

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (Organisation 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 positive and neutral impacts; and a service impact overview. These outcomes are based upon spending decisions taken during the last two years and changes resulting from the 2021/22 budget. The analysis also highlights a number of cumulative impacts that may arise resulting from the 2021/22 budget.
- 1.2 It is important to note that the budget is the financial expression of the Organisation 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 2021/22 budget. These will be subject to specific and more detailed equality impact assessments in line with the Council's Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 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 equality 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:
 - move 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 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 However, a preliminary equality analysis of the planned activity and budget proposals for 2021/22 indicates that the council is focused on making the majority of identified savings through efficiencies linked to internal systems and processes. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way in which most council employees carry out their work. Services that are provided to our citizens have also had to adapt to this change in circumstances, with more being offered online and in more cost-effective ways. Consequently, it is likely that the budget proposals will have limited negative impacts on the communities that we serve.
- 2.3 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 must 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 **Equality Impact Assessments:** As the budget proposals are developed, individual equality 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. These will all be reviewed to provide an assessment of the cumulative impact of the budget decisions.
- 3.4 **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 e.g. through consultation.
- 3.5 **Gaps in monitoring:** Where gaps in monitoring have been identified during the equality 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. Identified Positive Impacts

4.1 The Council is fully committed to addressing the challenges facing communities and supporting residents to live better lives. The Organisation Strategy 2017/21 sets out how services are responding to and are planning for these challenges with a key focus on tackling inequalities across the County. 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.

4.2 The Organisation Plan and Budget for 2021/22 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

4.3 Examples of areas where the Council will be taking forward action to achieve this include:

Exploring the development of a new Child Poverty Strategy/Family Resilience Strategy which will deepen our understanding of the issues being experienced by Essex children, and set out how we will work with partners across the system to address this long-standing challenge.

Increasing accommodation options that promote independence for vulnerable people including the development of Extra Care Housing for older people, supported living options for people with learning disability and autism, and improved accommodation options for people with mental health issues.

Improving our support to adults with mental health problems and work with partners to address the mental health challenges that have resulted from Covid-19.

Specifically targeting resources and support at those individuals and groups most at risk of suicide including e.g. middle-aged men, members of the LGBT community

Growing our asset-based social isolation programme to encourage increased kindness and belonging in communities. Through this programme we will support 50,000 people across Essex in combating social isolation.

Signposting, connecting and enabling working families with children to remain financially resilient.

5. Policy and Governance Context

- 5.1 The proposed social care precept 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 increase proposed relates to a specific social care precept that 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. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a reduction in collection rates, although they are still at a high level. Our budget proposes continuation of the investment into collection and hardship for 2021/22.
- 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 the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.5 With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting household incomes, there has been an increase in the number of claims for the local council tax support schemes. In 2020/21, the Government allocated a grant to allow households in receipt of local council tax support to receive a further £150 reduction to their bill. In 2021/22, an unringfenced grant has been allocated and we will be working with the district, borough and city councils to identify how this can be best used in a targeted manner to help those households hardest hit.

6. Portfolio Impacts Overview

Children and Families

- 6.1 The Children and Families Service's 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 **£5.8m** for 2021/22.
- 6.4 Of this, **£4.9m** will have no impact to service users as the saving is made through one-off use of carried forward under spend (from 2020/21), drawdown from reserves or contribution from grants.
- 6.5 Under the Placement Strategy the Council is seeking to place children in care within a family setting where possible, realising an in year saving of **£398,000** through the Council's fostering programme. Additionally, the Council will deliver a further **£542,000** saving through our Divisional Based Intervention Teams (DBIT) re-unification programme for under-10s which aims to help re-integrate children in care back into a family members care. Both of these initiatives are expected to have a positive impact on the children and their families.
- 6.6 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual equality 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.

Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate

- 6.7 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£3.7m** in 2021/22, the majority of which relate to efficiencies following lean reviews, support service redesign and efficiencies across the technology estate. These changes are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents. Individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken where necessary.

Deputy Leader and Infrastructure

- 6.8 Budget proposals of **£856,000** have been identified for the 2021/22 financial year. These are categorised into the 3 main areas outlined below:

- (a) Partnership improvements and efficiencies within the Essex Highways partnership (highways maintenance) has proposals totalling **£381,000**; Benefits are being achieved through seeking continuous improvements, economies of scale and different ways of delivering services more efficiently. This may have an impact on the level of reactive maintenance on the highway network.
- (b) Combined approach to working with other partners. Financial benefits of **£200,000** will be achieved through one-off opportunities, different methodologies, reducing subsidies and increasing income opportunities.
- (c) Reduced energy consumption from the phasing of LED street lighting and of **£275,000**

6.9 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impact.

Education and Skills

6.10 The portfolio has identified budget savings of **£654,000** for 2021/22, of which the most significant is an increased contribution to SEND Home to School Transport of **£600,000** from the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant. There is no reduction in the service, but a reduction in the cost funded by the Council.

6.11 It is not considered that savings proposals will have an adverse impact on persons who share any relevant protected characteristic. However, an equality impact assessment will be completed as part of the governance and decision making for each individual project.

6.12 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual equality 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.

