

County Councillor's Annual Report 2018

County Council £300m budget spending plan

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 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.

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

In the last year, the Council created 2,500 new places in Essex schools, 92% of which are rated good or outstanding, and supported the creation of 11,370 apprenticeships.

It also repaired more than 5,000 potholes, resurfaced more than 400 miles of road, while bringing superfast broadband to another 100,000 homes in the county.

Waste reduction remains a challenge, and a number of schemes will be promoted this year to encourage more reuse and recycling. Uttlesford residents remain one of the best performers for recycling. To help achieve greater reduction, the County will be supporting more food waste collections, more composting, clothes recycling and encouraging people to take small electrical for disposed at many of the County Libraries.

Local Highways Panel

This continues to be oversubscribed, with far more projects than the budget allows. Unfortunately we were unable to secure a top-up this year, so we are working on a much reduced budget of some £240,000. However, a number of schemes across the Thaxted Division have been agreed by the committee.

Mobile library changes and support for community libraries

Changes to the mobile library service across Essex and help for communities that want to set up their own libraries are going ahead after a public consultation.

The [new timetable changes](#) take effect on April 3.

More than 1,400 people and organisations had their say in the consultation last autumn and broadly supported plans to remove unused stops, merge stops serving the same community and increase the minimum stop time to 30 minutes.

The changes are being made because use of the current mobile library service has nearly halved since 2011, and seven of the nine mobile library vehicles are at the end of their working lives, making them unreliable as well as expensive to replace.

The new service will be provided by two newer vehicles, which are larger and better equipped.

Three quarters of the people who responded to the consultation were regular mobile library users and they favoured visits every three weeks, instead of every four weeks.

Respondents did not agree with removing stops less than two miles from a library building, so Essex County Council Cabinet reduced the distance limit to 1.5 miles.

Anyone unable to access a library or mobile library can sign up for the Home Library Service, which is delivered by volunteers, or a Friends and Family card, so that others can collect books on their behalf. You can sign up at your library, online at libraries.essex.gov/home-library-service or by phone on 0345 603 7628.

Details of the new timetable will be displayed at each mobile library stop before 3 April and sent to town and parish councils. You will be able to search for stops near you on the Essex Libraries website at libraries.essex.gov.uk/mobile-library-service.

If you are interested in setting up a community library please e-mail libraries@essex.gov.uk

My role

I continue to be Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste, and it is proving to be a busy portfolio. There are proposals for a second nuclear power station at Bradwell and I have oversight of that on the County's behalf. I am also responsible for supporting work to reduce flooding and work very closely with Environment Agency colleagues to get funding for a whole range of programmes, not just inland but also in protecting the coastline. I have received visits from the Flood Minister, Therese Coffey, and the Chief executive of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan. These visits raise the profile of work done in Essex and our Flood Team is recognised as being one of the best in the country.

Other work covers out Outdoor education Centres and Country Parks. Both are investing significantly in order to improve income which will be reinvested in further improvements.

Our joint agency work on fly tipping is beginning to show dividends, with the net closing on a number of suspects. My next piece of work is to reduce general littering which is proving to be a blight across the county.