

Vision Statement 2013-17

Report by Councillor David Finch, Leader of the Council

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Purpose of report

To recommend to Full Council the new corporate vision and priorities for Essex for the period 2013-17.

Background and proposal

The start of any new council term is an opportunity to refresh priorities, reflect on new challenges and to set goals for the next four years. The Leader of the Council began that process at the annual meeting in May.

The County faces a set of unprecedented challenges: we are living in a time of sustained economic uncertainty and cannot take economic growth for granted; we are also living through a period of austerity. The new Leader set out the stark financial challenge in his speech to Council in May:

“It is an inescapable equation: the cost of the services we provide are going up, the demand for our services is going up and the funding we are given to provide those services is going down.

That gap, between the money we have and the money we need, will grow over the next four years. We estimate that we will need to find at least £215m in savings by 2016/17.”

Although better placed than many public sector organisations, we cannot underestimate these challenges. The economic, social and financial challenges we face mean that we cannot continue to deliver the same services in the same way as we have in the past. Tough decisions lie ahead on what we do, how we do it and what we as the County Council must stop doing.

This requires a new vision for Essex and one that is realistic but ambitious. The Leader set out his vision at Full Council for an Essex where innovation brings prosperity:

“...innovation isn't just a word for us in Essex, it is the means for securing our future and ensuring we can use our resources in the best possible way for the people of Essex.

In Essex, we want to lead – in business markets and entrepreneurship, new technology, and in public service reforms.”

The attached document, “Vision for Essex 2013-17” sets out this vision in more detail. “Vision for Essex 2013-17” sets out the challenges we face, the principles we will follow,

and the priorities that we will pursue. It will provide a high level steer for developing a revised corporate plan and a new outcomes framework.

As a County Council, our most important roles will be to establish the conditions for innovation and prosperity in our economy, and to lead innovation in the public services.

Our vision and priorities aim to equip people and communities so they can flourish, live well and achieve their ambitions without being dependent on government. We recognise our duty to support and protect the most vulnerable in our communities, but we will do this in a way that allows all our residents to shape their own futures.

If we are to succeed through these testing times, we must maintain a focus on our core purpose. The challenge ahead strengthens our resolve:

- to increase educational achievement and enhance skills;
- to develop and maintain the infrastructure that enables our residents to travel and our businesses to grow;
- to support employment and entrepreneurship across our economy;
- to improve public health and wellbeing across Essex;
- to safeguard vulnerable people of all ages;
- to keep our communities safe and build community resilience; and
- to respect Essex's environment.

Delivering this vision will require action from all our partners: from government at all levels; from organisations across Essex civil society; from businesses; and from individuals, families and communities. This will require a long-term commitment, but by working together, we can address the issues that matter and secure an Essex where:

- the economy is growing
- our residents are safe
- our public services are sustainable, affordable and built around the needs of our residents
- dependency is reduced and
- Council Tax remains low.

Policy context

Vision for Essex 2013-17 builds on and replaces the previous *EssexWorks Commitment 2012-17*. It sets out the Cabinet's vision and priorities for the next four years and this will inform the development of a revised corporate strategy, a new outcomes framework that will guide commissioning decisions and inform the budget setting process.

Financial Implications

The Vision refers to the difficult economic situation facing the country and the impact on the County Council. While there are no specific financial implications arising directly from this paper, it is important that the delivery of the Vision is set within the reducing funding envelope available to the Council and mindful of the implications that reducing budgets have for the County Council's employees.

The Vision will be used to inform the development of a new Corporate Plan and Outcomes Framework, and prioritisation through the annual budget setting process.

Legal Implications

The Council is required to set the Council's overall vision and corporate strategy and the Executive will then implement this in accordance with the approved budget and policy framework. The Council is required to take account of its various duties and powers when setting its corporate vision and strategy. Individual decisions will be taken along the way in order to implement the vision and at various points careful consideration will be given to the financial, legal, equalities and other implications arising from different aspects of implementation. Consultation will need to take place where appropriate and feedback to consultation carefully considered.

Equality and Diversity implications

In making this decision the Council must have regard to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act 2010, i.e. have due regard to the need:

- (a) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- (b) to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- (c) to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;

Including having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The PSED is a relevant factor in making this decision but does not impose a duty to achieve the outcomes in s.149, it is only one factor that needs to be considered, and may be balanced against other relevant factors.

The Vision is a county-wide programme, and will have county-wide impacts. At this stage there are no specific proposals and therefore it is considered premature to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment. However, as proposals are developed within the context of the Vision, changes will have the potential to have a disproportionate impact on individuals within the population who have a protected characteristic.

The Vision also includes a commitment to safeguard vulnerable people of all ages, build community resilience and create public services that are “sustainable, affordable and built around the needs of our residents”. There may also therefore be opportunities within proposals to promote equality objectives.

It will be essential to investigate all emerging proposals both for any potentially disproportionate impacts and for opportunities to promote equalities objectives. In practical terms this means that in relation to each decision it will be necessary

- to take the PSED into account in; and
- to carry out an EIA in relation to the decision where it is likely to have a disproportionate impact on members of the community who have a protected characteristic.

Recommended:

That the new corporate vision and priorities for Essex contained in the document “Vision for Essex 2013-17” be approved.