

The EssexWorks Corporate Plan

Annex A – Supporting Information

Priority: Enabling every individual to achieve their ambitions by supporting a world-class education and skills offer in the county

There are strong relationships between improving education, employment and income, and improvements in health and personal wellbeing. A highly-skilled workforce provides a foundation upon which our future economic growth and prosperity can be built. At the personal level, a good, rounded education and the ability to learn throughout life can help ensure an individual has the tools to achieve their potential.

The Coalition Government has been eager to advance its education and skills agendas. The 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* proposed whole-system change that would see ‘schools freed from the constraints of central Government direction’ and, *inter alia*, support the development of academies and free schools whilst seeing local authorities adopt a strategic, rather than operational provider, role. It was swiftly followed by the 2010 Academies Act and the 2011 Education Act.

Nationally, skills policy will see funds transfer to learners with a renewed focus on training and qualifications valued by business. Support for learners with very low skills levels and the disadvantaged will be prioritised, whilst the costs of other training will be met by learner, employer and government.

These changes will see Essex County Council support learners and deliver a strategy to drive improvements in education and skills by collaborating with a wider range of educational institutions, including:

- academies and free schools;
- University Technical Colleges providing business-focussed technical education for 14–19-year-olds; and
- a broader market of further and higher education providers.

Academies now account for around 50% of secondary schools, and around 6% of primary schools in Essex – there are potentially 16 additional academies opening in Essex in the coming months. The first Essex free school is expected to open in Brentwood in 2012.

We have long-established programmes supporting local residents to learn skills to enable them to develop their careers – since 2009 the Essex Apprentice programme has helped over 1,700 people into apprenticeships. Our Adult Community Learning colleges offer Essex residents a range of courses – valuable and popular opportunities to continue learning. Essex County Council's much-loved library network provides another route into lifelong learning.

Education provision is the sixth most important issue in making somewhere a good place to live for Essex residents; with almost one in three people selecting it as a priority. The percentage of secondary age Essex pupils who wanted to study to go to university has declined from 50% in 2010 to 42% in 2011, accompanying an increase in the percentage of pupils who wanted to get a job at 16 or at 18.

Recent business surveys have highlighted that in addition to technical and managerial skills gaps, many workers lack functional or key skills such as numeracy, literacy, IT, communication and team-working skills. A fifth of Essex businesses also questioned whether those leaving school or university had the appropriate skills and attitude to work.

These are the issues that this Corporate Plan will address. By 2017 we expect to be able to demonstrate that we have helped our residents to achieve their full potential through learning by promoting a culture of aspiration and promoting learning opportunities for Essex people throughout their lives.

Priority: Securing the highways, infrastructure and environment to enable businesses to grow

Private enterprise creates jobs, generates wealth, and improves lives. In a time of austerity it is more important than ever that Essex is a place where business can flourish, providing employment opportunities for local residents and, by creating wealth, helping to fund the public services we use.

Essex County Council can help by shaping a county capable of supporting and attracting investment and jobs. In addition to promoting education and training opportunities, this means ensuring the county's physical and technological infrastructure is capable of meeting the needs of business. As businesses grow they create the jobs that can increase financial security, reduce ill health and improve individual and collective quality of life.

The 2008 credit crunch and its continued economic aftershocks mean there is a need to look beyond the financial services sector to create the growth the UK economy needs. The Government is also seeking to rebalance the economy by stimulating private sector growth in parts of the UK considered overly reliant on public sector employment.

A twin focus on deficit reduction and promoting growth means that the Government is looking to leverage private investment to support growth. One sixth of the spending to deliver the £30bn *National Infrastructure Plan* – an analysis of the UK's infrastructure networks and pipeline of projects – will come from the public purse, with the Government looking to a range of other funding sources, including UK pension funds and overseas investors, for additional funds.

Essex is part of the largest non-metropolitan Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in the UK. This joint local authority/business body reflects a genuine economic area and is tasked by Government with promoting local economic development. Working with business and other partners, we have secured a range of government funding and pilot status to support business growth:

- £32.5m from the Growing Places Fund has been allocated to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership;

- the Enterprise Zone in Harlow will offer simplified planning and business rates discounts and has the potential to create up to 5,000 new jobs across a 126-acre site; and
- a successful Regional Growth Fund bid – helping create or secure almost 800 local jobs.

Home to some 58,500 businesses, Essex has a real stake in getting the conditions for enterprise right – through our business support activities we are already helping firms innovate, become more competitive, and succeed.

Our Integrated County Strategy identifies priorities for future growth and we are considering how our approach to growth can deliver for residents, business and wider society. Our business community tell us the biggest barriers they face are energy costs, competition, business rates, low profitability and congestion.

