

Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council, held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Chelmsford on Tuesday 13 February 2024.

Present: Chairman: Cllr Jillian Reeves
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Ray Gooding

Cllr Barry Aspinell	Cllr Anthony Hedley	Cllr Ross Playle
Cllr Lewis Barber	Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cllr Chris Pond
Cllr Susan Barker	Cllr Jeff Henry	Cllr Pat Reid
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Cllr Paul Honeywood	Cllr Stephen Robinson
Cllr Malcom Buckley	Cllr Michael Hoy	Cllr Peter Schwier
Cllr Graham Butland	Cllr Eddie Johnson	Cllr Lee Scordis
Cllr Mark Cory	Cllr John Jowers	Cllr Lee Scott
Cllr Simon Crow	Cllr Sam Kane	Cllr Laureen Shaw
Cllr Tom Cunningham	Cllr David King	Cllr Andrew Sheldon
Cllr Jude Deakin	Cllr Dan Land	Cllr Chris Siddall
Cllr Mark Durham	Cllr Sue Lissimore	Cllr Mick Skeels
Cllr Beverley Egan	Cllr Derrick Louis	Cllr Kerry Smith
Cllr Jane Fleming	Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cllr Clive Souter
Cllr Martin Foley	Cllr Bob Massey	Cllr John Spence
Cllr Mike Garnett	Cllr Peter May	Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Alan Goggin	Cllr Aidan McGurran	Cllr Mark Stephenson
Cllr Marie Goldman	Cllr Louise McKinlay	Cllr Mike Steptoe
Cllr Ian Grundy	Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Cllr Paul Thorogood
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Cllr Dr Richard Moore	Cllr Marshall Vance
Cllr Michael Hardware	Cllr James Newport	Cllr Chris Whitbread
Cllr Dave Harris	Cllr Mark Platt	Cllr Holly Whitbread

Not present but attended the meeting online (these members did not vote on any items):

Cllr Dave Blackwell	Cllr June Lumley
Cllr Lynette Bowers-Flint	Cllr Wendy Stamp

Chairman's Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman informed those present that the meeting would be broadcast live over the internet by way of the [ECC Democracy YouTube Channel](#).

The opening remarks, together with the broadcast of the entire meeting may be found on the [ECC Democracy YouTube Channel](#).

Prayers

The meeting was preceded by prayers led by Reverend Zena Smith, Minister of the Benfleet Methodist Church.

Councillor Jillian Reeves formally opened the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Cllr Tony Ball, Cllr Luke Mackenzie, Cllr Jaymey McIvor, Cllr Lesley Wagland and Cllr Andy Wiles

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded by the Chairman of the need to declare any interests and to do so immediately or at the start of the consideration of any relevant item of business.

The Chairman also reminded members of the advice they had been given by the Monitoring Officer relating to the budget debate:

- ‘(a) that any member who may have any arrears of Council Tax outstanding for two months or more must make a declaration of interest and you not entitled to vote on the Annual Budget but are not prevented from taking part in the discussion; and
- (b) members must also make declarations of interest relating to the Budget debate in accordance with the detailed advice given’

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 12 December 2023

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Public Speakers

The Chairman noted that there were two members of the public registered to speak. The first was Jill Waight, asking the question as an individual but who was a Town Councillor from Rayleigh Town Council.

Jill Waight, having been invited to speak, said:

‘For the Academic year 2022 / 2023, there was a total £694,920 paid in fines by Essex parents due to “student non-attendance.” Following my discussion with the Leader on the 10th January, can he please

confirm whether this money goes back into the Essex Educational budget or is it taken by Central Government?’

In response the Leader, Cllr Kevin Bentley thanked Ms Waight for the question and said:

‘Firstly, just to clarify, I am told that the total collected in school absence fines during the academic year 2022/23 was £685,980. The monies collected are used to fund the administration of the entire penalty notice scheme across Essex. This includes cases which result in prosecution where parents choose not to pay their fine and where a court date is then set for the matter to be considered by the courts - this is under section 444 Education Act 1996.

The funds collected are used to cover the cost of Officer salaries and associated on-costs, associated stationary, postage, travel (for court purposes, where parents fail to pay their penalty notice fines) and the instruction of Essex Legal Services, where parents choose to enter a plea of “not guilty” and a trial date is set by the courts.

Current government guidance on penalty notice monies states that any surplus funds, after the costs associated with the administration of the scheme have been deducted, must be returned to central government.

Due to the high volume of fines (we issued the highest number of penalty notice fines of any LA during 2022/23) and the number of resultant court cases which we have responsibility for across Essex, no such surplus has been available in recent years.

I will now hand over to deputy Cabinet Member Cllr Andrew Sheldon.’

The following response was made by Cllr Andrew Sheldon on behalf of Cllr Tony Ball:

‘Every lesson really does count and all children should have access to the fantastic educational opportunities and experiences available across Essex - regular attendance helps ensure children have the best journey through their academic life.

Parents have a legal duty to ensure their children regularly attend school according to the rules set by schools and can be fined or prosecuted if their child is regularly absent without a valid reason.

