

ECC Report

March 2025

Essex councils accepted onto Devolution Priority Programme



As previously reported on 5th February the Government confirmed that Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council have been included in the Devolution Priority Programme, and that the elections scheduled for May this year for Essex County Council and Thurrock Council will be suspended.

This follows the councils [writing to the Government](#) on Friday 10th January requesting inclusion on the programme and committing to local government reorganisation.

The Leader of Essex County Council, Councillor Kevin Bentley, said: “I am thrilled that our hard work to bring devolution to Essex has paid off and we are a step closer seeing real positive change in our county.

“We welcome the government’s acceptance of our request and eagerly await next steps.

“I truly believe devolution is the best choice for our county’s future. It is the biggest chance we will get to rethink our system and bring more power into the hands of local people. This will mean more opportunities for our residents and businesses that will help them and our whole county flourish.

"With regard to Local Government Reorganisation, we will commit to work together with all councils in Essex to ensure that it delivers the best outcome for our residents and businesses too."

The Leader of Southend-on-Sea City Council, Councillor Daniel Cowan, and the Leader of Thurrock Council, Councillor John Kent, both agreed that this is another important milestone in moving towards delivering major change across Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock, and the wider Greater Essex County. Devolution will bring more powers and funding into the area, it will enable the new Unitaries to deliver major projects, better services, and improve the lives of local people and businesses.

The councils will now begin working together, and with Government as part of the programme, and the three Leaders of Southend, Thurrock, and Essex will meet in the coming days to discuss the Mayoralty, which will be the first part of forming the Combined Authority (CA).

At this stage the three Councils will become the CA until a new Mayor will have been elected in May 2026; that of course will change when the new Unitary Councils will have been set up. As part of the work and ensuring to keep a collaborative approach a steering group will be set up with representation of the North and South Essex Councils, and the Leaders of Tendring and Colchester Councils, which will mean that all voices will be locked in. But crucially at this stage only the three unitaries of Essex, Southend, and Thurrock will have the vote.

This Friday just gone 28th February a meeting of ELCE (Essex Leaders and Chief Executives) agreed the first draft of the report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG). This will have to be submitted to the Ministry by 21st March.

Our TDC's CEO, Ian Davidson, supported by ECC's Policy Officers, was chosen to spearhead the drafting and crafting the wording for the 21st of March submission, and the final Plan later in September 2025.

Find out more about <https://www.essex.gov.uk/about-council/plans-and-strategies/our-vision-essex/devolution-and-local-government-reorganisation>

Watch Councillor Bentley talk about the announcement through the link below
<https://youtu.be/QRI64EOs1Y4>



Deputy Leader visits Stansted Airport



Our Deputy Leader, Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity, met with representatives of London Stansted Airport to discuss its ambitious plans for the future.

The airport recently announced [a £1.1 billion investment programme](#). Over five-years this will deliver wide-ranging benefits for passengers.

Plans include a £600 million extension to the terminal building. This will allow it to serve 43 million passengers a year. It will also create 5,000 new on-site jobs and double its yearly economic output to £2 billion.

The airport is a key asset for promoting economic growth within Essex. The connectivity it provides is a huge attraction for businesses and investors.

Reflecting this importance to the Essex economy, Mike Hardaker, Chief Asset and Development Officer at Manchester Airport Group, is a member of the newly formed [Greater Essex Business Board](#).

Councillor McKinlay, said:

“Stansted is an important economic asset to Essex and a big part of what makes our county such an attractive proposition for businesses.

It was hugely exciting to visit the airport and hear more about future plans. These will not only help the airport accommodate more passengers, but also vastly improve the experience for those travelling from the airport, as well as create thousands of new permanent jobs for the area.

We will continue working closely with Stansted as we look towards an exciting future for the Essex economy.”

Mr Hardaker said:

“Essex is central to London Stansted’s success, and we’re really proud of the role we play in helping the local economy grow.

