

ECC Report November 2024

Cabinet Member for social care reacts to Autumn Budget statement



We are pledging to reach out to social care operators following the government's autumn budget.

The budget will significantly add to people's costs at an already difficult time.

Our Cabinet Member for Social Care, Councillor John Spence, said: “While we welcome the positive news in last week’s budget that the carer’s allowance weekly earnings limit will be increased, which is something Essex County Council called for through a motion in May, there can be no doubt it was a challenging day for all the working people of Essex who have had the bravery to start up their businesses and start creating wealth by employing others.

“My colleague Councillor Whitbread, the Chancellor of Essex, has already talked about the impact on the council’s finances and

my concerns are the social care operators with whom we work.

“Social care is particularly people-heavy, and the wage bill is a huge part of the total cost. It is also, sadly, an area where many work at or slightly above the living wage. The combination of national insurance employer contribution and living wage increases this week will have had a massive impact. Taking the simple example of a business with 20 employees earning the living wage, the total addition to costs would be in the order of £40,000 to £50,000.

“Essex County Council is dedicated to ensuring a vibrant social care market where our residents can be sure of choice and quality. Our hospital discharge rates are among the best in the country, thus minimising the numbers who remain in hospital longer than they need to be. We will do all we can to maintain the provision of quality social care across our great county, but it will be extremely challenging.”

Response to Autumn Budget 2024



Measures designed to generate billions for public services, protect working people and grow the economy, were announced by the Government in last week's budget.

Reacting to the Government's Autumn Budget, Councillor Chris Whitbread, Chancellor of Essex, said:

The Government has positioned this as a budget for working people and confirmation today that there will be an increase in the National Living Wage, but no new increase in income tax for many, will be welcome news.

“It is also reassuring to hear that the new Government’s plans are very much aligned to what we are already doing in Essex in respect of growing the local economy, using technology in the delivery of public services and prioritising maintenance of our roads.

“However, last week’s budget has also left us with some questions, particularly in respect of the implications of tax increases, such as National Insurance contributions from employers. This, along with increases in other areas, such as National Living Wage and reduction of business rates relief, will undoubtedly have a negative impact on local businesses and also increase the cost of delivering services for local councils.

“The budget’s announcements will not help us meet these costs and so this will undoubtedly mean more difficult decisions for us in the future as we are forced to look for additional local cost savings. The knock-on effect of the measures announced for local government means we could potentially be faced with a ticking timebomb in the future.

“While announcements of additional funding for key areas such as education, SEND, further investment in the Household Support Fund and more money for local government are of course welcome, they won’t go all the way in solving the financial challenges we currently face.

“The devil is also in the detail and it will be interesting to see what these and the other investments announced today mean in real terms as more information is shared in the coming days.”

Speaking specifically on the news that there will be a rise in the bus fare cap, Councillor Whitbread added:

Bus services are a lifeline in rural areas and so any price increase – and this is a 50% increase – will not be welcomed by passengers on already stretched incomes, but we are pleased to see a retention of the cap on fares until the end of 2025.”

Chancellor of Essex gives financial update for the county



On Tuesday 15th October Councillor Chris Whitbread spoke at [Full Council](#) ahead of the ECC's budget next year, and he told councillors "aspirations remain undimmed" for the county.

He spoke about what has been delivered for residents since our last budget in February this year, which includes:

- 1,860 new school places
- Three new primary schools in Basildon, Chelmsford, and Maldon
- £38 million invested in highways. This includes [Priority One](#) funding for resurfacing potholes, kerbs, and vegetation maintenance
- 412,000 trees planted over the last four years
- £9.436 million [Household Support Fund](#). The fund helps those struggling with the cost of energy, groceries, bills and so on
- Two new children's residential homes with further homes planned
- New Waste Strategy for Essex alongside district, borough, and city council partners
- Around 11,600 adults with social care needs supported by new care technology
- Launch of the [Caring Communities Commission](#) to tackle increasing pressures on public services

- Investment and support in foster care with new models providing placements for children

Councillor Whitbread also spoke about financial pressures on local councils across the country.

This includes services with increasingly complex needs. For example, children's services, adult social care and SEND.

Councillor Whitbread called on the government to increase financial support for local authorities. However, he is confident Essex will weather the storm through strong financial management.

He said: "It's no secret local councils across the country are facing financial challenges. Essex is not immune to them.

"We have a track record of strong financial management. We have saved over £1 billion since 2008, and we will never have a higher council tax rate than we need.

"Our budget next year will focus on protecting essential services. It will deliver on residents' priorities by providing value for money. This includes our capital programme to build infrastructure and boost the local economy.

"We therefore remain positive, with high aspirations for the future, but of course at this stage we don't know what the 30th October budget announcements will be."

