

# ECC Report December 2025

## Celebrating National Care Leavers Month: your journey, your future



Throughout November we celebrated National Care Leavers Month in Essex. Leaving care is a big step, and in Essex, no young person takes that step alone.

We are committed to helping care leavers feel ready to embrace independence. Whether looking for a place to live, planning your education or simply needing someone to talk to.

### **What's Available?**

#### **A place to call home**

Care leavers can [explore housing options](#) with help securing accommodation. This includes discretionary rent and deposit payments and support acting as a guarantor.

There's also a Setting Up Home grant of up to £2,000 to help furnish your new space.

## **Financial support**

From managing bills to accessing student finance, we offer [financial support](#) tailored to care leavers.

Care leavers living in Essex are exempt from council tax until age 21. Support is also available while waiting for benefit claims to be processed.

## **Education, training and employment**

Continuing studies, starting an apprenticeship or looking for work? [We provide bursaries, interview prep and even help with travel and clothing costs](#). You could also be considered for apprenticeship schemes within the council.

## **Health and wellbeing**

We have professionals [available and ready](#) to support your emotional and physical wellbeing. This includes personal advisers to help arrange and access healthcare.

## **Relationships and community**

You'll be supported to [build relationships and connect with others](#) in your community, including other care leavers.

Even if you stopped receiving support at 21, you can reconnect with your local Leaving and After Care Team. They're here to help with any concerns, big or small.

Parent groups and family hubs also offer safe spaces and practical [parenting support](#).

## **Legal and immigration support**

If you're [navigating the justice system](#) or have [immigration needs](#), we provide non-judgemental services to help you move forward.

Care leavers are encouraged to [give feedback](#) and help shape the services they receive. We believe in listening to your views and making sure your voice is heard.

## **Report shows benefits of Essex Pedal Power project**



A new independent research report has set out the huge benefits free bike schemes bring to residents.

The research assessed the impact of [Essex Pedal Power](#), alongside similar schemes in Birmingham and Southall. It was authored by economic consultants [Volterra](#) on behalf of the [Active Wellbeing Society](#).

The three projects distributed a total of 12,000 bikes. The report estimates for every £1 spent, the projects generated £12 in Social Return on Investment. This is much higher than Active Travel England's expectation for schemes. It's also "Very High" Value for Money according to the Department for Transport framework.

The social benefits of the free bikes also include:

- improving people's access to work and opportunities
- increasing recipients' physical activity
- contributing to the move towards Net Zero
- boosting community cohesion

A health Impact Assessment estimates the schemes could prevent 58 new cases of disease a year. This would save the NHS £1 million annually.

Councillor Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport, said: “Essex Pedal Power is a shining example of how transport initiatives can change lives.

“By removing barriers to cycling, we’re investing in individuals and enabling more people to access jobs, training opportunities, and local businesses, boosting productivity and supporting a stronger workforce.

“This report proves that investing in active travel delivers outstanding value for money and can help to power our economy.”

Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration, added: “Essex Pedal Power is helping residents become more active, reduce the risk of preventable diseases, and improve mental wellbeing.

“The evidence shows this scheme isn’t just good for transport, it will help create healthier communities, as well as saving the NHS money.”

Since launching in 2021, Essex Pedal Power has distributed more than 4,000 bikes. These have been given out across Tendring, Colchester, Basildon, Canvey Island and Harlow.

Learn more about Essex Pedal Power in this video:

[Report shows benefits of Essex Pedal Power project | Essex County Council](#)

Read the full [The Value of Free Bike Schemes report](#).

Find out more about [Essex Pedal Power](#).



## **Apply now for 2026 primary school places**



Parents and carers in Essex can now apply for 2026 primary school places. Applications opened on 10<sup>th</sup> November until 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026 for parents and carers of children born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022

Councillor Tony Ball, Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability, said: “Starting primary school is an exciting time for children and their families, and applying on time and making sure you use all of your preferences it will help to ensure there is the best possible chance of securing a place at your preferred school next September.

“It is also important that parents consider how they can best prepare their child to start in reception. I would like to take this opportunity to signpost parents to [www.startingreception.co.uk](http://www.startingreception.co.uk) which has a range of resources that may be helpful.”

