

Report by Cllr Derrick Louis, Essex County Council Member for Witham Southern, 2nd November 2020

1. Serious accident on the corner of Maldon Road and Jenkins Lane

Having raised the issue of the missing 30MPH sign, I had confirmation that a job was raised on 5 October 2020, and the Engineer is currently awaiting detailed underground utility maps. As soon as these have been received, the job will be passed for programming.

2. Hoarding next to the Coop

I received requests from local Cllrs and residents to investigate the Hoarding erected next to the Coop on the former Cowards Garage site. The concerns raised were that the Hoarding was encroaching on Highways land, the footway had been dangerously narrowed and the visibility splay for vehicles reversing off the Coop car parking spaces had been compromised.

Having looked into this, it was been confirmed that the hoarding is along the kerb-line and boundary of the footway and is not encroaching on highway maintainable land.

Additionally, permission for the build has been given by Braintree District Council and ECC's Enforcement team have been in contact with Planning at Braintree DC to inform them the hoarding does not meet the conditions of the application. According to the plans of the erection given to Braintree there should be 2 metre clearance which has not been adhered to.

I advised local Cllrs and residents that their concerns would need to be raised with Braintree District Council which I understand has now happened.

3. Member Locality Fund

Essex County Council has made £10,000 available to each County Councillor for the benefit of their Division and to date I have made three grants:

Hatfield Peverel Parish Council

- 2 community defibrillators -£2800
- Pond refurbishment – £1200

Hatfield Peverel Scout Group

- Contribution to Scout Hut refurbishment works - £2000

Please do send any additional proposals for consideration to me at:
cllr.Derrick.Louis@essex.gov.uk by the end of November.

In terms of the "small print":

What the money can be spent on:

Money must be spent in a way which benefits the division. There are three main ways of spending it:

- making a grant to a registered charity, a parish council or a properly constituted community or voluntary association for the purposes of a specific service or project in the Division;
- buying goods or services; or
- commissioning services from ECC.

What the money cannot be spent on:

- an organisation in which the Councillor is involved, unless the Leader agrees otherwise and makes a formal decision to that effect;
- an organisation which is political or undertakes any political campaigning activity or on a councillor's constituency business;
- anything which has a significant ongoing maintenance or support liability which ECC would be required or expected to bear – unless there is a separate agreement to bear the cost with funding identified;
- anything which benefits a particular individual, business or 'for profit' organisation;
- any organisation which does not operate on an inclusive basis – services must be available to the community without discrimination (recognising that some services are only useful to certain groups);
- any organisation which has previously misused public money;
- anything which is unlawful

4. Essex County Council and Central Law Group CIC Offer Pro Bono Legal Support for Armed Forces

Essex County Council is an active supporter of the armed forces and in 2012 made one of the largest pledges ever enacted by public, private and voluntary sectors in the shape of the Essex Armed Forces Community Covenant.

As an expression of its ongoing commitment, Essex County Council, through its Civilian Military Partnership Board, is offering pro bono legal advice, free at the point of delivery to the armed forces in Essex as part of the Essex Armed Forces Community Covenant.

The new scheme was pioneered in Essex as a result of a joint initiative from Essex County Council and Colonel Kitson of the Essex CMPB with Central Law Group CIC, the only not for profit law firm in the country, which itself is a nationwide pilot scheme, based in Essex.

Currently, this service only offers legal advice in the family law space, however it is hoped that this can be expanded to include consumer and housing law in the near future.

The Covenant itself raises awareness of issues affecting the armed forces community, reducing any disadvantages suffered by armed forces personnel, recognises their sacrifices and encourages activities which help to integrate the armed forces community with the wider community.

More details about the Covenant and other initiatives by Essex County Council that support the armed forces visit: www.essex.gov.uk/essex-armed-forces-community-covenant

5. ECC Correspondence with Housing Ministers

Below are key extracts from recent correspondence from ECC to Housing Ministers:

We believe securing a sufficient supply of new affordable housing is key to achieving positive outcomes for our most vulnerable residents. At our September meeting we identified three key issues that reduce our ability to secure affordable housing for our communities in Essex:

Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)

In late March Local housing authorities in Greater Essex responded at pace to move over 350 rough sleepers into accommodation. We welcomed the July announcement of £265m funding to enable our plans for accommodating and supporting rough sleepers over the longer term. Thirteen Greater Essex local housing authorities applied for NSAP funding. We would like to provide feedback on the process to help inform future funding rounds:

a. Encouraging local delivery models – the requirement for funding to be allocated to Registered Providers has restricted our ability to build on existing partners that have been successful in supporting rough sleepers through the pandemic. It is of critical importance that future funding is flexible in allowing for local solutions to address local problems and allowing a greater role for proactive non-RP local authorities, charities and homeless organisations in programme delivery.

