



# A Thriving Essex

**More Opportunities,  
Better Lives**

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# Foreword

When we first launched our Levelling up Essex Programme three years ago, I said that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed in life and fulfil their potential. When this happens, it helps places and communities to develop and grow. Since that day, at Essex County Council, we have made it our mission to ensure that Essex residents have more opportunities to succeed in life, in whatever way success means to them.

A huge range of projects have benefited both communities and individuals throughout the County, underpinned by **over £22 million of funding**, which has both delivered specific initiatives and enhanced existing projects and programmes.

Over the past three years Levelling Up Essex has positively impacted the lives of over 140,000 Essex residents. Alongside our partners, including city, borough and district councils, the NHS, charities, and businesses, we have created jobs and provided both skills training and financial support. We have seen literacy and numeracy levels increase in our targeted Levelling Up places, supported the creation of **over 2,000 new job opportunities**, and the number of people benefitting from our skills and employability programmes has more than doubled. We have supported families, children, and young people to thrive in education. We have invested in communities and places, providing more opportunities for people and businesses.



But this is about more than numbers. I have witnessed firsthand Essex residents transform their lives because they were given a real opportunity – like the young aspiring carpenter who accessed one of our free Multiply courses to strengthen his maths skills to help him better understand how to write quotes. He has since gone on to start his own business.

I have met the young single parent to four children who was struggling to cover the mounting bills, but through the assistance of a local community hub that we funded, she was able to access immediate financial assistance, gain volunteering experience and is now a trained physical activity coach, mentoring others who face similar circumstances.

Finally, it is the 9-year-old from a vulnerable home who found friendship, hope, and support through our Holiday Activity Programme. A free programme that provided not just high-quality childcare but also enabled his parents to afford to work through the school holiday periods.

Aspirations guide life decisions, influence our behaviour and create meaning. For some people, their aspirations are connected to vocation—finding a meaningful and satisfying job. For others, their aspirations are informed by the connections they have with their family, friends, and local community.

# Foreword

We know that most young people, irrespective of background, have high aspirations for themselves, but that access to the opportunities needed to realise those goals varies greatly. Without opportunity, aspirations are simply a dream.

This means there is much more to be done. Essex's economy is the same size of Northern Ireland, worth more than £44 billion a year and is home to award winning attractions, major transport hubs and over 81,000 businesses, from space tech to life sciences. However, almost 20% of adults in Essex have no qualifications, which is above the national average. In addition, 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. **Our programme aims to open up opportunities to more people.**

Over the next four years, we will be working more closely with the private sector than ever before to ensure that Essex residents have access to the right skills and education required to best position them to have

fulfilling careers, whilst also encouraging more businesses to invest in our unique and incredible county.

This report does not just detail what has already been achieved but also outlines our commitment to improve people's life chances by creating and spreading more opportunity, which in turn will enable the Essex economy to grow and help residents prosper.

## More opportunities, leads to better lives.

**Cllr Louise McKinlay**

Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity



# Why opportunity matters

**Opportunity is fundamental to better outcomes for people and communities, and for economic growth.**

This is why, the very heart of our levelling up programme, is about providing more opportunities to Essex residents to help counter disadvantage and enable success - recognising that 'you can't be what you can't see'. More opportunities for residents, creates an educated, skilled, healthier workforce, which drives economic growth and prosperity for both individuals and places.

## Levelling Up Essex: More Opportunities, Better Life Chances

Over the past three years we have invested over £22 million pounds worth of funding into Levelling Up Essex projects and initiatives focused on widening access to opportunity for priority residents and communities and driving growth. Levelling Up Essex has delivered against our aims of ensuring:

- more children receive the support they need to learn and succeed at key stages of their development and ensure more low-income families have access to good quality, free or affordable childcare to widen access to employment
- it is easier than ever before for residents to be able to retrain and gain new skills and offer targeted support and advice for young people not in employment, education or training
- that we have created the conditions for more local jobs and opportunities for Essex residents by working alongside our public and private sector partners
- we have strengthened our communities by investing in community hubs and community supermarkets in the places that will benefit the most

Our approach to Levelling Up Essex was data driven. We identified 6 priority places and 4 priority cohorts to ensure we took a targeted approach to supporting and investing in those communities that face the greatest barriers to opportunity.

**MORE OPPORTUNITIES**



**GREATER ECONOMIC GROWTH**



**PROSPERITY FOR ALL**



## Priority Places:

- Tendring (Clacton, Jaywick and Harwich)
- Basildon housing estates
- Colchester housing estates (Greenstead)
- Harlow
- areas of Rural Braintree
- Canvey Island



