

County Councillor's report November 2016

Staying well this winter

During the winter months, lots of people suffer because of the cold. No one in Essex needs to suffer- is the message Essex County Council is sending residents today as the 'Stay well this winter' campaign is launched.

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 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.

"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," said Cllr. Butland, Cabinet Member for Health.

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: essex.gov.uk/energyswitch.

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

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

For NHS advice on how to keep healthy this winter visit: nhs.uk/LiveWell/Winterhealth/Pages/Winterhealthhome.aspx.

Education

More than 25,000 new school places will be needed across Essex over the next decade, according to a new strategy published by Essex County Council.

The council's ten year plan, Meeting the demand for school places in Essex 2016 - 2025, provides the background to school place planning in Essex and outlines the anticipated demand for places in each district, as well as listing likely solutions.

Projections currently show an extra 13,909 new primary school places and 12,270 new secondary school places will be needed across the county between now and 2025.

They include 3,017 places in Uttlesford (1,792 primary and 1,225 secondary)

As well as identifying the predicted demand for school places, the ten year plan also reveals the projects Essex County Council already has planned and other potential future options to meet the growing needs of the county.

Schools attendance

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

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 per cent – above both the national and East of England averages, which were 3.9 per cent.

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

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

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.

Aiport expansion

Today's Government decision to name Heathrow as the preferred airport for expansion has been welcomed by Essex County Council.

A third runway at the West London airport is the most affordable and deliverable option. Now the Council is calling for the decision process to proceed at pace.

In the meantime, the Council believes Stansted Airport can help to alleviate capacity issues through natural growth using the current runway – offering the potential to create 10,000 jobs and serve an extra 20 million passengers a year.

Stansted, as one of two Essex airports, offers a short-term solution to ease capacity issues on London by utilising its existing runway to its full potential.

Recent moves to improve infrastructure around the airport will help support the airport's growth. One good example of this is a £1.5 million funding boost secured by Essex County Council from the Department for Transport to help develop a new junction 7a on the M11 to ease traffic flow along this vital route. Another good example is calls from the West Anglia Task Force for investment to improve rail links between London and Stansted.

Public WiFi

A new scheme has been launched by Essex County Council's Superfast Essex programme to enable local communities 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. So far the programme has enabled more than 65,000 homes and businesses to access superfast broadband speeds. The programme is also planning future work to extend coverage even further still.

With the infrastructure being upgraded across the county over the next few years, Superfast Essex would like 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.

The CIF is a small grants scheme funded by Essex County Council, designed to fund community projects. 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.

Both companies can be contacted via their respective websites below:

apcsolutionsuk.com

countybroadband.co.uk

More information on the Community Wi-Fi Scheme including costs and how to apply can be found at superfastessex.org/communitywifischeme and application forms for funding for the Community Wi-Fi Scheme can be found on the CIF website at essex.gov.uk/CIF.

Recycling

Drivers of vans and pick-up trucks will be faced with new restrictions at some Essex recycling centres from the beginning of the month.

Following operational changes announced in August, vans and commercial vehicles will not be allowed into around half of the county's recycling centres and will face increased scrutiny of their loads at those sites which still offer access. This change will help improve capacity and reduce the amount of illegal business waste entering recycling centres in Essex.

Research undertaken by Essex County Council identified that commercial vehicles make up more than a third of recycling centre users, causing additional queuing and longer unloading times than householders in cars.

On top of the changes for commercial vehicles, many sites will also no longer offer disposal facilities for DIY and construction waste; materials often brought in by businesses and not regarded as household waste by the law.

Many sites will continue to receive household DIY waste, although there will be limits on the frequency on which this will be accepted. The vast majority of householders dropping off waste will be unaffected."

The council has invested in a new automatic number plate recognition system to monitor site use. This will enable them to catch businesses who use cars as well commercial vehicles to illegally dispose of their waste. Businesses who persist with attempting to gain access may be liable to a fine of up to £50,000.

Councillor Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste said: “I want householders to have a swift and safe experience when they use our recycling centres. While the majority of traders play by the rules, the illegal use of recycling centres means that residents end up footing the bill. Removing illegal business traffic from sites will breathe new life into these facilities and improve sites for all users”.

Clothes recycling

Recycle for Essex are taking part in a county-wide campaign to encourage residents to reuse and recycle old clothes and textiles.

In each UK home, about £1,200 worth of clothes lies forgotten and unworn. That’s a lot of money residents in Essex could be saving.

If you no longer want a particular item or outfit, someone else probably will. Unwanted clothes can be resold, rejuvenated, recycled or given to charity. There are so many ways to make the most of them, bringing you money along the way.

Councillor Simon Walsh, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Waste said: “We all need to think ‘do I need it?’ before we buy, to be better informed when we purchase clothing, to choose pre-owned options more frequently, to learn long-lost repair and fixing skills, to get creative with clothing and to share and donate what’s unwanted. Last but not least, of course, we need to keep all clothing and textiles out of the bin”.

All clean clothing and textiles can be recycled, even items that are ripped or have holes in. Yes, even those clean holey socks and pants! It’s easy to recycle your textiles across Essex with many districts and boroughs offering kerbside collections, all recycling centres accepting textiles, along with the many textile banks located all around the county.

To find out more, visit recycleforessex.com and loveyourclothes.org.uk.

Simon Walsh

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