b. Capital/revenue split – we welcome NSAP including revenue funding to enable the ongoing support which is essential to long term tenancy sustainment. We would recommend increasing the proportion of revenue funding for the next round and exploring ways that this could be safeguarded over the long term.

c. Timescales – in future a longer lead in time than the five weeks to develop and submit bids would be beneficial. Equally we know that we will need to work at pace to get accommodation up and running by 31st March 2021 and would request that announcements on future bid rounds be accelerated to allow for capital works to get underway quickly.

2. Homelessness challenge

The government's policies to support renters since March are welcome as is the recent clarity provided on measures in place post September once the eviction ban ends. Our officers have identified key risks and issues we may face in relation to increasing

homelessness approaches as a result of the economic and social impacts of Covid-19 over the coming months.

Over 250,000 workers are furloughed¹, or claiming SEISS pro-rata in Greater Essex (c.30% of total). Alongside action we are taking locally we outline suggestions below that could stimulate the affordable housing market and make it easier for homeless families reliant on private rents and temporary accommodation. Short-term necessities to alleviate the immediate impact of the housing crisis include:

Review policy on Local Housing Allowance rates, to restore alignment with average market rents, making the private rented sector more affordable to those in receipt of benefits

- Introduce a Universal Credit/Housing Benefit 'premium' to enable families for whom there is a homelessness duty to be placed in properties with rent levels above the Local Housing Allowance. This would reduce homelessness as well as the time that families stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation

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A longer-term solution to homelessness requires:

- More grant support for developing/procuring affordable housing
- Relax rules on Right to Buy receipts to allow stockholding authorities to invest in capital projects (both in recognition of the Covid-19 challenges and more generally).

Changes to the Current planning system consultation – lifting the small sites threshold

Given the importance of increasing affordable housing supply in Essex we do not support the proposed uplift in the small sites threshold. As noted in the consultation document the lifting of the small sites threshold from 10 to 50 units is estimated to result in a 20% reduction of section 106 affordable housing delivery over a single year.

In the Essex county council area this would result in over 200 fewer s106 affordable houses being built over an 18-month period based on 2018/19 delivery rates. If following consultation you are minded to continue with the proposal to raise the threshold we would seek a guarantee that it is time limited and does not extend beyond the 18 months currently set out.

We fully agree with the policy aim of supporting small and medium enterprise builders and ensuring that the construction of new homes continues to play a key role in

supporting Covid-19 recovery. While the currently proposal may marginally help SMEs compete against the large national house-builders (although it could also increase the risks they carry), most of the benefit will accrue to land-owners via increased land value. We believe there are more efficient ways of achieving the same thing and are keen to discuss with you ways to encourage the build-out of new homes alongside much needed new affordable housing.

In place of the lifting of the small sites threshold we would encourage investment from Homes England to make sites viable, and to use the strategic partnering arrangements between Homes England and housing associations for development to buy and build out smaller sites therefore easing the process for smaller private firms.

6. New businesses invited to join free Essex Business Accelerator

Entrepreneurs or new businesses are invited to join a free Business Accelerator programme funded by Essex County Council and delivered by Colbea.

The initiative is open to businesses in Essex from any sector. It is primarily aimed at pre-start businesses or businesses under a year old but some more established businesses may also benefit from the training.

The programme, which will run from 12 November 2020 to 21 January 2021, will consist of eight sessions delivered over Zoom. Each session will last two hours with additional one-to-one mentoring and advice. The eight online sessions will guide participants through the fundamentals of starting and developing a business. It will include guidance on business structure and creating a vision, financial metrics and business planning, leadership skills in a growing business and delivering a winning pitch.

For more information or to apply visit www.colbea.co.uk/essexaccelerator or email enquiries@colbea.co.uk

7. Essex Moving into Covid Tier 2

Below is information **provided by Essex County Council** explaining their decision to support the request to move Essex from Tier 1 to Tier 2.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has raised the alert level in Essex from 'medium' to 'high'. Although the Secretary of State is legally accountable for the decision, he did so following a letter sent to him by the Leader of Essex County Council. That letter was sent following advice given by the Director of Public Health for Essex County Council and after consulting the leaders of all Essex Borough, City and District Councils who understood and supported the request and following a meeting of the 'Member Engagement Board' on 9th October 2020. The Board is made up of councillors and local authority chief executives across the County. We also consulted all Essex MPs.

