

County Councillor's Report: September 2020

Return to normal hours of use for Essex Concessionary Bus Pass Holders

The hours of use for Concessionary Bus Passes in Essex will return to normal on Tuesday 1st September 2020.

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Essex County Council (ECC) extended the hours of operation for Essex bus passes to all day from the usual off-peak times to help people make use of early hours opening for high risk groups.

Now businesses and shops are starting to return to normal, with schools preparing for a September return, social distancing requirements on bus services mean that during the peak morning travel period there will be additional pressure on bus capacity for school children and workers.

As a result, ECC has agreed with bus operators that the times of operation for Essex concessionary bus passes will return to normal hours - 9am to midnight on weekdays and all times on weekends and public holidays from Tuesday, 1st September 2020.

If you are a pass holder and want to travel outside the hours of operation of your bus pass you will need to pay the full fare for your journey from this date.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Passenger Transport, said: "I'm pleased bus transport arrangements are moving back to normal from the changes we brought in to help vulnerable passengers access shops at the height of the lockdown.

"This return to a normal service will help bus passengers and drivers observe social distancing protocols by spreading out the volume of passengers across the morning.

"I will take this opportunity to emphasise to all bus passengers that when using bus services, please follow the guidance from Public Health England, including the need to wear a face covering and reducing personal contact, while maintaining social distancing and personal hygiene measures, particularly sneezing or coughing into disposable tissues, avoiding touching your face and regular thorough hand cleaning."

All bus passengers are asked to note the availability of bus services is likely to continue to change over the coming weeks.

Bus passengers are strongly advised to check the bus operator's website, social media and phone apps to see what bus services will be running before starting their journey.

Win prizes for walking and cycling by joining the 60 Day Active Travel Challenge run by Stop. Swap. GO!



Swap to walking and cycling with a 60 Day Challenge run by Stop. Swap. GO! and you could win fantastic prizes, including Love2Shop and Amazon e-vouchers and even the chance to win a bike and cycling or walking accessories to the value of £1,000!

Stop. Swap. GO! is a behaviour change campaign led by Essex County Council, which aims to make it easier and more motivating for Essex residents to switch from car to more sustainable travel choices in the future.

The campaign builds upon temporary measures installed in town and city centres across Essex which increase space for social distancing and encourages walking and cycling.

A website outlining the campaign and full of tips on how to get the most out of walking and cycling is now live - www.stopswapgo.co.uk/

Take part in the 60 Day Challenge to be in with a chance of winning a prize. It's completely free and every trip counts. Whether you're walking to work or simply cycling to the shops, tell us about your trip and you could win! It's as simple as that.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Passenger Transport, said: "The Stop. Swap. GO! 60 Day Challenge is an excellent way to start thinking about how to swap walking and cycling into your daily travel. The new website makes it easy for people to register and take up this active challenge which could benefit us all."

There are five simple steps to starting your 60 Day Challenge:

- Hit the "Sign up" button to launch the registration form for the 60 Day Challenge and then enter your details
- Check your email inbox for an email from us containing the link to download our challenge smartphone app (it's called "Indeemo")
- Click the link and create an Indeemo account using the same email address you used to register for the 60 Day Challenge
- Log into the Indeemo app via your smartphone
- Follow the quick app tutorial and start your challenge!
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For more information about Stop. Swap. GO! and the 60 Day Challenge follow the campaign on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter or visit www.stopswapgo.co.uk

Stop. Swap. GO! encourages parents and young people to get to school using active and sustainable travel this September

Parents and children across Essex are being asked to think about how they get to school in September and visit the Stop.Swap.GO! website to start to plan their journey. This is particularly important because for many families their journey will be different – or they might want to choose another way of making it.

Stop.Swap.GO! is supporting students and their parents to get to school in September by providing an information service that encourages walking, scooting and cycling to school across Essex and helps young people know what to do if they travel by bus.

