

## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019/20 ON ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL MATTERS – Cllr Penny Channer CC**

I start this annual report for the ECC Municipal Year 2019/20 in a way I never envisaged would be necessary just three months ago as we now face the biggest challenge many of us have ever seen. The unprecedented times we find ourselves in due to COVID- 19 has affected the ending of ECC's 19/20 year. More so it has affected everyone in the county, in the country, the way we live, work and play. It has affected many by taking loved ones from them, before their time. It is tragic. By pulling together, this great county and this great country will come through it, 'battle weary ' maybe , but not defeated ,come through it we will.

ECC's aim is to keep people safe and informed. We worked as quickly as possible in responding to the latest guidance around COVID-19. This has meant some difficult decisions were made and there may be more. To mitigate the impact on our services has meant some disruption to and in some cases the closure of our services. All to stem the spread of Coronavirus and protect our NHS from coming under intolerable pressure.

From 20/3/2020 Libraries closed for up to three months and Adult Community Learning (ACL)classroom- based course provision was suspended until further notice. All ACL centres were closed to learners and the general public. It did not include those who are in vulnerable groups as per government guidance and they were contacted.

ECC has taken swift action to support the Adult Social Care market by announcing that £11.4M was to be released from its reserves to support the Adult Care Providers to cope with the anticipated demands placed upon them by COVID-19. The decision focuses on providers in the homecare market, including within supported living, extra care and those who manage their own direct payments. Further actions are being developed to support the health and social care sector, including providers of other care services.

Since writing this other decisions are likely to have been made .I urge you to keep up to date on the situation in Essex as changes are announced at: [www.essex.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.essex.gov.uk/coronavirus) and social media channels. Please Keep Safe, keep well. Staying home may save lives.

Even before the pressures that COVID-19 may bring Local Government has been under financial pressure over the last decade. ECC has made significant savings whilst proud that we still maintained excellent services, retaining our ambition to serve all the people of Essex and keep Council Tax rises to a minimum, focusing on reducing bureaucracy and increasing productivity which has led ECC to be identified consistently as one of the top ten most efficient Councils in the country.

During 19/20 we continued commitment to our four strategic aims: Enable inclusive economic growth; Help people get the best start and age well; Help create great places to grow up, live and work; Transform the council to achieve more with less.

Major achievements of ECC in 19/20 include:

Delivery of more than 2800 additional school pupil places; developed an Essex Skills Strategy ; secured £318m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund to support infrastructure projects in support of economic growth ; our children's Services rated outstanding by Ofsted for safeguarding the most vulnerable children in Essex ; invested an additional £1m to support the needs of children and adults with mental health issues ; secured nearly £750,000 grant funding from the Coastal Communities Fund for the delivery of the £1m Essex Path to Prosperity project ; delivered £60m of new savings and efficiencies to ensure that we continue to provide best value to taxpayers ; implemented a new fast payment arrangement with our suppliers giving them better cash flow, but also saving Essex

over £1m ; delivered £10m through the sale of surplus assets and reinvested that money within the county.

We invested £500,000 with the Office of the Police and Fire Crime Commissioner to create a Violence and Vulnerability Unit to address issues relating to gangs and associated exploitation of young people and vulnerable adults across Essex. The unit has been successful in receiving significant investment from Government.

ECC announced in October 2019 the setting up of the new independent, cross party Essex Climate Action Commission. It will advise on how we can best and most quickly achieve the Government's net zero carbon target, whilst also making Essex a centre for green technologies and enterprise. ECC's 20/21 budget allocated a reserve of £5m for Climate Action, this will be used for the implementation of recommendations from the Commission.

Also announced in October was the Essex Forest Initiative involving 375,000 trees being planted across the county over the next five years, capturing 60,000 tonnes of Carbon.

Footways in over 300 locations, nominated by ECC Members, were repaired using an investment of £700k. Woodham Walter has benefitted from this. To build on this an extra £5m in the 20/21 budget will be committed for improving road and footpath condition throughout the county.