



# Levelling Up Essex

One Year On: Impact Report

**Spreading Opportunity  
through Levelling Up**

# Contents

- 3 Foreword
- 4 What is Levelling Up and why does it matter?
- 12 What has been achieved in our first year
- 21 Levelling Up projects in Focus
- 38 Cost of Living
- 39 What is next? Year 2 and beyond



## Foreword

**Cllr Louise McKinlay, Deputy  
Leader of Essex County  
Council and Cabinet Member  
for Community, Equality,  
Partnerships and Performance**



“Everyone should have the opportunity  
to succeed in life and fulfil their potential.

When this happens, it helps places and communities both develop and grow. This is what Levelling Up is about in Essex – it is about making sure people have access to the skills, the education and the chance to succeed in life, in whatever way success means to them.

Essex is an incredible county, with a stunning coastline, picturesque countryside and a strong identity. 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.

To change this, we need to commit to focussed long-term action to make sure that Essex continues to flourish and that it is a place that you can be proud of living in as a resident - a place to raise your children, a place to make your career, a place that others outside of the county would be drawn to. We need to empower communities, devolve power and invest in our most deprived areas to give them, and the people who live there, a positive boost. To do this, in January 2022, at Essex County Council, we published a white paper, which was a document that set out our countywide strategy for Levelling Up in Essex. In this paper we identified both the key

cohorts and areas that would most benefit from Levelling Up and made significant funding available - over £20million to support economic growth, invest in skills and launch exciting new initiatives to build and strengthen communities.

Our Levelling Up Strategy, which was described as “trail-blazing” and an “invaluable source of insight for Whitehall, as well as the wider local government community” by Justine Greening, former Education Secretary and Chair of the This is Purpose Coalition, focused on the creation of Levelling Up opportunities against the key commitments set out in our wider ECC Everyone’s Essex strategy (2021-2025).

Since we published the white paper in January 2022, we have launched dozens of projects aimed at driving Levelling Up, spanning across skills, education, community and literacy, with many more already in train. Levelling Up is a long-term process that can take generations, but we have already had some early successes - this report outlines the achievements made so far. What you are about to read tells the stories of members of the Essex community, who are already making a difference to people’s lives. I would like to express my sincere thanks to them all. Levelling Up is no longer just a buzzword or a concept, it is real change in action.”



# 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.**

Levelling Up is not just about supporting people to succeed individually. It is also about supporting success in all forms that people come together – in families, in communities, in businesses, in faith groups, and in other organisations.

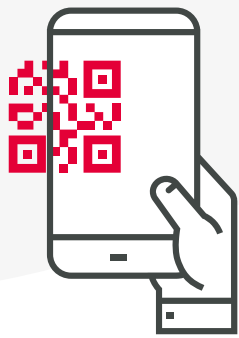
Over the past year, we have launched numerous Levelling Up initiatives, in both targeted places, supporting some of our most deprived communities, and across all of Essex. These include ensuring that children at key stages of development receive the support they need to learn and succeed, that parents have access to free childcare to enable them to more easily access work, that community hubs and 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.

Levelling Up is a long-term process and to see lasting change in key statistics, such as a child's school readiness, employment levels or an increase in reading and writing standards, takes years. However, we have already begun to see change through the initiatives launched so far, that are making a real difference to the lives of Essex residents.

To hear the real life stories of those who are already benefiting, skip ahead to our case studies section on page 21, or to see our Levelling Up programme in numbers, head over to page 10.

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.**



“It is vital that all parts of the country have their own Levelling Up plans to widen opportunities in their areas. Levelling Up is undoubtedly a complex challenge, but I am pleased to see local authorities such as Essex putting plans into action and launching initiatives on a local level as we know that's where change really happens.”

**Rt Hon Justine Greening (Chair of The Purpose Coalition which sponsors national Levelling Up goals)**

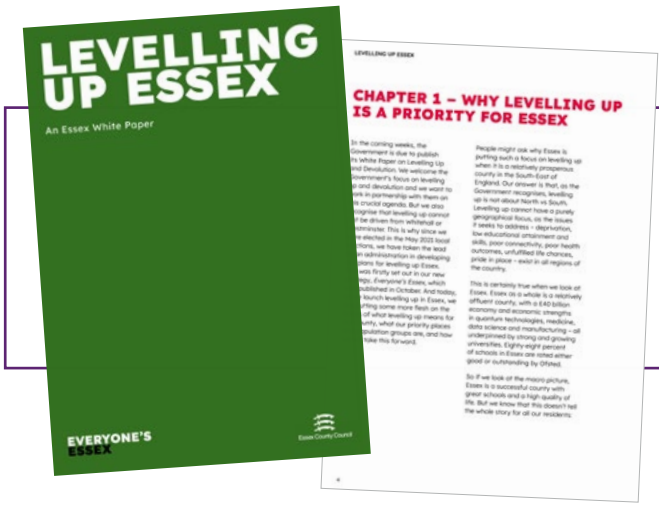


Visitors to The Lounge, community and wellbeing hub at Esplanade Hall in Harwich

## Background

In January 2022, at Essex County Council we published a white paper, setting out our countywide strategy for Levelling Up in Essex. In it, we identified both the key cohorts and areas that would most benefit from Levelling Up and made significant funding available, including an investment of £10m over the next four years to support economic growth and skills, as well as a separate £11m Levelling Up funding pot to help kickstart initiatives in this space.

Our white paper was published ahead of the government's own on Levelling Up, which outlined a new policy programme centered around increasing equality of opportunity, building aspiration and 12 key missions. These missions are designed to remove barriers, providing residents with the skills and education they need, as well as the infrastructure they require to achieve their potential e.g. high quality and affordable public transport, gigabit broadband. Levelling Up is also about creating pathways for renters to get on to the property ladder, strengthening and building resilience in communities, as well as reducing health inequalities.



