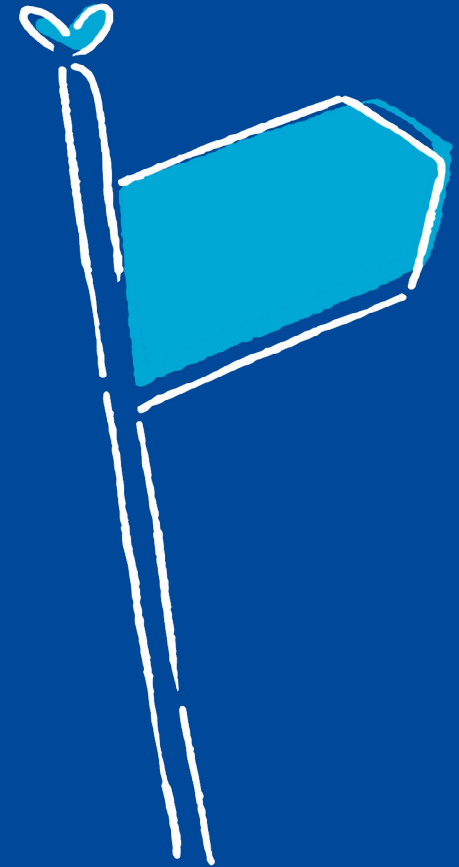


Essex County Council Annual Report

2019/20



Essex County Council

Contents

3	Foreword
5	Strategic Aims and Priorities
6	2019/20 achievements at a glance
10	Resources
12	2019/20 Activity and Performance
13	Aim 1 - Enable inclusive economic growth
21	Aim 2 - Help people get the best start in life and age well
29	Aim 3 - Help create great places to grow up, live and work
35	Aim 4 - Transform the council to achieve more with less

Foreword



Cllr David Finch

Leader, Essex County Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Finch', written over a horizontal line.

From the Leader

I write the foreword to this Annual Report in circumstances that are the most extraordinary in modern memory. In the Spring, I described the Coronavirus pandemic as the great challenge facing our nation since the second world war. I still believe that was an accurate statement.

In the first half of this year, we have experienced dramatic changes to the way we live our lives as a response to a health crisis that has swept across the globe. Where and how we work; how we walk down our streets; who we can meet and how we shop; every thread of the fabric of everyday life was affected.

No one could have predicted the scale of the challenge that we are now facing. It will have profound impacts not only on us as individuals, but also on our communities and on our businesses

– and we are still yet to see or even experience the full impacts of this pandemic.

It is the job of the County Council to secure the economic, social, environmental, and latterly the physical and emotional well-being of our communities. I have led a Council that has always taken those responsibilities extremely seriously and considered it of the utmost importance to plan for stormy weather ahead – even if we can't be sure what form those storms will take. That

Foreword

is why we have focused on efficiencies to protect front line services and transformation of our business models – because an efficient well-run Council which delivers the best possible value to our residents means that we can spend the money where it is needed most – particularly in times of crisis.

So, while the current circumstances throw up challenges, the Council is as well-placed as anywhere else in the country to weather the storm. The Annual Report sets out the progress that we have made in the last twelve months to deliver the aims set out in our [Organisation Strategy](#). It sets out our key achievements and the positive impact we have created for residents and communities. We are justifiably proud of the progress we have made in the last year.

While we applaud these achievements, we must also recognise the profound challenges that are in front of us. Like other parts of the public, voluntary, and business sectors we will need to redouble our efforts to think creatively about how we can best serve the people of this great county. We will need to dig deeper, try harder, work smarter than ever before to secure the outcomes that Essex's residents deserve. What I take from this report is pride in what we have delivered and perhaps more importantly a sense of confidence and a belief in our can-do attitude to address the challenges that lie in front of us – that has always been the Essex way. So, whilst we are conscious of the scale of the task we face, we are undaunted, and confident that we will bounce back stronger than ever before.

Together, for Essex.

Strategic Aims and Priorities

Our Strategic Aims	Our Strategic Priorities	Equality Objectives
Enable inclusive economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills• Enable Essex to attract and grow large firms in high growth industries• Target economic development to areas of opportunity	We will tackle the causes of disadvantage, ensuring that all Essex residents can access good jobs and an excellent education, regardless of their background.
Help people get the best start and age well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to fulfil their potential• Enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care• Improve the health of people in Essex	We will remove the obstacles that hold Essex residents back, tackling inequalities between children and supporting older people to live independently with dignity.
Help create great places to grow up, live and work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities• Help secure sustainable development and protect the environment• Facilitate growing communities and new homes	We will help make it easier for people to travel across Essex, bringing communities together and connecting people to services, employment and learning opportunities.
Transform the council to achieve more with less	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit cost and drive growth in revenue• Develop the capability, performance and engagement of our people• Re-imagine how residents' needs can be met in a digital world	We will employ a diverse workforce, drawing on the different values and experiences that reflect the communities we serve.

2019/20 achievements at a glance

Enable inclusive economic growth



- Construction of M11 J7a has commenced, funding for the improvement to the A12 is included within the Government's RIS2 (Road Investment Strategy 2) programme. We continue to make the case for investment in the A120 and A127 with partners.
- In 2019/20, Superfast Essex enabled a further 14,975 homes and businesses to access superfast broadband, many of these via full-fibre infrastructures. To date this investment has reached more than 17% of all premises.
- A new business-led Success Essex Board for Essex has supported the growth of large companies.
- Our Invest Essex service supported 25 Essex inward investment projects, leading to the relocation of 10 new businesses into Essex, including one large employer, and the creation of 707 new jobs.
- Invest Essex also supported 28 Department for International Trade (DIT) Foreign Direct Investment opportunities.
- The 'Harlow Works' programme supported 151 individuals to increase their skills and to access higher quality employment opportunities.
- The new University of Essex Knowledge Gateway Innovation Centre in Colchester opened in the summer of 2019.

2019/20 achievements at a glance

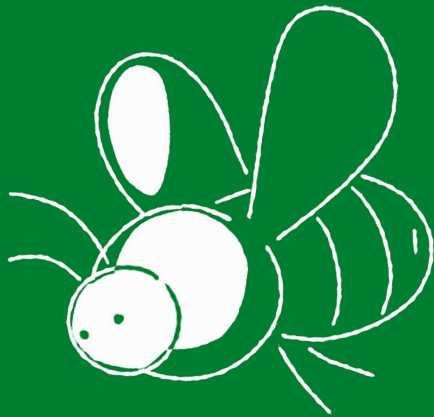
Help people get the best start in life and age well



- We created circa 3,500 new school places through school expansions, including two new secondary schools - Beaulieu Park School and the Paxman Academy created 1,200 and 900 school places respectively.
- The Essex Fostering Service continues to successfully recruit carers, consistently adding over 30 new carers a year. There are now over 520 carers providing placements for over 580 children.
- The summer 2019 Holiday Hunger pilot successfully delivered activity clubs for over 200 low-income families across Essex.
- The Sport England funded Local Delivery Pilot (LDP) used a micro-grants programme to develop over 50 community-led projects to improve physical activity. 17 large projects were started, totalling investment of £625k and attracting match funding of £1.029m.
- Collaborate Essex set up Local learning Disability peer support groups to enable people to live more independently.
- We have supported over 250 Essex businesses to improve the health of their workforce and have delivered over 4,500 Mental Health courses.
- In response to the start of the Covid 19 epidemic, we mobilised significant support for the adult social care sector, moved frontline teams to 7 day working, secured extra capacity, moved to new models for discharge from NHS facilities and started developing new models for working with care homes and supporting and connecting people through technology. Social workers continued to visit children and their families, as well as developing new, online ways of working, to improve their lives.

