

Minutes 19th May 2016
Annual Meeting of Elmstead Parish Council
Community Centre, School Road, Elmstead Market, CO7 7ET

Present: Councillors N Bell (Chairman), P Beard, S Beecham, R Fairweather, M Kirby, R Redding, J Routledge and M Ward

Also Present: District Councillors Fred Nicholls and Rosemary Heaney, Mrs Baxter (Clerk), and 6 members of the public

16/071 Election of Chairman 2016-17

It was resolved that Cllr Bell will continue to be chairman for the forthcoming year.
Proposed: Cllr Redding, Seconded: Cllr Beecham

16/072 To receive the Chairman's declaration of acceptance of office

Cllr Bell signed the Chairman's declaration of office.

16/073 Election of Vice-Chairman

It was resolved that Cllr Redding will continue to be vice-chairman for the forthcoming year.

Proposed: Cllr Bell, Seconded: Cllr Kirby

16/074 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Guglielmi (ECC) sent his apologies, he has a clash of meetings.

16/075 Declaration of Pecuniary Interests and Non Pecuniary Interests and any requests for dispensations.

None.

16/076 Approval and signing of the minutes from 21st April 2016

It was resolved to accept the minutes from 21st April 2016 as true and accurate with the following revision from Cllr Redding:

Under item 16/070 "Cllr Redding had received a note about who cuts the Spinney on Church Road. He will send the e-mail." To be replaced with "Cllr Redding received a verbal query about who cuts the Spinney on Church Road."

Proposed: Cllr Redding, Seconded: Cllr Beard

16/077 To receive an update about the progress of resolutions from the last meeting of the Council on 21st April 2016. (Clerk's report)

The clerk read through the updates (in red) on appendix 1. For item 16/062 it was agreed that Cllr Fairweather will assist the clerk in the writing of the letter to the GP surgery. For item 16/066 Cllr Routledge said that she had a name from the Essex Wildlife Trust but no further correspondence. Put it on the agenda for June. For item 16/070 regarding who cuts the Spinney, Cllr Bell will ask Mr Mitchell (landowner adjacent to the Spinney).

16/078 Election of Officers, Committee Members and Working Party Members

See appendix 1 – changes agreed in this meeting are in red. It was also agreed to remove the communications committee as the PC no longer publishes newsletters, but that Cllr Beard will be officer for communications should the need arise.

Proposed: Cllr Bell, Seconded: Cllr Beard

16/079 Public Speaking

Mr Allen East – Dog Warden for TDC:

Allen was invited to attend the meeting to discuss the issues we are having with dog fouling on Market Field. He will visit the field and provide signs to be put up warning of fines. He asked for the eyes and ears of the residents, if they have any information regarding the owners who don't pick up then let him know. Photos, car registrations, if you know where they live or the approximate time it's happening. Allen can issue a fixed penalty fine of £50, and if the owner

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refuses to pay, take them to court. Allen caught 4 people in April, 3 of those from photos. Even if he can't prove it outright he can speak to people about the problem.

The dog wardens can also deal with stray dogs (which can cause a problem with fouling). They can also help with microchipping, they can hold a surgery in Elmstead and microchip dogs for free (the owners can make a donation). It was law from 6th April that all dogs be microchipped.

It is also possible to prohibit dogs from private land.

Allen talked about DNA testing but warned that it's not cheap. It costs £120/£130 per test and then we'd have to employ a solicitor to take the individual to court. It could cost £300-£500 per animal. TDC won't use DNA testing.

16/080 County Councillor report

Report not available at the meeting, see attached appendix 5 for the May ECC report and the annual ECC report.

16/081 District Councillor reports

Cllr Nicholls: The sec 106 agreement for the Meadow Close development has been signed. Essex Highways could start on the crossing for Colchester Road at any time. The Church Road development sec 106 agreement is close to being signed off.

The local plan is moving forward. They've allocated approximately 10,000 houses over the next 17 years. Elmstead has no allocation, so each application will be decided on its own merits. The first consultation document will be coming out in 6-8 weeks, it will be 18-24 months until the final version is agreed.

Cllr Heaney: Since last week a development of less than 10 houses will not have to make a sec 106 contribution. The Broad Lanes application will come before the planning committee in the June meeting. When the CIL comes in (Community Infrastructure Levy) the council will set a rate per square metre. This will take over from sec 106. The CIL will come in when the local plan is done.