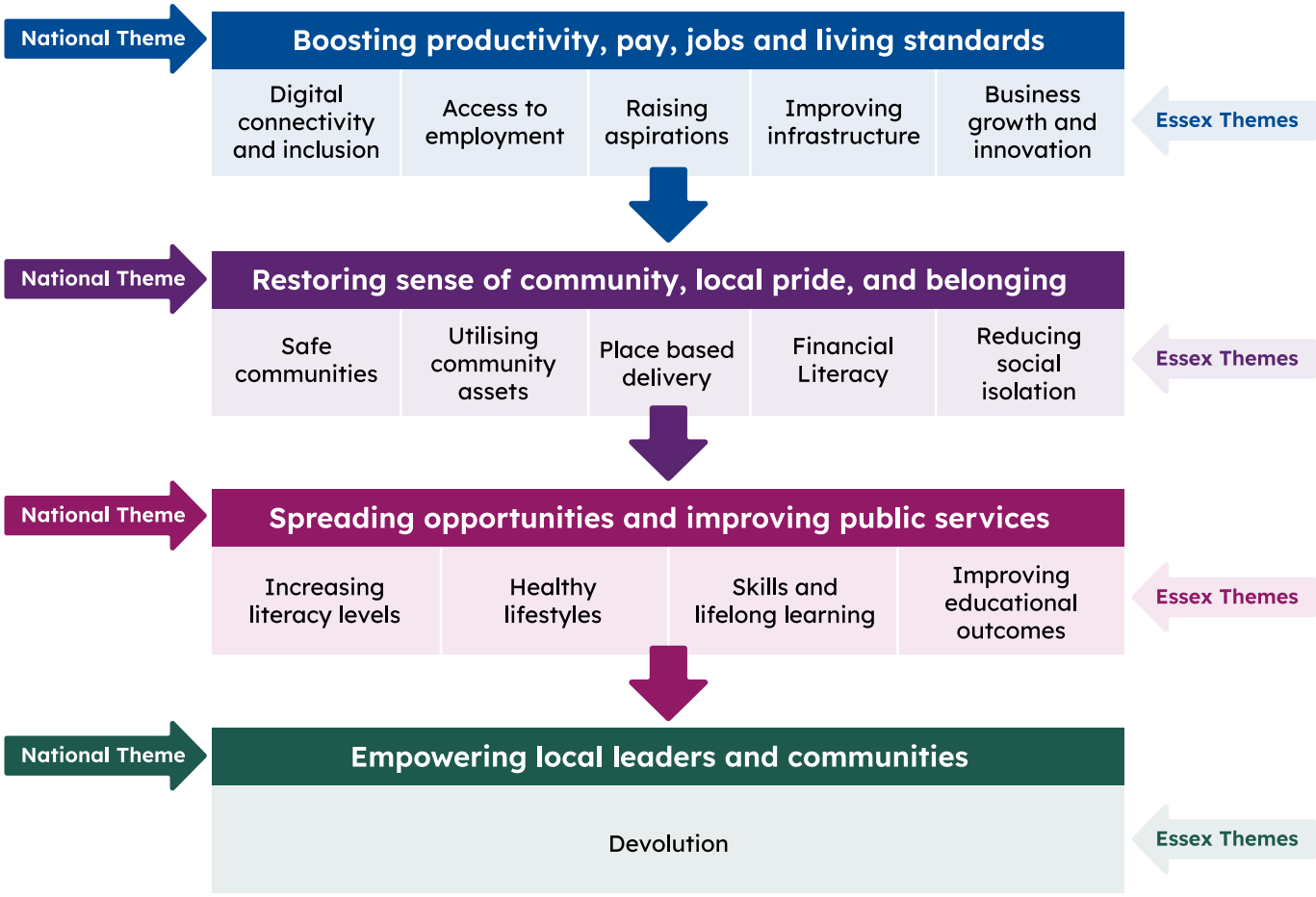
**Read the original Essex County Council Levelling Up Strategy here or scan the QR code.**





We know that there are differences between Levelling Up at a national level and a local level. In Essex we have developed a set of local priorities for each of the national Levelling Up themes, which guide the work we need to do in order to achieve our local Levelling Up goals.

Levelling Up Essex: National Themes for the Local Context



What does Levelling Up actually mean?



Click here or scan the QR code to watch our short animation

“ When I was not employed and I was just at home with my children, we really struggled financially and for food. Achieve, Thrive Flourish (ATF) provided us with food parcels and vouchers. They also provide me with counselling and some help for my children. Through all of those things they provided it has helped build my confidence and get me to where I am now, a full time ATF employee. ”

Angel, attendee and now employee at ATF

According to the Local Trust six out of the ten neighbourhoods with the highest level of community need in the entire country are in Essex. Essex is also home to two of the top 10 most deprived places in England according to the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation study (Jaywick and Basildon).

To achieve impact, Levelling Up needs to be focused on those places and groups of people (cohorts) that need it most. In Essex, we have taken a data driven approach to determining our key places and cohorts of focus, which are:

“ Levelling Up is about making sure that everybody makes the most of their potential. It’s about making sure that people have good quality education, good quality jobs, good quality opportunities, good quality homes and that is just as relevant here in rural communities as it is for any other part of the country. ”

Rt Hon James Cleverley, MP for Braintree

Priority Places:

- Tendring (Clacton, Jaywick and Harwich)
- Basildon housing estates
- Colchester housing estates (Greenstead)
- Harlow
- Areas of Rural Braintree
- Canvey Island



Priority Cohorts:

- (which apply across Essex not just in the priority places):
- Children and adults with SEND, learning disabilities, or mental health conditions (taking an all age approach)
  - Children on free school meals
  - Low income working families
  - Young adults (16-25) who have not been in education, training or employment for around 6-12 months.



Community garden in Colchester, which received grant funding from the community challenge fund



These targeted areas tend to be focused in urban centres such as Basildon, Harlow, and Colchester, and coastal areas – especially Tendring and Canvey Island. It is also important to support the isolated rural areas of the county, where Levelling Up means better connectivity to services and economic opportunity. Essex is still a very rural county and northern Braintree exemplifies some of the challenges that these rural areas experience.

Over the past year, we have held 7 launches in each of the places identified (2 launches were held in Tendring in both Clacton and Harwich) – at each launch we announced a raft of initiatives designed to support the unique needs of each area. What those announcements were and the success they have already started to see is detailed later in this report.

As well as the places, we also used a vast array of local and national datasets to determine the cohorts of people across the whole of the county who would most benefit from Levelling Up initiatives. Even if you yourself are not in one of these cohorts, you almost certainly will have friends or family members who are.

“ Essex Pedal Power has been a massive lifeline for me. Cycling has provided essential transport to support my low income and has also contributed to my overall wellbeing. The community has been incredibly welcoming, and I have made lasting friendships through the group rides. ”

**Essex Pedal Power bike recipient Kev**

“ The place will be clean, will be tidy, there will be people with jobs, who are proud of the place they live. Education will improve, (the) skills gap close up. These are great opportunities ahead for the area, add that to the Levelling Up funding coming in... I look forward to seeing a bright new future. ”

**Rt Hon Giles Watling, MP for Clacton**

“ We’ve got a lot to be proud of here, but there is also a lot to be done. We hope that in the years to come and what the Levelling Up programme will do, is actually make a real difference to people’s lives. We are going to see a lot of community projects actually helping people who need it most. ”

**Rt Hon John Baron, MP for Basildon and Billericay**

## The cohorts that are most impacted in Essex

### Learning disabilities (27,500 people)

2.4% have a learning disability and nationally only 17.6% with a learning disability are in employment. Pupils with SEN were 25% less likely to be in sustained employment aged 27 when compared to their peers. The average life expectancy is between 14-18 yrs lower than the general population.

### Low income (163,000 people)

28% of households across Essex (163,000) are low income households, most impacted are couples with children, single female parents; single female older people 65+; and more generally black households. There are low levels of social mobility for low income groups.

### Children on FSM (35,000)

In Essex, in 2019, 56.4% of 19 year olds were qualified to Level 3. However, only 28.9% of those eligible for FSM achieved this. Nationally, FSM-eligible pupils were 23% less likely to be in sustained employment aged 27 when compared to their peers.

### Young Adults 16-25 that have been out of employment for 6 – 12 months (156,800)

In Essex 11.2% of young people aged 16-25 are unemployed. 38% of young people are also estimated to be on low discretionary incomes.

### Mental Health (136,000)

Mental illnesses are more common, long-lasting and impactful than other health conditions. 1 in 7 people experience mental health problems in the workplace. Women in full-time employment are nearly twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men (19.8% vs 10.9%).

\*The above data is from 2021

“ Millions are being invested by the government, by Essex County Council, into Harlow to transform our town, to build an even better Harlow for residents. ”

**Rt Hon Robert Halfon, MP for Harlow**

## No one should be disadvantaged because of their background or needs.

Levelling Up might be a new term, but it is not a new concept. It is about doing the right thing to help and support those who need it most, to ensure they can enjoy a happy and fulfilling life.

The remainder of this report outlines the support already put in place and explores what you can expect from year two of the programme in 2023/24.





# A YEAR OF LEVELLING UP ESSEX

£10 million committed over the next four years to support economic growth and skills in Essex  
£11 million of additional levelling up funding made available by Essex County Council

## 74 New literacy areas created in libraries across Essex

Engaging spaces equipped with books and resources to support children and adults with reading and writing in a relaxed environment, with trained literacy advisers.

24,000 children took part in this year's Summer Reading Challenge

## The Essex Year of Reading

Launched in 2022 featuring 100s of author events, literacy sessions, and reading challenges.

