

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL – THE ESSEX APPROACH (Min. 401/99)

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1. To bring to Members' attention the County Council's Strategic Document "The Essex Approach" and to seek Members' views as to whether the Authority should support the broad principles and objectives contained therein.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members may recall that a draft of this document was considered by Finance & General Purposes Committee at its meeting last October (Min. 401/99)
- 2.2 At that time Members agreed that where common themes were emerging between the County's Strategic Document and this Council's own Corporate Plan, there might be benefit in both Authorities working together in areas of mutual advantage.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The County Council have considered the comments received to their draft Strategy and have produced a revised version. A copy of the Essex Approach 2000 is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 As Members will see, the key policy goals of the County Council are to:-
- Make communities safe, caring and healthy
 - Create a thriving economy and sustainable environment
 - Provide opportunities for lifetime learning and creative leisure
- 3.3 Following County Council approval, the document has been reported to the Association of Essex Councils and that Association has been asked whether it would endorse the broad principles and objectives contained within it and support partnership working to help achieve its content. Similarly this Authority has been asked whether it would support the broad principles and objectives contained within it.

4. Comment

- 4.1 The key objectives contained within the County's document are similar to those outlined in this Council's Corporate Plan and Best Value Performance Plan and there would, therefore, appear to be benefit to both Authorities in working together in areas of mutual advantage. In addition there are a number of issues under Best Value where there is likely to be considerable benefit in working with the County Council in undertaking service reviews, developing new standards and carrying out public consultation exercises e.g. Emergency Planning, Land Charges Searches, Community Safety.,etc.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The District Council already operates in partnership with the County Council in delivering the Crime and Disorder agenda.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are linkages between the District Council and the County Council in both the development and execution of the environmental agenda.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES:**

To advise Essex County Council of its willingness to work together in areas of mutual benefit to both partners

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers: None

For further information please contact Paul Warren on (01702) 546366

Essex Approach 2000

The Essex Approach sets out Essex County Council's:

- **purpose** - why it exists;
- **policies** - what it seeks to do; and
- **practice** - how it will operate.

Having consulted the public and our partner agencies, all political groups on the County Council agree that our key policy goals are to:

- **make our communities safe, caring and healthy;**
- **create a thriving economy in a sustainable environment;**
- **provide opportunities for lifelong learning and creative leisure.**

Given the financial constraints facing the council, differences will inevitably remain as to relative priorities at the detailed level. These will have to be resolved politically year by year as our annual budget and performance plan are formulated.

In meeting our overall policy goals, we shall strive to:

- **secure the highest quality services we can afford;**
- **seek a lively debate about priorities;**
- **work in partnership with a broad range of other bodies;**
- **ensure that services are fair and inclusive;**
- **be environmentally responsible.**

A wide range of other agencies is willing to work with us in realising our goals for Essex. These goals are ambitious. They cannot be met by the County Council acting alone. But they are about things that matter a great deal to local people, and that is why we are serious about working with others. Together, we can make a difference for Essex.

Mervyn Juliff
Leader of the Council
and of the Labour Group

James Gordon
Leader of the Independent Group

Lord Hanningfield
Leader of the Conservative Group

Ken Jones
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Our purpose

The purpose of Essex County Council is to help make Essex a great place in which to live and work. The council will:

- **enhance the quality of life of Essex people by providing for them a broad range of good quality services; and**
- **debate and decide matters of common concern to Essex people in an elected and accountable forum.**

In carrying out this purpose, the council will:

- **provide quality services at a reasonable cost in taxes;**
- **give leadership to the community and its own staff;**
- **involve local people in sensible ways when deciding what to do;**
- **set clear priorities for spending and action;**
- **work with others to tackle the county's most pressing needs;**
- **speak for the people and communities of Essex as a whole.**

Our policies

If Essex is truly to be a great place in which to live and work, the County Council and its partners have to meet three balanced challenges:

- **make our communities safe, caring and healthy;**
- **create a thriving economy in a sustainable environment;**
- **provide opportunities for lifelong learning and creative leisure.**

The County Council will mainly do this through:

- **action programmes across the whole county:**
safety
care
transport
enterprise
environment
lifelong learning
creative leisure.
- **a special action programme for young people**
- **local action zones within a county-wide initiative to tackle social need.**
For example:
East Basildon
Harwich and Clacton.