16/082 Planning (for information)

Applications:

16/00643/LBC Tudor House Chapel Lane Elmstead. Replacement of rear windows and doors. No comment made.

Determinations:

16/00313/FUL FV Conservatories & Windows Colchester Road Elmstead. Erection of an enhanced orangery structure on front elevation with associated alterations. Approval - Full

16/00438/FUL Beth Chatto Gardens Clacton Road Elmstead Charity building/classroom facility. Approval - Full

Any other applications or determinations received after the agenda was issued?

16/083 Finance

- i) *To listen to the finance report and approve the payments for May. See appendix 2.*

It was resolved to accept the finance report and approve the payments for May.

Proposed - Cllr Beecham, Seconded - Cllr Ward

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- ii) *Pensions – to consider the PC’s obligations should either employee opt in to a workplace pension scheme.*

Cllr Routledge has been looking at the PC’s obligations and options. She looked at two options which represent the two different types of pension, NEST (defined contribution scheme) and the LGPS (Local Government Pension Scheme – defined benefit scheme).

It was resolved that the Finance Committee would look at and discuss the options in more details and make a recommendation for the June PC meeting.

Proposed: Cllr Redding, Seconded Cllr Bell

- iii) *Insurance – to consider quotes received for the renewal of the Parish Council insurance due 1st June 2016.*

Cllr Fairweather: his bother-in-law is an insurance broker and chased 4 companies for a quote and all 4 said no. He was advised that Zurich are the only company covering PCs.

The clerk put forward the two quotes received from Zurich (current insurers) and Aon. The Aon quote was £1,531.83 (one year) or £1,455.23 (3 years). The Zurich quote was £1,103.25 (one year), £1,058.34 (3 years) or £1,013.45 (5 years). The clerk much preferred the customer service from Zurich and has had difficulties with the Aon customer service in relation to the mower insurance. It was discussed that he PC did not want to tie themselves to a 5 year deal but that a 3 year deal would offer protection against year on year increases.

It was resolved that the PC would renew their insurance with Zurich on a 3 year agreement.

Proposed: Cllr Beecham, Seconded: Cllr Bell

16/084 Finance Committee Meeting Report

To receive the following statements as reviewed by the Finance Committee Meeting 10th May 2016:

- i) *Fourth Quarter Expenditure (Comparison of Actual full year income and expenditure versus budget for 2015/16) and*
ii) *2016/17 Budget (updated for 2015/16 actual figures and reserves as at the start of 2016/17)*

The council resolved to accept these statements.

Proposed: Cllr Routledge, Seconded: Cllr Bell

16/085 Internal Audit Report and Annual Governance Statement

To consider Jan Stobart’s internal audit report and in particular the findings of the review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control:

- i) *“It would be useful for the councillors to undertake some internal control tasks at different times during the year e.g. quarterly sight of bank statements and bank reconciliations (initialled as evidence of inspection); six monthly inspections of assets on the register to note any refurbishment / replacement needs; familiarisation with location of key files; or other tasks as appropriate.”*

It was agreed that these actions would be taken at the quarterly finance committee meetings.

- ii) *To consider and approve a Risk Assessment.*

Cllr Beecham to work with the clerk on this.

- iii) *To adopt updated Financial Regulations.*

This was deferred until the June meeting. Cllr Fairweather is to help the clerk with these.

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- iv) *To approve the Annual Governance Statement (Annual Return Section 1) see appendix 3.*

It was resolved to approve the above statement.
Proposed: Cllr Bell, Seconded: Cllr Redding

16/086 Annual Return

- i) *To consider Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2015/16 see appendix 4*

- ii) *To approve Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2015/16*

It was resolved to approve the above statements.

Proposed: Cllr Beard, Seconded: Cllr Routledge

- iii) *Signature and date of the Accounting Statements by the Chairman.*
Cllr Bell signed and dated the statements.

16/087 To determine the time and place of ordinary meetings for 16/17:

June 16th, July 21st, August 18th, September 15th, October 20th, November 17th, December 15th, January 19th, February 16th and March 16th at 7.30pm in the Community Centre, School Road, Elmstead.

The above dates were noted and agreed.

16/088 Bluegates donation – village gates

To provide a cost estimate for 4 x single gates to be installed at the village entrances and agree a budget for expenditure.

