Flying the Flag for Essex

A Review of the Chairman’s Civic Year

2009/10
Preface

Of the three-hundred events that I have attended during the last year, the following report contains a selection of some of the most important and prestigious.

Over the course of the year, the Chairman travels thousands of miles and comes into contact with thousands of people from all over the globe. The role is carried out in addition to the work involved in being a Councillor and representing the interests of residents in my constituency. I hope this report demonstrates the commitment and worthwhile work that the Chairman does for the people of Essex.

My thanks are extended to all those who helped and co-operated with providing information and photographs for this report, and to the Civic Services Team who assist the Chairman throughout the year to fulfil the many roles as Ambassador of Essex.

Elizabeth M. Hart

Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Hart
Chairman of Essex County Council
The Role of the Chairman

The Chairman of Essex County Council is the civic and ceremonial head of the Council and represents the County Council at a number of events across Essex and Nationally. The Chairman is elected annually by the Council at its annual meeting.

The Chairman has a number of responsibilities which include upholding the constitution of the Council, principally through presiding at meetings of the Full Council. A large part of the Chairman’s role is to represent the County Council at civic and ceremonial events, promoting the County by acting as ambassador and champion for Essex and encouraging greater partnership working.

The current Chairman of the County Council is Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Hart who has held the position since 2008. She has represented Rochford West in the Rochford District since 1993 and held the Cabinet Member position for Lifelong Learning and Libraries between 2001 and 2005, in addition to sitting on various Committees.

Before her election as a County Councillor, Councillor Hart was a parish Councillor for over 16 years at Rochford District Council, and held the position of Vice-Chairman for two years, before becoming the Chairman from 1991 to 1992. Councillor Hart was also a Parish Councillor in Hockley between 1976 and 1980. She has a keen interest in St John’s Ambulance and is the President of the Hawkwell and Hockley quadrilateral St John Ambulance Group.

The first Chairman of the Council was Councillor Andrew Johnston of Woodford, who undertook the role between 1889 and 1916. To date there have been 39 Chairmen of the Council.

The Role of the Vice-Chairman

The current vice-Chairman of the County Council is Councillor Rodney Bass who represents Heybridge and Tollesbury in the Maldon District and has done so since 1997.

Since his election to the County Council the Vice-Chairman has been involved in many aspects of County Council business. Between 2003 and 2005, he was the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and prior to this position was the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources from 2000. He is also Chairman of the Essex Pension Fund Board.

Councillor Bass was a Member of Maldon District Council between 1967 and 2007 and during this time he chaired many committees and held the positions of both Leader and Chairman. Councillor Bass has also been a Parish Councillor at Great Totham Parish Council since 1970.
Working with the Lord Lieutenant

The Chairman of the County Council works very closely with the Lord Lieutenant of Essex, particularly in respect of royal visits and citizenship ceremonies.

The title of Lord Lieutenant is given to the British monarch's personal representatives in the United Kingdom. Usually a retired local notable, senior military officer, peer or business person is given the post honorarily.

Both men and women are eligible for the post. John Patrick Lionel Petre, 18th Baron Petre of Ingatestone, Essex, England, is the currently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Essex and took up his duties upon the retirement of Robin Henry Charles Neville, 10th Baron Braybrooke in October 2002.

Lord-Lieutenants are the monarch's representatives in their lieutenancy. It is their foremost duty to uphold the dignity of the Crown, and in so doing they seek to promote a spirit of co-operation and good atmosphere by the time they give to voluntary and benevolent organisations and by the interest they take in the business and social life of their counties.

The modern responsibilities of Lord-Lieutenants include arranging visits by members of the Royal Family and escorting Royal visitors, presenting medals and awards on behalf of the Sovereign, leading the local magistracy as Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Justices of the Peace; and Chairing the local Advisory Committee for the Appointment of the General Commissioners of Income Tax, a tribunal which hears appeals against decisions made by the HM Revenue and Customs on a variety of different tax related matters.