60,000 new library members

150,000 new library cards for every primary school child

15,000 downloads of our new library app in just 6 months!

## Invested £100k in a new Training centre at Harlow College

providing professional qualifications in electric vehicle repair, a major growth sector and key to supporting carbon net zero.

11,573 Residents

Currently being supported by ECC in learning new skills.

9,829 residents joined our

5 virtual job fairs in 2022.

Launched 'Multiply'

A new initiative to offer 14,000 residents free access to maths and finance training.

New partnership with HSBC UK running financial literacy workshops online and in person.

250 New Jobs

Created through our Social Value Scheme

Launched the Essex Opportunities Website for flexible job roles

In its first year the website has had over 90,000 visits and 6,500 clicks to apply for jobs

Kickstart is a government scheme providing high quality work placements.

We arranged 284 Kickstart placements across 129 different employers

With 142 of those placements in Levelling Up areas. 84% of placements gained a further role and the placements brought 1.5 million into the Essex economy.

Our Working Families Programme

connected with 960 families to provide support to those seeking information on upskilling or retraining.

960 families



## New Adult Community Learning Hubs

opened in Jan 2023 in Harwich and Canvey Island

Almost £2 million boost to social care under our Nightingale scheme

Which will support people from our most deprived communities to achieve social care qualifications and support existing care workers to achieve further qualifications.



30+ Major employers signed up to our new family friendly charter

a commitment to ensure working practices offer the flexibility required to support Essex families.

## The Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service

helped create 240 new apprenticeships across Essex businesses. Our new Essex apprenticeship hub will expand on this to create a further 300 apprenticeship opportunities in 2023.



Free games and activity sessions for all ages launched in

16 local parks

16,000 attendances so far and launching in more areas in 2023!

130,000

Children and young people supported at Essex Outdoors sites, learning a range of skills through outdoor pursuits.



## PEDAL POWER SCHEME

600 free bikes in Clacton and Jaywick

Leading to 20,000

New bike journeys and better access to employment and the community.



Beat the Street

GPS walking game launched to support physical activity. An incredible 3,613 people have joined and most are still active six months later.

12,000 more homes & businesses connected to

Superfast broadband



## £18 million bid for transport improvements in Tendring

Including the rollout of DigiGo, a fully electric, on demand minibus service, and cycling route improvements in Harwich and Dovercourt to help residents access services and jobs



Clacton, Colchester and Harlow bids backed by ECC Secured £60 million from the governments Levelling Up Fund to transform town centres in 3 priority Levelling Up areas. The funding will allow major upgrades to community and commercial facilities, creation of new learning spaces and a new culture-led project.

ECC Donated

6,600+ devices

To schools to help get students online and enhance learning. We also provided our Ukrainian guests fleeing war with 335 devices.

## Investing £2 million

Into new business units in Jaywick, bringing jobs and investment to a part of the county that urgently needs it.

650+ Jobs

Created and safeguarded through our 'Backing Essex Business' service providing access to over £1.6m investment by providing finance advice and social lending.

The project will see the creation of a new covered market including 25 affordable business spaces, a community garden and 10 covered market pitches bringing 45 New Jobs



Expanded our Free holiday activity and food programme ActivATE provided 500,000 free meals since 2020 and supported 30,000 young people 100% of whom are from low income working families or other vulnerable groups. Not only supporting childrens development but also providing free childcare to working families.



Created in Basildon providing physical activity classes and volunteering opportunities for around 2,000 regular participants, as well as creating routes into employment.

## 20 new Community Challenge Projects funded

including transport for socially isolated residents, community cafes, wildflower sowing, youth clubs, sensory play equipment, and improving community gardens.



3 New Community Supermarkets in Basildon and Jaywick offering quality food at very low prices.

We are committed to ensuring there is one in every district!

Image by: Rachel Newby @scribbly.ink





# What has been achieved in our first year

Below are the achievements made in the first year of our **Levelling Up** programme, across areas such as skills, education, community and literacy. This is just a snapshot, as many more projects are in development and will be launched soon.



**£10m** committed over the next four years to support economic growth and skills across Essex

**£11m** of additional **Levelling Up** funding made available by Essex County Council.

## Spreading Opportunities and Improving Public Services

### Increasing Literacy Levels



**60,000** new library members have signed up since Jan 2022

**150,000** new recyclable library cards distributed to every primary school child in the county as part of the 'Essex Year of Reading' celebration.

**74** new literacy areas have been created

across Essex (one in every library). 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.



Launched the **2022 Essex Year of Reading** which featured 100s of events across Essex, from author events, to literacy sessions, to reading challenges.

Almost **24,000** children took part in this year's Summer Reading Challenge. This is an increase of 36.4% on 2021.

**15,000** downloads of our new library app in just 6 months, which includes an interactive library map and brand new recommendations feature.



Library events, information and book recommendations have had **1.2million** views.

### Healthy Lifestyles

**600** free bikes provided to residents in Clacton & Jaywick

as part of our Essex Pedal Power scheme - leading to almost **20,000** new bike journeys and allowing more people to access employment and community settings.



ParkPlay are completely free games and activity session for all ages that run in local parks. Parkplay has now been launched in **16** areas across Essex and had over **2,000** unique people attend, with **16,000** attendances in total so far! Parkplay will be launched in more areas throughout 2023.



A "Beat the Street" GPS walking game launched to support physical activity - **38,019** miles were travelled by those who played the game, an average of **11** miles per person. During the five games, an incredible **3,613** people playing the game, the majority of which are still active six months later.



Supported the physical and mental wellbeing of **130,000** school children and young people at Essex Outdoors sites, where they learn a range of skills through outdoor pursuits.

### Skills and Lifelong Learning / Improving Education Outcomes

**Invested £100k** in a new electric vehicle training centre at Harlow College, enabling local people to develop professional qualifications in electric vehicle repair and maintenance - a major growth sector and key to supporting the transition to carbon net zero.

**2** new Adult Community Learning Hubs opened in Jan 2023 - one in Harwich and another Canvey Island, offering a range of exciting new courses.

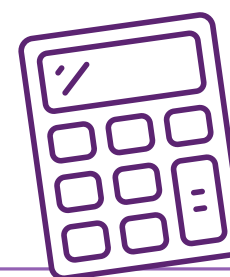
**11,573** Essex Residents are currently being supported by ECC in learning new skills.



**9829** residents joined our 5 virtual job fair events held in 2022.



Formed a new partnership with **HSBC UK** and have since run multiple online and in person financial literacy workshops.



Launched 'Multiply' - a new initiative that will offer over **14,000** Essex residents free access to maths and finance training



## Boosting Productivity, Pay, Jobs and Living Standards

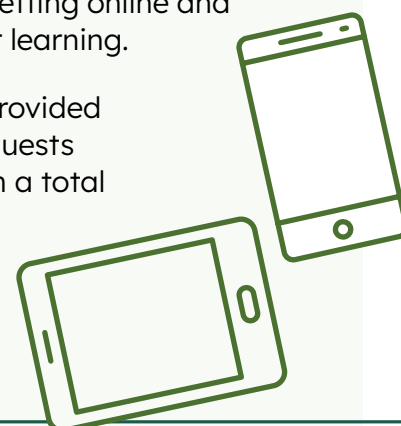
### Digital

**We connected 12,000 more homes and businesses to Superfast Broadband**



**Donated over 6,600 devices** to schools across Essex, to support students with getting online and enhancing their learning.

We have also provided our Ukrainian guests fleeing war with a total of **335 devices**.



### Access to Employment

**250 new entry level jobs** created through our social value scheme.

Launched the **Essex Opportunities website** to provide access to more flexible job roles. In its first year the website has had more than **90,000 visits and 6,500 clicks** to apply for jobs.



