

Report on Essex County Council Matters – 12 January 2021

Cllr Penny Channer CC – ECC Maldon Division.

Latest Covid-19 Data- Clarification on Hospital Data

Please see below a clarification added to the hospital data included in the 7/1/2021 Covid-19 data news release.

Covid-19 data for Essex (excluding Southend and Thurrock) is published online here:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/local-outbreak-control-plan>

Media outlets are encouraged to use this latest data to ensure the most up-to-date and complete figures are shared with Essex residents.

Cases and rates

In the seven days to 31/12/20, there were 15,474 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Essex. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.

As at 31/12/20, the weekly case rate for Essex is 1,039 per 100,000. This is the latest date for which complete data is available.

As at 31/12/20, the highest weekly case rates were in Epping Forest and Castle Point, with rates of 1,321.9 and 1,326.3 per 100,000, respectively.

Hospitals

As at 05/01/21, the data that Essex County Council has received shows that there were 1,024 beds occupied by confirmed Covid-19 patients in Essex hospital trusts. This equates to 34% of trust capacity and is 7% lower compared to bed occupancy one week previous (29/12/20). However, data was not received from one hospital meaning that the data relating to bed occupancy stated above is under reported by circa 250. With this data added, it equates to an approximate 15% increase.

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 two-week 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>.

County, City, Borough and District Local Covid-19 Contact Tracing proving a huge success

Essex County Council's Covid-19 contact tracing service, which operates with the help of partners in city, borough and district councils in Essex, is proving to be a huge success with 86 per cent of cases closed and 93 per cent of contacts traced.

The local contact tracing service was launched in June to support the national NHS tracing service. It originally just supported outbreaks in settings such as schools care homes and businesses.

The National NHS tracing service traced people who needed to self-isolate after coming into contact with people who had tested positive for Covid-19.

From October this year, when the national service had proved unable to contact a person, the contact was referred to the county level service who could use local knowledge and phone calls to track down contacts. The county tracing service was able to contact 86 per cent of cases which were referred to them by the national NHS service.

City, borough and district Councils in Essex have been supporting with the next step in contacting the last 14 per cent of cases which will result in even more cases closed and contacts traced.

The district level tracers were asked to help with contacts that had limited details such as no phone number or the wrong details, maybe a cross reference with Council tax info or other local sources.

Finally, as a last resort, a door to door visit was arranged to any non-responsive cases to ensure they are isolating, have the necessary support and to contact Essex and Southend Contact Tracing Service (ESCTS) to close the case and get any contacts.

It is important to underline the need to maintain social distancing to a width of two metres, to keep up a good hygiene regime of hand washing and the ongoing need to test, and self-isolate in the event of a positive test."

Putting food on the Christmas table for children and young people

Essex County Council launched ahead of Christmas a Christmas free school meals programme and sent out vouchers to parents of eligible children and to qualifying young people.

It meant the families of 35,000 children and young people had £30 per child to spend on food over the two-week holiday.

Parents and young people were sent their e-vouchers by email or text to arrive by Friday 18 December.

The vouchers could only be exchanged for food. They could be used in most supermarkets and the McColls chain of local shops.

Essex County Council commissioned Wonde , a national provider of free school meal vouchers, to send the vouchers direct and therefore eased the burden on schools that were already busy coping with the impacts of covid-19.

New funding to cut fuel bills and help tackle climate change

A Government grant has been awarded to Essex County Council and seven of the county's city, district and borough councils to install insulation and energy efficient heating in Essex homes.

The new funding will see even more people in Essex who are unable to heat their homes properly get help to keep their homes warm this winter.

The £813,000 funding comes from the £200m Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme, established by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

The funding is designed to support local authorities to help homeowners and landlords install energy saving measures in homes across Essex.

Aran Insulation has recently been appointed as the contractor to deliver the measures which include installing energy efficient heating and all types of insulation.

The installation of these measures has commenced and will continue until the end of March 2021.