2019/20 achievements at a glance

**Help create
great places
to grow up,
live and work**



- We secured over £317m of central government Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) investment to develop a new rail station and bypass in Chelmsford and a rapid transit system and link road in Colchester to enable the delivery of 20,000 new homes.
- Our flood protection schemes reduced the risk of flooding to 196 residential properties. Over 1,200 properties have seen a reduction in surface water flood risk since the beginning of our Floods Capital Programme five years ago.
- We continue to invest in our country parks infrastructure, as well as developing new outdoor events. In 2019, we were successfully granted seven Green Flag awards for our parks.
- We have made significant steps towards greener living through our commitment to planting 375,000 new trees over the next 5 years.
- Our Essex Energy Switch campaign encouraged 1,644 residents to switch to energy suppliers with 100% renewable electricity tariffs.
- Working with local Facebook groups has helped us to reach around 222,200 people a month with information and advice.
- Our Community Campaign Model launched the United in Kind campaign to address Social Isolation through kindness and the Never Too Late Mate campaign to tackle Male Suicide.

2019/20 achievements at a glance

Transform the council to achieve more with less



- Essex County Council has already delivered £300million of savings in the last 4 years. We have kept council tax as low as possible for residents, with bills amongst the lowest of county councils in England.
- Analysis by the consultancy iMPower found that we provided the fourth-most efficient children's services in the country.
- The new accessible Essex.gov.uk website was launched in 2019, making it much easier for residents to access council services and find the information that they need.
- In 2019, we brought employee recruitment in-house, saving £495,000. We also implemented an alternative arrangement for temporary recruitment allowing more flexibility, while saving the organisation up to £1.8m.
- We have increased the number of apprentices working for us to 229 from 147 last year. We've also seen a reduction of our gender pay gap by 1.7% since we started reporting and aspire to continue closing the gap.
- We completed the Moulsham Lodge housing development, made up of 26 residential units, which will enable eight adults with disabilities to live independently.
- We completed our LED Phase 3 street lighting programme which converted 20,000 streetlights to save electricity costs.
- A Pathfinder project tested the impact of care technology on people's lives and independence, installing over 1,600 pieces of Care Technology, supporting over 250 safe discharges from hospital and reducing the risk of people from falling.

Resources

Our track record

We continue to face significant financial challenges. We face tough decisions on where to focus our resources to best meet the needs of our residents and communities, now and in the future. This is particularly true in the light of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. However, although the Coronavirus outbreak began during 2019/20, it did not materially impact upon the Council's financial performance for 2019/20, because the outbreak happened close to year end. In financial terms, the impact will be felt more acutely beyond the Spring and Summer of 2020.

We know that securing the best outcomes for Essex means maximising the impact of the resources we have. We do this by continually seeking value for money for the taxpayer: reviewing our services regularly to ensure they are modern and fit for purpose; reducing costs; increasing efficiency and generating new income.

We have an outstanding track record of delivering savings, generating income and delivering value to our residents, with a constant focus on strategic outcomes and financial prudence. Over the last four years we have generated savings to taxpayers of £300m.

Our spending

Over the past year, we have spent £2.1bn on making Essex a better place to live and work. Of this, around £1.9bn was our day-to-day spending on the services we deliver to residents and communities.

We fund services which support some of our county's most vulnerable people. For example, we spent over £668m on public health programmes and on the support that we provide to older people, those with mental health problems and those with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. We provided support to more than 25,700 vulnerable adults.

We also spent over £154m on services to support children and families. This included services which helped us to safeguard, protect and secure positive outcomes for vulnerable children. It included supporting children in care and providing fostering and adoption services across the county.

As well as supporting and protecting vulnerable people, we fund key services that enable our county to function – services which we all take for granted, but which we cannot operate without.

For example, we spent almost £81m last year on environmental and waste management services. This includes running recycling centres and managing waste treatment and disposal. In a year, Essex households generated more than 673 000 tonnes of waste. This is more than 1,000 kg of waste per household, of which 55% is recycled.

We also use our money to fund services which contribute to our residents' quality

of life, such as libraries and country parks, and provide funding for local projects and initiatives.

Last year, over half of our spending was funded by grants, (including those from government), and from income that we generated through fees and charges. Local taxes paid by local businesses and residents accounted for the balance: business rates funded 9.8% of our spending while council tax funded 36.7%.

Our investments

In addition to our day-to-day spending on services, we invested £186m through our Capital Investment Programme last year. Through this programme we delivered:

Invest to grow

Investments in infrastructure to enable, and respond to, economic and demographic growth. In 2019/20 our investments have:

- created circa 3,500 new school places through school expansions, including two new secondary schools (Beaulieu Park School and the Paxman Academy which created 1,200 and 900 school places respectively).

- expanded and created new special school places ensuring that the additional provision reduces distances that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities need to travel, keeping them closer to their families and enhancing their quality of life and education outcomes. This includes completion of Lexden Springs and Oak View Special Schools.
- continued significant packages of improvements on our road network including M11 J7A, A127 at Fairglen Interchange, A133 Ipswich / Harwich Road Roundabout in Colchester and Harlow Enterprise Zone Edinburgh Way.
- supported colleges with the successful completion of Further Education building schemes including Colchester Centre for Health and Development; and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Innovation Campus (Braintree).

Invest to maintain

Maintaining or extending the life of current assets. In 2019/20 our investments have:

- enabled us to continue with significant improvements to the condition of the main road network and local roads;

- funded a flood programme, which has contributed towards projects that have enabled 196 residential properties to benefit from reduced surface water flood risk;

Invest to save/ generate financial return

In 2019/20 we have:

- completed the Moulsham Lodge housing development, comprising 26 residential units, of which eight will enable adults with disabilities to live independently.
- completed our LED Phase 3 street lighting programme which converted 20,000 streetlights to save electricity.

Next Year

The impact of COVID-19 makes predicting the future financial position difficult. Nevertheless, we will continue to seek value for money and invest in Essex. We will use resources at our disposal to ensure we meet the needs of our residents and communities and that Essex continues to be a great place to grow up, live and work.