I appreciate the concerns that you have raised and would like to reassure you, that the Secretary of State did not have made his decision lightly. Similarly, the Essex leaders did not agree to the request lightly. We appreciate the implications of Essex moving to 'High level' measures, however after considering the scientific advice we truly believe that this is in the best interests of residents and businesses. It will reduce the rapidly increasing number of cases, prevent further deaths, and protect businesses from 'Very High' level restrictions being introduced. The advice from the Director of Public Health is that taking this action now will reduce the length of time that restrictions are in place.

You can see a video produced by the Director of Public Health here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLZO6r3Bfwk

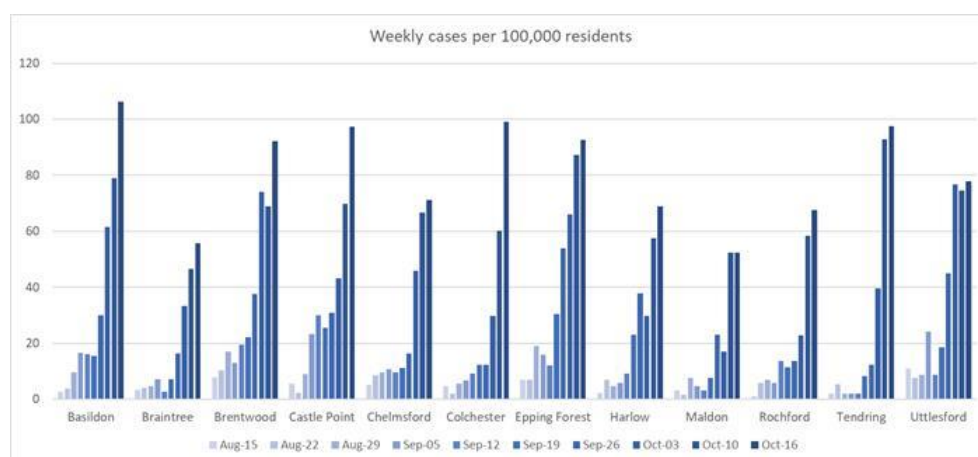
[You can view a video from Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care about why we made the request here:](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvaFMLR8U8c>

I have outlined below the data we have used to inform our decision and the rationale for taking this step, which I hope will offer you some reassurance.

Background - Cases of coronavirus are rapidly increasing all over Essex. Analysis has shown that all areas (except Maldon at the time of the analysis although Maldon now has as well) had moved to epidemic growth. This means that cases have been doubling every week, as evidenced in the table below.

Latest modelling from Public Health England



The difference in rates for each area between 1-11 October were shared as part of our consideration. The rates are the number cases per 100,000 residents per week and while they are low, the fact remains they are doubling everywhere across Essex. We believe that this trend will continue over the coming weeks and we will soon find ourselves in the same position as many northern towns. Our website (<https://www.essex.gov.uk/what-the-high-COVID-alert-level-means-for-you>) will include the most up to date information, below are the most recent figures. While cases waver somewhat across districts the trend continues to be upwards.

District	10 October cases per 100,000 per week	16 October cases per 100,000 per week
Essex	68.8	84.1
Basildon	79.1	106.3
Braintree	46.5	55.7
Brentwood	68.8	92.2
Castle Point	69.7	97.3
Chelmsford	66.7	71.2
Colchester	60.1	99.1
Epping Forest	87.3	92.6

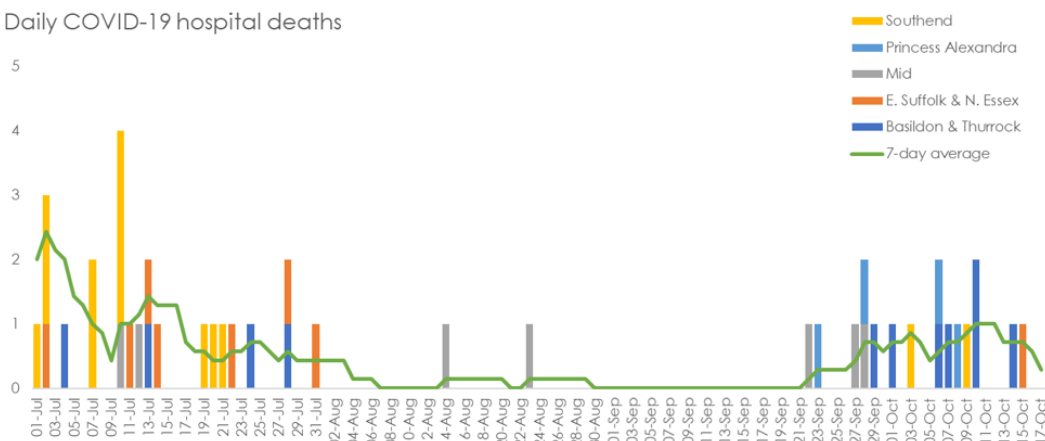
District	10 October cases per 100,000 per week	16 October cases per 100,000 per week
Harlow	57.4	68.9
Maldon	52.4	52.4
Rochford	58.4	67.5
Tendring	92.8	97.5
Uttlesford	74.5	77.8