## Priority Cohorts:

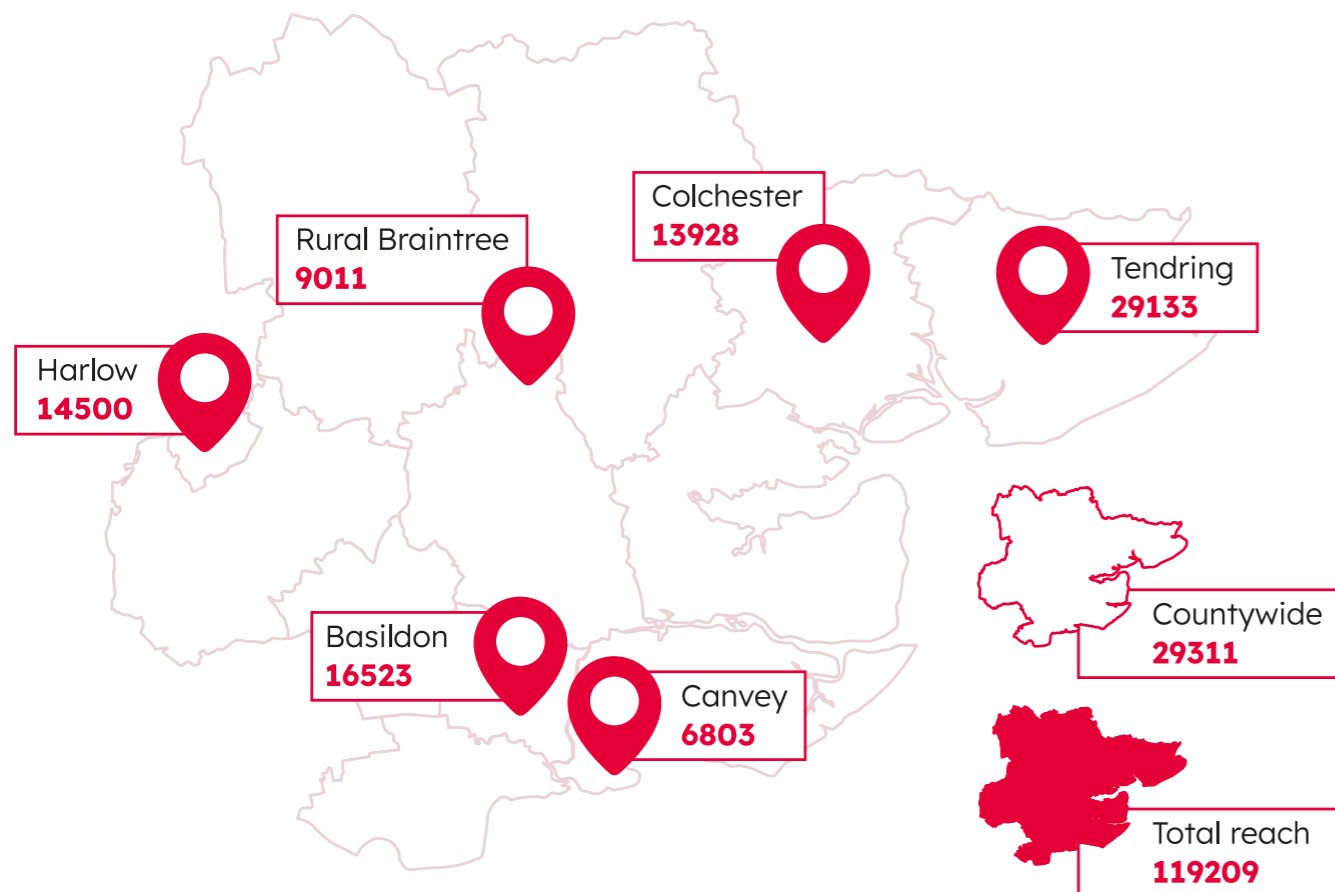


(which apply across Essex not just in the priority places):

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

To date the Levelling Up Essex programme has directly supported and impacted the lives of over 100,000 people and is on track to have improved the lives of almost **140,000 Essex residents** by the end of 2025.

### Summary of expected reach figures by place<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> please note this does not include HAF club reach and attendance

It would not have been possible to deliver the significant, large-scale change across Essex without working across a range of services, sectors and partners. Some of our collective achievements include:

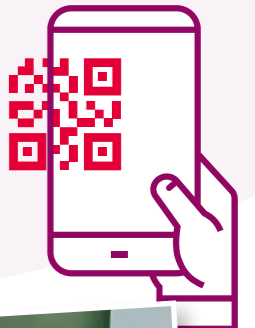
- **over 100,000 children** from low-income families accessed our award-winning holiday activity clubs
- **more than 20,000 children** and young people have benefitted from targeted education and career support
- the creation of more than **2000 new job opportunities**
- **over 10,000 people benefitted** from ECC skills and employability programmes in the first quarter of 24/25. Almost double the amount supported in the same period the previous year
- a rise in the percentage of children in early years achieving a **good level of development** (GLD) across all of our priority places, with the biggest gains in Castlepoint (10% increase) and Basildon (4.9% increase)

- an increase in the number of KS2 pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths across all of our priority places
- more Essex Businesses operating in our targeted growth sectors
- a **year-on-year increase** in the number of people starting Advanced Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships in Essex

The remainder of this report sets out some of the successes of our Levelling Up Essex Programme in more detail. It shows how we intend to continue to build on the work we have started to date, continuing to work in partnership across the public and private sector to create a county in which more people can contribute to, and benefit from, greater economic growth and prosperity.

This report is enhanced with QR codes to video clips to give you a closer look than ever before at the projects and people who are working hard to improve and enhance lives.

**Just scan the QR codes in the document with your phone to watch each project come to life.**



# Three years of Levelling Up Essex

## The work so far

Supported **450 unemployed residents** and care leavers into NHS employment through our Anchor Ambition Programme and providing savings of over £600,000

More Essex Businesses are now operating in our **targeted growth sectors**



Created a **digital platform** for 16-19-year-olds showcasing various roles in the NHS, used by over 1,000 students with **93% reporting an increased understanding** of NHS careers

Engaged over **250 attendees** and **130 businesses** at our first **Ambitious Essex Business Summit**



Launched our **Apprenticeship Hub** which has delivered school-based sessions to over 5,000 students and parenting support to 750 parents and carers

Launched the **Essex Construction Alliance**, a new group to support large and small construction businesses in Essex



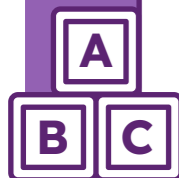
Supported over **150 Health & Social Care learners** to complete a certification or diploma through the **Nightingale Care Bursary**, supporting recruitment and retention in the workforce