Where parents choose to take holidays during term time, Headteachers may choose to request that penalty notice fines are issued by ECC in line with our published local code of conduct. We do not like issuing fines and they are always a last resort – which is why our Attendance Specialist Team works very closely with

schools across Essex.

The team provides advice and guidance to schools to encourage early intervention in cases where the attendance pattern of a pupil is a cause for concern.

Schools use various strategies to support pupils to improve their attendance patterns and engage directly with parents and other professionals so that the necessary support is made available, where barriers to regular attendance have been identified.

The increase in the number of absence fines is not unique to Essex – this is one of the drivers behind a major new drive from the Government to improve school attendance.'

The second speaker was Richard Hyland, asking the question as an individual but who was a City Councillor from Chelmsford City Council.

Richard Hyland, having been invited to speak, said:

'Will Essex County Council publish the measurement metrics/criteria, that was used to demonstrate the Social Media (Harris) contracts were seen to be value for money expenditure of public funds?'

In response, the Leader, Cllr Kevin Bentley thanked Mr Hyland for his question and said:

'A few weeks ago Essex County Council published extensive information relating to the social media work you mentioned, which you no doubt will have seen.

It is important that we are open and transparent with how this council spends public money. Any reports the council has should be published and scrutinised

On the agenda for today's meeting, I will be making a full statement on this matter later on.

I will address the question of value for money as part of that statement.

You will note as part of the report accompanying that statement that I am recommending that the Council's Audit, Governance and Standards Committee look at this issue further.

It could be that they explore this issue you raise in greater detail, though I would leave that up to the Chairman and Members of the committee to decide.'

5. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

University of Essex Students

The Chairman welcomed a number of students from the University of Essex to the meeting, who had come along to observe the Council meeting as part of their Journalism course, reporting on politics. The Chairman expressed her hope that they would find the meeting interesting and informative.

New Year's Honours

The Chairman informed Members that 19 Essex people were awarded honours in the King's New Year honours list.

The honours included services to social science, public service, policing, public health, early years, special educational needs and education, sport, diversity and equality, charitable fundraising, heritage, services to young people, the community and the environment.

The Chairman congratulated former Essex County Council (ECC) Officer, James Bullion who had received a CBE for his services to social care.

The Chairman extended congratulations on behalf of the council, to all those in Essex who had received an award.

Boundary Review

The Chairman reminded Members that should they, or members of the public, wish to make any submissions to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, the closing date of the consultation was 19 February 2024. Responses to the consultation could be made on the Commission's website.

The Chairman also noted that ECC had already submitted its own response.

Charter Plus for Councillor Development

The Chairman was pleased to inform members, that since the interim report on progress following ECC's Charter Plus Assessment for Councillor Development had been received, the Council had been notified that it continued to meet the Charter Plus standard of the Councillor Development Charter.

The Lead assessor said:

"ECC continues to be a flagship Council in respect of Councillor development and a Council that I highlight in respect of best and innovative practice with regards councillor development and I am pleased to see that this is still the case."

"I was particularly pleased to see the continuing commitment and take up of the Personal Development Plans and the forward planning in respect of preparation to support the induction following the 2025 County elections."

The Chairman thanked the Member Development Steering Group, that she was pleased to chair for their continued commitment and enthusiasm to the work and the lead officers, particularly Joanna Boaler and Sophie Crane, for all the work undertaken to support Members. The Chairman also reminded Members that should they wish to discuss their development needs, to make contact with Ms Crane directly.

HMS Venturer

The Chairman was pleased to announce that it was proposed that the Royal Navy ship HMS Venture would have an affiliation with the whole county of Essex. HMS Venturer is to be the first Type 31 frigate, currently being built by Babcock Marine in Rosyth. It had been announced that Essex would be the primary affiliation for the vessel and she should be able to visit the ports of Harwich and Tilbury. The intention would be to give her the freedom of the County in the future, possibly in 2026.

The Chairman commented that this was exciting news for the whole county – it was the first ship with this type of association since the last HMS Essex was completed 120 years ago.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Kevin Bentley spoke about this announcement.

Death of former County Councillor Sir Graham Bright

The Chairman informed Members that Sir Graham Bright, former County Councillor between 1967 and 1970 for Orsett and Stifford, Thurrock had died at the age of 81.

Sir Graham was born in Horndon on the Hill. Although he only served a short time on this council he went on to become an MP for two Luton constituencies before receiving a knighthood in 1994.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Chris Pond paid tribute to Sir Bright following which Members stood in silent remembrance.

Awards

The Chairman informed Members that ECC had been awarded an 'A' for climate Adaptation and for Mitigation from Carbon Disclosure Project, for the second year in a row. At the invitation of the Chairman Cllr Schwier, Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling spoke in connection with this award.

The Chairman congratulated all the individuals and teams who had won an award since the last council meeting.

6. Petitions

The Chairman informed Members that there had been five notifications of petitions in advance.

The Chairman invited Cllr Susan Barker to present a petition concerning a lack of street lighting in residential roads in Takeley. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

At the invitation of the Chairman Cllr Chris Pond presented two petitions, the first related to a dangerous pavement at Pyrles Lane. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

The second petition presented by Cllr Chris Pond was calling for prompt action in relation to establishing a school street for Staples Road. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

The Chairman invited Cllr Marshall Vance to present a petition relating to the condition of a road on the Ride London route. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Chris Pond presented a petition on behalf of Cllr Paul Thorogood who was not present for this agenda item. The petition was calling for a new pedestrian crossing in Coggeshall. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

7. Executive Statement on the Budget

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council gave a statement on the Budget.

