ECC Cllr Sara Naylor report

Apologies for not being able to attend the meeting this evening.

- Essex County Council administration / Cabinet is continuing with its 'strategic review' of highways functions including how Highways and the Cabinet Member engage with its 78 councillors, who naturally are the first port of call for parishes and residents. No timeframe has been given for the review to conclude and it was stated that it would take as long as it takes. I will press the issue further as it's unacceptable to have open-ended reviews of this sort.
- Councillors are very dissatisfied with the impact of the decision to remove member access to a named Highways officer which had been a longstanding practice. This was previously very useful to residents and parish councils. Prior to May 2026 councillors could liaise with their named officer who would offer expert technical advice about Highways matters such as new crossings, safety issues and road and pavement defects.
- Councillors are also dissatisfied with the service provided by members enquiries whose workload has increased significantly as there are no alternative routes to raise Highways issues. This is impacting on providing a timely service to residents by all councillors. We have escalated the issue at Full Council yesterday.
- The Local Highways Panels were also abolished. The schemes in the pipeline are being processed but no new applications were accepted after the local elections in May 2026.
- Other parish councils are reporting that requests for speed surveys are being denied even if parishes are prepared to fund the work.
- It is clear that the administration has diverted resources to potholes and therefore pavement and safety issues such as need for speed reviews are not being progressed.
- A number of local Highways schemes in Constable Division that had been approved by the previous administration have recently been cancelled. For example, a planned and approved speed reduction was cancelled and that stretch of road remains at national speed limit despite its use as a walk to school route on narrow pavements.
- The Cabinet Member for Highways restated its commitment to pothole filling at Full Council on 13 October and reported an uptick in the completion of pothole repairs compared to last year. However the overall number of new potholes reported has risen by over 20% year on year.
- The Cabinet Member for Highways also announced in September a new classification system of D1 to D5 compared to the current four-stage classification S1 to S4. The fifth category has been created by sub-dividing S3 into D3 and D4. Defects previously classified as potholes that are reassessed as D4 will no longer be recorded as a pothole but will be classified as 'observations'. 20-30% of S3 potholes will now be classified as D4 'observations'. However remaining D3 potholes will be repaired within 90 days of reporting. I will be monitoring how the reclassification exercise affects defects in Constable Division and try to scrutinise the degree of ongoing risk posed by reclassified D4 defects. The reclassification will make a significant difference to the statistics that the new administration reports however it remains to be seen what benefit it has for residents and road users.
- Essex County Council cabinet announced the authority has a rising deficit of £179m this year and announced a programme of officer redundancies which was reported by BBC Essex (14 October 2026). The administration said that the reduction in core grant funding by central Government,

under the Fairer Funding formula, was a significant contributing factor. This accounts for £50m per annum. The administration has since stated that it now predicts the deficit to rise to £500m during its period of office. It is seeking additional ways of reducing the structural deficit.

- The Cabinet Member for Highways invited councillors in June 2026 to request three roads that were most in need of repair. This was regardless of the size of the division and was therefore not proportionate. I am still waiting for a response to my request in July that larger divisions with a disproportionately large road network be permitted to nominate additional roads in recognition of the disparity with smaller more densely populated divisions. However I am pleased to report that my lobbying has resulted in safer travel east to west in the south of the division with dangerous ruts and potholes patched on two of the three nominated roads. I chose on the basis of well-used local routes that would benefit as many in the division as possible given the usual travel patterns.
- I have been supporting families who have experienced significant issues with the buses all over the division. Central Connect, the new provider, is being widely criticised for its failure to run a reliable service at a reasonable cost. I have raised the issue in the press and attended a meeting between some parents in my division and relevant cabinet members. I have been working with the Cabinet members for Education and also Highways to emphasise their responsibility to engage with providers that are failing to deliver school contracted routes to an acceptable standard. I am pleased to report, partly due to pressure that I have applied, that the administration is now reviewing formally what options it might pursue to support families who rely on buses to get their children to school on time. The Cabinet has not given a timeframe for reporting back although it was requested a number of times by councillors attending Full Council. The failure to give a timeframe is unacceptable.
- I have also been supporting the parish council separately with the issue of the Love Your Bus funded route that was unreliable. I have been copied into the response from Central Connect which I understand is on the agenda for this evening, and I am ready to support the council further.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and SEND stepped down unexpectedly from Essex County Council following the announcement of a school bus review. The new Cabinet Member took up the post last week. I will be pressing the new Cabinet Member to commit to a timeframe and sensible outcome for the review as parents are very worried about this issue.
- Would the parish council please alert me to dangerous defects that Highways are responsible for? I will press for the most serious to be addressed including pavements and safety issues.