Invested **£250,000 in the Greater Essex Careers Hub** leading to 97% of all secondary, special schools and colleges in Essex accessing employer-led careers guidance

Launched our **£1.4 million Poppins Bursary** to provide development opportunities for those working or entering the early years sector

Launched the **Essex Opportunities Portal** for tailored information on education, employment, and skills with over 110,000 users accessing the site



Essex Activate supported over **10,000 children** through their free holiday activity and food programme in Summer 2024



Supported **27 primary schools** in Harlow to deliver sessions focused on resilience, perseverance, and mental wellbeing through our **Harlow Futures** programme



Provided **160,000 free library cards** to every primary aged child in Essex through our Essex Year of Reading programme



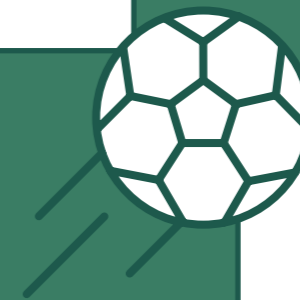
Launched phase two of Harlow Futures, which is working to deliver **speech, language and communication support** for early years

Provided a **financial education programme** in partnership with HSBC UK to **6,000 students** aged 14-18 through our Essex Year of Numbers programme

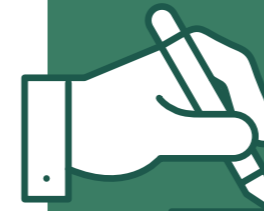


Supported Kendall Church of England Primary School in Colchester to become a **centre for early years speech and language development**

Trained **8,600 adults** in **numeracy skills** since January 2023 through our Multiply programme



Launched our Best Start programme in Canvey Island and supported **1,300 children** with skills training from **School Sport Partnership** professionals



An **increase** in the number of KS2 pupils **achieving the expected standard** in reading, writing and maths across all our priority places

More than **20,000 children and young people** have benefitted from targeted education and **career support**

Created a network of **14 Community Supermarkets** across Essex that provide over **7,000 people** with good quality, affordable food



Donated over **200 devices** since April 2024 to help people get online



# What has been achieved so far

Improving life chances for future generations and driving growth are long-term goals, however we have worked at pace on Levelling Up Essex over the past three years to invest in a range of initiatives purposefully designed to address the root causes of disadvantage and widen access to opportunity.

The initiatives highlighted are a snapshot of the change delivered so far – the full range activity can be found by [visiting our website](#) and reading our [previous Impact Reports](#)



[Click here or scan the QR code to watch our showreel](#)



We are committed to continuing to break down barriers



We've supported over 68,000 residents to help fulfil their potential



## #1 Widening access to economic opportunity

The Anchor Ambition Programme received £180,000 of Levelling Up Essex funding. This team of dedicated Anchor Employment Support Officers have supported 450 unemployed residents and care leavers into NHS employment (more than double the original target) and provided savings of over £600,000.

“ The Anchor programme is a life saver! ”

Jahaziel was supported by a member of the Anchor Team at the Basildon Advice Store and successfully gained employment as a Pharmacy Assistant.

“ The whole team was so helpful in explaining what it was all about. I was placed on a four-month admin traineeship programme within an NHS Hospital. I was so happy to be getting ready in the mornings with a purpose once again. It's great learning new skills and regaining some confidence. I cannot thank the Anchor team enough for giving me this opportunity and will always be grateful to them. ”

Traci had previously struggled to secure a job after a number of health issues, which had knocked her confidence and self-esteem.



The Anchor Ambition Programme received £180,000 of Levelling Up Essex funding

Used the Metaverse to showcase career opportunities - We invested £150,000 to create a digital platform for 16–19-year-olds, which showcase the various roles available in the NHS. Users create a 3D digital avatar of themselves, before exploring an interactive environment. This includes real life NHS case studies and the opportunity to obtain digital badges. Over 1,000 students have taken part so far, with 93% reporting an increased understanding of NHS careers.



We launched the **Essex Opportunities Portal** - a one stop shop for tailored information on employment, skills, and training. Since its launch in April 2021, over 110,000 users have accessed the site and there have been 22,000 visits to job application pages through the portal this year alone.

We also launched our **Apprenticeship Hub** - a free service designed to support Year 11 and Year 13 students in Essex. This year the service has delivered 95 school-based sessions to over 5000 students, delivered virtual parenting support sessions to 750 parents and carers and supported 98 students to secure an apprenticeship.

Residents can find out how to access the hub [here](#)





ACL Essex, the largest provider of adult education in the county, have launched adult outreach services for residents in Tendring, Canvey and Rural Braintree to enhance skills, enable increased participation in learning and access to fully funded courses and bursaries in key sectors facing recruitment challenges. These include:

- the **Nightingale Care Bursary** was implemented in 2023 to support the recruitment, retention, upskilling and progression of the Health & Social Care workforce. Our offer has since expanded to include Maths and English qualifications to enable applicants to access work-based diplomas. Since January 2024, over 150 people have started or completed a certificate or diploma with us, many of whom have gone on to secure work or gain promotion

- our new £1.4 million **Poppins Bursary** which opened in 2024 offers development opportunities and training for those currently working or looking to enter the early years sector. Grants are also available for those wanting to start their own childminding business. Whilst still in its infancy, more than 50 applicants have started a fully funded course with us. Looking ahead, plans include new diplomas in leadership, SEND and online courses

“ Doing the course at ACL has helped me to improve my ability, my talents and my work pattern ”

**Fatmata Sawi**



Find out more about fully funded training opportunities in the early years sector [here](#)

We launched the **‘We Rise’** youth movement – a project led by young people for young people which enables 16-25 year olds to access expert advice on how to achieve their career goals and gain employment in a variety of sectors. We Rise has been supported by major employers including UK Power Networks and Morgan Sindall.