The broadcast of the meeting may be found on the [ECC Democracy YouTube Channel](#).

8. Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2024-25

The Council received the report Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2024-25. The report was in two parts, Part 1 being the Section 151 Officer's report and Part 2 being the Budget and Plan.

There were also four appendices:

- Appendix A –Essex County Council Annual Plan 2024-25
- Appendix B – Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment 2024-25
- Appendix C – Pay Policy Statement 2024-25
- Appendix D – Budget Consultation 2024-25 Final Report

It was noted that there had been an addendum report containing replacement recommendations. This had been produced following assessment of the impact of the final local government finance settlement and the Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) information from Brentwood and Colchester Councils.

It was moved by Cllr Dave Harris and seconded by Cllr Ivan Henderson that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

'That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended for the reasons and purposes set out below:

1. Highways Quality Assurance

Increase to the 2024/25 Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport revenue budget of **£53,000**, on a one-off basis to support an independent review of the criteria assessment used by Ringway Jacobs. The review will assess the quality criteria applied when approving maintenance and repairs, carried out under the existing Ringway Jacobs contract to quality assure their remedial work.

This would require an increase in the budget for the Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport portfolio of **£53,000** which will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Ambition Fund reserve.

Increase to the annual Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport revenue budget for two years, from 2024/25 to 2025/26, of **£45,000** per annum. This is to fund twice yearly, independent inspections of highway repair work carried out under the existing Ringway Jacobs contract, sampling a range of completed repairs across the county.

This would require an increase in the budget for the Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport portfolio of **£45,000** per annum which will be funded through withdrawals from the Ambition Fund Reserve for 2024/25 and 2025/26, a total reduction to the reserve of **£90,000**.

2. Youth Service

An increase to the Youth Service revenue budget of **£525,000** to enable the setup of a dedicated team to target specific areas of high deprivation and mental health in young people. This will fund one Senior Targeted Youth Advisor, ten Targeted Youth Advisors and ancillary costs.

This would require an increase to The Arts, Heritage and Culture portfolio budget of **£525,000** per annum and a reduction of the same sum to the budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve.

3. Highways Rangers

Increase to the annual Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport revenue budget from 2024/25 of **£1.2m** per annum. This is to fully reinstate the previous service offer of Highways Rangers. Since the service has been discontinued, work on maintaining the aesthetic and safety of our roads, such as clearing paths, trimming vegetation at the side of the road and cleaning signs, is not being carried out.

This reinstatement is proposed on a permanent basis and will be funded through withdrawal of **£1.2m** from the Ambition Fund Reserve in 2024/25, becoming base from 2025/26 acknowledging that this will grow the gap from 2025/26.

S151 Officer's Commentary on the Budget amendment Proposal

The proposals have set out clearly the funding sources, which will amend the following tables in the Annual plan and Budget 2024/25:

Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
			Infrastructure		
1,471			Localism	1,200	1,200
13,292	14,556	14,672	Roads And Footways	15,439	(123)
					15,317

The Arts, Heritage and Culture

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
3,390	3,355	3,147	Youth Services	4,925	1,249
					(2,068)
					4,106

Other Operating Costs

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
			Approps To/(From) Reserves and Restricted Use Funds		
4,027	9,925	(1,326)	Ambition Fund Reserve		(1,298)
10,375	11,820	5,921	Transformation Reserve	18,295	18,295

Reserves

			2024/25		2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	Balance at 1 April 2023	Balance at 1 April 2024	Budgeted (Contributions) / Withdrawals	Assumed usage	Closing balance		
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Reserves earmarked for future use							
Ambition Fund	(10,551)	(6,874)	1,298	3,576	(1,999)	-	-
Transformation	(58,880)	(52,410)	(18,295)	25,000	(45,705)	(32,000)	(18,295)
							(4,590)

- £1,298,000 withdrawal from the Ambition Fund, taking the balance on this reserve to £2m at the end of 2023/24, with further proposed withdrawal of £45,000 in 2025/26. It is currently assumed that the balance of the reserve is fully drawn down by the end of 2025/26, however it is not fully committed so this does not change our planning assumptions.
- £525,000 reduction in the annual budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve across the MTRS. Proposals will reduce the balance of the reserve to £45.7m at the end of 2024/25. By 2027/28 the balance of the reserve will have reduced to £4.6m (currently assumed as £6.7m in the Annual Plan).

The reduction in the annual budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve will impact the capacity to invest in change to enable financial sustainability given the £51m gap over the medium term and the ambition of Whole Council Transformation.

