

County Councillor's Report January 2021

Lockdown essential to protect NHS and us all - A statement from Cllr David Finch, Leader, Essex County Council

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, said:

"Yesterday's lockdown announcement will not have been the news anyone wanted to begin the New Year on. But equally, it is absolutely essential to protect the NHS, and all of us, from the new variant of coronavirus.

"In Essex we have witnessed the growing pressure on our NHS acute hospitals and the wider health system during the past few weeks. Last week a major incident was declared. We are not yet through these pressures and we and our colleagues in the NHS are working night and day to ensure the viability of our health services.

"The new lockdown restrictions will impact families particularly as [schools will now move to remote learning](#), with the exception of vulnerable children or children of critical workers. We will continue to do everything possible to ensure all children and families have the equipment they need to access remote learning.

"Today, however, there is also cause for optimism. The Oxford Astrazeneca vaccine is with us, with the first doses being administered in Essex over the next week. All being well, by the time we reach the end of the February, we will have turned a corner with the most vulnerable, because of age or medical condition, and essential workers in the NHS and care homes having received the vaccine.

"We have come a long way, but the end is in sight. While we travel that final distance, we must all remember to play our part, follow the rules, and protect ourselves, those around us, and the NHS."

For advice, support and to find out what this means for our services, visit the [coronavirus hub](#).

Latest Covid data for Essex

In the seven days to 31 December, there were 15,474 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Essex. As of 31 December, the highest weekly case rates (per 100,000) were in Epping Forest (1,321.9) and Castle Point (1,326.3).

As of 5 January, data supplied to ECC shows 1,024 beds occupied by confirmed COVID-19 patients in Essex hospital trusts. However, due to a data reporting issue there has been an under reporting of bed occupancy of circa 250.

The latest Covid data for Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock) is for the seven days to 31 December and includes:

- [cases in Essex, per 100,000 per week](#)
- [cases in Essex by age band](#)
- [cases in Essex by district, per 100,000 per week](#)
- [hospital beds occupied by Covid patients in Essex](#)

Grants available to help Essex residents self-isolate

Essex County Council is providing extra funding to city, districts and boroughs in the county to help people who need to self-isolate to stay at home.

Because the new variant of COVID-19 is spreading so fast, it is important that everybody asked to self-isolate does so.

The £3 million funding is to ensure that those that must stay at home are given the financial means to do so. The £500 grant per resident will be a one-off payment to cover the 10 day period of self-isolation.

Essex residents who test positive for Covid-19 could be entitled to a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment from the Government.

However, many residents who have to self-isolate may be ineligible for the Government payment. It is these people this new fund aims to help.

People may not qualify for Government support because, for instance, they are on zero hours contracts, self-employed and trading for less than one year or self-employed without access to support because of low trading returns.

Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, said: "Throughout this pandemic we have emphasised the need to test and self-isolate. Now with the picture of rising rates we see this has never been of greater importance.

"Essex County Council want to help people to self-isolate without fear that self-isolation will worsen their personal finances. That is why we have secured these funds from the Government."

The funds ECC have been able to access come from the Government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) which is aimed to support city, borough and district councils with their test and trace isolation payments schemes.

The funds can be accessed by residents by making an application on the local city, district or borough website. Follow the link to your local council at: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment>.

New fast Covid-19 testing centre opens today in Harlow

From today, Friday 8 January 2021, a new fast testing centre opens in Harlow for those who DO NOT have symptoms of Covid-19.

The new Harlow Testing Centre is situated at The Civic Centre, Water Gardens College Square, Harlow, CM20 1WG.

This testing centre is the fifth of its kind in Essex joining the line-up of existing centres at The Nightingale Centre in Brentwood, The Towngate Theatre in Basildon, The MegaCentre in Rayleigh and The Place Leisure Centre in Pitsea.

The new 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 Harlow district of Essex.

You can book a test [here](#).

Booking online should be the quickest and most effective option for residents seeking a Lateral Flow Test. If you're not able to book using the online form, you can call 0333 772 6144 to arrange an appointment. Lines are open from 8am to 8pm, every day including Saturday and Sunday.

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

Anyone WITH symptoms should book a test via the NHS Test and Trace App, or [here](#).

This additional centre has been established in response to the current infection rate in the district of Harlow now reaching 1289.3 per 100,000. Latest data is available [here](#).

An additional mobile testing unit capacity has also been secured at Harlow Football Club, exact dates and times are being worked through and more details will be available in the coming days.

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex's Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, said: "Infection rates in Harlow are rising rapidly and local NHS services are coming under significant strain as a result of the new variant of Covid-19. A 'critical incident' was declared last week, 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 in the worst affected areas where we continue to see worryingly high rates. We know that over 5,000 people have already been tested at the first three fast testing centres which we have opened.

"Testing people who feel well will help identify the hidden cases in the community – people who may be unwittingly infecting others. If you test positive with one of the new fast tests, you will be asked to self-isolate, and take a further test to confirm the initial result."

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 like Harlow 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."

More details about testing can be found [here](#).