The **Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service** provides a central place where large businesses can pledge their unused levy funds and SME’s can register their apprenticeship opportunities and request a levy transfer. 897 opportunities have been supported across Essex since the launch of the service and over £5 million in pledges have been received.



Find out more [here](#)



We have **invested £250,000** in the **Greater Essex Careers Hub**, leading to 97% of all secondary, special schools and colleges in Essex have access to industry and employer led careers guidance. This is a significant step towards ensuring all children have expanded access to relevant careers education for future employment.



Employers can find out how to take advantage of this [here](#)



Find out about full-funded training opportunities in the health and social care industry [here](#)



Working with Braintree District Council, we have launched free courses on retrofitting to help upskill the energy sector and make Essex properties more energy efficient.



Find out more [here](#)



“ Becoming a qualified Retrofit Coordinator opens many doors and provides me with the credibility to help my start-up succeed. Just as important is the personal development and depth of the course. The topics covered taught me a lot about the industry ”

**Matt, Learner**

It is also important to acknowledge the great work that Essex ActivAte partners delivered as part of the Sport and Youth Crime intervention work across the County, engaging young people who are least likely to access mainstream programmes. Through activities such as horse riding and boxing, young people can socialise, access guidance and insight into how to realise their personal goals and aspirations.

To expand and widen access to opportunity, we have also:

- safeguarded and created more than 1,503 jobs through our Backing Essex Business service, which supported businesses to access more than £2 million of investment.
- secured £129 million worth of social value from our ECC suppliers which delivers employment, social and environmental benefits for residents. Almost 20,000 hours have been committed by 118 suppliers to support people into employment and 615 jobs have been created for people facing long-term unemployment.
- for example, Colas participated in the DWP Re-start scheme with Reed-in-Partnership in Harlow, offering sessions to help participants learn about careers in the highway sector. They invited candidates for work trials and informal career discussions, leading to successful job placements like Michael's.



This video showcases more of this incredible work

“ I like coming here because it gives me purpose and I don't feel empty. It makes me feel included. ”

Young person attending summer holiday project for vulnerable children

“ It makes me feel like I belong somewhere. I am more confident. ”

Young person attending summer holiday project for vulnerable children

“ Life as a single parent is like climbing a mountain. There will be setbacks, and times when you feel yourself falling, but you just have to hold on and keep climbing. ActivAte has given us the rocks we have needed to keep on climbing. They have helped me to continue working when I cannot afford childcare, they have fed my children during the holidays, at times when I struggled to, and have given my children amazing adventures and happy childhood memories which they wouldn't have otherwise. ”

Parent, Basildon

“ I struggled to find a company that saw me as the right fit. I felt elated when I was told I got the job after so many knockdowns in the past. It was such a happy moment. ”

**Michael**, participant on the Re-start Scheme



We've safeguarded and created more than **1503 jobs** through **Backing Essex Business**



Essex Activate - [Watch our amazing clubs in action!](#)



- in summer 2024 we saw almost 10,000 children take part and benefit from the programme – 15% more than summer 2023. 23% of those children attending had special educational needs and/or disabilities
- feedback from parents has once again been overwhelmingly positive, enabling them to work, whilst gaining access to free high-quality childcare, provided by our partners. At least £65 worth of work time (at minimum wage) was achieved by parents per day, whilst child(ren) attended a club
- 68% of our club providers throughout the county received support from local businesses, which donated fresh fruit, snacks, ingredients, and prizes to assist club activities
- Essex ActivAte significantly contributed to the Essex economy, and in particular employment rates. The programme gives local organisations opportunities for growth, enabling them to employ more staff. 840 local people gained paid employment in our Easter 2024 programme alone

The cost of childcare can be a huge barrier to accessing learning and employment, especially during the school holidays. We created 'Essex ActivAte' – a free holiday activity and food programme that is delivered across Essex. Joint funding from the Department for Education and Essex County Council has enabled the holiday club to operate during half term alongside longer school holidays. We have expanded the scheme further in those areas of greatest deprivation, working with over 100 local delivery partners to deliver holiday clubs and hot meals to over 100,000 children and young people in 230 local community settings across Essex. We have used the programme to build trusted relationships with families across the County, provide support networks and build long term resilience.



## #2 Improving Numeracy, Literacy and Communication

Strong literacy, numeracy and communication skills are vital for life. In Essex, we have therefore invested £3.5 million in our **Essex Year of Reading and Essex Year of Numbers programmes**. These have helped to improve life chances, by providing children and adults with the opportunity to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through initiatives such as:

- Parent ambassadors that engage and inspire residents to improve literacy skills within their communities.
- Literacy areas in every one of our 74 libraries.
- Provided 160,000 free library cards to every primary age child in Essex

Our focus on these priorities is paying off. Since 2022 the percentage of KS2 pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths has increased across all of our priority places, with the biggest increases seen in Tendring (increase of 8.4%) and Castle Point (increase of 4.9%). The percentage of children in early years achieving a good level of development (GLD) has also increased across priority, with the most notable improvement in Castlepoint (10% increase) and Basildon (4.9% increase). Children are defined as having reached a good level of development if they have achieved at least the expected level in 3 key areas of learning, such as maths, literacy and emotional development.



