

Essex County Council - Hedingham Division

Cllr Peter Schwier – 2024/25 Annual Report

Achievements of **Essex County Council in the Financial Year 2024-25**

Essex County Council (ECC) has made significant strides across various portfolios during the financial year 2024-25, reflecting its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its residents. Below is an overview of key achievements:

1. Economic Growth and Infrastructure

- **Investment in Local Economy:** ECC invested £1.95 million to stimulate local economic growth. This funding led to the creation of numerous jobs, supported business expansion, and attracted external investments, facilitating improvements in essential infrastructure. Since 2021, ECC's investments have resulted in over 1,200 new jobs across various industries and have provided training for more than 20,000 residents, enhancing their employability and earning potential.
- **Sustainable Transport Initiatives:** The council prioritized active travel, leading to a substantial increase in sustainable transportation. Notable accomplishments include:
 - Providing cycling training to over 6,000 pupils across 256 schools as part of the Bikeability programme.
 - Facilitating three million e-scooter rides in Basildon, Braintree, Chelmsford, and Colchester since December 2020, replacing approximately 593,508 car trips and reducing CO₂ emissions by 109 tons.
 - Installing 70 electric vehicle charging points across the county.
 - Enhancing cycling infrastructure in Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, and Harlow, including the development of cycle paths, improved signage, signalized crossings, and wider pavements.

These initiatives underscore ECC's dedication to promoting greener transportation options and reducing environmental impact.

2. Environmental Sustainability

- **Climate Action Plan:** ECC launched a pioneering app to engage residents in climate action. The Carbon Cutting Essex app enables users to track their carbon footprint and discover changes to reduce it. Features include interactive activities such as quizzes, blogs, and videos, with monthly themes focusing on different aspects of climate action, including waste, energy, transport, and food. Users are rewarded with points for positive environmental actions, which can be used to enter prize draws or donated to local causes.

Between 2023 and 2024, Essex County Council (ECC) implemented several initiatives to address climate change, enhance environmental sustainability, and improve waste management.

In July 2023, ECC updated its Climate Action Plan, increasing the budget to £250 million. The plan focuses on six core themes: land use and green infrastructure, energy, built environment, transport, waste, and community engagement. This update underscores ECC's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, as recommended by the Essex Climate Action Commission. ^[OBJ]

To support local climate initiatives, ECC allocated £500,000 through the Climate Action Challenge Fund by February 2023. This funding enabled 41 groups and organizations to develop projects aimed at combating climate change, reflecting ECC's dedication to community-driven environmental action. ^[OBJ]

Additionally, ECC released updated Climate Action Advice Packs in May 2024. Tailored for residents, schools, businesses, and early years childcare settings, these packs provide cost-effective and achievable strategies to enhance sustainability. The updates include new information on funding and volunteering opportunities, aligning with ECC's "Everyone's Essex" commitment to collaborative climate action. ^[OBJ]

Advancements in Waste Management Recycling & Reuse

ECC made significant strides in waste management during this period. A notable initiative was the year-long Food Recycling Project, launched in March 2023. Targeting 375,000 households, the project aimed to boost food recycling rates by providing residents with tools and support. The initiative led to a 21% increase in food recycling tonnage and an estimated reduction of over 90% in CO₂ equivalent emissions, showcasing ECC's commitment to reducing landfill waste. ^[OBJ]

In February 2024, ECC reported that over 37,000 tonnes of recycled food waste had been converted into green energy, powering approximately 6,310 homes across the UK for a year. This effort resulted in CO₂ savings equivalent to removing 16,189 cars from the road for a year, highlighting the environmental benefits of effective food waste recycling. ^[OBJ]

Furthering its commitment to sustainable waste management, ECC awarded new residual waste treatment contracts in August 2024. These contracts are set to commence on April 1, 2025, and will run for seven years, with an option to extend for up to an additional seven years. A key requirement of these contracts is the cessation of landfill use by January 1, 2028, two years ahead of the Essex Climate Action Commission's recommendation. The winning bidder has committed to eliminating landfill use by October 1, 2025, which is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 30%, equivalent to saving over 540,000 tonnes of CO₂ over the initial seven-year term. ^[OBJ]

Sustainable Development Initiatives

In May 2024, ECC established the Climate and Planning Unit (CaPU) to promote net-zero and sustainable development across the county. The CaPU collaborates with partner authorities to set net-zero policies, provides training for planners, councillors, and developers, and supports district councils with planning applications. The unit's efforts have influenced the energy efficiency standards of 20,000 new homes planned for two new garden communities, reflecting ECC's dedication to sustainable housing. ^[OBJ]

Collectively, these initiatives from 2023 to 2024 demonstrate Essex County Council's proactive approach to addressing climate change, enhancing environmental sustainability, and improving waste management, aligning with its long-term vision for a greener Essex.

3. Social Care and Community Services

- **Career Development for Social Workers:** ECC has prioritized the professional growth of its social workers through the Essex Social Care Academy, established in 2012. The academy offers continuous training in areas such as adult mental health, internet safety, and understanding trauma for separated migrant children. This commitment to career progression spans from apprentices to senior staff, fostering a culture of equality, inclusion, and diversity. Such initiatives have led to high staff morale and recognition by Ofsted for outstanding performance in children's services.

- **Digital Transformation in Services:** To enhance service delivery, ECC partnered with IEG4 to implement a digital solution for processing Blue Badge applications. This modern case management system streamlines the application process, reducing administrative burdens and improving user experience. In 2023, the council received 43,000 applications—a 57% increase since 2019—highlighting the necessity for this digital transformation to meet rising demand.

4. Education and Skills Development

- **Data Academy Launch:** ECC initiated a Data Academy to bolster data literacy and analytical skills among its staff. Partnering with Multiverse, the council enrolled 40 employees in programs such as 'Data Insights

for Business Decisions' and 'Data Fellowship.' This initiative aims to enhance evidence-based decision-making and modernize processes, ultimately improving services for residents.

ECC Budget 2025-26

The council plans to allocate over £2 billion across four primary sectors: the economy, environment, health, and initiatives to ensure Essex remains a great place for everyone. An additional £88 million is earmarked for portfolio budgets, with £8 million specifically directed towards road and footway maintenance.

Recognizing the importance of infrastructure, the council has committed an extra £12.3 million for highways improvements. This funding will support various projects, including:

- £8.5 million to continue the Members' Highways Initiative
- £1.6 million increase in the road safety budget
- £1.3 million for enhancements to cycle paths
- £500,000 for repairing damaged road signs
- £400,000 additional funding to improve drains and mitigate flooding risks

Despite these investments, the council faces economic challenges, including high inflation and increased service provision costs. To maintain financial sustainability, the council has identified the need for £43 million in savings for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Through strategic investments and prudent financial management, Essex County Council aims to address current economic pressures while ensuring the continued delivery of essential services to its residents.

Summary

The responsibility of representing the diverse interests and needs of all the villages both large and small have been both demanding and rewarding across all 33 parishes of the Division. With dual responsibilities on both ECC and BDC I have, I hope, effectively and continuously, addressed local issues, ensuring that the voices of Hedingham Division residents are heard and acted upon.

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