

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025
Southminster Division by Councillor Wendy Stamp 10th April
2025.

It has been another busy challenging year for councils, councillors, community groups and residents within the Southminster Division I would like to thank you for all your help and support and also, thank our residents in our wonderful diverse community.

Hopefully, everyone has been kept up to date throughout the year on the progress of Essex County Council's "Everyones Essex" 20 commitments launched in 2021 to 2025. The improvements and delivery of important life changing services including adult social care has reported positive change and better lives.

I am part of the working party recently commissioned called Essex Caring Communities Commission and the first annual draft report has been finished. I have no doubt this will continue to improve the care we all may need at some stage in our families and own lives. The report has been led by excellent professionals and we have consulted and met in person, with a large number of groups, medical professionals, the volunteer community sector and others. This sits alongside the large number of monthly decisions approved at Cabinet and Full Council alongside new initiatives, transformation projects – consultations, strategic and spatial policies – ECC is a very busy council with excellent staff.

The biggest change in local government for 50 years has commenced. Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Southend and Thurrock Unitary Council geographies) was selected to join the Devolution Priority Programme alongside 12 District Councils to deliver for the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The governments reasoning for Devolution and LGR, is for a simpler, more sustainable (savings), delivery of services, and greater infrastructure delivery by devolving and transferring the powers and funding from national government to local government. Not everyone agrees with this as many feel the local voice will be lost.

I have supplied further links below. It is a huge subject and the consultation process closes on 13th April 2025. The link was sent out a few weeks ago and I hope the opportunity has been taken up.

The Mayoral election will take place in May 2026 alongside possible ECC elections – albeit for a very short term.

Devolution [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: Devolution | Essex County Council](#) and LGR- Local Government Reorganisation [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: Local Government Reorganisation | Essex County Council](#).

The inception of Devolution has resulted in the suspension of the recent boundary changes and County Councils elections that are due in May 2025.

I thank clerks, councillors and residents for sharing all the important news, press releases and information, including links to add on Councils websites, notice boards and Facebook sites whenever possible.

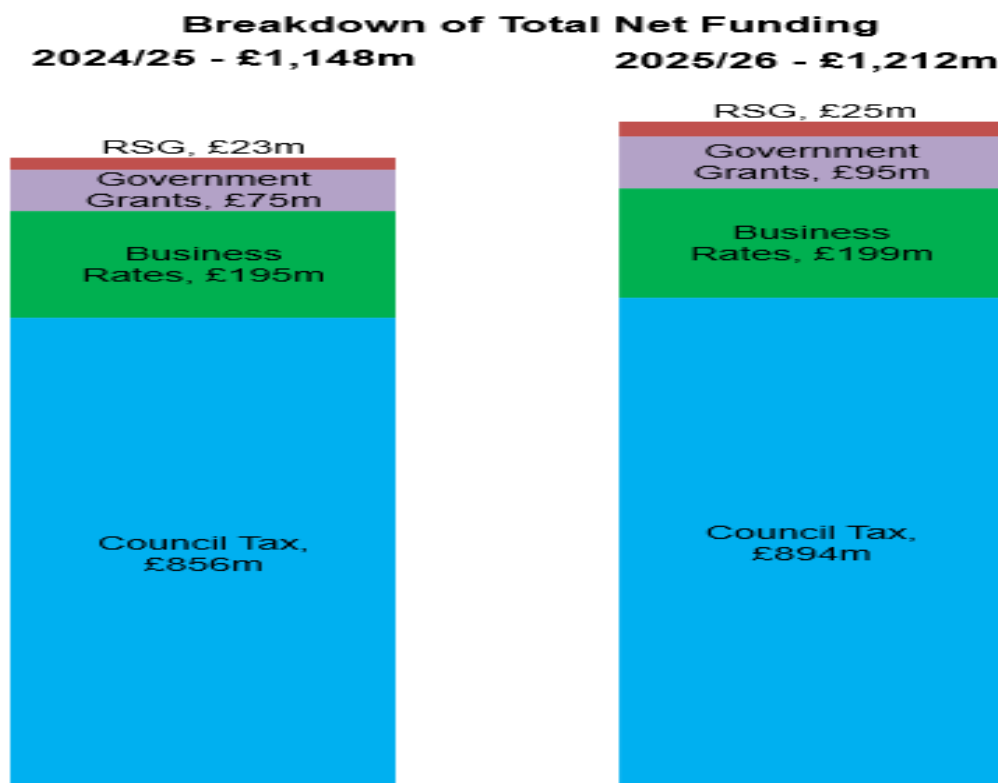
Essex County Council has a legal responsibility to operate within a balanced budget. With the changes and reductions in Government grant funding over recent years, coupled with increasing and more complex demand for core services such as caring for the elderly, protecting vulnerable children and supporting families who need it - the financial situation continues to be very challenging.

