

Agenda item 7

Report title: Everyone's Essex – Our Plan for Levelling Up the County: 2021-25	
Report to: Council	
Report author: Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council	
Date: 12 October 2021	For: Discussion
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To ask Council to adopt Everyone's Essex – Our Plan for Levelling Up the County as our new organisation strategy for the period 2021-25.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree that Everyone's Essex be adopted in the form as outlined in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2. Agree that the strategic aims in the Organisational Plan 2021-22 are superseded by the aims set out in Everyone's Essex and no longer have effect but that the areas of focus continue to have effect.

3. About Everyone's Essex and the Journey we have been on

- 3.1 In general the Council publishes a new strategy after each ordinary election to the County Council. This sets out the priorities of the newly elected administration for their four-year term of office. The purpose of the strategy is to:
- Set out clear strategic priorities upon which the organisation will collectively focus
 - Set out in high level terms what we will do to deliver those priorities
 - Explain how we will work as an organisation to deliver effectively and efficiently
 - Ensure that the Cabinet is focused on the strategic aims set by the Council.
- 3.2 It's proposed that Everyone's Essex will be a key part of the overall strategic planning framework for the Council. It represents our contribution to delivering the long-term Essex Vision which we and other public sector partners have adopted. Within the Council, it will guide business planning and the development of the Medium-Term Resources Strategy (MTRS) and it will shape the annual budget and Organisation Plan. The Cabinet cannot take decisions which are contrary to the Everyone's Essex strategy.

- 3.3 We brought a draft of Everyone's Essex (then provisionally entitled 'the Essex Plan') to Full Council in July to give County Councillors an opportunity to comment on the draft and agree that it should be subject to wider engagement. As we set out in July, whilst the practice previously has been to adopt the Council's strategy at the July Full Council following the May County elections, the new administration wanted to take a more collaborative approach, engaging County Councillors, partners and staff more fully in the development process before bringing an updated final version of 'Everyone's Essex' back to October Full Council for adoption.

Engagement and updating Everyone's Essex in light of feedback

- 3.4 Over the summer, we have carried out a comprehensive engagement programme on Everyone's Essex' as follows:
- The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive attended Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 4 August to discuss Everyone's Essex.
 - The Leader, Deputy Leader and Policy Director also attended an informal scrutiny workshop to get specific input to the framing of the performance indicators in the strategy.
 - The Leader of the Council has written to partner organisations across Essex to invite their views on Everyone's Essex.
 - The Leader and Deputy Leader have held meetings with the Leaders of all Borough, City and District councils in Essex.
 - We have discussed Everyone's Essex at a number of partnership boards, including Essex Partnership Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children's Partnership Board.
 - We have also held meetings with organisations and groups, including the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, the Young Essex Assembly and the Rural Community Council of Essex.
 - We have held a number of staff roadshows and briefing sessions to get staff feedback on the strategy.
- 3.5 In general, the feedback to Everyone's Essex has been very positive. People have told us that they welcome its ambition and focus on the big long-term issues facing the county; the clarity of its vision and drafting; its alignment to wider partnership strategies and plans; and its strong commitment to collaboration and partnership working. More detailed information is set out in appendix 2.
- 3.6 We have, however, made some changes to the drafting of Everyone's Essex in response to the feedback and these are set out in Appendix 2. These are largely to make it clearer what we mean by particular commitments or ways of working and to make more explicit some areas of policy or operations that are important priorities, but which were more implicit in the previous draft. In some cases, changes have been prompted by a further evolution in our thinking, in particular around Levelling Up, rather than by external feedback.
- 3.7 Partners have expressed a strong willingness to work with us in the delivery of Everyone's Essex, so that the delivery of our collective plans will be aligned

and will add up to more than the sum of their parts. We welcome these offers and we will ensure that there is close co-ordination with partners as we move into the delivery phase of the strategy