Make our communities safe, caring and healthy

Only in communities that are safe, caring and healthy can we achieve a decent quality of life.

The County Council will work in partnership with health professionals, the police, district and borough councils and other agencies to make Essex a safer place to live. We seek to uphold law and order, reduce crime, and prevent accidents. Public opinion surveys tell us that this is a top priority for Essex people.

No community can flourish without a sense of mutual care among its members. The County Council has a leading role to play in supporting families and individuals who need help. It shares this responsibility with the private and voluntary sectors. The council will also work closely with the health service to fight illness and promote healthy lifestyles.

Safety programme

- To make the public safer in their daily lives, from the dangers of crime, environmental pollution, and accidents, and to improve the sense of safety.
- To reduce the number of young people in Essex who start offending and to reduce re-offending rates.
- To reduce the number of people killed or injured on the roads in Essex.
- To reduce the number of people killed or injured in the home.
- To reduce the number of Trading Standards offences.
- To carry out enforcement activity over the whole range of the council's regulatory responsibilities in a way that maximises their effectiveness whilst minimising costs to those regulated.

Special projects in 2000-01 include:

- Youth at Risk scheme;
- Proof of Age scheme;
- developing Youth Offending Teams.

Care programme

For people for whom social services have a responsibility

- To ensure that children receive safe and effective care throughout their childhood, with fewer changes of carer.
- To ensure that children, including those with disabilities, get the best possible start in life.
- To help young people leaving care to have the best possible opportunities to find accommodation, employment, education, training and a social life.
- To help adults to exercise choice about their lives, so that they can lead as full a life as they can, in their own homes wherever possible.
- To ensure services to people of working age maximise scope for independence and employment for them and their carers
- To enable carers to care for as long as they and the service user wish.
- To promote and protect high standards of all round care in residential homes and under 8s day-care, including through a programme of registration and inspection.

For all Essex residents

- To protect children from abuse of all kinds.
- To do all we can to improve the health of Essex people generally, and in particular the worst off in society, by encouraging healthy schools, healthy workplaces and healthy neighbourhoods.
- To promote strong and inclusive communities that increase participation by local people in a shared local life.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- supporting Healthy Living Centres and healthy schools;
- Children's Services - Family Group Conferencing, foster carer recruitment, the Learning and After-Care Service;
- Community Care - the promotion of Independent Living and Health Partnership schemes.

Create a thriving economy in a sustainable environment

A flourishing local economy makes for higher living standards for us all. The council therefore places a high priority on helping to create more jobs, attracting the right kind of business to Essex, and helping local businesses to compete successfully in national, European, and world markets.

The council seeks to secure for Essex the infrastructure it needs to support a vibrant economy. At the same time, all development must be sustainable. The council aims to protect the natural and historic environment, as ultimately it is the home in which we all live and is the source of our well-being.

The council has a responsibility for ensuring that Essex's long term requirements for housing, transport, and employment are planned effectively, while conserving the county's environmental assets and its historic and cultural heritage.

Transport programme

- To improve the effectiveness of the county's existing strategic road network, reducing congestion to allow people and goods to move around the county more efficiently.
- To work with our partners to improve the quality and frequency of public transport services both in urban and rural areas to provide a viable alternative to using the car.
- To support the safety programme objective of reducing the number of people killed or injured on the roads in Essex.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- completing and implementing the Essex Local Transport Plan;
- progressing the A130 bypass (A12 to A127), A120 Stansted to Braintree and A131 Great Leighs by-pass strategic road improvements;
- implementing the Contract 2000 strategy for procurement of highway services.