It was discussed that Essex Highways will insist on installing the gates themselves, but we don't know how much that will cost. We need to send a photo to Glasdon on the village emblem to replace the 30mph sign to get a costing for that.

It was resolved that Cllr Beecham follow up on the above and provide the PC with one final option and price.

16/089 Post Office

To discuss a change in operating hours and any other service issues.

Cllr Routledge told the PC that the post office hours have been reduce to the following: Mon- Fri 9am – 5 pm, Saturday 9am – 12pm. There is no sign displaying the new hours.

It was discussed that in the original documents about the post office moving to the Spar we were told that the opening hours would be 6.30am – 10pm 7 days a week.

It was resolved to write to our contact at the post office to query the reduction in opening hours.

Proposed: Cllr Redding, Seconded; Cllr Beecham

16/090 Market Field

An update on the issue of dog mess on the field and the means of trying to eradicate the problem.

Cllr Beard said that as this is a big topic he would write a document for discussion in the June meeting.

16/091 Communications *Items of interest for inclusion in our July Upmarket report.*

Cllrs to e-mail the clerk.

16/092 Items for next agenda or for information only

Cllr Ward said that there had been 4 break-ins in shops in Elmstead. Cllr Ward to e-mail the clerk with information for the PC. Cllr Beard would like to Village Plan on the June agenda. Cllr Fairweather asked about the meeting with the

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planning people for some training on appeals. The clerk to follow up with Clare David (TDC planning).

There being no further public business councillors were thanked for their attendance.

The meeting closed at 9.52pm.

Date of next Parish Meeting: Thursday 16th June 2016.

To be held in the Community Centre, School Road, Elmstead

Minuted by Mrs. A Baxter

19th May 2016

Contact: elmsteadparish@gmail.com

01206 827139

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Appendix 1

Officers (Roles and Responsibilities)

2015/16

2016/17

TDALC	Cllr. Nick Bell	Cllr. Nick Bell
Community Centre	Cllr. Stan Beecham	Cllr. Stan Beecham
Public Transport	Cllr. Jean Routledge	Cllr. Jean Routledge
Road Safety	Cllr Nick Bell Cllr Stan Beecham	Cllr Nick Bell Cllr Stan Beecham
Dene Park	Cllr. Nick Bell Cllr. Ron Fairweather Cllr. Paul Beard	Cllr. Nick Bell Cllr. Ron Fairweather Cllr. Paul Beard
Parish Paths	Cllr. Jean Routledge Cllr. Nick Bell Cllr. Rob Redding	Cllr. Jean Routledge Cllr. Nick Bell Cllr. Rob Redding
Flag Officer	Mrs. Cathy Brock (Principle) Cllr. Nick Bell (Standby)	Mrs. Cathy Brock (Principle) Cllr. Nick Bell (Standby) Cllr. Martine Ward (Standby)
Health and Safety	Cllr. Stan Beecham Cllr. Ron Fairweather Mr. Alan Dingwall	Cllr. Stan Beecham Cllr. Ron Fairweather Mr. Alan Dingwall
Village Schools	Cllr. Mike Kirby	Cllr. Mike Kirby
Communications		Cllr. Paul Beard

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Committees:

Finance Committee

2015/16

2016/17

Chair	Cllr. Redding	Cllr. Redding
Vice Chair	Cllr. Fairweather	Cllr. Fairweather
Member	Cllr. Routledge	Cllr. Routledge
Member	Cllr. Beecham	Cllr. Beecham
Member	Cllr. Bell	Cllr. Bell

Personnel Committee

2015/16

2016/17

Chair	Cllr. Routledge	Cllr. Routledge
Member	Cllr. Bell	Cllr. Bell
Member	Cllr. Beecham	Cllr. Beecham
Member	Cllr. Ward	Cllr. Ward

Planning Committee

If a planning meeting is needed, then all councillors will attend as all councillors are members of the planning committee.

For week to week applications then the two planning officers below will look at the plans and come up with an appropriate response.