We've provided **160,000 free library cards** to every primary aged child in Essex through our Essex Year of Reading programme

You can find out more about the [Essex Year of Reading here](#)



“ Thinking Reading is aimed at secondary age children, and it had great success. Students were gaining two months of reading age per half hour session! When young people can read well it allows them to get qualifications, but it also allows them to live – they can go to shops, they can make healthy choices by reading labels on cans. ”

Teacher, Roding Valley High School



This past year's campaign, the **Essex Year of Numbers**, has been another packed programme of exciting learning opportunities, designed to give both children and adults maths skills a magic boost. Almost 6,000 children have taken part in events, which include:

- partnering with HSBC UK to make financial discussions more engaging for students aged 14-18. The adapted Smart Money Financial Education Programme covers key areas such as money management, budgeting, borrowing, savings, and fraud prevention
- working with the Royal Air Force STEM team on a children's maths activity book
- The 'Year of Numbers' inspired schools to highlight the importance of using maths in fun and engaged ways. For example, St Thomas More's School in Colchester celebrated National Baking Week with a maths-themed baking lesson, where students learned to weigh ingredients, measure volumes, and calculate baking times

“ If I don't have the maths when baking cupcakes, they will not turn out right. ”

Student at St Thomas More School, Colchester



[Watch how they got on!](#)

Launching soon is our next 'Year of...' campaign entitled the 'Year of Opportunity.' You can find out more details on this in the 'Look Ahead' section of this report.

Residents can download the Essex 'Year of' app now for android and iPhone for free, to gain access to fun reading and numeracy resources advice and guidance, for all the family.



[The 'Year of' app can be downloaded here](#)

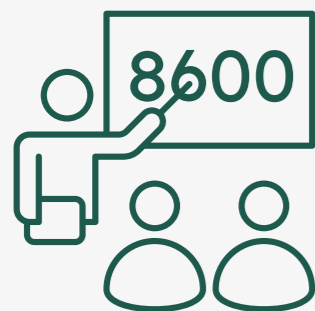
The **Multiply programme** in Essex has successfully trained 8,600 adults in numeracy skills since January 2023. The programme offers free, bite-sized courses (6-10 hours) to help adults manage money, assist children with schoolwork, and improve employment prospects.

Extensive engagement across providers and with services, alongside tailored learning approaches, have meant that Multiply has exceeded expectation:

- in the first half of 2024/25 alone 3,299 adults have received training – almost reaching our annual target in six months
- the programme is the highest performing nationally, delivering 7% of national outputs with just 1.4% of the funding
- it has also built strong relationships with voluntary and community organisations, leading to 3,275 traditionally hard-to-reach adults starting training through VCS referrals. The programme’s success is attributed to extensive engagement with providers, internal collaboration, and tailored learning approaches



[Watch Multiply in action or find out more here](#)



The **Multiply programme** has successfully **trained 8,600 adults** in numeracy skills since January 2023



In the first half of 2024/25 **3,299 adults** received **training** - almost reaching our annual target in six months

“ They got us involved in maths by learning about cost calculations, quotations for jobs and managing my own money – how to do your taxes, read your payslips. Anyone who is considering doing a trade, you need these skills. I have decided following the course to start my own woodworking shop. Don’t waste another second and get those key skills. ”

**Callum**, Multiply Course Participant

“ Maths skills are crucial for routine tasks in the beauty industry. They help with everything from ensuring there is enough stock for treatments to using ratios for mixing acrylics. Multiply makes such a difference. In the beauty industry, we like to learn through doing. We are kinaesthetic learners. We have never had such an increase in maths skills. We are seeing learners go up two levels from where they started. I definitely recommend Multiply to other businesses. ”

**Kersti Harding**, Business Director at Debut Academy, has witnessed the positive effect of the Multiply programme on adult learners in the beauty industry.

Kendall Church of England Primary School in Colchester received £50,000 of funding to become a **centre for early years speech and language development**. The school has earned the Elklan Communication Friendly Setting Primary Award and is one of three hubs in Essex dedicated to improving speech, language, and communication skills. A network of Communications Champions has also been set up, sharing best practice across 20 pre-schools and 15 primary schools. These projects are part of our broader efforts to deliver targeted communication programmes for young children.

**Harlow Futures** is a £300,000 project to help children and young people in Harlow enhance resilience and improve educational prospects for future success. The first phase of this programme included delivery of an initiative called ‘My Happy Mind’ across 27 primary schools. This focuses on improving resilience, perseverance, and mental wellbeing amongst children. The programme includes lessons on building positive relationships and understanding your own feelings. 86% of teachers have reported an improvement in the self-esteem and confidence of children involved, and 85% have reported an improvement in their children’s resilience and perseverance when trying to achieve their goals.

“ It has helped me with active listening, because now I can show respect to my friends when they are talking. ”

Year 3 student

“ Thank you for helping us learning about our superpowers ”

Year 4 student



The second phase of Harlow Futures focuses on speech, language and communication. It utilises Elklan speech and language support for early years to help prepare children for school.

Kirby from Little Angels Pre-School discusses the benefits of how Talk Boost sessions are benefitting children in early years education, as well as nursery staff and parents:



In 2023 we launched our **‘Best Start programme’** in Canvey Island. This two-year project works directly with reception age children in eight Canvey schools to provide a range of physical activities and festivals. At the halfway point of the project, 1,300 children have taken part and 27 staff from eight schools have benefitted from skills training from School Sport Partnership professionals. Across all the schools, children’s reading skills increased by 10%, their comprehension increased by 13% and their writing skills increased by over 16%. Following the programme’s success, we will soon be bringing Best Start to 24 schools in priority Basildon communities.

