

Essex County Councillor's Annual report 2018-2019

Budget: Over the past four years we have made savings of £311 million, by improving value for money, generating income and reducing costs. And despite finding further budget savings of £60 million for the next financial year, we have had to raise the County Council's portion of Council Tax by 2.99%. For a Band D property this is equivalent to 94 pence a week.

The Council continues to face major financial challenges; this coming year, our main grant from Government will be reduced by £27 million, staff costs through National Insurance and agreed pay increases along with other support costs, particularly those of our contractors continue to expose the Authority to significant financial pressures. In addition, a growing population, changing demographics, and increasing demand across many of our services all add to the challenges we face.

We have lobbied Government hard over ensuring sufficient funding is made available to ensure a stable Adult Social Care Service, and are still pushing for more details regarding the use of Business Tax as an alternative to the Government's Revenue Support Grant.

So in a year of financial challenge, your County Council has still managed to achieve a lot.

Children's Services have been rated 'Outstanding' by OFSTED, which ranks us as one of the best in the country.

The County Council has been ranked in the top ten of all UK Local Authorities, which reflects well in the way that it is managed.

A number of my Cabinet Colleagues are working nationally to advise failing councils, and example of the high regard the administration is held.

Examples follow which highlight a number of achievements over the past year

Equalities:

- Launched a Hate Crime Strategy
- Promoted apprenticeships to employers and young people
- Been assessed as a Disability Confident Leader
- Produced the joint Health and Well Being Strategy
- Improved the effectiveness of Mental Health Social work
- Developed new accommodation and employment opportunities for people with mental health problems

Enabling Inclusive Economic Growth:

- Created over 2,750 school places
- Implemented a Young Carers Service
- Set up a Multi-Academy Trust to support schools
- Helped establish a new college at Stansted Airport, a Centre for Health and Development in Colchester, and in Braintree, a Science Technology Engineering Maths Innovation Campus.

- Enhanced Careers education in schools
- Campaigned and put in bids to support the improvements to the A120, A12, A13, A127 and the M11
- Invested a further £5 million for broadband
- Invested £120 million to improve and maintain the County's roads

Helping People get the Best Start and Age Well:

- The Youth Offending Service, assessed as 'Outstanding'
- Increased support for all care leavers up to the age of 25
- Developed our own in-house fostering service, so reducing reliance on agencies
- Provided a seamless social work service for disabled children and young people
- Initiated a dedicated service to encourage young people to leave gangs
- Won funding from Sport England to improve physical activity

Help Create Great Places to Grow up and Live Well:

- Improved volunteering opportunities through the Essex Youth Service
- Funded Community Agents and Care Navigators
- Developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy to protect enhance and develop our green spaces
- Further protected 329 properties from flood risk
- Provided a Ride demand responsive travel pilot to help preserve rural bus services
- Worked with Districts to drive up recycling rates to over 54%
- Published an updated Essex Design Guide
- Built 38 new homes through Essex Housing including 15 for those with learning disabilities

I continue to be Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste, a portfolio brief that covers not just the functions of a Waste Disposal Authority, but flood prevention, renewable energy, (including the proposed new nuclear power station at Bradwell), rural matters, coastal partnerships, heritage, country parks and the County's woodland estate. In addition I represent the County Council on a number of external bodies, including two regional flood and coast authorities, the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area for Outstanding Natural Beauty (it is being extended into Essex) and the Kent and Essex Inshore Fishery and Conservation Authority. I also sit as an executive member of the Rural Community Council for Essex, and represent the ECC on the Stansted Airport Community Consultative Committee. Twice a year I represent the rural interests of Essex (as Chairman of the Essex Rural Partnership) with Government Ministers from DEFRA. Nationally, I sit on the Local Government Association's Coastal Special Interest Group (SIG) and another SIG concerned with New Nuclear Builds.

Simon Walsh

County Councillor for the Thaxted Division