

Leader's Executive Statement to Full Council – May 12, 2015

Positive Times Lie Ahead

Looking back

Mr Chairman, fellow councillors,

It is often said that a week is a long time in politics.

Few were predicting a week ago that we would have our first majority Conservative Government in this country in nearly two decades.

This is an historical win and tremendous news for our country and for Essex.

A strong and stable Government will provide security for our citizens and certainty for our economy.

And if a week is a long time in politics, then a year can seem like an eternity.

Mr. Chairman, looking back on 2014/15, it is very clear that it was a year of delivery.

We delivered a freeze in council tax for the fifth year in a row – saving Essex taxpayers an average of £335 per household.

We delivered over £100m of savings, on top of the £450m over the previous 5 years, balancing the books and ensuring our council is sustainable well into the future.

We embarked on a record level of investment to deliver the key infrastructure our county needs – £270m for 2015/16 and £1 billion over the next five years into schools, roads, flood defences, and superfast broadband.

And all of this while delivering high-quality services to our residents.

Improvements in the conditions of our roads, footpaths, and public rights of way and reducing the number of potholes on our major roads to just 500.

Improvements in school performance, with 80% of schools rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted – an improvement of 6% in just one year.

Improvements in our children's service – with now have just 1,100 children in care, 28% fewer than five years ago.

And we're improving the life chances of our young people. At the end of last year, we saw the lowest ever level of young people not in employment, education or training at 4.4% and we have delivered more than 3,000 apprenticeships so far.

Looking ahead

We have certainly achieved a lot. But we cannot rest on our laurels.

2015/16 is gearing up to be one of the most important years for Essex County Council in recent history.

With a majority Conservative Government at Westminster, there are positive times ahead for Essex. But there are also challenges that we as a council must face.

So let me tell you what my three key priorities going forward are.

First, and perhaps one of the most significant opportunities for local government in a generation, is the potential that devolution offers to us all.

More power to decide what should happen locally and how we spend our money will lead to better outcomes for our residents and businesses – more jobs, faster growth, and better services.

That is why I, and my Cabinet, am absolutely committed to working with our partners across Greater Essex to make sure we work with the Government so that we do not miss out on this once in a generation opportunity.

Secondly, we must join up our health and social care systems.

Essex has an ageing population – 20% is already over 65. This is a good thing. Living longer and more productive independent lives is something we continually strive to achieve for all of our residents.

But we need to ensure that the infrastructure and resources are there to support us all as we grow older. We expect the number of people in Essex needing social care to grow from 35,000 now to more than 137,500 by 2030. This Conservative Administration at County Hall will protect all ages and will also ensure as we all grow older with do so with dignity and independence.

We are and will continue to achieve this with the local NHS and ECC working together to provide an effective, more efficient, and more seamless health service for everyone.

The Care Act is a positive move for people as they grow older and an important piece of legislation but we must be mindful that we in Essex have to find a further £170 million as a result. A huge task, but because of this Conservative Administration and our outstanding fiscal record we will ensure this money is found because this is all about people's lives and that is our main priority.

Mr. Chairman, this is going to require some difficult choices to be made.

This leads me to my third key priority. To ensure our council is financially sustainable into the future, we are continuing to transform our organisation so that we are leaner, smarter, and more efficient.

The next step on our journey of change will see us focus even more on early intervention and prevention – because we all know prevention is better than cure. We understand that most people want to live in their own home, not a care home.

And we will be working more closely with our partners across the public sector, because operating within imagined organisational boundaries is not only less effective at tackling the challenges we face as a county, but also more expensive.

Conclusion

So to finish, looking back, it is clear that this has been a year of delivery for ECC.

Freezing council tax, investing in key infrastructure, delivery high-quality public services and balancing the books.

Looking ahead, I am equally clear about the priorities for our organisation.

Securing devolution for our great county, so that we – with partners – can deliver more jobs, faster growth, and better services.

Joining up our health and social care systems so that our residents enjoy a better experience and superior service when they need care.

And continuing to change the way we work and reshape our services so that we can remain a leading-edge council well into the future.

Mr. Chairman, there will be difficult decisions that lie ahead.

But with a strong and stable Conservative Government backed by balanced, long-term economic plan, I am confident that positive times pave the road before us.