

Key Messages: 2019/20 – Summer Edition

1. Balanced Budget for 2018/19

As you know, delivering a balanced budget has always been the number one priority for Essex County Council under my Leadership. I'm pleased to be able to say that last year's budget was indeed balanced, thanks to the excellent work of the Cabinet Members and Council staff.

2. Savings in the budget for 19/20

Looking ahead to next year, we are on track to make the £72m of savings required to deliver another balanced budget. The declining financial support from central government means this budgetary pressure has increased year-on-year. We are strongly lobbying Essex MPs and Government Ministers to make sure the next Government Spending Review has a long term, fully funded settlement for Local Government so we can deliver the public services our residents need.

3. New Cabinet Member for Economic Growth

We made a few changes to our Cabinet in May of this year, and in particular I'd like to highlight the appointment of Tony Ball as the Cabinet Member for Economic Development. Tony brings a wealth of experience to the role and has a vision to transform the economic potential of the county – attracting inward investment and great jobs for our citizens.

4. Reports of potholes decreased by 45% in Essex between 2015-2017

National figures released by the RAC in December 2018 showed Essex bucking national trends, where reports have been increasing. The figure reflects our hard work in tackling potholes, with extra funding/resources deployed to clear the backlog particularly following the "Beast from the East" cold snap at the beginning of 2018.

5. Reducing Air Pollution

We're working hard to improve air quality in the county – we have set up a working group led by Cllr Simon Walsh, Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste

6. Reducing Plastic Use

In December last year the government launched its new resources and waste strategy which aims to eliminate avoidable waste of all kinds (including plastic waste) by 2050.

ECC is doing its own part – we have established a specialist team in the county for just this issue, who have started by removing as much single-use plastic from County Hall and replacing them with more environmentally friendly alternatives. This work should be completed by September of this year.

We are also working closely with the city of Chelmsford, to do the same in the Business Improvement District (covering the city centre) which is home to more than 400 local and national businesses. We hope to roll out the programme across the county once we have successfully set up in the area.

7. Healthy Living

ECC is exploring ways it can help people make healthier choices around the food they eat, exercise they do, and other things that contribute to better health.

8. Footways

Administration is investing additional money in footway repair, recognising the concerns of residents in this area. £700k of additional funding and using £1m from the DfT grant we received in November.

9. Essex 2020

Next year the Council will be launching a programme of events to celebrate Essex's history as a home to arts and sciences of all kinds – there will be things for all the family up and down the county, throughout the year, and I look forward to be able to provide more information as we get closer to 2020 itself.

10. Housing Infrastructure Bids

We have submitted more than £500m of infrastructure funding bids to support infrastructure improvements in Essex linked to our growth aspirations. We strive through this process to win funding for key infrastructure upgrades ahead of new housing developments being built across the county.

11. Essex County Council is the most efficient/effective Council of its size in the country and ranks seventh overall

Consultancy iMPower surveyed 150 upper-tier councils, with ECC 7th for spending money effectively and getting the best results for residents.

- a) The results are drawn from an analysis of performance in six key areas: children's social care, older people, disability, health and social care, housing and homelessness, waste and recycling
- b) The council is passionate about delivering value for money and its performance has been nationally recognised through the iMPower report. But the council doesn't sit back on its laurels, and is doing further work to develop ways of monitoring its productivity levels across all services to ensure it remains one of the best authorities in the country
- c) ECC have only increased Council tax in 4 out of the last 9 years (including 2019/20)

12. Devolved funding to Parish Councils

Parishes have been invited to take part in a pilot where they would undertake devolved highways functions, including grass cutting and special verge maintenance, weed control, tree and hedge cutting, minor footway repairs, installing/maintaining signs, winter salt bags, maintaining bus stops/shelters and maintaining Public Rights of Way
15 Parish Councils have expressed an interest in taking part in the pilot

13. Reducing unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments

Working with the Police and Crime Commissioner, we have seen a 40% reduction in unauthorised Gypsy and traveller encampments

14. Essex Local Delivery Pilot funding

ECC being awarded over £10m by Sport England (with Tendring, Colchester and Basildon) for piloting ideas to increase sport and physical activity

- The Essex Local Delivery Pilot (LDP) which is tackling population levels of physical inactivity across the county secured the maximum grant of £10.68m from the funder Sport England.
- The LDP is governed by the Health and Wellbeing Board, and one of the seven priority projects for the Essex Partners and Essex Assembly.
- The LDP is using whole system change to hardwire the value of physical activity into key agendas including health, planning, transport, social care, and the built environment.
- Initial testing will mainly take place in Basildon, Colchester and Tendring, and the learning from the pilot will be shared across Essex through replication and scaling.
- The LDP lifespan is currently until 2025.

15. Gang related crime prevention

An additional £500k has been allocated to the Police and Crime Commissioner to support multi-agency work on gang related crime prevention in this year's budget. Discussions are ongoing between ECC and the Police as to how this fund is to be used.

16. Mental Health

An additional £1m has been allocated to mental health in this year's budget. Cabinet Members are currently in conversation on how best to use this additional funding

17. Digital Community Engagement

ECC is working with community leaders in social media to bring together Facebook Administrators of Community Pages from across Essex. We are supporting locally devised and delivered projects led by local community-based Facebook groups with small grants of a few hundred pounds that can be very quickly accessed. We are working with the Essex Association of Local Councils to help them to also work in this way.

While we are keen to help to address issues locally identified by Facebook groups, we have been delighted that most of the projects align well with our own priorities including around mental health, loneliness, physical activity and domestic violence.

A lot of work has been done but we see this as the start of a journey and want to expand this approach across the whole of the county. We are very keen to work with all local communities in this way and would be keen to see groups led by Facebook administrators or similar social media leads covering all of Essex.

18. Essex Housing update

Essex Housing has undertaken an ambitious programme to build affordable housing that supports the provision of specialist accommodation for people with learning difficulties across the county. The team also works on projects to construct public buildings such as schools, and have achieved recognition from industry experts; winning the 'Community Benefit' award for the eastern region from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

19. Homelessness

As a sign of ECC's commitment to tackling homelessness and its causes across the county, an additional £250,000 has been allocated to pay for mentors to help support up to 50 people at risk of rough sleeping and 150 people at risk of losing their homes.

This will allow us to build additional capacity into the existing programmes working with targeted groups in clearly identified areas of need, with the flexibility built in to respond dynamically to changes in demand. The programmes are:

- Horizon who work with some of the county's most chaotic individuals providing a highly intensive and focused intervention services. It works with the customer to support them in making the life changes needed to break negative cycles of: rough sleeping, poor mental wellness, substance use dependency, offending behaviour and unemployment. This has been shown to be extremely successful in turning around the lives of the most entrenched individuals.
- Essex Floating Support which is a county wide homeless prevention service working with families and individuals assisting them to live independently and to prevent episodes of homelessness.