

# **Report on Essex County Council News For Parish Councils**

**July 2019**

**Cllr Penny Channer – County Councillor for the Maldon Division**

## **Full Council 9 July 2019**

During Essex County Council's (ECC) Full Council meeting today, Tuesday 9 July, Essex County Council's Leader Cllr David Finch announced radical changes to the libraries strategy, including the commitment that no library will close for five years.

Addressing ECC members before the final strategy was to be published the following week Cllr Finch acknowledged that we have listened to what communities said they wanted and needed.

ECC published its final libraries strategy for approval at Cabinet on 23 July. The strategy has been finalised following a comprehensive consultation on the draft strategy. The consultation took place between November 2018 and January 2019.

There was a significant response to the consultation with over 21,000 responses, over 1000 letters and over 50 petitions received. Respondents made it clear that libraries are not just about books or computers – but that they are spaces too for people to meet, learn and exchange ideas.

The new strategy focuses on two key elements:

- Developing an investment plan to improve libraries
- Work with and support community groups or other partners to set up community run libraries, with the aim of ensuring a library service is retained in every current location.

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Since launching the consultation a number of organisations came forward with an expression of interest to run a community library. The new strategy commits to supporting those community libraries with a universal offer of support.

We assured everyone that their feedback would be taken into account, and it has- all our libraries now have a future.

This is a new, exciting chapter for libraries in Essex. It will be a service fit for the 21 century that is genuinely in the hands of communities and local users, who can help mould it to what they want and need.

At the Cabinet Meeting on 23 July the Cabinet made the decision to approve the future libraries strategy following the months of engagement, public consultation and significant work to ensure that there is a service fit for a modern age.

ECC understand people are keen to know what will happen to their local library and now that the final strategy has been approved we can get to work on developing more detailed plans, which will enable us to develop work with communities which will shape the future of local libraries. ECC hope to share these plans in the Autumn.

The strategy (2019 -2024) , which is available to view at <https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation> , proposes a future for every single library in Essex, as well as giving the service the opportunity to expand.

## **WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE LONELINESS**

Essex County Council have announced a new county wide approach to tackle loneliness and social isolation in communities across Essex. The council wants to work with communities to find ways to better connect people to create a sense of belonging.

Working with “Provide CIC” as a strategic partner, and delivery partners the Rural Community Council Essex and WECAN, the emphasis is on helping communities build their resilience and support them with existing initiatives that already challenge loneliness and increase the sense of community in Essex’s towns and villages.

Across Essex, community groups, local businesses, charities and individuals are finding their own innovative and creative ways to tackle loneliness. From initiatives such as Meet Up Mondays where people come together for a coffee, cake and a chat, through to Community Hubs which have specific support groups and activities, the new approach to tackle loneliness and social isolation champions these local solutions and helps them grow – believing everyone has something to offer to their communities.

Recently commissioned research\* shows that residents across Essex believe that the way to challenge loneliness is by building stronger, friendlier, more inclusive communities while also realising that while everyone may feel lonely at some point in their life, little acts of kindness can make a difference. The research also showed that those people who felt better connected and had a sense of belonging to a place were less likely to feel lonely. Supporting the new model of giving the power to the community to create the support systems they know people want and need.

Understanding the power of communities has led Essex County Council to continue to invest in Social Prescribing across Essex. Social prescribing is ‘more than just

medicine' – it's a way to help people find support with their social, emotional and practical wellbeing. The Live Well Link Well Navigation service supports individuals to identify issues affecting their health and wellbeing and then works with them to maintain their independence and find practical, emotional and appropriate support in their local community – strengthening those community links at the same time.

Recognising some people may want and need more structured help to tackle loneliness and feel part of their local community, Essex County Council has also funded a new service to promote social engagement called Essex Befriends, as well as continuing to fund the support via sensory services to connect with those with a sensory need.

ECC's approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation brings together partners, providers, the community and individuals. Ranging from putting people in touch with a local group, through to more structured befriending services – there is a range of support available and no one needs to feel alone.

### **Fighting for funding for a better Army and Navy junction**

The Army and Navy Flyover regrettably had to be closed again towards the end of July. ECC recognises that our residents deserve better, that there is no time to waste and government must support our funding bids immediately.

With a new Secretary of State for Transport in post, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure has written to The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP to urgently push for a quicker decision on this vital junction and speed up investment on a solution to manage Chelmsford traffic.

The decision to close the Army and Navy flyover on 26 July followed the extremely high temperatures of that week, which caused the base of a supporting column to shift. The flyover is now closed indefinitely, which will put additional pressure on a highways network operating at near capacity.

For over 40 years, Army and Navy Flyover has been a vital piece of infrastructure in Chelmsford even though it was originally built as a temporary structure. 60,000 vehicles use the junction each day with 10,000 passing over the flyover and most importantly, the flyover reaches 97% capacity in the morning peak and 95% in the afternoon peak. The cost of delay to the local economy at the Army and Navy roundabout is already estimated to be £4.85 million per annum and this is likely to be further exacerbated by prolonged closures such as we experienced last year and may experience again now.

The Army and Navy taskforce, established by Essex County Council in 2018, has been working hard to deliver a long-term solution to the Army and Navy junction and eight potential options have been shortlisted and engineers are undertaking detailed work including design, traffic modelling and costings.

However, plans to improve the Army and Navy took a major step forward very recently. On 1 August 2019 officials from the Department for Transport confirmed they recognised the urgency of the project and pledged to work with Essex County Council and Chelmsford City Council to deliver a long-term solution.