Working closely with Essex County Council and being part of the Greater Essex Business Board, I’m committed to making sure the airport continues to bring investment, create jobs, and support businesses across the county.

Our £1.1 billion transformation programme will help us grow the airport and improve the experience for passengers, all while boosting Essex’s economy even further.”

Find out more about [the airport's expansion plans](#).

Introducing Kinder Essex



To mark the five-year anniversary of the county's local community kindness project, it is being updated with a new name and fresh look.

Kinder Essex is an evolution of the United in-Kind project. The new look reflects the expansion of the project over the last five years and how its purpose has changed in that time. It has been co-created alongside individuals delivering support out in communities. The update means the project remains relevant and fit for the future, so it can help even more people.

The community-led social movement is delivered by Essex Wellbeing Service. It involves 12 coaches who work across Essex to enable acts of kindness. They connect people to local groups and activities where they can meet others. The aim is to reduce social isolation and support people's wider health and wellbeing.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation can escalate and become worse. They can impact not only a person's mental wellbeing, but their physical health too. It's therefore important the wider causes of ill health are addressed and not just the symptoms.

Coaches also work with local groups and organisations. This might include helping them to start a new project or extend existing services. Those looking to volunteer can connect with a coach to find local opportunities too.

Over the last five years, the project has:

- Helped more than 20,000 people across the county to become more connected.
- Encouraged nearly 46,000 acts of kindness over 5 years

- Recruited over 500 new volunteers in 2024 alone.
- Supported more than 1500 new initiatives to increase community connections over 5 years
- Assisted over 250 groups and organizations in setting up new activities in 2024.

[Find out more about Kinder Essex and how you can get involved.](#)

Increasing fees for foster carers



We're pleased to announce foster carers fees are increasing (on average) by 16%. This increases foster carers take-home pay while they support vulnerable children.

Foster carers receive professional fees, in recognition of the vital work they do. Other specialist fees are increasing too, including hourly pay for completing extra tasks.

To show our appreciation, we will also share a one-off £2,000 bonus to households who fostered during 2024.

Claire, a foster carer in Essex responded to the news by saying: "I want to say a massive thank you to anyone involved in the decision. The increase surprised us all, but made a lot of foster carers feel very happy and valued."

We have also committed funding for wellbeing support. This includes facilitating as many peer groups (called Oasis networks) as needed. Oasis networks connect fostering families who live near each other.

Recruiting foster carers continues to be a priority for us. By growing our network of foster carers, we can support children when they need it the most. We are offering a £2,000 welcome payment for new foster carers during 2025.

Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Public Health said: "We are proud to announce these increases in recognition of the vital role that foster carers play in children and young people's lives.

"We are grateful for the dedication and patience of foster carers and hope the increases will encourage more people to start fostering. If you have ever considered fostering, please find out more as you could provide a child with the care and stability they need for a brighter future."

There are currently around 1100 Children in Care throughout Essex who has a Statutory Duty to house, look after, and safeguard them, therefore fostering a child, or siblings, is extremely important for the children involved in achieving the best possible outcome in a happy family environment.

Find out more details on [how finances for foster carers are changing](#).

Get into volunteering



Volunteering in Essex is a great opportunity to support your local community. With a variety of opportunities there is something to suit everyone's skills, experience and availability. Volunteers in Essex work in a wide variety of roles, from offering companionship to people who are socially isolated, to providing practical help in the community.

Get that feel good feeling:

Whether you're looking to volunteer for a couple of hours or more, your efforts can make a huge difference to your community. The benefits of volunteering include:

- helping others in your community

- a sense of pride
- opportunity to make new friends
- learning new skills and gain work experience
- building confidence

Where to volunteer in Essex:

We have several [volunteering opportunities at Essex County Council](#). Opportunities include supporting Essex Libraries or becoming an ACL Digital Champion. Here is a list of local volunteer opportunities in Essex below

Discover more volunteering opportunities at [volunteer Essex](#), where you can search based on your location, interests and specific activities.

Is your home phone ready to go digital?