Some 40% of residents think it important that we support small and existing businesses. Local residents have identified job prospects as an important aspect of making somewhere a good place to live – and also identified job prospects, wage levels and the local cost of living as areas most needing improvement.

Our ambition through this Corporate Plan is to support business to generate wealth, jobs and opportunity. We will work with partners across sectors and geographies to ensure the physical and technological infrastructure is in place to enable businesses to flourish, thereby creating an environment in which economic opportunity is made available to all.

Priority: Improving public health and wellbeing

Quality of life matters. We want Essex citizens to enjoy healthy lives and to live them to the fullest extent possible. But quality of life can present itself in many ways – an individual exerting choice and control over their social care; a rural resident connected to a well-maintained urban centre; a happy and healthy citizen able to enjoy their county.

Everyone has a part to play in improving public health and wellbeing. Whilst much of the responsibility for personal health and wellbeing rests with the individual, we can work to ensure good healthcare is available and ensure that the wider causes of ill health are combated.

The funding of social care is an issue that central and local government are working hard to address as our population ages. For now, Government focuses on issues of personalisation and choice – concepts that Essex County Council has long promoted in adult social care. The debate about the sustainable funding of social care will continue in a forthcoming White Paper.

Reforms to the healthcare system have been a key plank of the Government's first eighteen months in office. Building on two 2010 White Papers, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* and *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, the Government has set out a philosophical position that is citizen-centric and where individuals take personal responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, with some positive nudging from government.

The Coalition agrees with the wider determinants of poor health articulated in early 2010 by the Marmot Review, and is looking to address many of these through reforms to welfare. The reforms contained within the Health and Social Care Bill - the biggest shake-up of the NHS since its inception - continue to make their way through parliament.

The Act will see local government's role expand as the responsibility for public health returns to local councils. Newly created health and wellbeing boards will bring together local commissioners, elected representatives, and representatives of HealthWatch to work together to better the health and wellbeing outcomes of the people in their area. This is a prime opportunity to improve the coordination of public health with other local services and Essex is acting as a HealthWatch Pathfinder, championing patients' views and experiences, promoting the integration of local services and improving choice for patients through advice and access to

information. We are also leading the national learning set on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

A decent physical environment supports personal, physical wellbeing. Access to the right services, to appropriate physical and technological infrastructure and to the natural environment can all improve health and wellbeing. Certainly, our residents consider parks, open spaces and proximity to nature as important factors in making Essex a good place to live.

More direct issues of health and wellbeing also matter to our residents. Health services are an important priority for residents, with over 53% regarding quality health services as most important in making somewhere a good place to live. More than 15% considered it an area that most needed improving in their local area. Yet a quarter of Essex adults (and 16% of 11 year olds) are obese, 23% of Essex adults smoke, and a fifth binge drink - lifestyle choices that will likely put pressure on our health system – and cost lives.

Whilst the UK's population is getting older, in Essex over the next 15 years, we can expect a 39% increase in the over-65s and a 68% increase in the over-85s. We are making great strides promoting choice and personalisation but with a projected 15% increase in older people with care needs over the next 5 years we need to increase awareness further about the services and support older residents can receive to support them in living at home.

Our Corporate Plan will see us help Essex residents to live full and independent lives, encourage healthy lifestyles and tackle wider causes of ill health, and protect and enhance Essex's environment.

Priority: Protecting and safeguarding vulnerable people

Society has a duty of care to its most vulnerable. Essex County Council works with individuals, charities and the private and public sectors to ensure that those in the greatest need of our protection are safeguarded. We have a moral duty to ensure that these residents can enjoy a better quality of life, that they are kept safe and that we support those who help create a safe environment for vulnerable citizens.

Following the Dilnot Review, a social care White Paper is expected in 2012. For now, though, the Government's focus remains on the Health and Social Care Bill which seeks to strengthen democratic legitimacy by creating Health and Wellbeing Boards and ensuring that commissioning is joined up across the NHS, social care and public health sectors.

In the face of reductions to local government funding and the tightest financial settlement in the NHS' history, it will be important to ensure that residents' experience of care services remains positive. There are more than 80,000 older people with social care needs in Essex: residents who have difficulty with, or are unable to perform, personal care or domestic tasks without help.

The *Open Public Services* White Paper advocates greater use of personal budgets and a wider competitive provider market to drive up standards – there is a role for the local authority here as a regulator of services and as a signposting body, directing residents through a more complex care market.

