

ECC Report February 2026

Elections will go ahead as planned for Essex County Council



Planning is now well underway for the Essex County Council May 2026 elections, and the Leader of Essex County Council, Councillor Kevin Bentley said:

“As previously announced, the Government has reiterated that Essex County Council elections due to take place in May 2026 will go ahead as planned with planning well underway.

I went on record to say the we did not want a postponement, but we will now consider how we can effectively manage resources to support the system-wide preparations for Local Government Reorganisation, alongside elections in May.”

You can read the Government’s official statement [here](#).

The election will take place using the new boundaries for its council divisions, as agreed in 2024.

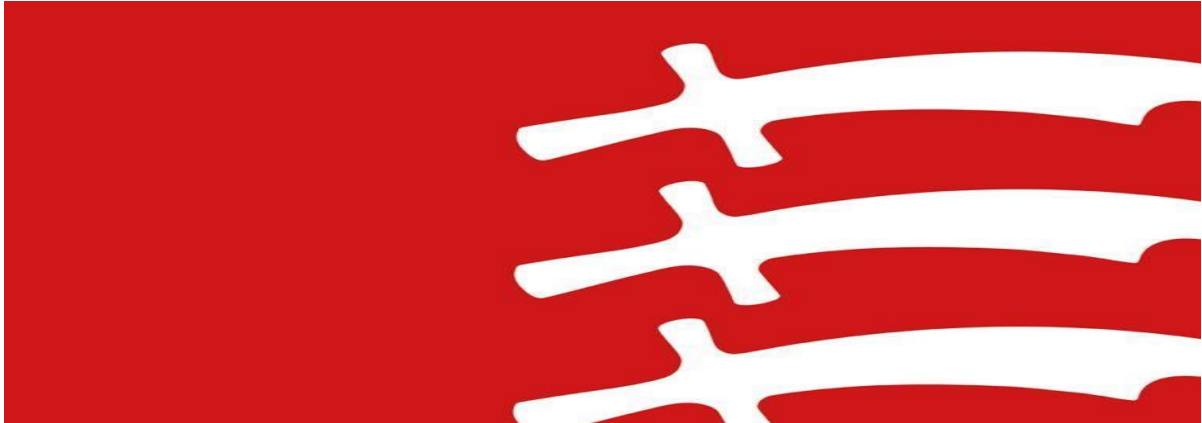
https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/si_2024-000_-_draft_essex_electoral_changes_order_map.pdf

The new boundaries of Tendring Rural West Division will include:

Ardleigh; Bradfield; Frating; Great Bromley; Lawford;
Little Bromley; Manningtree; Mistley; Ramsey; Wrabness.

Tendring, Little Bentley, and Wix will be in Tendring Rural East Division; and Elmstead will be in the Brightlingsea Division.

Changes to Cabinet and portfolios



We have announced some changes to our Cabinet Member portfolios. These reflect the importance of upcoming changes brought by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The changes include:

- an update to the Deputy Leader's portfolio to Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Transformation and Economic Growth
- the creation of a new Digital and Corporate Service portfolio
- a change to the Cabinet Member responsible for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport
- appointment of new Deputy Cabinet Member for the Deputy Leader and Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport portfolios

See the full list of Cabinet Members and Deputies below.

Cabinet Members

- **Councillor Kevin Bentley** – Leader
- **Councillor Louis McKinlay** - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Transformation and Economic Growth
- **Councillor Tom Cunningham** – Cabinet Member for Digital and Corporate Services

- **Councillor John Spence** – Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration
- **Councillor Tony Ball** - Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life Long Learning and Employability
- **Councillor Lee Scott** - Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning and Regeneration
- **Councillor Chris Whitbread** - The Chancellor of Essex (Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance)
- **Councillor Mark Platt** - Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport
- **Councillor Peter Schwier** - Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling
- **Councillor Mark Durham** - Cabinet Member for The Arts, Heritage and Culture

Deputy Cabinet Members

- **Councillor Lewis Barber** – Deputy to the Leader with principal accountabilities for Devolution and LGR
- **Councillor Beverley Egan** – Deputy to the Leader and Special Lead Member for the Caring Communities Commission
- **Councillor Daniel Land** – Deputy to the Deputy Leader and Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities, Transformation and Economic Growth
- **Councillor Lesley Wagland** – Deputy to the Deputy Leader and Special Lead Member with key accountabilities of infrastructure and Freeports
- **Councillors Jane Fleming, Lynette Bowers-Flint and Andrew Johnson** – Deputy Cabinet Members for Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration
- **Councillors Laureen Shaw and Daniel Land** – Deputy Cabinet Members for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport
- **Councillor Andrew Sheldon** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life Long Learning and Employability
- **Councillor Bob Massey** – Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling
- **Councillor Holly Whitbread** – Deputy Cabinet Member for The Arts, Heritage and Culture.

