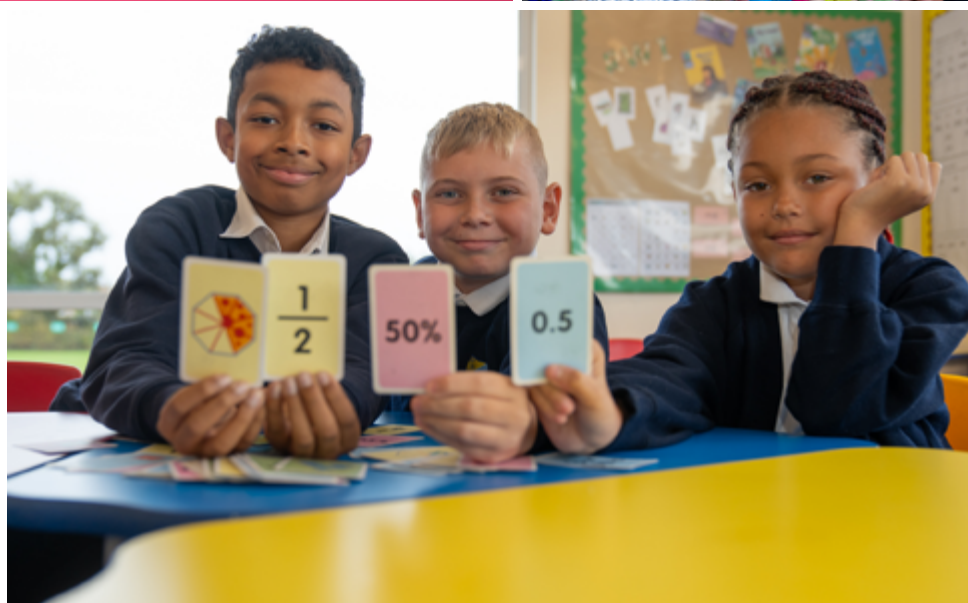




Reaching new heights

Levelling Up Year Two Impact Report 2023/24



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Since the launch of our Levelling Up Programme two years ago, we have supported almost 68,000 Essex residents to have the opportunity to succeed in life and fulfil their potential.

Foreword



Cllr Louise McKinlay
Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Communities and Business Engagement.

Follow the energy, build trust with organisations and create community champions. Since the launch of our Levelling Up Programme two years ago, we have supported almost 68,000 Essex residents to have the opportunity to succeed in life and fulfil their potential.

Essex is an incredible county, with a strong identity, a wild rugged coastline and passionate people. It is home to award winning attractions, major transport hubs and a wide array of businesses on the cutting edge, from medical to space tech. However, 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 and at Key Stage 4 there is a 30% gap in educational attainment between the most and least deprived areas in the county.

No one's future should be predetermined by where they are born, their family circumstances or financial situation. 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.

We, alongside our 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.

At our Levelling Up Year One Impact Report Launch, Angel Cogger, from Basildon, highlighted in person to MPs the impact of the support, advice and employability training she received through the community organisation ATF, which helped her, and her family, come through a difficult time. This then inspired her to learn the skills needed to help other families do the same. Angel is not alone – this Year 2 Impact Report shares many residents' stories of where Levelling Up has made a real difference to their lives. It also lists a huge range of support that you can access for free right now.

Over the last two years we have seen some of the most important measures of progress across the County increase – literacy levels are rising, health indicators are improving, and, in the majority of our targeted Levelling Up places, employment levels are increasing.

I, and all my fellow Cabinet Members at Essex County Council, are passionate about driving levelling up across each of our areas of responsibility. We have been volunteering at newly opened community supermarkets, building LEGO™ robots in libraries alongside young children learning to code, meeting excited apprentices, taking part in fun physical activities with families and engaging with more Essex-based businesses than ever before to better understand their needs.

We are committed to driving forward our Levelling Up campaign, as set out in our Everyone's Essex strategy, and making it work for every resident. Last year we launched the Levelling Up Programme, this year we reached new heights.

What is Levelling Up and why does it matter?

Introduction

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.

Over the last 2 years, since our Levelling Up Programme began, we have worked with our partners to launch a range of projects aimed at supporting residents, in both targeted places, helping some of our most deprived communities, and across all of Essex. These include:

- ensuring that children at key stages of development receive the support they need to learn and succeed,
- that parents have access to free childcare to enable them to more easily access work,
- that businesses are able to best support their workforce,
- that community supermarkets are set up in the areas that will benefit the most,
- and that we make it easier than ever before to be able to retrain and gain new skills.



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.



SCAN ME

Watch a snapshot of how we invested Levelling Up money in our first year here

So far, our Levelling Up initiatives have supported almost 68,000 people and we are on track by the end of year 4 to have improved the lives of almost 140,000 Essex residents. We are also pleased to have seen some of the key Levelling Up metrics that we are tracking improve. Whilst we know we still have a lot more to do, it is excellent to see:

- the employment rate for working age people has increased in 4 of our priority Levelling Up areas: Basildon, Castle Point, Colchester and Tendring.
- The percentage of children meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of KS2 has gone up by an average of 2% overall (this is over 350 children) across all Essex Districts, which is well above the national average.
- Tendring's Health Index has improved by 4.7% – the first time ever that it has increased in this area.
- The number of Essex Businesses operating in key targeted growth sectors (construction, health and care, advanced manufacturing, green economy, digital) has increased over the past two years in all or our identified Levelling Up places/districts.

“ I am a mum of four children, one of my children has autism. My journey with ATF began at the start of lockdown. They offered me support with food vouchers and started to give my children one to one sports coaching. They asked me to do some face painting for them, gave me volunteering opportunities, and this has supported me to get a job as a Teaching Assistant in Basildon. ”

.....
Angel, volunteer with ATF



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July 2023 Roadshow – Angel Cogger, Volunteer at ATF

“ Having been dealt with a very challenging set of circumstances, Essex Pedal Power has been fundamental to my wellbeing, both mentally and physically. It's so much more than cycling and the knock-on effect in terms of introducing me to other people means I am now engaged in other activities too. There's always a friendly, inclusive, warm welcome when we pop into the Jaywick office, it's an initiative which is a true credit to the community. ”

.....
Essex Pedal Power Free Bike recipient



“ The range of activities have been fantastic, and even just getting out in the summer holidays when my children wouldn't have otherwise been able to do so! ”

.....
Parent whose children attend the free holiday programme, Essex ActivAte



What is Levelling Up and why does it matter?

Programme Reach



138,090

Expected number of people who will be directly impacted by projects in the Levelling-up project portfolio, over the life of these projects.

67,747

Number of people to have been directly impacted so far (by end of November 2023).



Essex is home to the second largest cluster of advanced manufacturing and engineering companies in the UK, but some of these businesses are experiencing skills shortages in areas such as Aerospace, Civil, Environmental, Defence, AgriTech and MedTech. We have been strengthening our partnerships with businesses to help ensure that more Essex residents have the skills required to enable them to work in these industries.