Applications received after 15 January will be considered after on time applications. This means applying late could reduce your chance of getting a place for your child at your preferred school.

Find out more and [submit your application](#).

## **Keeping children safe online this festive season**



As the festive season approaches, many children will be hoping for new tech gifts - from smartphones and tablets to gaming consoles. With these exciting presents comes an important responsibility: ensuring children are supported to stay safe online.

Creating a safe and open environment at home is key. Just as we talk about road safety or stranger danger, regular conversations about online safety can empower children to speak up about anything that worries them. Taking an interest in their games and online activities can open the door to meaningful discussions.

Before wrapping up tech gifts, take a moment to double-check parental controls, especially on new devices.

From 8 to 14 December, [Essex Safeguarding Children Board](#) (ESCB) and its partners will be sharing vital online safety messages across social media. This week of action aims to raise awareness and provide practical advice to help families navigate the digital world safely.

A highlight of the week is the return of The 2 Johns, who will host one of their popular online safety sessions for parents and carers. This takes place on Thursday 11 December at 8pm. The free event offers up-to-date insights, practical tips, and expert advice just in time for the holidays. [Register now](#) on the ESCB Online Safety website.

Topics covered throughout the week include:

- youth-involved sexual images
- online gaming safety
- online risks for pre-schoolers
- supporting healthy digital relationships

Any child can be at risk of online exploitation - boys and girls alike. Grooming often begins on social media, and children are never to blame for being exploited.

The ESCB website offers a wealth of resources for parents, carers and professionals. These include:

- podcasts and videos
- guidance on reporting concerns
- information on spotting signs of exploitation.

If you're worried about a child, you can report concerns anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555111. For direct advice, contact the Essex Police Child Exploitation Hotline on 01245 452058.

Let's work together to keep children safe online this Christmas.

## **Colchester Library reopening after spectacular revamp**



Colchester Library has reopened today Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 following a spectacular refurbishment.

The revamp has seen the creation of a new Children's Imagination and Literacy Centre on the ground floor. The vibrant, interactive space is designed to spark creativity and a love of reading among children. It provides a warm and welcoming environment for families and includes innovative play equipment and resources that encourage learning through exploration.

The centre was funded via a £337,500 grant from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport through Arts Council England's Libraries Improvement Fund. We also put £112,500 into the project.

In addition, further upgrades at the library also include:

- fresh decor and modern furniture
- upgraded heating and ventilation systems



- energy-efficient lighting
- new air-conditioning
- upgraded meeting rooms
- improved study areas
- a refreshed exhibition space
- enhanced public computers and better printing facilities

These improvements have created a more modern and comfortable space for visitors.

Colchester Library is the busiest in Essex, with an average of 26,000 visits a month.

The library's book stock has undergone a complete refresh, with around 3,000 new titles added. Staff worked tirelessly on the refurb, returning almost 4.2 tonnes, or 1,300 containers, of stock in advance of reopening.

Councillor Mark Durham, Cabinet Member for The Arts, Heritage and Culture, said: "The transformation of Colchester Library has created a spectacular new facility that residents can be proud of.

"We're excited for children and families to experience the new Imagination and Literacy Centre, which celebrates the importance of literacy and learning for young people in Essex.

"While this is the centrepiece, the entire library has been completely revitalised to ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs of the community.

"We thank residents for their patience while works were completed and look forward to welcoming everyone back to enjoy the incredible new facilities."

A series of special events are planned over the coming weeks to mark the reopening.

Find out more [about Colchester Library](#).

## **Interim CEO appointed for Greater Essex Combined Authority**



*Statement on behalf of Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council.*

Greater Essex has reached another stage in plans to radically simplify local government in Essex, to improve services and save taxpayers millions of pounds over the years ahead; following recent agreement on the decision to create a mayoral combined authority in Essex, plans are shaping up to build the new organisation.

As part of this, Tom Walker has been appointed as Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Essex Combined County Authority, and his appointment follows a joint recruitment process by Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council.