Last but not least, we also worked with **‘Make Happen’** to design, develop, and deliver a raising attainment and progressive programme called Maths Club. The aim of this six-week programme was to work with 30 year 10 students (from Harwich & Dovercourt High School and Clacton County High School) who were at risk of not achieving a 4/C at their GCSE maths



### #3 Building Healthy and Connected Communities

We have worked with partners to ensure targeted investments across our priority places and wider communities across Essex. We've focused on securing investment and improving access to services. We've also enhanced connectivity to strengthen local communities. This includes:

- securing and helping to deliver £130 million from the Government's Levelling Up Fund, Community Regeneration Partnership and Towns Fund to support long term regeneration programmes in Colchester, Harlow, Clacton, Jaywick, and Harwich and Dovercourt
- starting to deliver the £19.66 million Colchester Town Deal programme in partnership with Colchester City Council, including new digital hubs, facilities for young people and communities, and improved walking and cycling routes between the city centre, Greenstead and University of Essex. Work is also underway on £20m of Levelling Up Fund projects, which includes the ECC-led transformation of St Botolph's Circus
- the Harlow Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund programmes will see over £40 million in government funding to support the regeneration of Harlow Town centre and surrounding areas, including the delivery of a new cultural quarter

- as part of the £20m Clacton Levelling Up Fund programme, the ECC-led Clacton Hub project will deliver a new building on the site of the existing Clacton Library that will encompass a range of services and partners, including Libraries, Registration Services, ACL and the University of Essex's newly formed Centre for Coastal Communities. We are also working with Tendring District council on the delivery of the £20m Community Regeneration Partnership (formerly Levelling Up Partnership) programme - which includes funding for EC-led transport and public realm projects in Clacton and Jaywick
- Harwich and Dovercourt will see £6.7m of Government funding for improvements to the Dovercourt Town Centre area - including two ECC-led projects to refurbish Harwich library and provide new ACL skills space (set to complete this year) and improve the public realm along Kingsway
- investing £100,000 in a pilot with Harlow College to create a new electric vehicle training centre, funding 50 training places to enable local people to develop professional qualifications in EV repair and maintenance, which we know will be a major growth sector. We have exceeded our original target and over 200 local residents have taken up one of these courses. Due to the success of the scheme, Ford now send technicians from their main electric vehicle plant to the College
- established plans to open of a Health & Care Academy at Harlow College based on the highly successful Aviation College at Stansted Airport

We've started to deliver the **£19.66 million** Colchester Town Deal programme including **improved walking and cycling routes**





### Community supermarkets

- we have created a county wide network of 14 Community Supermarkets and Pantries across Essex (including at least one in every district) that provide over **7,000** people with access to good quality, affordable food and household items, saving on average **35%** on the same items if purchased in mainstream supermarkets
- the **£461,000** invested to date has been used to leverage an additional **£682,000** in funding from delivery partners and City, District and Borough Councils. This is **£1.47** generated for every **£1** ECC has invested and a Return on Investment of **47%**
- shoppers browse the shelves of fixed sites like the Brooklands Community Shop in Jaywick or jump on board a double decker bus on Canvey Island (Stuff on the Bus), which is stocked with fresh fruit and veg
- the project has exceeded expectations, originally expecting to reach 4,730 families but has in fact reached **more than 15,000 families** to date



### Watch the launch of one of our latest community supermarkets in Epping Forest



“ The shop’s [Brooklands Community Shop] the best thing that’s happened to Jaywick... They’re brilliant with customers [the staff and volunteers] Everyone’s talking to everyone, you don’t get that in shops in town... It creates happy vibes. ”

Paul, Jaywick

“ I’m filling up my cupboard which have been bare for a long time. They’re not here to judge you, just give a helping hand. ”

Carol, Laindon

### Grant Funding

ECC provide a number of funds to specifically support and strengthen communities.

The **Essex Community Initiatives Fund (CIF)** is an annual £300,000 fund, whereby town and parish councils, community groups and social enterprises, can apply for grants up to £10,000m to go towards projects that benefit the wider community.

Examples of projects the CIF has funded since 2019 include upgrades to community sports facilities, improvements to community buildings, such as new heating systems or accessible toilets and restoring a nature reserve.

All Essex County Councillors have access to two funds to help strengthen communities:

- a **£5,000 locality fund** that each member can use to support both improvements and groups in their local ward area. Projects funded include equipment for community groups that support young people, litter picking kits, and books to restock school libraries
- a **local community fund**, totalling almost £400,000, which Essex County Council members use to fund projects activities or services under one of three themes – Youth provision, Levelling up in the Community and Climate Action. Projects funded include, providing school holiday activities to families identified by schools as those most in need of support, setting up slow cooker clubs for families on low incomes, and expanding employment programmes for young people with SEND

**New Community Hubs in Basildon** - Four physical activity hubs (linked to schools and health centres) have been established in Basildon. These provide physical activity classes and volunteer opportunities for local people, as well as routes into employment. The Achieve Thrive Flourish (ATF) hubs have 5000 attendees at their programmes and monthly activities. They have:

- mentored dozens of young leaders
- provided thousands of 1:1 coaching session
- supported more than 2,000 young people to stay in education
- trained over 1,000 volunteers

ATF’s Future Makers programme works closely with the local community. It provides them with volunteering opportunities, training and development, work placements and paid opportunities - all delivered within a supportive and encouraging environment.

“ I get messages everyday how I’ve changed people’s lives, and it just means so much to me. ”

Jade, Neighbourhood Connector Assistant with ATF

Jade started as volunteer and quickly demonstrated a talent for increasing engagement to unprecedented levels, attracting crowds as large as 600 people to take part in physical activity sessions in community spaces. Now employed as part of ATF’s Neighbourhood team, Jade attributes the opportunities she’s had to being able to grow in confidence and effectively support her local communities.