In February, Essex County Council agreed its new Budget for 2025/26. The Council again had a stark choice in balancing its budget increasing taxes or facing unacceptable cuts in services. The budget was balanced against a backdrop of some of the most challenging times that local government has ever faced. New financial pressures caused by measures introduced in the October Budget and continuing cost of living crisis, high energy costs and inflation levels, *and* the war in Ukraine have all landed on top of existing challenges to reform and reshape our services and respond to huge increases in demand from those who need our help the most.

The "Everyone's Essex" Annual Plan and budget was approved at Full Council in February, and due to the financial challenges facing local government, the budget for 2025/26 is increasing. Gross expenditure to be incurred in the delivery of Council services in 2025/26 is **£2,718m**. After taking income and specific grants into account, the net cost of services amounts to **£1,212m**, which is an increase of **£64m** or 6% over 2024/25. The net cost of services was set at **£1,212.0 million** and the net revenue budget requirement was set at **£1,117.3m** (net cost of services less general government grants) for 2025/6.

The total council tax funding requirement was set **at £891.6m** for 2025/26 – Essex County Council’s element of the council tax was increased by **3.75%** comprising of a 1.75% increase in general council tax and 2.0% adult social care precept. This spending supports the most vulnerable in our communities including older people, people with learning difficulties, mental health issues and physical and sensory impairments. The precept is being used to insulate Adult Social Care from having to make higher savings, and support the growth in need, caused by changes in the demographics of our population and inflation, including the national living wage rise.

This resulted in the Essex County Council element of the council tax being **£1,579.59** for a Band D property in 2025/26 - this is an increase of **£1.09** per household per week.



Net expenditure of £1,212m is funded by council tax, business rates, Revenue Support Grant and General Government Grants. Income from Council Tax is the largest funding stream and will make up 75% of our funding in 2025/26.

A public consultation on the proposed budget was undertaken during November and December 2024. Through this exercise, the Council gathered the views of residents and those who run businesses within the county. There were 2,105 responses to the consultation and the key

messages from respondents are that pressures on healthcare and the NHS are viewed by participants as the most important issue facing Essex today. The responses also recognise the pressures on social care provision and crime/community safety as key issues to be addressed. Topics of most concern for people personally are the condition of roads and pavements, crime levels and anti-social behaviour. When asked about things that should be prioritised for immediate action, respondents identified developing Essex's infrastructure as the top issue. This was followed by supporting those who care for the sick or vulnerable people and securing high standards in education.

Three main areas of disappointment and concerns are the sad loss of Arrow and some of the Dart bus services, the normal Highways challenges and the lack of local suitable SEND provision in the Maldon District.

The lack of a convenient service to Broomfield Hospital from the Dengie has been catastrophic and whilst the new 45 service is welcomed, this hasn't been without a large number of complaints and inconvenience. A round table was held at Maldon Town Hall with Dame Priti Patel and Sir John Whittingdale with Essex County Council Passenger Transport, major bus operators, "The Dengie Hundred Bus Users Group" and the relevant elected County Members. I certainly won't lie and say in my opinion this was a success, as I don't think it was. Despite a great deal of pressure, further meetings and hard work from DHBUG and residents the improvements are small and disappointing. I raise these concerns at every opportunity to bring a better service. Two Councils Mayland and Burnham applied for Love your Bus Grant funding and were successful, I obviously sent a letter of support. Thank you and well done. There is, still work to do.

"SEND" in the Dengie and "SEND 4 ALL", still work very hard fighting for local school provision for equality for ALL children. A huge amount of work and resources has been directed to catch up on Local Care Health Plans (LCHP) to help for school provision. This followed on from the shocking truth regarding the failure to deliver them within in the council BUT there is still so much more to do. This is a national crisis that has been recognised by Central Government. Sadly, we do not have local school provision for year 7 in the Maldon District despite talks, hope then disappointment. We are all still working hard. My personal view is

that every school should be inclusive for all children, unless their needs are severe of course. I also think a total review and revolution is required for the education of all children and young adults – I am no expert but I do listen to residents of all ages.

As a positive, I must thank the clerks and officers, again, for their support and professionalism and those who have worked hard in applying for funding for important community projects from the Locality Fund allocation and for ECC continued funding. The awards this year are:-

Recipient	Amount allocated	Amount Claimed
Asheldham and Dengie Parish Council	£1,500	£1,500
Southminster Parish Council	£750	£574.91
Maldon District Tourism Group (T24)	£1,200 (pooled with Cllrs Durham and Fleming)	£665 (£221 from each member)
Althorne Parish Council	£366	£336.37
St. Lawrence Parish Council	£660.51	£660.51
Mundon Parish Council	£323.45	£320.30
Althorne Parish Hall	£1,000	£980.00

The new initiative of members priority pothole scheme has helped deliver a variety of works but so much more is required.