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Visit our Youtube channel to hear from some of the young people already taking part in engineering apprenticeships in Essex

Essex is home to some incredible agricultural technology (AgriTech) companies.

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Visit our Youtube channel to watch this film that showcases some of the Essex careers paths in this area.

This document showcases some of the real life stories of those residents who are already benefiting from Levelling Up.




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To find out how Levelling Up could help you or your business, **visit our website**



“ We are extremely grateful for your generous donation of free laptops. These laptops will be invaluable in supporting our SEND students, as we plan to utilise them for software programs that will aid in their education and development. This contribution will undoubtedly make a significant difference and enhance their learning experiences. ”

.....
Francesca, PA to the Executive Principal at Clacton Coastal Academy, on the devices we donated via the Civil Aviation Authority.

“ It is a remarkable thing really; you only need a little bit of support and direction and it’s truly amazing how far that can carry you. I am indebted to ‘Adult Community Learning’ for helping me gain self-confidence, social skills and get into a career that I absolutely love. I now work as a client accounts analyst for a property management company. ”

.....
Jack Parsons, completed an accounting course with ACL.

Levelling Up Essex Year 2

£10 million committed up to 2025 to support economic growth and skills in Essex
 £11 million of additional Levelling Up funding made available by Essex County Council

A small snapshot of the work so far...

Increasing Literacy Levels

Built on the success of the Essex Year of Reading with the **£1.5m Essex Year of NUMBERS**

£337,500 Secured for a new **Children's Imagination and Literacy Centre**

Launched the **£7.5m Multiply** Programme offering free maths courses

Access to employment

Creating sustainable jobs by supporting the **Retrofit Academy** to train 200,000 retrofiters by 2030

20,000 job applications through our **Essex Opportunities Portal** a virtual one stop shop for information on employment, skills and training.

New **Apprenticeship Hubs** in Harlow and Colchester and delivered **Get Sorted events** in Basildon and Canvey supporting young people to meet local employers.



Essex ACTIVATE

Helps those who most need it, in 2023 we provided **172,412 free spaces** to children from low-income families providing **250k nutritious meals** and helping deliver **310 clubs**

Healthy lifestyles

Re-launched the **Essex Wellbeing Service** a one-stop shop for health and wellbeing and hosted our first **Wellbeing and Mental Health Conference**

Strong & safe communities

10 years of our **Family Solutions Service** Supporting over 8,000 families

Recognised by the 2023 **Community Energy Awards** as most **Supportive Local Authority**

Over £300k invested in **Community supermarkets** by Spring 2024 there will be one in every district!

Skills & Lifelong Learning

Partnered with business to launch the **South Essex Advanced Technical Skills initiative**.

our **Adult Community Learning Hubs** delivered 16,000+ training opportunities including over 900 apprenticeships and placements through our **Kickstart & Apprenticeship Levy Transfer schemes**

£100k invested in a new **electric vehicle training centre**

over 150 residents have applied for or completed a course so far!

Raising aspirations

Supported the extension of the **Youth Work in Hospital Project** with Levelling Up funding

Improved employment opportunities through our new **Get Set for Work** support service for adults with learning disabilities and/or neurodiversity.

Trained **360 Disadvantage Champions** who will support delivery of the **Essex Disadvantage Strategy**

Infrastructure, growth & innovation

Secured £120m from the government Levelling Up and Towns Funds to support long term regeneration around the county.

Celebrated the **opening of The Sunspot** after investing more than £2m building the landmark business centre.

Continued investment in cycling infrastructure through **Essex Pedal Power** projects.

Digital

Over £20m in external investment secured to bring superfast Broadband to Essex premises.

6,000 digital devices to schools, refugees, residents, and community voluntary services

What has been achieved in our second year

In this section we have set out some of the achievements made in the second year of our Levelling Up programme, across areas such as skills, education, community and literacy. Whilst true Levelling up can take generations, we have already been moving at pace by investing in new infrastructure, by offering free childcare support and by providing more ways than ever before to upskill or gain employment.

Spreading Opportunities and Improving Public Services

Increasing Literacy Levels

There have been more opportunities in Essex than ever before to help improve you and your families reading, writing and maths skills, whether you are in a library, a school or even a forest!

Over 400 volunteers supported the Summer Reading Challenge. **(an 11% increase on 2022).**

8,568 volunteer hours were given. **(a 15% increase on 2022).**



65,000 new library members have signed up over the last 12 months.

Over 26,000 e-books/e-audio were borrowed (13% increase on 2022).



Almost half a million books were borrowed across all Essex Libraries. **(a 5% increase on 2022).**



We secured £337,500 from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to create a new Children's Imagination and Literacy Centre at Colchester Library.

Equipment will include augmented reality mirrors, a bubble screen, infinity mirrors and LED lighting. The new space will have a Roman theme to celebrate Colchester's history.

26,874

children took part in our 2023 Summer Reading Challenge **(a 13% increase on 2022).**



Increasing Literacy Levels

How is the summer reading challenge making a difference – below is just some of the feedback from families who took part to tell you more:

- 85% of participants said that the Challenge made us use the library more than before **(an 8% increase on 2022).**
- 83% said that they planned to continue using the library more than before **(a 7% increase on 2022).**
- 81% said that their child’s reading had improved over the summer **(a 16% increase on 2022).**
- 87% said that my child read more this summer because they took part **(a 6% increase on 2022).**

In 2022, we launched The Essex Year of Reading, funded by Essex County Council and created by the **Essex Education Task Force**. Looking back over the past year, the campaign has: provided 160,000 free recyclable library cards to every primary school pupil, put on 100s of literacy events in schools and libraries, provided bespoke teacher training in almost 60 primary and secondary schools, and hosted author visits from famous faces, including King Charles, the Queen Consort, Dermot O’Leary and Michael Rosen.

“ On the Thinking Reading programme in secondary schools, which was just one part of the Essex Year of Reading, students were gaining 2 months of reading age every half hour session! It was incredible to see! ”

Teacher, Roding Valley High School

In 2023 we launched the Essex Year of Numbers, a £1.5m campaign

to inspire a lifelong love of learning, focussing on numeracy.

Such was the success of the Essex Year of Reading at improving literacy levels across the County, in 2023 we launched the Essex Year of Numbers, a £1.5m campaign to inspire a lifelong love of learning, focussing on numeracy.

The Essex Year of Numbers offers hundreds more fun events and workshops across the year for residents of all ages to attend, such as our exciting new Lego in Libraries programme, which teaches kids aged 6 – 11 to improve their maths, coding and English skills, by playing with LEGO®. To date, there have been 220 sessions across the libraries, with a further 186 already planned with bookings open now. Don’t just take our word for it that it is fun.