Planning Officer	Cllr. Bell	Cllr. Bell
Planning Officer	Cllr. Beecham	Cllr. Beecham

Working Parties:

New Community Centre Working Party

Chair		Cllr. Beecham
Member	Cllr. Fairweather	Cllr. Fairweather
Member	Cllr. Routledge	Cllr. Routledge
Member	Cllr. Beecham	Cllr. Ward
Member	Cllr. Bell	Cllr. Bell

Bluegates Solar Donation Working Party

Chair	Cllr. Routledge	Cllr. Routledge
Member	Cllr. Redding	Cllr. Redding
Member	Cllr. Beecham	Cllr. Beecham
Member	Cllr. Kirby	Cllr. Kirby
Member	Cllr. Bell	Cllr. Bell

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Appendix 2 Elmstead Parish Council Finance Report

Closing Balances to 30th April 2016 are:

Current Account to Bank Statement Ref 789	£31,359.28
Total uncashed cheques	£3,197.62
Total of cheques below (May payments - request for approval)	£251.68
Balance in current account after cheques	£27,909.98
Deposit Account to Bank Statement Ref 147	£27,704.30
Active Saver Account (Bluegates Donation)	£10,020.61
Estimated Overall Closing Balance - Current and Deposit	£65,634.89

Income Details for April 2016:

Precept	£14,229.00
LCTSS grant	£1,161.00
Total income for April 2016	£15,390.00

Approval is requested for the following payments:

Elmstead Community Centre – Hall Hire April x 1	£16.00
Cllr Fairweather – Drain Cover & Macadam for Elmcroft	£50.19
Mrs J Stobart – Internal Audit	£140.00
Cllr Bell	£7.20
Mr A Dingwall – weedkiller	£7.99
Mrs A Baxter – CiLCA April mileage and car park (Great Dunmow)	£30.30
Total Cheques	£251.68

Report prepared by A Baxter – Clerk & RFO
19th May 2016

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Appendix 3

Section 1 – Annual governance statement 2015/16

We acknowledge as the members of:

Enter name of
smaller authority here:

ELMSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including the preparation of the accounting statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the accounting statements for the year ended 31 March 2016, that:

	Agreed			'Yes' means that this smaller authority:
	Yes	No*		
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓			prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control, including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓			made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and proper practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this smaller authority to conduct its business or on its finances.	✓			has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with proper practices in doing so.
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓			during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this smaller authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✓			considered the financial and other risks it faces and has dealt with them properly.
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓			arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓			responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this smaller authority and, where appropriate have included them in the accounting statements.	✓			disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year-end if relevant.
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	Yes	No	NA	has met all of its responsibilities where it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.
			✓	

This annual governance statement is approved by this smaller authority and recorded as minute reference:

MINUTE REFERENCE
 dated

Signed by:

Chair SIGNATURE REQUIRED
 dated DDMMYY
 Signed by:
 Clerk SIGNATURE REQUIRED
 dated DDMMYY

*Note: Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response. Describe how this smaller authority will address the weaknesses identified.

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Appendix 4

Section 2 – Accounting statements 2015/16 for

Enter name of smaller authority here:

ELMSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2015 £	31 March 2016 £	
1. Balances brought forward	31,142	38,623	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	27,272	27,544	Total amount of precept or (for IDBs) rates and levies received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	11,280	15,296	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	15,904	13,927	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include salaries and wages, PAYE and NI (employees and employers), pension contributions and employment expenses.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the smaller authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	15,167	14,832	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	38,623	52,704	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) – (4+5+6)
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	38,623	52,704	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	579,910	579,910	The original Asset and Investment Register value of all fixed assets, plus other long term assets owned by the smaller authority as at 31 March
10. Total borrowings	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).
11. (For Local Councils Only) Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	Yes	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Council acts as sole trustee for and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets. N.B. The figures in the accounting statements above do not include any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2016 the accounting statements in this annual return present fairly the financial position of this smaller authority and its income and expenditure, or properly present receipts and payments, as the case may be.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer

[Signature]

Date 11/05/2016

I confirm that these accounting statements were approved by this smaller authority on this date:

[Signature]

and recorded as minute reference:

[Minute Reference]

Signed by Chair of the meeting approving these accounting statements.

[Signature]

Date [Date]

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Appendix 5

ECC report May 2016

New Chairman announced

Cllr John Aldridge has been elected as the new Chairman of Essex County Council for the coming year.

County Council Member for the Broomfield and Writtle Division since 2005, Cllr Aldridge takes over the post from the outgoing Chairman, Cllr Norman Hume.

