

## ***Parish Update***

### **Essex County Council – Budget**

The County Council have worked hard this year under increasing pressure from central government to provide key services to the public with less funding. This brief report outlines some of the notable achievements we have made in 2006/2007 that have resulted in real service improvements.

Following the summary bullet points, I have provided some information on our spending priorities for 2007/2008, which I hope you will find useful.

#### **Review of 2006/2007**

Notable achievements

- Received a 2\* performance rating for all our ASC services and won a number of awards
- Both our Learning Disabilities and our Emergency Planning services were short listed for Beacon Status
- Treated 400 miles of roads over the last two years of the Highways Maintenance Initiative
- Continued with the funding of the Community Initiative Fund
- Established the first Park and Ride scheme in the County and then extended it due to its success.
- Introduced a web based admissions procedure for schools.
- Reduced the number of children in our residential and foster homes
- Worked with District Councils on a Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and saw an increase in our recycling levels from 30% in 2004/5 to 35% in 2006/07. Recycling at our Civic Amenity sites is 61% - the highest it has ever been.
- Our Trading Standards services introduced ten new 'No cold calling zones'
- Opened a new Adult Community College in Witham

The 2006/2007 original budget included some £23m of efficiencies when it was set. During the year, a further £11.4m was identified across all services that were reinvested in Adult Social Care.

## **Headline points on the budget 2007/2008:**

Government grant increase equates to 2.7% - woefully inadequate given that inflationary pressures on Adult Social Care lead to cost increases of 18.6%, inflation on Children's services equate to 9.2% and on waste disposal, the costs have increased by 11.2%. Having said that the increase in grants for each individual schoolchild has risen by 6%, although that increase is through direct grant from central Government and unaffected by council priorities.

County Council tax increase of 4.5% on a band D property equating to a rate of £1,003.95

## **Spending priorities;**

### **Care for the elderly**

Branded a national disgrace by Lord Hanningfield, sentiments agreed by many across local government. In Essex, the over 85 age group will double in the next fifteen years. The Government have announced a £1.3 million grant to upgrade and refurbish care homes in the private sector across the County. The County Council will double this so that £2.6 million will be available.

The County Council is conscious of the fact that often those in elderly people's homes often feel disenfranchised from the decision-making processes that affect them – as do relatives of those residents. We will be funding the establishment of 'relations and residents associations' across the county so that they can have their voices heard, they can express concern and congratulate when going right.

### **Environment**

The County Council has set aside £2,000,000 for a rolling programme of works to reduce carbon emissions. In particular, buildings will be refurbished, improving thermal efficiency and decreasing energy consumption on council property. There will also be a focus on reducing staff mileage and, working in partnership with a major motor manufacturer, we will introduce vehicles to the council fleet that are fuelled by bio ethanol; so creating a demand for this kind of fuel which will benefit the wider public as distribution widens.

In partnership with Renewable East, we will also be looking to encourage both households and small businesses to look at renewable sources of energy including solar, wind, biomass and geo-thermal heat pump technology.

£100,000 has also been set aside for tree planting, so protecting and enhancing growth of threatened tree species and also improving the environment for all.

The County Council is still committed to opposing a second runway at Stansted as well as all Government imposed unsustainable development in the county.

## **Highways**

A record of £158 million will be spent on Highways and Transportation and associated initiatives this year as part of a three year programme of improvements, including safer journeys to school, new road construction, easing congestion and improved bus services. 560 kilometres of road will be treated over the next twelve months and continuing efficiencies will be found in improving the contractual arrangements we have in place.

The Essex Safety Camera Partnership will be replaced by a new Casualty Reduction Board comprising of senior members and officers of the County Council, the Police, the Ambulance Service and the Highways Authority. On top of this, money now collected from speed camera speeding fines will no longer go straight to the treasury but instead will be available to be used throughout the County in priority areas as laid down in the Local Transport Plan which will include safety measures worth in the region of £3.2 million.

## **Education**

Essex still has some of the best schools in the country and, in line with the Government's 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative we will ensure that the fabric of our school buildings is kept up to date.

In summary, the budget is a sound one and clearly illustrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that the quality of life within the county is improved, that the elderly are cared for and that getting around is made easier and more cost effective.