Enterprise programme

- To work with the private sector and other partners to increase the number of sustainable jobs in Essex.
- To promote higher standards of living for all Essex people.
- To improve business success and competitiveness.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- Technopole project;
- promoting inward investment;
- tourism.

Environment programme

- To increase the proportion of household waste which is re-used , recycled or composted to 40 per cent by 2004 and to 60% by 2007.
- To conserve the county's most important nature conservation habitats and species.
- To work with others towards meeting the targets within the National Air Quality Strategy.
- To help to conserve the county's landscape and historic heritage.
- To meet our housing needs in a sustainable way which contributes to the county's distinctive character, with at least 50 per cent of new development on previously used land.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- complete formal adoption of the replacement Essex and Southend Structure Plan; -
- complete formal adoption of the Essex and Southend Waste Plan and develop waste contract strategy jointly with district councils;
- initiate pilot schemes with district councils to promote high levels of recycling of waste.

Provide opportunities for life long learning and creative leisure

The County Council has a key role in helping each of us to learn and to achieve our full potential. This learning and enrichment is a life long entitlement for all in Essex. The Council therefore aims to raise achievement, widen participation, and develop a more socially inclusive society - thereby improving people's quality of life.

Information is a key resource for both individual learning and economic success. The Council will therefore provide a high quality library service, and make full use of new technologies to improve information services of all kinds.

A strong heritage and cultural life are important factors in attracting inward investment to our county. We shall encourage the creative use of leisure time by promoting sport, the arts, the heritage and cultural activity in its broadest sense.

Learning programme

- To raise levels of achievement for young people in numeracy and literacy and at GCSE.
- To ensure such improvements extend to all young people by:
 - a. reducing the numbers excluded from schools;
 - b. improving attainment among children looked after; and
 - c. educating children with special educational needs in a way which reflects their individual needs, where appropriate in a mainstream school.
- To widen participation in learning by increasing the percentage of young people over 16 in full time education and training, and increasing participation rates in the youth and adult education services.
- To make the most of our libraries as local learning places for all.
- To secure funded four year old nursery education for all children whose parents want it
- To work towards accessible affordable childcare for children under 14.
- To extend the National Grid for Learning beyond schools to link up to the People's Network in Libraries and Learn Direct's learning centres.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- extending the positive benefits of the Early Reading Research and the Family Literacy project to more localities;
- rigorous use of performance data, at local education authority and school level, to target action;
- implement the Special Educational Needs Action Programme agreed after wide consultation.

Creative leisure programme

- To increase use of the library, community information service, and adult community colleges, at times and places convenient to all.
- To extend library use to 70 per cent of the population, by extending library opening and access hours.
- To establish the new Essex Record Office as a centre of heritage for the county and maximise its use.
- To maximise participation in cultural activity, the arts and sport by Essex residents and visitors, including encouraging the provision of additional facilities.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- SEAMLESS - a new model for public information;
- SEAX - the heritage information system developed by Essex County Council and shared with partners in museums and local history groups;
- production of a comprehensive report on the impact of the arts by autumn 2000.

Special action programme for young people

Essex residents tell us that Essex County Council should do more for young people. Many of our partner organisations are getting the same message.

Investing in youth is key to a healthy future for our society and our economy. Attention is therefore being paid to the needs of young people in all our programmes, but here we are committing ourselves to highly targeted action to improve their quality of life throughout Essex.

Young people programme

- To continue to improve communications between local authorities and young people in Essex so that young people become more engaged in decision-taking.
- To promote affordable leisure facilities for young people in Essex which are readily accessible by public or voluntary transport.
- To promote the safety of young people.

Special projects for 2000-01 include:

- inter-active web site for young people;
- Essex Young People's Day 2000;
- Young People's Transport and Leisure Forum.