Cllr Aldridge was very honoured to be elected as Chairman of the Essex County Council, and said that following on from his two years serving as Vice Chairman, he wished to acknowledge the outstanding contribution to the County of Essex by his predecessor, Cllr Norman Hume.

The role of Chairman of the County Council dates back to 1889, when the County Council was formed, and there has been a long tradition of service to the community and it is his aspiration to follow in that tradition and the example of his predecessors.

Amongst his priorities he will promote entrepreneurial skills at all levels whilst also seeking greater recognition for all those voluntary groups and carers that make such a major contribution to the wellbeing of the residents of Essex.

During his time as a County Councillor, Cllr Aldridge has served as Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and as Chairman of a number of Council Committees.

He has also served on a number of outside bodies including the Anglian Eastern Regional Flood & Coastal Committee, Chelmsford Youth Strategy Group, the County Council's Network, Chelmsford Local Highways Panel and as Chairman of the Epping Forest District Locality Board

Changes to Council Cabinet

At the same Full Council meeting changes to the Cabinet were also announced, following Cllr Roger Hirst's election as the new Police and Crime Commissioner for the county.

The changes will see Cllr Simon Walsh, member for Thaxted, join the Cabinet and take on the new Environment and Waste portfolio. Deputy Leader Cllr Kevin Bentley will take on responsibility for public sector reform and strategic partnerships. Cllr John Spence will take on additional responsibility for Planning, while IT and digital transformation will move under the Leader's portfolio.

Cabinet Members

Name	Portfolio
Cllr David Finch	Leader
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Deputy Leader and Economic Growth and Partnerships
Cllr John Spence	Finance, Housing and Planning
Cllr Rodney Bass	Infrastructure
Cllr Eddie Johnson	Highways and Transport
Cllr Anne Brown	Corporate, Communities and Customers
Cllr Dick Madden	Adults and Children
Cllr Ray Gooding	Education and Lifelong Learning
Cllr Graham Butland	Health
Cllr Simon Walsh	Environment and Waste

Deputy Members

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Cllr Anthony Jackson (Property and Project Assurance)
Cllr Stephen Canning (Digital Innovation)
Cllr Penny Channer (Broadband and Enterprise)
Cllr Ricki Gadsby (Creative Economy and Skills)
Cllr Mick Page (Planning and Rural Affairs)
Cllr Ray Howard (Local Transport and Parking)
Cllr Malcolm Maddox (Age Care)
Cllr Sue Lissimore (Early Years and Customer Service Improvement)
Cllr Susan Barker (Health Living and Wellbeing)
Cllr Kay Twitchen (Sustainability)
Cllr Malcolm Buckley (Waste Reduction)

New Essex Waste-Busters Initiative

To boost recycling and improve figures a new county wide initiative has been put in place; Essex Waste-Busters are looking for volunteers who are passionate about the environment to join their award winning team.

If you are interested in helping your community, the Waste-Buster team is holding a recruitment drive for enthusiastic volunteers on the 21 May at Clacton Library from 9.30am to 4pm.

The Waste-Busters Champions help their local community to reduce waste, increase recycling and save money. Volunteers will be able to attend a free training day to find out about becoming a Waste-Buster as well as get advice on reducing food waste reduction, home composting, reusing and refurbishing items. They will then be able to speak to local groups, small or large to give demonstrations or workshops, as well as blog and share their knowledge.

It is hoped that the Waste-Busters Initiative can really make a difference to a local community not just by helping neighbours reduce waste, recycle more and save money but also by giving volunteers the opportunity to meet likeminded people and share their knowledge and experience. They will be able to attend training session, as well as get involved in events to find out more about reducing food waste, recycling reuse and home-composting.

Annual training, continued support and travel expenses will be provided for all recruited Waste-Busters and rewards will be offered on completion of 15, 30 and 60 hours of volunteering.

For more information please email waste.busters@essex.gov.uk or visit the website www.recycleforessex.com

Summer grass verge cutting

Drivers are being asked to be cautious and allow time and space to pass tractors as Essex County Council begins its summer roadside grass verge cutting programme.

Up to eight tractors will be working on the Essex road network at any one time during the peak summer cutting season.

Motorists are urged to keep a safe distance between their vehicle and the cutting machinery in case of flying debris, such as tree branches.

Grass verges on all of Essex's priority routes (main roads) are cut to improve visibility and so safety for drivers and other road users.

