

Inspiring Ideas to improve Essex Communities: outline criteria

In support of their work to strengthen Big Society, councils from across Essex propose to invite individuals, families and groups to submit ideas to help improve their communities.

We are keen to hear about any opportunities that local people have identified that would allow them to play a greater role in improving their communities and enhancing local quality of life. Essex Councils are keen to find out about the barriers these communities face: the processes, regulations and bureaucratic rules that block social action and stop people playing a full part in society.

By inviting communities to identify these opportunities and barriers – and by trying to facilitate/reduce these – local authorities are initiating a major change in the way government operates. There is, of course, a need to be realistic about the scope and scale of this change. For example, Essex authorities will need to ensure that any changes are:

- fair – councils cannot support ideas that disadvantage or limit the opportunities of specific individuals or groups;
- democratic – councils cannot support ideas undermining democratic processes; and
- achievable with existing resources – central government funding reductions mean that councils cannot commit additional money to new projects outside of any pre-existing grant programmes.

To ensure that we can focus our limited resources on advancing the best proposals, the proposals that councils receive from the community will be assessed to ensure that they:

- provide a clear articulation of the opportunities/barriers and of what needs to be changed;
- identify the benefits to the community that will be achieved if the opportunity is taken/barrier is removed;
- show evidence of widespread local support;
- do not have adverse effects on the wellbeing of other individuals or groups;
- do not contradict any locally agreed plans or policies which have already been subjected to local consultation (e.g. parish plans);
- do not request support beyond the scope of the invitation (for instance, requesting grant funding) in order to deliver its outcome.
- do not simply relate to a failure in an existing service (and thus be better handled by the ECC complaints team).

In assessing each proposal, councils across Essex will need to ask:

- is there an alternative, less bureaucratic way of achieving the same outcome?