

Mr Chairman, members.

I want to take the opportunity to reflect briefly on the past, our present challenges and look ahead to the future.

Recap

It would be naive of us to look back on the past of local government through rose tinted glasses and assume that everything was better then.

That was then.

We now have a different past to be proud of. One where we have empowered individuals, led the way through embracing innovation, created new opportunities and delivered the best value.

Mr Chairman, I would like to share some of these with you:

The council has been investing £315 million in creating new school places. £75 million of this has been spent on completing new schools and expansion projects in time for the start of the 2018/19 academic year.

Indeed, 2,325 primary places and 1,110 secondary places have been created across several sites in Essex.

This means that for parents we have created far more choice so that their children, who are our future, can take advantage of quality opportunities.

In August alone we repaired 1,485 potholes in Essex, 679 being on main roads and 806 on local roads.

As well as these repairs, the summer-only Surface Dressing programme is now complete, with over 2 million square metres of road improved and proofed against potholes for years to come.

The Goldlay Gardens development is scheduled to complete imminently, and to date, off-plan sales have been agreed on 14 of the 32 apartments, with the next phase of marketing set to begin this weekend.

We have also made a substantial difference to people's lives in Health and Social Care. Such as having dramatically reduced delayed transfers of care statistics to 2.58 per 100,000; which is below the government target. Indeed, in February it was lower than at any point in the previous two years.

Moreover, 13,532 adults received a service from us between Jun-Aug 2018. Of those 7,524 were supported under Older Peoples budget.

So real impact on real lives.

Today

This is a small measure of our impact in terms of how we are creating a legacy of innovation and opportunities for the people of Essex. Importantly, this is in the face of the challenges facing local authorities today and they are ever increasing.

- Essex has a hyper aging population - 20% of our population is aged over 65 compared with 17% nationally and this is growing.
- Vulnerable families continue to be placed here by London Boroughs increasing the pressures faced by our Children's Services.
- Our infrastructure must be able to support our growth ambitions. We have an ambition to double the size of the Essex economy over the next 20 years.

Mr Chairman, these challenges are set against a backdrop of continued uncertainty.

- We continue to receive less funding per person than London. If you live in Essex, the funding which councils get to run services for you adds up to £193 per person per year. However, cross the border into London and the average funding leaps up to £563 per person, more than triple what an Essex resident receives.
- There is still a lack of clarity on local authority funding beyond 2020.

However, I do know that we are not sitting idle. My Cabinet and I are working at the heart of central government to steer the agenda and ensure our voice is heard.

I wrote to the Chancellor and our MPs last week ahead of the budget setting out the key issues which must be addressed to ensure economic stability and individual wellbeing.

I also set out a number of innovative ideas for creating a clear, long term funding policy which would enable local authorities to continue to meet local need in the future.

We want to drive prosperity for everyone in Essex and if the Government increased our funding to bring us in line with our far richer London neighbours, then we could achieve so much more.

Cllr McKinlay led our submission for a 75% BRR pilot – a joint submission with our local authority partners. This bid uses the scale of Greater Essex to manage risk, whilst ensuring that growth-enabling investments are made using additional retained revenues.

We'll find out later this year if our bid is successful.

Cllr Madden is leading a national piece of work with the LGA on vulnerable families and early intervention. By working with families early we can reduce the later impacts on the social care system.

Finally, I'd like to mention Cllr Bentley who is the national lead in the LGA for Brexit, and he is working tirelessly to ensure that the needs of and implications for local authorities are understood.

Make no mistake, local authorities could do so much more if powers that come back from Brussels are devolved (with appropriate funding) to us.

Members, I've made no secret of my belief in subsidiarity and I am proud of my administrations track record in this area.

- I released an additional £2.4m for pothole repairs earlier this year with County Councillors working with colleagues in Parish and District Councils to identify hotspots in their areas where this funding should be targeted.
- More and more communities are coming to us with offers to co-locate within libraries or, with alternate venues for library provision.
- We are looking to devolve more highways maintenance work; this is hugely important to all of us, to you, locally to Parish Councils and then to Districts in unparished areas.

Local communities are best placed to understand the small but significant pieces of work, which will make a real difference to their lives and local areas.

The Future

Change is unstoppable, but, here in Essex we are making it happen on our terms.

Working with Government and across local authority boundaries to deliver real and lasting innovation and improvement.

Protecting the pounds in taxpayers' pockets and devolving delivery to the lowest possible level to empower communities.

Through this we will create a County where every single person has the support, the opportunity and the self-belief to fulfil the promise of their potential.

And we will do it together.

Change is unstoppable. And so are we.