by one of the 13 voluntary delivery drivers and then distributed.

The menu features a stable of firm favourites such as shepherd's pie and beef stew as well as sandwiches and a desert. Senior Citizens and families who sign-up for a seven-day menu receive a free Sunday lunch, while a two-week menu is to launch by the beginning of May.

Councillor Simon Walsh, ECC Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action, said: "It's due to the dedication of our volunteers and the support we have received from the Mayor of Mersea, Councillor Carl Powling, that this service has proved so popular.

"A lot of comments we receive is that everyone really enjoys the meals and they are all extremely grateful to our chefs and delivery drivers. We're also delighted to be working local care agencies as it means that more of our meals can reach those who are in desperate need of support during this difficult time."

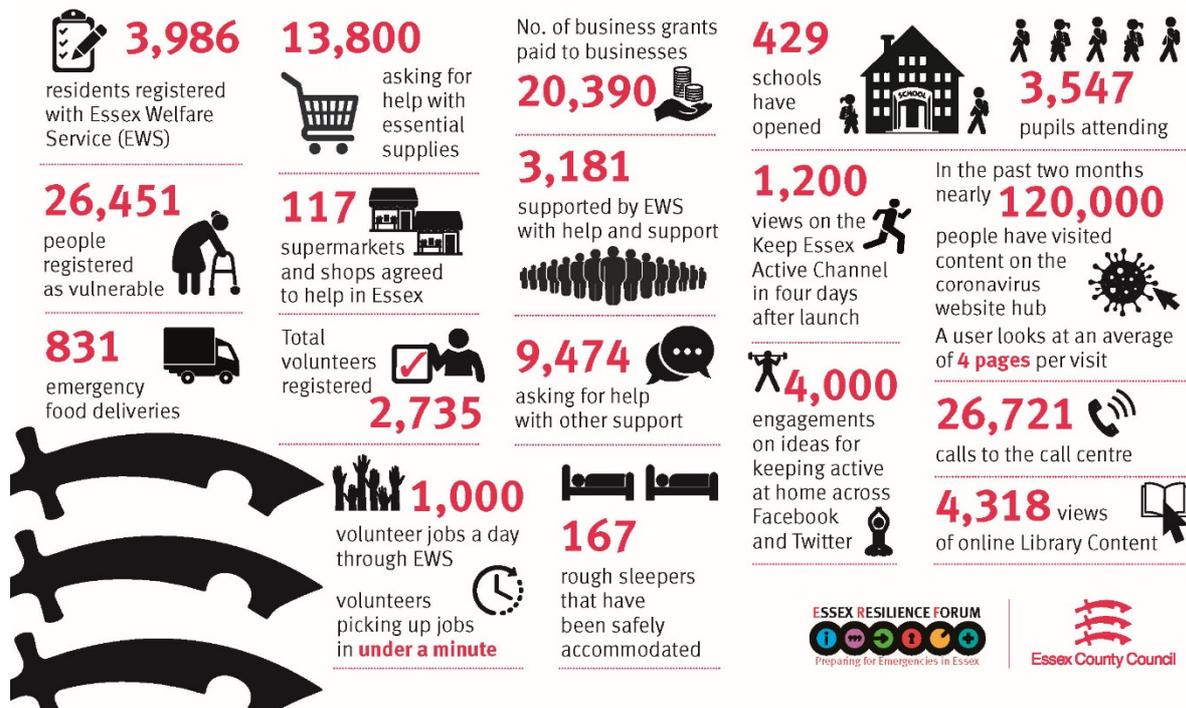
To sign-up to the meals on wheels service, which caters for individual dietary requirements email office@westmersea.org or telephone (01206) 489240.

Our response to coronavirus in numbers

We've been working continuously to ensure Essex residents, communities and businesses are fully supported during the coronavirus outbreak.

March/April 2020

Essex's response to COVID-19 so far...



Here are some key facts about our work so far:

- 3,986 residents registered with the Essex Welfare Service (EWS)
- 26,451 people registered as vulnerable
- 831 emergency food deliveries
- 13,800 asking for help with essential supplies
- 117 supermarkets and shops agreed to help in Essex
- 2,735 volunteers registered
- 1,000 volunteer jobs a day through EWS, volunteers picking up jobs in under a minute
- 3,181 supported by EWS with help and support
- 9,474 asking for help with other support
- 20,390 business grants paid to businesses
- 167 rough sleepers have been safely accommodated
- 429 schools have opened with 3,547 pupils attending

- 1,200 views on the Keep Essex Active Channel in four days after launch
- 4,000 engagements on ideas for keeping active at home across Facebook and Twitter
- In the past two months nearly 120,000 people have visited content on the coronavirus hub
- 26,721 calls to the call centre
- 4,318 views of online library content

(Last updated 1 May 2020)

Highways

Many highways operations are resuming, whilst observing present social distancing rules. This means that the spring/summer programme of work to resurface our roads will resume, which is great news, given that in the early stages of the Covid-19 crisis, there was a real fear everything would be on hold until next year. The programme will be less than planned due to supply chain restrictions.

Please continue to report defects on-line, these will be attended to as soon as they can be safely assessed and programmed in.

Essex County Council

The Cabinet has been meeting daily to discuss the emergency and how its progression has affected our services and our residents across the County. Due to the hard work of our staff, most of whom are working from home, a tremendous amount has already been achieved.

We are actively preparing the recovery phase and resuming Highways activity is a first step. In my world, I am working with officers to have a planned reopening of the recycling centres in the next few weeks, once we can be sure the sites can be safely managed to protect staff and users as well as ensuring the local roads don't get too overwhelmed with traffic. The same applies to Country Parks, and we await further Government guidance on relaxing social distancing and the need to travel before we embark on a phased reopening.

As ever, keep well and stay safe,

Simon Walsh

May 2020