Kickstart is a government scheme that aimed to provide more high quality work placements. We arranged **284 Kickstart placements** who were placed across **129 different employers** across Essex, with **142 of those placements in Levelling Up areas**. 84% of placements gained a further role and this brought **£1.5million into the Essex economy**.



**Over 30 employers**, including Essex Fire & Rescue, Mid and South Essex NHS Trust and Anglia Ruskin University, covering over **41,000 employees**, have signed up to our new family friendly charter, which is a commitment to ensure working practices offer the flexibility required to **support working families**.



The Essex Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Service supported creating **240 new apprenticeships** across Essex Businesses. We are expanding on this with our newly launched **Essex Apprenticeship Hub** to create a further **300 apprenticeship opportunities in 2023**.

### Raising Aspirations

We have provided an almost

**£2million boost to social care**

in Essex under our **Nightingale Care Bursary**, which will support people from the most deprived communities in Essex to achieve social care qualifications or support existing care workers to achieve further qualifications. This will not only support an industry under huge demand, but provide exciting new career opportunities for many Essex residents, in an area that they might not have considered or had the confidence to consider before.



**Our working families programme has been in contact with 960 families**

to provide support to those seeking information on upskilling or retraining for a new career.

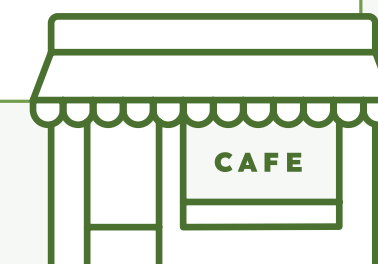


### Improving Infrastructure / Business Growth and Innovation

In Jan 2023, Clacton, Colchester and Harlow bids, backed by Essex County Council,

**secured £60m from the Government's Levelling Up Fund**

to help transform town centres in three of Essex County Council's (ECC) priority Levelling Up areas. **This funding will allow major upgrades to community and commercial facilities, creation of new learning spaces and a new culture-led project.**



**Investing £2 million into new business units** in Jaywick, bringing jobs and investment to a part of the county that urgently needs it. The project will see the creation of a new **9,500 sq. ft covered market**, including 25 affordable business spaces, a **community garden** and 10 covered market pitches, bringing 45 new jobs to the area.

Safeguarded and created **more than 650 jobs** through our '**Backing Essex Business**' service by supporting businesses to access more than **£1.6m of investment**, through providing financial advice and social lending.



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

## Strong and safe communities

Expanded our completely free holiday activity and food programme, ActivAte, which over the last two years has **provided over 500,000 free meals and supported over 30,000 young people.**

All attending are eligible for benefits based free school meals, from low income working families, or other vulnerable groups. Not only supporting children's development, this programme provides free childcare to working families, allowing them to access more employment opportunities.



## 4 physical activity hubs

(linked to schools) created in targeted estates in Basildon that provide both physical activity classes and volunteering opportunities for local people, that create routes into employment. The ATF run hub have almost **2000 regular participants** across their programmes and activities.

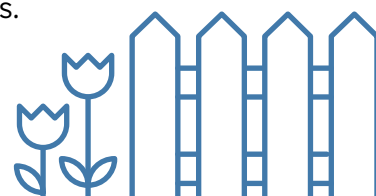


## 20 new Community Challenge Fund projects

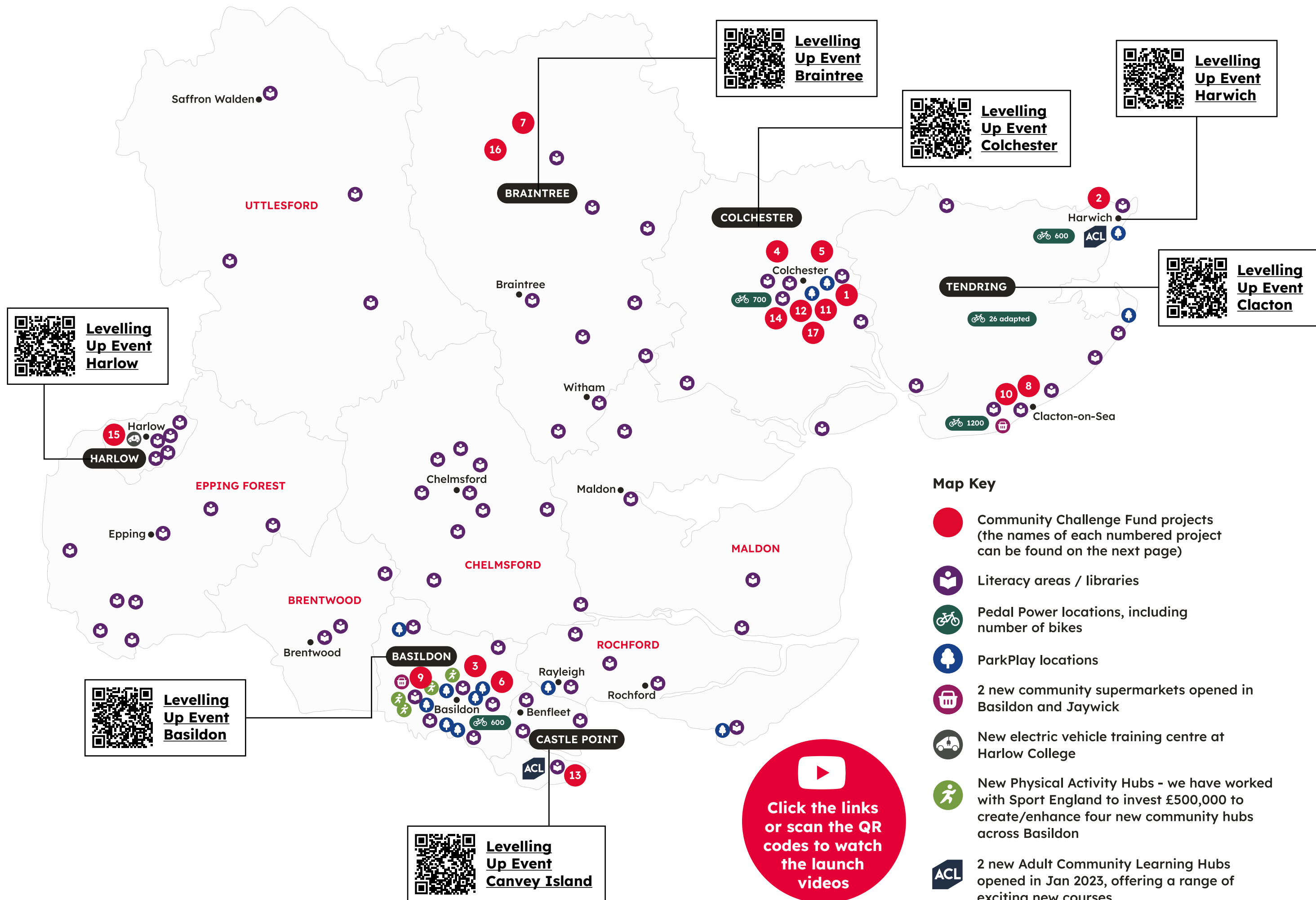
funded across the county, which include providing transport for socially isolated residents in Rural Braintree to community cafes, wildflower seed sowing and youth clubs in Colchester, sensory play equipment in Castle Point for children with SEND/LD and improving community gardens in Basildon estates.

## 2 new community supermarkets

have been opened in Basildon and Jaywick, offering good quality food at very low prices. We are committed to ensuring there is one in every district.