The cutting programme includes verges next to roads and pavements, as well as vegetation on central reservations and anywhere growth affects sightlines at junctions.

Around 6,100 miles of verge will be cut during the summer.

Engineers will also begin spraying weeds in some more urban areas to limit the damage they can cause by growing through the surfaces. Weeds can also trap litter and block drains.

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Wider verges on sections of the A127, A13 (Pitsea Flyover to Five Bells roundabout), A1245, A130 and A133 can take up to four passes by the tractor cutters to cover the whole area. To keep delays for drivers to a minimum the cutting will take place at night when roads are less busy.

To keep the verges at an acceptable height during fast growth in summer, Highways staff will trim the county's roadside verges twice. The first cut is to a minimum width of three feet, wherever possible, to account for sightlines at junctions, bends and known areas of higher risk.

A second trim up to 18 feet wide in particular spots, is carried out by staff following up after the tractors, to ensure that the areas close to road signs, street lights and other obstructions are cut with strimmers. Verge cutting is often complicated by piles of litter so people are also reminded to take all their litter home.

New "Families Included Prize" launches across Essex to help isolated families

The 'Families Included Prize' which aims to reduce the social isolation and loneliness of Essex families with children aged 0-5 was launched at County Hall on Thursday 12th May. Essex County Council, working with Nesta, the UK's innovation foundation, will deliver the first ever, local government challenge prize* and is encouraging people across the county to enter.

The Families Included Prize is an exciting new way for the Council to engage local communities, as well as discover and support great solutions. Social isolation is a growing concern for parents, guardians and carers in Essex, regardless of background, and impacts all aspects of life.

ECC are inviting applications from individuals, groups and organisations across communities in the county – anyone who has a great idea about how to address this issue – to apply. Ideas can relate to any aspect of life including personal, professional and social experiences.

Open until Thursday 14 July 2016, the prize process has several stages. Entrants will be whittled down to 10 finalists who will each receive mentoring and financial support to develop and test out their ideas. The winner, who will be announced in January 2017, will receive £10,000 to help develop their idea.

A short animated video has been produced outlining the Prize, its aims, who can enter and how. This can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/-UXUP5bgVSw>

Looking after a young child is one of the most rewarding things someone does but it can also be one of the toughest; there are families and carers in the county who feel isolated and are in need of support.

But there are also people among the Essex community with great ideas that the Council wants to work with and it encourages anyone with an idea, who's thought 'I know how I can solve this challenge' to enter.

Challenge Prizes are a proven way to develop new ideas that tackle real problems, said Helen Goulden, Executive Director at Nesta, and that's why we're excited to be supporting the delivery of Essex's first challenge prize. The Families Included Prize will give people in Essex the opportunity to put their ideas forward to help build more resilient families by reducing isolation."

For more information about the Families Included Prize in Essex, please visit: <http://challenge-prizes.essex.gov.uk> and follow the [#familiesincluded](#) on Twitter.

*Challenge prizes offer a reward to whoever can most effectively meet a defined challenge. They act as an incentive for meeting a specific challenge, rather than being a reward for past achievements (eg. Nobel Peace Prizes). They have a long history of tackling issues as diverse as food preservation and navigation, to health revolutions

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Council retains 'excellent' rating for equality

Essex County Council has retained its 'excellent' rating for embedding equality and inclusion into its work; it was announced at a meeting of the authority's Full Council on Tuesday 10th May.

The news comes following a reassessment of the Council by inspectors from the Local Government Association (LGA) which looked at every aspect of the Council, assessing how the organisation works with local communities and partners embedding equality and inclusion.

Essex is one of only two county councils in England to be reaccredited as Excellent – Leicestershire County Council is the second.

Essex is a diverse county with many different communities and faiths; the culture of equality and inclusion has always been the ethos within the Council and the inspectors not only spent time with officers but also went into out into the communities and were clearly impressed with some of the work that is happening across the county; they made particular reference to the partnership work done to tackle domestic abuse, the work undertaken to support the community in adopting, and the introduction of work experience opportunities for young people with autism.

The inspectors also noted the work the Council has been doing in supporting the Syrian Refugee Crisis, bringing together local authority, health, faith and community organisations to support arrivals into the county.

The full report from the LGA will be available in the coming weeks.