In the table above, you will note that the places with the lowest rates in mid-October have rates similar to those of places with the highest rates 10 before. The places in Essex with the lowest rates are therefore only a week or so behind those with the highest rates, which are in turn are a week or so behind areas in the North and Midlands. When Essex moved into 'high alert' the levels were in many case higher than the levels were in the north in the summer at the time when the government imposed restrictions on those areas.

Lower Tier Local Authority	Individuals tested per day per 100,000 population (7 day moving average)	Trend	Incidence per 100,000 population (weekly)	Trend	Contain Framework Watchlist Status – week beginning 7 September
Bolton	168.0	▲	121.9	▲	Intervention
Bradford	127.0	▲	72.2	▲	Intervention
Oldham	161.1	□	66.6	▲	Intervention
Salford	132.1	▲	62.3	▲	Intervention
Blackburn with Darwen	197.3	▲	61.8	▲	Intervention
Preston	160.1	□	59.9	▲	Intervention
Pendle	191.0	□	58.0	□	Intervention
Rochdale	165.0	▲	57.7	▲	Intervention
Tameside	154.5	▲	56.8	▲	Intervention
Manchester	133.1	□	53.9	▲	Intervention
Birmingham	114.1	▲	50.8	▲	Intervention
Bury	137.2	▲	46.8	▲	Intervention
Leicester	121.0	□	43.1	▲	Intervention
Kirklees	101.0	□	36.9	▲	Intervention
Solihull	113.9	▲	34.9	▲	Intervention
Calderdale	118.6	□	34.3	▲	Intervention
Trafford	144.0	□	31.3	□	Intervention
Sandwell	30.8	□	22.6	□	Intervention
Rossendale	222.5	▲	80.4	▲	Enhanced Support
Burnley	187.8	□	57.6	▲	Enhanced Support
South Tyneside	170.5	▲	50.6	▲	Enhanced Support
Leeds	136.8	▲	47.3	▲	Enhanced Support
Hyndburn	203.1	□	42.1	▲	Enhanced Support
Gateshead	123.3	▲	40.5	▲	Enhanced Support
Sunderland	120.3	▲	32.4	▲	Enhanced Support
Newcastle upon Tyne	116.3	□	28.0	▲	Enhanced Support
Stockport	120.8	□	20.2	▲	Enhanced Support

Additionally, while hospital admissions are thankfully low, there are currently 121 people with coronavirus in Essex hospitals, while a month ago there were virtually none. There have also been 16 deaths due to COVID-19 in Essex hospitals in the last three weeks following a month with no deaths.