2019/20 Activity and Performance

This section summarises our key activities and performance for each key area of our four strategic aims, outlined in our Organisation Strategy. Clicking on a section title below will take you straight there.

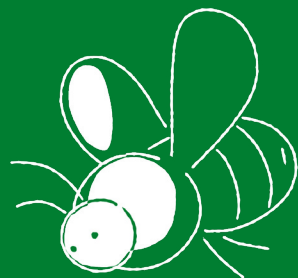
Enable
inclusive
economic
growth



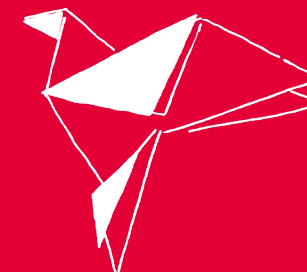
Help people
get the best
start in life
and age well



Help create
great places
to grow up,
live and work



Transform
the council to
achieve more
with less



Aim 1 - Enable inclusive economic growth

Summary

Our priorities are to increase residents' skills, to enable Essex to attract and grow large firms in high growth industries and to target development at areas of opportunity within the county.

We develop skills by working with our schools, colleges and universities and work-based training providers. We support groups of young people at risk of not being in Education, Employment or Training and are looking at the opportunities to use the Underused Apprenticeship Levy. Invest Essex supports inward Investment into Essex; the Superfast Essex programme

delivers the high-speed broadband needed in homes and businesses and we continue to bid for funds to develop infrastructure for improvements to road and rail. Our localised focus works with partners to support redevelopment, jointly develop town deals for central government funding and to secure funds to improve local infrastructure.



Aim 1 Priority 1 - Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills

Workforce skills

The number of well qualified people in Essex has continued to increase, but the workforce remains less well qualified than similar areas in the South East and the UK overall. Skills levels in Essex have risen slightly compared to 2018, with 52% of Essex residents aged 16 to 64 now holding Level 3 or above qualifications such as A Levels in 2019, but this remains below the average for the region of 55% and the UK average of 58.5%.

Certain groups in Essex are significantly less skilled, and as a result, can face other barriers to economic success. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to affect those who are already disadvantaged the hardest, in terms of academic achievement and access to opportunities.

A rise in unemployment figures is expected in September/October 2020 and will coincide with the lifting of furlough.

The acquisition of skills post-16 through employment and training remains critical to both economic recovery and individual access to opportunities.

Unemployment levels for 16-17-year olds in Essex in May 2020 were 3.7%, compared to 3% for England. 0.7% of these young people are unavailable to the labour market, in comparison with 0.6% for England.

Participation in learning for 2018 Year 11 leavers, in May 2020 was 92.2% for Essex, compared to 92.4% for England, and for 2019 year 11 leavers, it was 91.6% compared to 92.5% for England.

Ensuring quality education for all

On average, Essex secondary schools perform well and rank number 10 amongst the 46 counties. The league tables for schools highlight that 59.9% of secondary school pupils achieved five good GCSEs.

Essex County Council has worked with Further Education Colleges, Work Based Learning Training Providers and young people to monitor policies and procedures for safeguarding, the levels of support offered by student services and to gain an understanding of how the curriculum has been adapted to meet the changing circumstances due to COVID-19. The priority has been to ensure the safety of learners and to share good practice around learner engagement and recruitment for September 2020.

Plan B, a ten-week programme for young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), is targeted at those who face barriers which are preventing them from accessing the labour market. The programme provides learners with the opportunity to gain level 2 qualifications in English and Maths, an accredited qualification in employability skills, a work experience placement and a range of activities to support increased self-esteem and self-confidence. 70% of leavers will typically progress to education, employment or training.

Improving careers advice

Over the past year we have continued to focus our efforts on improving skills levels and increasing opportunities within Essex – working with schools, improving careers advice through the ‘What’s Your Thing’ brand, supporting families on lower incomes to access better employment opportunities and helping residents to develop the priorities of the new Success Essex Federated Board, particularly in support of inclusion and equality.

Teams have worked collaboratively to identify and support Year 11 and Year

12 leavers identified at risk of being NEET. Remote support has been offered by qualified Careers Advisers in recent months. Essex County Council was awarded the IAG Matrix standard in recognition of high-quality information advice and guidance delivered by teams.

We have also worked in partnership with admissions teams in Colleges and Work Based Learning Providers to provide them with a platform to promote their provision to young people who are yet to secure an offer of learning for September.

An IAG Factsheet was produced in conjunction with schools, colleges and training providers, along with a series of online job search resources. These have been shared with partners and young people.

‘Opportunity Ready’, a two-year European Social Fund funded programme, has supported those with low level skills who are furthest from the labour market. The offer has included information, advice and guidance and intensive job search. Beneficiaries have been tracked for a six-month period to evidence sustained employment.

Developing skills to support growth sectors

There is an estimated £93m of unspent apprenticeship levy in Greater Essex. There has been a 30% decline in apprenticeships starts, with training providers reporting a 70% decline in employer demand for apprenticeships for 16-18year olds.

Essex County Council has been working in conjunction with colleges and training providers to develop the concept of an Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Hub, in which unspent levy monies will be re-directed to support apprenticeships in growth sectors

A ‘Harlow Works’ programme has supported 151 individuals to increase their skills and to access higher quality employment opportunities.

A ‘Skill Up’ programme was designed to develop professional leadership skills and deliver career progression within the Health and Social Care sector.

Going forward

Ongoing partnership work with the Essex Provider Network and local businesses will be essential to managing rising levels of youth unemployment. Essex County Council is a key partner in a collaborative bid to the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions) for funding from the Government's COVID rescue package to secure targeted support for this group.

Nightingale Social Care Bursary

The Nightingale Social Care Bursary and Nursing Apprenticeship Scheme launched July 2020 will offer £1.1m funding for supporting training opportunities and qualifications in the care profession.

The scheme will focus on two key areas. The first, the Social Care Bursary will enable people from the most deprived communities to achieve social care qualifications, or to support existing care workers to achieve further qualifications. The bursary will help 85 people already working in the sector without a qualification in Health and Social Care to gain a national and sector-recognised

Diploma that supports their job role. An additional 110 employees will be able to undertake an accredited certificate that will support their continuous professional development within the Health and Care sector. This programme will be developed and delivered by our Adult Community Learning service.

A Nursing Apprenticeship will support 30 adult social care workers to become registered nurses working in the social care sector through the Nursing Apprenticeship Scheme. The Council will fully fund these 30 nursing degree placements which will be delivered through the University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University, where a new and innovative pathway into nursing from within the social care sector has been developed.

The Essex Apprenticeship Levy Service aims to both upskill individuals and increase the number of new opportunities for young people across Essex. The aspiration is to secure £10m of unspent levy funds which will be redistributed to support apprenticeship take up in growth areas in the county.

