

# PressRelease

**Communications** PO Box 11, Chelmsford CM1 1LX

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## County Council announces £300m budget spending plan

A RECORD programme of more than £300 million will be invested in roads, schools, new homes and supporting the economy across Essex, as part of the County Council's budget proposals for 2018/19.

The budget, which will go to Cabinet next week before it is put to the vote at Full Council on February 13, sets out the Council's proposed investment and spending programme for the coming year.

It also includes a continued commitment to innovation and digital technology, which is already having a positive impact on services such as adult social care, where tablet computers have more than halved the time it takes social workers to complete assessments.

The continued reduction in central Government funding, which will disappear completely by 2020, combined with increasing demand for services, increases in inflation, business rates and National Living Wage payments, mean the Council is proposing to increase Council Tax for only the third time in the last eight years.

This will rise by 2% through the Government's social care precept, which will be ring-fenced to adult social care, and 2.99% to support the delivery of vital services such as highways, public transport, libraries and recycling centres.

The proposed rise means a £1.12 per week increase for the average Band D property.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "This is a positive, practical and prioritised set of proposals. It takes a balanced and realistic budget view but at the same time, proposes record investment in key services and infrastructure.

"We have growing demand for essential services and meeting that demand with dwindling resources is a huge challenge. But we can face this challenge with confidence and strength – our track record for efficiency and innovation is second to none.

"Like households and businesses, Councils are not immune to inflation and increasing costs. This year, we are asking for a little over £1 a week more from the

average household to enable us to protect and invest in essential services which our communities rely on – care, roads, transport, education and environment.

“We will also continue to fight Essex’s corner and press the Government to provide social care reform, 100% business rate retention and a fair deal on funding for local government, so we have a level playing field on which to grow ours and the national economy in the post-Brexit world.”

The Council has delivered over £350m of savings in the last four years by generating income and reducing costs.

In the last year, the Council created 2,500 new places in Essex schools, 92% of which are rated good or outstanding, and supported the creation of 11,370 apprenticeships.

It also repaired more than 5,000 potholes, resurfaced more than 400 miles of road, while bringing superfast broadband to another 100,000 homes in the county.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Resources, said: “Our investment plans will plough £300 million into Essex’s infrastructure - including a £14m investment for broadband, £87m into mainstream schools, £17m into special schools, £9m into housing, £126m into major road schemes and maintenance, plus an extra £3m for potholes and pavement repairs.

“We’ll also continue investing in apprenticeships to ensure our economy has the skills it needs to thrive.

“Costs and demand for services are increasing. But our track record since 2010 – working hard to save residents money and absorbing cost pressures such as the National Living Wage - has meant we have kept millions of pounds in the pockets of Essex taxpayers by not increasing council tax and keeping increases as low as possible.

“In 2018, we will focus on looking at new ways to generate an income for the Council, outside of the usual fees and charges, as we continue to build on the strong financial foundations we’ve created to do more for Essex residents.”

**ENDS.**

#### **Notes to editors:**

Essex County Council’s proposed Council tax levels for 2018/19 are:

Council Tax Band	2017/18 £	2018/19 £
Band A	775.80	814.50
Band B	905.10	950.25
Band C	1,034.40	1,086.00
<b>Band D</b>	<b>1,163.70</b>	<b>1,221.75</b>

Band E	1,422.30	1,493.25
Band F	1,680.90	1,764.75
Band G	1,939.50	2,036.25
Band H	2,327.40	2,443.50