

County Council Annual Report 2016

After pegging Council Tax with no increases for five years, the Council has reluctantly increased its element of Council Tax by 1.99%. In addition a 2% Social Care Precept has been added in order to meet the increasing demands of an ageing population across the County. This means a Band D property will now pay £1,130.13 per year, a weekly increase of just under 84p per week. This despite a number of high level meetings with Government ministers, but unfortunately there was little movement on their part to improve the financial settlement for Essex County Council. Savings made by the Council over the past six years are some £521 million, with a further £76 million planned for this financial year. However, moving forward, a funding gap remains for future years as confirmed by the Budget Statement recently, where cuts to public services will continue to be made.

However, front-line services will continue to be protected: For example, Adult Social Care increases by £89,000 to £493.3 million. Children and Families grows by £10 million to £125.8 million. Communities and Healthy Living is now £69.5 million up from £8.7 million reflecting elements of the NHS public health budget now administered by ECC. Infrastructure and Highways Delivery is up by £2 million to £59.4 million and its capital allocation rises by over £7 million to £137 million.

Clearly savings across a number of areas will need to be made, for example the Local Highways Panels have had their budget halved, with an option for the Local district to make up half of the deficit, and the County will then match that. Only two Districts have done this, one is Uttlesford and that means we should be able to deliver a good number of schemes. However, our budget of £460,000 has schemes on its books exceeding £700,000!

Highways maintenance remains a challenge. Extra funding has been allocated to improve the condition of roads and footways and an extensive programme of works is about to commence. Other defects need to be reported so that they can be dealt with. The increase in the Highways Capital Budget is designed to get the roads back into good order with an enhanced programme of resurfacing works planned throughout the year.

The new waste plant in Basildon is up and running and is still in test phase. Less and less household waste is going to landfill which will make a considerable saving for the Council. Interestingly projected recovered recycled materials is much higher than expected, perhaps reflecting a degree of apathy for domestic rubbish sorting in parts of the County, but not I hasten to add, in Uttlesford!

A six-week consultation on the pre-submission waste plan was launched recently, with proposed key sites in Uttlesford located in Canfield, Newport and Elsenham; it can be viewed online at <http://consult.essexcc.gov.uk> and at all libraries, and County and District council offices.

A consultation on Children's centres is now out and runs until April 10th. Key proposals affecting Uttlesford are that the children's centre in Saffron Walden will close, the Dunmow children's centre becomes a family hub open 15 hrs a week, and the children's centre at Stansted Mountfitchet becomes a family hub delivery site open 40 hrs a week with a further 10 hours of telephone service provision. The intention of the service is to extend provision for a child and their family from pre-birth through to age 19.

Details are available on <http://surveys.essexinsight.org.uk/childrenscentresconsultation2016>

I continue to chair the Place Services Scrutiny Committee. This deals mostly with highways and economic growth matters, but also environment, county parks and waste. It is a wide but interesting brief and keeps me very busy. Key pieces of work include the passenger transport consultation, third party responsibilities on flooding, and the government's Welfare to Work programme. I also chair the Scrutiny Board which has oversight of all of the scrutiny committees. I serve on the County's planning committee and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority.

Simon Walsh

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