Nominations open for 12th Essex Teaching Awards



Pupils, parents and school staff can give a teacher the recognition they deserve with a nomination for the Essex Teaching Awards 2026.

The awards are now in their 12th year. We run them to recognise the outstanding contribution made by teachers and school staff across the county.

The awards celebrate individuals working in a range of settings. This includes early years to further education and support roles.

This year's categories are:

- Early years team of the year
- Childminder/childminding team of the year

- Further Education team of the year
- Headteacher of the year in a primary or secondary school
- Teacher of the year in a special school
- Lifetime achievement
- Making a difference - primary school of the year
- Making a difference - secondary school of the year
- School partnership
- Inclusive practice
- Outstanding new teacher of the year
- Teacher of the year in a primary school
- Teacher of the year in a secondary school or post 16
- Teacher of the year in a special school
- Teaching assistant of the year
- Impact of digital innovation
- Support staff (member of our school community)

The Essex Teaching Awards 2026 are sponsored by the [University of Essex](#), [Daisy Education](#), [MITIE](#) and [Able Canopies](#).

Claire Clilverd, Deputy Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment at the University of Essex, said: “We’re proud to sponsor the Essex Teachers’ Awards and celebrate the incredible dedication and impact of Essex educators.”

Nominations will close on 27 March 2026, and the awards ceremony will take place in June 2026. You can [make a nomination here](#).

Councillor Tony Ball, Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability, said:

“Everyone spends time in the formal education system and it’s the actions of individuals working in these settings that can influence some of the biggest decisions we’ll ever make.

“The Essex Teaching Awards give us the opportunity to ensure those individuals get the recognition they deserve, allowing us to not only identify and celebrate them, but also share best practice across the wider education sector.

“Over the past 11 awards, we have acknowledged outstanding teachers and headteachers, teaching assistants, governing bodies and school teams who work in Essex. I’m excited we have the opportunity to celebrate our staff across the whole spectrum of education.

“I would encourage pupils, parents and other school staff to think about the excellent contributions made in education and nominate anyone you feel is deserving of an award.”

Essex on global A-list for climate leadership



Essex has been given the top rating for leadership in protecting the environment.

The rating comes from an annual assessment by the Carbon Disclosure Project ([CDP](#)). The CDP operates the world's only independent environmental disclosure system. It sees over one thousand cities, states and regions report their environmental data. This includes more than 22,100 global businesses.

Essex is one of twenty locations in the UK on the CDP A List this year, and one of only two county councils.

Essex had to meet robust leadership criteria. This included reporting against climate and environmental plans.

Achieving an A rating places Essex among the leaders in protecting our environment. The council's work has included:

- [Essex Forest Initiative](#)
- [Essex Water strategy](#)
- [Waste strategy for Essex](#)
- [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)
- [Pedal Power](#)
- [Design Guide for new builds](#)
- [Switch Together](#)
- [Carbon Literacy training](#)

Councillor Peter Schwier, Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling at Essex County Council, said: "It's exceptional that Essex has been globally recognised as a leader in protecting the climate.

"Getting on CDP's A List is no easy feat. Achieving this four years in a row proves Essex's commitment and progress in being a world leader in climate and environmental protection.

“Essex is working hard to mitigate the effects on the climate, and it will continue to work to improve the Essex environment and grow our sustainable economy for the benefit of its residents.”

