

'We'll fine you if we have to,' says police boss

THE county's police and fire commissioner has stressed the importance of people staying at home to save lives and prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Roger Hirst said the police are appealing to the public's "better nature" to remain at home.

But he warned that officers will fine people who flout the law, if they have to, after being given additional get-tough powers.

Mr Hirst spoke out after talking to Policing and Fire Service Minister Kit Malthouse earlier this week.

Mr Hirst said: "Firstly, it is important to stress these powers are around making sure that people conform to the social distancing rules, stay home and save lives.

"The police's initial response is going to be to encourage people to go home, make sure that they get the right advice and appeal to their better natures.

"Only then will we be seeing them issuing fixed penalty notices, which I am sure you will know, start at £60 but can rise to nearly £1,000 for such offences.

"The other powers are to disperse people and use reasonable force to take them home – again intended to make sure that we acknowledge the social distancing rules and to stay home and save lives."

Mr Hirst also welcomed the Fire Brigades Union's decision to let its members drive ambulances and also deliver vital medical supplies as well as delivering medication to vulnerable people.

Markets open for vital supplies

COUNCIL bosses have announced that weekly markets will open to offer essential food and groceries to residents.

Braintree Council posted an announcement on Twitter saying the weekly markets will now only be open to traders offering essential food and groceries until further notice.

The statement said: "Continuing to operate a market for essential food and groceries will help provide essential local supplies for those unable or unwilling to access other shops.

"We've seen so many businesses and local communities really coming together to support one another during this time, so please do show your support and look out for those who may need help in these testing times.

"Please follow the latest government advice on social distancing and staying home."

'Business as usual' as classrooms go online

Schools hold 'virtual' assemblies to keep pupils motivated

SCHOOL bosses say it is "business as usual" despite the majority of students being forced to stay at home because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Both New Rickstones and Maltings academies, in Witham, are now only open to about a dozen pupils whose parents have been categorised as key workers by the Government.

The schools are being staffed each day by two teachers and three members of the senior leadership team.

Teachers are scheduled to work on site one day per fortnight, but are also working remotely and providing online lessons for students not attending school.

Damian Lee, who is executive headteacher at both schools, said: "Staff are not on holiday. They are working from home, planning, setting and marking work.

"They are supporting parents and encouraging students with their daily routines, such as getting up in the morning, getting dressed, doing exercise and having three square meals a day rather than snacking.

"Staff have gone above and beyond, working to run the sessions.

"The students who are in are doing art, cooking and outdoor activities.

"The staff are being so creative with their ideas for all students.



STAYING FOCUSED: New Rickstones Academy's head of English Matt Davies (left) and executive headteacher Damian Lee (right) say staff are continuing to work from home and help students while schools are closed

"The advantages of being part of a trust is that we can all share and pick out the best practices for us.

"The Academies Enterprise Trust has been really good.

"We have a daily conference call with the CEO to discuss the Prime Minister's latest announcements.

"We are doing as much as we can to keep everyone mo-

tivated."

The two schools are using a Google classroom programme to set students work in key subjects such as English, maths and science.

Virtual assemblies are also being held once a week and the schools are contacting all pupils on a weekly basis to ensure they are maintaining good health.

Matt Davies, head of Eng-



lish at New Rickstones, said: "We have forged relationships in our classrooms and we can use that to remain focused, which is so important at the moment.

"Our students are adapting really well.

"They adore the videos being uploaded and there is that familiar classroom banter going on, which is also important.

"Whereas in class you might feel a bit self-conscious to get involved and make a fool of yourself, you do not mind as much via video."

The Academies Enterprise Trust, which runs both schools, says it is delivering lunch to 273 children on free school meals and has also provided 32 pupils with laptops to allow them to work from home.

Roads network maintained for vital travel and 999 services

HIGHWAYS bosses say the county's road network will continue to be maintained for emergency vehicles, essential staff travel and food deliveries.

Essex Highways is adjusting scheduled work and operations to ensure the public and its employees are safe, while existing roadworks remain in place.

While most repair work will continue for as long as possible, more extensive improvements are being reviewed.

Deputy county council

leader Kevin Bentley said: "It is vital during these extraordinary times we do everything we can to continue supporting our emergency service colleagues and critical key workers who need to use our county's roads in order to carry out their important work.

"However, we must ensure we are doing so in ways which are safe for our employees and members of the public, and also consider the likely impact of the current situation on availability of workers, materials and equipment

going forward."

Mr Bentley said County Hall was constantly reviewing the "extremely fast-moving situation".

Essex Highways is also working with utility companies and developers to see if any changes need to be made to planned work.

People are encouraged to continue reporting defects online.

Essex Highways is currently experiencing a high volume of calls and so residents are asked not to call unless they spot an urgent road safety issue.



MONITORING SITUATION: County Hall deputy leader and infrastructure boss Kevin Bentley

Visit braintreeandwithamtimes.co.uk for the latest coronavirus updates