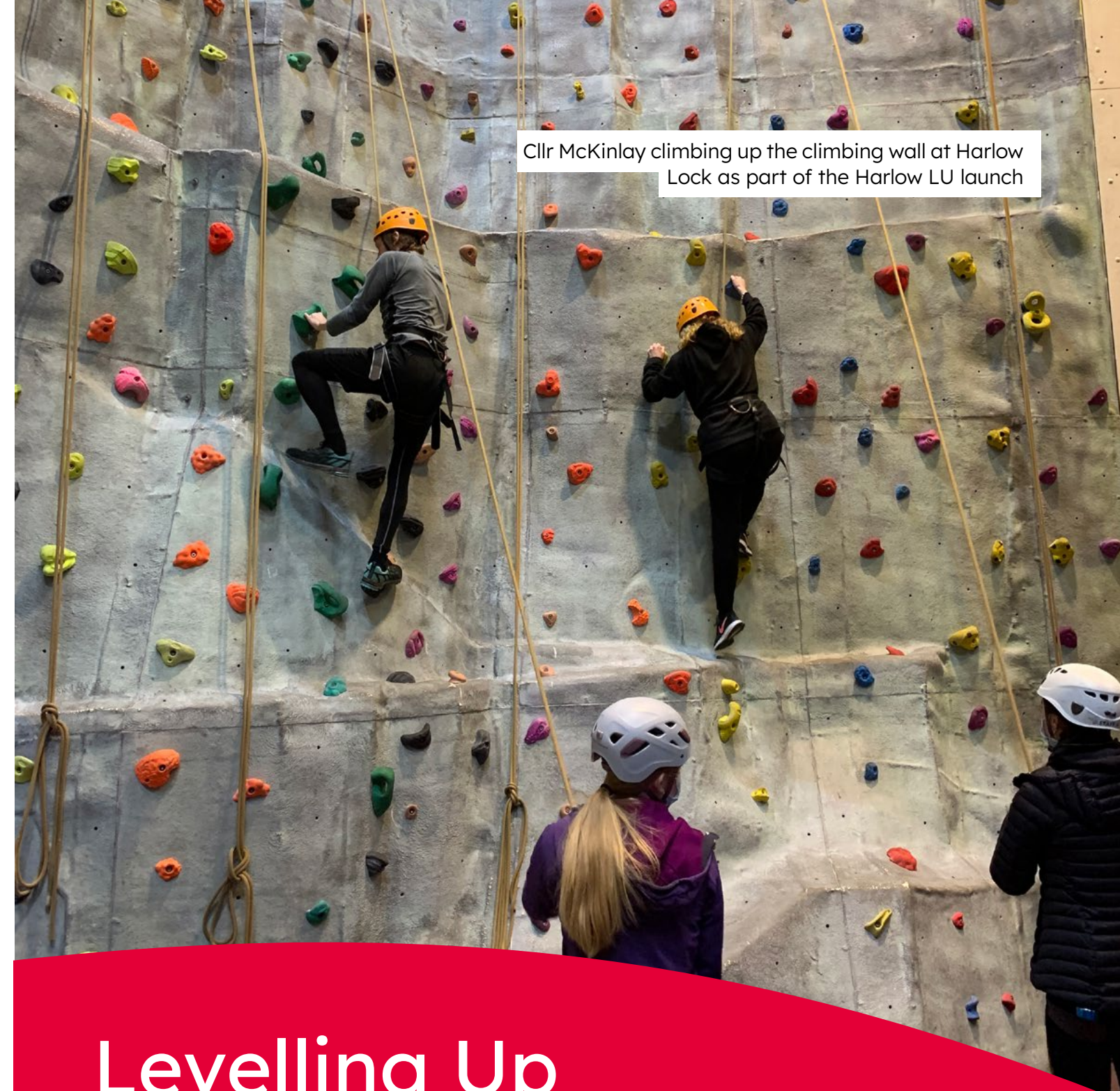
## Community Challenge Fund projects

- 1 **Seed swapping - Greenstead**
- 2 **Equipment for local sports club - Dovercourt Vines and Parkeston Ward**  

“Wow, what a fantastic email to receive, thank you so much for giving our young players an unbelievable step up in their development and growth, this will go a long long way.”
- 3 **Youth Club - Pitsea NW Ward**  

“We would like to say a huge thank you for providing the funding for Briscoe Youth and Community Club. It's been a surprising and unprecedented success which has rather taken out breath away. Most gratifying is the speed in which a real community ethic has built up during this time. Children and whole families are playing and socialising in a safe space and the word is spreading.”
- 4 **Park and Play - St Anne and St Johns Ward**
- 5 **Budget Food project - Greenstead**
- 6 **Greenhouse for therapy - Pitsea SE Ward**  

“Thank you so so much for your support!!!! We would love to accept the funding offer and put it to great use straight away!!!”
- 7 **Accessible Wheelchair Vehicle Hire for monthly cafe - Yeldham Ward**
- 8 **Creating an outdoor space to promote mental health and wellbeing**
- 9 **Football sessions - Laindon Park Ward**
- 10 **Litter picking trolleys - West Clacton and Jaywick Sands**
- 11 **Youth Club - New Town and Christchurch Ward**
- 12 **Planters - New Town and Christchurch Ward**
- 13 **Sensory Room/Garden - CI Winter Gardens Ward**
- 14 **Park Play area - Shrub End**
- 15 **Creative sessions for adults with learning disabilities - Toddbrook ward**
- 16 **Mens Shed**
- 17 **Stitching Hub for refugee women - New Town and Christchurch Ward**



Cllr McKinlay climbing up the climbing wall at Harlow Lock as part of the Harlow LU launch

## Levelling Up Projects in Focus

This next section is all about detailing projects and telling the real life stories of people who have already seen their lives improve and change as a result of the Levelling Up programme, as well as acknowledging our incredible partners who helped make it happen - the District Councils, schools, charities, community groups and private sector organisations.



# Essex Year of Reading

 **Levelling Up Area:**  
**County-wide**



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action



**The ongoing Essex Year of Reading is a countywide campaign created to help children and young people discover a lifelong love of reading and ensure every Essex child can read at their age level or better.**

Whether you're a parent or carer who wants to support their child on their reading adventure, a young person looking for inspiration, or an adult keen to rediscover the joy of reading, the Essex Year of Reading is here to help. So far the Essex Year of Reading has featured hundreds of events and featured incredible poets and authors, such as Michael Rosen (which was attended by 1000 Essex children) and Dermot O'Leary. Activity has included:

- Launching the free Essex Year of Reading that provides anyone who downloads with a free digital library of immersive audio books, animations, quizzes and texts to read offline, anytime, anywhere.

- Providing, through schools, a library card to every single primary aged child. 150,000 cards were provided and all are recyclable and plastic free.
- Working with teachers across 96 schools to improve their training in helping others learn to read. 600 students have benefitted from this enhanced teacher training so far.
- Created parent ambassadors, who have so far helped 600 parents to sign up for specialist courses to help develop their child's reading skills.
- A summer and winter reading challenge through our library service, that over 30,000 children and young people have taken part in.