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It was moved by Cllr David King and seconded by Cllr Mike Mackrory that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

‘1 That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended as set out for the reasons and purposes set out below:

1.1 We recognise the enormous pressures facing all Councils following a very disappointing Local Government Settlement. A welcome, but minor and late adjustment was made to the Settlement after many requests for a substantial uplift in funding, supported by the Leaders of all thirty three County Councils, including Essex, and the Unitary Authorities and many Members of Parliament, including Essex MPs. Each made the case for a step change in Government support to local government. Given Council Tax has been capped at well below inflation and service costs, and demand continues to soar. Including vital services such as Social Care, Childrens Services and home to school transport. All on top of the over 40% cut in local government funding in recent years. The additional adjustment to the settlement, by way of additional Social Care Grant, can be used to fund the majority of investments we propose. This grant of £12.332m has been placed into the Early Intervention and Prevention

Holding Account (EIPHA).

- 1.2 We further recognise that some 52% of the revenue budget is directed at Social Care and Health. And that reduces the scope to address many other vital services, including highways.
- 1.3 Mindful that the Section 151 officer estimates that the authority faces a budget shortfall of £22m in 2025/26, after savings of £52m, and by 2027/28 that will have widened to £51m, the Liberal Democrat Group's amendment recognises those financial pressures. And restricts additional funding to addressing the most pressing of many concerns for our residents:

Youth Services

Support for families

Pavement and highway repairs

Surface water flooding and gulley cleansing

Children and young people's Mental Health

- 1.4 We propose additional help and support as detailed below for 2024/25 baseline budget and for each year that follows.
- 1.5 By utilising the additional Social Care Grant of £8.8m, reprofiling £0.3m from the Transformation Reserve and £0.25m from the Everyone's Essex Reserve this, with an additional £12.75m funded through borrowing for capital investment will enable a total of £9.35m to be made available for the budget in 2024/25. These are one off calls on reserves, and from 2025/26 onwards further savings or calls on reserves will be required. The following revenue and capital investment proposals are to be funded and the budget recommendation be amended as detailed in the Section 151 officer's commentary and statement below.
- 1.6 To increase protection for low income families from the impacts of the increases in Council Tax by **doubling ECC's investment into the district led hardship scheme**, adding an additional £300,000 to the cost base. This scheme is in partnership with Essex District, Borough and City Councils who in past years have generously supported many households, so reducing hardship and the pressure of their Council Tax bills.

2 Supporting the mental health needs of children and young people

- 2.1 **An increase in the Children and Families base budget by £3m (or 2%).** Mindful the significant and sustained increase in numbers of young people requiring advice and treatment for mental health issues is well documented. That the after effects of the coronavirus are still prevalent. And that current demand is not being met fast enough as shown by waiting times, to the detriment of those young people. Pressures made worse by the impact on wider NHS capacity. It is accordingly proposed

that:

- 2.2 £1m of this additional funding to enable **more vital work with children and young people with mental health issues**, in the knowledge that any such measures may reduce the risk of harm and suicide prevention, and benefit the NHS. Looking to match fund this significant additional investment with the Integrated Care Systems. Our proposal that with their help we make available a mental health practitioner or access to shared resources, in all schools, to help identify and address mental health issues at an early stage. An investment in prevention that will reduce demand on services in the future.
- 2.3 £1m additional **investment in the Family Innovation Fund**, working with children and young people to achieve stable, resilient and safe family environments, delivering services including coaching, mediation, conflict resolution and counselling through 1:1, group and family/parent/couples work.
- 2.4 A further **£1m invested in Essex Short Breaks**, a service that provides clubs and activities for young people with SEND and also offers parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disability a break from their additional caring responsibilities which enables them to maintain their ability to support their children and manage work and family life balance.
- 2.5 An increase of **£2m for Active Essex** (Levelling Up and the Economy portfolio), specifically to invest in sport and activity by extending school and club capacity and resource in the community. In the knowledge that this exercise and connection to others materially contributes to health and physical and mental wellbeing.
- 2.6 An increase of **£1m for Youth Services** (The Arts, Heritage and Culture portfolio). To enhance the provision of Youth Service projects including, support, mentoring and respite for young carers, school lunchtime clubs/drop in sessions run by youth workers and outreach work, including detached working.
- 3 Investing in additional social care capacity
 - 3.1 An increase of £1m in **the adult social care base budget** (Health, Adult, Social Care and ICS Integration portfolio) to address care and support for older people, specifically to invest in additional social care bed capacity. In addition, **£1.5m for the Discharge Fund** which, through our Better Care Fund partners, would further support additional bed capacity and enhance outcomes by expediting hospital discharges.
- 4 Investing in our response to the climate emergency
 - 4.1 An investment of **£250,000 into the Essex Forest Initiative** with a priority for greening our towns and cities, to reduce heat island impacts,

and to make them better places to live work and visit, through urban tree planting and “tiny forest” initiatives. Recognising the gravity of the Climate Emergency and increasing public engagement and awareness of our work.

5 Investing in our infrastructure and quality of life

5.1 **A one off increase of £5m** in the Highways Capital programme provision for Road Maintenance (Highways, Transportation and Active Travel portfolio) to include **increased gulley cleansing and surface water prevention measures**. So doing to reduce the backlog of repairs that can make life intolerable for our residents.

5.2 **To increase footway maintenance spend** by £3m as the most neglected and in need of repair area of highways. And as a contribution to the wider aims of Active Travel, by an additional one off capital investment of £2m.

5.3 **To help Local Highways Panels delivery** with an additional £2m invested to enable delivery of priority highways schemes in local areas.

5.4 An increase in our **capital investment in new cycling and walking infrastructure** of £750,000 improving thus our prospects of attracting match and grant funding from Government and other partners, such as the NHS.

6 Cost and Use of Reserves

6.1 These measures contained within this proposal will be an increase of £9.35m to the 2024/25 budget (some 0.8%) and are funded in full by reprofiling the Everyone's Essex and Transformation Reserves. The call on these reserves is supplemented by the late change to the Local Government Settlement for Social Care Grant which provides the County Council with an additional £12.332m, which will be held in the Early Intervention and Prevention Holding Account (EIPHA). One off capital investments will be funded through borrowing and there will be no draw on unrestricted reserves.

7 Section 151 Officer's Commentary on Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment

7.1 It is proposed that the revenue amendments to budget of £9.35m are to be funded from additional Social Care Grant monies and from reserves. The proposed investments will have an ongoing impact on the Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) from 2024/25 onwards as detailed in the table below:

Investments and source of funding for 2024/25: EIPHA: Early Intervention and Prevention Holding Account	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000
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EE: Everyone's Essex TR: Transformation Reserve					
Supporting low income families	EIPHA	300	300	300	300
Investment in children's mental health services	EIPHA	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Investment in children's family support	EIPHA	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Investment in children's sport and activity	EIPHA	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Investment in youth services	EIPHA	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Social care bed capacity	EIPHA	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Discharge Fund	EIPHA	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
Investment in climate change emergency	EE	250	250	250	250
Additional capital expenditure, interest on borrowing	TR	300	599	599	599
Additional capital expenditure, Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)	TR	0	440	440	440
Total Cost		9,350	10,089	10,089	10,089

7.2 The impact on reserves in 2024/25 is shown in the table below, with the 2024/25 budget increasing by £9.35m. The impact on future years is £10.089m.

Reserves	2024/25		
	Current Estimated Closing Balance £'000	Proposed Additional Usage £'000	Revised Estimate Closing Balance £'000
Early Intervention and Prevention Holding Account	12,332	8,800	3,532
Transformation Reserve	46,230	300	45,930
Everyone's Essex	22,928	250	22,678

7.3 The impact of the proposed amendments to the 2024/25 capital programme is detailed in the table below

Capital Investment Description	Current Budget 2024/25 £'000	Proposed Budget 2024/25 £'000	Increase/ (Decrease) £'000
Road maintenance including gulley cleansing and surface water prevention measures	42,155	47,155	5,000
Footways maintenance	9,000	12,000	3,000
Active Travel	7,011	9,011	2,000
Local Highways Panel investment	3,400	5,400	2,000
Cycling and walking infrastructure	1,483	2,233	750
Total cost	63,049	75,799	12,750

7.4 The estimated revenue borrowing costs for the additional capital expenditure of £12.75m have been calculated using the assumption that MRP is charged over 30 years and using the 2024/25 budgeted interest rate of 4.70%. These costs are set out within the revenue investment summary table above. There is no assumption as to ongoing revenue commitment from the incremental capital spend proposal in 2024/25.

7.5 The following table summarises and reconciles the proposed budget amendment as set out above across the life of the MTRS;

Budget amendment reconciliation	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000
Budget amendment proposals				
Revenue investments	9,350	10,089	10,089	10,089
Proposed funding streams				
Social Care Grant (Additional)	8,800			
Reduction of Transformation Reserve	300			
Reduction of Everyone's Essex Reserve	250			
Total remaining funding gap	0	10,089	10,089	10,089

7.6 These amendments do add to the pressures and funding gap in 2025/26 onwards which must be addressed by the County Council, through further savings and or call upon reserves.

Appendix A: Amended tables in Annual Plan and Budget 2023/24

Revenue Budget Summary

Children's Services and Early Years

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
16,250	18,368	18,583	Children's Services		
2,034	2,008	2,008	Children's Family Support	24,088	(14)
			Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service	3,015	(7)
					3,008

Climate Czar, Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
40		286	Green Infrastructure	739	(49)
					(90)
					600

Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
123,547	103,454	104,748	Care and Support		
			Older People	344,756	(147,107)
					(73,380)
					124,269

Levelling Up and the Economy

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24		2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
771	246	243	Sports Development	2,884	(640)
					2,244

The Arts, Heritage and Culture

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24			2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Income £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
3,390	3,355	3,147	Youth Services	5,400	1,249	(2,068)
						4,581

The Chancellor of Essex

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24			2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Income £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
10,489	10,918	12,465	Finance	17,091	(5,865)	11,226

Other Operating Costs

2022/23	2023/24	2023/24			2024/25	
Actuals £000	Original Budget £000	Latest Budget £000		Gross Expenditure £000	Income £000	Total Net Expenditure £000
21,245	28,494	28,494	Interest Payable			
			External Interest Payable	26,822		26,822

.....

The amendment moved by Cllr Dave Harris and seconded by Cllr Ivan Henderson was put to the vote and was **lost**.

The amendment moved by Cllr David King and seconded by Cllr Mike Mackrory was put to the vote and was **lost**.

