

ECC Report August 2025

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and three unitaries plan for Greater Essex revealed



The map has been revealed the of ECC's preferred option for three brand-new unitary councils which could replace the 15 current local authorities across Greater Essex.

The new councils would mean the abolition of all the existing councils. This includes the existing unitaries of Thurrock and Southend on Sea as well as all the councils in the county council area.

The proposal for the three unitaries is:

- **South Essex Unitary:** Southend, Rochford, Castle Point, Basildon, Thurrock
- **Central Essex Unitary:** Chelmsford, Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon
- **North Essex Unitary:** Colchester, Tendring, Braintree, Uttlesford

Each new council would take full control of local services. This includes everything from schools and roads to social care and bin collections. The move

is designed to simplify governance, save money and deliver better outcomes for residents.

The plan puts Essex's three cities – Southend-on-Sea, Chelmsford and Colchester – at the heart of each new authority, in order to power economic growth, create thriving communities, and provide excellent services.

The recommendation follows months of detailed analysis, with the council working alongside partners to explore multiple options. The proposal will be published in full later this summer. It is based on evidence, financial modelling and the Government's criteria for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Our Leader, Councillor Kevin Bentley, said: "We've painstakingly weighed up the options and have concluded this model delivers the best possible value and outcomes for Essex.

"Three councils offers the simplicity, strength, and stability our great county is crying out for and which the status quo does not offer. It is also 100% based on solid evidence. If Greater Essex is to achieve its full potential and be a place where communities and the economy can thrive, I firmly believe it is the best available option."

The recommendation will now be included in a formal business case. This will be submitted to government by 26 September.

Alongside this three-council proposal, Southend-on-Sea City Council is leading work on business case for five councils. Thurrock Council is also intending to develop a business case based on a four.

The Government will consider all proposals before deciding which business cases will go forward to public consultation.

Read more about [Local Government Reform in Greater Essex](#).

Government gives approval for devolution work to proceed in Greater Essex



On Thursday 17th July the Government confirmed that Greater Essex can proceed with its devolution work. It has confirmed Greater Essex has ‘passed the legal tests’ and work towards establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) can continue.

The decision follows an eight-week consultation held between February and April. This saw a total of 4,070 responses from residents, business and partner organisations. A [report on the consultation](#) has also been published today.

Welcoming the decision, Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said: “This is a momentous day for Greater Essex, and I welcome the decision from Government that devolution will go ahead in our county.

“Devolution will provide us with the greatest opportunity to transform our county in more than a generation and help transfer more power into the hands of local people across Greater Essex.

“Our hard work will continue as we work with the Government to grasp the opportunities created by devolution which will help our residents, businesses and our whole county flourish.”

Councillor Daniel Cowan, Leader of the Southend-on-Sea City Council, said: “This is another major milestone in our devolution journey, and an important step

forward for Greater Essex to be able to represent and lobby for greater powers from Central Government."

Councillor Lynn Worrall, Leader of Thurrock Council, said: "The news today that the Secretary of State has given devolution in Greater Essex the green light is warmly welcomed.

"Our focus in Thurrock is on delivering value-for-money services for residents, with decision-making kept as close to communities as possible. We want local people to be able to hold local leaders to account for what they do. We also want to see places thrive, with jobs, investment and housing all given the priority we know they need.

"Devolution provides a real opportunity to turbo-charge the economy and opportunities of Greater Essex for all who live, work and learn here."

The Government's [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) is set for a second reading in September. Separate legislation to create the MCCA will then go through Parliament in the autumn/winter.

The MCCA is set to be legally established in early 2026. A Mayoral election is scheduled to take place on Thursday 7 May, 2026.

Find out more about [devolution in Greater Essex](#).

Read the [Written Ministerial Statement on today's announcement](#).

Keeping children safe online



Over the summer holidays it's important to remember that the risk of online harm does not disappear. Any child is at risk of exploitation. Grooming can affect both boys and girls and contact often starts on social media.

