

Appendix B – Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (Annual Plan and Budget)

1. Overview

- 1.1 This appendix describes the most significant equality pressures confronting each main service area, informed by an equality analysis. It highlights the effect of policy and governance changes; an overview of potential impacts; and a service impact overview. These outcomes are based upon changes resulting from the 2024/25 budget.
- 1.2 It is important to note that the budget is the financial expression of the Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and our operational intent, and where known, the equality impact of change is disclosed. However, there are a number of individual decisions that will arise over the period of the 2024/25 budget. These will be subject to specific and more detailed equality impact analyses in line with the Council's Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment (ECIA) guidance. Political decisions will only be taken once effective and meaningful engagement has taken place on a need-by-need basis.
- 1.3 In making this decision we must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, i.e. have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 1.4 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. In addition, marital status is a relevant protected characteristic for 1.3(a)
- 1.5 The PSED is a relevant factor in making this decision but does not impose a duty to achieve the outcomes in s149. It is only one factor that needs to be considered and may be balanced against other relevant factors.
- 1.6 Part of the equalities governance is to ensure that Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments are undertaken when considering new and/or revised policies to inform and underpin good decision making processes. This also helps us pay due regard to our equality obligations.
- 1.7 The Equality Act also says that public bodies must pay 'due regard' to equality. This means that we must:
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
 - take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

2. Identified high level cumulative equality impact

- 2.1 At this stage, it is not possible to fully measure the cumulative impact of the proposals on those people who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, or how the geographic spread of budget proposals will be felt across rural and urban areas of Essex.
- 2.2 Key impacts from this initial analysis across the portfolios are outlined from section 5 below.

3. Mitigating actions which will be considered

- 3.1 **Monitoring of impact:** Services should ensure ongoing equalities monitoring of the impact of service changes, to identify trends in disproportionate or unanticipated impact at an early stage to address them. This reporting should be monitored Council-wide at senior levels within the Council in order to identify cumulative impacts and mitigating actions. Consideration should be given to working with other partners in this monitoring and evaluation where appropriate.
- 3.2 **Informing decision-making:** The findings of this monitoring should be used to inform the budget-setting process year on year.
- 3.3 **Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments:** As the budget proposals are developed, individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken. This will include an assessment of who is likely to be impacted by the changes, whether they are considered to have 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010 and if they are, what mitigation activity is proposed to ensure that they will not be disproportionately affected.
- 3.4 Where no mitigating factors can be identified to a change to a policy, process or practice, which may affect one or more protected characteristics adversely, ECIA authors must provide Cabinet Members with clear options by which to base their political decision making on.
- 3.5 In addition to considering the nine protected characteristics when completing an Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment, consideration of the following areas is also required in terms of impact and mitigation:
 - Digital accessibility
 - Levelling up (priority cohorts and places)
 - Inclusion health groups and other priority groups
 - Geographical areas
 - Families
 - Crime and disorder
 - Climate

ECIAs are reviewed to provide an assessment of the cumulative impact of the budget decisions.

- 3.6 **Targeting based on need:** Resources and services should clearly identify specific needs of different groups at an early stage in order to be most effective and meet needs at first contact wherever possible.
- 3.7 **Gaps in monitoring:** Where gaps in monitoring have been identified during the Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment process, steps should be taken to fill these in the forthcoming year. This will enable better modelling of potential impacts and assessments in future.

4. Strategic focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 4.1 The Council is fully committed to addressing the challenges facing communities and supporting residents to live better lives. Everyone's Essex: our plan for levelling up the county 2021-2025 sets out how services are responding to and are planning for these challenges with a key focus on tackling inequalities across the County. We are focused on four areas where outcomes really matter for the quality of life of our residents.

They are:

- the economy
 - the environment
 - children and families
 - promoting health, care and wellbeing for all parts of our population, particularly those who need our support the most
- 4.2 This commitment to equality and inclusion is shared by partners and is firmly rooted in the long-term Vision for Essex: The Future of Essex. This outlines commitments to improve the life chances and experiences for all Essex residents. A key ambition within the Vision for Essex is to share prosperity with everyone, an ambition that is vitally important to the Council.
- 4.3 The Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget for 2024/25 gives effect to this in the following ways:
- By ensuring that the savings are balanced across service areas and are not targeted at the most vulnerable
 - By driving savings through the delivery of efficiencies and through the reform of services to improve outcomes and make them more cost effective
 - By continuing to invest in services and activities that will reduce inequalities and support better lives for all residents

5. Policy and Governance Context

- 5.1 The proposed council tax increase may adversely impact some residents of Essex; however residents on the lowest incomes will remain eligible for support with their bills via their local council tax support schemes (operated and maintained by the city, district and borough councils). The element of the increase relating to the specific social care precept will be ring-fenced for adult

social care. This should positively impact on vulnerable adults within Essex by helping to protect and improve social care services.

