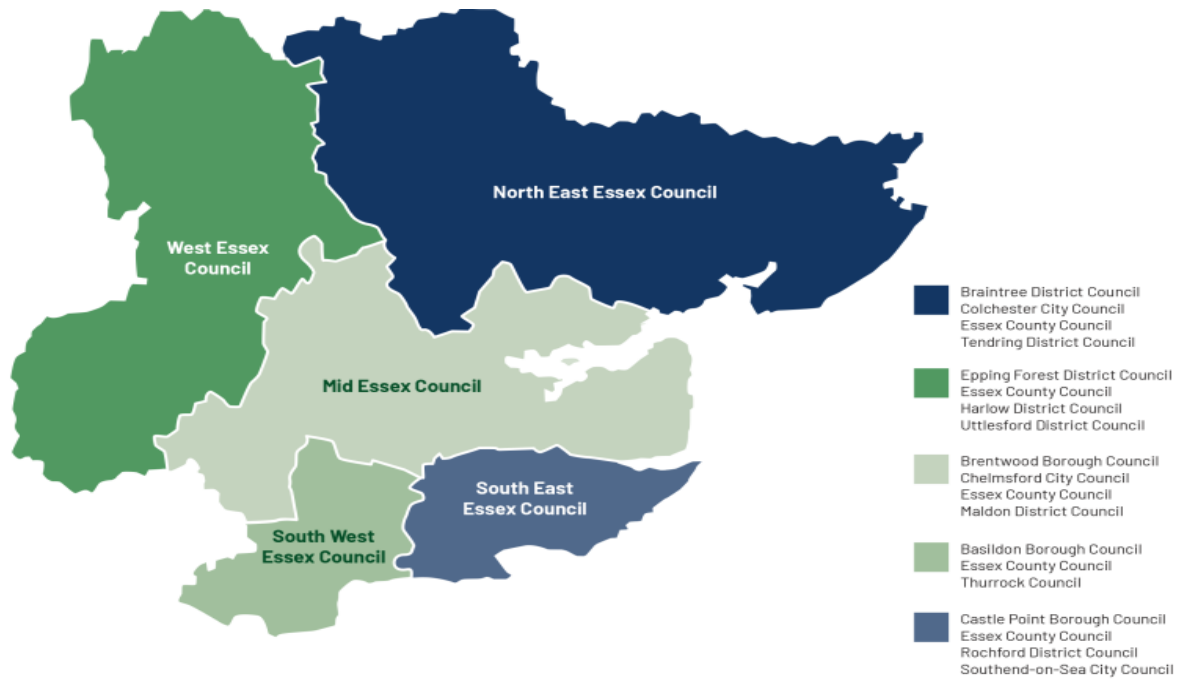


ECC Report February 2026

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)



On Wednesday 25th March the government confirmed its preference for 5 new unitary authorities in Greater Essex.

[Visit the LGR hub website for more information about the new unitaries.](#)

The delivery of services in the Greater Essex area is currently split between the 15 councils in a 'two-tier arrangement. These councils are:

- Essex County Council
- Southend-on-Sea City Council
- Thurrock Council
- and the 12 City, Borough and District Councils

There are also 307 Parish and Town Councils who look after local amenities such as village halls, grass cutting, cemetery provision &

upkeep, street lights, play areas & playing field, community development by organizing festivals, celebrations, youth projects, and supporting local services in some cases the Police.

Town and Parishes could play a much bigger and localised role once LGR gets under way, but currently no firm statements have been released on what this role could be.

The government believes reorganising and simplifying councils can drive economic growth, while delivering better public services.

Following the submission of four proposals, the Government has decided to go with a five-council model. This will see all 15 councils in Essex replaced with five, all-purpose, 'unitary' authorities.

Our proposal recommended moving to a three-council model: one each for North, Mid and South Essex, which was supported by Braintree and Epping Forest District Councils.

[Visit the LGR hub website to read all four proposals.](#)

Following the 25th of March announcement, the Leader of the Council Cllr Kevin Bentley sent the statement below to all members of the Council:

"I am writing to update you on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme for Greater Essex. As you know, we have been waiting to hear from government following the submission of proposals for the future structure and number of councils in the county. The Government has today (Wednesday 25th March 2026) confirmed its preference for a five unitary authority model.

It is my view that the Government has chosen the wrong option for the people of Essex.

Their decision means that, and as the evidence base shows, it will take 50 years for the five proposed councils to pay the bill for this reorganisation. That means our children will be grandparents by the time this is paid down.

The Government set out criteria for the new councils on fragmentation, sustainability of services and the ability to withstand financial shocks. The justification for their decision is thin. Given the Government's reasons for their decision, we will be looking to legally challenge”.