The scheme has currently been suspended whilst we wait for an update from the Chairs of the panels, no date for the meeting is scheduled as yet!

I receive a huge number of speeding traffic concerns and requests for lowering the speed limits but so far, sadly not one has met the criteria or been delivered. One of our villages has been waiting for a speed limit reduction for a number of years and we are still waiting for a decision. we keep trying!

“Levelling Up Essex” was launched in 2022. By levelling up, the Council means 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 in Essex” is about making sure residents have the education and skills they need to find good quality employment, take pride in where they live and make lasting improvements to their lives. Essex County Council, alongside partners, including, city, borough and district councils, the NHS, charities and businesses, have provided job opportunities, skills training, and financial support. A huge range of projects are having a positive impact on communities throughout the County, underpinned by over £22million of funding, which has delivered specific initiatives, as well as enhanced existing projects and programmes.

On 3rd March 2025 Essex County Council published the third in a series of annual impact reports outlining the progress and achievements of “Levelling Up Essex”. “A Thriving Essex – More Opportunities, Better Lives” spotlights some of the dozens of projects that are being delivered across Essex, with almost 100,000 residents and businesses being positively impacted by projects since the start of the programme in 2022. This clearly demonstrates that Essex is investment ready – economic growth is vital for prosperous success and lively communities. Key achievements so far include.

- Direct benefit to over 100,000 residents and is on track to deliver benefit to over 140,000 residents overall.
- Enabled over 100,000 children from low-income families to access holiday and activity clubs, and more than 20,000 children to benefit from targeted education and careers support.
- The creation of more than 2,000 new job opportunities, with more businesses operating in our targeted growth sectors in Essex and a year-on-year increase in the number of people starting Advanced Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships in Essex.
- Co-funded projects with partners on shared goals. For example, Levelling Up Essex co-funded work with health partners which resulted in 450 residents into NHS employment in and around Basildon. This delivered multiple benefits of improved life chances for those residents in priority places, addressed a skills and capacity shortage in the NHS and achieved greater impact and value for money.
- Investment in proactively addressed the root causes of issues, rather than responding to the symptoms. For example, the Poppins and Nightingale Bursary Schemes [New bursary supports training in Early Years | Essex County Council](#) , designed to

increase capacity and skills in sectors which face massive recruitment challenges. by providing pathways into employment in this sector.

- THE ESSEX YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY [Introducing Essex Year of Opportunity | Essex County Council](#)– was a £1.2 million programme which did encourage career aspirations, training, and learning - it improves life chances for individuals and supports people.
- Greater Essex Business Board (GEEB) has also helped drive economic growth by forging strong partnerships and policies for innovation and addressing skills shortages. [Document.ashx](#)

Next Steps Levelling Up Essex Year 3 A Thriving Essex – More Opportunities, Better Lives 'Impact Update - Levelling Up Essex is a generational change. The work undertaken to date has laid the foundations for longer term work and approaches to support the delivery of long-term outcomes through Devolution.

In the coming year the Council will continue to progress all in-flight activity and launch a range of further interventions, designed to support communication in early years and further support young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET).

Tackling the lack of Infrastructure including the NHS and poor rural transport services.

Following my persistent hard work, Councillor Bentley eventually agreed to convene a group of stakeholders, officers, NHS partners and elected members from Essex County Council and Maldon District Council, to for the "Maldon Summit" group. The group has met several times with the next date scheduled at the end of April 2025.

Work is progressing on addressing the poor lack of infrastructure which has deteriorated due to the large number of developments across the Maldon District.

The current challenges regarding the National Health Service and funding crisis has recently been reported in the media and continues causing concerns to everyone. NHS England is being abolished.

The NHS working group recommended that St Peter's Hospital remain operational for about five years while funding is gathered for a new

facility on the current site. The new facility would provide outpatient services and primary care space for local GPs. Inpatient care should not continue at St Peter's because it cannot be operated efficiently and low usage, but pre- and post-natal appointments should remain, with midwife-led births continuing at Braintree Community Hospital. These recommendations will be included in a Decision-Making Business Case for review by the ICB (Integrated Care board), in the summer.



Finally, I wish to thank the Youth Service and the Community & Voluntary Service, for the Community Gaming Service and Beyond the Ballot. Beyond the ballot is how young leaders can drive political change. Our youth are our future and one of this division's excellent ambassadors is Burnham's Tyler May, who continues to inspire, engage and encourage people of all ages. Tyler was the recipient of the Mayor's award in Burnham, presented by Joan Costello and myself.

I have supported residents with a huge number of issues, problems and concerns, assisted parish and town councils, whilst attending a number of scrutiny meetings, working groups and council meetings at Essex County Council. If I can help in anyway, please contact me

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