As schools return and bus capacity is limited due to social distancing requirements, many families will find their school journey is different. Or they might choose another more active way to make it.

A new, dedicated 'Getting to school' page on the Stop.Swap.GO! [website](#) is now live to help families develop a sustainable and active travel option for the school run. It includes maps and information on cycle and walking routes to schools in Essex, as well as suggested drop off zones away from the school gate to reduce congestion. These are being developed for schools in our most congested areas – and schools are being asked for their own suggestions so you'll see more added.

It also contains all the up to date information for travel to school by bus and travel to school for young people who receive education transport provided by Essex County Council. It's important parents and young people understand the new requirements on face coverings and social distancing.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Passenger Transport, said: "Getting to school in September will be a new experience. We need to give parents and pupils the information to travel to school safely yet in a way which reduces emissions, improves health and is good for the environment."

Getting to School support will be promoted on Stop.Swap.GO! Facebook, Instagram and Twitter social media channels.

The Getting to School initiative will also include a competition to incentivise sustainable travel to school, launching late August.

Stop.Swap.GO! is a campaign led by Essex County Council, aiming to increase sustainable travel in the county. The aim of the campaign is to make it easier and more motivating for Essex residents to switch from car to more sustainable travel choices in the future.

The campaign builds upon temporary measures which are installed in town and city centres across Essex to increase space for social distancing and encourages walking and cycling. For more information and tips on how to get the most out of walking and cycling visit the [website](#).

Back to School support for Essex families

Essex County Council (ECC) is encouraging families across the county to find out about the advice, guidance and support on offer to help children and young people prepare to go back to school in September.

Confidential advice and support is available locally across a range of areas, including emotional wellbeing and resilience, coping with change and travelling to school, all of which are key areas as children and young people get ready to return to the classroom.

For some children and young people, this will be the first time they have been back to school since March and so ECC will be raising awareness of the local organisations and information that can help families over the coming weeks through its Every Family Matters campaign.

Cllr Ray Gooding, ECC's Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, said: "Going back to school is a really exciting time, although we know that the last few months have been strange and unsettling for lots of children and young people, and that they may need additional support over the next few weeks in order to prepare.

"I'd like to reassure families that education colleagues across the county have been working extremely hard to ensure schools and settings are prepared to welcome children back for the Autumn term, so that children can return to school feeling confident and ready to learn."

The support available to Essex families also includes the [summer holiday clubs programme](#) which saw the county council invest around £240,000 into 21,600 free activity camp sessions during the six-week summer holiday.

The aim of the programme is to help children to stay physically active and socially connected, as well as supporting them to get back into a structured routine, ahead of returning to school.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, ECC's Cabinet Member for Children and Families, said: "We are pleased to be able to offer a range of support to help Essex families, including our summer activities programme, which we know will be particularly welcome as children prepare to go back to school.

Throughout August and September, ECC will be sign-posting to support, resources and local organisations that can help on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Additionally, ECC's [Stop.Swap.GO! campaign](#) provides an information service that can help and encourage parents, carers and students to walk, scoot and cycle safely to school.

More information about the type of support available and how families can access local organisations that can help them, can be found on the [Staying Well Children and Families page](#).

Essex pupils receive A-Level results

Pupils across Essex will receive their A-level results today (Thursday 13 August), following a period of highly unusual circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final months of the last school year saw unprecedented disruption for pupils, leading to many missing their final face-to-face lessons and having to adapt to home-schooling and remote learning, before this year's A-Level exams were eventually cancelled.

To ensure students still received grades in time to progress to further study or employment, an alternative system of calculating results has been adopted by the Government.

However, these grades will not be used for performance tables for schools, colleges or local authorities and Essex County Council (ECC) will not be publishing its usual headline figures.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, said: "The past few months have meant an extraordinary period of disruption for A-Level students, never before experienced by a cohort of pupils.

"I would like to extend my congratulations to all those receiving their results during what I know has been an extremely challenging and stressful time.