- 5.2 The localisation of council tax benefit (introducing new payees to council tax as a result of national policy changes) was implemented in 2013/14 alongside a scheme for hardship and investment in collection initiatives including Citizens Advice support. Over this time, the 12 billing authorities have sustained collection rates against this backdrop, ensuring no negative impact on other council tax payers. Our budget maintains the investment into collection and hardship that was introduced in 2023/24 for a further two financial years.
- 5.3 We have joined forces with the borough, district and city councils and police and fire authorities to tackle council tax fraud across the county. The programme:
- ensures those entitled to discounts or exemptions on their council tax are receiving the right support;
 - has introduced extensive regular reviews to ensure the levels of benefits people receive are correct;
 - encourages people to notify councils if their circumstances change, and the consequences of not doing so, to enable councils to take swift and appropriate action against people fraudulently claiming council tax benefit.
- 5.4 The budget will be discharged against a background of continuing intense pressure across the health and care system in Essex, particularly in light of heightened inflation and the lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Portfolio Impacts Overview

Children's Services and Early Years

- 6.1 Children's Services and Early Years purpose is to protect children and young people from neglect and abuse, and to promote their development and wellbeing. The Council will continue to work with partners to provide a wide range of early help, family support and social work interventions, to help families improve their lives and support children to overcome early childhood trauma, look forward to a brighter future and achieve their aspirations. As Corporate Parents, the Council will do its best to see that this happens for children in care and care leavers.
- 6.2 To do this well and get best value for money, the Council aims to be at the forefront of best practice. It will always learn from the most forward-thinking innovations and positive developments in the social work profession, as well as from the children, young people and families the Council works with.
- 6.3 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£1.7m** for 2024/25 (1.2% of net budget).

- 6.4 £750,000 relates to one-off drawdown from the Family Solutions Reserve, and £100,000 one-off drawdown from the Youth Justice Reserve where Children in Care also have involvement with Youth Justice.
- 6.5 Under our Placement Strategy we are seeking to place children in care within a family setting as evidenced through our Essex fostering programme. This will therefore reduce the reliance on the independent market realising a £639,000 saving in 2024/25.
- 6.6 Aligning £150,000 of staff costs to the Domestic Abuse Grant where activity is targeted to grant outcomes.
- 6.7 There is a £100,000 income generation target, to be delivered across the portfolio through a range of different activity that is currently being developed.
- 6.8 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impact on children, young people and their families. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

Climate Czar, Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling

- 6.9 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£350,000** for 2024/25 (0.4% of net budget).
- 6.10 This will be delivered through service interventions and education to increase participation in existing food waste recycling services and improve capture rates. This will reduce the amount of food waste treated as residual waste and divert this to lower cost treatment routes.
- 6.11 The food waste recycling initiative has no adverse impact on persons who share any relevant protected characteristic. The food waste recycling services, and intervention have both been designed to ensure all residents provided with these services are able to fully participate.

Education Excellence, Life Long Learning and Employability

- 6.12 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£578,000** for 2024/25 (2.9% of net budget).
- 6.13 £100,000 relates to a managed vacancy factor within school crossing patrols.

- 6.14 £78,000 relates to increased income generation from the school improvement offer that commenced in September 2023.
- 6.15 £200,000 relates to surplus school properties due to lower maintenance costs as a result of fewer surplus properties.
- 6.16 £200,000 relates to increasing the recharge of central support costs to the Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 6.17 Whilst it is not anticipated that there will be any impact to service users from the proposals set out, in order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impacts. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration

- 6.18 The priority is to operate in a manner that is fiscally sustainable while fully meeting our obligations, and in this context, we remain committed to ensuring that we do what is required to keep adults safe. We will ensure adults, carers and families have access to the information, advice and tools they need to enable them to live ordinary lives, safely and independently, for as long as possible. The Council at any point in time supports around 16,000 adults in long term care, of which about 9,500 are older people, 4,000 are people with learning disabilities and autism, over 2,000 are people with physical or sensory impairments and around 800 are people with mental health needs. In addition to those adults, we impact the lives of many other people on a short-term or regular basis. This includes carers, people in reablement, people in receipt of care tech, and people supported into employment, safeguarding activity to keep people safe, as well as support through information and guidance.
- 6.19 The portfolio has identified new budget savings proposals of **£4.8m** this year (details set out in 6.21 and 6.22 below) which together with some **£13.4m** of savings from activity already included within the Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) but due to deliver in this financial year amounts to **£18.3m** in savings for 2024/25 (3.9% of net budget).
- 6.20 The proposals set out in the 2023/24 ECIA which will deliver in the 2024/25 financial year are listed below. A copy of the 2023/24 ECIA setting out the assessment of the impact of these proposals has been published online and can be found here [Document.ashx \(essex.gov.uk\)](https://www.essex.gov.uk/document/ashx). These areas total **£13.4m** and are;
- Disabilities (Learning, Physical and Sensory) **£6.2m** – Paragraph 6.7(a)

- Technology, and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) **£942,000** – Paragraph 6.7(c)
- Older People **£3.4m** – Paragraph 6.7(d)
- Changes to inflation modelling **£1.4m** – Paragraph 6.7(f)
- Essex Cares Ltd (ECL) review **£1.5m** – This will be achieved through contractual efficiencies. There is no impact on anyone using ECL services.

6.21 The main areas of continuing activities with additional savings total **£2.4m** and are set out in the 2023/24 ECIA link above;

- Disabilities (Learning, Physical and Sensory) **£76,000** – Paragraph 6.7(a)
- Mental Health **£400,000** – Paragraph 6.7(b)
- Technology, and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) **£1.5m** – Paragraph 6.7(c)
- Older People **£430,000** – Paragraph 6.7(d)

6.22 The new savings that impact on 2024/25 total **£2.4m** and are set out in the following paragraphs;

- Supporting independence reviews **£1.5m** – We will review adults with learning disabilities who are not currently getting the best outcomes to identify the most appropriate option with the objective of maximising their independence and quality of life. The savings will be realised from more efficient and higher quality service delivery made possible through appropriate housing options and increasing use of community assets.
- Mental Health **£200,000** – This has already been achieved through the outcome of our recent re-tendering of Supported Accommodation provision for people with mental health issues. There is no impact on anyone using these services.
- Intermediate Care **£500,000** – This is care provided to people who need short term support, in most cases this is through our reablement provision, and while some people may go on to require long term care and support the objective is always to help people regain as much independence as possible. We have identified that the current provision is not operating as efficiently as we would like and work is underway to redesign the service offer with a view to improving outcomes for those who use the service and reducing the time spent within the service for adults who require interim care at home or who require a short-term residential care home placement as part of their onward journey back to their own home, following an acute admission or step up from the community. This work is intended to benefit all groups who use the service by offering personalised support designed to enable the adult to regain as much independence as quickly as possible. The savings come from the efficiencies that this approach will generate.

- Equipment service **£175,000** –The equipment service has recently been re-tendered, and our equipment catalogue has been reviewed and refined. Adults requiring equipment will continue to have their needs fully met.

6.23 In developing our budget proposals for this year, we have kept our vision for Adult Social Care at the centre of our thinking. We want people to be able to live their lives to the fullest. This means people can be active citizens, exercise choice and control over their care and have sustainable solutions supported by a community-based model of social care that is preventative and localised. This reflects the Council's commitments to levelling-up the county in 4 key areas: the economy; the environment; children and families; and promoting health, care and wellbeing for all ages.

6.24 Our mission of making the difference every day for those who rely on us for care and support is underpinned by clear and measurable outcomes. We want people to enjoy:

- Independence and wellbeing that is maximised
- Choice and control over care and support
- Access to a place called home
- Access to social and employment opportunities
- Positive experience of social care
- Reduced inequalities and increased inclusion
- People at risk can live free from abuse, harm and neglect

6.25 The activities set out above, with their focus on increasing independence and personalisation, align with our vision, and our mission statement, while at the same time delivering best value for all citizens of Essex.

