

Essex County Council report November 2016

Application period open for primary school places

Parents in Essex are being encouraged to apply for their children's primary school places.

Children are entitled to start school in the September after their fourth birthday and applications can now be made for children starting reception from September 2017.

Parents and carers of children born during the period 1 September 2012 and 31 August 2013 must apply between 14 November 2016 and 15 January 2017.

Late applications, submitted after the deadline on 15 January, will only be considered once all on-time applications have been determined.

Applications can be made online at www.essex.gov.uk/admissions

Parents are encouraged to use all four of their preferences and use the website to search for the school information and check admissions criteria.

Pupils thriving as Essex achieves best ever school attendance figures

Attendance at schools in Essex is at its highest since records began, according to data published by the Department for Education last month.

Statistics for the autumn and spring terms in 2015/16 show the percentage of sessions missed in state-funded primary schools in Essex was 3.7% – above both the national and East of England averages, which were 3.9%

The figure means Essex enjoys its best ever ranking of 29th out of 151 local authorities.

At secondary level, the percentage of sessions missed in Essex was 4.8% compared with 5% nationally and 4.9% for the East of England, meaning the county remains ranked 54th.

The increase in school attendance rates comes as Essex enjoys much improved Ofsted ratings and amid continued exam success for the county.

More than nine in ten Essex schools are currently rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, while the average Attainment 8* score and percentage of Key Stage 2 pupils achieving at least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths are both above the national averages.

The statistics contained within this release are based on data published by the Department for Education on Thursday, 20 October 2016. They can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-2015-and-spring-2016>

Autumn and Spring absence 2015/16 –

- Essex primary schools – Overall 3.69%, authorised 3.01% and unauthorised 0.69%
- Essex secondary schools – Overall 4.79%, authorised 3.69% and unauthorised 1.10%

Data refers to all state-funded schools, which includes academies

Schools are required to split the school day into two sessions, morning and afternoon, and absence data is based on these ‘sessions’

*Attainment 8 is one of the Government’s new GCSE performance measures and is a pupil’s average grade across a set of eight subjects.

Superfast rollout to reach even more remote areas

Thousands more homes and businesses in the most rural areas of Essex are to be given access to superfast broadband in a new phase of Essex County Council’s Superfast Essex programme launched this week.

Superfast Essex Phase 3 will invest up to £10million of public money in the areas of the county which still experience the lowest levels of superfast broadband availability. The plan also includes an initiative to achieve 100% superfast broadband coverage in Tendring District.

The next phase of work will build on the success of the Phase 1 rollout to 65,000 homes and businesses which completed three months ahead of schedule in June this year, and the Phase 2 rollout which is currently on track to reach 120,000 and provide 95% coverage across Essex by 2019.

Phase 3 will bring together savings from the existing Superfast Essex programme, contributions from Tendring District Council and Uttlesford District Council, and a new grant from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) – the team within Government overseeing the national superfast broadband rollout.

The tender for the new rollout was launched on Thursday 10 November and the requirement has been split into four separate zones, known as ‘Lots’.

Across the four Lots, an estimated 24,000 premises are eligible for inclusion in the Phase 3 rollout. The actual number of properties to be included will be determined during the procurement process. The lots are split as follows:

- Uttlesford District – 5,500 premises. One of the most rural districts in the county with significantly poor connectivity.
- Central North – 4,500 premises. This includes parts of Braintree, Colchester and Chelmsford districts.
- Tendring District – 5,500 premises. To help Tendring District reach 100% superfast broadband coverage.
- South East – 8,500 premises. This includes rural areas along the coastline of Maldon and Rochford districts and parts of Castle Point and Basildon districts.

Phase 3 will consider all technologies capable of providing superfast speeds, not just fibre. The new approach recognises the rurality of the remaining areas and the need to use alternative solutions and opens up the potential for smaller network operators to partner with the County Council to get the job done.

Tendring District Council Cabinet has long recognised the importance of superfast broadband to both businesses and residents alike, as this very important requirement cannot be underestimated in today's society, and it created a Cabinet position with special responsibility for Broadband. As such, TDC is firmly committed to achieving as near to 100% superfast coverage as is practicable.

The procurement process will take several months, and it is expected delivery partner(s) will be awarded contracts in May next year.

