Dear Parish Clerk and Councillors,

Please find below my latest Essex County Council update for circulation to councillors and inclusion in parish newsletters where appropriate.

Highways and the Pothole Emergency

Improving the condition of our roads remains one of the main priorities of the new administration at Essex County Council. Following the declaration of a Pothole Emergency, further investment has been made in highway maintenance. The number of dedicated repair crews has increased from nine to twelve, meaning every district now has its own crew.

Since 1 June 2026, the number of carriageway repairs completed across Essex has been **42.87% higher** than during the equivalent period in 2025. This is encouraging progress, but the priority must be to maintain the increased rate of repairs so that residents see a sustained improvement in the condition of our roads. Alongside pothole repairs, Essex Highways continues to deliver resurfacing programmes and more permanent repairs where appropriate.

Locally, I continue to report defects across the division and regularly follow up outstanding issues with Essex Highways to help ensure repairs are progressed as quickly as possible. I encourage parish councils and residents to report defects through the Essex Highways online Report It service. This provides a unique reference number, ensures the defect is formally logged and allows its progress to be tracked.nIf you would like me to follow up a report on your behalf, please send me the reference number, location and date on which it was first reported, and I will raise it with the relevant officers.

Where a defect presents an immediate risk to public safety, it should be reported by telephone on **0345 603 7631** rather than through the online service.

Drainage

Between April and August 2025/26, 74,720 drainage defects were dealt with, representing a 20% increase compared with 2024/25. Four jetting units are currently operating across Essex.

This work is important because blocked drainage can contribute to flooding, standing water and further damage to the road network. I continue to work with residents and parish councils on local drainage and flooding concerns and will follow up outstanding reports where necessary.

Overgrown Hedges and Vegetation

Landowners are responsible for cutting back privately owned hedges and vegetation where they obstruct the highway, reduce visibility or create a safety issue. I would be grateful if parish councils could include a reminder

in newsletters and parish magazines. Between June and August 2026, 18,025 vegetation issues were dealt with, and 729 enforcement letters have been issued since the beginning of the year.

Local Highway and Community Issues

During the past month, I have continued working with residents and parish councils on matters including:

- Potholes and carriageway defects.
- Drainage and flooding concerns.
- Overgrown vegetation affecting highway safety.
- Public Rights of Way enquiries.
- Road safety and speeding concerns.
- Requests for resurfacing and other highway improvements.
- Coordination of planned roadworks and road closures.
- Liaison with Essex Highways and other County Council officers to progress outstanding local issues.

I remain committed to working with parish councils to address local concerns and welcome any County Council matters you wish to raise.

Proposed Hed-TEC Stages Rally 2027

I am aware of local interest and concern about the proposed Hed-TEC Stages Rally 2027, which is currently proposed to take place on **Sunday 11 July 2027**.

The current proposal involves using an approximately seven-mile section of public road between Castle Hedingham, Great Maplestead and Little Maplestead as a legally closed competitive rally stage. The proposal remains at an early stage. Initial discussions have taken place with the organisers, but no formal application for the required road closures or permissions has yet been submitted. Any event taking place on the public highway would need to secure the necessary approvals and satisfy highway-safety, traffic-management and operational requirements.

Concerns raised so far include:

- Access to homes, farms and local businesses during any road closure.
- Access for emergency services and people caring for animals.
- The effect of noise on horses, livestock, pets and wildlife.
- The suitability and condition of narrow rural and protected lanes.
- Safety for horse riders, cyclists, walkers and other vulnerable road users.
- The possibility of competitors or other drivers attempting to familiarise themselves with the route before or after the event.

- Traffic displacement and the effect on neighbouring villages.
- The timing and extent of consultation with affected residents.
- The potential effect during the farming and harvest period.

Residents and parish councils with questions or concerns should contact the organisers' Resident Liaison Manager, Stanley Graham, directly at **stanley@pcs-support.com** or on **07796 805 072**.
Please copy me into any correspondence at **cllr.nathan.robins@essex.gov.uk** so that I remain aware of the issues being raised and can ensure that relevant highway or County Council matters are followed up through the appropriate process. When contacting the organiser, please include your name, address, the road or location affected and clear details of your question or concern. This will help the organisers understand the practical implications for individual properties, businesses, farms, animals and local road users. Stanley Graham has confirmed that issues raised with the organisers and parish councils are being considered. Part of the route has already been changed in response to concerns about residents having only one available access road. No final decision has been made at this stage. If the event progresses, any application affecting the public highway will be assessed by Essex County Council. This will include consideration of highway safety, traffic management, resident access, emergency-service requirements and stakeholder feedback. I will continue to monitor the proposal and keep parish councils updated as further information becomes available.

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

The Government has withdrawn its previous decision on Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex while it conducts a wider review of the programme. Local elections to the existing authorities are currently expected to take place in May 2027. Existing councils will continue to operate and deliver services while the Government reviews its approach. The administration supports greater devolution of powers to Essex and the creation of a combined or strategic authority in principle. However, there is still significant work to be done to determine how any future arrangements should operate and how they would be funded and held accountable We agree that change is needed, but it must be the right change: properly planned, financially responsible and designed around the needs of Essex residents and the services on which they rely.

I will continue to update parish councils when the Government publishes further decisions.

Fostering in Essex

Essex County Council continues to encourage more people to consider fostering. Around 500 foster families currently care for more than 750 children across Essex.

Recruiting more local carers can help vulnerable children remain close to their schools, friends and support networks while providing the stability and security they need. Anyone interested in fostering can contact the Council for an informal discussion and further information without making an immediate commitment.

Affordable School Transport

At the meeting of Full Council on 13 October, Essex County Council passed a motion committing the Council to explore options for making home-to-school bus travel more affordable for families.

We will consider a range of options, including:

- Capping daily student fares.
- Negotiating improved student-fare arrangements with commercial bus operators.
- Directly commissioning more school bus services.
- Exploring Council-run services where these could provide better value.
- Considering how the transport needs and costs of young people aged 16 and over with SEND could be better supported.

This is an important first step. The cost of getting children to school places real pressure on many families, particularly in rural communities where public transport options are limited.
Recent changes to national legislation have given councils greater flexibility over how local bus services can be provided. The Council will now assess the costs, benefits and practical feasibility of the different options before deciding how they could be taken forward. I welcome the commitment to examine every reasonable option for reducing costs while ensuring that any changes are financially sustainable and provide a reliable service for children and families.

Operation Vanguard

Operation Vanguard was launched on 14 September 2026 in response to concerns about antisocial behaviour and public safety in Braintree, Colchester and Chelmsford. The initial three-month pilot places security operatives in the three town and city centres to provide a visible presence, reassure residents and help deter and prevent antisocial behaviour. Essex County Council is also seeking discussions with the Home Office about the additional pressure being placed on local public services.

Local Casework

Supporting residents remains a significant part of my role as your County Councillor. Alongside attending meetings at County Hall and across the division, I continue to assist residents with individual casework involving highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way and other Essex County Council services. If a matter has already been reported, please include any existing reference number and the date on which it was originally raised. This helps me follow up the matter more effectively.

Working with Parish Councils

I greatly value the positive working relationship between Essex County Council and our parish councils. Your local knowledge is invaluable in identifying issues early and helping to ensure they are addressed effectively. If your council has concerns relating to highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way, the proposed rally or any other Essex County Council service, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to attend parish council meetings where diary commitments allow. As always, please send me details of any County Council matters affecting your parish so that I can raise them with the relevant service.