

## County Council Report - August 2020

Clearly the Covid-19 issues have been the major items that we at ECC have been presented with over the last few months and the following is a snapshot of the challenges faced: -

The school term has now finished, and children are at home officially without the need for parents to “Home Educate. However, the majority of our schools in Essex have been open throughout and as the weeks have gone by increasing numbers of children have returned to school.

Schools have needed to adapt quickly to the ever-changing situation. Firstly, through supporting children and parents with their home learning utilising many online platforms to do so. When the government announced that schools will reopen, the professionalism and desire to make the school environment a safe place so that children could return to learning was fantastic. We had an amazing response from schools, and I thank all those teachers and support staff who not only continued to teach key worker and vulnerable children throughout the pandemic but were instrumental when the schools reopened to wider cohorts.

Another part of the education system within the County is Adult Community Learning and ACL has also been supporting residents, communities, and businesses across Essex to quickly and easily access new learning and upskilling opportunities during this time. Impressively, as well as sustaining its apprenticeship training provision, it has also attracted new apprentices.

Furloughed workers have also been supported so they can enhance existing skills or develop new ones. Part of this is the delivery of a ‘Preparing to Work in Adult Social Care’ programme, which will enable more people to gain jobs in the sector at this critical time. This has included the Nightingale Nursing Apprenticeship scheme where the County Council have pledged £1.5 Million to support the training of Staff within the Caring Professions with opportunities to progress to Degree Qualified Nurses.

The Youth Service has been running an extensive programme of activities including:

- Holding a weekly timetable of Zoom sessions that young people can access for help and advice including mental health and wellbeing.
- Our Employment advisers have been supporting those young people at risk of becoming NEET via ‘online’ means with webinars and chats
- Our Targeted Youth Advisers have continued to support those young people on our employability programmes such as ‘Plan B’ and caseload welfare check in’s
- Our Young Carers team have maintained support to their caseload, as well as keeping in contact with all young carers that have been referred to the service to reduce social isolation.

As lockdown eases the youth service have been reengaging with young people through detached street-work sessions across our priority districts enabling them to offer support to vulnerable groups face to face whilst maintaining social distancing.

The number of youth work sessions has risen again this year by 8% compared to the year before, a total of 16,481 youth work sessions. We’ve seen the number of young people engaging with us increase again this year by 7%, a total of 54,957.

This summer we have a whole programme of activities planned through our Youth Service including our Virtual Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) which continues to support participants with all sections of the award from home.

We have very recently been awarded £56,000.00 from the Youth Endowment Fund. This will enable us to extend our early help offer with online Prison No Way, Sisters in Strength and the Goodman projects for 10 – 14 year olds.

The Youth Service in association with Active Essex and the Early Years teams have also been involved with the plans for Summer Activity Camps that are now running across the County to provide families with the break to enable them to return to work whilst their children are engaged in safe and supportive activities. This will be providing more than 21,000 sessions during August and will be ensuring that children are ready to return to school in September should conditions allow. Most importantly this is all in conjunction with the Holiday Hunger Programme, ensuring that some of our most deprived children continue to have at least one substantial meal per day and In Uttlesford this provision is being operated by the Essex Boys and Girls Clubs.

Lots of work by ECC to support the residents of Essex during these difficult times.

**Ray Gooding**