

Headlines for Introduction by Cllr Whitbread - Full Council Budget Setting 2022/23

Intro

- Mr Chairman, it gives me great pleasure today to introduce this budget. A budget that is based on a clear vision for the County. A budget for everyone in Essex. A budget that will deliver renewal, equality and ambition – so that no one in this great county is left behind.
- Everyone's Essex set out how we will renew this county.
- Levelling Up puts equality at the moral heart of this Council.
- Climate action demonstrates the extent of our ambition.
- And the budget I present today cements our commitments to these key priorities whilst maintaining the strong finances which are a hallmark of this Council and which we will never put in jeopardy.

Financial Context and CT Increase

- Mr Chairman, we face considerable challenges. Inflation at over 5%, the National Insurance Levy (1.25%) and the increase in the National Living Wage (6.6%) add £32m to our annual bills.
- And these pressures come on top of the demand pressures we are facing post-Covid, for example a 16% increase for domiciliary care.
- And those pressures come on top of the historic demographic challenges we already faced as a country and as a council.
- Mr Chairman we are a low tax county. Last year we used exceptional powers to defer tax rises. This year we plan to deliver £36m of savings on top of the £46 million we are delivering in the current year. No stone will be left unturned to ensure we are operating as efficiently as possible and driving value out of every penny we spend.
- But it would be irresponsible of me not to recognise the pressures we now face. And it would be the poorest and most vulnerable members of our community that would suffer the most – just when they need us – if we didn't take account of that in our financial planning.
- Our proposals are therefore for a 4.49% council tax increase, of which 2.5% relates solely to the funding of adult social care.

- The Council Tax increase equates to £60.21 for a Band D property. £42 of this will be directed to fulfilling our duty to support our most vulnerable residents

Investing in our Priorities

- This budget is the first to be shaped around the priorities in Everyone's Essex:
 - a strong, inclusive and sustainable economy;
 - a high-quality environment;
 - health, wellbeing and independence for all ages; and
 - a good place for our children and families to grow
- It is by investing in our priority areas that we will bring the prosperity to this County that is the surest pathway to the long-term well-being of our residents and communities.
- So although we have rightly sought through this budget to maintain sound finances in the face of huge uncertainties, I am very pleased that we are also able to announce investments in key areas – including:
 - a £1.3 billion capital programme across the next 4 years. Creating over 5,000 new school places. Investing in 14 major road schemes. Maintaining 5,100 miles of road. And building 763 homes.
 - On top of that, I can announce today a further £2m of investment in our infrastructure through the creation of a new Pot Hole fund, targeting fixes where they are needed most.
 - For the economy, we will be investing an additional £10m in skills and economic growth – recognising that now is the time to invest in the talent of our county to take advantage of the economic opportunities that we all hope the post-covid recovery will bring
 - On the environment, this budget supports £200m of spending commitments over the next four years to deliver our net zero ambition and to create a cleaner, greener and healthier Essex – demonstrating the seriousness of our intent when it comes to climate action.
 - On Levelling Up, we have committed investment of £10m as seed funding to begin to support our drive to extend opportunity to all corners of the county. And today I am announcing a further £1m will be made available to further this agenda. I am also pleased to announce the continuation of specific localities funds, worth £750,000, enabling members to direct money to those groups and communities that need it

the most, with half of this money being focussed on supporting levelling up needs and priorities in specific divisions.

- Mr Chairman, we are committed to reinvigorating the role that arts and culture can play in the well-being of our communities. That is why we have established a new £1.5m fund – a fund which will not only support jobs in the arts and heritage sector, enable Essex people to share in the creativity that has made this county so dynamic over the years, but also support our levelling up ambitions by using the power of art and culture to engage people in new and unique ways.
- We recognise the pressures that households are under right now. And we welcome the actions of government in the past week to address those through - £200 for households for energy bills, and £150 energy rebate through council tax bills for all Band A to D properties.
- And we will continue to be focused on supporting stretched families too - £20m has already been made available to help families directly. We will also be putting 700k into the Essential Living Fund – doubling its size to make sure that residents in the most acute need will always have somewhere to turn for support.
- Finally, today I can also announce a continuation of the £500,000 investment into the well-established programme with the Essex Police & Crime Commissioner to protect our children from being targeted by gangs who bring violence into our communities.

Conclusion

- I Commend this budget to Council. I would like to thank the Finance Team for their incredibly hard work in supporting the preparation of this budget.
- Our track record of excellent financial management means we have the firm foundations on which to build the future prosperity of this county.
- There remain tough and uncertain times ahead, so it is essential we help our Essex economy continue to recover from the pandemic, whilst ensuring we continue to protect the most vulnerable in our communities and invest in our plans for Everyone's Essex, for climate action and for Levelling Up the County.