Director of the Essex Digital Service

Essex County Council is ambitious and by 2030, it will be one of the most forward looking, effective and financially sustainable Councils in the country

July 24

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Essex: The Place

There is no single centre to Essex, but rather a series of interconnected economic corridors, overlapping labour and housing market areas and health economies. 72% of the county is rural, there are 350 miles of coastline, 35 islands, and we have the seventh largest road network in the country, as well as areas sitting in the London fringe. Within our towns and villages there is diversity too, from the Roman city of Colchester to the 1950s new towns of Harlow and Basildon, the seaside resort of Clacton-on-Sea and the market town of Saffron Walden.

We are well connected to London, Cambridge and the M11 corridor and are a gateway to trade and investment with two international airports (London Stansted and London Southend), and two emerging Freeports (Thames Freeport and Freeport East), building on the Haven ports (Harwich and Felixstowe) and London Gateway and Port of Tilbury, as well as 57 railway stations.

Essex is home to two universities: the University of Essex, and Anglia Ruskin University, both of which generate research with world-leading impact. Some of the most outstanding schools in the country – four of which, the girls' and boys' grammar schools in Chelmsford and Colchester, regularly feature amongst the top 20 schools in the country.

Essex key data

Council; Essex is the second largest County Council

- Serving a population of 1.5m
- We employ over 7500 people
- 75 County Councillors
- Revenue budget 2024/25 £2.5bn
- Social Care budget £1bn
- 12 lower tier Councils, 284 Parish Councils

People

- Over 320,000 people aged over 65 – 1 in 5
- Population growth of 11,100 people per year on average
- 17% of population living with life limiting conditions
- 8-year difference in life expectancy for males and 6 years for females from those living in the least deprived to most deprived areas in Essex
- 91% of Essex schools have achieved a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating

Place and Economy; 6th largest economy of any County Council area

- Essex is 70% rural with 350 miles of coastline
- 123,000 people living in the 20% most deprived areas of the country
- Significant housing growth over the next 15 years to 2035 – 148,000 in emerging local plans of which 102,000 remain to be built
- £42bn gross value added
- 77% employment rate
- 74,000 businesses
- £740 net weekly household income, £500 in deprived areas
- GVA per hour worked – Essex £36.73, England £38.90, Buckinghamshire £38.70, Berkshire £53.50

Service Transformation and Technology Services

[Everyone's Essex](#) is the Council's four-year strategy running from 2021-2025 and sets out the vision for services for our residents. To enable our front-line services to deliver against this vision, Essex County Council requires an efficient and effective, digital, design, data and technology enabled service. The new Essex Digital Service will provide a council-wide view of technology demand, help plan investment and resources to deliver efficiencies, identify and join up cross-cutting requirements and support the delivery of value and excellent services to Essex residents.

Technology is a key enabler of the Council's ability to deliver for its residents; this includes technology that supports employees in doing their jobs, technology that is more resident/customer facing, and technology that will enable the Council to transform the way it works in the future. The pandemic has naturally placed new demands on our technology estate to support hybrid and more flexible working. We are also conscious we need to keep pace with the public's changing expectations on accessing services and information digitally.

To support us in the effective development and use of technology, the Council has developed **Service Transformation objectives and a Technology Roadmap**, setting out our key programmes of work. The mission underlying the roadmaps is to 'drive outstanding outcomes and experiences for residents and employees enabled by modern, secure, compliant and connected technology solutions'.

Importantly, our approach recognises that technology is not just about 'the kit', but is also about governance, ways of working, and skills and capability to use technology effectively. Therefore making the most of technology is not something that our Digital Services team 'does to' the rest of the Council, but rather a partnership that is done together. As part of that, the Digital Services team collects regular feedback from staff which is reflected in the roadmaps. Read our recent blog:

Technology – not just for the techies

Service Transformation Objectives

Our service objectives describe how we are supporting the organisation to achieve the Council's transformation ambitions and deliver good public services in a climate of uncertainty and volatility

Create better services for residents and businesses

- Consolidation of websites and publishing platforms
- Digital service exemplars
- Measurement and service performance improvement
- Accessible digital service design

Help teams respond to strategic challenges

- Creating alignment between strategic objectives and team structures, processes and activities
- Supporting Design Authority
- Shaping policy and strategy as trusted delivery partners

