

## **ECC Annual report Southminster Division by Cllr Wendy Stamp 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024.**

Hopefully your Councillors and residents have been kept up to date throughout the year on the decisions being made as well as new initiatives, transformation projects – consultations and strategic direction for the future via the regular updates I send to your excellent Clerks or Chief Officers instead of a monthly report. A monthly report can often result in missing urgent updates and press releases. Can I thank everyone for sharing all the important information and links to important references and legislation, on your Council websites and notice boards where possible.

There is little point in repeating anything shared thus far, so I will give you a *brief* report. Believe me I could have written even more.

Starting with the positive, I must thank the clerks and chief officers, again, for their support and professionalism who have worked hard for applying for funding for important community projects for the locality fund allocation and the free trees offered. Both are excellent opportunities and the locality fund that will continue. I have no doubt ECC will continue to lead on tackling the real climate emergency. U tube link is <https://youtu.be/78B52uKEHtU?si=xJ7Vml6sgfO24aR6>

The remainder was renamed 'Local Community Fund.' The Local Community Fund operated as twelve separate funds, each covering the area of a district, borough or city council. The fund for each district was £4,000 for each county councillor representing the relevant area. The fund had to be spent on one of three areas: Levelling up, Tackling Climate Change, and Youth services.

We (the ECC Division Members for the Maldon District) decided to direct funding specifically to help our secondary schools to purchase educational and pastoral care resources and to projects to support young people in the District. The projects funded to go into our secondary schools were a production called 'Shadows' produced by N-Act, a 'Do you Hear Me' work shop produced by Tic Box Productions, and Resilience Voyage for the visit of the County lines "Drugs Bus", a double decker bus designed to educate and to raise young people's awareness of gangs, grooming, and knife crime to our schools.

For our secondary schools we also funded the purchase of Check Your Drink (CYD), easy to use drug detection strips to be made available to sixth form students. These strips test for both GHB and Ketamine, the two most widely used drink spiking drugs.

We also funded two one day events at the Maldon and Burnham Skate Parks run by King Ramps. The events were aimed at 100-150 young people with demonstrations from some of the country's top professional skateboarders and BMX riders. Competitions were held at the end of the events which were open for all abilities and judged by professionals. King Ramps provided prizes for the top 3 places in skateboard, scooter and BMX competitions. Workshops were also open to all ages

and abilities for which full safety equipment (helmets knee, elbow and wrist pads) and skateboards and BMX bikes was provided.

The Locality Fund and the Local Community Fund open again for applications this May, so if you have a project or community initiative, please do contact me with your suggestions/applications at [cllr.wendy.stamp@essex.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.wendy.stamp@essex.gov.uk)

Outside of our secondary schools we provided funding to the MDCVS Community Gaming Initiative project which runs activities for people, particularly younger people, to build social connections and other skills such as team working and problem solving.

Essex County Council announced in February of this year the review of the Local Minerals Plan. The Minerals Local Plan Review Consultation was launched on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February and will finish on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April. Hopefully, many of you will have taken the time to comment on both the draft Replacement Minerals Local Plan.

Also launched in January of this year, was the Mid & South Essex Integrated Care Boards' Consultation on 'Proposed Changes to Services at Local Community Hospitals', A huge number of residents responded on future of St Peter's Hospital and the future of medical services in the district-thank you. We all know the transport infrastructure is lacking in the Dengie thus causing major difficulties getting to appointments at Maldon, never mind Brentwood, Braintree and Broomfield.

### **Budget Headlines.**

The 2023/24 financial year was a challenging year. Like many councils up and down the country, Essex County Council experienced pressure on both Adult's and Children's Services and Home to School Transport. The care market continues to struggle with capacity, and there is still uncertainty around the timing and financial impact of potential care reform. The Council continues to operate in a climate of uncertainty and volatility - inflation has begun to reduce, although it is still above the Bank of England target rate, interest rates remain high and the Council continues to face a significant level of uncertainty in the medium term.

Essex County Council has a legal responsibility to operate within a balanced budget. With the changes and reductions in Government grant funding over recent years, coupled with increasing and more complex demand for core services such as caring for the elderly, protecting vulnerable children and supporting those families who need it, the financial situation continues to be challenging.

In February, Essex County Council agreed it's new Budget for 2024/25. The Council again had difficult choices to make to produce a balanced budget. They were to increase taxes or facing unacceptable and unpalatable cuts in services – never popular and much frowned upon as many disadvantaged residents in our society are

often on the receiving end. The Council balanced the budget against unforeseen financial pressures caused by the need to support the recovery from Covid, the cost-of-living crisis, the war in Ukraine, the energy cost hike, high inflation levels plus existing challenges to reform and reshape our services. We still must ensure we look after and respond to huge increases in demand from those vulnerable in our society and who need our help the most.