As the sovereign's representative in his or her county, the Lord-Lieutenant remains non-political and does not hold office in any political party. The Lord Lieutenant is supported by a Vice Lord-Lieutenant and Deputy Lieutenants that he or she appoints. Essex has 68 active Deputy Lieutenants due to size of the county. The responsibility of the Lord-Lieutenant extends to cover the geographical area of Essex, which includes the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend.

Supporting the Chairman

The Civic Services Team

The Civic Services Team responsibilities are to support the Chairman of the Council in his/her Civic Role, the Vice-chairman of the Council in their role assisting the Chairman and the Lord-Lieutenant of Essex in his role as Her Majesty's representative in the County. This includes arrangements for all the events on the Civic Programme and administrative support to manage diaries and invitations.

The Chairman’s Chauffeur

Frank Kennedy is Chauffeur to the Chairman, and is responsible for ensuring that he/she arrives on time for her civic engagements. Frank drives the Chairman thousands of miles every year.
Royal Visits to Essex

Since the Chairman’s appointment in May 2008 there have been a number of visits to Essex by members of the Royal Family. During 2008 Princess Michael of Kent attended the opening of the new Sworders Fine Art Auction Room, His Royal Highness, The Earl of Wessex visited a number of venues on Canvey Island and Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal opened the new Home Farm Trust Resource Centre.

The Princess Royal visited Essex again in January 2009, this time attending four events at a diverse range of venues. Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal is a Patron of the Butler Trust, who are an independent charity, set up in 1985 who aim to support and share good practice in correctional settings and assist residents in gaining new skills. The Chairman and the Princess Royal visited Chelmsford Prison and other venues as part of this visit to Essex.

His Royal Highness, The Duke of York visited Essex in March 2009 and visited three venues. The Chairman of the Council was present at the first venue, Snell and Wilcox in Saffron Walden. This company has received awards for their design and development of infrastructure solutions for digital media markets.

During 2009 and 2010 the Princess Royal visited Essex again and the Chairman was in attendance.

The first of these visits, was to the Catch 22 Charity—a national charity that work with young people who find themselves in difficult situations. The second visit was to the Chigwell Riding Trust, a charity who work with young disabled people.

In February 2010 the new Headquarters of the Essex Young Farmer Association at Chatham Green, were opened by His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester.

Queen’s Awards

There have been four Queens Award events during 2009/10, with the Chairman able to attend three of these. Theses awards were presented to Essex Companies who receive their trophy and Grant of Appointment from the Lord Lieutenant.

Charity Events

The Chairman is invited to participate in many charity events and in September visited the NSPCC Colchester Young Witness Project to support the valuable work they carry out by working with vulnerable young people who have to give evidence in Court.
**Annual Civic Service**
The Annual Civic Service has been held at Chelmsford Cathedral for many years, but this year it was held at Brentwood Cathedral. The service is one of thanksgiving for everyone involved in Local Government.

Those invited to attend include representatives from the District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils from across Essex, all Essex County Council Members and Officers.

**Swearing-In Ceremonies for new Magistrates**
The Swearing-In Ceremony for new Magistrates is an annual event held in the Council Chamber. The ceremony is a high profile event attended by the Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Chairman of the Council, Mayors and Mayoresses, Crown Court Judges, Chairmen of the Benches and officials of the Courts Service, as well as the new Magistrates (usually 35-40 of them) and their guests. The dignitaries wear their ceremonial clothing. The Chairman of the Council sits on the “top table” in the Council Chamber, alongside the Lord Lieutenant, and her role is to open proceedings by welcoming everyone to County Hall and to the Council Chamber.

**Remembrance Service**
This service is held at County Hall in Chelmsford and all Members and Officers are invited to the Public Square to join in the two-minute ceremony of silence. The Chairman reads a piece from the Act of Remembrance along with a member of the Clergy.

Councillor Hart in her year as Vice-Chairman at the 2007 Remembrance Service, with the then Chairman, Councillor McEwen.
Citizenship Ceremonies

The Chairman and Lord Lieutenant attend the Essex County Council Citizenship Ceremonies throughout the year to welcome the new Citizens of Essex. The ceremonies were introduced in 2003, and have been held in Essex since 2004.