Create better experiences for ECC staff and partners

- Creating a better Digital Employee Experience that fosters a culture of engagement and collaboration
- Shaping Corporate Systems and Support Services approaches

Build design and change capabilities across ECC

- Improving digital capabilities across the workforce
- Continuous improvement practice leadership
- Digital accessibility network and community

Build a strong and sustainable team

- Autonomy, mastery and purpose in people's roles
- Fewer vacancies and less turnover
- Supporting apprentice and junior level positions

Technology Roadmap

	Deliverables			
	Q1 FY24/25	**Q2 FY24/25**	**Q3 FY24/25**	**Q4 FY24/25**
Artificial Intelligence, Automation and Efficiency And Platforms for Data	• Action plan based upon recommendations from PWC pilots • Initial draft of Centre of Excellence Model • Pipeline for planned automations implemented • Planned Data Ingestion Pipelines • Policies for data management, data quality and data standards	• Roles and responsibilities for Centre of Excellence defined and identified • PWC Phase Two commissioned	• Final design of Centre of Excellence submitted for Design Authority approval • Action plan based on PWC Phase Two • Comprehensive Data Models	• Centre of Excellence Model 'stood up' • Training and development for 'Citizen Developers' planned for delivery • Consistent structure of Data Models Across Services • Consistent approach to data management across the business
Renewing and Maintaining our Tech	• Enterprise Capability for Device Management • Enterprise Capability for Application Management	• Modern Identity Management • Zero Touch Device provisioning • Instant Application Management	• Intuitive and Streamlined ESM • Instant Application Access	• Improved Essex employee experience • Modern hosted ECC applications • Automated patching • Commence a new Managed Service and refresh for WAN, LAN and WI-FI services
Technology for Collaboration	• SharePoint workshops to design directorate, function, team sites • training designed • Design Digital Champion roles Bitesize and learning pathway • Test and learn B2B federation with pilot partners; assess complex partners and agree strategy • Draft collaboration strategy, supporting policies and risk assessment	• SharePoint templates embedded; design data migration plan and deliver data owner training • Commence learning pathway training • Define governance and repeatable process to manage and maintain • Approval of collaboration strategy; implement policies	• Commence data migration • Continue training • Promote federation ability • Review risks, issues or incidents	• Complete data migration • Embed training for all new starters • Investigate B2C federation design and strategy • Move to BAU
Service specific schemes	• Social Care Platform Programme • Transforming how we produce Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) – Working in partnership with Outcomes Matter • Support Services Programme • Whole Council Transformation • Modernising Passenger Transport • Future Highways Programme			

The Case for Change

- **To realise our ambitions, and to deliver a step-change transformation in how we work as an organisation** we need to modernise the operating model for technology. The current structure doesn't support the new ways of working that we need. It doesn't create opportunities for succession planning or clear accountabilities and responsibilities.

- **To realise our ambition to be the leading digital council** we need to work in a cross-Council, digital way. We don't have digital capability across the Council and digital initiatives are piecemeal and internally or transactionally focused. We will maximise benefits from an external and relationship focus. We are demonstrating user centred, agile and iterative delivery for essex.gov.uk and a few digital services, but this approach won't scale out without a change to our operating model.

- **To implement a sustainable and best practice service**. We want to develop, retain and attract the best digital talent to our team and by modernising the service, introduce new ways of working, making digital part of what we all do we will be creating an environment when people can progress and build their careers in Essex.

Our Ambition: An Essex Digital Service

Work is already underway to consolidate and align our Service Transformation and Technology Services objectives and roadmaps, which will support a more standardised digital approach as an Essex Digital Service.
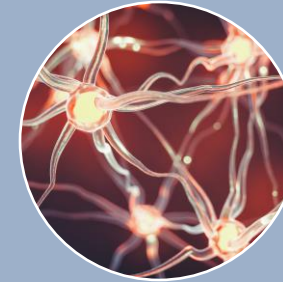
Development of the Essex Digital Service will progress us towards a Digital, Design, Data and Technology approach to bring together the key disciplines around people, processes and technology, aligned to best practice.

People	Process	Technology
Behaviour	Design	Applications/products
Change	Mapping	Architecture
Ways of working	Prototyping	Strategy/engagement
Training	Usability	Cyber security
		Information management
		Operational and infrastructure services

A digital way of working: a planning pipeline

Curiosity

We need to start with **understanding issues and problems**. Knowing what we want to change and why is key to empowering teams to deliver the changes that we need. Empowered teams will be critical to delivering our ambitious plans.