ECC Annual report 2015-2016

Highways

The Council back in April 2015 announced that it would lead on a feasibility study to make the A120 a dual carriageway between Braintree and Colchester by pledging £5 million available for this purpose.

The aim is to get the scheme in the 2020-2025 Roads Investment Strategy works programme; this project will bring great benefit to road users in that part of the county as well as many more that use this road to get to Stanstead Airport and the Midlands.

A consultation exercise for the siting of a roundabout at the Hare Green-Pellen's Corner stretch was held at Great Bromley Village Hall in August 2015; in this location 6 deaths, over 30 serious collisions and countless unreported accidents have taken place over the last five years, with a cost to the public purse of well over £10million.

After much pressure from us your local political representatives, the installation of speed cameras was finally achieved and as a result the number of serious accidents have dropped dramatically with thankfully, no more deaths. It is hoped that the installation of the new roundabout will begin later this year.

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Essex County Council has fully backed plans for a Thames Crossing from Highways England (formerly Highways Agency) which will link Tilbury in Essex with Gravesend in Kent, as its preferred option (known as Option C).

This option proposes that the scheme would run from the end of the M2, crossing the river just east of Gravesend and Tilbury and joining the M25 between junctions 29 and 30.

This will be the first new crossing of the Thames east of London since the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge which opened 25 years ago.

Subject to the necessary funding and planning approvals, Highways England anticipates that the new crossing would open in 2027, if publicly funded or by 2025 if private funding can be secured.

To find out more or contribute to Highways England's consultation please visit www.lower-thames-crossing.co.uk

In July Essex County Council's Highways won a prestigious national highways award for the most efficient partnership with Ringway Jacobs as a model of effective partnership working built on shared objectives and problem solving and a great example to others.

The Council introduced a new scheme for public works to tackle unnecessary congestion, which carries heavy fines if works over-run.

Over 1000 fixed penalty notices have been issued since going live on 16 March 2015 to companies digging up the roads outside the agreed permit terms, with one company been fined £4,000 and having had its permit revoked.

Since March 2015, Essex County Council has processed more than 20,000 permit requests, granting more than 15,000; refusing outright more than 3,000; and requiring changes to work dates or timings for more than 1,200 other requests.

Finances

Essex County Council gave a very robust response to the Comprehensive Spending Review in the Autumn Statement with the Chancellor not even mentioning the reduction to Local Authorities budgets in his speech. The very significant on-going reduction in the grant funding will place considerable extra pressures on services across the board and the current identified funding gap for the next three years is in excess of £200million.

After five consecutive years of freeze the Council has been forced to increase the council tax increase by a total of 4% which includes the extra increase of 2% to pay for social care funding and the financial implications of the new Care Act.

Communities

The ever popular match funding scheme Community Initiatives Fund (CIF) has once again been retained and it is open to all Community led groups and organisations who can yet again now bid for a share of £1.5million pot.

This year the Council awarded sums of up to £20,000 to a total of 90 projects; in most cases it attracts a consequential total financial benefit of five times the amount granted.

CIF is a small grants scheme funded by Essex County Council which is designed to support community projects that:

- create, procure or develop new community projects
- enhance existing community projects
- enhance or develop initiatives that strengthen a community.

This scheme has once again been enhanced by CIF emergency Response (subject to a maximum application of £15,000 for any one project) for time critical projects only, and must be fully supported by the relevant Division Elected Member.

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A new Grant to help protect residential properties from surface water flooding was made available for residents in October; applications for Property Level Protection (PLP) grants, of up to £5,000, can be made by individual homeowners via the Essex County Council website and are now available for residents to apply for.

The purpose of this grant is to provide assistance to residents who have suffered from flooding in Essex by helping them to become more resilient and resistant to future flooding. To find out more about the grants and to fill out an online PLP application form please visit www.essex.gov.uk/flooding and look under the 'Apply' tab.

A new free webcasting service was made available to Parish and Town Council in October to enable meetings to be broadcasted live into resident's homes thanks to a new audio webcasting app.

The app allows for audio to be streamed and recorded through a mobile phone. These recordings are then made available as minutes following the meeting. For further information please contact

Jonathan.Phillips@essex.gov.uk or ring 03330 133400

A popular scheme launched two years ago which has already saved Essex residents almost £1 million, reopened again in December for new applications.

During last year's "Essex Energy Switch", residents saved approximately £263 per household resulting in a total savings across the county of a staggering £948,792.

