

ECC Annual report 2015-2016

Highways

The Council back in April 2015 announced that it would lead on a feasibility study to make the A120 a dual carriageway between Braintree and Colchester by pledging £5 million available for this purpose.

The aim is to get the scheme in the 2020-2025 Roads Investment Strategy works programme; this project will bring great benefit to road users in that part of the county as well as many more that use this road to get to Stanstead Airport and the Midlands.

A consultation exercise for the siting of a roundabout at the Hare Green-Pellen's Corner stretch was held at Great Bromley Village Hall in August 2015; in this location 6 deaths, over 30 serious collisions and countless unreported accidents have taken place over the last five years, with a cost to the public purse of well over £10million.

After much pressure from us your local political representatives, the installation of speed cameras was finally achieved and as a result the number of serious accidents have dropped dramatically with thankfully, no more deaths. It is hoped that the installation of the new roundabout will begin later this year.

Essex County Council has fully backed plans for a Thames Crossing from Highways England (formerly Highways Agency) which will link Tilbury in Essex with Gravesend in Kent, as its preferred option (known as Option C).

This option proposes that the scheme would run from the end of the M2, crossing the river just east of Gravesend and Tilbury and joining the M25 between junctions 29 and 30.

This will be the first new crossing of the Thames east of London since the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge which opened 25 years ago.

Subject to the necessary funding and planning approvals, Highways England anticipates that the new crossing would open in 2027, if publicly funded or by 2025 if private funding can be secured.

To find out more or contribute to Highways England's consultation please visit www.lower-thames-crossing.co.uk

In July Essex County Council's Highways won a prestigious national highways award for the most efficient partnership with Ringway Jacobs as a model of effective partnership working built on shared objectives and problem solving and a great example to others.

The Council introduced a new scheme for public works to tackle unnecessary congestion, which carries heavy fines if works over-run.

Over 1000 fixed penalty notices have been issued since going live on 16 March 2015 to companies digging up the roads outside the agreed permit terms, with one company been fined £4,000 and having had its permit revoked.

Since March 2015, Essex County Council has processed more than 20,000 permit requests, granting more than 15,000; refusing outright more than 3,000; and requiring changes to work dates or timings for more than 1,200 other requests.

Finances

Essex County Council gave a very robust response to the Comprehensive Spending Review in the Autumn Statement with the Chancellor not even mentioning the reduction to Local Authorities budgets in his speech. The very significant on-going reduction in the grant funding will place considerable extra pressures on services across the board and the current identified funding gap for the next three years is in excess of £200million.

After five consecutive years of freeze the Council has been forced to increase the council tax increase by a total of 4% which includes the extra increase of 2% to pay for social care funding and the financial implications of the new Care Act.

Communities

The ever popular match funding scheme Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) has once again been retained and it is open to all Community led groups and organisations who can yet again now bid for a share of £1.5million pot.

This year the Council awarded sums of up to £20,000 to a total of 90 projects; in most cases it attracts a consequential total financial benefit of five times the amount granted.

CIF is a small grants scheme funded by Essex County Council which is designed to support community projects that:

- create, procure or develop new community projects
- enhance existing community projects
- enhance or develop initiatives that strengthen a community.

This scheme has once again been enhanced by CIF emergency Response (subject to a maximum application of £15,000 for any one project) for time critical projects only, and must be fully supported by the relevant Division Elected Member.

A new Grant to help protect residential properties from surface water flooding was made available for residents in October; applications for Property Level Protection (PLP) grants, of up to £5,000, can be made by individual homeowners via the Essex County Council website and are now available for residents to apply for.

The purpose of this grant is to provide assistance to residents who have suffered from flooding in Essex by helping them to become more resilient and resistant to future flooding.

To find out more about the grants and to fill out an online PLP application form please visit www.essex.gov.uk/flooding and look under the 'Apply' tab.

A new free webcasting service was made available to Parish and Town Council in October to enable meetings to be broadcasted live into resident's homes thanks to a new audio webcasting app.

The app allows for audio to be streamed and recorded through a mobile phone. These recordings are then made available as minutes following the meeting. For further information please contact

Jonathan.Phillips@essex.gov.uk or ring 03330 133400

A popular scheme launched two years ago which has already saved Essex residents almost £1 million, reopened again in December for new applications.