Experimentation

In an ever faster changing digital world, we need to adapt and deliver more quickly and iteratively. Our approach needs to involve more **willingness to experiment** to find solutions at a small scale – working together in multi-disciplinary teams.

Scale solutions

Having learned from our experiments, we need to **scale-up our successes** with a good understanding of the likely benefits. As solutions are scaled, we will likely need additional resource to extend proven solutions more widely across our endeavour.

Artificial Intelligence

"As leaders working in a digital era, we have a role to play in helping our workforce navigate the use of everyday AI that can help us 'keep up' and support productivity AND we have a role to play in setting the right level of ambition by selecting the key business problems and vision for how we can use game changing AI capabilities to support transformation

Our Corporate Leadership Team has sponsored the exploration of working in a new way. As part of this executive steer, we have engaged with our Functional Leadership Teams to develop problem statements and explore areas of opportunity that would be suitable to deploy the use of responsible AI. This experimentation will test, learn and develop our AI ambition as an organisation.

The approach taken to prioritisation included:

- Feasibility; can it be done and to a good enough result?

- Suitability; should it be done, ethical and legal?

- Impact; can we act as a result and scale of benefits?

- Scalability; can it be reused or reapplied elsewhere?

- Engagement; is there a clear and engaged sponsor from the business area?

Six pilot cases have been identified including transcription, information advice and guidance, Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCPs), a digital front door and Member Enquiries.

Whole Council Transformation

The Council has a long history of transformation, having delivered in excess of £800m sustainable savings as well as countless improvements to the way we provide services to residents. This historical success means that further improvement requires a more systematic approach and an innovative mindset, meaning that every part of the organisation has to work together to be successful.

To enable this, we have designed a Whole Council Transformation (WCT) Strategy and accompanying deployment approach. The overarching principle of WCT is to keep our three strategic drivers in balance:

- Everyone's Essex; the articulation of the political ambition for the citizens and businesses of Essex and our guiding light for everything we do in WCT

- The Changing World We Live In; this recognises many factors that are beyond our direct control, ranging from the societal consequences of the post-Covid era, the demographic-driven increases in demand or the expectations and opportunities brought to us by technology

- Financial sustainability; the Local Government sector is battling to balance available funds and increasing demand, while this is true for us too, our sound financial management means our cliff-edge is a few years away. We are committed to using that time to ensure we can make considered, evidence based, sustainable changes to the way we operate.

WCT consists of six portfolios; Strong Foundations, Independent Adults, Community Resilience, Modern Digital Council, Effective Organisation and High Quality Environment.

Working in partnership

Our leader, Councillor Kevin Bentley, is the Senior Vice Chair of the Councillors' Forum, Senior Vice Chair of the Executive Advisory Board and Senior Vice Chair of the Local Government Association. We are extending our partnership working with other local authorities and key partners, such as Microsoft.

Alongside the continuous improvement of our Essex Digital Service, we are working alongside the Digital Innovation Zone, Essex Assembly, Essex Digital Partnership, Essex Partners, and Essex Strategic Coordination Group.

Essex Partners lead the public service reform agenda across Essex. This includes senior leaders from across a range of public sector bodies, including Integrated Care Boards, hospitals, and the police and fire service, along with our universities, healthcare, the police and crime commissioner, voluntary and community sector and local businesses. It recognises the importance of shifting to a system leadership model, collaborating across organisational, cultural and other boundaries, to deliver better outcomes for the people we serve.

We also host the Essex Centre for Data Analytics (ECDA), a partnership venture between Essex County Council, Essex Policy and the University of Essex. ECDA is a centre of excellence, turning insight into action to enable the Essex public sector to make evidence-led decisions to intervene early and prevent some of the biggest challenges face people and places in our county.

We are committed to adopting standards as part of how we work and were a founding member of the local government digital declaration. We are using the Local Government Association Cyber, Digital, Data and Technology framework as the basis for our service design and working approach. More about our commitment to the digital declaration here:

Local Government Digital Declaration   Joining the LocalGov Drupal Collaboration

Essex County Council

The information contained in this document
can be translated, and/or made available in
alternative formats, on request.

Published xxx