Children may spend more time online over the summer, which could increase the risk of online harm. They may access inappropriate gaming and chat forums. They may also use apps that are not age appropriate.

The addictive effects of technology could also impact their mental health.

The [Essex Safeguarding Children Board](#) (ESCB) has been sharing messages about online safety.

Topics include youth involved sexual images, online gaming, and online safety for pre-schoolers.

Also included is guidance to support young people with healthy relationships in a digital world.

It is important to remember that exploitation is not the child's fault, and they are never to blame.

Families can regularly discuss online safety to create a supportive environment. By doing this, children will feel able to share about any concerns they may have.

Parents and carers can start conversations by asking children about their online world. They can discuss the games they play or the YouTubers they watch. Adults can also double check that devices have the correct parental controls.

The [ESCB website](#) has resources including podcasts and videos [ESCB - Safeguarding topics](#) There is information about how to report concerns and how to spot the signs of exploitation.

Report concerns about child exploitation anonymously via Crimestoppers at 0800 555111. There is also a dedicated Essex Police Child Exploitation hotline. Call 01245 452058.

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/expert-insights/child-criminal-exploitation>

<https://www.escb.co.uk/news/child-criminal-exploitation-expert-insight-videos/>

**New Essex railway station on track to receive passengers
from autumn**



Progress at the new Beaulieu Park Station in Chelmsford is steaming ahead.

The railway station is now expected to open its doors to passengers from autumn 2025.

The station was previously expected to open in 2026. Good progress by Network Rail and its contractor Murphy means it is now expected earlier.

The new station will transform travel in the north of Chelmsford. It will ease pressure on the existing train station and reduce car journeys into the city centre.

Beaulieu Park Station will be run by Greater Anglia and offer:

- travel to London Liverpool Street in 40 minutes
- three platforms
- two carparks
- public transport interchange
- taxi rank
- drop-off areas
- cycling facilities
- new track for passing trains

The Beaulieu Parkway relief road will help bring passengers from the nearby A12. In time, the Chelmsford North-East bypass will bring those from around Braintree.

Beaulieu Park Station is a significant addition to the Beaulieu and Channels neighbourhoods. These form the first phase of the new Chelmsford Garden Community.



4,350 homes already have planning permission as part of the Garden Community. This includes 1,989 new homes which have already been built.

Other parts of the Garden Community include:

- Beaulieu Square Neighbourhood Centre - providing local shops, community and health services
- Beaulieu Park School - the first all-through primary and secondary school in Essex

In the coming years, the Garden Community will feature:

- another 6,250 homes
- a second all-through school campus
- up to three primary schools with early years and childcare
- up to four standalone early years facilities
- over nine hectares of employment space
- walking and cycling routes

Beaulieu Park Station will help the economic development of the area and encourage further investment.

Councillor Louise McKinlay, our Deputy Leader, said: "Essex is pioneering the type of infrastructure-supported growth that's on the national agenda, being

bold and ambitious in our commitment to future-proofing the county and putting investment where it's most needed.

"The new Beaulieu Park station is testament to this, and the role it will play in transforming travel in this part of Chelmsford and surrounding areas will have a positive impact for years to come.

"The progress being made to build the station is remarkable and I want to thank everyone involved for their hard work to get the project to this stage. I'm very much looking forward to the station opening later this year."

Promises kept – looking back on four years of achievement



[Everyone's Essex](#) was laid out by Leader of the Council Councillor Kevin Bentley in 2021 as a roadmap to 2025.

It pledged to make a real difference to the lives of residents with:

- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- A high-quality environment
- Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
- A great place for children and families to grow

Essex residents have been through extraordinary events since Everyone's Essex was published. This includes the Covid-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis and conflicts around the globe.

The council is pleased to have been able to make good on every one of its 20 commitments, as [outlined in our new report](#).

