

County Councillor's Report February 2021

As I write, we have had significant rain over the past few weeks, with flooding affecting many roads and properties. The Council will respond as soon as possible, but it is important to understand that it is not an emergency service and cannot deploy to distressed areas straight away. Blocked drains cannot be cleared if under deep water, and it may be where they discharge to is already full and backing up in any case.

Homeowners who have unfortunately experienced flooding **inside** their property may be able to seek financial help through a grant scheme run by the County Council. This is for flood prevention measures to stop water coming in again, such as flood barriers for doors, non-return valves for drainpipes, sump pumps and airbricks that automatically seal when water levels rise. We can offer a maximum of £8000 per property.

Ultimately homeowners are responsible for their property and are advised to check if they are in a flood prone area, and if so, register for flood alerts with the Environment Agency and to ensure their insurance is all in place. If they know they are vulnerable to flooding it is prudent to have some protective measures to hand in case the worst happens.

Please go to the ECC Flood website launch page for further details and how to report a flood.

<https://flood.essex.gov.uk>

Here you will also find a useful video here which describes in some detail where responsibilities rest regarding land ownership and flood risk.

New fast Covid-19 centre opens in Uttlesford district

From Monday 25 January, a new fast testing centre will be available in the Uttlesford district for those residents who DO NOT have symptoms of Covid-19.

The new testing centre will be located at Saffron Walden ECL, 39 Audley Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 3HD.

The site is the latest testing centre to open in Essex, following recent sites set-up at Waterside Farm Leisure Centre in Canvey Island, Braintree at Witham Town Football Club, Colchester Leisure World, Long Meadows in Tendring, Rayleigh at the Megacentre, the Civic Centre in Harlow, the Nightingale Centre in Brentwood, the Towngate Theatre in Basildon, The Place Leisure Centre in Pitsea, Theydon Bois Village Hall in Epping Forest and Central Baptist Church in Chelmsford.

These centres are among the first of their kind in the region, offering new and fast Lateral Flow Tests to the wider population. The tests are ONLY for people for who DO NOT have symptoms and give results in around 30 minutes.

Tests are by appointment only and bookings should be made online. Anyone booking should live in the Uttlesford district. Tests can be booked here: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/getting-tested-for-covid-19/if-you-dont-have-symptoms>

Booking online is the quickest and most effective option for residents seeking a Lateral Flow Test.

Residents can also book by calling **0333 772 6144** to arrange an appointment. Lines are open from 8am to 8pm every day, including Saturday and Sunday.

They can also email: booking.confirmation@nhs.net and a member of staff will contact them to arrange an appointment.

Anyone WITH symptoms should book a test via the NHS Test and Trace App, or online here: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

This additional centre has been established in response to the current infection rate in Uttlesford which has reached 440.3 per 100,000 (according to the latest available data here: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/local-outbreak-control-plan/data-cases-in-essex-by-district>).

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex's Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, said: "Infection rates in Uttlesford are significant and local health services there and across the county are currently under strain as a result of the new variant of Covid-19. A 'critical incident' had been declared across Essex with critical care and bed capacity rising as well as high staff sickness and self-isolation levels.

"This additional testing centre will allow us to test even more people where we continue to see high rates. Thousands of people have already been tested at the fast testing centres we have opened.

"Testing people who feel well will help to identify the hidden cases in the community – people who may be unwittingly infecting others. If you test positive following one of the new fast tests, you will be asked to self-isolate, and take a further test to confirm the initial result. If positive, you will also be required to disclose any close contacts to the local or national contact tracing service.

"It is absolutely vital that in addition to these efforts, everyone continues to adhere to the appropriate Covid-19 guidance. This includes working from home wherever possible and socially distancing, particularly in indoor settings that are permitted to remain open, such as essential shops and supermarkets. Behave as if those around you have Covid-19 and maintain a two-metre distance from anyone outside of your household or support bubble at all times."

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Adults and Health at Essex County Council, said: "We are absolutely determined to do all we can to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in Essex, especially in the areas where we are seeing cases continue to increase considerably as a result of the new variant. "Targeted testing programmes are one part of how we will continue to tackle the virus, in addition to everyone playing their part in following the latest lockdown rules to limit the spread. An appointment to carry out a Covid-19 test will count as an essential journey under the lockdown rules."

Local vaccination roll-out ramps up

With more doses of the Covid-19 vaccine now available, the NHS has been able to expand its vaccination services, including opening new vaccination centres. In Essex, the first vaccination centre opened this week (18 January) in Wickford - marking the next milestone in the roll-out of vaccinations across both the county and nationally.

The vaccination programme will see individuals over 80, care home residents and staff and frontline health and social care workers who are most at risk of catching Covid-19, among those who are

vaccinated first. As more locations go live, the programme will increase and expand to other priority groups.

These new centres are the important third strand of the NHS Covid-19 vaccination plan, sitting alongside hospital hubs and local GP-led vaccination services, both of which will continue to grow in scale as the supplies of vaccine available to the NHS continues to grow. Pharmacy-led vaccination services in Essex will also be joining the vaccination programme in the next few weeks.

The NHS or GP will contact residents in those priority groups to make an appointment when it's their turn to get the vaccine. It will not be possible to use the NHS Covid-19 Vaccination Booking Service if you haven't received an invitation letter.

Cllr John Spence, ECC's Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, said: "All eyes are on the vaccination programme now. I know that everyone in the priority groups is desperate to hear from the NHS, if they haven't already, and others are looking for roll-out into their age groups or occupation group. The NHS are doing a great job in rolling out this major programme and Essex County Council will give them as much support as we can.

"If you haven't heard, do please be patient - we are assured your turn will come."