"I'd also like to pass on my thanks to all our teaching and school colleagues for their ongoing hard work and dedication throughout this period.

"If anyone is disappointed with their grades, there is an appeals process which their school or college will be able to support them with.

"I'd like to wish everyone that collected their results today the very best of luck in the future and hope that they enable individuals to take their chosen next steps."

Schools and colleges sent exam boards grades and a rank order of their pupils in each subject. Exam boards then standardised this information to ensure consistency of teacher judgements and comparability to previous year's performance.

This means students, universities, colleges and employers can have confidence in this year's results. We would encourage all students (and parents) to speak to their school or college if their results aren't what they were expecting.

ECC is supporting schools with guidance which will enable them to help pupils through the appeals process.

More information about grading this year – as well as information on resitting exams in the Autumn and making an appeal – can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/your-results-what-next.

Schools and colleges are preparing to open for all pupils in September. Measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 are in place, and next year's exams are scheduled to take place, with some adjustments. You can find out more about full opening plans on our website here: www.essex.gov.uk/changes-services/schools-learning.

Essex pupils receive GCSE results

Pupils across Essex will receive their GCSE results today (Thursday 20 August), following a period of unusual circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and weeks of uncertainty around how GCSE grades would be determined this year.

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) finally confirmed this week that this year's GCSE grades have been awarded using the centre assessment grade from schools and colleges, rather than those calculated through a standardised algorithm.

However, if students' calculated grades are higher than the centre assessment grade, their calculated grade will stand. This means that no pupils will receive downgraded results.

Similar to this year's A-Level results, this year's GCSE grades will not be used for performance tables for schools, colleges or local authorities and Essex County Council (ECC) will not be publishing its usual headline figures.

Cllr Ray Gooding, Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, said:

"The past few months and particularly the past few weeks, have been a very stressful time for lots of young people who should have been preparing for their GCSE exams this year.

"I hope that following the latest announcement on grading, young people feel reassured by the results they receive this week and I would like to congratulate everyone collecting results today on their achievements.

"Young people and everyone working within a school or other educational setting have shown an incredible amount of resilience over the past few months and I wish those receiving their results the best of luck as they decide on their next steps."

If young people need further support around employment and apprenticeships, it is available from the Essex Youth Service from Thursday 20 August onwards. They can be contacted on 0800 707 6384.

Schools and colleges are preparing to open for all pupils in September. Measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 are in place, and next year's exams are scheduled to take place, with some adjustments.

Essex County Council responds to schools opening

An open letter to Essex parents and carers ahead of schools opening full time from 2 September

From:

Cllr David Finch, Leader Essex County Council

Cllr Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education

Clare Kershaw, Essex County Council's Director of Education

Dr Mike Gogarty, Essex County Council's Director of Wellbeing, Public Health and Communities

Dear parents and carers of Essex school children,

Last month marked the end to an extraordinary school year. Schools and colleges had to respond to necessary measures aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19, meaning they closed to the majority of pupils on 23 March. June then saw the return of some pupils, largely on a part-time basis. Throughout, we have been incredibly proud of Essex's response. Many parents and carers have had to provide childcare and assist with education on top of their work commitments, teachers and education staff have had to deal with the logistical issues associated with ensuring those attending settings were kept safe, and pupils have experienced disruption to their routine, education, exams and social interactions. We do not underestimate the sacrifices that have been made, the uncertainty that's been felt, and the hard work that's gone into Essex's response to this crisis.

The government has said education settings can return to full-time opening for all students from the beginning of September. This is possible because the prevalence of COVID-19 in the community has decreased since settings restricted opening in March, NHS Test and Trace is now up and running, and settings have a better understanding of the measures that need to be in place to create safer environments. While there will still be risks as long as COVID-19 remains in the community, scientific evidence shows that COVID-19 presents a lower risk to children than adults of becoming severely ill, and that there is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults.

