

ECC Report February 2020

Budget proposals aim for action on climate change

A £5million fund to enable action on climate change and an independent commission to oversee the work are key elements of draft budget plans published by Essex County Council ahead of its Budget Meeting on 11th February.

The Council's draft Organisation Plan and budget for 2020/21 outlines plans for significant investment in services and infrastructure.

Also proposed is an extra £5million for highways to enable investment in improving the condition of roads and pavements, and new investment in technology to support social care case management, more money to help meeting increased demand for home to school transport and adults and children's social care.

For the second year running, more than £200 million has been earmarked for capital investment, including housing schemes, major infrastructure improvements such as the A127 Fairglen interchange, and new schools for children with Special Education Needs and Disability.

According to papers published on 14th January, the overall financial picture remains challenging, with the Council's future revenue support and social care grant from central government uncertain, plus the impact of inflation, population growth, the new National Living Wage and increasing demand for services.

This has necessitated a proposed ECC council tax increase of 1.99%, alongside the continuation for a further year of the Government's social care precept of 2%.

This would mean the annual bill for a band 'D' property in Essex for County Council services would be £1,321.11, a weekly increase of 97p – meaning the increase for an average household would be below £1 a week, again for the second year running.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "Action speaks louder than words and we intend to use our new fund to take action on climate change. We will be advised on how we can get the maximum from that investment by an Independent Climate Change Commission, which we are in the process of establishing.

"Our budget proposals strike the right balance between an affordable increase and investing in the services residents told us are the most important for them to be protecting in our budget consultation.

"Our proposals reflect the people's priorities – so caring for vulnerable people and investing in roads and infrastructure, for example, are high on the list.

“For a Band D household, the proposed increase in Council Tax is 97p a week, which we believe strikes the right balance between protecting services and paying just a little bit extra for them.

“Inflation, increasing demand and uncertainty around our core grants mean that the financial outlook is still challenging. But we have an outstanding record of providing value to tax-payers and for two years running we have appeared in the top ten most productive councils. We’ve saved over £1million a week, every week, over the past four years through cutting waste, innovating and doing business more efficiently, and this will continue.”

The Council’s Cabinet met to approve the proposals on Tuesday 21 January, before they go to Full Council for final approval on Tuesday 12 February.

The Council carried out an on-line consultation with residents and businesses during November and December 2019. There were 396 responses to the consultation. The key messages from respondents to the consultation are that:

- The majority of participants (55%) feel well informed about public services.
- 84% of participants recognise the financial challenges facing the county council and the impact that these are likely to have on future spending.
- Almost two thirds (62%) of participants have felt the impact of service change arising from national funding reductions.
- Residents have a clear view on the approaches that ECC should take in managing financial pressures. There is strongest support for strategies that seek to:
 - prioritise spending to protect the most vulnerable and those without choices
 - help build self-reliance and reduce dependency on public services; and
 - streamline services so that they can deliver the same outcomes.

The consultation suggests that participants are unlikely to support reducing or stopping services wholesale to protect others.

- The majority of residents would be prepared to either pay more, or give their time, to support local services that are experiencing financial pressure. 43% would be prepared to pay more through a one-off donation or a new/higher charge when using the service.
- Residents want to see key services protected in the face of financial pressure. More than 80% of participants identified care and support for vulnerable older people and those with mental health needs, and the maintenance of roads, footways and bridges as services which should be protected.

If you hate spending time searching for the best energy deals, sign-up for the Essex Energy Switch today.

The collective switching initiative could beat the tariffs you find on price comparison sites and help you save up to £250 on your gas and electricity bills. The best part is, we do all the hard work for you.

All you need to register is a copy of your latest energy bill; it's free, takes five minutes and there is no obligation to switch if you change your mind. Plus, the more people the sign-up, the bigger the potential saving per household.