Aim 1 Priority 2 - Enable Essex to attract and grow large firms in high growth industries

Our strategy

We know that Essex needs to attract large firms and support existing businesses to improve their productivity to bridge the gap that exists between Essex and its peers within the UK and overseas.

Through the Industrial Strategy, the UK government aims to boost productivity by backing businesses to create good jobs and increase the earning power of people throughout the UK. Our strategy is to ensure that Essex has a business environment that allows productive and knowledge-based industries to thrive.

Promoting Essex as the place to locate

Invest Essex delivered a programme aimed at attracting new businesses to the high-quality commercial spaces that Essex has to offer, targeting national and international industry networks and targeted exhibitions, conferences and network events.

The Invest Essex service supported 25 Essex Inward Investment projects in 2019/20, leading to the relocation of 10 new businesses into Essex, including 1 large employer, and the creation of 707 new jobs.

Invest Essex supported 28 Department for International Trade (DIT) Foreign Direct Investment opportunities.

Generally, the level of Essex Foreign Direct Investment opportunities has been resilient in contrast to national trends.

Through the Invest Essex service we have also supported Small and Medium sized Enterprise (SME) businesses to develop and grow. This programme has supported 79 Essex SMEs to grow and has led to the creation of over 110 new jobs.

EU-exit preparations, together with the impact of Covid-19 towards the end of the year, created a period of business uncertainty which has impacted business investment in Essex in line with the rest of the country.

To support the growth of large companies in Essex, a new business-led Economic Board for Essex (Success Essex) has

been established. As one of the federated boards for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), the Success Essex Board has supported the development of The Essex Prosperity and Productivity Plan which has been prepared to inform the developing SELEP Local Industrial Strategy and guide strategic economic growth in Essex.

Developing supportive infrastructure

The Superfast Essex Programme is working with Openreach and Gigaclear to upgrade homes and businesses across Essex that were not going to be reached by commercial network rollout. The programme is deploying infrastructure to enable these premises to access superfast broadband, supporting economic growth opportunities in the rural and harder to reach areas of the county.

In 2019/20 Superfast Essex enabled a further 14,975 homes and businesses to access superfast broadband, many of these are delivered via full-fibre infrastructure, capable of ultrafast speeds. To date, this ECC investment programme has delivered superfast or ultrafast broadband access to more than 17%

of premises across Essex, which would otherwise not have access.

We have been supporting the development of strategic commercial space across the county aimed at supporting businesses in High Growth Industries. This includes the new University of Essex Knowledge Gateway Innovation Centre in Colchester, which was officially opened in the summer of 2019 and was gaining occupants prior to the impact of Covid-19, and Anglia Ruskin University's ARISE Harlow Innovation Centre on Harlow Science Park, where opening was delayed until later in 2020 due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

ECC is working with Transport East, the Regional Strategic Transport Board, to make the case for investment in strategic transport connectivity to support Essex businesses via new partnerships with Highways England and Network Rail and co-creating future investment programmes.

Construction of M11 J7a has commenced, funding for the improvement to the A12 is included within the Government's RIS2 (Road Investment Strategy 2) programme. ECC continues to make the case for investment in the A120 and A127. ECC is also working with Network Rail to make the case for early investment in the

three rail corridors with Strategic Outline Business Cases expected to be submitted to Department for Transport covering the Great Eastern Mainline and Essex Thameside lines during 2020.

Also underway is a significant programme to identify the investment necessary to support decarbonisation of our transport network to enable sustainable transport access to employment and the sustainable distribution of goods, creating places in Essex where new businesses focused upon future economic opportunities can establish.

What next?

We will develop a plan to support the recovery of Essex businesses affected by the Covid-19 crisis to assist them to meet future challenges, including climate change and adopting new green initiatives.

And we have commissioned a new Essex: Back to Business service. This is aimed at supporting the recovery of businesses located in Essex though the provision of intensive business support provided by a specialist business support organisation, the Let's Do Business Group.

Aim 1 Priority 3 - Target economic development to areas of opportunity

Opportunities

While Essex remains one of the largest economies in the country, performance is variable, and some areas of Essex have untapped potential for higher economic growth. As a result, the economic performance in some areas is not as strong as it could be. Basildon and Colchester are long established economic successes, where there are now opportunities to further increase productivity and secure more inclusive growth. Harlow is undergoing a transformation through the enterprise zone, the arrival of Public Health England and the new garden community of Harlow/Gilston. Tendring, despite some significant inward investment, remains one of the least economically productive areas in the county.

Investing in our key locations

We are working with Tendring District Council and other partners to support the rejuvenation of the Tendring Coast. We have successfully worked together to be shortlisted for up to £25m of Future High Streets funding which will enable us to bring forward a master plan for Clacton town centre which will enhance the join-up of local public services and provide more job opportunities for local people. We will jointly finalise a Place Plan for Jaywick Sands to make local residents safer, improve housing and improve social infrastructure, and to develop future strategic options for Harwich and Dovercourt.

We will work with Harlow District Council to get a Town Deal agreed with Government, and we will enter into a

partnership to develop proposals for town centre regeneration to secure significant additional investment, developing proposals for our own assets in the town centre and continuing to build on recent positive developments, such as the re-location of Public Health England.

We are working with Basildon Borough Council and the National Infrastructure Commission to develop an Intra-Urban Growth and Connectivity Strategy for Basildon which we will jointly publish in 2020. We will work with our partners to secure the investment needed to implement those proposals.

We will work in partnership with Colchester Borough Council to get a Town Deal agreed with the Government and we will work together to deliver improvement projects in deprived parts of the borough.

What next?

We will work with industry to help navigate the many supports, initiatives and incentives there are to support young people such as kickstart, traineeships, apprenticeships and brokerage. This will include developing an Apprenticeship Levy Match Making Service to better utilise unspent levy and to help businesses to recruit young people.

We will roll out bursaries and a levy funded apprenticeship pathway into Nursing for staff employed in Adult Social Care.

We will continue to work with District, City and Borough Councils to support the development of their Local Plans to support sustainable local growth for communities.

Aim 2 - Help people get the best start in life and age well

Summary

Our priorities are to keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to reach their potential, to enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care, and to improve the health of people in Essex.

Our Children's Services focus on vulnerable children, young children and families, especially care leavers and children with Special Educational Needs and Disability. Our work with adults supports people with learning disabilities and autism to improve lifestyle and their independence and to be part of communities and we support older people to stay at home and live independently. Our work on health spans a range of issues from promoting healthier, more active lifestyles, tackling substance misuse and providing support for mental health.

During lockdown, social workers continued to visit children and their families, as well as developing new online ways of working to improve lives. We mobilised significant support for the adult social care sector, moved front line teams to 7 day working, secured extra capacity, updated models for discharge from NHS facilities and used technology for supporting and connecting people.



Aim 2 Priority 1 - Help keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to fulfil their potential

Our work

Over the past year, our work to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Essex has continued, especially with care leavers and children with special educational needs and disabilities.

