

Intro to Full Council – 11.10.22

Welcome.

I speak to you today in challenging times - for our residents, our businesses, and for public services – who are not immune to the pinch.

Today, I will set the scene – before handing to Cllr Whitbread for the Essex County Council Autumn statement. After Cllr Whitbread has spoken I will outline more on how we are supporting residents with the Cost of Living.

Inflation at a 40 year high; the pound has been at an all time low against the dollar; Bank of England interest rates highest for 14 years – this means that everyone's money will not go as far as it would in previous years. This means challenging times for both this council and for the people of Essex.

However, Essex is a strong council, and it is a county of strong people. We came together, showed our strength during COVID. We came together, showed our strength supporting refugees from Ukraine. We came together, showed our strength in mourning our Queen and celebrating our King. We are more united now than we have been for generations

- Before that, I'm going to spend a couple of minutes now talking about our involvement in Thurrock
 - You may know that we have been chosen by the Government to act as Commissioners to support Thurrock Council in respect of their financial position.
 - This is a critically important undertaking, to ensure that Thurrock Council can continue to provide services to its residents and businesses.
 - The nature of our Commission from the Government is unique – we are the first council to be selected as Commissioners to support another authority. This novel approach of peer to peer support is one we fully endorse and hope to see more of for the sector
 - The 'intervention', as it is termed, is two-fold; firstly, there is the initial activity we have undertaken to support Thurrock Council over its finances
 - Secondly, and starting yesterday a Best Value Inspection is taking place, which will report early in January. This will also focus on finance but will also undertake a potentially wider examination of the Council's operations if necessary.
 - Our initial work has been on supporting Thurrock on finance - to ensure that Thurrock takes the decisions it needs to take to ensure its financial position is stable - and assembling team members who will be involved in the intervention, alongside undertaking the Best Value Inspection.
-

(Chris will hand over to you after his Autumn Statement)

- The cost of living challenge is being experienced by every person, every family in Essex. It is reducing the ability of many to purchase the essentials like food, heating, and transport. The key word here is essentials – we all have a part to play in supporting residents in need – us as politicians, our partners and of course the fantastic community networks across our County.
- In the last month I have been working closely with officers and partners to determine what support the Council can offer in this turbulent time to try and bring some more peace and stability to people's lives. We also asked residents what they needed the most.
- Our cost of living survey has just closed and almost 1000 residents have told us what would make the difference for them. This includes:
 - Help & support to make homes more energy efficient (e.g. free/subsidised home insulation, greener energy sources, financial support for repairs)
 - Community initiatives (such as libraries, cafes, religious institutions) offering activities, meals and other food support
 - And help with food costs/access to sufficient food
- We knew quick action was needed, so two weeks ago, I launched a £50m support package, which is outlined in the Council's new *Cost of Living Support for Households and Communities Plan*. This is aimed at helping those residents who need immediate support, especially as we approach the colder winter months.
- The plan brings together partners, charities and organisations to tackle the issues residents are facing, whilst also beginning to map the wider support being delivered across the county.
- Our approach is based on three pillars – Response, Resilience and Root causes and to achieve this, there are six core areas we are focussing on. These are supporting residents with the provision of essentials, help them keep warm, eat well, offer money management services, provide advice and information, whilst also supporting overall wellbeing.
- Let's start with 1. **support with the provision of essentials** – during the course of the year, with help from DWP, we will have made more than £18.8m of support available for those with essential needs. In the last six months, from this fund, we have already allocated: • £4.2m for the provision of food vouchers for children during school holidays • £3.2m to support pensioner households that are reliant on means tested benefits • £1.3m to the Essential Living Fund that provides essential goods for people on low incomes and £482,000 for support for unpaid carers, vulnerable adults and targeted family support. Going forward, we will soon be able to announce the detailed allocations of the new support, in line with government guidance

- **2. Keeping warm** – working with community organisations, we are providing targeted advice and support to those most at risk from living in a cold home. Through our Sustainable Warmth Programme –working with district, borough, and city partners, Essex has secured over £17m to be invested to improve home energy efficiency. It is targeted at home owners with low energy efficient homes who have household incomes below £30,000. And we have secured a further £2.5m to be directed towards social housing providers to also make further energy efficiency updates to premises.
- Our new £100,000 Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Programme will also be launching soon to provide community organisations with grants of up to £1000 to provide additional activity in local warm places. This might be a 10 week arts and crafts club, cooking lessons or a knit and knatter.
- **3. Eating well** – through our programmes we are supporting healthy and free meals for children from families on low incomes during school holidays and providing advice and education on cooking healthy meals. Our Essex ActivAte Holiday Activity and Food Programme has supported over 30,000 individual young people. We have provided almost 400,000 free spaces at our holiday activity and food clubs, and provided over 500,000 free meals. The programme provides families with a healthy meal, activity sessions and education on the importance of eating well and moving more. We are continuing our commitment to invest in the programme over the coming two years including all half terms.
- We are also supporting in the creation of more slow cooker clubs and creating two brand new community supermarkets that will offer low cost produce to residents.
- **4. Money management** – we are developing money management tools and advice to support families to make their budgets go further. For example - Essex Multiply is a new £7.9m initiative that will offer over 14,000 Essex residents easy access to free maths and finance training. One of the priority areas for the scheme, which will run over the next three years, will be numeracy skills training to help support people with their financial management.
- **5. Information, Advice, Guidance** – we are investing in additional capacity and resources to provide information to enable people to make informed decisions that can help to reduce their bills. For example, we have invested £120,000 in the Citizens Advice network in Essex this year to assist them in supporting residents with information and advice through the cost of living challenges.
- **6. Wellbeing** – we are continuing to work with communities, organisations and partners to improve the wellbeing and health of local people. We will seek to expand and find new ways to work together to build resilience and self-reliance. For example - we have invested £6m in the Essex Wellbeing Service to support residents across a range of wellbeing issues, including help with day to day needs.

- The cost of living challenge is an area where we are working closely together as system partners. As we move into the challenging winter months, we will continue to co-ordinate even more closely. That is why we will be hosting a Cost of Living Summit on 7th November to come together to collectively share our knowledge and expertise, to ensure that our response to the cost of living challenge further meets the needs of our residents and businesses.