In accordance with Standing Order 16.10.2 (Voting on budget decisions) the Motion as shown in the Budget report, the Addendum Report and Replacement Recommendations document was put to a division by name and **carried** by 47 votes for, 15 against and 3 abstentions.

Those voting for the Motion were Councillors:

Cllr Lewis Barber	Cllr Jeff Henry	Cllr Peter Schwier
Cllr Susan Barker	Cllr Paul Honeywood	Cllr Lee Scott
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Cllr Eddie Johnson	Cllr Lauren Shaw
Cllr Malcolm Buckley	Cllr John Jowers	Cllr Andrew Sheldon
Cllr Graham Butland	Cllr Sam Kane	Cllr Chris Siddall
Cllr Simon Crow	Cllr Dan Land	Cllr Mick Skeels
Cllr Tom Cunningham	Cllr Sue Lissimore	Cllr Kerry Smith
Cllr Mark Durham	Cllr Derek Louis	Cllr Clive Souter
Cllr Beverley Egan	Cllr Bob Massey	Cllr John Spence
Cllr Jane Fleming	Cllr Peter May	Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Mike Garnett	Cllr Louise McKinlay	Cllr Mark Stephenson
Cllr Alan Goggin	Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Cllr Mike Steptoe

Cllr Ian Grundy	Cllr Dr Richard Moore	Cllr Marshall Vance
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Cllr Mark Platt	Cllr Chris Whitbread
Cllr Michael Hardware	Cllr Ross Playle	Cllr Holly Whitbread
Cllr Anthony Hedley	Cllr Chris Pond	

Those voting against the Motion were Councillors:

Cllr Barry Aspinell	Cllr Dave Harris	Cllr James Newport
Cllr Mark Cory	Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cllr Pat Reid
Cllr Jude Deakin	Cllr David King	Cllr Stephen Robinson
Cllr Martin Foley	Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cllr Lee Scordis
Cllr Marie Goldman	Cllr Aidan McGurran	Cllr Paul Thorogood

Cllr Michael Hoy, Cllr Ray Gooding and Cllr Jillian Reeves abstained.

Resolved:

Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Revenue budget

- 1.1 That the Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and budget be approved in the form appended to this report (Appendix A) subject to the changes set out in paragraph 2.17 below.
- 1.2 That the net cost of services to be set at **£1,148.0million (m)** for 2024/25 – Appendix A (page 30).
- 1.3 That the net revenue budget requirement be set at **£1,073.2m** (net cost of services less general government grants) for 2024/25 – Appendix A (page 34).
- 1.4 That the total council tax funding requirement be set at **£848.3m** for 2024/25 – Appendix A (page 34).
- 1.5 That Essex County Council's element of the council tax be increased by 4.99% comprising of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and 2.0% adult social care precept. This would result in the Essex County Council element of the council tax being **£1,522.53** for a Band D property in 2024/25. A full list of bands is as follows:

Council Tax Band	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Band A	966.78	1,015.02
Band B	1,127.91	1,184.19
Band C	1,289.04	1,353.36
Band D	1,450.17	1,522.53
Band E	1,772.43	1,860.87
Band F	2,094.69	2,199.21
Band G	2,416.95	2,537.55
Band H	2,900.34	3,045.06

- 1.6 Full Council approve the Essex County Council element of the council tax for each category of dwelling and the precepts on each of the council tax billing authorities for 2024/25, together with the final tax base, as set out in the table below:

Billing Authority	2024/25 Final Tax Base Band D Equivalent	2024/25 Gross precept £
Basildon	61,444	93,550,942
Braintree	56,914	86,653,272
Brentwood	34,141	51,980,848
Castle Point	31,417	47,833,325
Chelmsford	71,536	108,916,086
Colchester	66,132	100,687,953
Epping Forest	55,617	84,679,464
Harlow	28,753	43,777,305
Maldon	26,400	40,195,066
Rochford	33,010	50,258,715
Tendring	51,866	78,967,540
Uttlesford	39,921	60,782,092
Total for ECC	557,153	848,282,613

- 1.7 That the proposed total schools budget be set at **£720.6m** for 2024/25 which will be funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, Pupil Premium Grant, Universal Free School Meals Grant, Teachers Pay and Pension Grants, PE and Sports Premium Grant, Sixth Form Grant, COVID-19 Recovery Premium Grant, Pupil Premium Plus Post 16 Grant, YPLA Funding Grant, NPQ Targeted Support Grant and Senior Mental Health Lead Training Grant. The majority of this will be passed through to maintained schools.

- 1.8 That the underlying balance on the General Balance be set at **£68.1m** as at 1 April 2024 (Appendix A, Annex 1, page 62).
- 1.9 That the capital payments guideline be set at **£320.1m** for 2024/25 (Appendix A, page 33).
- 1.10 That for the purposes of section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the Council formally determines that the increase in council tax is not such as to trigger a referendum.

Strategic Performance Measures

- 1.11 That the strategic performance measures as set out in Annex 2 (Appendix A) be approved, noting that Annex 2 was not in the information submitted to Cabinet.

