Parish Council Update – September 2026

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

One of the first priorities of the new Essex County Council administration was tackling the condition of our roads.

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.

Repair activity remains above last year's level. July's results were 60% higher than in 2025, and August's were 30% higher. Since 1 May, 998 repairs have been completed in Braintree District, the second-highest total among Essex districts.

Alongside reactive pothole repairs, Essex Highways continues to deliver resurfacing programmes and more permanent repairs where appropriate. The priority now is to maintain this momentum so residents see a sustained improvement in road conditions.

Highway safety initiatives also remain under review. Parish councils should note that the Local Highways Panel will end in March 2027.

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 directly through Essex Highways' online Report It service. This creates a unique reference number, ensures the defect is formally logged and allows its progress to be tracked. If you would like me to follow up a report on your behalf, please send me the reference number and I will raise it with the relevant officers.

Drainage

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

This work is important because blocked drainage can quickly contribute to flooding 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

Residents and landowners are responsible for cutting back privately owned hedges where they obstruct the highway 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 start of the year.

Local Highway and Community Issues

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

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

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

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government delayed responding to Essex County Council's judicial review on four occasions. We have now received confirmation that the Government's Local Government Reorganisation decision for Essex has been withdrawn while the wider programme is reviewed.

This means district council elections will take place in May 2027 on the existing council boundaries.

We are awaiting further information about the date of the Greater Essex mayoral election and the arrangements for a combined authority should this be what the government wants to pursue The administration supports devolution and the creation of a combined authority in principle, but there is still significant work to be done to determine how this should operate.

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 they rely on.

Net Zero

The new administration has ended Essex County Council's Net Zero programme, stopping spending on initiatives it considered ideological and not the best use of taxpayers' money. The changes are projected to save £3 million over four years.

This does not mean the Council is stepping back from its responsibilities to protect residents or maintain essential services. Investment will continue in practical measures such as flood prevention, drainage improvements, highway maintenance and resilience planning where these form part of the Council's statutory duties and provide clear benefits to residents.

The administration's approach is to focus resources on effective frontline services and practical environmental measures that provide clear value for Essex taxpayers.

Fostering in Essex

Essex County Council is encouraging more people to consider fostering. Around 500 foster families currently care for more than 750 children.

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.

Operation Vanguard

Operation Vanguard has been announced and launched 14/9/26 in response to concerns around safety and ASB within the 3 towns

The initial three-month pilot will place security operatives in Braintree, Colchester and Chelmsford town and city centres. They will 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 placed on local services.

Local Casework

Supporting residents remains a significant part of my role as your County Councillor.

Alongside attending meetings at County Hall, I continue to assist residents with individual casework involving highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way and other Essex County Council services.

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 ensure they are addressed effectively.

If your council has any concerns relating to highways, transport, education, flooding, Public Rights of Way or any other Essex County Council service, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to attend parish council meetings when I can.

As always, please send me details of any County Council matters affecting your parish so that I can raise them with the relevant service.