To be eligible for up to £10,000 grant, homes to be improved should be currently rated as Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) E, F or G and the household income below £30,000.

Residents can check their eligibility for the funding and, if applicable, apply for the grant by emailing Aran Insulation at info@arangroup.co.uk or calling 0800 587 7795.

Warm Homes Essex

Essex County Council is working in partnership with the Citizens Advice service in Essex, to deliver a project that supports fuel poor households to improve their financial and physical circumstances.

The initiative sees a team of specialist energy advisers operating across the county, working with their clients to provide advice services for people struggling with their energy bills, managing debt with energy suppliers and obtaining grants to improve energy efficiency.

Residents and professionals can contact the Citizens Advice Warm Homes team on 0300 3033 789 or visit www.warmhomesessex.org.uk.

County Council investment unlocks £1million loan fund to Essex businesses

A new £1million loan fund to help business during the current Covid-19 restrictions has been unlocked thanks to a £200,000 investment from Essex County Council.

Businesses in Essex which need financial support are urged to apply to this loan fund, which has been specifically ring-fenced for use by firms in the county.

The loan fund has been created with Let's Do Business Finance, a partner in the Government's Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS).

Under this scheme a £200,000 investment from Essex County Council unlocks £1m to be available to businesses in the county with the fund having opened on Saturday 2nd January, 2021.

The Government will guarantee 80 per cent of the finance to the lender, with fees and the first year's interest costs covered by the Government.

The Cabinet Member stated that Essex County Council is committed to taking any action we can to support Essex Businesses during these current restrictions.

Essex County Council has spent £74.5million to support the community during the Covid-19 restrictions this year and that is right and correct, but when we heard about the CBILS fund, ECC officers creatively searched for any investment we could make to create a loan fund for Essex businesses.

If your business needs support during these current restrictions then apply. We want you to keep trading and be in a good place to drive economic recovery when these restrictions end."

You can apply if your business:

- Is based in Essex
- Has an annual turnover of up to £45million
- Requires finance up to £150,000

You need to show that your business:

- Would be viable were it not for the pandemic
- Has been adversely impacted by the Coronavirus.

All the details here www.letsdobusinessfinance.co.uk/cbils-ldbf

Library service update

Following latest Government guidelines, all libraries temporarily closed to the public from Monday 4 January 2021. Sixteen sites will remain open to offer Registration appointments, Blue Badge assessments and emergency public computer access by appointment only.

Please check individual library opening hours to see what services are available.

Unfortunately click and collect service is not available at this time.

What this means for your library account/loans:

- Items which were due on or from Monday 4 January will have their loan period extended until Monday 1 February
- Reservations – you will be still be able to reserve items but will not be able to collect them until libraries are open

While library services are limited please continue to use the fantastic range of e-resources that we have on offer, including e-books, e-audio, e-comics, newspapers and magazines. These are all available from our catalogue home page.

Love Essex

Love Essex is set for a busy start to 2021. Late January will see the introduction of a series of short educational films which will inform viewers on how to compost at home, and why it is important to do so. The launch of these films follows on from October's 'Introduction to Home Composting' webinar.

The Love Essex team will be building on the success of the home composting webinar with another event on 28th January which will focus on the impact that plastic is having on the planet, and practical ways of reducing plastic household waste.

Additionally, the team plan to use their January communications to place a spotlight on the importance of recycling, as they aim to keep Essex residents motivated to recycle by busting myths around kerbside recycling being disposed of in landfill.

Finally, this month's competition has been designed to support residents making the decision to reduce their plastic waste in the new year. The team has compiled 10 plastic-free starter kits and residents are invited to sign the Essex plastic pledge online to be in with a chance of winning. More info about the pledge, as well as details on how to sign it, can be found at loveessex.org/plasticpledge. In January, the team will also launch a social media profile ring and invite plastic pledgers to celebrate their commitment to reducing plastic waste by adding the profile ring to their social media profile.