

## Essex County Councillor's Annual Report 2013 – 2014

The council has frozen the council tax for the fourth year running, despite increasing budget pressures and a reduced settlement from the Government.

We have already made savings of £364million in the preceding years and have a further £107 million of savings identified this year, of a total of £235million by the 2017. There are also other pressures such as the impact of the Care Bill which could add a further £40 million to our budget costs.

That said, we have agreed to make extra funding available for a number of areas.

Because of the prolonged bad weather, an extra £17 million will be spent on making good the damaged roads. At any one time there have been numerous potholes awaiting repair across the County, so we really are making an effort now to catch up on these.

To deal with flood management £2 million has been set aside, and a further £1 million for highways flooding problems, with 60 schemes identified by the Districts across the county.

Having listened to young people in our Youth Services consultation, we will put an extra £1 million for better equipment and facilities for young people. There will be some reconfiguring of the service, but no centres will close.

And for those young people looking for work, an extra £500,000 is provided to help them do that for example, by creating 260 apprenticeships, which takes the total for this year to 515 places.

In education, I can report that the number of primary schools rated as outstanding has increased to 70% (up from 62%). And in Secondary Schools 83% of our pupils achieved 3 or more A levels. We want to continue this trend, so an extra £1 million is being allocated to the schools improvement fund which will help raise standards further in primary schools.

School buildings too are to have £96million invested in them over the next three years.

Having children in care is always a challenge for any local authority, but with early intervention we have reduced those numbers by a quarter. Reflecting the amount of work that has gone into this area, Ofsted has recently inspected children's services and rated them as Good. Just a few years ago, we were in special measures.

High-speed Broadband has had a £6 million investment and will be rolled out across the county over the next three years.

We set up the Essex Energy Switch, and had just over 4200 residents sign up to get their energy bills reduced.

We are reviewing our recycling centre service across the county to make sure they are fit for purpose. The Saffron Walden site is the model we would like to have elsewhere across the county. The consultation is open until April 20<sup>th</sup> and is available online at [www.essex.gov.uk/recyclingcentres](http://www.essex.gov.uk/recyclingcentres) .

This year will see the completion of a waste management plant at Basildon this will go live next year with all of the non-recycled waste being processed there. This will make a considerable dent in our landfill tax bill of £19 million, and also recover even more recylates.

Locally, we have the Tour de France cycle race taking place on July 7<sup>th</sup>. I had encouraged officers to identify routes that would showcase the best of Essex; unfortunately there will be some disruption on the day, with roads on the route in Uttlesford being closed from 7.30 to 4.00. There will be thousands of people descending on the area so it is an opportunity for the village as people will no doubt wish to explore this part of Essex over the weekend.

The Community Initiatives Fund is now open for applications, details at [www.essex.gov.uk/cif](http://www.essex.gov.uk/cif)

At County I 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. 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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