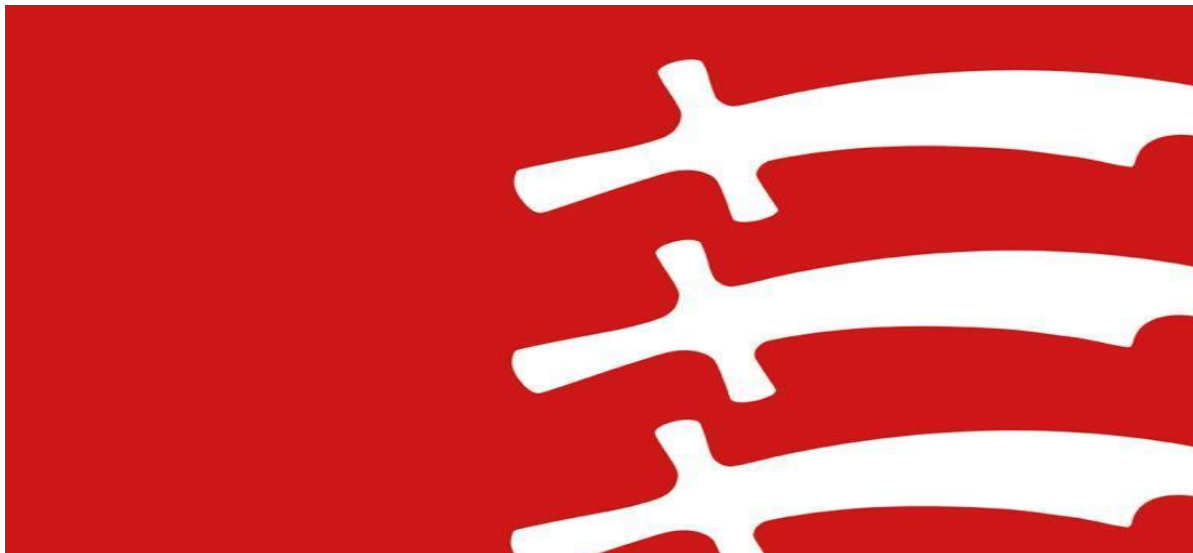
Sherry Madera, CEO of CDP, said: “When local governments commit to transparent disclosure, robust climate planning and clear adaptation strategies, they not only protect their communities but also unlock opportunities for innovation and sustainable growth.

“Their leadership shows how data-driven climate action can strengthen both people and the planet.”

Learn more about Essex’s climate action on the [Essex County Council website](#).

The full CDP 2025 A List is [available on its website](#).

2026/27 budget proposals revealed



We have set out our budget proposals for 2026/27. These outline how we plan to spend the £2 billion we are responsible for.

The proposals focus on protecting essential services, supporting the most vulnerable and investing in the county's future - while keeping council tax as low as possible.

Residents and businesses helped shape the proposals. More than 1,300 people took part in our recent budget consultation. Findings included:

- condition of roads and pavements is a top concern for residents
- respondents want to see support for vulnerable people, improvements to infrastructure and the creation of good jobs
- more than 70% of people would understand if there was an increase in Council Tax to support essential services

Reflecting this feedback, we are proposing an additional £82 million of investment across key portfolio budgets in 2026/27.

The budget this year has also been set within a national context of:

- high inflation
- the increased cost of living and providing services
- the impact of the Government's Autumn Budget announcements
- changes to the local government funding system

Despite these pressures, and an expectation from the Government council tax would increase by the full amount allowed this year, 4.99%, we are limiting the increase as much as possible. As a result, we are proposing a modest **3.95% increase**. This is made up of:

- 1.95% general increase
- 2% Adult Social Care precept

For an average Band D property, this would mean an increase in our element of council tax of £1.20 per week, or £62.37 per year.

Councillor Chris Whitbread, Chancellor of Essex, said:

“This is a budget that is firmly on the side of residents and businesses in Essex. It makes good on our promise that we will not tax people a penny more than we absolutely have to.

“We are doing everything we can to keep the pounds in our residents’ pockets, while maintaining the standards of services they rely on.

“We are proposing what we believe is the lowest council tax rise for an authority our size in the country, yet our proposals still deliver on residents’ priorities and on our Everyone’s Essex strategy.