Local action zones

There are localities throughout Essex where the particularly pressing character of social need has been recognised by the government, through programmes such as Education Action Zones and the Single Regeneration Budget.

The County Council wishes to work closely with its partners throughout the county to ensure that all such initiatives are fully integrated. Within this countywide initiative the first challenge is to make a success of the two Education Action Zones already established. These are in East Basildon and in Harwich and Clacton.

East Basildon and the Harwich and Clacton programmes

To develop integrated programmes of action with partner agencies and local communities that address the inter-related social, economic and environmental needs of the action zones.

- To improve the co-ordination and delivery of County Council and other services in the action zones.
- To investigate ways that greater levels of external funding can be brought into the local community by building on the achievement of Education Action Zone status.
- To apply experience gained in the action zones to all areas of the county.

Further information on policies

The annual Best Value Performance Plan sets out the measures and targets applying to each of these policies.

More detailed Service Plans are also available for each of the County Council's services.

Our practice

We make five commitments to the Essex people about our practice.

Commitment to democracy

Local democracy is a dialogue involving Essex people...

The County Council seeks to involve the local community in decisions it takes about how it provides services. To do this properly, it needs to encourage active involvement in its affairs by local people as electors and citizens.

We therefore seek to improve electoral turn-out, and to draw more people more deeply into our debates and decision-making. By informing, consulting and involving we shall bring county government closer to the people.

Most of our services are not delivered to people, they are fashioned with them. For example, governors, parents and children shape the education service just as much as our managers and teachers.

We therefore seek to involve all service users in the constant search for top quality by:

- giving clear information about services and how to access them;
- seeking ideas about what we should do to improve services;
- consulting them about changes we propose to our working practices;
- encouraging feedback, both complaints and compliments.

... and Elected Members

Elected members of the County Council:

- represent the interests of all the people of their communities;
- are advocates for their local communities and for Essex as a whole;
- take decisions after carefully considering information, opinion and debate;
- monitor the performance of the council to ensure quality services at a fair cost.

To aid accountability, members will:

- consult the public and report back on decisions;
- encourage public involvement in the council's work where appropriate;
- give a clear account each year of their key decisions, and the reasons for them, in the council's annual report; and
- publish information that will enable people to judge the efficiency and effectiveness of the council's services.

Further information

For copies of the following documents, contact **0345 430430**:

- Corporate Information Strategy;
- Essex County Council Complaints Procedure;
- Essex County Council's Standing Orders;
- Members' Handbook;
- Protocol for Member-Officer Relations.

Commitment to partnership

Effective partnerships put Essex people first

Essex County Council can only succeed in tackling the changing and complicated needs of its communities if it works in partnership with many other agencies.

Few if any of the objectives set out in this Essex Approach can be met by the County Council acting alone.

The County Council is therefore committed to:

- seeking out partners with whom to work for the good of Essex people;
- consulting those partner organisations about its policies;
- providing more services with and through partner bodies.

Our closest partners are those who like us are members of the Association of Essex Councils, the police, health authorities, borough and district councils and the Essex Association of Local Councils. But we also work closely with a broad range of other public bodies at the regional and local level, as well as many organisations in the private and voluntary sectors.

Many organisations join with us in seeking to meet the needs of Essex people. With them, we are committed to putting our local communities first.

Further information

For copies of the following documents, contact 0345 430430:

- Constitution of the Association of Essex Councils;
- Aims and Objectives of Essex Links;
- Code of Practice for Relationship with Town and Parish Councils.

Commitment to quality

County Council services have a critical impact on the quality of life of local people. This is why we are committed to initiatives such as the Business Excellence Model.

Quality depends on the County Council listening to the people who use its services. But beyond that, it also turns on the calibre of our staff, how well we manage information through technology, and our stewardship of resources.

Our staff

We look to staff for:

- top quality and imaginative professional advice;
- success in developing partnerships and commissioning external services;
- excellence in managing and delivering our own services.

