

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

“The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement and Essex’s Devolution Bid”

Thank you Mr Chairman.

Last week’s Autumn Statement showed how the UK, and Essex, is looking forward to a bright future.

Over the last year the UK has grown two and half times faster than Germany; over three times faster than the Eurozone; and over seven times faster than France.

And Essex is leading the way with our companies winning new orders and our support helping them to new success.

Over half a million new jobs last year, double the predictions.

And Essex is leading the way as a low-unemployment county with a county council investing in skills and apprenticeships.

Billions invested in new roads, building our infrastructure and keeping us competitive in the global race.

And Essex is leading the way, lobbying for better transport links and winning money to improve our economic arteries.

UK borrowing decreasing year by year over the next four years with a surplus predicted by 2019.

And Essex is leading the way with prudent financial management that has seen performance get better despite achieving nearly half a billion pounds in savings.

Mr Chairman, it has not been easy to get to this point. And it will not be easy in the coming years.

We know that further public sector cuts are inevitable. We know they will test our partnership, our innovation and most of all test our communities.

But every time Essex responds in a way that should make us all proud.

And I would like to add how proud I was Mr Chairman at the announcements you have made this morning.

Awards for our people. Awards for our successes. And national recognition for people like Zaahra who represent the very best of Essex.

Mr Chairman, as a year comes to the end it is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges that lie ahead.

The days of the state doing everything are over.

Even if we had the money to do everything we used to, it would not be right. We must utilise the skills and energy of public, private and voluntary sectors in Essex to achieve the outcomes we care most about.

We must help communities to get stronger and to do more for themselves.

We must invest in prevention and early intervention, helping people to help themselves before the light is on red.

To do all that we must reform how public services are designed and delivered.

We need to be more outward-looking, lift our vision from individual organisations to our communities,

Mr Chairman, we were right to drive forward transformation over the last six years. We have done so much so well.

But it's going to be even harder in future. The challenge is no longer inside this council. It is to fundamentally rethink public services across Essex. Are we big enough to put to one side our parochial, institutional interests as a Council?

Are we up for the challenge?

I think we need two things to be ready for the future.

First, we need strong partnerships.

From health to the economy to local government, working in partnership is vital to our outcomes.

We need to forge new models of leadership, working with districts and the voluntary sector like in our Essex Partnership Board.

And secondly, we need more devolution in Essex.

In a strong Autumn Statement, the only disappointing thing was the lack of a package of devolution for county areas.

Devolved powers in Essex is not a token.

Putting power and funding for skills training directly in the hands of our employers, colleges and councils is a huge prize.

Reforming business rates so that more funding is kept in Essex to invest in our infrastructure is achievable.

And campaigning for a share of Air Passenger Duty to remain in Essex so we can improve routes to and from our airports is sensible and fair.

My view Mr Chairman is that devolution to Manchester and not Essex is anti-competitive.

So we will continue to press Ministers for a Fair Deal for Essex.

I want to close Mr Chairman by talking about our communities.

Two weeks ago I spoke at a conference for our volunteer carers.

An invisible army of 180,000 Essex people who give up in some cases 50 hours a week to care for family members.

As we near Christmas I want to pause for thought and give thanks to everyone in Essex who gives of their time, energy and skills to make our county better.

That spirit of volunteering – for family, friends and neighbours – is something we must cherish and support.

I would like to wish all Members and their families and, on behalf of us all, our officers, a very Merry Christmas.

Thank you.