

LEVELLING UP ESSEX

An Essex White Paper

**EVERYONE'S
ESSEX**



Essex County Council

FOREWORD

Essex is prosperous. We have a £40bn economy, support 700,000 jobs, and are home to nearly 75,000 businesses. However, there are gaps in how and where this prosperity is experienced with disparities in opportunity across the county. The reality is that it does make a difference where you live and who your parents are to the success you enjoy in life. We have set out in *Everyone's Essex* our approach to changing that.

In the most productive societies talent is efficiently matched to opportunity. But that doesn't happen all the time, everywhere, automatically. In places that are hot-beds of social mobility – for example many parts of London – you are much more likely, if you are from a relatively poor family, to go on to higher education and fulfil your economic potential than you are if you are from other parts of the country. That is not right and we are determined to change it.

In focusing on levelling up, our interest is to spread opportunity, not to constrain it. No one benefits from putting a ceiling on ambition and we all benefit when people have the chance to fulfil their potential. In some parts of Essex and for some parts of our population it is more difficult to do that. There are approximately 123,000 people in the county living in the most deprived 20% of places in England. There are also some parts of our

population – children on free school meals, people of all ages with mental health conditions, SEND or learning disabilities, and young people unemployed for a significant period of time – who require more support to ensure that they can seize opportunities to get on in life.

We see the role of public services as responding to the needs of these places and people – and the role of the local authority to lead this approach. It is both a moral imperative that no one should be disadvantaged as a result of circumstances over which they have no control, and an economic one, that everyone should be able to rise as high as their talent and hard work can take them. The levelling up agenda seeks to identify ways to support this ambition.

We understand that addressing levelling up and achieving greater social mobility will not be easy or short-term. We are committed to this work for the long-term and we also recognise that levelling up cannot be delivered by the County Council alone. Levelling up can only succeed if it is embedded in communities and has the support of all key partners in a place: local government, health partners, emergency services, schools, colleges and universities, the voluntary sector, community groups and businesses.

Our commitment is to work collaboratively with our communities, our local partners and with national government as we take this vital work forward over the coming months and years.

This White Paper is the first expression of our overall approach and rationale in developing this work.

Cllr Kevin Bentley and Cllr Louise McKinlay, Leader and Deputy Leader, Essex County Council

CHAPTER 1 – WHY LEVELLING UP IS A PRIORITY FOR ESSEX

In the coming weeks, the Government is due to publish its White Paper on Levelling Up and Devolution. We welcome the Government's focus on levelling up and devolution and we want to work in partnership with them on this crucial agenda. But we also recognise that levelling up cannot just be driven from Whitehall or Westminster. This is why since we were elected in the May 2021 local elections, we have taken the lead as an administration in developing our plans for levelling up Essex. This was firstly set out in our new strategy, *Everyone's Essex*, which was published in October. And today, as we launch levelling up in Essex, we are putting some more flesh on the bones of what levelling up means for our county, what our priority places and population groups are, and how we will take this forward.

People might ask why Essex is putting such a focus on levelling up when it is a relatively prosperous county in the South-East of England. Our answer is that, as the Government recognises, levelling up is not about North vs South. Levelling up cannot have a purely geographical focus, as the issues it seeks to address – deprivation, low educational attainment and skills, poor connectivity, poor health outcomes, unfulfilled life chances, pride in place – exist in all regions of the country.

This is certainly true when we look at Essex. Essex as a whole is a relatively affluent county, with a £40 billion economy and economic strengths in quantum technologies, medicine, data science and manufacturing – all underpinned by strong and growing universities. Eighty-eight percent of schools in Essex are rated either good or outstanding by Ofsted.

So if we look at the macro picture, Essex is a successful county with great schools and a high quality of life. But we know that this doesn't tell the whole story for all our residents:

There are more than 123,000 people in Essex, 40,000 of whom are children, that live in areas that are in the 20% most deprived of the whole UK. This is a figure that has doubled since 2007.

