

Report For Parish Councils On Essex County Council Matters

Cllr Penny Channer – 4th February 2019

High ambitions for Essex in County Council budget proposals

Essex's ambition to be the leading Council in innovation and efficiency is at the heart of its budget proposals for the coming financial year. Recently published, the Council's draft Organisation Plan and budget for 2019/20 outlines plans for significant investment in the services and infrastructure the County needs to retain its position as one of the most dynamic places in the country to live and work.

Recently rated in the top ten most productive councils in the country for productivity by iMPower, and celebrating an 'outstanding' rating for its children's services from Ofsted, Essex has announced capital investment of just under £250m for homes, schools and roads in the coming year, alongside revenue spending plans which include:

- Funding for 1,066 new primary school places, and 2,198 new secondary school places – the equivalent of five new schools - including those for pupils with special educational needs and disability
- £117m for maintaining and improving the road network
- £14m for faster broadband connections
- New contracts with residential care providers which increase their income
- 40 new homes including eight for people with learning disabilities through Essex Housing.

With the Council's revenue support grant from central government reducing fast and set to be phased out entirely from next year, plus the impact of inflation, population growth and increasing demand for and expectation of services, the financial picture remains challenging. This has necessitated a proposed total council tax increase of 3.99%.

Of this, 1% would be ring-fenced to adult social care from the Government's social care precept allowance, with the remaining 2.99% supporting the delivery of other vital local services. The council tax annual bill for a band 'D' property in Essex for County Council services would be £1,270.44, a weekly increase of just £0.94 a week.

The Leader of Essex County Council has stated that "Essex prides itself on being innovative, dynamic and entrepreneurial. We are going – we have one of the highest business start-up rates in the country. People expect the same from their council.

If we don't find ways of doing things differently, if we don't innovate, we won't succeed. The challenges of ever-increasing costs and demand are real. Austerity might be over, but its effects are still with us.

The budget is about making the right decisions, in the right way, so we are investing now for Essex's future prosperity. We have a track record of rolling up our sleeves and getting things done. We've saved over £1million a week, every week, over the past four years. Our track record speaks for itself, as does our willingness to innovate, be enterprising, entrepreneurial and embrace internet-age opportunities."

Essex County Council has an outstanding record of providing value to tax-paying residents and the budget reflects how we prioritise services that promote economic growth, continue to support excellent education and protect vulnerable children and adults across our County.

The budget plans for the Essex of tomorrow – how we provide services is changing – doing things the same way that we did 10 years ago will not work, as the way we live, work, travel and enjoy leisure time has been radically transformed by technology. Yet we are rising to these challenges and have set a budget that will support and reflect these changes to ensure we can seize opportunities across the County. Inflation, population growth and increasing demand and expectation mean we plan to utilise the Government's 1% increase for social care and thus increase council tax by a total of 3.99%. With those proposed increases, for a Band D property, this amounts to just under £1 a week, which we believe strikes the right balance between asking people to pay a little extra to ensure the services people need and rely on are provided and our ambitions for the future of Essex can be met.

The Council's Cabinet met to approve the proposals on Tuesday 22nd January, and the budget proposals go to Full Council for final approval on Tuesday 12th February 2019.

Millions of pounds saved through the Essex Energy Switch

Millions of pounds have already been saved by residents across the county through the Essex Energy Switch and registration for this year's auction is now open.

The initiative is an annual, county-wide collective energy switching campaign designed to help local people save on their gas and electricity bills, as well as support those that may be struggling to pay for their energy supplies.

Since the scheme launched in 2014, more than 15,000 people have saved an average of £230 per household on their energy bills – more than £3.5m overall.

Registration for Essex Energy Switch is free and only takes five minutes. Once registered, there is no obligation to switch providers. The deadline for registering is Tuesday 12 February 2019.

It is a great opportunity for local communities to come together and make significant savings on their energy bills - the more people that register, the bigger the potential benefit.

Residents that took part in last year's Essex Energy Switch will need to register again this year to continue benefiting.

Small and medium-sized businesses can also register for the initiative through the bespoke business bureau service.

To find out more about the Essex Energy Switch, and how it can help you save money energy bills, visit essex.gov.uk/energyswitch.