There are no immediate changes for residents or businesses following the news today. The proposed new authorities are not expected to come into effect until April 2028 with elections for shadow authorities in May 2027.

Extra £2.6m to speed up SEND assessments



We're putting an extra £2.6 million into the SEND assessment process over the next two years. This will help us keep up recent progress and reduce delays for families.

The funding will pay for around 1,200 additional Educational Psychologist assessments. These will be carried out by a trusted external agency. We're also increasing capacity in our SEND and social care teams.

This will enable us to coordinate assessments more efficiently.

Demand for assessments continues to rise. In Essex, requests have grown every year, with more than 4,500 received in 2024/25.

Over the past year, we've strengthened our workforce and introduced new ways of working. This has already helped us cut the assessment backlog by more than 40%. It also means we are completing assessments faster than planned.

This new investment will help us maintain momentum and continue improving.

Jobs with meaning and reward for people with SEND



Learning difficulties need not be a barrier to finding a rewarding job with an inclusive employer.

ECL's (Essex Cares Limited) Inclusive Employment service supports adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to achieve their ambitions of obtaining paid and meaningful employment. The jobs empower people to be independent, develop new skills and be a part of the local community.

ECL matched one young man with a school in Basildon. He became a much-valued member of the school crossing patrol team.

The role was life changing. Beforehand his day-to-day life was spent helping his sister with her lunch and then going back to bed. When he became a part of the crossing patrol, he was grateful to have the opportunity to work.

But his confidence was low, and he was worried that the school would find someone else to do the job he loved. Today his role there is secure, and he loves being part of the school community and is very thankful that ECL matched his skills with a job he loves.

Breaking down barriers to learning and upskilling is what the Essex Year of Opportunity is all about. Through projects and partnerships with organisations, the campaign makes careers more accessible.

This story is one example of the life changing ways we and ECL can support people with SEND into fulfilling jobs.

About ECL Supported Employment Services

ECL provides supported employment through its Connect to Work and Inclusive Employment services. With these two services, ECL can help anyone over the age of 16 living in Essex that faces barriers to paid employment to find and maintain paid employment. With or without a formal diagnosis and regardless of eligibility for social care.

The Inclusive Employment service supports adults with learning disabilities and/or autism to achieve their end goal of paid employment by identifying their talents, skills, qualifications and interests. It matches them to ECL's established network of partnership employers.

Every step of the individual's journey towards paid employment is supported by developing their CVs, arranging interviews and work trials, and work experience if required. The team provides on the job coaching for the employer and employee to maximise success.

Find out more on the [ECL website](#).

[Learn more about the Essex Year of Opportunity.](#)

Your Essex: The newsletter connecting you with your council



Last year we launched “Your Essex”, a monthly newsletter designed to keep you informed, engaged and connected with everything happening across the county. Although the uptake has been really good and very popular with residents, I thought I would publicise it again and share how to subscribe, especially at this time of great ongoing changes with LGR now confirmed.

Each edition of Your Essex delivers trusted updates on the full range of council services, from essential information like school admission windows to exciting developments in health, environment, children and families, and the local economy. It's your go to source for clear, consistent, and reliable news straight from the council.

Your Essex is more than just updates, as it's about giving you a voice. The newsletter includes consultations and surveys, ensuring you have the opportunity to share your views and play an active role in shaping decisions that affect our communities.

Stay connected and [sign up to Your Essex today](#).

Why you should sign up to Your Essex:

Your Essex provides residents with:

- **timely information:** Stay updated on important council news and events
- **trusted information:** Single source of information from Essex County Council sent directly to your inbox at the start of every month
- **community engagement:** Opportunities to participate in live consultations and share your views on matters that are important to you and your community
- **diverse topics:** Coverage across a wide range of topics such as children and families, health, environment and economy

Stay connected and [sign up to Your Essex today](#).

Childcare Reforms Expansion: Key changes explained



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 have the best start in life.

What's changed? Expansions to the current Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE). 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.

Since September 2025 The support extends further, with up to 30 hours of funded childcare per week in term time, over 38 weeks, or 1,140 hours a year if your provider stretches the offer 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](#).

Help with childcare costs Find out about funded early education and childcare for 9-month-olds to 4-year-olds and other childcare schemes. For more information please [visit our help with childcare costs webpage for more information](#).

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.

Watch our [video highlighting the impact of wraparound childcare](#).

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.

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

How do families apply for wraparound childcare?

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> or contact your local school directly.

Please note, some families may be eligible for tax free childcare. [Visit the Best Start in Life website to check if you're eligible.](#)

How do families apply for FEEE? 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 have applied and received an approved code by 31 August 2026.

For the spring term families need to apply and have an approved code by Wednesday 31 December 2026.

For the summer term families need to apply and have an approved code by 31 March.

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.](#)