Capital Strategy

- 1.12 That the 2024/25 to 2027/28 Prudential Indicators and limits, together with updated limits for 2023/24 as set out in Annexes 3A and 3B of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, pages 110-114), be approved. This includes an authorised limit for external debt of **£1,373m** for the 2024/25 financial year, which defines the maximum amount of external borrowing by the Council, and represents the statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 1.13 That the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 be approved, comprising:
 - a. Borrowing strategy, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 92).
 - b. Treasury management investments strategy, as set out in Annex 3 and Annex 3D of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 102).
 - c. Indicative strategy for commercial investment activities, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 105).
- 1.14 That the policy for making a prudent level of revenue provision for the repayment of debt, (the Minimum Revenue Provision policy) as set out in Annex 3C of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 115), be approved.
- 1.15 That the revised Treasury Management Policy Statement (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 121) and Treasury Management Practices (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 122), which set out the policies, objectives, and approach to treasury management, are adopted.

Pay Policy Statement

- 1.16 That the Council adopts the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix C.

Changes to annual plan and budget

- 1.17 That the following figures be amended to the Annual Plan which forms Appendix A to the report (which starts at page 51 of the published agenda pack) as shown on the replacement pages annexed to the addendum report.
- (a) Where the net cost of service currently shows **£1,148,011,006** (page 84 of the agenda pack), this will be amended to **£1,147,990,151** (page 84 of the agenda pack)
 - (b) Where the net budget requirement currently shows **£1,073,411,809** (page 84 of the agenda pack), this will be amended to **£1,073,207,634** (page 84 of the agenda pack)
 - (c) Where the Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration portfolio shows **£881.395m** total gross expenditure budget and **£231.734m** specific grants budget (page 92 of the agenda pack), these figures are amended to **£881.461m** and **£231.801m** respectively. There is no change to the total net expenditure budget.
 - (d) Where the Everyone's Essex Reserve shows **£13.128m** total net expenditure (page 109 of the agenda pack), this is amended to **£13.107m**
 - (e) Where the Other Operating costs portfolio shows **£148.811m** total net expenditure budget (starts at page 107 of the agenda pack), this is amended to **£148.790m**.
 - (f) That pages 80, 82, 84, 92, 109, and 112 of the agenda be replaced with those appended to the addendum report circulated at the meeting.
- 1.18 That the Section 151 Officer be authorised to make the necessary consequential amendments to amend other figures in the Annual Plan which are the arithmetical result of the above changes.

9. Adjournment

With the agreement of Council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1:20pm. The meeting reconvened at 2:05pm.

10. Executive Statement

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council gave a statement on Social Media Issues.

The broadcast of the meeting may be found on the [ECC Democracy YouTube Channel](#).

11. Report to Council on Social Media Issues

The report was presented to Council. The motion on the report was moved by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr John Spence.

'This Council, given the media interest and public disquiet and being ever mindful of the need to spend taxpayers money wisely, requests an urgent investigation by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee into the circumstances in which Essex County Council engaged Mr Simon Harris in contracts and payments amounting to £493,000 to provide social media posts from June 2020 until April 2023. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to pay particular regard to the following:

By what selection process was Mr Harris initially awarded these contracts, who made the decision and what background checks were made given his reputation as a comedian and prankster?

What precisely were these contracts awarded for, who signed them off, what due diligence was carried out and what value for money was carried out before further contracts or payments were awarded?

Were declarations of interest correctly recorded by those directly authorising the payments?

Why wasn't the in house ECC Communications Team given the additional resource to carry out the work by Mr Harris given that it was for a corporate public health awareness messaging campaign?

What analysis of the viewing data is available, considering the average view of a typical Facebook page is three seconds, and in particular Mr Harris's Facebook coverage in Essex? The Committee should consider use of an Independent data analyst to be engaged as a witness to the committee to verify how meaningful published reach data is.

It has been reported that serious concerns were raised in 2021, why did payments continue until 2023?

What is the usual budget for social media and how much has been spent on social media since April 2023?

Does the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee consider this expenditure to be value for money, and if so, how?

What learning so far has been taken and what changes made or are being explored in procurement processes?

It was moved by Cllr Aidan McGurran and seconded by Cllr Ivan Henderson that the motion be amended to read:

‘This Council, given the media interest and public disquiet and being ever mindful of the need to spend taxpayers’ money wisely, requests an urgent investigation by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee into the circumstances in which Essex County Council engaged Mr Simon Harris and others in contracts and other agreements amounting to £1,027,867 to provide social media engagement from January 2018 until now. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to pay particular regard to the following:

By what selection process was Mr Harris initially awarded these contracts and other commissions, who made the decision and what background checks were made given his reputation as a comedian and prankster?

What selection processes were used for the others carrying out social media engagement functions? Who made the decisions and what background checks were carried out?

What precisely were these contracts and agreements awarded for, who signed them off, what due diligence was carried out and what value for money assessments were carried out before further contracts, commissions or payments were awarded?

Were declarations of interest correctly recorded by those directly authorising the payments and commissioning the work? If this was not the case what action was taken as a result?

Why wasn’t the in house ECC Communications Team given the additional resource to carry out the work by Mr Harris given that it was for a corporate public health awareness messaging campaign? Why were they not involved in any way?