In the past year there have been 41 Citizenship Ceremonies held on 24 separate days. Almost 10,000 new Citizens have been welcomed by the Chairman and Lord Lieutenant.

The people that attend these ceremonies have applied for, and been granted British Citizenship. The ceremony is the final step for them to becoming a British Citizen. During the ceremony, new Citizens swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen, sing the national anthem and pledge to respect the rights and freedoms of the United Kingdom.

In addition to receiving their certificate for naturalisation, a photograph of the Lord Lieutenant and the Chairman is taken with each and every new Citizen.

The Young Essex Assembly

The Young Essex Assembly is the elected youth council for the County and is designed to mirror the adult County Council, being made up of 75 members aged 11 to 19. The members of the YEA are elected every two years, and in the last election 25,000 young people in Essex cast votes.

Councillor Hart has supported the YEA and their projects since her appointment as Chairman. In January 2009 the Chairman and Councillor Walsh joined the retiring members of the YEA for a farewell dinner at the Stansted Hilton Hotel, and presented certificates and Diana awards to all of the retiring members. A few weeks after the farewell dinner, in February 2009, the Chairman gave her support to welcome the newly elected members into the Council Chamber at their inaugural sitting.

As part of local democracy week, the Chairman attended an intergenerational event hosted by the YEA to break down negative stereotypes associated with teenagers and older people, and to demonstrate how both generations can learn from each other.

The Chairman also attended an anti-bullying event in Braintree, organised and hosted by the YEA.
Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee

The Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee (EYSC) is a pilot project offering young people (aged 13-25) in South Essex the opportunity to form their own Scrutiny Committee and look at important issues that affect them and talk to decision makers. The Committee also has the chance to put forward recommendations to make things more effective. The EYSC has its own website that was launched on 18 April 2009, and there was a competition to design the website logo. At the launch the Chairman presented the winner, Joedy Ray with her prize of an 'i-Pod'. Councillor Twitchen, Chairman of the Children and Young Persons Scrutiny Committee, who is acting as a mentor to the young people taking part in the pilot scheme also attended to present the prize. The other young people involved received a certificate to celebrate their contribution to the project of voluntarily giving 50 hours to the project.

Community Initiative Grant Events

The Chairman attends as many of these events as possible, but one of the highlights this year was a parade event held by the Basildon Sea Cadets who had been awarded a grant. As a result of attending this parade the Chairman was invited to their fund-raising concert.

Essex Book Festival

The Chairman always opens this annual event. In 2009 the Festival celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Full Council Meetings

At least 5 Full Council meetings take place each year in the Council Chamber in County Hall, over which the Chairman presides. Her role includes overseeing the procedures and acting as facilitator during the lively debates that take place between the 75 Members who are elected to the Council.

You Make the Difference in Essex Awards

Originally launched in 2007, the council’s Corporate Awards-You Make the Difference in Essex Awards honour the hard work and dedication of Essex County Council employees who make a real difference to the people of Essex by providing excellent services and delivering the best quality of life in Britain.

In 2009 the celebrity host Brian Blessed announced who had won each of the six categories and the awards were presented to the winners by the Leader and Chief Executive.
**Annual Millennium Awards**

As a way of celebrating the Millennium, Essex County Council took the very forward thinking decision to establish an endowed fund - The Essex Millennium Fund, to support the people of Essex for generations to come. The Annual Millennium Awards are organised by the Civic Services Team for the Chairman.

The Fund is managed by a local grant-making trust, Essex Community Foundation. A committee is made up of Councillors, Officers and the Essex Community Fund who meet to discuss applications for funding. Once an award has been agreed, the recipients are invited to attend the awards evening, hosted by the Chairman.