During lockdown, social workers continued to visit children and their families, as well as developing new, online ways of working, to improve lives.

Our people have been recognised for their outstanding contributions to this work - Jo Worley won Children's Social Worker of the Year at the annual Social Work Awards for her work with children in care.

Analysis by the consultancy iMPower found that we provided the fourth most efficient children's services in the country;

and this recognition means that children, their families, and the people of Essex can have a high degree of confidence in the help we provide.

Improvement Partnerships

The Partners in Practice contract with the Department for Education, helping other local authorities to improve their children's services, was extended by a year. In 2019/20, we worked with 19 other local authorities; and we also worked with other Partners in Practice authorities to learn about best practice in pre-proceedings work. We also acted as Children's Commissioner to Blackpool.

This work helps our senior managers to develop their understanding of what works well, and that learning is applied to benefit children and families in Essex.

Inside Out: Engaging with Vulnerable Adolescents in Care

We were awarded £3.1m from the Children's Services Innovation Fund in 2017 to lead the Inside Out pilot project, in partnership with Hertfordshire and Norfolk County Councils, and The Children's Society. The project engages the most vulnerable young people in residential care, with intensive support, to settle them, and then safely step them down to family-based services. During the year, Inside Out was independently evaluated by the Tavistock Institute. In addition to a variety of good outcomes achieved for the young people, they found that for every £1.00 spent, £2.50 was saved directly, or in future costs, to other agencies in Essex.

Essex Fostering Service

The Essex Fostering Service continues to successfully recruit carers, consistently adding over 30 carers a year. There are now over 520 carers providing placements for over 580 children. We are on track to provide 90% of placements for children in foster care, by March 2023.

What next?

Our primary focus is to maintain the quality of outcomes for children and their families. However, Covid-19 began to impact on this:

- Children and Families had a robust business continuity plan. Face-to-face visits have been prioritised to the most vulnerable children, with others receiving a virtual service using social media platforms. A duty service was available at Hub buildings.

- There is 'pent-up demand' for the service, as referrals have reduced by half. We expect to see a spike in referrals when all pupils return to school in the Autumn.
- We would expect to see medium-term growth in referrals and the number of children in care, resulting from the economic downturn due to the pandemic.

We are modelling future demand and will revise our Business Plan accordingly.

Aim 2 Priority 2 - Enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care

Supporting people with learning disability and autism

We have improved outcomes for adults with learning disabilities and autism, enabling them to be listened to and valued, have lifestyle opportunities, take risks, make their own choices and be part of their communities.

Supporting older people to stay home and live independently

Research undertaken on Intermediate care, identified that better outcomes are achievable for 44% of people going through health and care pathways as well as significant financial opportunities for the health and care economy in Essex. We aim to transform the outcomes for individuals from ECC home-based

intermediate care commissioned services, enabling more to stay at home and live independently.

Increasing independence

Through Collaborate Essex we have set up Local learning Disability peer support groups where people are coming together to discuss issues and resolve their own problems. Our 'lived experience' forum of members with experience of a broad range of disabilities enables us to address the strategic issues that people in our communities are facing, and to create opportunities to help people within our communities.

A project funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant to place Occupational Therapists in Housing Departments has

worked to speed up the process of making adaptations to people's homes to help them live independently. This has helped people who have recently been discharged from hospital and allowed people to spend the end of their lives at home with their loved ones.

Using care technology

Through our Pathfinder in South Essex we have tested the impact of care technology on people's lives and independence, installing over 1,600 pieces of care technology, supporting over 250 safe discharges from hospital and reducing the risk of approximately 75% of recipients of the technology from falling. We have used this insight and learning to shape the design for a new county-wide service.

We are developing a strategic approach to prevention: promoting healthy lifestyles, reducing health inequalities and reducing/delaying the impact of changing needs.

Supporting carers

We recognised the need to re-think our support for carers and improve outcomes and galvanised commitment from across Essex to form the Essex Carers Partnership. In 2019 we organised two carers' summits, bringing together partners across Essex and the UK to develop a shared vision and influence, mobilise and deliver collective action.

What next?

There will be significant challenges and impact arising from COVID 19 on our communities, care market and workforce, and we will be re-focusing our work to ensure that people are safe, and that services and society can function. In response to the start of the epidemic, we mobilised significant support for the adult social care sector, moved front line teams to 7 day working, secured extra capacity,

moved to new models for discharge from NHS facilities and started developing new models for working with care homes and supporting and connecting people through technology. We will focus on restoring hope and confidence that people can live happy and healthy lives and achieve their goals and aspirations.

We will support the care market to diversify and adapt to new levels of demand, and will develop a more localised approach, building on our partnerships with health to increase integration.

Aim 2 Priority 3 - Improve the health of people in Essex

Our priorities

The most recent Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) has shown inequalities persist across Essex and are worsening in some areas. The national review of the Marmot report has shown limited progress in tackling inequalities over recent years. The coronavirus outbreak and lockdown have exacerbated this position. Tackling inequalities through improving educational attainment, including best start in life and employment opportunities are key. ECC is committed to work in these areas to improve health and wellbeing.

Improving mental health and wellbeing is a key corporate priority. Coronavirus has had a negative impact on both people with existing mental health issues who would benefit from employment, and on those who develop poor wellbeing due to the impact of Covid-19 on debt and isolation.

Approach to wider determinants

We have worked with partners to look at the potential role of public sector partners as anchors, including a funded pilot with Mid and South Essex acute trusts, working with local schools and developing an NHS Charter with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System. The Essex Health and Wellbeing Board has adopted an approach recognising the importance of the wider determinants of health.

Work has commenced with partners in North East Essex to develop a plan to attract a government department to Clacton. This included a visit by Professor Marmot and his engagement locally.

We have also rolled out with the Citizens Advice Bureau a local version of the Healthier Wealthier Children approach which has been successful in Scotland.

Lifestyles

500 people have participated in our Adult Community Learning mental health wellbeing and recovery courses. There has been increased participation since lockdown measures were introduced. We have supported over 250 Essex businesses to improve the health of their workforce and have delivered over 4,500 Mental Health courses. The Essex Sexual Health Service has adapted its centralised access, electronic records and telephone triage process to maintain and expand all online services. Triage has been enhanced through virtual consultation and assessment, resulting in a far greater focus on clinical need before any direct contact. Non-attendance rates (historically poor in sexual health) have been improved and, therefore, service efficiency improved. We are also exploring a range of remote imaging and diagnostic software

and systems to support the development of further virtual work

Vulnerable groups and substance misuse

Substance misuse services continue to develop and keep pace with demand. Our new alcohol contract began in April 2019, providing non-medical interventions and recovery support across the county. This service replaced multiple contracts provided previously, with the aim of standardising the quality of provision across the county, with no increase in resource.