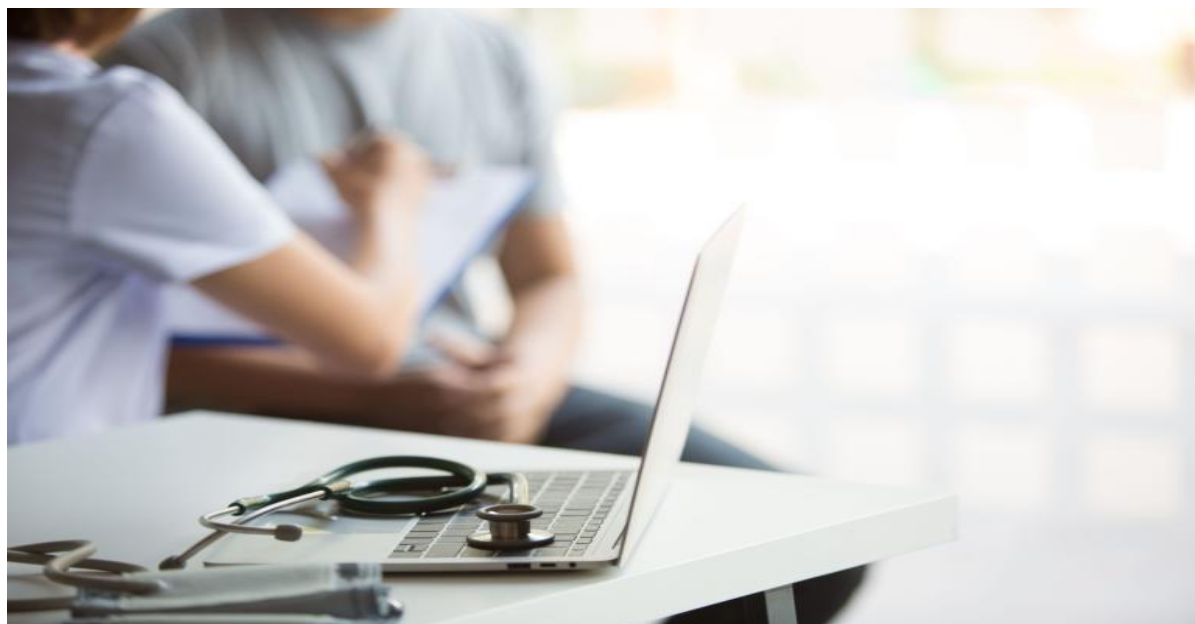
“The budget continues record levels of investment in highways, focuses on protecting the most vulnerable so that nobody falls through the net, and uses our capital programme to invest in the long-term future of Essex.

“Local government finances are under pressure across the country. However, thanks to our strong track record of financial management, efficiency and productivity, we are able to deliver a balanced budget that meets residents’ needs.”

Our Cabinet will consider whether to recommend the Everyone’s Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2026/27 at a meeting on Tuesday 27 January. The proposals will then be debated for approval at a Full Council meeting on Thursday 12 February.

Read more about [our budget proposals](#) for next year.

Find support for your Sexual Health



This Sexually Transmitted Infection Question (STIQ) Day, we are encouraging open and honest conversations about sexual health.

STIQ Day, marked on 14th January each year, is dedicated to promoting informed discussions about sexual health. It encourages individuals to ask questions, seek reliable information and hopes to create a stigma-free environment to address sexual health concerns.

Essex Sexual Health Service (ESHS) is commissioned by us, here at Essex County Council, and delivered by Provide Community. It offers free support to adults and young people on their sexual health. This includes everything from emergency contraception to in-clinic and at-home STI testing. The service focuses on accessibility, inclusivity and outreach.

During the last financial year (April 2024, March 2025), Essex Sexual Health Service delivered:

- 71,261 clinic appointments - ensuring broad access to sexual health services
- 34,681 home test kits - making testing more convenient and accessible

- 6,708 Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) devices were fitted - supporting long-term reproductive health choices
- 15,496 condoms distributed - promoting safe sexual practices
- 166 outreach sessions reaching 6,209 individuals
- 131 professional training sessions
- 47 SEND sessions, engaging 584 young people
- HIV support services to 141 individuals
- 178 relationships, sex and health education session delivered, supporting 4,577 young people
- free sanitary products introduced in clinics, reflecting user feedback

Councillor John Spence, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration, said: "STIQ Day is an important reminder that sexual health is a vital part of overall wellbeing. We want everyone in Essex to feel confident asking questions and accessing the support they need without embarrassment or stigma.

"Essex Sexual Health Service has made incredible strides in improving accessibility and inclusivity, from expanding digital resources to delivering thousands of clinic appointments and home testing kits. These efforts ensure that residents can make informed choices about their sexual health in a way that works for them."

Susan Luty, ESHS Sexual Health System Lead, added: "The Team at Essex Sexual Health Service strive to ensure the residents or visitors to Essex have access to contraception, sexual health care and support when they need it.

"We offer a range of preventative measures including vaccines and medication to prevent the transmission of HIV and STIs to people who believe they are at higher risk. It has never been easier for us to take control of our sexual health and wellbeing."

Find out more about the [support offered by ESHS](#).