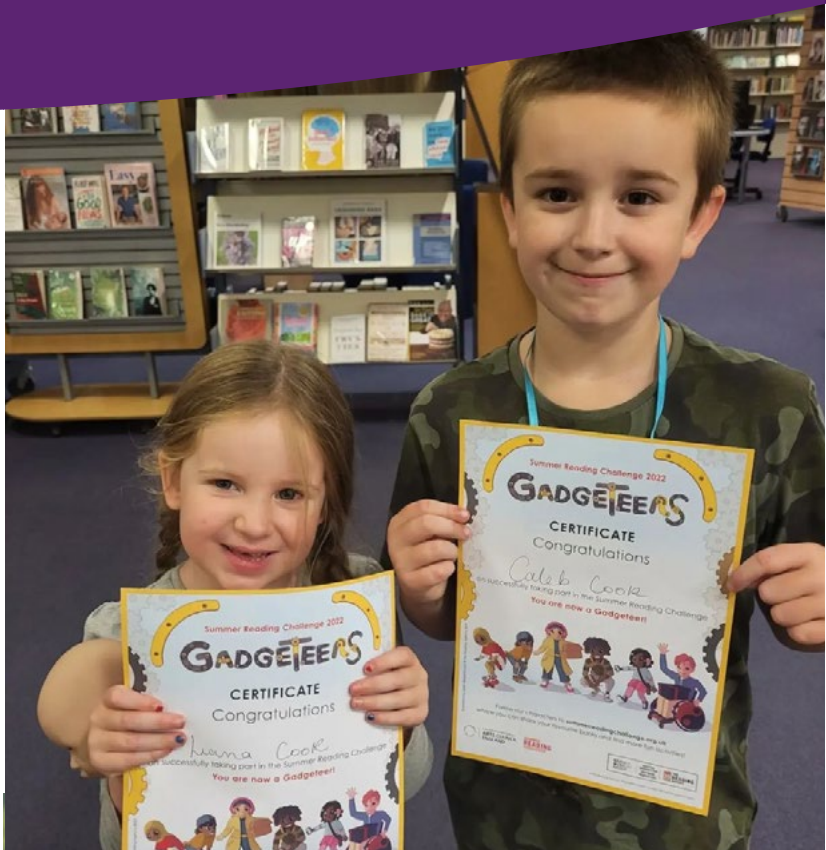
**150,000** plastic free library cards provided - one for every single primary school child



## Literacy Areas

Every one of our 74 libraries has a new Literacy Area, where we have recently introduced vibrant and modern spaces dedicated to nurturing a love of reading and writing among adults and children. These new areas have books and resources to help improve reading skills and contain:

- books for adults on how to support your child to read
- phonics and learning-to-read books
- easy-read books for adults and children
- fun resources to help children improve their vocabulary and reading skills
- signposting to other areas of support for reading skills
- and comfy seats!



## Memory café

In May 2022 as part of the Essex Year of Reading campaign, our first memory café was set up by the Essex Education Taskforce at Essex County Council and Wayback, virtual reality specialists. The partnership worked with the James Hornby School and residents at Woodbury Court Dementia Care Home to deliver a intergenerational project to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The project took older and younger people back to the Queen's Coronation using VR, films and books to trigger memories, connection and conversation across young and older generational groups including people living with dementia.



# Essex Pedal Power

📍 Levelling Up Area:  
Tendring



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action



**More than 2000 bikes** will be given away across 2023 in Colchester, Basildon, Harwich and Dovercourt

**3 disability cycling hubs** will open in 2023 and we have already provided **26 adapted bikes**

“ Essex Pedal Power has opened up opportunities for me beyond cycling. I have always struggled with my weight, but since having the bike I have become more active and healthier, and wanted to help others like me. I now run a free community weight support group, as well as wellbeing walks and led rides! ”

Essex Pedal Power bike recipient Diana

**When living in a disadvantaged community, having access to a bike can provide free travel to community groups, shops, as well as the ability to apply and gain jobs that are further afield.**

It can open up access to joining new clubs and improve both mental and physical wellbeing. This is why, as part of our Levelling Up programme, we created Essex Pedal Power. As part of this scheme, Active Essex loans a brand-new bike free of charge to eligible residents. If the bike has been used regularly during this time, the participant gets to keep the bike. The Essex Pedal Power team are able to monitor the bikes usage via a GPS tracking system, which provide data on how the bike is used.

Since first launching in June 2021, Essex Pedal Power has already made a positive impact to the lives of those who have received a bike in Clacton and Jaywick where over 600 bikes

have already been given away. More than 2000 more bikes will be given away across 2023 in Colchester, Basildon, Harwich and Dovercourt, to people living in some of Essex's most deprived communities.

The project has created new community cycling groups, a brilliant cohort of volunteers, led bike rides and bike training sessions. Friendships have formed, which has helped to reduce social isolation, communities have strengthened. 20 bikes have been gifted to schools in our Levelling Up areas to enable children the chance to learn to ride a bike with Bikeability instructors, equipping them with a lifelong skill. 3 disability cycling hubs will open in 2023 and we have already provide 26 adapted bikes to help those with additional needs with accessing cycling.

Further funding from partners is also being used to improve infrastructure in the area, creating safe environments for residents to cycle.





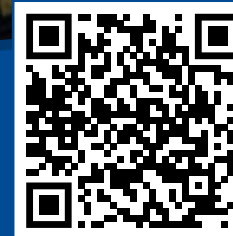
# Essex ActivAte

 **Levelling Up Area:**  
All areas of Essex

**The impact it  
has on young  
people and  
families**



Click the  
videos or scan  
the QR codes  
to watch this  
project in  
action



**Summer  
programme**

**Winter  
programme**



**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.**

We deliver up to 200 clubs every holiday, all providing fun physical activity and enrichment activities, at least one substantial meal, and support/signposting for the whole family. This programme is designed to build leadership and team skills in the children and young people, whilst also providing free childcare for parents, helping relieve financial pressures, and enabling those parents to more easily gain and maintain employment.

During the 2022 programme, we supported around 31,500 young people and their families, as well as providing nearly 400,000

free spaces, over 400,000 free meals, as well as 5000 food hampers to families most in need. We supported around 31,500 young people and families. Over Christmas we provided additional experiences for nearly 2000 families, this included trips to pantomimes and local attractions, plus visits from Father Christmas.

“ The holidays are usually a time I dread to my core, but my daughter had the best summer and I have been pretty much stress free. ”

**Essex Parent**

“ The people are just really nice and it's fun because I get to do activities. We got to go on a bouncy castle, we get to play basketball. One time we got to go to Leisureworld! ”

**Lily, child attending Essex ActivAte**

Following feedback from parents and carers and delivery partners when we first launched in 2021, for 2022 we ensured that many of our clubs delivered for up to 6-8 hours each day, ensuring that we could support more working parents with childcare for full time jobs.

“ It's nice to know I can get a hot meal, not a cold one. It's just really tasty as well I'm just grateful that I've got food to be honest. ”

**Harrison, child attending Essex ActivAte**

“ My son is disabled physically and this was not a problem whatsoever, he was included in everything. ”

**Essex Parent**

**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

**82%** of children were not previously doing 60 minutes of physical activity during the holiday



For more information about the free clubs and to see how you and your family can take advantage, please visit the Active Essex website [www.activeessex.org/children-young-people/essex-activate/explained](http://www.activeessex.org/children-young-people/essex-activate/explained)



# Harlow Electric Vehicle Centre

Levelling Up Area:  
Harlow



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action



**Levelling Up is about ensuring that residents have the opportunity to get training in the skills they need to start a new career or develop within their existing one.**

With this in mind, we are working with Harlow College to support the creation of their new electric vehicle training centre. We have committed £100,000 to fund 50 training places enabling local people to develop professional qualifications in EV repair and maintenance, which we know will be a major growth sector and is key to supporting the transition to carbon net zero. Harlow College is aiming to become an electric vehicle centre of excellence.

**We have committed £100,000 to fund 50 training places.**



# Community Supermarkets

Levelling Up Area:  
Basildon and Tendring



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action



**Access to affordable food is even more essential in today's climate. In the last year ECC has funded a programme to set up and support at least six Community Supermarkets across Essex.**

Initially aligned to the priority areas for Levelling Up the research and modelling work has created a number of additional, opportunities enabling the programme to extend beyond the six locations originally identified.