In preparation for wider opening, we ask that parents and carers read the government's guidance on [what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges in the autumn term](#) and speak to their children about the important role we must all play in reducing the spread of the virus. Essex schools and colleges have been communicating their individual plans for September with their parent communities; it's crucial we support our county's schools and colleges by understanding and adhering to the protective measures they put in place.

Outside school and college, and as a wider population, we must all remain vigilant and observe social distancing measures. It is vital we all play our part if we are to ensure we avoid further restrictions that will impact society.

Essex County Council (ECC) has been working with schools, colleges and partners to prepare for this return, and measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools and colleges will

be in place in September. These may include pupils being kept in class or year group-sized bubbles, older pupils being asked to socially distance where possible, the staggering of start, end, break and lunch times, and regular hand-washing. If children, or anyone they live with, have coronavirus symptoms, they must not attend their school or college and you will be asked to collect your child if they are displaying symptoms whilst at school or college. Remote education will be provided for pupils self-isolating.

You will also note the recent change in the government's advice regarding the wearing of face coverings for children over the age of 12. Schools and colleges have the discretion to advise on the wearing of face coverings in communal areas and have assessed this need as part of their risk assessment. Your school or college will advise you on the decisions it has taken. It is only compulsory to wear face coverings in schools where a local lockdown is in place. This is currently not the case in Essex but please do talk to your school or college about any concerns you have regarding face coverings.

It is recognised that the disruption to children's education since partial school closures in March has the potential to have a long-lasting impact. It is therefore vital that all children and young people are supported to catch up on any lost learning and to return to the structure and routine of school and college as soon as possible, as we know that schools and colleges play a crucial role in providing for children's educational, social and emotional developmental needs. We further recognise the challenge placed upon parents needing to home educate their children during this time. It is therefore vitally important that every child returns to school and college when they fully open from 2 September 2020.

However, we also recognise the significant impact that COVID-19 has had on many families' lives, and that some families will need more support during this time. We will therefore be asking all schools and colleges to work with families who are anxious about their child returning to the classroom to understand the individual circumstances and the concerns they have. All schools and colleges have been required to complete a risk assessment to outline the protective measures that they have put in place to make their setting COVID safe – it is therefore important for parents who are anxious to talk to their child's education setting to discuss the measures they have put in place and any further support that may be required.

The government has made it clear that attendance will be mandatory for pupils of compulsory school age from September. If any parents are still not sending their child back to school after the school has made contact to explain their risk assessment and measures that are in place, or if levels of attendance were low prior to the lockdown, then it remains within the headteacher's discretion to request that we, ECC, issue a targeted penalty notice in line with our policy on attendance. We will want to see clear evidence of the support the school has offered to the family to help their child to attend before we agree to the school's penalty notice request, and will take each case on an individual basis.

Parents and guardians of eligible students who receive transport to their place of education should have now received a letter outlining transport arrangements and protective

measures in place for the new school year. We have been working with transport providers to ensure passengers can travel safely.

Students and parents who can travel to school or college safely by walking or cycling are recommended to do so. To help with this, a new dedicated [Getting to School section](#) has been launched on ECC's Stop.Swap.GO! website. It includes maps and information on cycling and walking routes to schools and colleges in Essex, as well as suggested drop-off zones away from the school gate to reduce congestion. These are being developed for schools in Essex's most congested areas, with more suggestions being added soon. The aim is to help families develop a sustainable and active travel option for the school run.

We are sharing advice, resources and information about local organisations that can help children to prepare to go back to school with confidence as part of our Every Family Matters campaign. Find out more on the [Staying Well: Children and Families page](#) on our website.

Finally we would like to wish all young people, their parents and families, and school staff our best wishes for a safe and successful start to the autumn term. We know that whether you are starting a new school for the first time, returning after a long period away from your school setting, or returning from the summer break, the start of a new school term is always an exciting but anxious time – we know this year there will be more nerves than usual, but have confidence in our school leaders and staff that they will welcome you back with warmth, support and understanding.

Simon Walsh

September 2020