

MALDON DIVISION ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2024 – COUNCILLOR JANE FLEMING

I'm delighted to present my third annual report for Woodham Mortimer & Hazeleigh Parish Council's Annual Parish Meeting. Firstly, I would like to thank the Parish Council for their tireless work in supporting residents and protecting the parish.

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 6th of February and will finish on the 9th of April. Hopefully, many of you will have taken the time to comment on both the draft Replacement Minerals Local Plan and the interim results of the site assessments that will guide the allocation of new mineral sites to support development in Essex to 2040.

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', which again hopefully many of you found the time to get involved with as the future of St Peter's Hospital and the future of medical services in the District are at its heart. The Consultation has now been extended to Thursday 11th April.

In September, I supported Maldon District Council's Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival, a hugely successful week long event. The Festival was recently listed in the top 10 UK Walking Festivals in The Guardian newspaper and will run again this year at the end of September. Also returning to the District again this year is the RideLondon Womens World Tour which will be held on Saturday the 25th of May. The event is accompanied every year by the launch of a grant scheme from the London Marathon Foundation which aims to encourage 'active' projects in the community. The scheme will be launched shortly, so if you have a project in my mind, please get in touch with me for further details.

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.

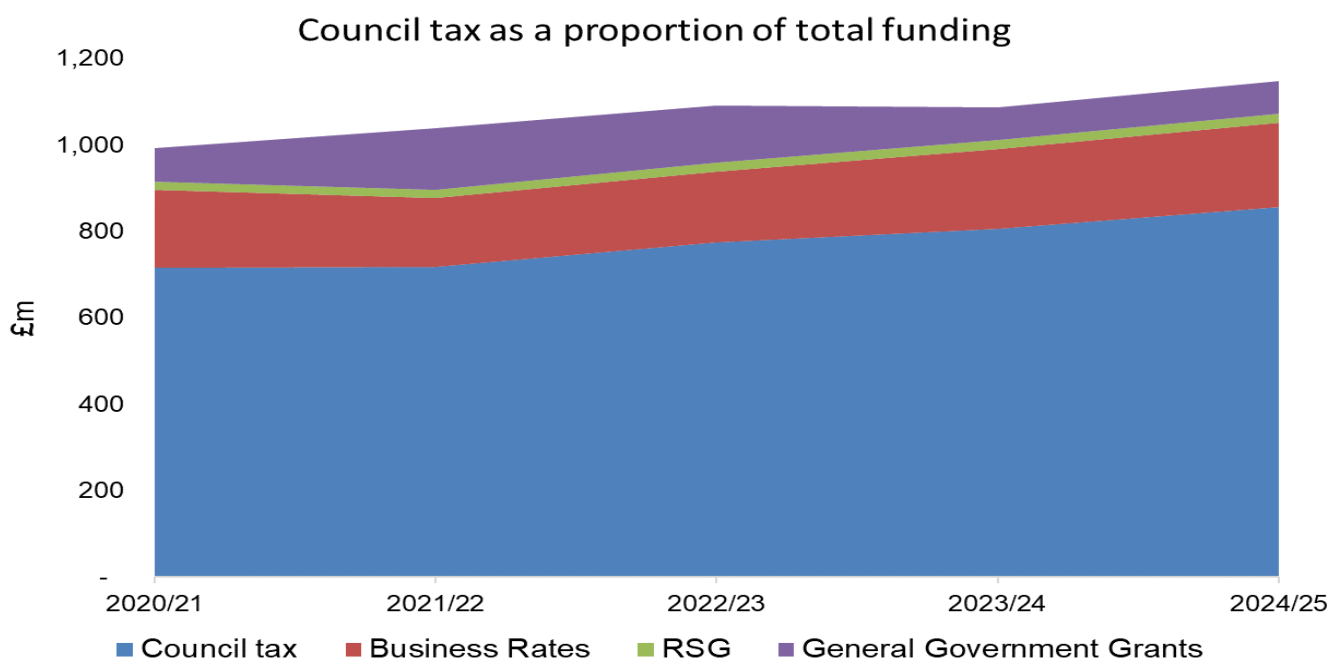
Essex County Council has a legal responsibility to operate within a balanced budget. With the changes and reductions in Government grant funding over recent years, coupled with increasing and more complex demand for core services such as caring for the elderly, protecting vulnerable children and supporting 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 a stark choice in balancing its budget - of increasing taxes or facing unacceptable cuts in services. We balanced the budget against a backdrop of some of the most challenging times that local government has ever faced. New financial pressures caused by the need to support the recovery from Covid, the cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine, the energy cost spike, and unprecedented inflation levels have all landed on top of existing challenges to reform and reshape our services and respond to huge increases in demand from those who need our help most.

The Everyone's Essex Annual Plan 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 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.

Also at Full Council, the Cabinet Member for Highways 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.

Investment is also being made in Essex for the long term: there has been a focus on levelling up to ensure that opportunity is spread to all parts of the county. Investment has been made in the construction of a new railway station at Beaulieu Park – the first publicly built new station on the Great Eastern Main Line for 100 years. In the last year, 125,000 trees have been planted in the county in the last year bringing the total since the start of this Council period to half a million. ECC has also expanded the provision of care-tech – enabling thousands of people to live more independent lives; and invested in innovation across our children’s services, building on ECC’s status as one of the best children’s services authorities in the country.

In September I was invited to view the construction and sign the steel of the new 420 place primary school being built at Limebrook Way, Maldon.

VISITING THE SITE OF THE NEW LIMBROOK WAY PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MALDON



The ECC Locality Fund reopened for applications last May with £5k allocated per Division. Again, I'm pleased to say that every penny of the funding specifically allocated for the Maldon Division Locality Fund, was spent. Projects that benefitted this year were Wentworth School Council for an Active Travel Scheme designed by Living Streets called The Walk to School Challenge, Beeleigh Mill Restoration Group to fund the renovation of the historic Elephant Boiler, Helping Hands a Carers Support Group to fund a day trip to Southwold this summer, Woodham Mortimer Litter Picking Group to fund litter picking equipment, and Purleigh Village Shop to fund the renovation of an outbuilding to use for community events. My thanks go to the councils and community groups who approached me with their projects and for the hard work put in.

The remaining Locality funding was directed to a new fund – the '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.

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.

AT THE NATIONAL LITERACY CONFERENCE AT COUNTY HALL LAST WEEK



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.jane.fleming@essex.gov.uk

The Local Highways Panel work continued very slowly this year, with delivery of schemes once again impacted by resource issues at Essex Highways. 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 a new Member Led Local Works Scheme is also due to be launched shortly. I continue to argue for schemes within the Maldon Division and District to be a funding priority as speed reduction and highways safety are vital for those living and driving on rural roads.

Throughout the year, I have continued to support residents with their concerns and to assist parishes with their issues requiring escalation. If you have concerns about an issue in the Division, please email me: cllr.jane.fleming@essex.gov.uk