

The Budget clearly set out that we have a Government that is committed to growth and increasing opportunity.

The announcement of £44 billion to build new homes with a particular focus on freeing up unused public sector land; and the abolishment of Stamp Duty for first time buyers on homes up to £300,000 will help many of our county's young people onto the property ladder.

It will come as no surprise to this Chamber that Essex County Council is ahead of the national curve on house building. Essex Housing, our in-house developer is working with public sector authorities to identify surplus land for redevelopment to deliver the homes we so desperately need.

This year alone we have started building 64 properties on three vacant sites and are working on another 1000 homes.

The Chancellor did not announce any new monies for Social Care in the budget, however, through the announced Improved Better Care Fund (iBCF), we received an additional £24.7m in 2017/18, and will receive £16.8m in 2018/19. About two-thirds will be used to maintain investment in services and offset pressures, and the remaining one-third will be made available for new initiatives.

Another area that wasn't mentioned in the Budget was Children's Services. Our Children's Services continue to go from strength to strength. We are recognised as one of the best in the Country and asked by DfE to support the improvement of local authorities with inadequate ratings.

The Budget did see additional monies put into Education particularly to training Maths teachers. We continue to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people year on year and this year educational attainment was in the top 25% of local authorities for early years provision and the top 50% for outcomes key stage 2 and 4. On top of this 93% of schools in Essex are now judged good or outstanding by Ofsted.

The future of local government finance is still unclear after the Budget with the majority of Business Rate Retention pilot areas still to be announced.

Despite this uncertainty we continue to invest in innovation, strengthening communities and supporting infrastructure. This year alone we've secured a new junction on the M11, built leaky dams in Thaxted, consulted on the routes options for A120, and rolled out more community hubs.

Chairman, fellow Members as I said in May this is a Cabinet committed to delivering for the people of Essex and already their achievements speak for themselves.

You have all heard me speak before about my enthusiasm for localism.

Many of the solutions to the challenges we face exist out there in our communities.

That's why I was excited to formally launch The Local Services Fund last week, which is being run by EALC on our behalf.

It offers revenue funding, providing groups with the opportunity to submit match funded proposals for localised services.

This is about helping local communities to deliver new and innovative activities to improve their area.

The scheme possibilities are almost endless. e.g. verge maintenance; community cafe offer; or a community handyman.

My point is that local communities are best placed to understand the small but significant pieces of work, which will make a real difference to their lives and local areas.

And this fund, for the first time gives them the money to help get their schemes off the ground.

Empowering our communities is at the heart of this administration, our local connections fund (Crowd Funding) has already seen £48,919 pledged across 5 causes with another 25 waiting to come online.

## **Leader's Executive Statement to Full Council, December 12 2017**

What can be achieved by communities working together is never more transparent than when looking at the plight of refugees. Whilst this is not making headlines anymore it is still a real and present issue for the world.

I am proud to say that Essex has led the way working with partners in the public, community and faith sector has enabled the resettlement of an additional 22 individuals through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme during 2017.

As our vision states, there's no one way to describe who we are. But if there is one thing that unites us more than anything else, it's our spirit and belief that we can achieve anything

We saw that spirit in practice clearly over this weekend. There is no denying that Sunday was a challenging day, with gritters out 5 times in a little over 24 hours during the weekend and again several times yesterday.

As it takes about 3 hours to grit the routes we are responsible for, that meant 15 hours-plus on the roads, and was our busiest day for several years, covering over 2,000 miles of roads 5 times over, laying 1900 tons of salt. Our crews did a fantastic job all day and into the night and I'd like to thank them for their hard work.

We also have a group of farmers who use tractors with snow ploughs to clear more rural roads and lanes. They were busy on Sunday and hats off to them for helping with the overall effort.

The people of Essex really are our greatest asset and as we near Christmas I want us all to pause for thought and give thanks to everyone in Essex who gives of their time, energy and skills to make our county better.

That spirit of volunteering – for family, friends and communities – is something we must cherish and support.

I would like to wish all Members and their families and, on behalf of us all, our officers and their families, a very Merry Christmas.