“ Max attends regularly and can get a little overwhelmed if there are too many people around, but he did brilliantly by sharing with a new little boy and showing him how to use the Lego set. They created a little truck and soon had it whizzing around the library. They are looking forward to meeting up and creating more together next week. Max’s Nan is in the process of writing up a Feedback report for us as she has seen a huge improvement in his confidence, behaviour and socialising since he has been coming to the Lego sessions and she cannot praise the library enough for giving children the chance to use the sets. ”

Staff member at Harwich Library



Visit our [Youtube channel](#) to hear from some of our young curious inventors who have already taken part.



Increasing Literacy Levels

As part of the Essex Year of Numbers, we launched a new £7.9m programme called Multiply, which offers free maths courses to residents aged 19 and above.

Multiply in Essex has already trained over 3000 adults aged 19 and over from Levelling Up communities and cohorts in 2023 – offering bite-sized courses that enable local people: to manage their money and increase their confidence with numbers, to help their children at school, and to help people to get into, or progress in, employment.

The project’s support offer has delivered £250,000 in community grants to the voluntary and community sector and public partners to give vital support to over 1500 Essex residents – enabling many residents to participate in adult learning for the very first time.

“ I enjoyed chatting with the other parents, it was a great way to help us feel more relaxed about maths together and to share ideas and experiences with each other. ”

Multiply Session Attendee

There are thousands more opportunities to take part to just waiting for you – for more information and to apply visit [Multiply \(essexopportunities.co.uk\)](https://essexopportunities.co.uk).

“ I now know how to prepare my toddler for being able to understand maths and be ready for school. I loved this class! ”

Multiply Session Attendee



FOLLOW UP

Last year we created 74 literacy areas – engaging spaces where books and resources are grouped together to support children and adults with their reading and writing in a relaxed environment, supported by trained literacy advisers. Since the launch, over 50,000 books have been loaned out from the literacy areas to support people’s development.



Healthy Lifestyles

The cost of childcare is often a huge barrier to accessing employment, especially during the school holidays, so we created ‘Essex ActivAte’ – the free holiday activity and food programme that is delivered across Essex, funded through the Department for Education, with additional funding from Essex County Council to ensure it is run across all half terms, as well as the major school holidays.

Essex ActivAte helps those who most need it, which is why 100% of children on the programme come from low-income families, and we provide specialist SEND and mental wellbeing support.

In 2023 we provided 172,412 free spaces to children in Essex, have provided over 250,000 nutritious meals and worked with over 90 organisations to deliver over 230 clubs during the Easter, Summer and Winter and over 85 clubs during half terms.

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This year, through the clubs, we expanded to do even more by offering free multiply courses to the parents of young people attending the clubs, teaching valuable numeracy skills and offering food education to parents, helping people to cook on a budget and providing free resources to do this, like access to slow cookers.

ParkPlay is a simple idea: It’s an event that takes place every Saturday, packed with fun and games, to which everyone of every age is welcome. It is free and organised at local parks. 14 Parkplays are currently running in some of our most disadvantaged communities. Since we launched the programme in Spring 2021, there have been over 28,000 attendances, across 1333 sessions, with many attending regularly. ‘State of Life’ who assessed ParkPlay’s impact on wellbeing, found that attendance at ParkPlay is associated with significantly higher life satisfaction, higher resilience, reduced loneliness, and increased trust with neighbours.

Most importantly, the highest positive effects were found in the 20% most deprived areas of Essex, where ParkPlay is largely focused.



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Watch ParkPlay in action and join in the fun



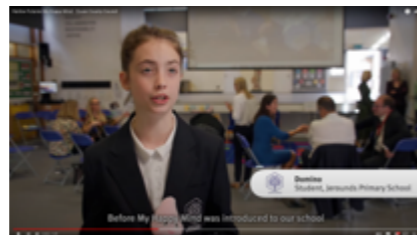
FOLLOW UP

Last year we launched our 'best start programme' in Canvey Island. This two-year project works directly with children of reception age in 8 Canvey schools to provide a range of physical activities and festivals. At the halfway point of the project 1300 children have taken part and 27 staff from 8 schools have benefitted from skills training from School Sport Partnership professionals.

We have also introduced Ready 4 School in Canvey Island – pre-school physical literacy breakfast clubs for 300 children and their families who will benefit the most.

Active Essex led a disability cycling project for Tendring which saw over 7,500 people with disabilities and long-term health conditions start cycling regularly and independently when provided with a free bike of their own. This expanded their world and has introduced them to a wealth of new opportunities.

We launched the Harlow Futures project in schools – a £180,000 project to help children and young people in Harlow who are falling behind to improve their educational prospects and take up opportunities. The first stage focusses on supporting mental health and resilience in young people.



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[Watch Harlow Futures in Action](#)

Healthy Lifestyles

Provided free workplace health and wellbeing support for businesses, supporting over 580 organisations and training more than 1000 mental health first aiders.

In July 2023, we hosted our first Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Conference in Chelmsford. We invited employees from schools and education settings in Essex, Southend and Thurrock. The conference gave attendees the opportunity to reflect on good practice and offered them the chance to learn practical strategies that could support their young people.

Our popular Memory Cafe at Harwich Library has celebrated one year supporting people living with dementia. During its first year, a total of 19 events helped to support almost 200 people with dementia and their carers.

The first organisations to benefit from the £7.5m Public Health Accelerator Bids small grants programme have been announced.

These include:

- Urban Support: to provide a supported learning programme in partnership with local schools, focusing on assisting children with learning difficulties, by providing access to physical activities and mentoring.
- Maldon District Council: has received a grant to launch the Beat the Street programme to encourage residents to walk, run and cycle more in the district. Launching in summer 2024, Beat the Street will aim to improve the health and wellbeing of 5,000 Maldon residents.
- Canvey Island Youth Project (Yellow Door): to employ a counsellor specialising in supporting young people who are neurodiverse.

Provided free workplace health and wellbeing support for businesses, supporting over

580

organisations

and training more than 1000 mental health first aiders.



Skills and Lifelong Learning

We are always learning – with that in mind we have aimed to make Essex a place where developing your talents and learning new skills is as easy as possible.

This year we opened the new Adult Community Learning Colchester Digital Hub



an IT and digital skills training centre where residents can access digital learning and services.

Our Adult Community Learning Hubs delivered over 16,000 training opportunities, including nearly 6000 Level 1 to 6 qualifications and over 900 apprenticeships and placements for young people through our Kickstart and Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Schemes.

Our Adult Community Learning Festival of Learning, which showcased new courses, offered free taster workshops and provided training for over 3000 residents to gain new qualifications.



FOLLOW UP

Last year we invested £100k 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 and key to supporting the transition to net zero.

This target has been exceeded – to date over 150 local residents have completed or applied for a course (courses offered are from Level 1 up to Level 4). Due to the success of the scheme, Ford are now set to also send technicians from their main electric vehicle plant to complete Level 4 courses.



Skills and Lifelong Learning

We launched Adult Community Learning outreach services for residents in Tendring, Canvey and Rural Braintree to help them participate in learning and improve their skills. Wherever you want to learn, we aim to be there. As part of this, we provided £60,000 of Levelling Up funding to purchase new mobile interactive ‘hands on’ science kits to help both children and adults develop their learning.