**“ Coming and shopping here means I can afford to put the heating on. ”**

**George, Jaywick**

Community Supermarkets form the bridge between Food Banks and Affordable Supermarkets, by providing a non-charitable offer. Customers pay for their shopping but at a much-subsidised rate providing choice and dignity for those moving away from crisis support. Unlike a food bank, the

Community Shop will always stock core food and household items ensuring shoppers can guarantee access to bread, milk, sugar, tea coffee and fresh fruit and vegetables.

**“ I'm just filling up my cupboard which have been bare for a long time. They're not here to judge you, just give a helping hand. ”**

**Carol, Laindon**

In July 2022, awards were successfully made to two local delivery partners. Billericay Street Pastors and Hope 3:16 were awarded the Basildon programme and launched the Hope Community Supermarket from Laindon Community Centre. The small team at the Jaywick Community Resource Centre were awarded the contract for Tendring, initially establishing a pop-up shop before launching a permanent site in Brooklands Gardens. Over the last six months the delivery partners have been supported by ECC, Feeding Britain and Basildon Council to realise their proposals.



# New Physical Activity Hubs

 **Levelling Up Area:  
Basildon**



Click the  
video or scan  
the QR code  
to watch this  
project in  
action



“ A local resident dropped into the Janet Duke Community Hub just before Christmas, they were a parent of the school. They were able to open up in a safe environment about several struggles they had, including debt, lack of support, likelihood of job loss.

We were able to make referrals to Citizens Advice, Trussell Trust foodbank and donate a £15 ASDA voucher. We talked through how they could access free childcare through our Essex Activate programme. ”

**Hub employee**

**We have worked with Sport England to invest £500,000 to create/enhance four new community hubs across Basildon in Lee Chapel at Janet Duke School, in Felmores Estate at the Briscoe School and in Laindon at the Millhouse and James Hornsby Schools.**

Each community hub provides a range of services for local people, and engage with hundreds of residents, especially children and families, in order to help create a more positive environment in these densely urban areas. A new youth worker supports the hubs and a wide range of physical activities and community sport are offered, from dance, to gardening sessions, to football tournaments.

The ATF (Achieve, Thrive, Flourish), one of those that we have invested in, are integral to the delivery of the Briscoes and Janet Duke hubs. They offer digital support, signposting to volunteering opportunities, food support,

wellbeing support, help accessing services and free local activities. ATF specialise in working with communities and young people at risk of exclusion to create increased opportunity and enhanced wellbeing.

You only need to read some of the stories from individuals and families who have got so much out of the hubs to understand the importance of these caring support networks.

“ Through attending the Janet Duke hub I have been able to get help with my housing application. In just a few months, I am now well on my way to securing permanent accommodation for me and my little girl. Thank you ATF and the Resident Involvement Team. ”

**Janet Duke, hub attendee**





# Community Challenge Fund

 Levelling Up Area:  
County-wide



Click the  
video or scan  
the QR code  
to watch this  
project in  
action



We recognise that communities often know what is best for their local area, so we created a £250,000 fund for individual residents or organisations to bid for grants of up to £5,000 to help get a new idea off the ground.

We have funded some fantastic projects including low cost healthy cooking clubs, youth club provision in rural areas, creation of sensory play facilities for children with SEND/LD and gardening clubs. 20 projects have been funded.

“ As a local sports club, Harwich & Dovercourt Cricket Club has used the money to bring in high quality coaches and investing in equipment to enhance the training for young people to grow to a stage to progress eventually into the adult development team.

We want to act as a hub for young people to engage in sports and activities, but most importantly, feel part of a community to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Thank you so much for giving our young players an unbelievable step up in their development and growth, this will go a long long way. ”

**Harwich & Dovercourt Cricket Club**



“ The fund will make a big difference to the community here in Greenstead. We applied for £500 for our community garden, to help bring local people together to grow our own veggies and do some seed and plant swapping. This money is also important as it encourages our neighbours to get together & improve their physical and mental wellbeing, encouraging us all to adopt a healthier lifestyle by being outside & eating healthier food. ”

**Hazel, Greenstead (Colchester)**  
resident and local volunteer



**£250,000** fund

**£5,000** per grant to help individual residents or organisations get a new idea off the ground

**20 projects** have been funded so far



# Power in Partnerships

 **Levelling Up Area:  
Across Essex**



Click the  
video or scan  
the QR code  
to watch this  
project in  
action



Cllr McKinlay with HSBC UK partners, including Karen Collier and Paul Houlding at the Colchester Levelling Up launch

**Levelling Up cannot be achieved by Essex County Council alone. That is why we are lucky to be working with so many amazing partners, including those in the private sector, who are helping us to bring free support and activities to Essex residents.**

The private sector has a huge role to play in Levelling Up and we will be expanding our efforts in this area to launch even more joint initiatives. Below are just a few examples of where these partnerships are already making a difference.

Our 2022 Winter Reading Challenge was sponsored by Penguin books, who provided free resources for children and young people. The penguins at Colchester Zoo even lent a hand in promoting the event and the zoo also offered some fantastic prizes for those that completing the Reading Challenge.

This year we announced a new partnership with HSBC UK to support local residents to improve their financial literacy. Free bespoke online webinars and in person pop up events

in libraries have been held to help people get the most from their money at this challenging time. The events have already been expanded to include speakers from supermarkets, such as Morrisons, who talk about the best way to shop on a budget, and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) who provide advice on pensions.

“Business and the private sector have a key role to play in Levelling Up, as a strong economy is absolutely essential to enabling people to fulfil their aspirations. We know that people are facing significant challenges at the moment due to the cost of living rising significantly and so we are delighted to be working with ECC to help young people and adults improve their financial skills and wellbeing.”

**Karen Collier, Local Director for the Chelmsford Local Market at HSBC UK**

A lack of family friendly working practice is a key barrier for working families being able to adequately juggle work and caring commitments. It can affect parental income, as well as wellbeing. In March 2022, we launched our Family Friendly Employers Charter. The “Essex Family Friendly Employer Charter” was developed in collaboration with employers and set out minimum principles for employers in Essex to be deemed “family friendly”. Not all employers are able to offer flexible working arrangements, but the charter sets out principles which go further than the ability to work from home and sets out how employers can support “family friendly working” in order to support working parents and carers to be able to adequately juggle and manage work and caring commitments.

“We pride ourselves on employing the best people to provide the best care to our patients, and very often these people have families or conflicting demands on their time. We support the Essex Family Friendly Charter, as it enables our diverse workforce to have rewarding careers and a fulfilling family life which reflects the patients we serve. Family friendly working is at the heart of our Trust and firmly embedded within our culture.”

**Brid Johnson, Director of Operations, Essex and Kent for NELFT**

As of December 2022, we had **34 employers** signed up covering over **41,000 employees across private and public sectors**, which includes Morgan Sindall, North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT) and Anglia Ruskin University.



# Ready 4 School and Flying Start and Beyond

 **Levelling Up Area:**  
Canvey Island



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action

**What's the best way to support reception age children's physical development, school readiness and support school teacher's professional development all at the same time? By helping aliens on their journey to the moon of course.**

Delivered by Castle Point and Rochford School Sport Partnership, 'Ready 4 School' and 'Flying Start and Beyond' are helping children in Canvey Island develop an early love of being active. Ready 4 School is a 12-week targeted intervention, providing physical activity breakfast time clubs for reception aged children and their families.

This is paired with 'Flying Start and Beyond', a space themed 6-week programme, which pairs highly trained coaches with key stage 1 teachers to upskill and build their confidence when delivering physical activity and PE lessons. The unique programmes are fun and imaginative, as staff and students undertake physical challenges to help extra-terrestrial

characters on a space journey, all whilst keeping active, healthy, and happy.

