

# The EssexWorks Commitment 2012-2017



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## Foreword

**This publication sets out our vision for Essex, articulates our commitment to the county, and marks the first step in a new partnership bringing together public bodies and Essex's citizens and communities.**

Essex is a vibrant and successful county and we want to build on that potential. Based on an extensive programme of analysis and engagement we have identified the key trends and challenges that will face our communities and our public services over the next ten years. We have consulted elected members and our partners, we have heard from our staff and we have listened to our residents. Based on these contributions, this document articulates our vision for Essex, our commitment to the county and our priorities for change over the next five years.

At the heart of this vision is our commitment to the economic success of our county. We make this commitment at a time of considerable economic uncertainty – our county can only grow through the efforts of the businessmen and women whose hard work underpins our prosperity. Their entrepreneurialism is all the more important given the severe strain on public finances. We expect to see the financial resources available across local government reduce by around 27% to 2014-15. We must recognise that while publicly funded services will continue to play a key role, the social, economic and cultural success of our towns and villages will depend more than ever on the contributions of individuals, families, businesses and local communities.

If we are to build on the success that Essex has enjoyed in the past, we need to forge a new partnership that brings together the county council, the wider public sector, civil society and the citizens, businesses and communities of Essex. We can deliver local success in the face of global uncertainty, but we can only do this by working more closely together.

Cllr Peter Martin  
Leader, Essex County Council

Joanna Killian,  
Chief Executive, Essex County Council

## **Our vision statement**

*Essex means business. We want to be a vibrant place where every individual and community has the opportunity to grow and reach their potential and play a part in our county's success.*

## **Our key priorities**

Over the next five years, our key priorities for Essex are:

- enabling every individual to achieve their ambitions by supporting a world-class education and skills offer in the county;
- securing the infrastructure and environment to enable businesses to grow;
- improving public health and wellbeing;
- protecting and safeguarding vulnerable people; and
- giving people a greater say and a greater role in building safer and stronger communities.

We want people across Essex to have the skills and opportunities that will allow them to succeed in a changing global economy, realising that education doesn't stop when people leave school, college or university. We want to see families, communities and partners work together to keep our neighbourhoods safe, strong and healthy. We want to see our businesses drive the economic growth on which our wellbeing depends. We want to look after our elderly and our most vulnerable children, ensuring that they have the protection, support and care they need so that they too have the choices to determine their own future, achieve their ambitions, and play a meaningful role in society.

The work of public services can help make this happen. As one part of a vibrant civil society, Essex County Council will enable Essex citizens and communities to realise their ambitions and aspirations – this is our commitment to Essex. We will always spend taxpayers' money wisely, we will prioritise the interests of Essex above all others and, in partnership with

people and places, we will maintain the physical, social and service infrastructure that allows our citizens to live full and independent lives.

But the work of the public services can never be enough – citizens across Essex have a critical role to play in improving their neighbourhoods, securing opportunities for themselves, their families and their communities and realising their aspirations. Business, charities, voluntary groups and community associations have an equally valuable contribution to make.

## **Our principles**

To support our work to deliver these priorities, we want to build a new partnership with public bodies, Essex citizens, private businesses, civil society and local communities: a partnership based on Essex's long-term interests and on our shared responsibility for improving local quality of life. We want to see citizens play an active role in their communities – responsible, engaged and empowered; consuming services over which they have control and helping to shape the communities in which they live. As we work together in this new partnership, we will ground our actions in the following principles:

- **Putting our residents first:** Our commitment to putting our residents first underpins all our activity. Essex County Council exists to represent the interests of local communities and to serve its residents, customers and clients. We will always strive to champion Essex residents and communities, ensure they have access to high quality and innovative public services and make the best use of taxpayers' money.
- **Increasing choice:** We make informed choices about almost every aspect of our lives. Market forces and advanced technologies allow us to tailor the services we consume to fit our increasingly diverse demands. Local public services will have to be equally responsive if they are to retain the trust of taxpayers and citizens. Essex County Council will put more choice and control in the hands of citizens and communities, whether through direct payments, personal budgets, or by giving people direct choice over the services they receive.

- **Promoting local decision-making:** Not all services can allow for individual choice. Where services are provided collectively and for the benefit of the community as a whole rather than for individuals, we will look to promote decision-making at the most locally appropriate level. For many services, decision-making could be decentralised to local forums, community groups or District, Borough, Town or Parish councils. Our approach will transfer power to those who have greatest interest in getting decisions right and allow Essex's diverse communities to shape local services to meet local needs.
  