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Watch the new STEM kits in action

We worked with key partners to launch the new private sector-led South Essex Advanced Technical Skills initiative to provide key skills for residents and support for businesses, working with Ford Motor Company, DP World, Southend Airport, Leonardo and TEVVA Motors. This new initiative partnered with Coventry University last Autumn, which has allowed the first cohort of 100 learners to start their work based training.

Secured over £4 million from the national Community Renewal Fund to support people in Tendring and Harlow into work.

Opened a dedicated Essex Film Office promoting Essex as a go-to location for film and TV production, driving investment into the creative arts sector in Essex, supporting local businesses in the supply chain and fostering local talent and young people entering careers in the film industry.

We provided training for jobs in key sectors for

200 recently unemployed adults



through the COVID Recovery Academy.

With 2 airports and 3 seaports in Essex, logistics is a key sector for the county. HGV drivers, a critical component of this sector, are responsible for transporting food, drink, materials, machinery and more. Despite this role being essential to the economy, there is a significant workforce gap in Essex. There were almost 900 regional HGV job postings in the past year alone. We have been working with district council partners to provide free HGV driver training courses in Essex. The programme has funded over 50 spaces, supporting individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. Of the 21 who have completed their training so far, ten students have already secured work in the sector. Find out more about the HGV Driver Training programme and how to apply in this video:



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Essex HGV Driver Training Programme 2023

At Essex County Council we provided full funding grants to schools to upskill experienced Teaching Assistants (TA) to achieve the Higher-level Teaching Assistant status, which enables them to be able to undertake whole class teaching. Due to demand, we increased the pot of funding to £75k with the aim of training up almost 100 TAs. Many of which have already started or now completed the training.

Worked with Art Clubbers to create a Green Entrepreneurs Programme that awarded £5,000 of seed funding to three young entrepreneurs, aged between 18-30 to advance their sustainable startup businesses. The programme featured six weeks of fully funded workshops led by expert facilitators for all those taking part.



The first iteration took place this year and awarded three of the participants £5,000 each. These were Essex Chestnut Cooperative, **BEE Homes** and **Acuro Group**. Each business had a different green idea. For example, home insulation and sustainable timber production.



FOLLOW UP

Following on from last year’s launch of the Nightingale Care Bursary to help meet the shortfall of trained professionals in the care industry – this year we expanded the successful scheme, enabling it to support hundreds more people from low-income backgrounds, over the next three years, to access care training and qualifications.

The scheme has already funded 195 residents and the new expanded scheme will support over 400 more.



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Watch them speaking about their businesses

Boosting Productivity, Pay, Jobs and Living Standards

Digital

Developing digital skills in today’s modern world is essential. This is why, as part of our Levelling Up Programme, we have made it one of our aims to make sure residents have the skills and access to infrastructure they need to get the most out of new technology.

We have distributed over 6000 digital devices to residents, schools, refugees, and community groups, offering digital inclusion support to residents, reusing devices that were donated through our scheme Closing the Digital Divide. This included the provision of laptops for young people via the countywide Traveller Outreach team to those who were not in employment and had experienced barriers to access learning. Below is just some of the feedback from those who have received devices:

“ The provision has made a real difference to these young people’s ability to reach their potential and avoid further exclusion at a pivotal time in their lives, supporting and raising aspirations. ”

Nicola Coates – Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Outreach Worker



We secured over £20 million of external investment to bring Superfast Broadband to over 140,000 Essex premises and provide a 44% increase in properties with access to gigabit capable broadband.

Launched a social tariff campaign in Harlow, Tendring and Colchester, helping residents who receive Universal Credit to save up to £200 a year on their broadband bill. Almost 6,500 residents engaged with the campaign, such as an adult in Braintree with special educational needs and his single mum carer – we are helping them to save £480 a year by supporting them onto a social tariff and reducing their bill for mobile use.

We secured over **£20 million** of external investment



to bring Superfast Broadband to over 140,000 Essex premises and provide a 44% increase in properties with access to gigabit capable broadband.

Across Libraries and working with Reed in Partnership and the Good Things Foundation, we have set up National Databank Hubs that offering eligible Essex residents free SIM cards loaded with mobile data to help them access employment opportunities.

Introduced Health and Digital Literacy Champions across 26 libraries who have helped residents to develop the skills they need to interact with important online services like the NHS app.

“ This equipment has been pivotal in providing structure to support our ‘Accessible Apprentices’ and alleviates huge anxieties for identified low-income families. ”

Jonathan Smith, Targeted Employment Team on the iPads we provided

The Essex County Council Local Community Fund has made £10k available to develop 4 sites in Brentwood into Community Health and Digital Literacy Hubs.



We created Essex Unlocked, a project working with ex-offenders, supporting them with literacy, digital literacy and community integration.



Launched a Digital Champions Pilot to train people who are seeking asylum as digital champions in Colchester and Tendring. Once trained, they receive a laptop to be able to support themselves and others in the community to digitally upskill. 15 people have taken part so far.

“ The iPads I was able to access will make a massive difference to 2 young people I am supporting. Both have been out of education for a number of years and have been unable to access a device. This will allow them to work remotely and will take advantage of their enthusiasm to learn, even though they can’t currently attend a school. The difference the speed and ease of accessing the devices has made, in comparison to the struggles professionals were having using other routes, is huge and really made a big difference to both. They are both very thankful. ”

Luke Goldie-McSorley, Practice Supervisor, Children and Families

Access to Employment

We have safeguarded and created more than 720 jobs through our Backing Essex Business service, which supported businesses to access more than £2 million of investment.

Delivered ‘Get Sorted’ Events in Basildon and Canvey which enables young people to meet local employers and training providers. These were attended by 51 young people.

We created new Apprenticeship Hubs in Colchester and Harlow.

Launched a Family Friendly Employers Charter which sets out a series of principles for how employers can help parents and carers manage work and caring commitments. To date 40 firms, employing over 43,000 employees in total, have signed the charter.

We are supporting The Retrofit Academy CIC with their mission to train over 200,000 retrofitters by 2030. Retrofitting is adding extra functionality to existing buildings to make them more sustainable. This can involve installing heat pumps, adding solar panels or improving insulation. We worked with the Retrofit Academy CIC on the programme. We have supported more than 240 residents receive funded retrofit qualifications across Harlow and Tendring. The programme received the **‘Collaboration of the year – knowledge building and research’** award at the Unlock Net Zero Live Awards 2023.



Secured annual investments of £50,000

from EDF for the new Longfield Solar Farm, which will be used to train residents for new job opportunities in the sustainable energy and green economy sectors.



Watch the launch of the community pledge on our Youtube channel

Using £400,000 of Levelling Up funding, we are upskilling and creating multiple entry level job opportunities in Health and Care, working in Partnership with Mid & South Essex NHS to deliver 3 projects.