Tom, whose current role is ECC's Executive Director for Policy, Economy, Investment and Public Health at Essex County Council will lead the crucial next stage in establishing the future Greater

Essex Combined Authority because of his extensive experience both in Essex and previously in national government. He brings experience in economic growth, regeneration, housing, planning, and environment policy to the role.

This appointment marks a significant milestone in Greater Essex's devolution journey and the ability to seize the opportunities that devolution will bring, to drive growth, attract investment and create prosperity across communities.

The combined authority is not a service delivery body, like a council. It is a strategic body that will drive economic growth across a whole economic area using powers and funding devolved from central government.

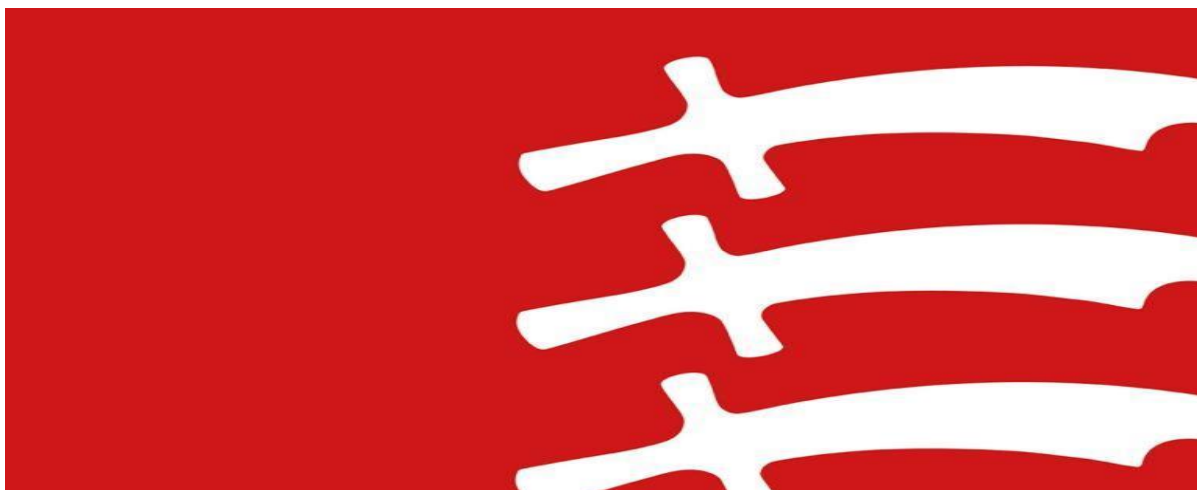
A multi-million-pound investment fund is expected to be confirmed shortly as the legislation is laid in Parliament to create the new combined authority.

On his appointment, Tom said: "I look forward to working with partners across Greater Essex over the coming months to create a new organisation working for the whole system and ensuring the new Mayor of Greater Essex and the combined county authority they lead delivers real impact from day one and strengthen our economy and invest in the skills that will power prosperity for generations to come."

The new combined authority will come under the leadership of the Mayor of Greater Essex due to be elected on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

Currently Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council are working on the operating model, constitution and governance framework to ensure the organisation is ready to deliver from the outset.

## **Partners, residents and businesses to have their say on future shape of Essex local government**



You will shortly be able to share what you think about our proposal for Local Government Reorganisation – [‘Three new councils, one bright future’](#). This outlines how Local Government Reorganisation will achieve a more sustainable future for Greater Essex.

Our proposal, supported by Braintree District Council and Epping Forest District Council, recommends moving from 15 councils to a model of 3 new all-purpose unitary councils. We want to simplify services, strengthen accountability and deliver better outcomes.

The Government has also confirmed that it will also be inviting your views on the three other proposals submitted for Greater Essex. These have been developed by other councils in the county.

The public consultation opened on 19<sup>th</sup> November and will run until 11<sup>th</sup> January. It is open to anyone living or working in Greater Essex and is your chance to shape the future of local government.

[Find out how to take part in the consultation](#)

[Read ‘Three new councils, one bright future’](#)

[Read all the LGR proposals](#) submitted for Greater Essex.

Government will decide the final model for Greater Essex early next year