This includes:

- £50 million Cost of Living Support Programme
- 400,000 sq m of extra road resurfacing
- 2,000 drainage, vegetation and signage improvements with £25 million Priority One programme
- 17,000 Adult Community Learning opportunities delivered
- Outstanding Ofsted rating for Children's Social Care. The only local authority to achieve Outstanding in every area
- £250 million Essex Climate Action Plan
- £218 million for the North East Bypass and Beaulieu Park Railway Station
- £10 million for Connect to Work, supporting 7,800 unemployed residents facing barriers
- Over 80 organisations awarded grants through the Arts and Cultural Fund
- 52 private homes, 22 affordable homes and 10 specialist units. This is in addition to a new library and commercial space

These examples show what can be achieved by working with partners for the people of Essex. However, there is always more room for development.

Devolution in Greater Essex opens up more of these opportunities. It means more power would be given to local people with important decisions made locally.

Councillor Bentley said: "Everyone's Essex is all about making sure residents get what they vote for and ensuring promises are kept.

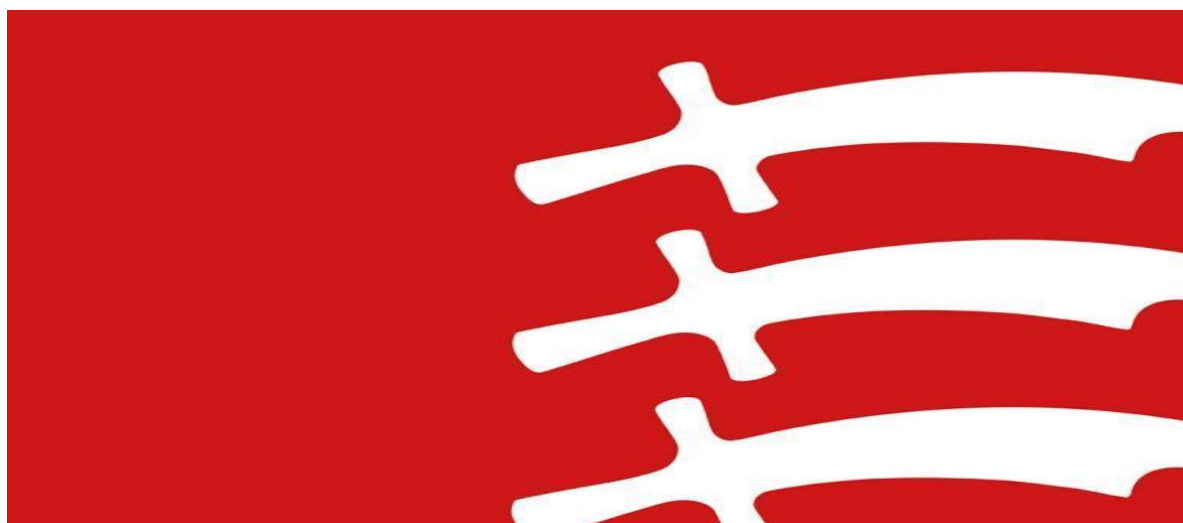
"Residents have been through unprecedented times with the Covid-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis and conflicts around the globe. Despite this, I am pleased to see a real difference has been made to people's lives.

"From being the only local authority to achieve an Outstanding rating in every Children's Social Care category to delivering 400,000 sq m of extra road resurfacing, there has been wide-ranging progress over the last four years. This

is thanks to the hard work of our services and for Essex residents making clear where their priorities are.

“This is just the beginning. Devolution is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring more power to local people, with important decisions about Greater Essex made in Greater Essex. I look forward to progressing our plan so we can present it to the government.” [Read the full Everyone's Essex report online.](#)

Statement on decision to cancel the A12 widening scheme



Commenting on the Government's decision to cancel the A12 widening scheme, Councillor Louise McKinlay, said:

"It is hugely disappointing to hear news that the Government has decided to cancel the A12 Junction 19 to Junction 25 widening scheme. As I and other council leaders and MPs in Essex have set out to the Government previously, the project is essential to support the ambitious plans for new homes, jobs and economic growth that we share. We know that major infrastructure projects can have significant wider benefits. Essex County Council, and I am sure many of our partners, are concerned that this decision could have a significant, adverse impact on economic prosperity across Essex and the wider region for many years to come.