- Anchor Ambition – This project supports young people acquiring skills and employment, raise aspirations, and open opportunities to work within the NHS. The project is being delivered in Castle Point, Rochford, Basildon and Chelmsford and will engage with at least 300 residents by 2025.
- Health Start – supports 18 to 25-year-olds. The pilot will offer four months of paid work placements in the NHS to nine disadvantaged young people.
- Explore the NHS in the metaverse – We are working with Hundo to create a new digital platform where young people will be able to design their own virtual avatar, then walk round a virtual job fair, no matter where they are based in Essex. The virtual environment will be packed with multimedia and interactive elements and engage more than 1500 young people in NHS opportunities, as well as helping to simplify the NHS application process.

This year we launched the new Essex Business Community Pledge, a call to action for employers of all shapes and sizes to commit to attracting and retaining talented staff.

If you represent a business, you can **pledge to join via our website.**

Over 20 major businesses have so far already expressed interest.



FOLLOW UP

In April 2021 we launched the Essex Opportunities Portal to provide a virtual one stop shop for Essex residents seeking information on employment, skills and training related matters. Since then, almost 20,000 residents have applied for jobs through the site, and we have added an apprenticeship hub to the site to showcase over 70 business apprenticeship opportunities.

What helps make the Essex Opportunities Portal unique is that there is an adviser working to help place candidates. This past year the adviser has engaged with over 1000 residents, over a 100 of which successfully moved into employment, training or volunteering. We also held 6 virtual Jobs Fairs and supported 90 businesses and Providers. This resulted in 3374 clicks on our Live Vacancy Board.

Access to Employment

2023 saw us launch 'Essex Careers,' a new printed and digital magazine showcasing new job and training opportunities.



Read the digital edition of Essex Careers

SCAN ME

or contact essex.careers.magazine@essex.gov.uk for a free copy to display in your school or college.

Essex County Council has joined a collaboration with Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council to embark on an ambitious expansion of the Greater Essex Careers Hub. Five experts, known as Enterprise Coordinators, are being deployed to enhance careers education and opportunities for Greater Essex residents aged 11 to 18. 60 apprentices have already been supported in the first year.

Launched a new social value campaign aimed at our £1 billion supplier base in Essex, designed to make the most of the money we spend in the county to deliver wider employment, social and environmental benefits for our residents. Across our 135 suppliers who have current contracts with a social value commitment, £5.7m has been delivered in terms of employing young people not in education, £3.8m has been delivered in terms of employing those who were long term unemployed and £2.1m has been spent employing people with disabilities.

“ This service has improved the quality of my life enormously. I’m partially sighted and live in the middle of nowhere, so now I can get out more without having to ask for lifts. ”

DigiGo user review

“ I have been using DigiGo for over a year. It’s fantastic, never let me down and my car is off the road for 80% of my travelling. The drivers are super friendly and accommodating. Try it once and you’ll never look back. ”

DigiGo user review






FOLLOW UP Last year we launched DigiGo, a brand new, fully electric on-demand minibus service for people who do not live close to main public transport routes. The pre-bookable service has no fixed route or timetable and is low cost and completely free for concessions after 9am on weekdays and at all times on weekends. It has now transported over 35,000 passengers and has a 5-star rating from thousands of reviews. Due to overwhelming demand, we have extended the service for a further two years, ensuring more people from both urban and isolated rural areas can travel to where they need to for an affordable price.



Raising Aspirations

Trained over 360 Disadvantage Champions across Essex schools who will support delivery of the Essex Disadvantage Strategy, which aims to raise educational outcomes for pupils.

Pre Plan B Programme – Pre Plan B is an early intervention NEET prevention for year 11 students who have difficulty accessing mainstream education – this might be due to diagnosed additional needs or complex family backgrounds. It offers a work experience placement, City&Guilds qualification, first aid training, outdoor education days and more. This programme has given them the opportunity to try new things, learn new skills and start to believe in themselves. The aim is for all young people taking part to have an offer for post 16 provision when they leave year 11. Almost 50% of participants so far have either secured an ongoing work placement or applied for a college placement.

SCAN ME

[Listen to some of the participants share their stories.](#)

We published our new strategy for supporting people with learning disabilities and autism, ‘Meaningful Lives Matter: Our plan for a more inclusive Essex.’

There has since been significant progress made in improving rates of employment for people with disabilities via ECL, including a new inclusive support service for adults with a learning disability and/or neurodiversity, reaching a total of 350 people, who have been supported to obtain jobs.

We also launched a new guide to help people with disabilities in Essex shape their future and gain access to exciting new opportunities.



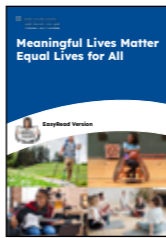

SCAN ME

You can [Download a copy of shaping my future from our website](#)


The Children and Families Service extended their Tendring Multi-Disciplinary Team, which provides families with support from a range of different professionals to help them address and manage the problems they face. The Team have worked with over 190 vulnerable children and 75 families.

We have exceeded our targets by more than double, with 14 children prevented from entering care and avoiding costs of between £1 million to £4 million.

With Levelling Up funding, we supported the extension of the Youth Work in Hospital Project, which provides personalised support for young people aged 11 to 19 (25 with SEND) who have presented at Basildon Hospital Children’s A&E and/or who have a chronic condition, such as diabetes, sickle cell disease or epilepsy. This support includes providing one-to-one Key Youth Worker support and mentoring and access to a weekly youth group. Across Basildon, Rochford, Castlepoint and Brentwood 540 referrals to the project have been made, with 102 since April 2023.



[Read the easy read version of the strategy on our website](#)



SCAN ME

“ I am happy my Youth Worker is in my life. He always listens to me and makes me laugh a lot. He helps me see things easier and he tells me a lot about history and the world. He has made me feel that I’m not alone with my anxiety. He’s very honest and really makes me feel better when I see him. ”

.....
Young person on project



Improving Infrastructure / Business Growth and Innovation

Secured £120 million from the Government levelling up Fund and the Towns Fund to support long term regeneration projects in Colchester, Harlow, Clacton, Harwich and Dovercourt.

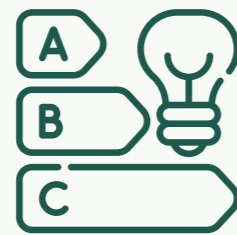
Began delivering the £19.66m Colchester Town Deal programme in partnership with Colchester City Council, including new digital hubs, facilities for young people and communities, and improved walking and cycling routes between the city centre, Greenstead and University of Essex

The Harlow Towns Fund and Levelling Up Fund programmes will see over £40m in government funding to support the regeneration of Harlow Town centre and surrounding areas, including the delivery of a new cultural quarter.

The 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 secured over **£2.5m** for energy efficiency



and retrofit measures for low-income households in social housing, as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

We secured £2.5m for energy efficiency and retrofit measures for low-income households in social housing, as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Our plans to revamp Loughton Library have received planning permission. The new library will provide modern, flexible space for users with a new outdoor learning space.