This programme has already started in four schools in Castlepoint - Winter Gardens, Canvey Infants, St Josephs and St Katherines, with four more school launches taking place in the first half of 2023.

“ We are delighted to be a part of this much needed project. Working with our youngest students to make sure they enjoy being active and taking part in PE lessons and clubs is vitally important; it creates good habits and often sets the tone for many years to come. This project is so comprehensive, not only benefitting students but also their families as well, plus is supporting our staff to feel more confident. ”

**Sandra Dorrington, Head Teacher of Canvey Island Infant School**

# Expanding Essex Opportunities Portal

 **Levelling Up Area:**  
County-wide



Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action



**If you are an Essex resident looking for a new job, considering a career change or thinking of retraining or improving existing skills there is support available for you from Essex County Council (ECC).**

The **Essex Opportunities website** is funded by Essex County Council and Southend-on-Sea City Council and is a one stop shop to help you find a job, gain a qualification, set career goals and much more.

**In its first year, the website has had more than 90,000 visits and 5,000 clicks to apply for jobs.**

Essex Opportunities has also hosted a series of virtual jobs fairs and live broadcasts this year, with many more events planned. Here are just a few website users who have made use of this great resource:

“ Can I just say a massive thank you for all your help and how fantastically quick this turn around has been because I now have a job! ”

**Essex Opportunities website user**

“ The advisers helped me move forward with my business idea in leaps and bounds. With her knowledge and genuine desire to help, she connected me with several services, courses and information within 24 hours including childcare support. Those resources would have taken me a while to figure out on my own. I highly recommend anyone looking for assistance into work or business who has children to get in touch. ”

**Essex Opportunities website user**



# Cost of Living

**Inflation on the items that drive household bills is running at the highest level for decades. With the increase in food and energy prices especially, this is creating a challenge for all of us.**

The government has provided some intervention in an attempt to offset the worst impacts for citizens and businesses, but even with this support, many residents across Essex will still struggle, and for a number of households the impact of these cost rises will force them to make difficult choices about what necessities to prioritise.

Levelling Up is longer term, but the current financial climate has meant that an additional short term response to the cost of living was required. In 2022, Essex County Council announced a £50m support package, which included:

- **£9.4m of additional funding going into the Household Support fund** to help the most vulnerable residents with essential costs.
- **Launched a new Community Winter Warmth and Welcome Programme**, which has allowed us to fund over 150 warm community spaces across the county.
- **£17m of government funding to expand our Sustainable Warmth Programme** to help households make improvements to secure energy efficiency measures, such as insulation.
- **Information, Advice and Guidance:** as well as funding citizens' advice and other agencies to provide support services, we have also created a central resource that pulls together advice and guidance for residents.



**Click the video or scan the QR code to watch this project in action**



“ The impact of the additional funding into Age Well East will enable us to connect more people with vital support over the coming months. ”

**Martin Jones, Operations Manager for the Welfare Team, Age Well East**

“ The additional investment will support the network of local Citizens Advice serving the Essex County Council area to increase our capacity to respond to the needs of Essex residents affected by the cost-of-living pressures. ”

**Martin Lord, Director of Citizens Advice Essex**

# What is next? Year 2 and beyond

**It has been a productive first year, but as previously recognised, to achieve Levelling Up and to make a real difference, it requires a programme of long-term investment.**

Looking ahead to year 2, we have already agreed a variety of projects that will launch soon and seek to create better outcomes for residents, which include:

## Improving pupil's language skills in Tendring

We will be working with the Tendring Education Partnership to provide opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable Children and Young People by equipping them with the skills they need to learn for life. This will seek to improve language and communication development and strengthen professional development and deployment of Teaching Assistants to support pupils' learning behaviours and emotional needs.

## Good level of Development

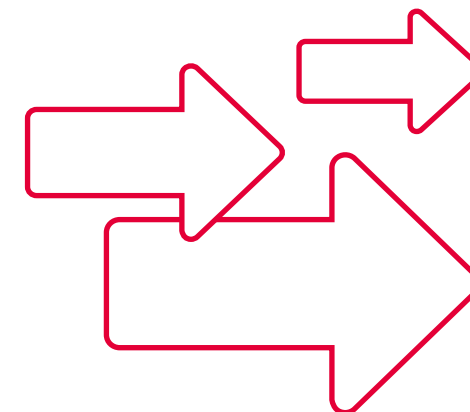
New support for children in the Early Years in Colchester, with investment targeted directly at increasing the number of school pupils who can reach a Good Level of Development. This is the national benchmark for children at the end of their reception year at school, with a government ambition of 90% of children reaching their expected level by 2030. We are making funds available to support staff and parents in the early years sector to help children achieve this expected level in all learning related to language and literacy.

## Rural Braintree Community Engagement Project

Working with our partners to look at ways to strengthen our rural communities and reduce social isolation and loneliness.

## Harlow Futures

This is a new educational scheme looking to inspire young people in Harlow to be ambitious about their futures, bringing employers in the town together with young people so that they can learn about the opportunities available and how best to utilise their skills in the world of work.





## Funding for Community Hubs

Harwich Wellbeing Lounge in Esplanade Hall has received funding from Essex County Council's Levelling Up fund to support the continuation of a shared space for local people who are particularly isolated or vulnerable. The new funding will secure the rental space for three years, allow for improvements to enhance access and use of the space and increase opening hours from just four hours, one day a week, to daily opening Monday to Friday.

Our first year has been very much focussed on launching initiatives in the identified Levelling Up places, however, in 2023, we will be prioritising providing more support across the whole of Essex for those cohorts who would benefit the most (see below).

1

### Grouping 1

- Low income working families
- Children on free school meals

2

### Grouping 2

- 16 - 25 year olds not in employment, education or training for more than 12 months
- People with learning disabilities, mental health needs or special educational needs

As well as focussing on the above, we will also be strengthening and forming new partnerships across the public and private sector. We will continue to develop our evaluation approach to make sure that the actions we are taking are actually making a difference. We will also make more creative use of our property assets and our incredible workforce – most of whom are themselves Essex residents. Finally, whilst there is much within our control, national government policy can make a huge difference to resident's lives. As such, we will continue to lobby and engage with government on Levelling Up, to help ensure the best outcomes for the people of Essex. Devolution is a key part of this.

## Devolution

The government's Levelling Up White Paper set out plans to empower local leaders and communities by offering a devolution deal to every part of England that wants one by 2030. A deal would mean more funding and decision-making powers moved from central government to local authorities. Devolution has been gathering pace in the last six months, with over 50% of the population in England now covered by a deal, including our neighbouring counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. In June 2022, Leaders from the county, unitary and district councils in Essex, Southend and Thurrock agreed to explore the case for a devolution deal for Greater Essex. They have been assessing the potential benefits and impacts for residents of devolving powers and funding for priorities like skills, transport, housing, and the environment, and will review their findings in early 2023.

We are focused not just on national devolution, but also on how we can devolve powers down to our local communities.

**We are positive about local devolution, recognising that this can lead to better outcomes that meet the needs of communities, whilst also further empowering them.**

## Conclusion

This report is just a snapshot of the programme of work we have been implementing across Essex. However, we know that there is much more to do and that this is just the start.

The next year will see us make more announcements, as we introduce new initiatives targeted at both our key places and cohorts and we work to support our partners and colleagues across the county, as they develop and implement their own Levelling Up projects.

We remain committed to working in a new and innovative way 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.



Families at Park Play







This information is issued by:  
Essex County Council  
Corporate Strategy Team

Contact us:  
[\*\*everyonesessex@essex.gov.uk\*\*](mailto:everyonesessex@essex.gov.uk)

Corporate Strategy Team  
Essex County Council  
County Hall, Chelmsford  
Essex, CM1 1QH



[Essex\\_CC](#)



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