In addition to the Millennium Fund, the Chairman’s Fund is also held by the Essex Community Foundation. The money in this fund was raised from the sale of the number plates F1 and 1F and is awarded by the Chairman to good causes.
Harvest for the Hungry

The Chairman supports the work of Harvest for the Hungry, a local Essex charity that arrange for food and aid to be shipped to areas in need in Bulgaria. The County Council provides assistance to this charity every year, and the Chairman hosts the Bulgarian Ambassador and/or his representatives to lunch every year.

In June 2009 the Chairman was invited to attend the Bulgarian Embassy for a Reception and Farewell dinner for the current Bulgarian Ambassador. This event was unique and recognised the work that the Council has put in to assist the Harvest for the Hungry charity.

In October each year the charity collect food parcels from across Essex, including 140 Essex schools to send over to some of the poorest residents in Bulgaria. In 2008, the charity, in conjunction with the Chairman and Essex County Council managed to raise sufficient funds to purchase a new fire engine for the Bulgarian town of Lom.

Armed Forces Events

The Chairman attends many events related to the Armed Forces. These include dinners and receptions for local dignitaries to maintain the close relationship already enjoyed between both organisations. The Essex Army Cadet Force hold an annual visitors day, held at a number of venues across the country. In 2008, the event was held at Knock near Warminster when the Vice-Chairman of the Council, Councillor Bass attended as the Chairman was already committed to another engagement. Councillor Gerard McEwen, Chairman of the Council between 2006 and 2008, hosted a reception for the 1st Battalion of the Royal Anglican Regiment, who had just returned from a tour of Afghanistan. Another reception for this Regiment will take place in June 2010.

Christmas Reception

The Christmas Reception is held every year at Maynetrees. The event is hosted by the Chairman by way of thanks to those who have supported her throughout the year in her role, such as County Councillors and Officers.
Chairman’s Annual Reception

The Chairman hosts a prestigious reception each year to which are invited a plethora of guests including local charities, voluntary organisations and local businesses. Mayors, Chairmen and Chief Executives of all the Essex Boroughs and Districts are also invited, along with all Essex Councillors and Senior Officers.

The purpose of the event is to foster better working relationships between all who are invited. The Chairman’s role is fundamental in helping to develop these important local networks.

British Trust of Conservation Volunteers

The British Trust of Conservation Volunteers celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2009, and invited the Chairman to attend a celebratory event to recognise the partnership working with Essex County Council. The Chairman accepted two awards, that were given in recognition for the Council’s Tree Planting Initiative.

Breaking Barriers Exhibition at Brentwood Library

The Chairman was invited to open the Breaking Barriers Exhibition at Brentwood Library in September 2009. The Exhibition highlighted the brave and dedicated women of Essex who were members of the Suffragette and Suffragist movements, who campaigned for women to be given the right to vote.
Essex Women’s Advisory Group Charity Dinner

The Chairman attended the Essex Women Advisory Group Dinner at Hylands House in September to raise funds for the charity.

The main aim of the Group is to empower the women that live in Essex and to broaden their vision, self-worth and belief. The Chairman is a member of the Essex Women’s Advisory Group Committee.

A ‘Day for the Girls of Essex’ will take place in July at Hylands House and aims to bring together successful women in business and celebrities who either were born in Essex, have lived a considerable part of their lives in Essex or now make their home in the County. The “Day for the Girls of Essex” will be a celebration of girls and women and the role they can play at all levels of society, and to publicise “Essex Girls” past and present as role models.

Pearly Kings and Queens Society Harvest Festival Parade Service

The Chairman is invited to attend the annual Pearly Kings and Queens Harvest Festival Parade Service, which takes place in September and raises money for the Whitechapel Mission. The event features traditional entertainment, church service and a reception, which has in previous years taken place on a boat along the River Thames.

Rayleigh Weir Fire Station Opening

On 1 December the Chairman was invited to give the opening address and unveil the plaque for the new fire station alongside the High Sheriff of Essex.
This report is issued by
Essex County Council – Members Support & Governance Services
You can contact us in the following ways:

By Post:
C328
County Hall
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1LX

By telephone:
01245 430306

By email:
scrutiny@essexcc.gov.uk

Website:
comad.essexcc.gov.uk