Why given Mr Harris doesn’t appear to have been vetted was he allowed to make payments to third parties? Given that Essex CC did not know who he was paying how could they know these payments were in keeping with normal Council practices and procedures?

What analysis of the viewing data is available, considering the average view of a typical Facebook page is three seconds, and in

particular Mr Harris's Facebook coverage in Essex? The Committee should consider use of an independent data analyst to be engaged as a witness to the committee to verify how meaningful published reach data is.

It has been reported that serious concerns were raised in 2021, why did payments continue until now?

What is the usual budget for social media engagement and how much has been spent on social media since April 2023? What is the budget for social media engagement for next year?

Does the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee consider this expenditure to be value for money, and if so, how?

In the interests of completeness, the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee should also investigate the payments made under the heading Summary of Payments ECC made to non-social media suppliers in the Council document Spending and Council Tax: Spending on Digital Community in the Pandemic.

What learning so far has been taken and what changes made or are being explored in procurement processes?

It was moved by Cllr Dan Land and seconded by Cllr Lewis Barber that the motion be amended to read:

'This Council, given the media interest and public disquiet and being ever mindful of the need to spend taxpayers money wisely, requests an urgent investigation by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee into the circumstances in which Essex County Council engaged Mr Simon Harris in contracts and payments amounting to £493,000 to provide social media posts from June 2020 until April 2023. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to pay particular regard to the following:

1. By what selection process was Mr Harris initially awarded these contracts, who made the decision and what background checks were made given his reputation as a comedian and prankster?
2. What precisely were these contracts awarded for, who signed them off, what due diligence was carried out and what value for money was carried out before further contracts or payments were awarded?
3. Were declarations of interest correctly recorded by those directly authorising the payments?

4. Why wasn't the in house ECC Communications Team given the additional resource to carry out the work by Mr Harris given that it was for a corporate public health awareness messaging campaign?
5. What analysis of the viewing data is available, considering the average view of a typical Facebook page is three seconds, and in particular Mr Harris's Facebook coverage in Essex? The Committee should consider use of an Independent data analyst to be engaged as a witness to the committee to verify how meaningful published reach data is.
6. It has been reported that serious concerns were raised in 2021, why did payments continue until 2023?
7. What is the usual budget for social media and how much has been spent on social media since April 2023?
8. Does the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee consider this expenditure to be value for money, and if so, how?
9. The effectiveness of opposition member scrutiny of this expenditure?
10. What learning so far has been taken and what changes made or are being explored in procurement processes?

It is acknowledged that the above list is not exhaustive and therefore, the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee should ensure that a full and thorough examination is undertaken and allow any Member to bring any evidence or questions they have forward.

This Council therefore calls on the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee to report and publish the outcome of its investigation.'

The amendment moved by Cllr Aidan McGurran and seconded by Cllr Ivan Henderson was put to the meeting and was **lost**.

The amendment moved by Cllr Dan Land and seconded by Cllr Lewis Barber was put to the meeting and was **carried** and became the substantive motion.

Having been put to the meeting the motion was **carried**.

12. Annual Report of the External Auditor for Financial Year 2020/2021

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Anthony Hedley Chairman of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee presented the report.

Members paid tribute to the officers in Finance and those working alongside the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

It having been moved by Councillor Anthony Hedley and seconded by Councillor Chris Siddall it was

Resolved:

That Council noted the report.

13. Approval for Extended Absence

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley presented the report and it having been moved by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr Louise McKinlay it was

Resolved:

That, in accordance with section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council approved Councillor Andrew Wiles' non-attendance at meetings due to reasons of ill-health.

14. Cabinet Issues

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley presented the report and it having been moved by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr Louise McKinlay it was

Resolved:

To receive the list of urgent decisions taken and the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 19 December 2023 and 16 January 2024.

15. Oral Questions of the Leader, Cabinet Member, chairman of a committee or the representative of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

The oral questions and answers as part of the broadcast of the meeting may be found on the [ECC Democracy YouTube Channel](#).

The questions asked were:

Question asked by:	Question asked to:	Subject of the question:
Cllr Dave Harris	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Member led pothole scheme repairs, Colchester
Cllr Dave Harris	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Bus stop request in Gosbecks, Shrub End, Colchester
Cllr Wendy Stamp	Leader	Closure of St Peters Hospital in Maldon
	Question asked to:	Subject of the question:

Question asked by:		
Cllr Ross Playle	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Proposals for charging for on street parking in Witham
Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Improvements by National Highways to the A120.
Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Pedestrian Crossing at White Hart Lane, Chelmsford in connection with Beaulieu Park School.
Cllr Marie Goldman	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Repair of potholes in Gloucester Avenue
Cllr Derrick Louis	Chancellor of Essex and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance	SEN spend in 2024/25 budget
Cllr James Newport	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Flooding in Watery Lane Hullbridge.
Cllr Michael Hoy	Deputy Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability	Employment prospects for people with SEND.
Cllr Michael Hoy	Deputy Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability	Accessible Apprenticeships
Cllr Martin Foley	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Repairing of potholes in passing places on single track roads.

16. Closure of Meeting

The meeting closed at 4:05pm.

A recording of the meeting is available as a [video on YouTube](#).

Chairman