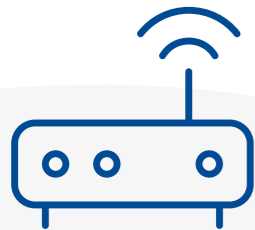
ATF hubs have trained **over 1000 volunteers**

“ My parents died young; I grew up in the system. I was homeless from 10 years old. That’s when I started getting into trouble with drug dealing. ATF have made the biggest difference. Not only do they help with funding if I need it, not only did they help me when I was homeless in Essex, but Vicky from ATF was also a very big help if I needed someone to talk to. It doesn’t feel like a job, feels like family, like being with friends. ”

**Ted**, now a Young Volunteer leader with ATF

“ Before ATF, I wasn’t really doing anything – I’d wake up in the afternoons. I was unmotivated. Now that I’m working with ATF, it’s completely changed me – it’s given me motivation, I’m happier. It’s changed me a lot. ”

**Connor**, ATF Team Member



We’ve secured over £20 million of external investment to bring **Superfast Broadband** to **over 140,000 premises**

We’ve **donated over 200 devices** since April 2024 to help people get online



Alongside securing investment and establishing community supermarkets and hubs we have also delivered an expanse of activity that delivers better digital connection for residents and businesses across Essex. This is critical in ensuring better access to service and opportunities. We have:

- secured over £20 million of external investment to bring Superfast Broadband to over 140,000 premises in Essex and increased the number of properties with access to gigabit capable broadband by 44%. Better digital connection enables better access to services and opportunities
- worked with Reed in Partnership and the Good Things Foundation to set up National Databank Hubs in our libraries that provide eligible residents with free SIM cards and mobile data. This includes the development of four community health and digital skills hubs across the Brentwood district. The hubs provide access to devices, free SIMs and a digital support drop-in. We have helped dozens of residents at each location – ranging from teaching someone the basics of how to use their new digital phone, to helping someone apply for a residency permit online
- donated over 200 devices to help get people online since April 2024. The programme has also donated over 6,000 laptops to individuals fleeing Ukraine – this provided a vital opportunity to thousands of families across the county
- collaborated with Internet Service Providers to improve their low-cost social tariffs to help those in the most vulnerable communities get online. Our new Digital Exclusion Risk map helps organisations understand areas of digital exclusion risks by using connectivity data, skills and qualifications, and deprivation indices. It also highlights over 200 digital inclusion initiatives available to Essex residents and has been recognised for its impact by the United Nations



# Look ahead – what’s next?

**Our Levelling Up Essex programme has already provided a strong foundation for our ongoing work to improve life chances and drive growth in Essex.**

Creating opportunities and removing barriers, ensures more people in Essex can contribute to – and benefit from – strong local economic growth.

**MORE OPPORTUNITIES**



**GREATER ECONOMIC GROWTH**



**PROSPERITY FOR ALL**



This impact report showcases how our Levelling Up Essex programme has been actively delivering our priorities over the past three years. The work shows how councils are well placed to improve life chances and drive good growth. We can tailor and deliver plans that meet the needs of the local economy and place.

We have taken an all-ages approach - from programmes that teach toddlers how to interact with the world around to help them become school ready, to connecting young people with employers, to providing parents with access to free childcare - enabling them to more easily attend work and training, to working directly with businesses to understand what their future needs are.

We also recognise there is much more to do. The ‘Levelling Up Essex’ programme has shown that co-ordinating efforts around the complex challenges that priority places and cohorts face is one of the most valuable mechanisms for driving the type of change we want to see in Essex. We are committed to a further long-term programme, focused on improving life chances for residents in priority places and cohorts. This will align with local economic plans and strategies, to deliver real results and establish Essex as the County of Growth and Opportunity.

**Our future work will focus on:**

## Skills

Making sure people have the right skills for their jobs. It includes education, training programs, and ongoing learning to keep up with industry and business needs.

## Careers

Initiatives that increase awareness of and provide opportunities for residents to engage with businesses, providers etc. increasing aspirations and direction to employment.

## Employability

Work that enables residents to directly access employment, including in our key sectors of focus.

To achieve the above we will:

- **start early** - begin career guidance and skills development early in a child’s life, through targeted interventions with children and family in early years and primary education
- **build a Connected Careers System** - putting in place the building blocks to deliver a cohesive careers system by 2030, enabling Essex to respond to emerging Government priorities

- **focus on unemployed young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS)** - we will improve the aspiration and employment prospects for young people in Essex, by working across systems to bolster support and initiatives to get people into further education or employment with training
- **work with more employers, both local and international** - developing more opportunities to enable residents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with SEND to move into or onwards in employment
- **invest in priority places** - we will continue to increase opportunities and growth for communities in our priority places. We will do this by working with local groups, as well as across the council and with our partners, to join up initiatives that to improve reach and capacity

Some of our upcoming projects include:

