

**REPORT FOR PARISH COUNCILS ON ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MATTERS –  
CLLR PENNY CHANNER, ESSEX COUNTY COUNCILLOR -11FEBRUARY 2018**

**A RECORD programme of more than £300 million will be invested in roads, schools, new homes and supporting the economy across Essex, as part of the County Council's budget proposals for 2018/19.**

The budget, which went to Cabinet in January before it is put to the vote at Full Council on February 13, sets out the Council's proposed investment and spending programme for the coming year.

It also includes a continued commitment to innovation and digital technology, which is already having a positive impact on services such as adult social care, where tablet computers have more than halved the time it takes social workers to complete assessments.

The continued reduction in central Government funding, which will disappear completely by 2020, combined with increasing demand for services, increases in inflation, business rates and National Living Wage payments, mean the Council is proposing to increase Council Tax for only the third time in the last eight years.

This will rise by 2% through the Government's social care precept, which will be ring-fenced to adult social care, and 2.99% to support the delivery of vital services such as highways, public transport, libraries and recycling centres.

The proposed rise means a £1.12 per week increase for the average Band D property.

There is growing demand for essential services and meeting that demand with dwindling resources is a huge challenge. But Essex County Council can face this challenge with confidence and strength with a track record for efficiency and innovation which is second to none.

The Council has delivered over £350m of savings in the last four years by generating income and reducing costs.

**Pioneering projects are being sought in a first-of-its-kind national challenge to find the next generation of ideas to help improve the lives of people living with dementia.**

Challenge Dementia, which has been spearheaded by Essex County Council, was launched on Essex Dementia Day, Friday January 19. It's a national search for next generation products, technologies and services that could transform the way people live with dementia, helping them to live enjoyable and fulfilling lives for as long as possible.

The challenge is open to individuals, teams and companies with ideas for ambitious and innovative products, technologies and services that will enable people living with dementia to remain connected to the people and places around them and to maintain their identity.

Entries must be submitted by 12pm on Friday April 13. Following that, a panel of judges will invite up to 10 finalists to test and develop their ideas in Essex over a six month period starting in May. Each idea will receive £5,000 funding and access to a unique ecosystem of dementia experts from across the community, voluntary, public and private sector as well as people living with dementia. £100,000 will be awarded to the winner who successfully meets the entry and judging criteria.

Solutions might include an easy to use service that keeps people connected to their family or friends; a programme that helps and encourages people to keep in contact with the places they love, from walking outdoors to enjoying a pint at their local pub; or even a simple digital solution that helps people connect with their community according to their likes.

**More than 22,000 new school places will be needed across Essex over the next decade, according to a new strategy published by Essex County Council.**

The council's ten year plan, Meeting the demand for school places in Essex 2018 - 2027, provides the background to school place planning in Essex and outlines the anticipated demand for places in each district, as well as listing likely solutions.

Projections currently show an extra 12,201 new primary school places and 9,915 new secondary school places (22,116 in total) will be needed across the county between now and 2027.

They include 779 places in Maldon (504 primary and 275 secondary)

Essex County Council works closely with partners, including schools, district/borough councils and housing providers, to assess demand for school places and the ten year plan is updated regularly as projections change.

The plan also outlines the projects Essex County Council already has planned to meet the growing needs of the county, along with other potential future options.

The council spent about £74million creating 2,535 new permanent mainstream places across the county for the 2017/18 academic year and plans to create thousands more in the years to come.

In addition to its own projects, the council also continues to support the submission of free school applications to help meet demand.

It is currently estimated that up to 22 new mainstream schools will be needed over the next ten years in Essex, while a number of existing schools will also need to be expanded.

**Secondary schools in Essex have cause for celebration after new statistics confirmed the county's GCSE pupils again performed above the national average.**

About 15,000 young people were entered into GCSEs at schools in Essex last year, which was the first since the Government introduced a new numerical (9 to 1) grading system.

Figures released by the Department for Education, alongside the secondary school performance tables, show the Attainment 8 score for Essex (average grade across a set of eight subjects) was 46.7 – above the national average of 46.4.

As a result of the released data, Essex is ranked 58 of all 151 local authorities.

The 65.3 per cent of pupils in Essex who achieved a standard pass at GCSE (9-4) in English and maths is also above the national average of 64.2 per cent

English language, English literature and maths were the only subjects to be graded under the new 9 to 1 scale, with others continuing to be graded A\* to G. Most other subjects are expected to adopt numerical grades by 2019.

As well as releasing revised Key Stage 4 results, the Department for Education has published revised A-Level results.