Testing

ECC has introduced new fast testing centres across the county for residents who do not have Covid-19 symptoms. Residents who are not showing symptoms can take a Lateral Flow Test which gives results in around 30 minutes.

This approach to testing will help to identify the hidden cases in the community – people who may be unwittingly infecting others – and allow them to self-isolate.

Cllr Spence added: "The Essex testing strategy is country-leading, both in terms of its scale and the variety of access points – our new, fast-testing centres in each of our districts are the first of their kind in the region.

"The more we test, the quicker we identify, the faster we isolate, the less the spread."

More information about the Covid-19 vaccine and testing can be found in our [Coronavirus Hub](#).

Stop Press: Great Leighs (Chelmsford City) Race Course has opened as a mass vaccination site as of Monday Feb 1st.

Laptops to help children to study at home

"Closing the Digital Divide" is an Essex County Council (ECC) initiative, aimed at providing laptops to children and young people, who would otherwise be without access to a device at home.

By the end of next week, some 3,000 iPads, Chromebooks and laptops will have been distributed to schools across the county for them to give to families in need.

The scheme, launched in autumn 2020, saw 500 devices delivered before Christmas to colleges across Essex and to schools in Basildon, which had to move to online learning because of the sharp

rise of Covid-19 cases. A further 2,500 devices are going out to secondary schools across the county this month.

ECC is also working with primary schools to find out how many younger children are without online access. An initial four hundred iPads are ready to meet urgent requirements, some of which have already gone out in Tendring district.

This initiative builds on a Government scheme, launched in summer 2020, that provided 2,500 devices for the most vulnerable children in year 10 at local authority-maintained schools and care settings in Essex. In addition, schools are also able to apply for more this month via the government portal.

Laptops under the Essex scheme are being distributed to secondary schools on a city / borough / district basis, for the schools to pass on to parents. Families with no access to a device are the first priority. Depending on supply and demand, it is hoped that additional devices can be provided to larger families.

Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Cllr Louise McKinlay said: "With home-schooling here once again, we want to ensure that as many children as possible can partake in online lessons from their school. To do this, technology is of course vital and by investing in these devices, we can support our schools to deliver lessons to our children. It is crucial that during this period of lockdown and the pandemic that our children's education is at the forefront of all we do.

"By next week we'll have shared 3,000 devices with secondary schools. We are now working with primary schools to identify their pupils' needs and hope to start delivering to them on 20 January.

I am determined that as a county council we'll continue to support schools and families to ensure that we can reach as many children as possible."

Cllr McKinlay also appealed for businesses to donate old devices to the scheme.

"Last year, when lockdown was eased, we were able to accept some donations. We had a fantastic response with more than 700 being offered. I would like to thank everyone who has donated a device. Your generosity is making a big difference to young people's education.

"I am keen that we continue to build on all that has been done so far. Due to COVID restrictions, we cannot currently accept donations from individuals but we can collect from companies who may be upgrading their hardware and we would love to receive your old laptops. Our partners at EOL IT services will cleanse and recondition the machines so they are ready for use."

The device must be a laptop, we cannot accept other devices currently. It does not matter the age, make or condition as they will all either be re-used or the parts will be sold to buy new equipment with the money raised.

Once received, all laptops are thoroughly cleaned inside and out with all data and programmes removed securely, no data on the device will be accessed during this process.

As lockdown eases, it is hoped that individuals will once again be able to contribute to the scheme. Details will follow in due course.

To donate or find out more please email TSLaptop.Donations@essex.gov.uk

Further funding to support vulnerable families

Essex County Council has launched another £90,000 funding pot for food banks and projects to support vulnerable families and individuals through lockdown.

This builds on the food and welfare support the council has provided for residents in need since the start of the pandemic and follows grant funding released in summer, autumn and in December.

Grants of up to £2,000 per project are available to help food banks and projects provide food hampers or packages for families and individuals across Essex who are most in need and adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The grants are being administered by [Essex Association of Local Councils](#) and will open on midday on Thursday 14 January for bids. Projects can bid whether they have received funding before or not. Interested parties should apply by 5 February.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Lead Member for Children and Families at Essex County Council says, “We remain committed to helping Essex residents who’ve been hit by the pandemic to put food on their tables and to keep their families warm and safe. This latest pot will once again provide vital funds for food banks and other community food projects that have been working so hard since last March, to continue to support local families.”

To find a food bank or food project near you, contact your [local Community Hub](#).

Essex County Council’s Energy Switch closes on soon, you have just a few days left to register!

Save more when you’re part of a group

Lower your energy costs through collective energy switching. Don’t want to miss out?

Register today

Why join today?

- Taking part is free
- It is simple and quick to do
- There is no obligation to switch

59,596 households have registered for our collective energy switching scheme. Join them today!

How does collective energy switching work?

1. Registration

Our registration is quick, free and there is no obligation to switch to the winning supplier

2. Auction

Our auction will take place on 9 February. The supplier who offered the cheapest tariff will get to offer you a new contract

3. Personal offer

From 22 February, you will receive your personal offer and you can see how much money you can save.

4. You decide

You will have until 23 March to decide if you would like to switch and if you do we will take care of the entire switching process.

5. Take control

You will be one of the thousands who have taken control of their energy costs through our collective energy switching scheme.

[More information](#)

Collective Energy Switching: Better Offers Together

Switching with us means you can benefit from the bargaining power of a large group. Once you have registered, we hold an energy auction where suppliers compete for the opportunity to offer you the lowest energy tariff. There's no need to compare different tariffs as you'll receive a personal offer. And what about the switch over? We'll handle that all for you. It's hassle-free and the only thing you'll notice is a lower energy bill.

[Read more about how it works](#)

Take control of your energy costs. Are you in?

Register today

- [Terms and Conditions](#)
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Cllr. Simon Walsh

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