

ECC Report January 2019

Primary School Admissions

Parents of children are reminded that the closing date for Primary School Admission, which opened on 12th November, did close on 15th January 2019 for the academic year starting in September 2019; the start

Children are entitled to start primary school in the September after their fourth birthday so parents and carers of children born between 1 Sept 2014 and 31 August 2015 need to apply.

For anyone who has missed the deadline they can still apply on line, but there is no guarantee that a place will be offered. For more information ring **0345 603 2200**, or watch the very useful video clip below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3V8Sa3hITu4&feature=youtu.be>

Further information about the admissions process and individual schools can be found at

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/EducationSchools/Schools/Admissions/Pages/Admissions.aspx>

Essex Children's Social Care rated Outstanding

Essex County Council is celebrating the fantastic news of achieving an Outstanding rating from Ofsted for its children's social care services.

Following a period of assessment in November 2018 Inspectors judged the local authority to be outstanding in its services to children, with consistently high standards applied across the county, innovative and high quality help and support available and a well-trained and highly skilled workforce.

The report in particular praised the staff and social workers, highlighting that "Staff enjoy working in Essex; morale and motivation are high. Workers describe the work they are able to undertake with children and families as the reason they came into social work." And that "Social workers know children very well. They demonstrate a good understanding of their needs and plans and are passionate about securing and sustaining improvements in their lives."

Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Children and Families said: “This Outstanding rating is simply the best way to start the New Year. It is a fantastic achievement to all working in children’s social care in Essex and I want to say thank you to each and every person who has played a part in making Essex Ofsted Outstanding. The journey to becoming an Outstanding children’s social care service has been greatly rewarding. We have invested in our staff, improved practice and developed innovative methods but all the time we have ensured at the heart of everything is the drive to improve the lives of our vulnerable children and their families. I could not be more proud of this achievement. Congratulations to all involved.”

The report also highlighted that the strong political and corporate support has meant the local authority has been able to manage demand and prioritise children’s needs across the council, with praise for senior leaders in their pursuit of excellence for children.

The full Ofsted report can be found at www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Central government grant

Local Councils across the country will once again be able to put up Council Tax by 3% with a further 1% for social care. ECC, following Government direction took up the option of a stepped increase of 3% in 2017/18, 2% in 2018/19, and 1% in 2019/20

Essex County Council leader David Finch said that he was very disappointed with headlines from the finance settlement for Essex, with no changes or improvements to what was expected. There were few surprises other than the small slice of a national business rates surplus, with no opportunity for Essex to benefit from becoming one of the business rate pilot schemes announced by the Secretary of State last year.

This latter omission is a shame, as this would have enabled the Council to retain three quarters of the business rates collected locally and then decide locally here in Essex to decide where and how that money should be spent, as opposed to Whitehall deciding.

There are still significant challenges ahead. Austerity might be ending, but its effects are still here, and there will be a need to make some tough choices in the next couple of years. It is worth highlighting that Conservative Administrations have achieved savings of well over £700million since 2010.

Providing services today in the way that they have been provided over the past 20 years ago will not work; in a digital world where everyone works differently, bank differently, shop differently, and there is a great need to embrace that, so services can be delivered to reflect how people live today.

There is also the ever-present need to continue to look after the most vulnerable; Essex communities are an ever-ageing, ever-growing population with ever-more complex needs. But the Council is fully committed to protecting Essex's vulnerable children and older people as ever.

These are challenges which need to be faced and overcome as the budget is finalized for the coming financial year.

The Budget meeting will take place on Tuesday 12th February.

The right bus services for the people of Essex

On Wednesday 19th December Essex County Council launched a consultation to find out more about how important evening and Sunday local bus services are to the county's residents and to ask them for their views on some proposed changes to how those services are delivered.

With low passenger numbers on some services, the County Council is looking again at the way it supports local bus services on evenings and Sundays.

Around 85% of the bus network in Essex is run commercially; this includes most of the daytime and peak period services in and between towns. These services will not form part of this consultation.

The remaining 15% of services are not commercially viable and are subsidised by the County Council; this means that the commercial bus operators will not run them. These non-commercial services mainly operate in rural areas and at less popular times for travel, such as in the evenings and on Sundays. The supported and evening services (buses that operate after 10pm) are the ones that are being reviewed. In particular we are reviewing supported services that run after 10pm on weekdays and 11pm on Saturdays; and on Sundays reviewing services that run after 7pm and run more frequently than two hourly.

The consultation also looks at how we might develop the right type of service to meet the travel needs of residents and visitors by making more use of a wider variety of ways for providing services, such as smaller vehicles, 'demand responsive' transport or taxi-buses.

Residents will also be asked their views on giving local communities and their representatives at district, town and parish level the opportunity and funding to commission local bus services in their area, based on their understanding of local needs and where this can be done more cost effectively.

Cabinet Member, Cllr Ray Gooding said that the County Council has a strong record of supporting local bus services particularly in comparison with other local transport authorities who have significantly reduced the level of support that they offer.

At present the Council spends around £9m of taxpayers money on these services each year. However with the number of passengers in some cases falling below six per journey, coupled with the strong financial pressure on all local government funding, means a very carefully look on how these services will be provided in future to ensure that the limited funding available is focused where it will do most good and where the local communities need it.

The council recognize that buses are important to many people. The consultation is the opportunity to have your say on these proposals. It's imperative that any comments or concerns should be included within the consultation, all of which will be considered.

Essex County Council has made £750million of savings since 2010 and there is a continued financial pressure on all services, which means that there is an ongoing need to reform and re-invent these services, which cannot be delivered as they were in previous years.

The consultation was launched on Wednesday 19th December 2018 and will run until 22nd March 2019.

The consultation can be accessed at www.essex.gov.uk/local-bus-consultation

Paper versions are also available to collect from all libraries and on request.

Residents can also complete the consultation over the phone by calling 03457 430 430 or e-mailing passenger.transport@essex.gov.uk.