

Report title: Essex County Council Organisation Strategy	
Report to: Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Kevin Bentley, Leader Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader	
Date: 4 August 2021	For: Consideration
Enquiries to: Richard Puleston, Director of Policy Patrick Guthrie, Head of Policy	
County Divisions affected: Not applicable	

1. Introduction

This session will consider the draft Organisation Strategy for 2021-25 and, as part of that, our approach to performance.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider the draft Organisation Strategy for 2021-25 and in particular our approach to measuring performance, so that the views of the committee can be reflected in the development of the final Strategy that will be adopted at Full Council in October.

3. Background

A new Organisation Strategy is needed to replace the current Strategy which applied to the last Council period and is expiring this year. The new administration brought forward its draft Organisation Strategy (called *Everyone's Essex: The Plan for Essex 2021-25*) to Full Council in July. Unlike in previous years, when Council was asked to adopt the Strategy, the administration asked Council to note the Strategy pending a further period of engagement prior to seeking adoption at Full Council in October. This approach reflects the new administration's commitment to being open and collaborative and to building the engagement that is needed to ensure effective delivery of the Strategy.

The strategy embodies the themes that the new administration has set out of:

- **Renewal** – helping our residents, our communities and our businesses to recover and rebuild following the pandemic
- **Equality** – ensuring that growth and renewal benefits all and that everyone in the county has the opportunity to succeed in life
- **Ambition** – ensuring that as a Council we are always reaching for the stars to secure the best outcomes and the best value for money that we possibly can for our residents and businesses

The strategy is anchored around four new strategic priorities:

- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- A high-quality environment
- Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
- A good place for children and families to grow

Each priority has five commitments (so a total of 20 in total), which are the things that we commit to doing to achieve these priorities over the next four years. These commitments deliberately do not describe everything that the Council does. They are focused on those areas of action that are needed to drive strategic change. This reflects the spirit of the strategy, which is to take action now on the big strategic issues facing us so that Essex and its people can look forward to a bright future.

The strategy also includes sections on:

- **Levelling Up** – because levelling up is a key objective that cuts across all of our strategic priorities and requires collective action across the Council and across partners.
- **How We Will Deliver** – because strategies cannot succeed if they only describe the ends, they also have to be clear about the means. Our strategy therefore sets out how we will work and makes a clear commitment to working in a joined up, collaborative, open-minded and evidence-based way. These ways of working are not “nice to haves”; they are essential if we are to deliver on a set of issues that by their nature are complex and involve all parts of the public sector, businesses, the voluntary and community sector and communities themselves.
- **Service excellence** – because delivering high quality and value for money services is core to our mission as a Council and we never forget that residents pay for, use and in many cases rely on our services to meet essential needs.

Overall, the strategy represents some continuity with what has gone before, but also significant change. There is much more emphasis in this strategy on climate action and sustainability, on modernising our infrastructure, on levelling up, on educational excellence and on transforming care to support independent living. There is also more emphasis on partnership working, building on the excellent partnership work that has taken place during the pandemic to keep services running and to protect our most vulnerable residents. We will deepen our work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sectors and our suppliers. We will also strengthen collaboration with other groups, including the arts and heritage sector, that have an important role to play as well.

The draft strategy does not yet include performance measures, which are being developed over the summer in time for inclusion in the final version of the strategy for adoption at October Full Council. Some Members raised questions at July Full Council about the approach to performance measures. These are addressed in the section on performance below.

Essex County Council Organisation Strategy

We have now started an engagement process with County Councillors, partners and staff to get further input to the strategy ahead of its finalisation and recommendation for adoption at October Full Council. Our approach to engagement is as follows:

County Councillors:

- In addition to this scrutiny session, we will be arranging an all-Members discussion session on the strategy for early September.

Partners:

- We have written out to a wide range of partners across our work to make them aware of our draft strategy and to seek their feedback. We are keen to explore how our strategy aligns with their priorities and how we can work collaboratively together to deliver on our shared priorities.
- We are engaging partners collectively through various partnership board meetings over the coming weeks.
- We are also setting up bilateral meetings with a number of partners, including all of our districts, to enable us to explore these issues fully.

Staff:

- Our aim is to reach right across the organisation, not just senior leaders but also middle managers and frontline staff. This is essential because we want to ensure that the strategy is meaningful for all staff and helps them all to set priorities and do their jobs more effectively.
- We will be setting up a series of workshops across the organisation to get input from staff.
- We will also be getting feedback through the line management chain.

We will include in the papers for October Council a summary of the feedback received from the engagement exercise and how it has been reflected in the final version of the Organisation Strategy and in our ongoing work.

Performance

Our approach to performance recognises that there are different types of performance measures and that they require different approaches:

- **Contextual** – high level real world outcomes that describe the ambition of ECC and its partners for improving the lives of Essex residents. They may be long term or span multiple ECC functions and wider Essex organisations and we may have limited direct influence over these outcomes.
- **Strategic** – measures identified as critical to delivery in the coming year to make progress towards our ambition for Essex. Core measures are limited in number to provide clarity and focus for strategic discussions. Some core measures may be reported annually, but regular updates will be provided for most indicators, and will be chosen on the basis that ECC can influence performance improvement over the coming year.

Essex County Council Organisation Strategy

- **Statutory and operational** – underpinning measures that are collected and reported by functions, but still make a significant contribution to the delivery of our strategic and contextual measures. These include more detailed metrics for our statutory functions and business as usual measures that support functional priorities.

We are in the process of putting together performance measures for the new Organisation Strategy. Work is in progress, led by Cabinet Members, and we will have draft measures developed by around mid-September. These will include a mix of contextual and strategic measures as described above. We want to keep the number of measures as short as possible, whilst ensuring good coverage, as this gives more clarity and therefore aids transparency, accountability and learning. We will be able to share examples of the sorts of measures we have in mind in relation to each of these categories with the Scrutiny Committee.

Once performance measures for the new strategy are agreed, we would be happy to share a quarterly performance report with scrutiny committees that would include a summary of ECC's position on key indicators and the actions agreed by the organisation to address the issues raised.

This would give scrutiny panel members greater visibility of what was being discussed and planned, allowing them to focus the work of their scrutiny committees on these issues should they wish and to feed back into the organisation's performance process.

4. Update and Next Steps

The discussion in the committee will be used to inform the further work on the strategy pending its finalisation for adoption at Full Council in October.

The session will be attended by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Kevin Bentley.

5 List of Appendices

ECC's draft Organisation Strategy: *Everyone's Essex: The Plan for Essex 2021-25*