

## **A Budget for All - Speech by The Leader, Councillor David Finch – 11/02/20**

Chairman, fellow members,

I commend this budget to you today as a budget for all, a budget of hope.  
It is a budget for our most vulnerable residents,

It is a budget for older adults, children at risk, and families who are Just About Managing,

It's a budget for businesses and people with ambition.

A budget for **anyone** who lives, works, walks, cycles, takes a bus or drives in our county.

It's a budget for our environment.

And it's a budget for our children and for future generations.

Chairman I believe that this is the most ambitious budget you will find anywhere in local government.

Over the last few years we have gone from a very effective, very well-run authority, to one of the strongest councils in about any category you can think of.

Indeed, for two years running we have been in the top ten most effective local authorities in the country. No other council of our size is anywhere near that level. For that I'd like to personally thank my Cabinet, our Chief Executive, his leadership team and every single one of the thousands of people employed by Essex County Council.

It is thanks to how effectively we operate – in a time of ever-tightening financial constraints – that we are able to deliver a budget that not only balances the books, keeps Essex moving, protects our residents, but also breaks new ground, and enables us to explore new and exciting opportunities to take Essex into the future. And I truly believe it gives an incredibly strong message of hope.

Front and centre is our programme of Climate Action.

It is clear that the announcements we made at the last Full Council – the cross-party commission and the Essex Forest Initiative - captured the imagination of the county. Cllr Walsh and I have been inundated by excited residents, partners and industry bodies who are keen to work with us.

I am able to announce the Independent Chair of that Commission to you today. We are very proud to have been able to secure Lord Randall as the Commission's Independent Chair. It is a massive result for us, demonstrating the huge potential for the commission to make genuine change – his experience, reputation, connections and influence nationally gives the Commission a huge head start.

We are in the process of finalising the full list of members of the commission, which we will release very soon, the first meeting will be in the next couple of months.

Of course, we must never ignore the voice of residents, and especially the voice of youth. As a result, Lord Randall will have two co-Chairs, who are both students at Essex schools, and who have been appointed by the Young Essex Assembly. I know Cllr Walsh was very impressed by their enthusiasm and passion for the environment, and he is looking forward to working with them both.

As you will have seen in this budget, we have set aside £5m in a reserve for Climate Action. That is £5m to be spent on implementing the recommendations from this Commission.

Chairman, no other council is showing this level of ambition or commitment to Climate Action.

As I've said already Chairman this is a Budget for All; and a Budget of Hope.

And you all know of this administration's commitment, and indeed my personal commitment, to improving the lives of every single resident of this county.

Last year we pledged a quarter of a million pounds to help tackle homelessness. I am pleased to say that this money directly prevented 75 different households from becoming homeless and supported many hundreds more to stabilise their accommodation status.

We have also just secured nearly half a million pounds from Government to continue our work with rough sleepers.

We have also invested £1m in initiatives to improve the mental health and wellbeing of residents, which has been spent on several projects supporting children in care and children with autism as well as adults in the workplace, prisoners and veterans. Thanks to this investment, we've been able to trial innovative new approaches to working with these often-vulnerable groups of individuals and we are looking now at how to scale up and implement permanent solutions for both prevention of mental health crises and homelessness.

And thanks to how effectively we've run this authority over the years we are able to invest additional money to support our most vulnerable this year; with millions of extra investment in our outstanding Children's Services, home to school transport and adult social care.

However, there is a group of people for whom I think we can do a lot more. I firmly believe that there is more we can do to help the hard-working people in Essex to thrive. We are therefore announcing that by the end of this year we will have invested a total of **£1 million** to increase the prosperity of those working families who are Just About Managing. The potential of this work is massive, we could make huge differences to an entire group of residents who sometimes feel left behind.

I also know the importance of community safety and the protection of our residents, young and old, from gangs and county lines. Last year we announced half a million pounds for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to help tackle this major issue through our violence and vulnerability partnership. This has proven a great success. One example: the partnership engaged with hundreds of young people at their most 'reachable' moments – like when they come into contact with the hospital in a moment of crisis. In these 'reachable' moments, if our approach is right, we are finding we can get through to these young people and divert them away from gangs but it is also only the beginning. We are happy to commit another half a million pounds this year to continue to trial new approaches to supporting children at risk of exploitation from gangs.

This truly is a budget for all. We have listened to our residents and we have listened to every member in this chamber. We know you want Essex to continue to be a great place to grow up, live and work.

Alongside delivering 1700 new school places next year, more money for home to school transport and our £130m programme for our roads, we will also begin to see the fruits of the £318m that we won from government to invest in our infrastructure – starting with a new train station in Chelmsford and a rapid transit system in Colchester.

Last year we invested 700 thousand pounds in improving our footways and with your help we repaired footways in more than 300 locations. To build on this we are committing an extra £5m for improving road and footpath condition in the county this year.

Chairman, I'm a firm believer in localism. I've said many times in this chamber that nobody knows more about their local community and its challenges than the local councillor. We are therefore providing a fund of £750,000, a grant of £10,000 to each Essex County Councillor, to spend on local community initiatives in your division in 2020/2021. This will enable you, as the local councillor to tackle some of the local issues in your community that you know about – quickly and efficiently. Providing local solutions for local problems. You will be briefed on this in full in March.

Chairman, I have outlined a balanced budget to you today. A budget that continues to push Essex County Council forward as one of the most effective Councils in the country. But it will also do much more than that.

It is a budget for all, and it is a budget for hope.

It will enable us to do things no other council is doing.

We will support hard working residents in new and exciting ways

We will give new levels of control to our county councillors

We will go further than any other council in tackling climate change

Chairman/ Cllrs, I commend this budget to you and move the recommendations set out as parts 1 and 2 of the Budget Report.