In the meeting held at County Hall the Department for Transport confirmed they not only want a long-term resolution that is palatable to residents but also that they are interested in a short-term solution following the recent closure.

Cllr Kevin Bentley considers it his duty, to the people of Chelmsford and Essex, to accelerate the delivery of this project and ensure we find a long-term solution to the Army and Navy junction.

The Army and Navy Taskforce will continue to meet over the summer to work on the short-term solutions for the flyover and how to mitigate traffic congestion and disruption while the flyover remains closed. Over the next two weeks engineers will be on site doing more discovery work on whether it is safe to reopen the flyover and the public will be kept informed of these findings.

### **Ultrafast broadband plans for new phase of work confirmed**

Full fibre broadband is on its way for several thousand more homes and businesses in Essex as a result of a new phase of the Superfast Essex programme.

Essex County Council has signed three new contracts with network operator Openreach to bring ultrafast fibre broadband to more than 3,700 homes and businesses under a Phase 4b of the broadband programme.

The work has been made possible by a £5million grant awarded from DEFRA's Rural Development Programme for England to provide ultrafast broadband to just under 1,000 rural businesses in Essex. In addition, Openreach has confirmed a further 2,700 homes will benefit from a full fibre network upgrade as a result of its own commercial investment.

Phase 4b is split into three separate contracts, which will include upgrades to some parts of the following local authority areas:

- 4b.4 will include parts of Brentwood, Chelmsford, Harlow and Uttlesford
- 4b.5 will include parts of Castle Point, Colchester, Maldon, Rochford and Tendring
- 4b.6 will include parts of Thurrock

Work is due to start in July 2020 and complete by March 2021 for 4b.4 and 4b.5. Work in Thurrock under 4b.6 is due to start in October 2020 and complete by December 2020.

The additional network upgrades will add to the existing and planned superfast broadband coverage being enabled by the Superfast Essex programme, bringing the new total to be reached after all current plans are complete to 158,300 homes and businesses.

The technology rolled out by Openreach under the Superfast Essex programme has historically included mostly Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) upgrades but most of the remaining network build, including all of Phase 4b, will be completed using the latest ultrafast Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP) technology. And once built, the network will provide broadband speeds of up to 1Gbps – enough bandwidth for a family of four to all stream ultra HD or 4k quality movies or TV simultaneously, without waiting or buffering.

The Superfast Essex programme has so far enabled 125,000 homes and businesses to access superfast broadband in Essex with its network delivery partners Openreach and Gigaclear across 10 contracts, eight of which are still ongoing. Phase 4b will increase the total of live contracts with Openreach alone to eight.

To find out if your address is able to access superfast speeds or due to be upgraded as part of the Superfast Essex programme, visit the Superfast Essex interactive map. If fibre broadband is available, remember nobody is automatically connected, you have to contact a service provider and ask to upgrade.

## **Let us know about private fostering arrangements**

Essex County Council is reminding residents that if there is a child living with them for more than 28 days that isn't a close relative it is a legal requirement to let the county council know.

A close relative is defined as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or step parent and if any arrangement falls out of these boundaries it is known as a private fostering arrangement.

By letting the County Council know of any arrangement the council can ensure the child – under 16 or 18 if disabled – is safe and cared for, as well as offering advice and support to the carers.

The following are examples of a private fostering arrangement

- A young person living with the family of a boyfriend, girlfriend or a friend.
- A child or young person living with an extended family member, for example a Great Aunt or Cousin
- A child or young person living with a family friend, perhaps as a result of parental separation, arguments at home or because their parents are overseas or working away.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families has stated that a private fostering arrangement can be a great option for some young people and in the majority of cases these children are well looked after, and all their needs are met. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure our children are safe and protected so if you are in a private fostering agreement or know someone who is please let us know and we can provide support if needed.

To find out more or to make a referral to the Private Fostering Team please contact [www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/](http://www.essexeffectivesupport.org.uk/) or by contacting The Children and Families Hub on 0345 603 7627

## **Improve your English & Maths skills with Adult Community Learning (ACL)**

ACL Essex is nationally recognised as the 4th best provider for our exceptional GCSE English and Maths pass rates.

ACL offer GCSEs in English, Maths, Biology, Chemistry and Computer Science.

Whether you're looking to change career or increase your qualifications and confidence, ACL are here to help. Find out more and enrol onto a GCSE assessment.

Need to brush up on your English & maths skills before enrolling on a GCSE? ACL have free\* English and maths courses that will help to improve your confidence and gain a qualification.

## **School holiday activity days**

Essex Outdoors are offering fun-packed school holiday activity days for 8-16-year olds this summer.

Activities range from archery to canoeing, climbing to high ropes and are available at Bradwell, Danbury, Harlow and Mersea centres.

As well as activity days, every Saturday over the summer, you can have a go at Archery, Caving, Climbing and much more at Essex Outdoors Danbury and Mersea. Tickets are from £8 per hour or £20 for a family ticket.

For more information, visit Essex Outdoors to book school holiday activity days or pay and play sessions.

## **School term dates released**

The school term and holiday dates have now been published for the 2020-2021 academic year .

Visit the Essex County Council website to view them or download a copy to keep handy

### **Make a difference to your community**

Essex County Council's Ugobus team are looking for caring, compassionate and friendly people to join as a minibus driver.

Ugobus (formerly Community Link) delivers tailored transport for businesses, residents and public sector organisations throughout Essex using our modern and fresh fleet of minibuses that are accessible for all.

A fully funded training package is available to ensure that you're qualified to drive the minibuses as well as flexible shifts and an industry competitive wage.

To find out more, visit Ugobus or call 03330 139 489.