During last year's "Essex Energy Switch", residents saved approximately £263 per household resulting in a total savings across the county of a staggering £948,792.

From the nationwide sign-up last year, over 27 percent of participants were from Essex. For more information visit www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch

Trading Standards

The Council's Trading Standards officers have had yet again another very busy year. They have dealt with several issues such as the sale of counterfeit goods on line and through Social Media of clothing, jewellery, fake cigarette and tobacco, pets with false certification, footwear, handbags, perfume, make-up as well as having confiscated large amounts of illegally imported alcohol.

The authority also relaunched the continuing campaign against scammers by raising awareness and suspicion on things such as:

- Out of the blue phone calls, letters and emails
- Being asked to send money to claim a prize
- Being told of winnings when a competition wasn't entered into
- 'Too good to be true' offers
- Pressure selling
- Uninvited door step callers
- Being asked share your personal details
- Secrecy

Every year, scams and scammers dupe UK consumers out of around £9 billion, not to mention the devastating psychological effects on the victims they leave behind.

Essex County Council has identified and dealt with more than 3,000 scams within the county in the past year, but the real figure is estimated to be at least three times higher.

Any information about sales of counterfeit goods can be given by calling the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline who handle calls for Trading Standards on 03454 040506.

Communications

A New Digital Subscription called "Keep me Posted", was launched last April to Essex residents who will now be able to subscribe to a tailored news and information service from the Council; this service gives updates on road works, gritting, the latest information from schools or libraries, or a 'what's on' guide to local events and activities, and it sends all these latest information direct to a registered email account. So far well over 140,000 residents have signed up, which represents 10% of the Essex population.

To sign up simply visit the Council's website www.essex.gov.uk and click on "Keep Me Posted" button.

Recycling

Essex County Council's Funding and Investment Team secured a one off funding of £900,000 of government money, the largest pot of cash in the UK handed by DCLG, and was awarded equally to four Councils in Essex, which includes Tendring, Braintree, Epping Forest and Harlow; this money was earmarked to boost recycling amongst households and in schools.

Essex County Council's Funding and Investment Team help to facilitate and prepare this partnership bid.

Tendring District Council has used part of their share for the provision of free biodegradable liners for the food-waste caddies and part in a comprehensive recycling awareness campaign.

The Young Essex Assembly (YEA) fully engaged with the programme and The Rolf C.of E. Primary School in Thorpe-le-Soken was the first school in Essex to take up food waste recycling, which has led the way to the rest of the County.

Education

From September 2015 the new controversial Home to School Policy came into force; the Policy states that new pupils will receive free home to school transport if they attend the nearest secondary school to their home address 3 miles or more from the home and in line with legislation on school transport. In some cases this has precluded some children to attend the historical school of their choice because of the extra expense that parents would have had to bear. In our district only a small number of households have been affected.

There are exceptions for families on low income where the annual household income is less than £16,190.

Priority admission, or living in a catchment areas is no longer a relevant factor when assessing whether a child is entitled to free home to school transport.

Once again Essex has returned some impressive figures on A-Level results with a marked improvement across all key measures.

More than 4,000 students were entered in Essex schools, initial results show that of all the grades awarded, 78.3% were A*-C and almost 99% were A* - E.

GCSE results also showed improvement on last year figures climbing from 56.5% in 2014 to 58.4 per cent in 2015 of pupils achieving 5 or more A* - C grades including English and maths.– the equivalent of about 300 extra pupils.

Essex Primary School pupils have too improved SATS benchmark results by showing 81% of 11-year-olds achieving level 4 or higher in their tests in the three subjects in 2015 – a 2% rise from 2014. They have also improved on its ranking against all authorities which now is 51st out of 151.

3150 new Primary and Secondary school places were created in time for new academic year in September, following record investment of almost £48million; even though a large percentage of schools in Essex are now Academies the County Council is still the responsible authority for the provision of school places.

A new campaign “Teach in Essex” was launched in the autumn to attract teachers to our County with the aims to promote Essex as an excellent place to both teach and live.

The Council is working closely with the Association of Secondary Head teachers in Essex (ASHE) and Essex Primary Head teachers' Association (EPHA) and the campaign will primarily target areas of the country where there is a known surplus of teachers which has been identified in the north of England.

Vacancies and more information about teaching in Essex can be found at <http://www.essexschoolsjobs.co.uk/>