6.26 Individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken where necessary. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport

6.27 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£5.7m** for 2024/25 (4.5% of net budget). These are categorised into the main areas outlined below:

- Removal of surplus passenger transport budget through efficiency savings associated with concessionary fares totalling £1m
- One-off Local Transport Fund grant funding £3.6m to maintain the Local Bus budget at existing levels
- A one-off recharge of Special Educational Needs to the High Needs Block £500,000

- Annual street lighting maintenance saving due to LED conversions being complete £400,000
- £25,000 insourcing of statutory sustainable drainage system advice for housing developments

6.28 Whilst it is not anticipated that there will be any negative impact to service users from the proposals set out, in order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impacts. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

Leader

6.29 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£141,000** for 2024/25 (3.4% of net budget), the majority of which relate to efficiencies through support services.

6.30 These changes are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents.

6.31 Individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken where necessary. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

Levelling Up, Communities and Business Engagement

6.32 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£265,000** for 2024/25 (2.2% of net budget).

6.33 £36,000 relates to a planned reduction in external audit support, a further £20,000 relates to reductions in non-staffing budgets across Democratic Services which reflect a reduction in demand for external services.

6.34 £73,000 relates to a managed vacancy factor within the Chief Executive Office.

6.35 £115,000 relates to the deletion of a number of vacant posts, with the remaining £21,000 linked to realising efficiencies across the Chief Executive Office.

6.36 Individual Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessments will be undertaken where necessary. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will

need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.

The Arts, Heritage and Culture

- 6.37 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£426,000** for 2024/25 (1.6% of net budget).
- 6.38 £300,000 relates to a redesign of the staffing structure within the Library Service, revisiting logistic processes around the movement and storage of books and engaging more residents in events and activities to deliver the Everyone's Essex Library Plan.
- 6.39 £51,000 relates to the funding of Outreach staff within the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit. There is agreement for these costs to now be funded from the Public Health grant.
- 6.40 £25,000 relates to the Rural Farming Schools Food Day. This contribution has not been requested since Covid therefore this budget is no longer required.
- 6.41 £50,000 relates to service improvements for food, beverage and retail within in-house operated outlets in ECC Country Parks, including exploring alternative operating models.
- 6.42 There are not expected to be any negative impacts on service users with protected characteristics, but an Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment will be completed as part of the governance and decision making for any individual project.

The Chancellor of Essex

- 6.43 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£3.8m** for 2024/25 (3.2% of net budget).
- 6.44 £544,000 relates to the Exit of Essex House. This reflects the ongoing work to rationalise ECC core estate to realise efficiencies. There will be no impact on the service received by residents.
- 6.45 £302,000 relates to the Estate Transformation which will deliver efficiencies relating to the utilisation of ECC buildings. There will be no impact on the service received by residents.
- 6.46 £300,000 relates to customer services digital transformation. Through improved use of technology and workforce management, customer services will benefit from staffing efficiencies. The transformation process will positively impact the

customer journey, providing improved online options and increased access to upskilled officers who have been released from transactional tasks.

- 6.47 A £120,000 staff saving in the Customer Services Compliance and Complaints team will be realised. This reflects the existing lean operation. There will be no negative impact on residents as this was achieved as part of previous lean review.
- 6.48 £1.1m relates to reductions in staffing budgets across support services. The main driver is the deletion of vacant and fixed term positions. But this includes review of service offers, redesign of delivery models, and increased use of technology to realise efficiencies. These savings are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents.
- 6.49 £682,000 Network and Voice savings relates to the Councils renewal of its telephony, contact centre, and network infrastructure to enhance performance, improve reliability, increase security, and ensure compatibility with future technology requirements. This will create efficiencies through process redesign and use of modern technology.
- 6.50 £350,000 will be realised from process simplification, maximising the use of available technology, better workforce management, and digital automation of service across Procurement and Transactional Services. This is expected to positively impact the customer journey.
- 6.51 £102,000 will be realised from the right sizing of budgets, it reflects a reduction in demand for some external services and supplies over the last three years across Support Service budgets. There will be no impact on the service received by residents.
- 6.52 £125,000 will be realised from a one-off adjustment to the insurance fund reserve which actions recommendations from the annual actuarial review.
- 6.53 A further £157,000 relates to commercial activity income across Procurement and People Operations.
- 6.54 At this stage it is not considered that the savings proposals will have an adverse impact on persons who share any relevant protected characteristic. However, an Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment will be completed as part of the governance and decision making for each individual proposal. Where there are no mitigating factors, policy authors will need to set out the options based on the adverse impacts in order for political decision making to take place.