The focus is, and will continue to be, on safety and prevention of harm linked to recovery. A major focus is the need to improve the penetration rate into the estimated number of opiate and crack users, again within an environment of no increase in resources. The Substance Misuse Commissioning Charity (Essex Recovery Foundation) developed and launched as a result of permission being granted by ECC cabinet, is now operating successfully (albeit now under the

restrictions placed on it by the Covid-19 crisis). There has been some success in attracting grant funding for small projects for community engagement.

Both the Housing Related Floating Support provision and Accommodation Related Support contracts have been retendered and let successfully. The first to Peabody and the second to a consortium of providers. Work with District, Borough and City Council colleagues continues to ensure the services are effectively integrated with the accommodation and support offers provided more locally.

Health and Justice services are now fully operational, and performance continues to improve in relation to both Full Circle (Offenders with Complex Needs) and the Integrated Health and Justice Service (previously Street Triage, Liaison and Diversion and Police Custody Healthcare). Community Sentences and Out of Court Disposal provision continues to develop with plans in place to go live with a new approach to Mental Health Treatment Requirements as an alternative to custody.

Physical activity

The Sport England funded Local Delivery Pilot (LDP) tackling high levels of physical inactivity, established a comprehensive micro-grants programme to develop over 50 hyper-local community-led social movements. 17 large projects were started, totalling investment of £625k and attracting match funding of £1.029m. The projects were in partnership with health, social care, transport, education, and the voluntary and community sector. The new LDP evaluation partner, the University of Essex, undertook the first LDP baseline survey in November 2019 revealing very high levels of physical inactivity in our test areas compared to the county average (Basildon 59%, Colchester 56%, Tendring 69%, Essex 27%).

The LDP pioneered training in Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) for over 150 people from different sectors. The summer 2019 Holiday Hunger pilot successfully delivered activity clubs for over 200 low-income families across Essex. Similarly, 17 innovative tests in Basildon, Colchester and Tendring were evaluated as successful, with two being

identified for rapid scaling up, which were Motivated Minds in Basildon and Sport For Confidence across all three areas. The LDP ran two major share and learn events, attracting hundreds of delegates to hear about the initial successful work.

The LDP team were redeployed to support the Covid-19 response in March 2020.

What next?

We will work with stakeholders in North East Essex to develop a Clacton Health and Care Campus to improve local people's access to health and care careers. Through ACL lifelong learning we will develop new opportunities and courses over the next year in this area, including optimal use of apprenticeships. We will work with the NHS and other partners to further the anchor agenda, including supporting a more local supply chain and assessing social value in contracts.

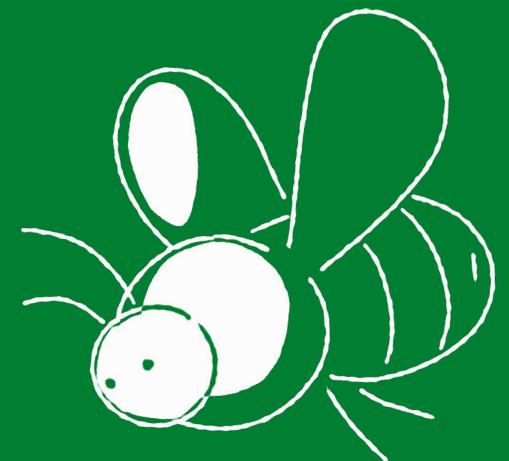
Aim 3 - Help create great places to grow up, live and work

Summary

Our priorities are to help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities to live in, to support sustainable development and protect the environment and to facilitate growing communities and new homes.

We have been building digital communities and a community campaign model to address issues such as social isolation and male suicide. Our work on sustainable development and the environment includes flood defences, improving green spaces, moving towards zero waste and promoting energy efficiency. Our

Climate Action Commission is developing its strategy and priorities. To facilitate growing communities, we are working in partnership with District and Borough councils to plan for garden communities as new more sustainable places to live in Essex and to fund the rail and road infrastructure needed.



Aim 3 Priority 1 - Help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities

Building capacity through social media

Over the last year we have been building on our approach to reaching people through digital communities. With the support of both Facebook as our corporate partner and the Cabinet Office, we have created a community campaign model that can be implemented for communities of interest, place or purpose. This is a new approach which seeks to align the wants and needs of the community with the objectives of the public sector. It creates a social movement around issues which engage and mobilise citizens to provide solutions for themselves with the support of local authorities.

The community campaign model approach is a finalist in both the MJ and LGA Awards in the Digital Impact Category.

The approach saw the launch of initiatives such as *United in Kind* which seeks to address Social Isolation, and *Never Too Late Mate* which has sought to raise awareness and provide access to support about male suicide.

Building capacity through the community and voluntary sector

United in Kind is now a growing a social movement in Essex that addresses loneliness. We have created a whole systems approach to addressing social isolation through a mixed digital and physical offer that focuses on care navigation, social prescribing and befriending. We have also created Kindness Coaches who help to stimulate and build hyper-local community-led initiatives that address social isolation.

People in Essex contact Kindness Coaches through the Facebook platform and they help people to connect with activities, advice, befriending or setting up their own initiatives using our “Community Chest” micro grant programme for local initiatives.

Facebook has helped us to create a relationship management function, that reaches people, is agile and through *United in Kind* we are now reaching around 222,200 more people a month.

In the last year over 50,000 people in Essex have been directly supported through this way of working, which is a five-fold increase on the volumes of people supported in the previous year. We have also invested in a £50,000 micro grant programme, hosted by the Essex Association of Local Councils.

Aim 3 Priority 2 - Help secure sustainable development and protect the environment

Protecting communities from flooding

Over the past year we have delivered a programme of flood protection schemes reducing the risk of surface water flooding to 196 residential properties. Over 1,200 properties have benefitted from reduced surface water flood risk since the beginning of our Floods Capital Programme five years ago. We succeeded in securing external flood investment of £1.52m in 2019/20, bringing the total amount of external investment to more than £4.5m over the five-year programme.

Flood protection schemes have been completed in Braintree, Witham and Hillyfields at Colchester.

Alongside these larger schemes we also worked with partners, volunteer groups

and other stakeholders to deliver small scale natural flood management solutions in Thorndon, Sturmer, Little Baddow and Pitsea. The Thorndon scheme was shortlisted for the prestigious British Construction Industry Small Project Award, and for the Climate Resilience Project of the Year.

Improve our green spaces

We have made significant steps towards greener living both through the publication of the Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy, and the target to plant 375,000 new trees over the next 5 years.

We continue to invest in our country parks infrastructure, as well as developing new outdoor events. In 2019, we were successfully granted seven Green Flag awards for our parks.

Commitment to achieve zero avoidable waste

To deliver our ambition of zero avoidable waste by 2050, and a more circular economy for Essex, we have focused our activity on reducing waste and increasing recycling. The success this year has been achieved by supporting extensive recycling and waste avoidance programmes and supporting local communities. In the last year total household waste generated in Essex fell by almost 1%, despite an increasing Essex population, and we recycled and composted almost 55% of our household waste.

