

Leader's Budget Speech 2018/19

Mr Chairman, fellow Members

At a time when public finances continue to be under pressure and household budgets are also stretched,

You might be expecting a speech which provides little by way of optimism.

Well, if that is the case, I am pleased to be able to disappoint you.

No-one in this Chamber will need reminding that Local Government finances continue to be constrained.

Our funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant has reduced by a further £28m next year and will be phased out completely by 2020.

At the same time, of course, demand for many services has continued to grow.

But financial management in this Council is strong and will remain so and our record in this area speaks for itself. So I am pleased to say that despite the issues relating to local government finance and our pressures, we have continued to make excellent progress with the delivery of our objectives through strong and purposeful leadership.

Let me share some of that excellent progress with you.

In the last year, we have:

- Seen 94% of Essex schools judged good or outstanding - three points higher than the national average and created over 2,500 additional school places
- Signed over a hundred good causes up to receive funding from the Essex lottery
- Helped 1,330 young people not in education, employment or training to move into employment or learning
- Reduce the amount of household waste over the last 12 months by 32kg per household
- Continued to invest in our country parks which has increased visitor numbers by 7.5% to almost three qtrs. of a million
- Resurfaced over 400 miles of roads – nearly 4 times around the M25 – and filled in 5,000 potholes.

As well as all of this, we have an outstanding track record of ensuring value for tax-paying residents.

We have delivered £350m of savings in the last 4 years by driving out inefficiency, innovating, generating income and reducing costs. And will continue to do so

This track record has enabled the Council not only to maintain services in new and improved ways at lower cost, but also to invest for the future so that Essex is a better place in which to live and work.

Over the past eight years, during which we froze council tax on five consecutive occasions, we've kept £161 million where people needed it most – in their own pockets to spend on what mattered to them.

We've had to take the difficult decision to propose an increase Council Tax.

We need to ensure effective services not just for today, but for the future. Therefore, this budget proposes an ambitious investment of **more than £300 million** into Essex's infrastructure.

We are able to do this precisely because of our past and present financial discipline. Our past enables us to deliver a brighter future for the people of Essex.

Organisation Plan

We agreed the Organisation Strategy in July that set out what we want to achieve in Essex by 2021. We are now focused on achieving our four aims to:

- Enable inclusive economic growth,
- Help people get the best start and age well,
- Help create great places to grow up, live and work, and
- Transform the council to achieve more with less.

The budget presented to you today will enable the delivery of these four strategic aims that will help us build the future our residents and businesses need.

Firstly, enabling inclusive economic growth

Economic growth will improve not only the living standards of people in Essex but also their health and wellbeing, opportunities and life chances.

We all know there is enormous untapped opportunity in the economy of Essex and an entrepreneurial spirit that is hard-wired in to our DNA which will we capitalise on in the future.

Amongst other things in the next year we will:

- Develop a local Industrial Strategy for Essex
- Invest £14m in broadband and £126m into major road schemes and maintenance. With an additional £3m set aside for potholes and footpath repairs.
- Invest £87m into mainstream schools and £17m into special schools bringing an additional 2,750 places.

The people of Essex are our greatest asset and our second aim is to help them get the best start and age well.

This Council has a critical role to safeguard and support the most vulnerable people in the county. **Over 65s** projected to increase to almost **one third (32%) by 2030**.

The council is a proactive children's service authority delivering integrated services to children and families, with just over 1,000 children in care. We have the third lowest rate of children subject to a child protection plan in the country.

With demand for services **growing faster than our funding streams**, especially in adult social care, we need to continue our shift from a reactive service, to one that is focused on prevention, early intervention, recovery and enablement. Working with communities, the NHS and our private care sector will help achieve this change.

Some of our priorities for next year are:

- Grow the Essex Fostering Service to increase market share, reducing placements in more expensive independent fostering agencies whilst still providing excellent care to those who need it
- Seek to increase the number of care providers rated good or outstanding by continuing to invest in the PROSPER programme; dementia training and rolling out the Gold Standards Framework for End of Life
- Launch a major initiative to improve physical activity in the population

Our people deserve great places to grow up, live and work, and our third aim is to create these conditions

Essex will need to build at least 136,000 new homes over the next 20 years - a 22% increase in the current number of homes. We are committed to facilitating that housing growth in such a way that the characteristics of the county we cherish are protected and enhanced. We are not just building new homes, we are building communities.

In the next year we will work with MHCLG to develop a strong partnership approach towards securing new homes and infrastructure in sustainable garden communities.

The council has a key role to play as a custodian of our environment for this and future generations. Our stewardship requires that less waste is produced, less carbon emitted, more homes and businesses protected from flooding and the use of our green space is maximised. New housing growth in Essex has the potential to deliver more connected, healthier communities.

Next year we will develop a Great Green Plan for Essex to unlock the value of our green assets.

I have said many times in this chamber that individuals, families and communities are the best guardians of their own interests. Where it is appropriate to do so, we should support communities to help themselves. But we also recognise there are times when public services need to step in.

Next year we will bring forward a number of initiatives to should support communities to help themselves by seeking to foster and build community capacity and capability:

- Continue investment to establish vibrant hubs in our communities that include library and registration services with other partners and our communities
- Develop a single point of access to optimise effectiveness of funded community schemes, including community agents and care navigators

- Develop new citizen-led approaches to enabling communities to improve well-being

Our final aim is to transform the Council to achieve more with less

We have delivered **£350m of savings** in the last 4 years by driving out inefficiency, innovating, generating income and reducing costs.

We are always conscious that the money that Essex County Council spends is taxpayers' money and we must invest it wisely on services that directly affect every resident and their communities and improve their lives.

And we need to ensure effective services not just for today, but for the future. Therefore we have ambitious plans for our capital investment - a capital programme of £299m, an increase of £32m on that for 2017/18.

This investment will help deliver our strategic aims and priorities, and in some cases give us a return on investment.

As part of our innovation and adapting to the digital revolution we are increasing our digital and commercial capabilities as we aim to transform our services to be better, faster and cheaper.

In addition next year we will:

- Deliver £59m of further savings
- Develop a more commercial approach to enable further investment in services
- Optimise the use of our buildings, through changing and modernising working practices

Securing Essex's future

Mr Chairman, members, I have spoken to you about our record of low tax and responsible financial management.

I have spoken to you about the unprecedented challenges we face.

And I have spoken to you about our plans for the future.

We are protecting the most vulnerable in our communities and those who are just about managing.

We are building on stable a foundation. A foundation that will provide security, prosperity and opportunity for all.

By growing Essex's economy.

By caring for our growing and ageing population.

By giving local people a greater role to play in their lives and communities.

And, by innovating and reshaping public services so they are sustainable into the future.

Mr Chairman, cabinet colleagues, fellow members.

This is a budget that will secure Essex's future.

And I so move recommendations on pages 40 - 42