“The 16 mile stretch of the A12 between Chelmsford and Colchester is widely acknowledged as being unfit for purpose; indeed, a recent satisfaction survey by Transport Focus rated the A12 as the worst A-road in the country following a survey of 9,000 road users. It is frankly essential that improvements to this vitally important corridor are made. I will be seeking an urgent meeting with

Government ministers to discuss how the opportunity presented by the widening project, which has been many years in the making, is not lost.

“Having previously decided not to progress an upgrade to the A120, which is the other key corridor in Essex managed by National Highways in much need of improvement, if the Government does not now deliver any of the consented and previously committed works needed on the A12 corridor this would represent a double-whammy for Essex which we must avoid.”

In respect of the Government’s reaffirmation of funding for two other important projects in Essex, Councillor McKinlay added:

"The funding commitment from Government for both the Army and Navy Sustainable Transport Package and the Fairglen Interchange scheme is very welcome. These will deliver significant benefit and are actively being progressed by the County Council. However, the A12 widening scheme is crucial for realising the scale of growth planned in Essex in the coming years.”

Childcare Reforms Expansion: upcoming changes to accessing early years and childcare places



The Department for Education (DfE) Childcare Reforms Expansion has been designed to better help parents and carers manage childcare alongside their work responsibilities. These changes are part of the government's ongoing

commitment to support families and enable parents to return to or remain in the workforce, while ensuring their children receive the care they need.

What's changed?

Expansions to the current Funded Early Education Entitlement. Funded Early Education Entitlement hours can be used over 38 weeks of the year during school term time or, depending on the provider, up to 52 weeks as a stretched offer.

Since April 2024

Working parents have been eligible for up to 15 hours of funded childcare per week in term time, over 38 weeks, starting from the term after your child's second birthday.

Since September 2024

Eligible working parents have been entitled to up to 15 hours of funded childcare per week in term time, over 38 weeks, available from the term following your child turning nine months old.

From September 2025

The support extends further, with up to 30 hours of funded childcare per week in term time, over 38 weeks, available from the term following your child turning nine months old.

Parents of 2-year-olds that are not eligible for the working parent entitlement should check their eligibility for the 2-year-old entitlement for families receiving government support. Read more about [funded childcare for 2-year-olds](#).

How do families apply?

To apply for funded childcare, eligible parents need to register for a code by the end of the month before a new term starts.

[Check your eligibility and apply on the UK government's dedicated childcare support page](#). For the autumn term families need to apply and have an approved code by Sunday 31 August 2025. Once you receive the code (usually beginning 50) please share this with your childcare provider. For more information, [please visit our Family Information Service page](#).

Wraparound childcare for parents and carers of primary school-aged children

From September 2024, the national wraparound childcare programme commenced with the ambition that by September 2026 most working parents will be able to access wraparound childcare that is either on their school site or within the local community. This wraparound childcare offer will be available during term time for parents with primary school-aged children.

What does this mean for you?

Wraparound care hours

During term time, parents of primary school-aged children can pay for their child to access childcare from 8am to 6pm. This includes breakfast clubs and after-school care.

Providers

These services can be offered by schools or private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers like childminders, out of school and early years settings.

Locations

Wraparound care can take place either on school premises or at another suitable location within the local area.

For more information and to find a wraparound provider near you, please visit: <https://secureapps.essex.gov.uk/fis>

28th July 2025

Cllr Giancarlo Guglielmi
ECC Member for Tendring Rural West

Chairman of the D&R Committee
Vice Chairman of Essex County Council

Vice Chairman of the People and Family Committee
TDC Ward Member for Lawford, Manningtree, and Mistley
Chairman of the Planning Policy and Local Plan Committee
Vice Chairman of Tendring/Colchester Border Garden Community