- **The Year of Opportunity** – Launching in March 2025, the Year of Opportunity will be a new £1m investment that will build on the success of both the Essex Years of Reading and Numbers. We will deliver high-quality and meaningful careers education for all ages, which will include working with businesses to connect 36,000 children up with employers. This will give them a greater understanding of career pathways and embedding the importance of preparing children and young people for work by skilling up more teaching staff to support pupils to achieve and develop future career goals
- **Essex Connector (A new digital careers tool)** – In 2024, we provided £240,000 of funding to develop resources to support career pathways for young people with SEND, working in collaboration with local families and young people. In addition to this work, we will launch our new Digital Careers Tool, called Essex Connector, which will connect businesses, residents, and training providers. It is anticipated that in the first full year of use the tool will have 50,000 unique users
- **Tending Future Skills Programme** - We have commissioned The East of England Energy Group (EEEGR) and University of Essex, to work with both us and our partners to identify the jobs that will be required in the future by Freeport East, the Renewables industry (such as Offshore Wind Farms) and in the development of our new Garden Communities. The project then works with schools and other providers to deliver skills and careers sessions to help prepare the future workforce for these exciting new emerging opportunities. Over 1,500 young people and adults have taken part in sessions so far

We provided £240k of funding to develop **career pathways** for young people with SEND



## Power in Partnerships

In Essex, we focus not just on taking action, but also on how we adapt the way we operate to create opportunity in the places where it is needed most – this is through collaboration with partners, strong engagement and well-placed joint investment in infrastructure and services. Everything we have achieved through Levelling Up Essex is a result of strong partnerships, across a range of countywide public and private services and sectors. The lesson here is clear: when we come together with a unified voice, we can achieve more than any single organisation can alone.

Below is a summary of the steps we are taking to ensure we continue to strengthen and grow our partnership working.

### Greater Essex Business Board

By business, for business and with business. We will drive economic growth by forging strong partnerships and developing policies that foster innovation and address skills shortages. The new Greater Essex Business Board will bring together business and education experts. This collaboration will set the strategic direction for business growth. The board is a partnership between Essex, Southend and Thurrock Councils, but led by the business community. It will shape economic and industrial policy for the long term. Membership includes major companies like Teledyne, DP World, Freeport East, and Leonardo.



### New Greater Essex economic growth strategy

Working with the Greater Essex Business Board, a new economic growth strategy for Greater Essex will be published in 2025. This will set out how we will attract investment to the county. The strategy will allow us to deliver vital.

### Greater Essex Inward Investment and Place Promotion

Inward Investment means attracting people from outside of Essex to invest money in our county. We need to create a good business environment, so they want to bring their money, technology, and expertise here. We have created a new website to highlight Essex's prime investment opportunities. This also showcases the region's appeal as a fantastic place to live, work, visit, and study, known as Extraordinary Essex.

Over the past year, we have been able to work with partners to demonstrate that Essex is hugely investable. Recent announcements include:

- a £1.1 billion investment into Stansted Airport that will expand the existing terminal and create 5,000 on-site jobs, with ECC's own investment in Stansted College, enabling people to benefit from that opportunity. Also included in the investment announced is the creation of a new on-site solar farm
- a new solar and battery storage farm is set to be built in Chelmsford. We have secured a £2.4 million investment from Longfield Solar Energy Limited to fund the upskilling of local residents in the green sector to access new jobs

## Sector development and business support

This is about making plans and rules to help certain parts of the economy grow. It includes building infrastructure, improving regulations, and supporting new ideas. We will continue to work to develop future sectors like Green Growth, Space, Care Technology, and Construction. This will create the conditions needed for over 40,000 new jobs. Our business support services will continue to foster growth and employment opportunities - including the Greater Essex Growth Hub and the Backing Essex Business Service.

Some recent examples of actions in this area include:

- in October 2024, over 250 attendees and 130 businesses came together at our first ever Ambitious Essex Business Summit. Attendees enjoyed free workshop sessions on key topics, such as how to export internationally. [Watch what happened on the day](#)

- we have supported fast-growing manufacturing business, Dura Composites in our priority area of Clacton. Dura plans to grow by 100% in the next three years. This will see opportunities created for local people to help deliver this growth
- we launched the Essex Construction Alliance - a new group to support large and small construction businesses in Essex. Construction plays an essential role in the local economy and employs over 65,000 people in Essex. It is set to grow by more than 30% by 2040. The Alliance now boasts over 200 committed members. and brings together both the public sector, where we can provide support and access to apprentices, with the private sector, who have the jobs



## International trade opportunities

Exciting new international trade opportunities for Essex will begin delivering for the county in 2025 and beyond. This includes engaging US investors and exporters in East Anglia, to create more jobs for local people.

Our new partnership with the authority of Virginia Beach exemplifies this commitment. Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex have partnered with the US city, to benefit from its booming technology and renewables sectors. This will boost transatlantic trade and cooperation through a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Virginia Beach is the largest city in Virginia, located on the US East Coast.

“ There is a huge amount of common ground between East Anglia and Virginia Beach. Our city is one of the main hubs for the US offshore wind industry, as well as technology sectors like software and cybersecurity - and companies from East Anglia are already doing well there. ”

Virginia Beach Deputy City Manager,  
**Amanda Jarratt**

## Health Determinants Research Collaboration

A £5 million Health Determinants Research Collaboration for Greater Essex, with the University of Essex. The findings will help to inform decisions by partners across Greater Essex, as they work to understand and deliver improvements to the health of Greater Essex residents, with a focus on those places and groups who experience greater health inequalities.

## Education Taskforce

The Essex Education Taskforce has worked with system partners within and outside of ECC to bring a variety of projects and opportunities for all children, young people and their families to access learning regarding Reading and Numbers. Strong lasting relationships had been formed with HSBC, cultural institutions (i.e. The Mercury Theatre) whilst providing opportunities for children in school to become more confident in the use of numbers by developing ECO Refill shops.



Finally, we are excited by the new government's devolution agenda and welcome the devolvement of power away from the halls of Westminster. Local organisations are best placed to advise on local needs, and we will continue to work with our public and private partners to create opportunity, improve life chances and grow the Essex economy.



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