So, here's a bright idea, register for the Essex Energy Switch before 10 February and see how much you could save. If you've signed up previously, you will need to do so again in order to continue benefitting. **Watt** are you waiting for? Don't miss out on the Essex Energy Switch and check out the link below

https://essex.ichoosr.com/landing?utm_medium=besw%20news%20story&utm_campaign=essex%20energy%20switch&utm_source=ecc%20website&utm_content=&utm_term=#

Essex 2020: A Year of Science and Creativity

“By experiencing our pioneering STEM industries and rich diversity of arts and culture first-hand, Essex 2020 will help residents of all ages feel proud of the county's past achievements and believe in our exciting future. A new decade of opportunity for our county has begun and Essex 2020 is our window to the world.” - Gavin Jones, Essex County Council's Chief Executive

This year, we're shining a spotlight on the scientific and creative innovation that is unique to Essex, with the aim of creating a lasting impact for future generations in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM).

Essex already has a surprising and inspiring track record of breaking new ground; our diverse county delivered the first entertainment broadcast to global airwaves; created the Queen's favourite jam and helped bring Big Beat to the world courtesy of resident Liam Howlett of the Prodigy.

We also have a rich history of entrepreneurship, with innovators including Lord Alan Sugar and digital colour photography inventor Michael Francis Tompsett, alongside a myriad of successful businesses which are helping to revolutionise the world we live in, to name but a few.

Essex 2020 is seeking to build on this with over 360 inspiring events – at least one for each day of the year – that will celebrate Essex's pioneering past and present-day innovators. We

want to elevate the aspirations of young people in terms of their future careers, drive innovation across the county and inspire residents to feel proud of where they live.

Find out more about how you can get involved at [essex2020.com](https://www.essex2020.com)

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Applying for the EU settlement scheme

The UK has left the EU and while there is no immediate changes for anyone living in the UK, for some there are important actions that need to be undertaken now.

If you are an EU, EEA or Swiss resident living in Essex, regardless of how long you have lived here for, it is important that you apply for the EU settlement scheme before 30 June 2021.

The scheme provides the basis for which you will be able to work, use the NHS or access any other benefits or services to which you are entitled to.

To apply for the EU Settlement Scheme, <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families> you will need to prove your identity using a valid passport or biometric residence card. You can do this yourself using the EU Exit: ID document check app on a mobile phone or tablet.

If you do not have access to a suitable phone or tablet, you can seek help from selected Essex Libraries where there is a free walk-in service available

<https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/facilities-and-charges/european-settlement-scheme-readers>

Are you looking to grow your business and develop your existing workforce? Or a change of career?

ACL Essex offers a fantastic choice of apprenticeships across the County. We work with all employers who take training and development as seriously as we do. We work in partnership with every employer to ensure that training and development needs are met every step of the way. If you need help in recruiting we can assist with that too. We seek out motivated and enthusiastic individuals who are bursting with potential, and serious about launching their careers. Read our brochure here

As well as apprenticeships, we have a huge range of training and development programmes available to suit both the needs of the employer and employee. We have lots of ideas for 'alternative' team building days too! Visit:

http://www.aclessex.com/employers/?utm_medium=campaigns%20banner&utm_campaign=acl%20b2b&utm_source=ecc%20website&utm_content=&utm_term=

Help young people 'find their brave'

What does bravery mean to you? This Children's Mental Health Week, we're supporting efforts by charity, Place2Be, to encourage young people to be brave and think about their mental health.

Nationally, one in eight children has a diagnosable mental health condition and many are already struggling by the time they start school. Therefore, conversations with children about their mental wellbeing need to start at a young age. We need to support children to find ways to look after their mental health and to have the confidence to ask for help if they need it.

Throughout this week, Place2Be will be asking people to share what makes them feel brave to help inspire young people. Every child is different and being brave will mean something different to everyone; it is vital that young people find a positive way of looking after their mental health that works for them. You can show your support by joining the conversation and helping them 'find their brave'.

There is lots of local and national support available for young people who may be struggling with their mental health. The Livewell campaign <https://www.livewellcampaign.co.uk/livewell-articles/mental-health-support-for-young-people/> offers information and links to resources that can help. Take a look this Children's Mental Health Week and join the conversation on social media, by following @Place2Be <https://www.place2be.org.uk/>