

Leader's Budget Speech 2017/18

Mr Chairman, fellow Members

All of us in the Chamber know that Local Government finances continue to be constrained.

Funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant has reduced by £44m in 17/18 and will be phased out completely by 2020 to be replaced by business rate retention.

At the same time demand for services continues to grow.

But this administration has proven we are up the challenge.

Over the last four years this administration has:

- Kept Council Tax low, supporting all our residents, especially those who are just about managing
- Invested £191m in additional school places (26,000 new places set to be created by 2025, 91% of schools good or outstanding, up from 70% 4 years ago),
- Invested £681m in improving transport infrastructure (defects on major routes at record lows, significant investment secured from Government for major projects such as A120 and M11 J7a)
- Helped protect 443 properties against the risk of flooding as part of the first two years of a Flood Alleviation programme that will protect a total of 2,300 properties by 2020
- Invested in new homes that help people live independently for longer (creating 1,800 independent living units by 2021) and begun to pave the way for new garden communities to meet the county's housing needs in a sustainable manner
- Brought superfast broadband to over 75,000 homes and businesses who didn't have access before March 2014

We have been able to achieve all of this whilst saving £597m over the last 7 years and on track to save a further £106m by the end of 2017/18 because of our long-term financial prudence.

We have made difficult choices, cut our cloth and brought forward innovation I am pleased to say that we will not be increasing core Council Tax at all.

However, as colleagues in the Chamber will be aware, in Essex we currently spend over £1.4 million a day on adult social care alone.

Over the next 12 years the number of people over 85 needing social care will grow by 50 per cent.

The Government has again given councils the power to add a 'Social Care Levy' onto Council Tax bills.

We have taken the decision to implement the 3% Social Care Levy. It will raise an extra £17 million that we can use to support the most vulnerable in our society.

This means that a resident living in an average Band D property will pay 65 pence more each week in council tax or £34 a year in total. But it also means we will be able to continue to support the vulnerable people in our communities. This is what civilised and responsible authorities do

Despite the reduction in funding from central government this budget sees us spending:

- £524m on adult social care
- £127m on children and families
- £668m on education and lifelong learning
- £233m on highways, infrastructure and public transport
- £92m on health

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

We are tabling a budget that will be investing to deliver four priorities for Essex.

Four priorities that will help us build the future our residents and businesses need.

An economic engine room

Our first priority is to create the conditions for an even stronger economy in Essex.

We want to boost the Essex economy from £33 billion to £60 billion by 2025.

Because economic growth is the key to creating a prosperous and healthy county.

The ground breaking Independent Economic Commission for Essex has published its first report identifying a number of key challenges that need to be addressed including:

- Raising skills and qualifications
- Improving transport infrastructure

- Supporting businesses to grow

I would like to thank the work of the commission and especially its chairperson, the renowned economist Andrew Sentence, for their work.

Our investment in new school places will continue, creating a further 2,500 on top of the 8,000 of the past few years

And we are investing £7m capital it in

- Two Innovation Centres, Harlow MedTech and the University of Essex Innovation Centre in Colchester, which are aimed at supporting small and medium size businesses to grow and develop, providing flexible space and access to technology. And;
- Further education colleges that will deliver skill centres focussed on the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths.

We are investing significantly into roads and transport infrastructure to ease congestion and help people commute and travel across the county. We will begin work to deliver improved slip roads on the A120 in Braintree, a new railway station in Chelmsford and improvements to M11 J8.

Thanks to our investment over the last three years, our 5,000 mile road network is now among the best maintained in the whole country , and in the coming year we will invest over £108m in our footpaths, bridges and local roads.

Investment in new homes will continue – we will work with partners to increase the flow of affordable housing.

Investing in our infrastructure, investing in our economy is investing in the people of Essex.

2nd Enabling people to live independently for as long as possible

We want to ensure that the elderly and most vulnerable in our society are supported to live independently and can access care and support if they need it.

In 2017/18 we will be spending £524 million on adult social care.

This is our biggest area of spend and also our biggest area of pressure.

By 2039 , our older population is set to grow from 21% to 27%

I am proud of the work our children's social care teams do with families – reducing the number of children in care to just 1,000, when almost every other area in the country has seen an increase.

And we can be proud that for the second time in the last few years, an Essex social worker has won the national social worker of the year award. Congratulations to Bianka Lang

And just last week, we announced the first ever winner of our inaugural Challenge Prize. Claire and Heather won the prize for their ground breaking peer support programme *Mums and Families* that addresses the issues of loneliness and isolation amongst mums and families with children aged 0 – 5. People who took part in the pilot scheme said it was “amazing”, “innovative” and “life changing”. They will use the prize money to train at least two new programme leaders who will expand the project to other locations in Essex and will enable delivery of 12 courses for up to 120 mums.

I'm sure that all Members in this Chamber will join me in congratulating Claire and Heather and wishing the scheme, as well as all of the other Challenge Prize contestants and the hundreds of people across Essex that they have supported, our very best for the future.

The Challenge Prize is a down payment on the legacy we can expect to reap from our investment in innovation over the next few years.

Mr Chairman, it is these examples of creative public service reform that allow us to balance the budget while protecting frontline services as much as possible.

3rd Helping create great places to live and work

Mr Chairman, I have already outlined the investment we are making in our infrastructure to make Essex communities good places to live and work, but we are doing more.

I have spoken before in the Chamber about my passion for localism.

I strongly believe that we do not have all the answers in County Hall.

Many of the solutions to the challenges we face exist out there in our communities and our third priority is to give local communities a greater role.

That's why I am excited to announce two new initiatives to launch later this year: a new Supporting Communities Fund and the Essex Lottery.

We do this because we recognise local people are frequently best-placed to understand what can make the most difference in their area.

We do this because we recognise that it is the right thing to do.

The Supporting Communities Fund is designed to help local people to make that change happen.

We are committing a total of £1m to support two distinct types of local scheme: local services that, by being more locally responsive, improve local places and local action - community-led activities that build social capital and local connections.

This is about helping local communities to deliver new and innovative activities to improve their area.

The scheme possibilities are almost endless:

- Handymen (or women) to clean signs, repair finger posts or clear vegetation from footpaths.
- Libraries - from extending opening hours in the evening and at weekends using paid staff and volunteers to increase access and footfall to taking over this service on a SLA on a lease or with the freehold

My point Mr Chairman is that 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.

And this fund, for the first time gives them the money to help get their schemes off the ground.

The fund will open later in the year and more details will be available soon.

The Essex Lottery will also open later this year and will provide funding to community projects that already exist.

These schemes are further examples of how Essex County Council is providing the means to help people help themselves, each other, and their local area.

I am pleased to support both these schemes and call on you all to spread the word amongst your communities.

4th Sustainable public services

Mr Chairman, our fourth priority is to deliver public services that are not only high quality, but are sustainable well into the future.

We will do this by joining up public services so that we are in a position to respond strategically to the challenges we know we will face down the line. We are working with partners to agree a Vision for what this County needs to look like so that in an increasingly competitive world Essex can speak with one voice and punch above its weight where it really matters.

And our drive for better, more joined-up public services, also means making real differences to how we operate right now.

Our library service is a shining example of this. By turning them into community hubs we have brought together services across local government, health and the police to provide a seamless service, tailored to local needs. This is bringing more people into

libraries 2.25m visited between October – December this year compared with 2m in 15/16.

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 a foundation for the future. 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 commend it to the Council.