Superfast Essex held an Open Market Review (OMR) of broadband availability and a public consultation to identify the properties eligible for investment in Phase 3. Under EU State Aid rules, Superfast Essex is not allowed to invest where another broadband network operator is already providing a service. For more information about this process, feedback to the consultation, and to view an interactive map of broadband availability visit: www.superfastessex.org/whats happening next

A new scheme has been launched by ECC's Superfast Essex programme

Local communities will be able to access a public Wi-Fi service in community buildings or 'hubs'.

Superfast Essex is the county's broadband improvement programme which is working to make Essex one of the best connected counties in the UK. With the infrastructure being upgraded across the county over the next few years, Superfast

Essex plans to support local communities in experiencing superfast speeds at their local community hubs, encouraging them to see how it might benefit them at home.

Under the scheme, community hubs (such as village halls or community centres) can buy a broadband service from two approved suppliers, APC Solutions or County Broadband. Initial set up costs will be supported by the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) and community hubs will subsequently need to pay a monthly service charge. Money from the CIF has been set aside to help community hubs pay for the setup costs of a Wi-Fi service as offered by the two service providers under this scheme. Up to £400 can be claimed per community hub by completing a short online form similar to the general CIF application process.

The Community Wi-Fi Scheme is supported by the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) and the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC).

More information on the Community Wi-Fi Scheme including costs and how to apply can be found at www.superfastessex.org/communitywifischeme and application forms for funding for the Community Wi-Fi Scheme can be found on the CIF website at www.essex.gov.uk/CIF. Both companies involved in the scheme can be contacted via their respective websites below:

www.apcsolutionsuk.com

www.countybroadband.co.uk

Streetlights in Essex will be illuminated in the early hours of Christmas Day and New Year's Day

For the third year in a row ECC will be keeping all lights on across the county in the early hours of 25 December and 1 January 2017. This announcement has been made especially early this year to support those planning celebrations.

Part Night Lighting (PNL) operates on a majority of streetlights across Essex between 1am and 5am (midnight until 5am on Monday mornings). PNL saves taxpayers approximately £1.4 million a year. The savings are part of a wider eco-friendly push, which includes the rollout of 19,000 energy-saving LED lights on all-night streetlights across the county which began this summer.

Essex County Council streetlights remain on in areas where well-established exemption criteria apply.

Social Care funding

With the Chancellor due to give his first Autumn Statement later this month Cllr David Finch has said that Social Care funding must be his top priority. In the past few weeks the likes of the Care Quality Commission, as well as various think tanks have stated, quite rightly that social care is at crisis point nationally.

In Essex more than £1million a day is currently spent on Adult Social Care. This figure is increasing, and at the same time we are seeing a rapid increase in the older population. Over 85s currently make up over 51% of users in Adult Social Care. Over the next 10 years this will grow by 50% - and in 20 years' time, the money we are spending on adult social care today would only cover care for the over 85s

But while the older population continues to rise, according to Age UK, spending on social care has fallen in the UK by £770m over the last five years.

Council Tax rises are not a long term solution. Last year saw the Government allow councils to implement a two percent 'social care levy' on to Council Tax bills to help address the funding issue, but this is not a long term solution. For ECC this equated to £11million – or two weeks cover. This does little to address the issue, and we simply cannot accept local taxpayers funding what is a national problem.

Ahead of the Autumn Statement Cllr Finch has written to the Chancellor setting out three key asks

- Bring forward the Better Care Funding planned for 2020. A pot of money already approved by Government this could provide much needed social care investment now.
- Protect investment into public health, and reverse £160m of public health savings planned for the next two years. These savings create a false economy and will lead to greater pressures on the NHS.
- Give Councils clarity on any future planned reforms enabling them to plan for the future.

New hospital stop for Colchester Park and Ride

Staff, patients and visitors to Colchester General Hospital will soon be able to take advantage of a new Park and Ride stop. The new stop means hospital goers can now park at Essex County Council's conveniently placed Park and Ride car park just off Junction 28 of the A12 offering 1,000 spaces.

They can then buy a day, week or monthly ticket and hop on the regular Park and Ride bus which will drop them to and from the hospital from 7am to approximately 7pm.

The stop will be situated on the Northern Approach Road, just a short walk from the main entrance. Buses are due to begin using the stop in the New Year.

A daily ticket, which allows unlimited travel throughout the day it is purchase, costs just £3 with discounted fares for under 16s. Concessionary pass holders qualify for free travel after 9am.

Cllr Eddie Johnson, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, said: "Visiting the hospital can be a stressful time for a lot of people, even before you contemplate searching for a parking space on site.