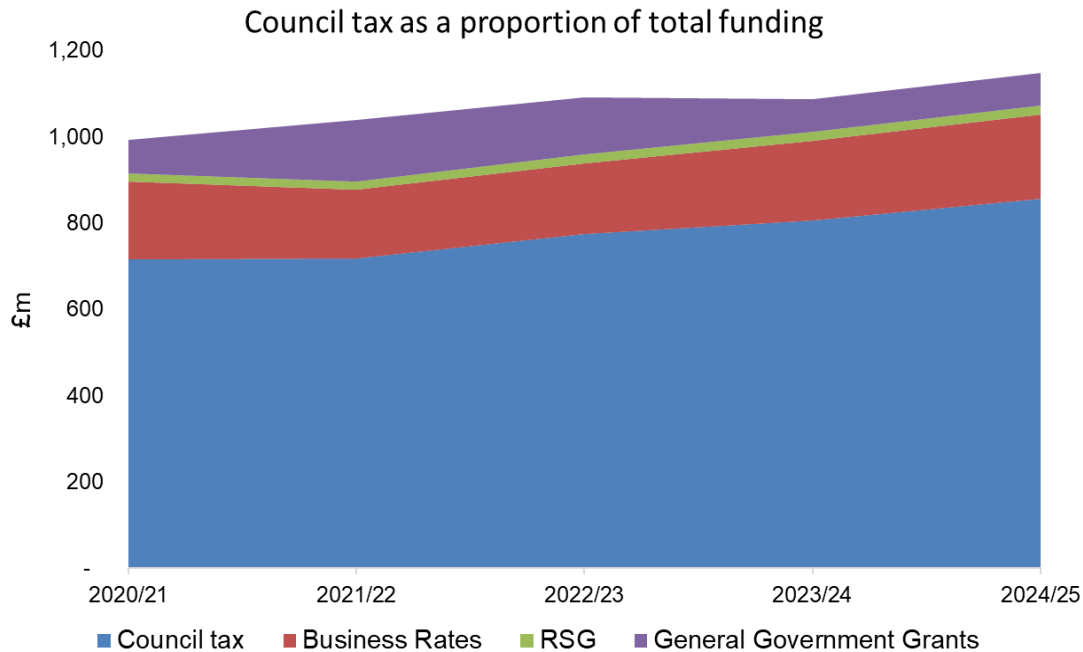
Understanding the cost-of-living crises, ECC has created a £50million cost of living programme, investing in summer clubs so that thousands of young people can participate in holiday activities and have a hot meal when not in term time school. The Council continues not to close libraries but to improve them and working to improve the country parks and green spaces, supporting everyone's health & wellbeing.

The Everyone's Essex Annual Plan, strategic aims and budget was approved at Full Council and the net cost of services was set at £1,148.0million (m) for 2024/25 and the net revenue budget requirement was set at £1,073.4m (net cost of services less general government grants) for 2024/25. The strategic aims are:-

- Strong, inclusive and sustainable economy.
- High quality environment.
- Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages.
- A great place for children to live and grow.

The total council tax funding requirement was set at £848.3m for 2024/25 – Essex County Council's element of the council tax was increased by 4.99% comprising of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and 2.0% adult social care precept. This spending supports the most vulnerable in our communities including older people, people with learning difficulties, mental health difficulties and physical and sensory impairments. The precept is being used to insulate Adult Social Care from having to make higher savings, and support growth in need caused by changes in the demographics of our population and inflation, including the national living wage rise.

This resulted in the Essex County Council element of the council tax being £1,522.53 for a Band D property in 2024/25 - this is an increase of £1.39 per household per week.



Net expenditure of £1,148m is funded by council tax, business rates, Revenue Support Grant and General Government Grants. Income from Council Tax is the largest funding stream and will make up 75% of our funding in 2024/25.

**Everyones Essex.**

I have decided to include the paragraph underneath as it was in last years report. I am happy to say some of below IS now a higher priority – the actual delivery is frustratingly slow. More important is the delivery of local schools including the support and improvement for our SEND community. I was hoping to be able to say “things have got better” but they haven’t. This cannot be only laid at ECC door but Central Government and Dept of Education. Whilst I understand the complexities of individual needs – it is vital that ECHP (Educational Care Health Plans) are carried out within 20 weeks – ECC only achieve 1%!.

At the recent PAF (People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee), held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 an unprecedented number of questions from the public was submitted 18 – some residents attended in person. I suggest if you are able to watch this meeting on u tube you should. There are a number of ECC Councillors who still work hard to meet the needs of our SEN children as we believe everyone deserves a fair chance to receive a good education. I will take this opportunity of thanking all the parents who contact me for help and highlighting the unacceptable, inadequate unfair education system we are in but a special thank you to Chantelle Poulter – Dengie SEND and Tara Strydom – Burnham SEND.