Only a well-motivated, well-managed, competent and committed staff can provide the high quality support we need. This is why Essex is committed to the Investors in People standard, a national quality standard linking the training and development of staff to our service objectives.

We are committed to:

- equal opportunities for all actual and potential employees;
- continuous improvement in the way staff are managed;
- developing more effective ways of communicating with our staff;
- ensuring that excellent training and development opportunities are made available to all employees; and
- a culture which encourages initiative at all levels.

All staff must:

- ensure that members receive the best advice when taking decisions;
- supply members with information about service performance;
- implement decisions using the best professional expertise;
- manage resources effectively to provide quality services.

The County Council places a high priority on ensuring that all its staff are fully competent to carry out their various roles.

Managing information through technology

The information age is upon us, and Essex County Council is already responding positively.

We have a part to play in the many information society initiatives emerging at the national level, but we can also benefit from the new information and communications technologies in the following ways:

- New technologies should help us to enhance the life of our communities, strengthen local democracy and deliver new and better services. They provide key tools with which to meet the challenge of the Government's Modernising Local Government initiative.
- Networking is the basis of successful partnership. The new technologies can help us all to communicate more effectively and work more productively.

We will therefore make the best use of new technology to:

- communicate with citizens, ensuring effective local government in a local democracy;
- promote Essex as a learning society, making for a better quality of life and strengthening our economy;
- improve efficiency and effectiveness, offering the public high quality services at the lowest possible cost.

Careful stewardship of resources

The County Council holds its money and assets in trust from the people of Essex. We shall take care to be good stewards of these resources.

We aim to ensure that we provide good quality services at a sensible price in taxation. To achieve this, we shall make sure we:

- get best value from the money we spend in terms of the topmost quality we can secure; and
- always seek efficiency in the way we do things.

Over the next five years, we will carry out careful reviews of our services, covering about a fifth of our spending each year.

Further information

For copies of the following documents, contact **0345 430430**:

- **Corporate Framework;**
- **Delegations to Chief Officers;**
- **Financial Regulations;**
- **Procurement Standards;**
- **Corporate Human Resource Development Strategy;**
- **The Competency Framework;**
- **Corporate Management Development Framework;**
- **Statement of Values;**
- **Equal Opportunities In Employment Policy;**
- **Best Value Performance Plan (from April 2000);**
- **[Your Council Tax 2000-01][or whatever it's actually called]???????????????**

Commitment to fairness

The County Council seeks a society that is fair and inclusive. It will seek to uphold these values in its own dealings with the public.

The Council will:

- treat all people fairly and equally;
- make services accessible to all;
- allocate resources according to need.

Essex County Council is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all. It recognises that particular care should be shown towards those who are disadvantaged.

Equality is a fundamental feature of both democracy and service quality.

Further information

For copies of the following document, contact 0345 430430:

- Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy.

Commitment to the environment

Sustainable development is at the heart of our decision making.

The County Council will consider the economic, social and environmental effects of all its decisions, and where necessary will strike a balance for the overall well-being of Essex.

As a council, we shall meet our own environmental responsibilities by:

- Conserving energy, water, paper and other resources, while still providing a safe working environment.
- Reducing waste, encouraging recycling and the use of recycled products and materials in our own operations.
- Providing staff with the information, training and supervision necessary to enable them to carry out their duties with the minimum impact on the environment.
- Using our influence as a major purchaser to educate and encourage manufacturers and suppliers to develop 'greener' goods and services.
- Ensuring, where practicable, that our buildings are designed, constructed and operated to reduce their impact on the environment.
- Ensuring that our own actions are at the forefront of environmental best practice.

Further information

For copies of the following document, contact **0345 430430**:

- Corporate Environmental Stewardship Strategy.

Conclusion

Essex County Council believes that the framework of values contained in this document will help the Council's members, officers, and partner organisations to work together even more effectively for the good of the Essex people. If you would like to comment on anything in the Essex Approach, please contact us by:

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