Performance measures

- 3.8 The draft of “Everyone’s Essex” that we took to July Full Council did not include performance measures. We explained in July that we would develop performance measures over the summer and would include these in the final version of Everyone’s Essex for adoption at October Full Council. We also undertook to involve County Councillors in the development of the performance measures, which we did at an informal scrutiny workshop on performance held on 23 September.
- 3.9 Our performance measures, set out in Appendix 3, have been prepared to help ECC track and assess progress towards the delivery of the four strategic aims set out in Everyone’s Essex. Our targets are intended to be stretching, and reflect the administration’s judgement, based on professional advice, on the measurable results that we can achieve, based on the resources we expect to have available, the current baseline performance and the context in which we are operating.
- 3.10 It is intended that the performance measures remain relatively stable over the plan period – providing clarity on the results that we hope to achieve. This does not preclude future changes in the measures, but any additions or changes should be subject to careful consideration and council agreement. While it is intended that the set of performance measures remains relatively stable, targets will need to be reviewed on (at least) an annual basis. Council is not asked to agree the performance measures.
- 3.11 The need for review stems from the fact that we are setting targets in a climate of significant uncertainty. Financial uncertainty because we don’t yet know the outcome of the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review, which will be announced to Parliament on 27 October. Economic uncertainty because we don’t yet know the scale and pace of the economy’s recovery from the pandemic. And operational uncertainty because we don’t yet know how demand levels on key Council services will stabilise as we move out of the pandemic and as the Government’s changes to social care funding start to take effect. For these reasons, it is important that we take an agile approach.
- 3.12 The performance measures and targets will be used as the basis for ECC’s strategic performance reporting. They replace the measures previously agreed by Council as part of the Organisation Plan in February 2021. The latest position on each of these measures will be reported to the CLT, PLT and subsequently to the Corporate Scrutiny Panel on a quarterly basis. This position will be published to ensure transparency on ECC performance.
- 3.13 It is important to note that these are not the only measures and targets used to monitor and manage ECC’s performance. Each ECC function has access to an array of operational data and business intelligence which is to monitor

the effectiveness of specific services and programmes. Reports on service-specific, operational performance measures are made available on a regular basis to senior officers and to portfolio holders.

4 Issues for consideration

4.1 Financial considerations

4.1.1 The organisation strategy provides the framework for setting the Council's Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) and the annual budget. Delivery of Everyone's Essex will therefore be set out clearly each year within the budget presented to Council in February and within the constraints of the resources available.

4.1.2 For the first time, the Council is publishing an Autumn Budget Statement, which is being presented as an executive statement to this meeting of the Council. The Autumn Budget Statement sets out the financial context and our approach to maintaining sound finances over the medium term, which is the foundation for being able to deliver the commitments in Everyone's Essex.

4.2 Legal considerations

4.2.1 The adoption of the Strategy by Full Council means that neither Cabinet nor Cabinet Members – nor officers acting on their behalf – are able to take a decision which is contrary to the Strategy – any proposed decision contrary to the Strategy would take effect as a recommendation, leaving Full Council to make the decision.

4.2.2 It is therefore crucial to ensure that commitments are only made if they are considered to be deliverable.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

5.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

- 5.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 5.3 An equalities impact assessment is submitted at Appendix 4. Although the equality impact assessment indicates that the vast majority of impact is likely to be positive, it is too early to assess the overall impact of proposals in this report as individual equality impact assessments will need to be undertaken on project proposals to deliver the strategic aims set out within Everyone's Essex.
- 5.4 The overall aim of Everyone's Essex is to improve outcomes for all the residents of Essex and to reduce inequalities. This is reflected in making levelling up a central theme and ambition of the strategy. Everyone's Essex includes specific commitments on levelling up and a section setting out in more detail our approach to levelling up. The administration's commitment to equality is reflected right through the strategy, for example also in the section on maintaining excellence in service delivery, as we recognise that many of our most vulnerable residents depend on the quality of services that they receive from the Council.

6 List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Everyone's Essex – Our Plan for Levelling Up the County: 2021-25
- Appendix 2: Changes made to Everyone's Essex in response to feedback
- Appendix 3: Performance measures for Everyone's Essex
- Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment – published online
<https://cmis.essex.gov.uk/essexcmis5/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/4636/Committee/50/Default.aspx>