*Cllr Bentley has a clear strategy, it is an intergenerational change, focusing on net zero, levelling up and devolution. He is aspiring to building a pathway to a better*

future. Whilst I absolutely agree with this aspiration and strategy, I am finding this is not inclusive of ALL resident's needs.

Sadly, we are all aware, despite raising genuine problems ranging from lack of local school places to local passenger transport for SEND children Essex County Council is unwilling to compromise even with special circumstances, the only option left is the appeal process.

Cllr Chris Whitbread, the "Chancellor" said they couldn't cater for the minority only the majority – hmm how is that levelling up on all levels – it is not in my opinion. Sadly, I feel the Southminster division has not been on the radar of ECC. Importantly when it comes to addressing rural challenges and lack of adequate services and investment. Substantial increase in traffic movements resulting in serious damage to the road network, reduced bus transport services, poor connectivity for walking and cycling, timely infrastructure delivery, planned digital investment to promote vital growth for local economy and tourism. Focus on the delivery of a local SEND school hence reducing the need for 75-minute travel times.

On a positive note here is the link for ECC's Levelling up year 2. Its 25 pages long but a snap shot is on page 5.



<https://www.essex.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Levelling%20up%20year%20two%20impact%20report%20-%20Reaching%20new%20heights.pdf>

## **Highways and Local Highways Panel**

Since my last report the Council has had a change of cabinet member - Cllr Tom Cunningham. At Full Council, they made the welcome announcement of an additional £12m for highways maintenance, £8m of which will go to fund additional highways crews to be tasked by their local councillor, an extra £2m to go to Local Highways Panels and also funding for extra enforcement resources. The details of the scheme for locally directed maintenance work will be announced shortly. I certainly hope they will deliver for everyone and it will now be fit for purpose as it hasn't been for over nine months! I have wasted hours and hours, working hard for residents, and delivering very little – something I am not accepting responsibility for! Schemes that I have submitted in the division is numerous with limited delivery. The only ones completed are the repair of Burnham on Crouch Quay and Whitney Road plus 20s Plenty Scheme for Dunkirk Road around the school. Local Highways Panels are due a reset at the end of this month in terms of what type of scheme will fall within their remit and an announcement is due shortly. I continue to argue for schemes within the Southminster Division and District to be a funding priority as speed reduction and highways safety are vital for those living and driving on rural roads. We all know how long we have been trying to reduce the speed on B1010 through Althorne and despite approval it has still to be delivered – I fear more U turns. The fatalities on our rural roads and accidents have sadly risen with the number of accidents increasing.

### **Quick links- again but ever useful :-**

The standard response from County "Please be assured that all publicly maintained roads throughout Essex are inspected in their entirety on a routine basis. The frequency of these inspections is dependent on the classification of the road in question, for example, local roads are inspected annually, and priority routes are inspected more frequently on a monthly or quarterly basis due to the important function they perform within the highway network. Station Road is inspected on a quarterly basis.

The Highway Inspectors will also perform separate inspections of particular issues in response to reports made by members of the public.

During these inspections the Highway Inspectors risk assesses issues which are then prioritised for repair based on their severity and risk to public safety. The timescale for the repair depends on the risk assessment and which type of road the pothole is on. To view the different response times Essex Highways must adhere to, please visit the 'Potholes' page of the Essex County Council website:

<https://www.essexhighways.org/potholes>

If there is a particular pothole you are concerned about, you can report this to Essex Highways via their dedicated online Report it Tool: <https://www.essexhighways.org/tell-us>. You will be given a unique reference number which you can use to track the progress of the inspection and the action taken.”

Useful links Essex website [Essex Highways | Essex County Council](#)

Report an issue you have seen [Tell us - Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Track an issue you reported [Track it - Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Find out what road works are happening in your area [one.network](#)

Find out what works Essex highways are responsible for and planned programmes of capital works [Highways Information Map | Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Find out about road works happening two weeks up to 12 months into the future [Future Roadworks Map | Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Track gritters [Track the gritting lorries | Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Essex highways latest news [News, Press Releases and Highway Highlights \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Further reading road strategies including annual maintenance plans [Road strategies | Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Throughout the year, I have continued to support residents with their highway problems but can I ask pot holes, white lines and flooding defects are reported to your parishes and town clerks first and then to me - with the reference number - if the issue requiring escalation contact me at [\*\*cllr.wendy.stamp@essex.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:cllr.wendy.stamp@essex.gov.uk)

## **Boundary Changes**

There will be boundary changes next year in time for next year's County Elections. I have sent out the possible changes. I will of course update you all when the final changes have been agreed.

Please continue to email me with any problems and thank you all for all your hard work and working together with me – trying to improve the place we live, love and work.

Wendy

Cllr Stamp

Southminster Division