Secondary schools in Essex are continuing to perform exceptionally well, with about 97.5 per cent currently rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted, compared with a national average of 80.3 per cent.

As a council, we remain committed to ensuring all pupils in Essex receive the best possible education and continue to work very closely with schools.

**The Superfast Essex broadband programme has reached a new high, enabling 100,000 homes and businesses to access superfast broadband.**

The new headline milestone is the latest achievement in the fibre infrastructure rollout being co-ordinated by Essex County Council in partnership with network operators Openreach and Gigaclear. It means 100,000 more Essex homes and businesses can now access superfast speeds of 30Mbps and above.

The news comes as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announces the nationwide superfast broadband rollout, led by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), successfully achieved its target of providing at least 95% of the UK with access to superfast broadband by the end of 2017.

Superfast Essex has helped contribute to this national target, and the Openreach rollout in the county continues to be three months ahead of schedule. In total more than 385km of fibre cabling has been installed under the subsidised deployment programme across the county – three and a half times the length of the English

Channel which is also roughly the same as the distance from Earth to the International Space Station.

The Superfast Essex programme is ongoing, with work planned to reach more than 144,000 homes and businesses in total by early 2020. Further work, seeking to address the remaining gaps in coverage by the end of 2021 is currently being commissioned.

To find out if your property is due to be upgraded as part of the Superfast Essex programme's rollout plans, check the Superfast Essex interactive map which displays address level information: [www.superfastessex.org/maps](http://www.superfastessex.org/maps).

Anyone not currently due for an upgrade can register their demand for faster broadband by completing the Make the Connection Survey: [www.superfastessex.org/registerdemand](http://www.superfastessex.org/registerdemand).

**A six week consultation began (Monday 5 February 2018) on proposed changes to car parking charges at a number of Essex Country Parks.**

Car parking charges at the Country Parks have not been increased for three years, since March 2015, with the exception of Weald which were reviewed in 2016. In line with ECC's fees and charges policy, a review of charges has taken place and an increase is proposed.

In most cases, the proposed increases have been pegged to 50p, with a larger increase of up to £1.50 for Great Notley, Belhus and Cudmore Grove for longer stays of up to three hours.

Country Parks provide valuable outdoor spaces for people to enjoy and Essex County Council is proud of the excellent reputation the parks have - reinforced by the prestigious Green Flag awards we have received for many of our parks.

The Country Parks Service aims to improve the experience of our 850,000 customers a year and increase the number of visitors enjoying the parks, while keeping operating costs as low as possible.

The range of events throughout the year at the parks will be maintained, with many activities provided free of charge such as the play trail at Great Notley, the Gruffalo trail at Thorndon, Stickman at Weald, Wild Wednesdays at Danbury and the new coastal themed adventure play equipment at Cudmore Grove.

Over the last couple of years ECC has invested more than £1 million in the country parks for the benefit of our visitors with improvements to footpaths and accessibility, car parking, facilities, signage and play equipment and there are plans for further investment. We need to ensure we are able to continue to maintain, develop and invest in the country parks and car parking charges are one of the ways we can bring in funds to help do this.

The proposed changes are subject to public consultation with any changes to be implemented by the end of April 2018. Visitors are encouraged to feedback their thoughts during the consultation by emailing:  
Countryparks.carparking@essex.gov.uk.

Visitors to Essex Country Parks can still enjoy access to unlimited parking at all of our country parks with the purchase of an annual season ticket at £65 or six-months at £40, with the full annual season ticket fee reduced to £45 and £30 respectively for Blue Badge Holders and over-60s; offering excellent value for money for frequent visitors.

**A new Essex County Council drug and alcohol project was officially launched following a royal visit on Wednesday 7 February 2018.**

HRH The Duchess of Cambridge visited charity Action on Addiction's new addiction treatment centre in Wickford to launch a new programme which Essex County Council commissioned and co-designed called 'Clouds in the Community'.

Clouds in the Community is the starting point for long term recovery and abstinence, and leads to improvements in participants' physical and psychological health, self-efficacy and overall quality of life.

This new programme will support Action on Addiction's mission to make its life-saving work available to more people in more places. It's also based on the charity's work at its highly-renowned treatment centre, Clouds House, which first opened its doors 35 years ago. The strategy also draws on remarkable outcomes achieved at its SHARP (Self-Help Addiction Recovery) programme in Essex, which was first piloted by Action on Addiction and Essex County Council from 2013 to 2016.

As part of the visit, The Duchess officially opened the new Wickford Centre, and took part in a round-table discussion which was led by Head of Wellbeing and Public Health at Essex County Council, Ben Hughes. Also present was Chairman of Essex County Council, Cllr John Aldridge.