From the nationwide sign-up last year, over 27 percent of participants were from Essex. For more information visit www.essex.gov.uk/energyswitch

Trading Standards

The Council's Trading Standards officers have had yet again another very busy year. They have dealt with several issues such as the sale of counterfeit goods on line and through Social Media of clothing, jewellery, fake cigarette and tobacco, pets with false certification, footwear, handbags, perfume, make-up as well as having confiscated large amounts of illegally imported alcohol.

The authority also relaunched the continuing campaign against scammers by raising awareness and suspicion on things such as:

- Out of the blue phone calls, letters and emails
- Being asked to send money to claim a prize
- Being told of winnings when a competition wasn't entered into
- 'Too good to be true' offers
- Pressure selling
- Uninvited door step callers
- Being asked share your personal details
- Secrecy

Every year, scams and scammers dupe UK consumers out of around £9 billion, not to mention the devastating psychological effects on the victims they leave behind.

Essex County Council has identified and dealt with more than 3,000 scams within the county in the past year, but the real figure is estimated to be at least three times higher.

Any information about sales of counterfeit goods can be given by calling the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline who handle calls for Trading Standards on 03454 040506.

Communications

A New Digital Subscription called "Keep me Posted", was launched last April to Essex residents who will now be able to subscribe to a tailored news and information service from the Council; this service gives updates on road works, gritting, the latest information from

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schools or libraries, or a ‘what’s on’ guide to local events and activities, and it sends all these latest information direct to a registered email account. So far well over 140.000 residents have signed up, which represents 10% of the Essex population.

To sign up simply visit the Council’s website www.essex.gov.uk and click on “Keep Me Posted” button.

Recycling

Essex County Council’s Funding and Investment Team secured a one off funding of £900,000 of government money, the largest pot of cash in the UK handed by DCLG, and was awarded equally to four Councils in Essex, which includes Tendring, Braintree, Epping Forest and Harlow; this money was earmarked to boost recycling amongst households and in schools.

Essex County Council’s Funding and Investment Team help to facilitate and prepare this partnership bid.

Tendring District Council has used part of their share for the provision of free biodegradable liners for the food-waste caddies and part in a comprehensive recycling awareness campaign. The Young Essex Assembly (YEA) fully engaged with the programme and The Rolf C.of E. Primary School in Thorpe-le-Soken was the first school in Essex to take up food waste recycling, which has led the way to the rest of the County.

Education

From September 2015 the new controversial Home to School Policy came into force; the Policy states that new pupils will receive free home to school transport if they attend the nearest secondary school to their home address 3 miles or more from the home and in line with legislation on school transport. In some cases this has precluded some children to attend the historical school of their choice because of the extra expense that parents would have had to bear. In our district only a small number of households have been affected.

There are exceptions for families on low income where the annual household income is less than £16,190.

Priority admission, or living in a catchment areas is no longer a relevant factor when assessing whether a child is entitled to free home to school transport.

Once again Essex has returned some impressive figures on A-Level results with a marked improvement across all key measures.

More than 4,000 students were entered in Essex schools, initial results show that of all the grades awarded, 78.3% were A*-C and almost 99% were A*- E.

GCSE results also showed improvement on last year figures climbing from 56.5% in 2014 to 58.4 per cent in 2015 of pupils achieving 5 or more A* - C grades including English and maths.– the equivalent of about 300 extra pupils.

Essex Primary School pupils have too improved SATS benchmark results by showing 81% of 11-year-olds achieving level 4 or higher in their tests in the three subjects in 2015 – a 2% rise from 2014. They have also improved on its ranking against all authorities which now is 51st out of 151.

3150 new Primary and Secondary school places were created in time for new academic year in September, following record investment of almost £48million; even though a large percentage of schools in Essex are now Academies the County Council is still the responsible authority for the provision of school places.

A new campaign “Teach in Essex” was launched in the autumn to attract teachers to our County with the aims to promote Essex as an excellent place to both teach and live.

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The Council is working closely with the Association of Secondary Head teachers in Essex (ASHE) and Essex Primary Head teachers' Association (EPHA) and the campaign will primarily target areas of the country where there is a known surplus of teachers which has been identified in the north of England.

Vacancies and more information about teaching in Essex can be found at
<http://www.essexschoolsjobs.co.uk/>