

Essex County Council - Heddingham Division

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2021/22 Annual Report

The last 12 months have been exceptionally busy and demanding. They have also been productive, and the new administration at Essex County Council has lost no time in setting out its clear aims and priorities for the four-year term.

While too many to list in full, below is a small sample of the landmarks and achievements of the last 12 months at the county council.

- **Launch of Everyone's Essex Strategy** – the council's ambitious plan for the four years ahead. It set out our levelling up plan for the county, and 20 commitments under the key areas of "economy", "environment", "health" and "family". The strategy set out how renewal, equality and ambition run through everything we do. Crucially, from my perspective, it established our aim to reach net-zero in Essex.
- **A budget for Essex** - In February this year, the council set its budget for the 2022/23 financial year. To help achieve ECC's vision of a county where everyone can thrive, it was announced that several areas would receive significant additional investment, including:
 - a £1.3 billion capital programme across the next four years
 - £200million over the next four years to support our climate action and net zero ambitions
 - an additional £10million in skills and economic growth
 - a further £2million for infrastructure and a new pothole fund
 - a £1.5million fund for the heritage and culture sector
 - an additional £1million for Levelling Up across Essex
 - continuation of the £750,000 localities fund to support district-based Levelling Up priorities
 - a continuation of the £500,000 investment in the work being done to protect Essex children from being targeted by gangs

A £20million investment has already been made available to help families. This includes directly supporting financial wellbeing and helping them with summer childcare. ECC will also commit an extra £700,000 to the Essential Living Fund to help families and individuals with food, fuel, clothing and furniture bills.

- **Council Tax** – At the same meeting, ECC took the difficult decision to increase its share of council tax by 4.49%.

As an administration, we are very clear that the only money the council has to spend is the money of our residents. It is therefore right that we raise taxes reluctantly and only once every alternative has been explored. In this instance, the main part of the increase was a 2.5% increase in the social care precept – money that goes towards supporting vulnerable residents, including

frail, elderly, adults with disabilities, and vulnerable children in need. While we always seek to avoid council tax increases, the pressures on the social care market are such that an increase this year was deemed the only way to stave off serious problems in provision of social care, with providers struggling to stay in business.

- **Highways** - The council will be spending £135m on highways maintenance over the coming year and, as ever, will prioritise the areas by severity of need.

In the Braintree district council area, over the last six months, this spending has led to repairs to 184 county-grade roads, 160 local roads, 187 pavements, 3,711 drains cleared and 2,240 street lights fixed.

- **Climate Action** - In November, ECC's cabinet approved a Climate Action Plan which agreed a £200m commitment to help address all areas of climate-related activity in Essex. The county council's ambition is to ensure we are building a coalition of support across the county for the move to net-zero carbon emissions in our county by 2050. Detailing how we will implement the recommendations of the Essex Climate Action Commission's report [Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#), it included plans across areas such as housing, infrastructure, transport, waste and the natural environment.
- **Within the first 100 days** - the following was achieved
 - repairing over one million square metres of roads and 40,000 square metres of footpaths and cycleways
 - creating over 600 new roles for unemployed young people aged 18-24 as part of the Government's Kickstart scheme
 - delivering four BT broadband contracts under Superfast Essex programme for a further 12,000 premises
 - starting construction of the West Mersea temporary defence barrier scheme
 - launching a new £500,000 fund to support community action on climate change
 - working with the Essex Climate Action Commission (ECAC) to develop and publish the 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' report
 - launching the Active Essex 'Find your Active' campaign, supported by a £1.25 million fund
 - launching Essex Pedal Power, a £2.7million community-based project being piloted in Clacton and Jaywick Sands
 - launching the new Essex Care Technology Service to support people with care needs access and use the latest technology to help them to live as independently as possible
 - announcing the Essex Education Task Force which will invest £1million in reading over the next 18 months, to support children and young people affected by the loss of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic
 - piloting construction methods designed to deliver net-zero, future proof, inclusive school buildings

It has been a pleasure to assist the following communities with My Locality Fund - Sturmer, Ashen, Pebmarsh, CastleHedingham, Lt Maplestead, Gestingthorpe and Belchamp St Paul.

I hope the above gives you an idea of the work that has gone in over the last year to develop our plans and deliver on them for the people of Essex.

For my part, my appointment as Climate Czar was a great privilege. It is a role that speaks volumes for our commitment in this space, but the work has only just started and there is much still to do.

Most of all, it has been my pleasure and privilege to serve the residents of all the villages, both large and small, within the Hedingham division. I look forward to continuing to do so in the next year and beyond.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Schwan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small red dot above the first letter 'P'.