Daily COVID-19 hospital deaths

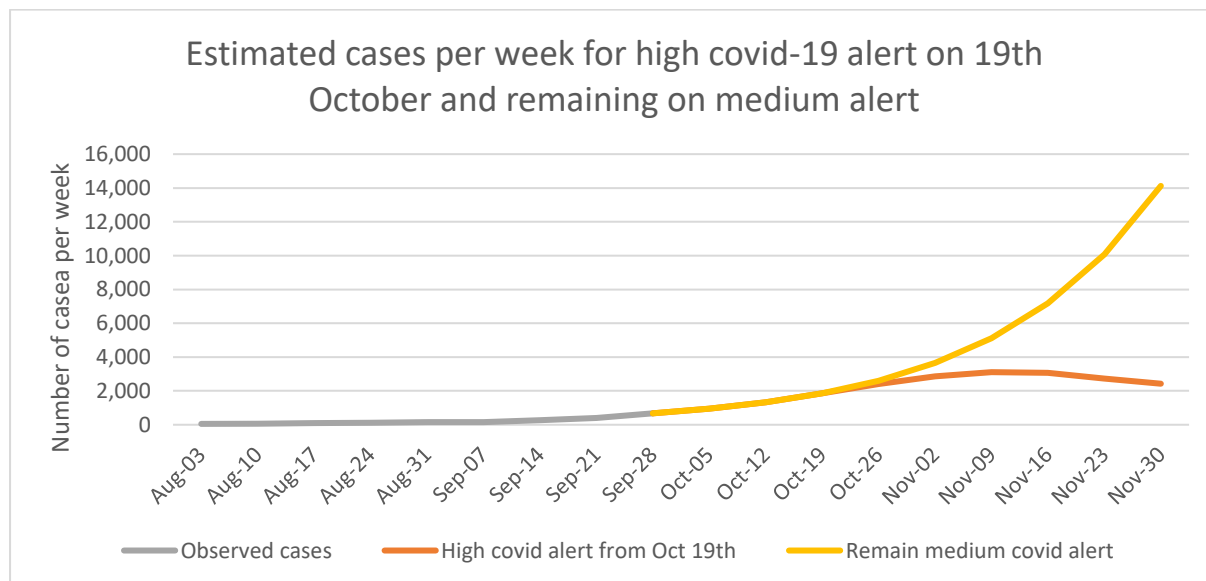


- 43 COVID related deaths across all Acutes since beginning of July to date
- 4 deaths in Mid Essex Trust (August 23rd, September 22nd, 27th, 28th)
4 in Princess Alexandra (September 23rd, 28th, October 6th, 8th)
6 in Basildon & Thurrock (September 29th, October 1st, 6th, 7th, 2x 10th, 14th)
1 in ESNEFT (October 15th)

While these numbers remain low, they are increasing at an alarming rate and if we don't take action soon, we are likely to see a doubling in line with the increasing cases soon.

The County Council has a responsibility to make decisions based on what the evidence tells us, in order to protect residents, local health services, schools and businesses, and we have considered how best to do this for the people of Essex. The interventions implemented within the 'high' tier of measures have been devised by SAGE to reduce the rate of transmission and reverse case growth.

We have used the below model to show the potential impact if the introduction of High-Level restrictions is delayed:



We believe that by moving to the High Level sooner, the curve will turn quicker and the peak will be lower. This will reduce the time Essex spends within this tier, as well as the chances of the county needing to move to 'Very High'.

It has not been an easy decision to make this request, but we feel on balance that it is absolutely the correct one for Essex at this time. As you will appreciate the data is changing rapidly, please visit <https://www.essex.gov.uk/local-outbreak-control-plan/data-cases-in-essex> for the latest data.

8. Support for community energy groups launched

Local communities are encouraged to find out how they can help make a difference to climate change and fuel poverty through community energy groups. Community energy is the delivery of community-led renewable energy, energy demand reduction and energy advice projects. Activities provided by community energy groups can include energy audits, providing energy saving services and the installation of solar panels on community buildings and members' homes.

Essex County Council has commissioned experts Community Energy South to help deliver a wide range of support which will include information provision, an online masterclass, information resources and group support. The support will help groups to understand the technical, legal and funding issues within the community energy sector. Further in-depth group development and mentoring will help the formation of new community energy groups and help get projects started across Essex.

The masterclass will take place 3 December and is open to any interested groups. It will include a step by step guide to setting up a community energy group and examples of inspiring projects that have taken place elsewhere. Speakers will include some of the leaders in the community energy sector. Places can be booked online.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/community-energy-masterclass-making-local-action-on-climate-change-happen-tickets-124683386365>

The project is part of an overall strategy by Essex County Council to address the environment and climate change. Other initiatives include the formation of the Essex Climate Action Commission to make recommendations about how we can improve the environment and the economy of Essex. If you would like further information on how to get involved in community energy or climate action in your local area email lowcarbon@essex.gov.uk

9. New businesses invited to join free Essex Business Accelerator

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The Essex Business Accelerator is part of a wider package of support being offered by Essex County Council to support businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. Other initiatives include an application to be a gateway organisation for the Kickstart Programme, developing an Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Scheme along with partnering with SELEP to commission a programme that will support people at risk of redundancy to gain alternative employment.

The programme, which will run from 12 November 2020 to 21 January 2021, will consist of eight sessions delivered over Zoom. Each session will last two hours with additional one-to-one mentoring and advice. The eight online sessions will guide participants through the fundamentals of starting and developing a business. It will include guidance on business structure and creating a vision, financial metrics and business planning, leadership skills in a growing business and delivering a winning pitch.

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If any Cllr requires help or advice, please don't hesitate to contact me on 07967 830277 or cllr.Derrick.Louis@essex.gov.uk