At Key Stage 4 there is a 30% gap in educational attainment between the most and least deprived areas in the county.

There is on average a 12 year life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived areas of the county.

Health outcomes among the residents of the most deprived areas of the county are significantly worse: 87% higher instance of Respiratory progressive diseases (COPD); 69% increase of mental health conditions; and adult obesity is 53% higher.

The Covid pandemic has both highlighted and accentuated inequalities in income, education, and health. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown how Covid has widened three main types of inequality: income inequality between richest and poorest; inter-generational inequality, with the young bearing the biggest impact on employment opportunities; and socio-economic equality in education and skills. For example, during the first national lockdown around three-quarters of private school children were benefiting from full school days, but one-quarter of all children were getting no formal schooling or tutoring at all. Levelling up was already important before Covid, but it is even more urgent now.

There are therefore multiple reasons why we as a Council consider levelling up to be both vital and urgent. There is a moral imperative because we will not stand by while a part of our population is not experiencing the outcomes and quality of life that others take for granted. There is an economic imperative, because in a highly competitive national and global economy, success will go to those places that are able to make the most of the talents of all their people. And there is a sustainability imperative, because public services will not be able to sustain effective performance, especially in a climate of tight financial constraints and with demographic pressures, if they have to firefight and react to growing demand pressures linked to widening inequalities.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LEVELLING UP?

By levelling up, we mean that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed in life and fulfil their potential; and that all places and communities should be able to share in this.

Levelling up is not just about supporting people to succeed individually. It is also about supporting success in all forms that people come together – in families, in communities, in businesses, in faith and community and interest groups, and in other organisations.

This is a positive agenda – it is not about taking away or limiting opportunities from those who already have them; and it is not about “fixing broken places”. It is building on strengths, capitalising on potential, and spreading the right opportunities and support across the county to places and people who haven’t previously had them. We want everyone to succeed in life to the fullest extent they can.

We don’t believe that the Council should specify what “succeed in life” means for people. People will have their own definitions of success for their own lives and it is important that they do so. But broadly we as a Council are focused on five main areas that align most closely with our areas of responsibility:

1. **The economy** – we are focused on improving access to “good jobs”. By good jobs, we mean jobs that pay enough money to support a decent quality of life; that provide the appropriate balance that people want between job security and flexibility; and that offer opportunities for people to learn, develop and for those who want, to progress in their careers.
2. **The environment** – we are focused on improving access to a high quality environment. By this we mean access to the natural environment and green spaces, to good quality air, and on addressing climate impacts such as flooding. We are also focused on making the transition to carbon net zero in a way that widens opportunities, for example by creating more green jobs and greater access to active and sustainable forms of travel.
3. **Health and wellbeing** – we are focused on supporting people to live long, healthy and happy lives. By this we mean that people should have high levels of

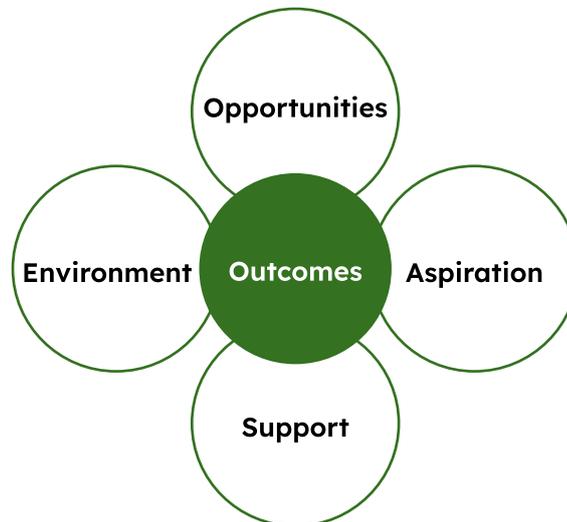
physical and mental health, the social connections they need for wellbeing, and they should be able to lead healthy, independent and active lives.

4. **Education and skills** – we are focused on improving educational attainment and access to good quality and relevant skills. This is a whole life approach, encompassing early years, school years, higher and further education, and then lifelong learning.
5. **Families and communities** – we are focused on supporting people to grow up and live in strong, safe, and resilient families and communities. By this we mean families and communities where people feel safe and have strong ties and mutual support for each other.

These outcomes are set out in our strategy *Everyone's Essex*. They are also closely integrated with the This is Purpose Coalition framework that we have been using to help us develop our approach to levelling up and which is reflected in the *This is Purpose* report on Essex being published alongside this policy statement today.

Being rigorous about the measurement of outcomes and the evaluation of impact against levelling up is absolutely essential, and we set out later in the document how we will do this.

Our approach to levelling up is guided by a way of thinking about how long-term outcomes around levelling up are best shaped and delivered as follows:



Outcomes – ultimately, levelling up is about the achievement of outcomes which help people to succeed in life. If you don't achieve better outcomes, then you haven't achieved levelling up. But we are also mindful that some outcomes can be “sticky” – they can take years to realise and the path to better outcomes, for individuals and communities, can be long and winding with ups and downs. We therefore need to look below the bonnet of end outcomes and understand the things that help to shape whether better outcomes are on the path to improvement. This also helps us to target our interventions where they can be most effective.

Opportunities – clearly, better outcomes cannot be achieved without more opportunities being created for those people and places that currently lack them. This means more opportunities for good jobs, for education and training, for healthy and active lifestyles, for families and communities to build connections. It also means more opportunities for businesses – to grow, to become more profitable and to locate and to recruit in different areas to where they previously would have done. A key point here is not just the existence of opportunities, but the accessibility of them in particular for more disadvantaged groups. For example, jobs, services and learning opportunities need to be promoted to all groups and need to be physically or digitally accessible to them. The hidden barriers to recruitment and advancement need to be addressed.

Aspiration – opportunities alone are not enough; it requires aspiration to make them and to seize them; and resilience to stick with them when the going gets tough. Aspiration, combined with resilience, is the engine of levelling up. Without aspiration and resilience, it is hard for individuals, families, and communities to achieve their potential. The starting point must be what individuals, families, and communities want to achieve for themselves. This is why we are putting aspiration at the heart of our levelling up programme. But we are conscious that aspiration doesn't exist in a vacuum; it is

shaped by various factors, such as the opportunities you perceive around you and the aspirations and experiences of your family, friends and peer group. We are therefore putting a strong focus on supporting aspiration and resilience in our levelling up work, so that people don't think certain paths or careers are off limits just because of their background and people are supported to be resilient to see through the achievement of their goals.

Environment – we recognise that environmental factors are hugely influential in shaping outcomes. For example, the wider determinants of health (housing, deprivation, education, employment) have a significant impact on the health outcomes that people experience. And we are also focused on “pride of place”. We know that communities that have pride in their places have better outcomes and they become places where people want to live rather than leave. A further key environmental factor is connectivity. Poor transport, social or digital connectivity cuts people off from employment, social and other opportunities. So our approach to levelling up is placing a strong emphasis on environmental factors. This is exemplified for example in the work of the Active Essex Local Delivery Pilot, in our new Community Challenge Fund and our work on digital inclusion.

Support – this is a crucial ingredient in levelling up. Anyone who has achieved success in life will be honest that they did not do it themselves, but with the support of others. In many cases, support will come from within families and communities and that is often the most effective support that there is. But it can come from many quarters – from schools, sports and community clubs, inspirational local leaders, local businesses, public services. Our role is not only to provide support ourselves, for example through services or other interventions, but to help foster a wider network of support in communities. An example is the work we are doing to support digital communities across Essex, helping them to use the power of digital connectivity to build vibrant communities and address loneliness and poor mental and physical health.

It is by focusing on outcomes, opportunities, aspiration, environment and support that we will build a truly effective and sustainable approach to levelling up in Essex.

CHAPTER 3: FOCUSING ON PRIORITIES

Levelling up is a broad agenda in terms of the outcomes it seeks to achieve and the interventions it needs to bring together. But to achieve impact it also needs to be focused – on those places and groups of people (cohorts) that need it most.

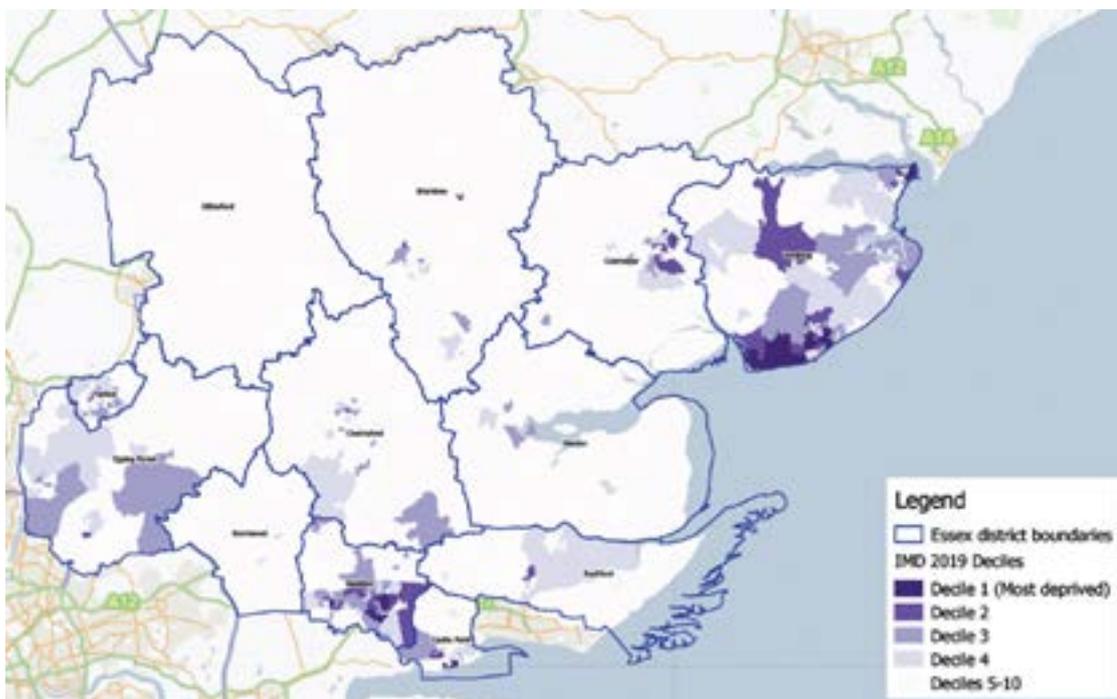
In Essex, we have taken a data-driven approach to determining our key places and cohorts of focus. We have used in particular three analytical frameworks to help us identify priorities:

- The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- The 14 levelling up goals identified in the This is Purpose framework
- The community needs index developed by the Local Trust and OCSI

We have also ensured that we embed our equalities duties under the Equalities Act in our consideration of priority cohorts.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation

The map below shows the results of the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation study which highlights that there are concentrated pockets of deprivation in the county. These are focused in urban centres such as Basildon, Harlow, and Colchester, and coastal areas – especially Tendring and Canvey Island.



Aside from the areas of deprivation highlighted through the above map, it is also important to support the isolated rural areas of the county where levelling up means better connectivity to services and economic opportunity. Essex is still a very rural county and northern Braintree exemplifies some of the challenges that our rural areas experience.

This is Purpose Levelling Up Framework

This is Purpose Coalition, led by the former Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities, Justine Greening, has developed a framework of 14 ‘levelling up goals’. These goals set out how levelling up can support greater social mobility for everyone as set out below.

| Levelling Up Goals | What they cover |
|--|--|
| 1. Strong foundations in early years | Good level of development in early years |
| 2. Successful school years | Pupil performance at primary and secondary school |
| 3. Positive destination | Training, employment and education post-16 |
| 4. Right advice and experiences | Access to careers advice, mentoring, internships |
| 5. Open recruitment | Unemployment; fair recruitment processes |
| 6. Fair career progression | Secure work; ability to progress at work |
| 7. Widening access to savings & credit | Levels of disposable income; access to financial services |
| 8. Good health & well being | Life expectancy; ill health; mental health; loneliness; lifestyles |
| 9. Extending enterprise | Number of businesses per head; SMEs per head |
| 10. Closing the digital divide | Access to digital connectivity |
| 11. Infrastructure for opportunity | Transport availability to access employment; good services |
| 12. Building sustainable homes and communities | Crime; access to green spaces; decent, affordable housing |
| 13. Harness the energy transition | Green businesses; CO2 emissions |
| 14. Achieve equality through diversity & inclusion | Gender pay gap; senior appointments by gender/ethnicity |

We have used this framework to inform our thinking about the multiple dimensions of levelling up and where disadvantage is experienced most acutely. Alongside this document, This is Purpose is publishing an audit of the existing activity of the County Council against the fourteen goals.

Community Needs Index

This model, developed by the Local Trust and OCSI, looks at how strong or weak communities are on three key dimensions: civic assets; connectedness; and community engagement. The research shows that communities that have high needs on these dimensions suffer poor outcomes over and above those that arise due to socio-economic deprivation alone. As shown in the table below, six out of the ten highest needs neighbourhoods in the entire country are in Essex.

Wards with the highest community needs/weakest social capital score

| | Ward | Local Authority | Region |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Laindon Park | Basildon | East of England |
| 2 | Canvey Island East | Castle Point | East of England |
| 3 | Canvey Island North | Castle Point | East of England |
| 4 | Norton South | Halton | North West |
| 5 | Meir North | Stoke on Trent | West Midlands |
| 6 | Stockbridge | Knowsley | North West |
| 7 | Haven | Tendring | East of England |
| 8 | Airedale& Ferry Fryston | Wakefield | Yorkshire & Humber |
| 9 | Bockings Elm | Tendring | East of England |
| 10 | Golf Green | Tendring | East of England |

Left Behind Areas 2020 – Interim Data Set; OCSI

Based on the data against these frameworks in particular and embedding our equalities duties under the Equalities Act, we have identified the following as our priority places and cohorts in Essex for our levelling up work.

Priority places:

- Tendring
- Basildon housing estates
- Colchester housing estates
- Harlow
- Rural Braintree
- Canvey Island

Priority cohorts (which apply across Essex not just in the priority places):

- Children and adults with SEND, learning disabilities, or mental health conditions (taking an all-age approach)
- Children on free school meals
- Working families
- Young adults (16-25) who have not been in education, training or employment for around 6-12 months.

Our goal is to support these priority places and cohorts to achieve better outcomes and close the gap on the Essex and national averages.

CHAPTER 4: WHAT LEVELLING UP MEANS FOR THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL

County Councils are well placed to lead the levelling up agenda in their areas working closely with partners. This reflects the fact that County Councils:

- have a democratic mandate to lead the development of the economy, infrastructure, education and skills, and health and wellbeing in their areas. Of course, this is a shared democratic mandate with other elected representatives in their area and levelling up is approached as a shared endeavour
- have many of the policy and operational levers to effect levelling up at a local level, working with partners and with national government
- have the scale, both in terms of geography and in terms of resources, to lead this agenda; and
- have the convening power to help bring partners together to work in a coherent and ‘whole system’ way, as has been demonstrated throughout the Covid pandemic

In some respects, levelling up represents a continuity with what county councils are already doing as we have long been focused on developing the economy, infrastructure, education and skills, and health and wellbeing for our residents. However, levelling up also poses some challenges to traditional ways of working and it requires us to collectively think differently.

Core Operating Principles

As a Council, we have set out our core operating principles around levelling up as follows:

- It is **levelling up** – we are not interested in achieving equality if that is at the expense of making people or places worse off
- It is both **place-based and cohort-focused** – recognising that inequalities affect both people and places and we need to address both
- It is **long-term** – we don’t believe that there are quick fixes here and the Council and its partners will have to demonstrate their commitment over the long term

- It is a **shared endeavour** – we believe the actions to address levelling up will need to take place right across the Council and the wider system
- It is **cross-cutting** – levelling up will not be achieved issue by issue, but by joining up our work at a place and people level
- It is **structural** – we want to address the root causes, not symptoms (as symptoms are already where a lot of our existing service interventions are necessarily focused)
- It embraces our **statutory equalities responsibilities** – which remain the legal bedrock in tackling inequalities
- It **builds sustainable change** – supporting aspiration, enterprise and opportunity among individuals, families and communities, rather than creating dependency
- It requires a **diversity of approach** – blending service delivery, strategic place-shaping, local capacity building, devolution, and convening power
- It **does not have a ceiling** – nobody should be held back from opportunities to succeed in life

Through these operating principles we want to challenge traditional notions of the role of a County Council and demand that we think carefully about the support we provide to all our residents. We have already started that work with the focus on working families – and levelling up extends that approach further.

In doing this we are mindful of two things.

First, the importance of communities. There is no sustainable, long-term pathway to levelling up which doesn't have strong communities at its core. The County Council has a strong track record of working with communities in new and innovative ways and it is important that we build on that.

Second, being evidence-led. Levelling up represents a complex multi-dimensional policy challenge and it is important that in addressing it we make best use of the evidence and data at our disposal. Again, the county council is well-placed to ensure it does that by building on the work we have done with the Essex Centre for Data Analytics, a joint partnership with Essex Police and Essex University, to harness the data that exists across the system for the public good.

CHAPTER 5: DEVOLUTION

Devolution is central to levelling up – and this is reflected in the Government’s bringing together of the two themes in its forthcoming White Paper. There are two aspects to devolution, both of which are essential:

- **The devolution of powers from central government down to local areas.** Levelling Up cannot be managed directly from Whitehall. We have seen the benefits already in places that have secured devolution. For example, devolution to Teeside has seen a radical transformation of the region’s prospects through a series of major regeneration projects and through a strong focus on local skills to take advantage of new job opportunities.
- **Devolution down to local communities.** Recent research by the think tank Onward has shown that those levelling up initiatives that have had the best long-term results are those that have been embedded in communities. This makes logical sense. Initiatives that are done to communities may achieve some initial impact, but they do not take root in communities and do not galvanise the local leadership and action within those communities that is needed for long-term transformation.

National devolution

In Essex, we are well placed to benefit from national devolution down to local areas. This reflects a number of points.

- Essex has a **strong political and cultural identity** which embraces the things we have in common, but also our diversity – with urban areas bordering on London, market towns, rural villages and coastal resorts. This shared yet diverse identity was something that came out very strongly as a theme when we developed our Vision for Essex with the participation of local residents.
- We have **strong local leadership** that is ready to take on devolved powers. As a Council we have demonstrated strong leadership in delivering £742m of savings in the last 10 years and in building and sustaining excellent services, for example our outstanding rated children’s and youth offending services. And while the partnership landscape in Essex is complex, we work very effectively as a system with our partners. This has been

particularly demonstrated in the work we have done collectively during the pandemic to support our residents, communities, and businesses. But it is true in other areas too: for example our work on housing, climate action, health and wellbeing; our children's partnership; and our work on gangs, violence, and women's safety.

- We have **ambitious plans for our county**. This is set out in the Essex Vision and in *Everyone's Essex*. It is demonstrated in other areas too: our plans to build major new garden communities to meet Essex's long-term housing needs; our commitment to achieving net zero carbon targets as demonstrated through the work of the Essex Climate Action Commission; and the development of plans with the new Integrated Care Partnerships in Essex to tackle the wider determinants of health.
- The **location and scale of Essex** means that major programmes of work here can achieve national, not just local, impact. For example, we need to build 140,000 new homes in Essex over the next fifteen years. If we can achieve that, this will also make a significant contribution to national housebuilding targets.

Essex will therefore want to be at the forefront of the national devolution agenda. We look forward to the Government's forthcoming White Paper on devolution and levelling up and once we have considered the details of the Government's proposals, we will respond positively with a proposal for how devolution can be taken forward in Essex to achieve the best outcomes and value for money for our residents.

Local devolution

However, we are focused not just on national devolution, but also on how we can devolve powers down to our local communities. We are positive about local devolution, recognising that this can lead to better outcomes that meet the needs of communities, and also that it can strengthen community empowerment and leadership.

Highways is one particular area where we have been exploring local devolution. We have set up a pilot project to enable parish and town councils across Essex to undertake maintenance of local verges and pathways. And we have set up local highways panels to influence highways decisions in their areas. We are currently reviewing both these schemes with a view to coming forward shortly with a more developed local devolution model for highways in Essex.

We will also be launching shortly a Communities Challenge Fund that will give groups of community leaders the power to spend small amounts of money in their local areas on community action to support levelling up. This will support local communities in developing a vision for their place and use some initial seed money to start making this a reality.

Local devolution sits alongside our approach to co-producing strategies and services with user communities, which is reflected across our business.

CHAPTER 6: MONITORING AND EVALUATING OUR PROGRESS

Essex County Council's approach to levelling up has, at its core, a moral imperative – to change lives for the better – that is what we believe the role of public services to be. But as a local system with limited resources and considering the scale of the challenge ahead of us, we also need to make sure we get the most out of every pound we and our partners spend.

That's why it's so important that we effectively monitor, track, and evaluate our progress. In doing so, it is important to distinguish between the two kinds of performance evaluation we need to undertake:

1. We need to track the progress of levelling up outcomes especially for our priority places and cohorts recognising that some of these may be “sticky” and take some time to shift.
2. We need to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and whether they are helping to achieve progress on levelling up outcomes.

In terms of levelling up outcomes, we will measure success in terms of:

- The overall performance of Essex on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which include a range of indicators relating to life inequalities. As set out earlier, in the 2019 IMD survey there were 123,000 Essex residents living

in neighbourhoods in the most deprived 20% in the country, a figure that has doubled since 2007. We will need to halt and start reversing this trend.

- The achievement of the outcomes set out in Chapter 2 (good jobs, reduced health inequalities etc). These measures are included in the performance framework for *Everyone's Essex* and so will be reflected in our performance reporting against this.

In addition to this focus on whole population outcomes, we will also be evaluating the effectiveness of the specific levelling up interventions we put into place to achieve these outcomes and feeding back the learning from these evaluations to help us better prioritise, focus and design interventions to achieve the best outcomes from the resources available.

CONCLUSION

This White Paper sets out our approach and rationale for the Council's focus on levelling up. We are not presenting this as a definitive statement or the last word on the subject but as the start of a conversation we want to have with partners locally and nationally.

Taken together with This is Purpose's audit of the 100 or so actions the Council is already undertaking this provides a clear statement of the seriousness of our intent in this area.

Over the next few months we will further refine our approach and develop our thinking. We want to do that in concert with partners and look forward to working with you to change lives, extend opportunity, and build pride so that this is truly everyone's Essex.

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