We have been successful in securing external funding to embed the circular economy, drive up recycling and reduce waste. This will test and deliver a range of innovative waste reduction projects and

services for the community of Essex. ECC is the lead partner in the successful award of 5.6m euros from the EU Interreg fund.

Our cloth nappy support programme continues to reduce the number of disposable nappies being used in Essex, whilst saving parents money.

Working with the voluntary sector, we have funded 10 local community waste reduction projects, worked with volunteers to spread the message and collaborated with Freegle, resulting in 60,000 new Essex users accessing this service to give away unwanted items and reduce their waste.

Clean growth and affordable energy

We are supporting businesses and residents to be 'greener' through the promotion and development of grant funded campaigns to install energy efficient technologies for their homes and places of work, as well as encouraging 1,644 residents to switch to energy suppliers with 100% renewable electricity tariffs through the Essex Energy Switch campaign.

Leading by example, we are delivering projects to improve our own estate to drive down energy cost and carbon emissions.

We are also supporting communities to take action by forming community energy groups and investing in renewable energy schemes locally.

What next?

The recommendations of the Essex Climate Action Commission will generate a range of exciting and transformative climate action opportunities for the Council, its partners and communities throughout Essex.

As the county recovers from Covid-19, we have identified climate action as one of four priority areas. We will put forward innovative recommendations to set a net-zero pathway for our own estate and service delivery; climate resilient new developments and communities; active travel solutions supporting the electrification of transport; and supporting sustainable land use, increasing tree planting and urban greening to drive carbon capture, improved resilience and improved public health.

Aim 3 Priority 3 - Facilitate growing communities and new homes

New homes in Essex

The number of new homes in Essex increased by 7,300 in 2018-19 (the latest date for which data are available), the highest number in the 21st century and a 19% increase on the 2017-18 figure. The County Council continues to work with partners to enable the development of the new homes required through emerging Local Plans, while protecting the county's landscape and ensuring Essex remains a great place to live. Homes need to be affordable and meet residents' needs throughout their lives; building vibrant communities, not just houses.

Garden communities: sustainable new developments

Districts across Essex are bringing forward proposals to create new 'Garden

Communities' as great places to live and work. Essex County Council is working in partnership with district councils to plan for the new communities across the county. Garden communities are designed to promote community inclusion and walkable neighbourhoods, with easy access to green spaces and commercial areas.

Ongoing partnership work continues with Chelmsford City Council on the Garden Community planned for North Chelmsford, and Brentwood Borough Council on Dunton Hills Garden Village. Work continues to progress the Harlow Gilston Garden Town, and the new garden community at Tendring Colchester Borders. We are also engaging with the respective councils on a new settlement bordering Rochford and Southend that is at an early stage of consultation.

Delivering major transport infrastructure to unlock new homes

Infrastructure is vital alongside new homes. We secured over £317m of central government Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) investment to develop a new rail station and bypass in Chelmsford, and a rapid transit system and link road in Colchester. Work has begun to finalise contracts and commence delivery of these projects, which will benefit existing communities and enable the delivery of 20,000 new homes.

Local Plans

New Local Plans set out how to deliver significant housing proposals, including new Garden Communities, and the

infrastructure they need to become great places to live. We are continuing to provide support to our Borough, City and District councils to bring forward Local Plans early. The Brentwood Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in February 2020. The Chelmsford Local Plan will be adopted early in 2020/21 giving certainty to the Chelmsford Garden Community and other strategic sites, and substantially increasing the housing and employment land supply in Chelmsford.

We have committed to directly invest to support our local planning authority partners to maximise contributions generated through new development that unlock necessary infrastructure and affordable housing. The investment will increase capacity and capability around fair negotiations on development viability and support the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy at two Essex Districts. The implementation phase to deliver both projects will begin in 2020/21.

Essex Quality Review Panel

We established the Essex Quality Review Panel in 2019 to support District Councils with the quality assessment of strategic development proposals. The Quality Review Panel has already been appointed to support the Chelmsford Garden Community and has provided support for Uttlesford District Council.

What next?

We will continue to work with District, Borough and City councils to progress their local plans for growth, including planning and delivering Garden Communities. Essex districts have committed to increase the supply of new homes in the coming years. We will start to deliver the strategic transport infrastructure needed for new and existing communities, including progression of the Housing Infrastructure Fund projects where we will finalise contracts and plan for delivery of the Chelmsford North East Bypass, Beaulieu Station, the A133/A120 link road and the Colchester rapid transit system.

We produced an ECC Housing Strategy, setting out how Essex County Council will work with partners to achieve aims around housing growth, housing for vulnerable groups and homelessness. We consulted externally and we will continue engagement with partners with an aim to develop a final strategy and action plan during 2020.

A sub-set of the Essex Quality Review Panel will be launched in July 2020 to promote and assess the Livewell Accreditation Standards, which aims to improve the extent to which housing schemes make a positive contribution to health and wellbeing. The panel will be chaired by a senior representative from Public Health England.

Aim 4 - Transform the council to achieve more with less

Summary

Our priorities are to drive value for money from our available resources and to optimise income sources.

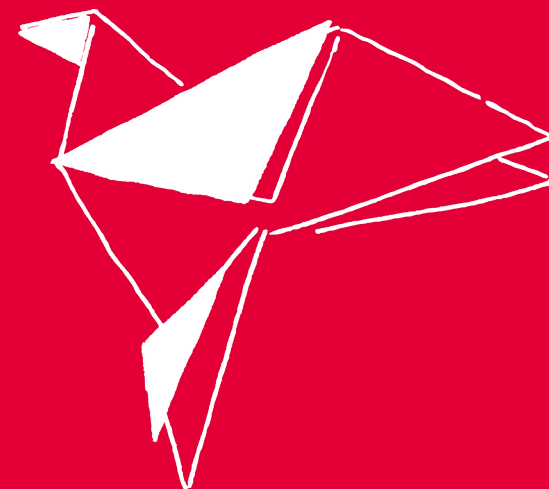
We will limit cost growth and improve our revenue, develop the capability, performance and engagement of our people and reimagine how residents' needs can be met in a digital world.

We focus on ongoing challenge to our services to reduce costs and sound decision making to achieve cost reduction and revenue growth.

To develop our workforce we have launched a people plan to deliver strong performance management, deliver

a learning platform, grow employee networks to promote inclusion and deliver tools and techniques to develop our managers.

To deliver digital services we ensure that web services are accessible and undertake service discoveries to identify how we can improve digital services to make them relevant and easier to use.



Aim 4 Priority 1 - Limit cost and drive growth in revenue

Essex County Council has already delivered £300million of savings in the last 4 years. We have kept council tax as low as possible for residents, with bills amongst the lowest of county councils in England. But we face significant financial challenges and must continue to maximise the value of every pound of taxpayers' money.