"That is why we have introduced this new service, in partnership with Colchester Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust, to ensure a cost-effective option for those visiting the hospital.

"The site is conveniently placed and with a large number of parking spaces and regular buses throughout the day

"With an all-day ticket costing just £3, we are confident that the new bus service will prove a huge hit with staff, patients and visitors alike."

Chris Howlett, Director of Estates and Facilities at the Trust, said: "We welcome the Park and Ride service stopping at Colchester General Hospital. This will provide a convenient and affordable travel option for getting to and from the site, help to ease congestion and at the same time encourage use of more sustainable transport for local people."

Work to build the new stop is set to begin in the No one in Essex needs to suffer because of the cold

No one in Essex needs to suffer

is the message Essex County Council is sending residents today.

During the winter months, lots of people suffer because of the cold and the 'Stay well this winter' campaign has been launched to address this.

Winter conditions can be bad for our health, particularly for those most vulnerable. So this winter, Essex County Council's Public Health team are teaming up with partners and organisations across Essex to keep the county's most vulnerable residents well and warm.

The 'Stay Well this Winter' campaign was today launched by Director of Public Health, Mike Gogarty and Cabinet Member for Health, Cllr Graham Butland and aims to highlight how people can keep well this winter and signpost those at risk this winter to help and support in their local area.

The campaign also aims to raise awareness of the importance of making sure people's homes are ready for winter and to keep warm when temperatures drop.

Mike Gogarty, Director of Public Health at Essex County Council, said: "In this day and age no one should be suffering because of the cold and certainly no one should be dying as a result. We are working with key providers and organisations across the county to ensure our most vulnerable residents stay well and warm this winter.

"Older people tend to be most vulnerable as they are often less active, spend more time indoors and have reduced muscle and body fat to help insulate them from the cold. This can increase the likelihood of a heart attack, stroke, pneumonia, and other chest diseases. We hope that the awareness raised by this campaign and the advice given will help people understand what support is available and where to go for help."

Cllr Graham Butland, Cabinet Member for Health, said: "The cold should not be the cause of anyone's health deteriorating. So it's crucial to prepare both yourself and your home before the cold weather arrives. For your home, ensure it's well insulated and that your boiler has been serviced recently.

"We would also encourage people to look out for elderly or vulnerable friends, relatives and neighbours, for whom keeping warm this winter could be a matter of life or death. Check to see that their homes are ready for the colder weather, if they have stocks of food and enough medicines so that they don't need to go out in really bad weather, and, when the weather is milder, encourage them to stay active and wrap up well when they go out."

According to Age UK, every winter in the UK, one older person dies needlessly every seven minutes. No one should die because of the cold. With greater awareness about winter health it is hoped that people know what to do to prepare for winter, and where to go for support.

For over 65s the cold weather can be very harmful as it weakens the immune system, increases blood pressure, thickens the blood and lowers body temperature, increasing risks of high blood pressure so it is important to be aware of what support is available and what you can do to help protect those you care for.

The NHS advises that at the first sign of a cough or cold you should get immediate advice from your pharmacist before it gets more serious. They also suggest thinking about any medicines that you or your family may need during the winter months to

make sure that you have enough and also ensure you pick any prescriptions up before the Christmas holidays because of closures.

For over 65s, those with long term conditions and children aged between 2 and 7, the flu vaccination is also available free, and those in these priority groups are urged to book in to get theirs done as soon as possible. It is estimated that several million people get flu each winter, leading to more than 2,000 NHS intensive care admissions across the UK last year.

Keeping your home warm this winter is also key to making sure you stay well. Your home should be heated your home to at least 18°C (65°F). Many people worry about the cost of heating but the success of the Essex Energy Switch, people can be confident that when they turn up the heating, they are still getting value for money.

The collective energy switching initiative is for people who want to cut their energy bills. It's a free, easy and secure way to cut energy bills without wasting time comparing prices on comparison sites and last year residents saved approximately £263 per household.

For more information on the energy switch visit www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch

You may also be eligible for support towards your fuel payments, visit <https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/overview> for more information.

For more information on how to stay well this winter, visit <http://www.livingwellessex.org/health-and-well-being/taking-care-of-yourself/stay-well-this-winter/>

For NHS advice on how to keep healthy this winter- <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Winterhealth/Pages/Winterhealthhome.aspx> coming weeks.