The UK's telephone network is changing. Traditional phone lines will be replaced by a digital landline service. This means that calls will be made over a broadband line.

For most residents and businesses, the switchover will still be completed by 2025. However, BT have recently announced that to ensure that vulnerable residents can be moved over safely the deadline will be delayed until 2027.

For most people, this change will be straightforward. Before your phone line changes, your telephone provider will contact you. Depending on your provider, this could be a letter, text or email.

Beware of scams

Your telephone provider is unlikely to ask for money to switch you to a digital line. Be aware of fraud – if you receive any requests for money, report it on the [Action Fraud website](#) or call 0300 123 2040.

How we can help

Over the summer, we attended events across Essex to help residents understand what they need to do to prepare for the end of analogue phone lines. Visit the [Digital Essex](https://www.digital-essex.gov.uk) website to see the events we were at across the county. Please email digital@essex.gov.uk if you'd like us to attend your events next.

In the Autumn of 2024, we will also be running free webinars providing guidance and resources to help businesses prepare for the transition to digital communication services. Visit the [Digital Essex](https://www.digital-essex.gov.uk) website to book now.

Vulnerable residents need to take action

What vulnerable means

If any of the following apply to you or someone you know, additional support may be offered. Please contact your telephone provider if you:

- are over 75
- use a personal alarm or healthcare device
- do not use broadband at home
- live in an area with no mobile signal or, do not have a mobile phone device
- have additional needs
- have concerns or questions about what you need to do to make sure your phone line isn't affected

How to register as vulnerable

If you or a family member are vulnerable, you can notify your telephone service provider by dialling 150 directly from your landline. This number will connect you to most telephone service providers, allowing you to inform them of your situation. If you are unable to connect using 150, please call your provider directly using the number on your bill.

Once connected, tell your provider that you are contacting to inform them that you are "vulnerable and will need additional support".

This will prompt your provider to explain the next steps and provide you with extra support and the additional equipment you might need.

What registering as vulnerable provides

Registering as vulnerable delays the switchover until Spring 2025 and offers the following support:

- Vulnerable customers will likely receive a free battery backup unit, ensuring phone access during power outages. They can choose a hybrid phone with battery and mobile network access or a battery backup for the internet router. Both devices will

offer at least a 1-hour battery life, in practice this is more likely to be between 4-8 hours.

- Customers can nominate someone to assist with the switch. This person will handle all necessary information and equipment. The switch will only happen after an advisor confirms the appointment.
- Starting Spring 2025, Telecare support will be available. An engineer will make sure the device works after the switch or reverting it back to an analogue line if necessary.

Customers who don't use broadband

For customers without broadband, including landline-only users and businesses with specialised needs like alarms and payment terminals, BT has developed an interim landline service to maintain connections as they transition from analogue to digital.

New equipment in local exchanges will allow these customers to continue using their landlines as usual until a digital solution is available, or by 2030 at the latest.

For everybody else

Nothing will change if you:

- do not have a landline
- only use mobile phones in your home
- already use a digital phone line

For most residents, the switchover should be simple. This is likely to be a case of just plugging your phone into your broadband router. Your telephone provider will contact you with the correct steps that you need to take.

Please note that after you have been switched over to the digital line your existing phone sockets will likely stop working.

Power supply

Digital phone lines rely on a power supply; if there is a power cut, you will need to use a mobile phone.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

I have already told my provider that I have a personal alarm and/or additional needs - do I need to do anything else?

You do not need to do anything else if your telephone provider already knows you have additional needs, use a personal alarm/healthcare device or are vulnerable.

Your provider will contact you before anything changes.

How do I find out who my telephone provider is?

To find out who your telephone provider is, check your phone bill. Your bill should include the provider's name and contact details. If you have recently moved into a property and are not sure who provides the land line, you can dial 150 to find out.

Where can I get more information from?

If you have concerns or questions about the switch to a digital phone line, contact your telephone provider.

You can also find information on the [Which](#) and the [Gov.uk](#) websites.