Our commitment to secure value is reflected in the way we work. We have built sound financial and cost management practices. We apply rigour to our financial decision-making and to our investments, scrutinising the business case supporting each decision to ensure that taxpayers' money is used wisely.

We also review our services on a regular basis to ensure they are modern and fit for purpose; reducing costs, increasing efficiency, increasing skills and capacity when necessary and generating new income.

This way of working provides a platform for success. It allows us to secure quality in our services whilst maintaining discipline in managing our costs. It allows us to invest in positive outcomes whilst exploiting opportunities to generate income. It allows us to innovate and be confident that we can realise the benefits of new ideas and new ways of working.

Aim 4 Priority 2 - Develop the capability, performance and engagement of our people

Our people plan

Essex County Council employs around 6,500 people. They are our greatest asset. We need to continue to attract a highly skilled workforce and provide the tools, processes and direction they need to perform well. This work is crucial to ensure we continue to attract and retain the best employees in local government.

In 2018, the workforce strategy “Our People Plan” was launched, and a £2.9m investment was agreed to ensure delivery of four crucial themes.

Creating the right conditions

In 2019 we have addressed crucial cultural elements of our workforce conditions, including design and delivery of a new and innovative performance development

approach. This gives our managers and employees the opportunity to have a two-way discussion about their performance, wellbeing and development. As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we know that some of the things we do or the way we do them will change. A focus of our work going forward, therefore, will be reviewing our ways of working. The aim will be to evaluate how some of our core services work now and in the future. We will be focusing on the conditions and skills of our employees to make sure that we find the opportunities to work in a more productive way in an ever-changing environment.

We have increased our active apprentices to 229 from 147 last year. We’ve also seen a reduction of our gender pay gap by 1.7% since we started reporting and aspire to continue closing the gap.

Getting ahead of the curve

We have launched a new learning platform ‘My Learning’. This gives all employees access to learning relevant to their role and interests. The platform also encourages shared learning through the use of playlists and content recommendations to internal and external colleagues.

We will be adding to “My Learning” with new technology for Performance Development and Recruitment being delivered in 2020. ‘My Performance’ will supplement and record conversations as part of our new performance development approach. ‘My Recruitment’ will be a more efficient and effective way of managing recruitment processes as well as a new modern, accessible careers website.

We have also started to replace our payroll and HR systems with more efficient versions. These will be delivered by October 2021.

Optimising the employee experience

We also continue to promote and nurture our employee networks with over 700 employees across nine different employee community groups. We have successfully launched a new Women's network. We have ensured that the voices of the network groups are elevated so that we can continue to learn and grow as an organisation and be proud of the inclusivity of our workforce.

In 2019, we brought our permanent recruitment in-house saving £495,000. We also implemented an alternative arrangement for temporary recruitment allowing more flexibility, while saving the organisation up to £1.8m. We've already improved time to hire and received positive feedback throughout the organisation and from our candidates.

Enabling growth and development

In November 2019, we delivered our inaugural festival of learning over the week-long 'Learn fest'. This was a celebration of learning which involved 2,145 participants in 204 different sessions on a variety of topics. This event also launched our new My Learning system.

We also launched our 'Management Acceleration Programme'. This provides a curriculum of tools and techniques for improving management, including topics such as project management, continuous improvement and performance management. We have set up a line managers' community of practice and established action learning sets to facilitate continuous development and peer to peer learning and support.

What next?

Throughout all aspects of 'Our People Plan', we will use the remaining year of our workforce strategy setting the foundation for improved performance, productivity and engagement. We will also be developing

our next generation workforce strategy to cement our position as an employer of choice in local government.

We will continue to work on our people technology. The launch of My Recruitment and My Performance will enable a different way of working. We'll use the data from these new systems to focus on our effectiveness and efficiency.

We aim to review our current suite of employment policies to replace them with a set of modern employment standards. These will clearly articulate what ECC expects of employees, what employees can expect of us and responsibilities on both sides during the employee journey.

We will continue to harness the passion of our employee networks to make sure we're attracting and developing our people. Diversity is a key driver in all of our people processes.

Aim 4 Priority 3 - Re-imagine how residents' needs can be met in a digital world

Improving our on-line services

Residents expect to be able to find information about services online that they understand, that is adaptable to what is happening and is responsive to their needs.

The new Essex.gov.uk website was launched in 2019, making it much easier for residents to access council services and find the information that they need. The improved website platform means that we can quickly update and improve the service based on data, insight and feedback from users. Since going live, we have already completed the first measure, test and improve cycle of website content. This will be an ongoing process that ensures we are continually improving.

This work, and the standards we have

adopted for digital services, have prepared us well for the challenges we are now experiencing during 2020, meaning we are able to respond to fast changing needs and publish essential information on services and guidance rapidly in a time of crisis.

New digital services and service discoveries

Throughout 2019-20, we carried out a number of 'service discoveries' which gave us insight into complex issues facing users across a range of our services – from reporting a highways fault to completing an adult social care financial assessment. These service discoveries are short, focused pieces of work which help us better understand how well services are meeting the needs

of people who use them and how we can improve. As a result, we have been able to use this learning to respond to the rapid changes that we have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, we have been able to work quickly with the Essex Welfare Service to produce a comprehensive online directory of services that provides information and signposts to wellbeing support services for Children and Families.

During this time of increased contact by residents and businesses, we also made improvements to how we manage enquiries. As a result, our Contact Centre now manage enquiries quicker, report fewer dropped calls and online complaints as a result of residents being able to find the correct contact information.

Accessible, inclusive services

Over the last year we have been working with an external partner to audit the Essex.gov.uk website and ensure it meets the AA accessibility standard. The site gained compliance in September 2019. Since then, we have been supporting a range of services across our wider web estate, to make their information inclusive and accessible to all residents and businesses and to gain accessibility compliance in line with legislation.

Redesign and automation of services

Work has been ongoing to reduce the number and complexity of our supporting IT systems, to enable the council to do more with less and to limit overhead costs. As we continue this work, our customer contact platform will be replaced and improved. This will extend choice of online access channels and introduce new tools like web chat which will improve the experience of people contacting our customer teams and enable assisted on-line applications.

What next?

We will continue to improve and optimise our online platforms and services based on a clear understanding of the needs of the people who use council services. This includes understanding what additional support is required for residents who can't currently access services online.

We will continue to explore the potential of new and emerging technologies such as video services, automation, machine learning and artificial intelligence to support our employees and improve services for residents and businesses.

This will ensure that access to council services continues to improve and keeps pace with people's expectations.

This information is issued by: Essex County Council

Contact us:

communications@essex.gov.uk

0845 603 2200

Corporate Development,
Essex County Council,
County Hall, Chelmsford,
Essex, CM1 1QH

Twitter: twitter.com/Essex_CC

Facebook: facebook.com/essexcountycouncil

The information contained in this document can be translated,
and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.

Published October 2020.



Essex County Council