

A budget for Everyone in Essex - investing in services, providing opportunities for communities, protecting and enhancing the environment

Proposals contain a below-inflation council tax increase and ambitions to invest in and protect services, renew the economy and create a fairer Essex in the post-pandemic era

Essex County Council's budget proposals, revealed today (Tuesday, 11 January 2022) feature investment in families, communities, the economy and environment but also peg a proposed council tax increase to below the current inflation rate.

The agenda set out in *Everyone's Essex – the plan for Levelling Up the County* is at the heart of proposals, which also deal with rising demand for key services, particularly social care, as a result of the pandemic.

Plans include investing £1.3 billion over the next four years on major infrastructure projects, such as new schools and large road improvements, a scaling up on previous years. The spend in 2022/23 is set to be £284m, money which also supports local contractors and their workers.

Real action is to be taken on climate change and carbon reduction through responding to the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendations, including a £200 million spending commitment toward Essex's net zero targets and achieving the *Everyone's Essex* commitment to a high-quality environment.

Support for businesses will continue through the *Backing Essex Business* programme, supporting business growth across the county, promoting economic growth and creating jobs, as well as continued investment in skills to help people progress and get back into work.

Libraries will also be at the heart of supporting communities, alongside £10 million in funding for Levelling Up including £500,000 for new Community Challenge Fund and help for families in managing finances, alongside encouraging businesses to be more family friendly.

The proposals amount to a council tax increase of 4.49 per cent. This is made up of a 2.99 per cent council tax increase (including 1% specifically for adult social care), plus a further 1.5 per cent for Adult Social Care that was deferred from last year during the pandemic.

This would mean that for an average Band D property household, the ECC element of council tax will increase by £60.21 next year, or £1.16 per week.

Despite a strong track record of financial management and one of the lowest County Council tax rates in England – delivering savings of over £45 million a year for the past 13 years - the council is not immune to current inflation pressures and rises in utility prices.

Inflation has added £32m to next year's bill for services, with interest rate rises increasing the cost of borrowing for the Council's capital spending programme.

Demand for Council services which protect the most vulnerable has also risen – particularly in adult social care.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "This budget will allow us to commit to *Everyone's Essex*, our plan to improve the economy, the environment and life for children and families and promoting health, care and wellbeing for all ages.

"We are responsible for ensuring that we renew our economy, provide equal opportunities for all and ignite ambition for the people and places we are privileged to represent. This budget is a crucial step on that journey."

CLlr Chris Whitbread, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs, said:

“We have a stark choice – either we propose an increase, or we face unacceptable reductions to services.

“For all of us the last few years have been especially tough, and recently we’ve seen the price of energy rise and our fuel bills go up and increases in the price of goods and materials. All of which has been compounded by the pressures of Covid.

“Councils, just like any business or family, are affected by inflation and price rises for goods and services. The increase in the national living wage, while welcome, means we will have to pay our contractors more.

“I am proud of the work we have done on these proposals in difficult circumstances. We are not willing to compromise the level of service residents receive. We are committed to making sure vulnerable residents receive the care they need, that the roads we travel on remain safe, that we continue to invest in communities and that our environment becomes greener, cleaner and healthier.”

CLlr Peter Schwier | Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader / Climate Czar



Hedingham Division, Essex County Council

Renewal, Equality and Ambition

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