Tendring residents will be a huge beneficiary of the upcoming Freeport announced in terms of direct jobs. In June Freeport East announced a £800k programme that will support small businesses to help get young people into green energy jobs.

All Essex Pedal Power projects are committed to using and developing the local cycling infrastructure, including dedicated cycle paths, cycle lanes on roads, and community bike parking. An injection of £1.7m in funding, has enabled improvements to be made to the Jaywick to Clacton cycle route, resulting in a new coastal path. This will improve connections between the two towns and encourage more people to get out on their bikes.

In 2021, Essex County Council’s Targeted Employment Team and the Disabilities Commissioning Team jointly collaborated to run a pilot, the Learning Disabilities and Autism Business Grant Funding Scheme. The Scheme was a unique funding opportunity for new and existing businesses in Essex to apply for funding up to £25,000 to create paid employment opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism.



With an initial investment of £112,312 Essex County Council awarded funding to 5 businesses, creating over 19 paid roles, and securing over 220 paid hours per week. Reviewing the success of the scheme, and the feedback from both employers and employee’s being positive a second round of funding was commissioned and applications opened late 2022.

With a further investment of £106,199, Essex County Council will be awarding another 5 organisations creating a minimum of 14 roles, and securing over 250 hours of paid employment per week.

In November 2023, the team attended the BASE (British Association for Supported Employment) awards in Leicester, and won the “Innovation of the year” award for their work on the scheme.



FOLLOW UP



Celebrated the opening of The Sunspot, after investing more than £2m in the building of this landmark business centre on the seafront at Jaywick Sands, providing affordable business units, a café and indoor and outdoor market space, delivered in partnership with Tendring District Council.

Every one of the 24 units have been rented out to businesses, including a barber shop, a maker of specialist school uniforms, a multimedia artist and an asset finance company, with the help of low and flexible rents.

Empowering Local Leaders and Communities / Restoring sense of community, local pride and belonging

Strong and safe communities

Greening Basildon is a new project from Trust Links for the areas of Five Links, Lee Chapel and Felmores to enable residents to improve the green spaces in their neighbourhoods. They can best describe it in their own words:



FOLLOW UP

4 physical activity hubs (linked to schools) created in targeted estates in Basildon, providing both physical activity classes and volunteering opportunities for local people, to create routes into employment.

The ATF run hubs have 5000 regular participants across their programmes and activities every month. An increase of 3,000 when compared to last year. They have mentored 40 young leaders, provided 2,400 1:1 coaching sessions, have supported 1,872 young people to stay in education and trained 1,044 volunteers.

In 2023/24, we have invested over £450,000 in the development of affordable community supermarkets in Jaywick, Colchester, Harlow, Basildon (Laindon and Vange). At the time of writing over 1500 people have now become members across all seven supermarkets, which provide fresh, chilled, frozen and ambient food, and household items to over 2,200 adults and 1600 children with an average saving of 35%.

By Spring 2024 the remaining five funded programmes will launch in support of their communities, meaning that there will be at least one in every district.

Celebrated ten years of our Family Solutions Service, which has worked with over 8000 families to support them to make sustained positive changes to their lives.

Delivered the Community Initiatives Fund for individuals, groups, and voluntary organisations across Essex to apply for grant funding of up to £10,000 for projects that benefit their local community. Between 2021 and 2023 the fund has allocated over £700,000 to almost 120 individual projects.

In April 2023, the Children and Families Service launched a new Short Breaks offer for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities. Since the launch, nearly 12,000 hours have been delivered to 460 children and young people, 3,042 children and young people have accessed days out and 1,275 children and young people and their families have accessed an adapted holiday break.



“ It’s 1 year since we first kitted out our van and started promoting our project on our first target estate, Felmores. Since then, we have gone on to establish a weekly gardening morning in Northlands Park, helped start a community garden for residents at Nevendon Place, and ran several projects with residents down Littlebury Green. We’ve also run lots of free children’s activities in the Park and in local libraries, from making bug hotels to leaf printing. ”

Trust Links

Held the It’s My Life Festival for children and young people who are supported by the Children and Families service, enabling them to meet new friends and enjoy a range of free, fun, stimulating and creative activities. Nearly 1,000 children and young people took part, who are either in care, care leavers, children with disabilities or unaccompanied young asylum seekers. The event was supported by 75 volunteers from Essex County Council. Watch the festival fun in action

Our work in providing access to cheap renewable energy has seen us recognised as the most “Supportive Local Authority” at the 2023 Community Energy national awards. Essex’s community energy groups have assisted 1600 residents and 200 homes with energy efficiency measures, resulting in significant bill reductions for low-income households.

In 2023, the Love Essex team awarded 36 micro-grants to local organisations, individuals and schools that are aiming to reduce household waste. Examples of recipients include:

- Cornerstone Church Repair Cafe, who have been running for several years and has mended hundreds of items, including electronic gadgets, garden tools and pushbikes.
- Laindon School Uniform Bank is a project that has redistributed over 22,000 items of pre-loved school uniform to the local community.



FOLLOW UP



In March 2022, we provided the Lounge Community Hub in Harwich with £100,000 to expand their offer and open every weekday.

Since then, they are now able to support over 100 people a week, including offering a Slow Cooker Club, Knit n Natter, parent support group, Parkinson's Support group and many more wellbeing groups, supporting those on benefits, low-income families and those at risk of social isolation.

Strong and safe communities

Essex County Council's Arts and Cultural Fund has supported over 60 arts and cultural projects since launching in 2021. It provides between £2,500 and £30,000 to successful applicants to deliver free and low-cost activities, events and exhibitions throughout the county. During 2022/2023, the fund has:

- seen over 17,000 workshop participants
- had 100,000 residents engage with over 60 arts and cultural projects
- given the opportunity to over 5,000 schoolchildren to engage with arts and culture
- employed over 500 creatives to deliver projects,
- attracted over £450,000 in match funding.



Essex County Council's Arts and Cultural Fund has attracted over

£450,000
in match funding.





Levelling Up Projects in Focus

This next section includes the real life stories of people who have already felt the benefits of the Levelling Up programme, and acknowledges the incredible partners who helped make it happen – the District Councils, schools, charities, community groups and private sector organisations. In this summary we have included a few examples, but to view more, please visit our [Levelling Up website](#).

Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Essex ActivAte

The cost of childcare is often a huge barrier to accessing employment, especially during the school holidays, so we created 'Essex ActivAte' – the free holiday activity and food programme that is delivered across Essex, funded through the Department for Education, with additional funding from Essex County Council to ensure it is run across all half terms, as well as the major school holidays.

Watch this project in action

Essex ActivAte – Explained!