In terms of children's social services, we have recently begun to see the returns on our investment to improve our safeguarding capacity. At a national level, the Government is committed to restoring public confidence in the child protection system and ensuring that lessons are learnt when tragedies occur. It commissioned the Munro Review and supported its fundamental premise – that the child protection system needed to focus on the views and experiences of children. Government says it wants to move away from a centrally prescribed system and to place greater trust and responsibility in skilled professional staff. In Essex, the number of Children in Care has increased by 20% since 2009 due to higher numbers of children becoming looked after and reduced rates of children leaving the care system. Over the last twelve months, numbers have stabilised and are predicted to fall over 2012.

Our innovative work to protect and safeguard families with complex needs is intimately linked to our prioritising the needs of vulnerable citizens. The Essex Family project - one of only sixteen national pilots – looks to improve the life chances of families with multiple problems; it brings partner agencies together to work with some of the most vulnerable and most resource-intensive households in the county.

Government reforms outlined in the 2010 White Paper *Universal Credit: welfare that works* and now in the Welfare Bill seek to simplify the benefits system, tackle administrative complexity and increase incentives for people to return to the labour market. This is predicated on the assumption that the costs of a reliance on benefits are borne by society as a whole, and blight the life chances of both parents and children. Our focus on economic growth as a means to promote personal wellbeing is in keeping with this approach.

Changes to welfare and housing systems will particularly affect families with children and those on the lowest incomes. This may be exacerbated by introduction in the Localism Act of fixed-term flexible tenancies for new tenants replacing standard tenancies which offer security of tenure and rights to pass on tenancies. Welfare reform also has the potential to affect carers. One in ten Essex residents give unpaid care – we estimate that over 84,000 people aged 65 years and older act as carers and some 28,000 citizens provide more than 50 hours of unpaid care a week. Our Benefits Plus service continues to provide advice, information and training to ensure residents access the benefits to which they are entitled.

This Corporate Plan reaffirms our commitment to protect residents from injury and harm. It will ensure we work to see vulnerable people enjoy a better quality of life whilst also supporting parents, carers and families to create safe and stable homes.

Priority: Giving people a greater say and a greater role in building safer and stronger communities

We all like to feel in control of our lives and where we live. Formal and informal connections that bring people together help create a sense of community spirit, belonging, and can increase feelings of personal and social worth. By being part of a wider society – whether through faith groups, sports clubs, charity work or other bodies – we can feel like we are giving something back to the communities and groups that we care about.

In Essex, this social capital appears unequally distributed across the county with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to take part in voluntary activity. Yet strong connections between people are an important element of cohesive communities, helping create neighbours and neighbourhoods that look out for each other.

Traditionally, social connections were based on shared geography, however advances in technology mean that people can build networks, organise activities, and help and advise each other unimpeded by distance. People are shaping their world through geographic or virtual communities of interest.

A key plank of the Conservative Party's 2010 manifesto was the introduction of Police Commissioners; the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act will see directly elected Police Commissioners hold Chief Constables to account from November 2012. Local authorities will hold the Police Commissioner to account via Police and Crime Panels.

The Big Society agenda was to be the *leitmotif* for the Government's term of office. Whilst the economy now predominates, a commitment to shift responsibility from the state to wider society remains.

The *Open Public Services* White Paper promotes principles of increased choice, decentralisation, provider markets, fair access and accountability. The Localism Act provides opportunities for local communities to run services or assets and to play a greater role in agreeing local housing growth, potentially changing the rules of the game for councils. Government's commitment to build social capital, to transform public services and to empower

communities is welcome but it would be wrong to suggest that this is new territory for Essex County Council. By way of example, our:

- volunteering initiatives, our £2m Thriving Third Sector endowment fund and our £1.4m Big Society Fund help bolster social capital;
- commissioning of services through the third sector, the pioneering of personalisation, and our openness to see volunteers run community services all point to a transformation of public services; and
- long-standing work with Essex's town and parish councils and our involvement with community groups in service design, policy making and planning supports community empowerment.

Evidence suggests crime and personal safety are key issues for Essex residents – our own polling shows a crime-free environment is the most important factor in making an area a good place to live for over 60% of Essex residents. Although the picture varies across the county, with 60 crimes per 1,000 residents for the year to March 2011, Essex remains a safe place to live and Essex residents' feeling of safety continues to increase as well.

Across Essex, a majority of residents say they feel a sense of belonging to their local area, with some 85% feeling people get along with each other. A significant minority of Essex residents volunteer – many of them on a weekly basis; that said, 55% of citizens have not volunteered in the last year.

This Corporate Plan supports this direction of travel. It provides a focus for our activity to make Essex a safer county in which to live and work, whilst emphasising our commitment to encourage Essex residents to influence decisions and shape their communities, and help communities play a greater role in challenging local services.