Have your say on Chelmsford Park and Ride services

Essex County Council wants to hear from Chelmsford Park and Ride users on ticket options, fares and opening days as part of a consultation that launches today at 9am.

We need to ensure the current service is fit for purpose and best meets the needs of those that use it, while also ensuring value for money for Essex taxpayers.

These services are continually under review with the aim of maximising the benefits while keeping the cost to the taxpayer as low as possible.

The proposals not only address changes in passenger journeys, but also follow feedback from the recent Park and Ride survey in summer 2018 which indicated that parents would like a change to the children's ticket and passengers would like discounted tickets.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Cllr Kevin Bentley for Infrastructure stated that we understand that the Park and Ride Services in Chelmsford are important for many people. We want to ensure that those of you that use the Park and Ride are getting the best possible deal, service and experience. We also need to demonstrate value for money, which is why we are reviewing the service. As well as looking at passenger numbers, we have taken on board feedback from residents and have reflected this within the proposals. These proposals aim to create a more efficient service by addressing a shortfall in users at Chelmer on a Saturday. They also look to benefit young people by extending the age for a child ticket as well as introducing discount ticket offers for all.

The Cabinet Member is keen to hear from residents as part of the consultation so that the Council can ensure we have a service that meets the needs of residents in the most effective way. The consultation proposes the below;

- Raise the child ticket age from 16 to 18. Currently children are required to stay in education or training until 18 but are charged adult price for a P&R ticket from age 16. The proposed change would better reflect this and would encourage parents to drop their children at park and ride sites rather than drive into Chelmsford.
- A discounted ticket offer when tickets are purchased digitally through an app (12 tickets for the price of 11). Digital ticketing helps customers board more quickly compared to a contactless card payment. Park and Ride tickets are already available through First's ticketing app.
- Closure of Chelmer Valley Park and Ride on Saturdays. Sandon would remain open for customers wishing to use Park and Ride and would run on a loop route around the city centre. Despite a reduced adult fare of £1.50 on a Saturday and promotion of the service, passenger numbers from Chelmer Valley on a Saturday are low compared with numbers Monday to Friday.

At the Chelmer Valley site on average 394 passengers use it each Saturday, which means that 60% of the spaces are unused. This compares with an average of 1,285 on a weekday.

- Remove the ticket machines on site as they reach end of life from 2019 and continue to allow cash fares to be taken on bus.
- An inflationary fare increase.

Full details of the proposals can be found at the consultation web pages. The consultation will run from 21 January until

22 March 2019 (8 weeks). It can be accessed via www.essex.gov.uk/Chelmsford-park-and-ride.

Paper copies will also be available at both sites as well as on request by emailing passenger.transport@essex.gov.uk.

Following the consultation consideration of all the responses will occur and then make an announcement of how we intend to proceed in summer 2019.

News from Essex Records Office

March talks regarding the Maldon Moot Hall - Speakers: Mike Fogg and Penney MacAvoy

The Grade I listed Moot Hall is one of the most historically important buildings in Maldon. The building has its origins in the 15th century, and is a fragment of a much larger house built for the wealthy and powerful Sir Robert D'arcy. It is a masterpiece of the medieval bricklayer's art, and was at the forefront of architectural innovation of its day. Over the centuries it has been not only a private house, but a courtroom, a prison, a council chamber, and a police station. This talk will use photographs to take you on a guided tour of the building, without the need to go up and down the tower's many steps!

Tuesday 5 March, 10.30am -12.00noon

Tuesday 12 March, 10.30am -12.00noon

You can book by going on the Essex Records Office web site.

Rogue Trader Alert

As the wintery weather closes in Trading Standards is warning Essex residents about approaches from traders cold calling or using leaflets, offering roofing repairs or tree and garden services. It is widely recognised that this is not the best way to advertise if you're a legitimate trader. We are becoming more concerned about the circulation of leaflets with fake or incomplete address details that are often associated with very poor workmanship and distraction burglaries. Trading Standards are regularly publishing leaflets that concern it on its social media pages, follow Trading Standards on Facebook and Twitter and feel free to share. Look out for your neighbours too! If you have any concerns ring 03454 040506 Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline