

## NEWS RELEASE

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### LOOKING TO OUR BIG SOCIETY OF THE FUTURE

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The first of what could be regular roundtables on the future of local public services in Essex took place this week, when the County Council met with representatives of countywide voluntary organisations to explore how they can work closer together in order to improve services for the residents of the county.

Laura Warren, chief executive of the Essex Community Foundation, who jointly hosted the discussion, said: "Local charities are rooted in communities, so, every day, we are reaching the very people who will be most vulnerable if services are reduced. It makes sense to work together in those areas where voluntary organisations offer effective support and help where it is most needed."

County Councillor Peter Martin, Leader of Essex County Council, said: "The topic under discussion was the Big Society and what this means for the people of Essex. I want to work closely with voluntary organisations to ensure that communities across Essex have a greater say and involvement in the running of their services. We know that the County Council is facing the most difficult financial outlook for a generation. But working more closely with local communities and voluntary organisations is a great opportunity for the council to do things differently. We know we have to change - and we will have to do so especially if we are to continue in our aim of providing the best quality of life for the people of Essex."

The Lord Lieutenant, Lord Petre, introduced the discussion by paying tribute to the extraordinary resource of willing and conscientious people volunteering their time to make Essex a better place. He said that the voluntary sector is already playing a part in creating the Big Society, but cautioned both central and local government not to view the Big Society agenda as a response to having less money.

The backdrop to the discussions was the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review, which is due to be announced by the Government on 20<sup>th</sup> October and will set out the budget for local councils. The discussions in the seminar were focused around what can be done working with the voluntary sector to help reduce the impact of anticipated reductions in funding, and at a later date conversations will be had around how this can be achieved.

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Reflecting on what had been a productive discussion, Cllr John Jowers, Cabinet Member for Localism observed: "This meeting gave us the opportunity to talk about our priorities and ask voluntary sector colleagues for their thoughts on what changes can be made, and how they may be able to assist us. The Big Society will form an important part of this council's future outlook, and before we begin to put plans in place, it is important to know what is already out there. What we do know is that the work done by the voluntary sector makes a real and significant difference to our residents, and we must capitalise on the common objectives on which we could share expertise and ideas on."

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#### NOTES TO EDITORS:

**Essex Community Foundation** was set up in 1996 and has established a grants programme which has seen more than 4,000 grants totalling over £15 million awarded to Essex based charities and community groups. Funds are distributed on behalf of a wide range of donors who want their charitable giving to be accessible to local charities. [www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk](http://www.essexcommunityfoundation.org.uk)

Community Foundations are independent charities committed to supporting projects that engage local people. Since the 1980s, a nationwide network of Community Foundations has developed, endorsed by many major public figures and leading companies.

There are 1000's of charities and voluntary groups working for the community to create a richer society for all. Community Foundations build endowed funds and make grants to these organisations.

- There are 57 local Community Foundations in the UK covering 94% of the population
- Collectively they manage endowed funds values at circa £220 million
- In 2007/08 Community Foundations distributed grants totalling £66 million and funded 20,500 voluntary organisations and community groups