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Report to Parish Councils – September 2024

This report is written is for Parish Councils meeting in September. Please note that I did not issue a report for August meetings as Parish Councils do not meet then.

Some of the items here are from information circulated by ESCC but which may not have been drawn to the attention of parish councillors and others.

Queensway Gateway

I've reported on this in the past, but I am delighted to say that this link road will be starting construction at the start of September with completion by the end of the year, though the latter as always depends on weather and other factors.

It is likely to cause some disruption during the works though the aim is to minimise this including overnight work, but once complete should massively reduce traffic jams where the A21 meets the Ridge, along the Ridge and in nearby roads.

Flexibus Now is Even More Flexible!

Whenever this type of service is introduced in the country it is generally found that it needs to evolve as residents get used to it and usage patterns change.

As part of this Flexibus is now almost zone free with one zone covering 90% of East Sussex. You can now book destinations up to 14 miles from your pickup point. You can check if your pickup point and destination are covered using this link: <https://flexibus.sussex.podaris.com/>

Please remember you cannot book one along an existing public transport route. You can see the zones covered using this link: https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/3pmcvdi1/east-sussex-flexibus-single-zone-map_july-2024.pdf

Fruit and Veg Payments

This is from a recent ESCC press release which I include in its entirety. Please publicise in your parish.

OVER 1,200 families in East Sussex are missing out on extra funds for milk, fruit and vegetables, as well as access to free vitamins.

Families are being urged to check if they are eligible for help to buy milk and food through the NHS Healthy Start initiative.

The NHS scheme also provides free Healthy Start vitamins to support women during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and vitamin drops for babies and young children which are suitable from birth to 4 years old.

Women who are over 10 weeks pregnant as well as families with a child under 4 and who are in receipt of certain benefits can apply for the scheme.

It is estimated that eligible families across the county are missing out on at least £270,000 of available funding every year.

Figures show that 247 families are missing out in Hastings while 333 eligible families in Wealden are also failing to claim.

In Rother and Lewes, 200 and 232 families respectively are eligible but have not joined the scheme, and in Eastbourne 220 families who qualify haven't applied.

Darrell Gale, East Sussex Director of Public Health, said: "Approximately one in three eligible families in East Sussex are missing out on this vital funding which can help ensure they have access to healthy food, milk and vitamins.

"Good nutrition is very important for pregnant women and young children and the NHS Healthy Start scheme helps families to make healthy food choices.

"I would urge pregnant women and families with children under 4 to check their eligibility and apply to the scheme."

People who qualify for help will be sent a Healthy Start card with money loaded on it that can be used in shops such as supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations, and pharmacies that display the Mastercard® symbol and sell healthy food and milk.

The Healthy Start card is topped up automatically every four weeks.

Pregnant women will receive £4.25 each week of their pregnancy (from the tenth week). Families with young children will get £8.50 each week for children from birth to 1 year old, and £4.25 each week for children between 1 and 4 years old.

The card can be used to buy plain liquid cow's milk; fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables; fresh, dried, and tinned pulses; and infant formula milk based on cow's milk.

In addition to the Healthy Start scheme, children in Year 3 and above may qualify for free school meals if their parents or carers have a low household income and receive certain benefits.

Mr Gale added: "All children are entitled to free school meals in Reception, Year One and Year Two, but parents and carers are reminded to check if their child is eligible for free school meals in Year 3 and above.

"A healthy, well-balanced school meal at lunchtime can have a huge impact on energy levels and concentration and children who eat better, learn better.

"I encourage families to see if their children may qualify for free school meals throughout their time at school."

For more information on Healthy Start and details of how to apply visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk/.

To apply for free school meals and find out more, visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk/education-learning/schools/school-life/school-meals/free-school-meals. Parents can also email the free school meals team for further information Free.SchoolMeals@eastsussex.gov.uk.