“ The Essex ActivAte clubs are giving the children the opportunity to make memories. We have helping them to build their self-esteem and they’ve got that opportunity to just be children. ”

Anne-Marie Murphy, Time for Change Kids

“ It makes me feel like I’m surrounded by people that care about me. ”

Sophia, young participant

“ The ActivAte clubs allow students to do activities outside of school, where they would never have been able to afford it. ”

Kirsty Taylor, Teacher at Clacton Coastal Academy

In 2023, we worked with over 90 organisations to deliver approximately 220 clubs across the main school holidays and 90 clubs during the half terms. The clubs are fully inclusive and engage primary and secondary aged children. Specialist clubs are also provided for young people who are in or at risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

This year, the programme provided 172,412 free spaces to children and young people – 100% of which are from low-income families. We also provided over 250,000 nutritious meals.

Other councils, such as Basildon Borough Council, are providing increased funding to help the scheme reach even more young people in targeted areas.

This year, we have also been able to offer more support to the whole family, including parents and guardians. Parents of young people attending the clubs were able to improve their maths skills through our Multiply scheme, we provided free food education sessions to parents, enabling people to cook on a budget, and the library service worked with 350 children to support development of their literacy skills.

Visit our Youtube channel to hear from some of the parents who took advantage of the Multiply scheme during Essex ActivAte sessions.

Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Essex ActivAte

92% of parents reported a positive impact on their child’s physical and mental health after attending an Essex ActivAte club.

88% of parents said the clubs supported their own mental wellbeing.

“ Zac has autism and enjoyed being around mainstream children and having the routine of a club to go to. It helped a huge amount with his anxiety. ”

Essex Parent

Club Focus – Castle Point and Rochford School Sports Partnership

One district in Essex had high numbers of refugee children staying in a local hotel. One of our South Essex delivery partners, Castle Point and Rochford School Sports Partnership, helped them access Essex ActivAte. The refugees improved their spoken English over the five-week summer holidays, as a result of participating in the fun physical activities. Due to having been more restricted at the hotel – it was clear their health improved over the holiday period.

Club Focus – ATF

Delivering a range of physical activity, enrichment and food education, ATF are one of our most successful providers, engaging over 450 young people across their 10 clubs each day during the half term and holidays. They design each club with the local community, including children in decision making regarding the activities, menus and timings of the clubs.



Watch ATF in action on the Active Essex Youtube channel

“ My kids absolutely enjoyed this summer thanks to Essex Activate wide range of clubs offered, that I would otherwise not be able to afford. We visited two different farms, sports events, clubs, golf, climbing, it was unbelievable, my kids felt over the moon. My son is in the autistic spectrum, and I believe this experience was invaluable for him. He managed to overcome many fears. ”

Essex Parent

ATF hugely embed themselves into their local community and offer unemployed residents opportunities to volunteer and gain training qualifications, as well as paid opportunities at clubs with local partners, including roles in coaching, admin, promotions and catering. During the Summer delivery of 2023, ATF engaged 48 community member volunteers to help deliver their HAF camps. ATF also piloted the young leaders programme in summer 2023, giving 37 local young people, many who were struggling with their mental wellbeing or feeling socially isolated, the chance to attend clubs as leaders.

ATF were recognised for their fantastic Community work during the 2023 HAF Awards winning the ‘Special recognition Award,’ as well as the ‘Regional Award’ for the East of England.

Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
Castlepoint and Basildon

We Rise

Over the summer, we teamed up with a group of young people from Canvey Island to launch the We Rise youth movement. We Rise was established with young leaders to inspire and raise aspirations of local young people, whilst enhancing employment opportunities on the Island.

One of the movement’s biggest achievements to date is its World Café event, which invited young people from Canvey Island along to discuss the barriers and challenges they are facing today. Three key themes came out of the session: Employability and skills, mental health and personal safety. Since this event, the group has developed key activities around the themes identified, such as a Canvey based careers fair, mental health first aider training and the setting up of a teenage market supporting local entrepreneurs.

“ Get young people involved. If you do, it will lead to brilliant things. ”

Angelo, founding member of We Rise Youth Movement

Working with the young people and businesses, we have also been able to set up a youth mentoring service across both Canvey and Basildon. Young people from ‘We Rise’ are now being mentored by experts from Essex County Council, c2c trainline, Legal and General and Microsoft, providing them with careers advice, skills training and the potential for work experience and employment. More than 15 young people are currently on the mentor scheme.

We Rise goes to show how impactful a movement can be when led by young people for young people! The young leaders were instrumental in setting up the project, designing the branding, deciding the name and running the social media channels.

Pop over to Instagram and meet Angelo, one of the young founders of the programme. **Meet Angelo, a Canvey local who’s studying maths, further maths, economics, and government and politics.**

To find out more and join the movement, follow We Rise on **Instagram** or **Facebook**.



Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Increasing Literacy and Numeracy

Providing access to free and low-cost opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy skills is at the very heart of the Levelling Up programme. Across last year's 'Essex Year of Reading' and this year's 'Essex Year of Numbers,' we have invested £3.5m into urban, rural and coastal communities.

The Essex Year of Reading left an incredible legacy, working with teachers across 96 schools and our own library service across 74 sites, we put on hundreds of fun learning events and programmes, created parents ambassadors to inspire others and engaged with thousands of children and adults alike. We also provided 160,000 plastic free library cards – one for every primary aged child in Essex.

“ Thinking Reading is aimed at Secondary age children, and it had great success. Students were gaining 2 months of reading age per half hour session! When young people can read well it allows them to make progress and get qualifications, but it also allows them to live – they can go to shops, they can make healthy choices, they can read labels on cans. ”

Teacher, Roding Valley High School

Our new campaign, the Essex Year of Numbers, is a year of exciting learning opportunities, designed to give both children and adult's maths skills a magic boost.

Low numeracy skills can disadvantage people later in life and lead to problems such as debt, unemployment and even poor health. Without even realising, we use maths every day, from cooking to DIY, to managing money. Maths skills are just as important as reading in helping pupils and adults reach their full potential.


“ When I grow up, I want to be a library card ”

Child from Elmwood Primary visiting one of our mobile libraries



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.

Download the Essex Year of... app now to inspire you and your child to enjoy the magic of maths with confidence. You will find useful learning resources as well as information about all the upcoming events.



Hear from some of the residents that have already benefitted from the Multiply Scheme

Alongside the Essex Year of Numbers, we are running the Multiply programme over the next three years, which provides free maths courses for adults, using

£7.9m
of funding
from the Department for Education (DfE).

Since January, over 2,800 residents have taken part in courses delivered by a range of providers. Courses cover everything from help with managing bills to supporting children with schoolwork. The most popular workshops have been Money Management and Workplace Numeracy. Harlow and Basildon have seen the most learners.