- **Improving outcomes:** We will ensure that citizens and communities get the services they need at best value for the taxpayer. This will mean working in partnership with a diverse range of service providers across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It will also mean working with public sector staff, with local businesses and with social entrepreneurs to develop new types of public service provider (such as free schools and public service mutuals). We will see a shift from a system where the council provides services directly, to one where it commissions innovative services from a diverse range of providers. From a system where public service professionals 'know best' to one where our partners seek out new, improved ways of delivering services that help citizens and communities to help themselves.
  
- **Taking action early:** We will work ever more closely with our partners to integrate services and to use our collective resources to address intractable issues, such as poor educational performance, dependency, crime and reoffending, that can undermine local quality of life. It is vital that the public services tackle these problems before they become difficult, costly to address, and blight people's lives. Individuals, families, and communities have an important role to play in taking responsibility for what happens in their area. For example, evidence suggests that if communities simply accept the first acts of anti-social behaviour and low level crime they can quickly attract escalating problems and decay.

- **Delivering value for money:** We will never forget that we are stewards of taxpayers' money. We will deliver the best possible value for money by improving efficiency, getting a better deal when we buy goods and services, making better use of our property, trading our services within Essex and beyond, and sharing costs and integrating services with other parts of the public sector. We will live within our means and we will keep council tax low.

We are confident that Essex citizens and communities will welcome this new partnership. Some 87% of residents feel that, on the right issues, they would like more influence over what happens in their area. In many cases Essex citizens, families and communities are already shaping both their neighbourhoods and the services they receive. The work of District, Borough, Town and Parish councils; businesses; community groups; service clubs; faith groups; sports clubs and voluntary associations, for instance, provide a solid foundation on which to build this new partnership. They provide a basis upon which citizens and communities can lead our joint work to make Essex economically, socially, and culturally successful and prosperous.

## The challenges we face

**Essex is one of the largest, most populous and most multifaceted counties in the UK – it faces challenges to match its scale.**

In 2011 many of our citizens enjoy high living standards and high incomes but persistent pockets of deprivation and disadvantage remain. Essex has some of the best schools in the country yet too many of our young people leave education without the skills demanded by businesses. Our communities are safe and healthy, but lifestyle choices continue to place services under strain. Our residents have access to some of England's most beautiful countryside and coastlines but the pressures of development and a changing climate are taking their toll.

Over the coming years, we need to recognise that:

- **Essex cannot take economic growth for granted** – job growth over the past decade has been in areas such as construction, financial services and the public sector – these areas may not deliver future jobs.
- **Social capital and community cohesion will be critical to the county's future** – as public services look to devolve more responsibility, we will need to ensure that individuals, families and communities have the appetite and capacity to play an even greater role.
- **Our county's rich variety poses challenges for public services** – Essex is a place where rich and poor and young and old live side-by-side. As resources diminish, community leaders may need to balance differing demands and conflicting interests.
- **Essex has an ageing population** – the over-85 age group is growing faster than any other, placing strain on health and care services. Furthermore, the burden of financing services is falling increasingly on the relatively small working-age group.

## **Delivering our commitment**

Our vision is for Essex to be a vibrant place where every individual and community has the opportunity to grow and reach their potential and play a part in our county's success. We will do everything we can to realise this through a new partnership involving the public sector, Essex citizens, private businesses, civil society and local communities. We have retained the name *EssexWorks* to acknowledge the aspirations, ambitions and contributions that, taken together, will achieve this.

We will continue to use our *EssexWorks* programme to communicate with our citizens and communities, staff and partners, and to state clear objectives that focus on areas where we can make a real difference to people's opportunities.

This is a long-term commitment to Essex citizens and communities. In five years time we want to see:

- A buoyant local economy: where prosperity is secured by improving life-long education and skills, enhancing the transport network, attracting investment and stimulating growth both in vibrant town centres and key business sectors such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing and logistics.
- People-oriented public services: where Essex public services work effectively together, commissioning services, sharing resources and collaborating on projects that deliver value for money and benefit all our citizens.
- A strong, cohesive Essex: where civil society at large recognises that protecting our most vulnerable citizens is important to us all, and where individuals, families and communities look out for each other.
- Improved outcomes: where Essex is recognised as a great place to live, with services and wider society working together to improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of our adults, children and families.

- Increased independence: where individuals, families and strong communities take responsibility for the quality of life in their area and play an active role in influencing local decisions.

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