Environment and Climate Change Action

6.13 Efficiency savings of **£3m** (3.58% of net budget) have been proposed for 2021/22. The largest efficiencies are predominantly associated in the following two areas of activity:

- (a) Waste Treatment – The Council is responsible for making suitable arrangements for the treatment and disposal of waste. Savings have been identified as a result of the re-tendering and re-direction of waste to cheaper disposal solutions, and the reduction in kerbside waste tonnage requiring treatment as a result of historic service changes and changing public behaviour. This has no impact on service delivery and therefore no impact on protected groups has been identified as a result of the delivery of this saving.

- (b) Recycling Centre Operation – More robust enforcement of existing recycling centre policies regarding access will deliver continued tonnage reductions and operational savings at the network of centres. This saving is associated with existing polices and has no identified additional impact on protected groups.

6.14 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impact.

Finance

6.15 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£2.4m** in 2021/22, these relate to a number of efficiency savings across support services. These changes are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents.

6.16 It is not considered that savings proposals will have an adverse impact on persons who share any relevant protected characteristic. However, an equality impact assessment will be completed as part of the governance and decision making for each individual project.

Health and Adult Social Care

6.17 The priority is to operate sustainably while fully meeting our legal obligations and in so doing 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 currently supports around 16,200 adults, of which about 9,300 are older people, over 4,000 are people with learning disabilities, over 2,050 are people with physical or sensory impairments and 770 are people with mental health needs.

6.18 Included within the total net budget of **£438.5m** (total gross budget is **£630.1m**) are budget savings proposals of **£18.4m** (4.2% of the net budget or 2.9% of the gross budget) that need to be made in order to achieve financial sustainability and to accommodate demographic and inflationary pressures in 2021/22.

6.19 The main areas that will see changes as a result of our budget proposals are set out in the following paragraphs.

- (a) **Learning Disability** – The Council aims to support individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism to ensure their needs are being met and to enable them to achieve their outcomes and life aspirations. The main vehicle for this is the Meaningful Lives Matter Programme (MLM) which is now in its second year.

The programme seeks to:

- a) develop individual potential and independence by providing the infrastructure, opportunities and support people need to flourish and

- b) to make this happen by working with the market to ensure there are appropriate alternatives to traditional care models that support this approach, including reducing reliance on residential care.

It is anticipated that MLM will ensure that people's needs are appropriately and sustainably met, promote better and more sustainable long-term outcomes and in so doing generate **£3.5m** in efficiencies.

- (b) **Mental Health** – We are undertaking a review of our partnership arrangements and a new partnership agreement with our provider has been put in place to support the delivery of the outcomes of this review as they emerge. The intention is to ensure that we provide effective support for adults in the most efficient manner possible. It is anticipated that this review will generate efficiencies of some **£500,000** in 2021/22 whilst allowing us to continue to fully meet our legal obligations and provide more person centred support for individual adults for example through the development of more flexible accommodation options that better reflect individual needs.
- (c) **Technology, and Information Advice and Guidance (IAG)** - We are developing our care technology offer with the objectives of:
 - a) enabling adults with lower level of need to remain independent in their own homes for longer without ongoing care and support from ASC and
 - b) where appropriate, using technology to replace traditional means of providing support, for example prompting a person to take medication, or providing a means of checking a person is safe.

We will only use technology solutions to meet need where we have assessed this option as being safe and appropriate for the adult. Where it is not appropriate, we will ensure alternative support is offered where the adult has been assessed as having eligible needs in line with provisions of the Care Act 2014.

Through a combination of more efficient provision and the cost avoidance that appropriately meeting need through technology solutions provides we expect to generate efficiency savings of **£1m** in 2021/22.

- (d) **Older People** – Through our “Connect” programme we are undertaking a full review of the critical pathways that support adults going into and leaving hospital. The objective is to ensure that the adult is offered the most appropriate support for them, with an emphasis on people being enabled to return home where this is possible, with support to regain as much independence as possible. It is anticipated that this approach will enable us to both fully meet the needs of adults and generate some **£5.8m** in efficiencies in 2021/22 and pave the way for a more sustainable operating model in future years.
- (e) **All care groups** - In addition to the work set out above we will continue to work with our market to develop new models for meeting need, for example through the development of micro-providers to enable adults with Direct

Payments to have more choice over how they use them. In parallel we will develop the infrastructure required to support this new approach. We anticipate that as this model develops it should generate some **£640,000** in efficiencies in 2021/22.

- 6.20 In order to ensure that the Council pays due regard to the PSED, individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken in order to ensure there are mitigating actions, where possible, to minimise any adverse impact on citizens accessing Adult Services.

Leader

- 6.21 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£171,000** in 2021/22, the majority of which relate to efficiencies through support services. These changes are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents. Individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken where necessary.

Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships

- 6.22 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£151,000** in 2021/22, the majority of which relate to efficiencies through support services. These changes are not expected to impact on the level of service provided to residents. Individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken where necessary.

Other Operating Costs

- 6.23 The portfolio has identified budget savings proposals of **£10.9m** in 2021/22. Most of the saving is through the Corporate Finance Review which has identified opportunities to reduce planned contributions to reserves, with a reduction of £10m in 2021/22, with an anticipated ongoing impact of £5m per annum. These changes will not impact on the level of service provided to residents. Individual equality impact assessments will be undertaken where necessary.