“ They got us involved in math 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



Watch the Legacy of the 2022/23 Year of Reading



Watch the Essex Year of Numbers Launch Video

Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Increasing Literacy and Numeracy

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

“ 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. ”

Whether you are an individual looking to improve your own skills to take that next step or a business who is keen to develop your workforce, find out more now.

www.essexopportunities.co.uk/multiply/

“ I have now read a book for the first time ever. ”

Harlow Read Easy participant aged 50+

Literacy in Libraries

Raising Literacy levels across Essex has been a key priority for Essex Libraries over the past year. Not only have we installed an ‘Everyone’s Literacy Area’ in all 74 of our libraries, but we also have a Literacy Lead and Community Connector Team, who have initiated several new activities and programmes for the Essex community, from LEGO® coding sessions, to ‘Lab in the Library’ science sessions. Since January 2023, the team have attended 333 events, engaged with over 23,000 customers, and have signed up 1550 new library members.

In Essex, we have had 65,000 new members join the library in the last 12 months.

“ Many children have enjoyed using the phonics magnet board a lot – making words and handling/saying/looking at the sounds. Customers have said that they particularly like having tactile elements in the Literacy Area. We have also enjoyed incorporating more phonics into Rhymetimes too, as a follow on from this resource. ”

Library Literacy Lead

Building strong relationships with our partners has been key to our success this year. We have joined forces with charities including Read Easy and the Shannon Trust. Local businesses, such as Hopefield Animal Sanctuary and Colchester Zoo, have also been extremely supportive of our work, allowing us to hold poetry competitions, workshops and story times on their sites and in collaboration with us in our libraries.

One to one reading coaching from Read Easy is now available in the Chelmsford and Harlow areas. Having been matched with an appropriate coach, learners meet in library public spaces at regular times to build their reading skills. To learn more or become a Volunteer Reading Coach, visit [Volunteer Reading Coach](#).



Raising Literacy levels across Essex has been a key priority, we installed an ‘Everyone’s Literacy Area’ in

all 74 of our libraries.



Real life stories

Community Supermarket Update

Increases in fuel and food prices alongside rising interest rates have created a ‘perfect storm’ for individuals and families alike, particularly those already on the lowest incomes. Individuals and families who were already financially vulnerable, for example those accessing benefits for disability and worklessness, working families, parents with young children and older people are constantly having to decide where to spend their limited finances, making difficult choices between heating, food and other essential day to day costs.



Watch this project in action:
[Find out more about Ford End Community Supermarket](#)

Over the last year, Essex County Council has invested over £450,000 to open six community supermarkets. Shoppers browse the shelves of fixed sites like the Brooklands Community Shop in Jaywick or jump on board a double decker bus (Stuff on the Bus) stocked with fresh fruit and veg, chilled and ambient goods on Canvey Island. Having selected their food and household items, shoppers pay for them at the till, but save between 30% and 40% on the same items purchased at an affordable supermarket like Aldi or Lidl, thanks to investment in a diverse supply chain.

Levelling Up Area:
Tendring, Basildon, Harlow, Castle Point and Colchester with provision planned for Rural Braintree in early 2024

“ Things just seem to get harder; money goes nowhere at the moment. My kids are all adults, but I seem to feed them and the grandchildren two or three times a week which costs so much. If I can save by shopping here [Brooklands Community Shop] it means I worry less about running out of money before I get my pension each week. ”

Vanessa, Jaywick

At the time of writing over 1500+ people have joined the six active Community Supermarkets, accessing affordable food and household items for over 2,200 adults and over 1600 children. 5 more funded community supermarkets are set to open in Spring 2024.

“ Honestly it’s a life saver, what I save on my bus fare into Clacton and my shopping here means I can put my heating back on ”

Leo, Jaywick

A stark reality, but Leo isn’t in a unique position and because of the impact of the Community Supermarket programme we are committed to opening a Community Supermarket in every district of Essex by the end of Spring 2024.

“ We are hoping to fill in the gap between a food bank and a supermarket. People can jump on board our double decker bus and get what they need. ”

Holly Alberici, Pioneer Leader of The Salvation Army on Canvey Island and one of the incredible Project Leads for Stuff on the Bus.

Real life stories


Power In Partnerships: Engaging with Business

The first year of our Levelling Up Programme saw us announce a new partnership with HSBC UK to support residents to improve their financial literacy, work with UK Power Networks to host careers events in our libraries on engineering, aimed as secondary age school children, and working with Penguin Books on our Winter Reading Challenge, to name just a few. Below are just a few examples of how we are continuing to build on this work.

Watch this project in action:



[Watch a short about the first meeting of the Essex Construction Alliance](#)



[Cllr Louise McKinlay explains what the Essex Construction Alliance is all about](#)

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Essex Construction Alliance

A new group has launched to support large and small construction businesses in Essex. Construction plays an essential role in the local economy. It employs over 65,000 people in Essex and is set grow by more than 30% by 2040. The Essex Construction Alliance brings together both the public sector, where we can provide support and access to apprentices, with the private sector, who have the jobs, so it’s about ensuring that we’re having that joined up approach, to give people the skills and the opportunities that they need for the future.

Essex-based construction businesses can join the alliance and be first to hear about events and growth opportunities. Email constructionalliance@essex.gov.uk to register an interest.

Essex Business Community Pledge

2023 also saw us launch the brand-new Essex Business Community Pledge. This invites businesses to commit to a series of skills, training and employment actions.

Examples of pledge actions include offering shadowing opportunities and promoting entry level jobs. Business can also make a bespoke pledge. Our team of business engagement and skills experts will then help your organisation to develop any actions and achieve your aims through technical guidance and promotion activity. Over 20 businesses are already supportive of the pledge, from across the banking, telecoms, construction, transport and manufacturing industries.

Find support to grow, retain and develop your workforce – [Read the Essex Business Community Pledge](#) and commit to supporting local skills initiatives to achieve your business goals.

Real life stories

Levelling Up Area:
County-wide

Power In Partnerships: Engaging with Business

Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service
This service provides a central place in Essex where large business can pledge their unused levy funds and SMEs can register their apprenticeship opportunities and request a levy transfer. This means there is a cost saving to the business, as the requested Apprenticeship training costs are then paid in full via a levy transfer. This is an Essex wide initiative that covers all sectors.

Learn more and find out how the Mercury Theatre in Colchester has been using the scheme to increase the amount of apprentices they employ.



SCAN ME

Essex Transfer Levy Transfer Scheme

733 opportunities have been supported across Essex since the launch of the service and almost

£4 million

in pledges have been received.



For more stories and case studies visit our [Levelling Up webpage](#), which will be kept updated with the latest news and initiatives.

On the site Residents and Businesses will also be able to find out about the great range of Levelling Up initiatives that they can take advantage of right now.



What's next? Year 3 and beyond

Levelling Up is a long-term programme that will take generations to make a lasting impact, however, we have already helped almost 68,000 residents over our first two years. This report showcases the depth and breadth of the Levelling Up Programme in Essex.

At Essex County Council, we remain committed to working in new and innovative ways across the Council and with our partners, to bring different, skills, knowledge and experience together to deliver the most impact, aiming to be as inclusive as possible to ensure we really spread and create opportunity, especially in those places where it is needed most.