[Watch the Full Council meeting of Essex County Councillors online.](#)

Extra £250,000 for food support fund



We have added an extra £250,000 to our food support fund. Local organisations providing food and support to those in need can apply for up to £2,500 from the fund. Applications for grants are open from Monday 4th November.

Organisations can use the money to buy food for families and individuals who are struggling with the cost of living. Grants are available to organisations, including:

- food support groups
- food pantries
- foodbanks
- community based organisations
- voluntary groups

Organisations can [find more information and make an application](#).

The fund will be available until the money is used. There is no deadline for applications. All grants awarded must be spent by 31 March 2025.

Councillor Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity, said:

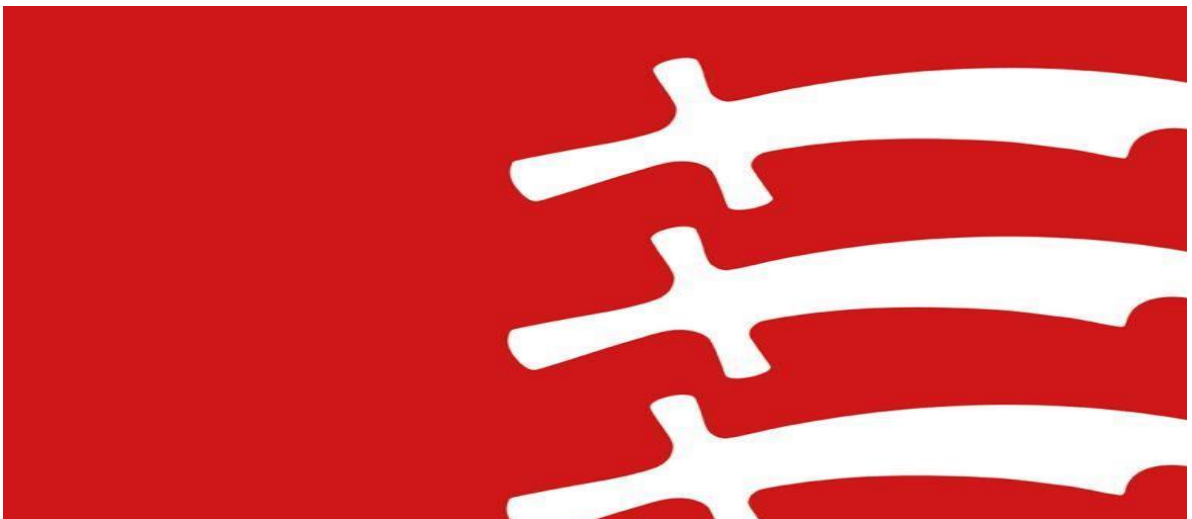
We know that organisations like community supermarkets and food pantries are a lifeline for many and we're pleased to make this additional funding available so organisations can continue their vital work.

“The funding is also reflective of our ongoing commitment to supporting those who are vulnerable, and I’d encourage anyone who is struggling to find out more – there is help for you.”

This extra funding means we have now allocated nearly £1.5 million to the food support fund over the past year. It is also part of a £9.4 million package of support that is available to Essex residents this winter.

If you are struggling with the cost of living, find out about the [help and support available](#).

Essex ranked third most productive council in the Country



We have been confirmed as the third most productive council in the country. This means we achieve the most value for residents per pound spent.

Independent consultancy, IMPOWER, analysed 149 councils across eight core areas using their index. These are the areas where councils spend the most money and include:

- housing
- homelessness
- waste and recycling
- high needs
- children's social care
- working age adults
- older adults
- health

They used nationally available metrics to determine the top 10 and found Essex is achieving better outcomes for people for a less-than-average spend.

In the last league table, Essex ranked seventh. This latest ranking means we have outperformed our 10 closest statistical peers by the biggest margin and across the most areas.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex County Council, said: “I am proud that despite of the tough financial challenges currently faced by local government, Essex has continued to put residents at the heart of decision making and that this has again been recognised. This is undoubtedly down to the incredible work of our employees, and I’d like to thank them for their unwavering commitment to improving the lives of our residents.

“I have always been clear that it is public money we are spending and we must do so wisely. Through prudent decision-making and collaborative working with our public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector, we can continue to think big and be ambitious for our residents and their future.

“This does not mean that we, like other councils across the country, don’t have tough decisions ahead of us. However, residents should feel confident based on this latest endorsement that we will continue to make decisions in their best interests and do what we can to continue serving our communities well.”

[Read more about the IMPOWER index.](#)

Funding for over 200 homes on surplus land in Essex



The government has allocated £3.6 million to support housing on brownfield land in Essex.

The Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) is part of the One Public Estate programme. It helps local councils release surplus land for housing and other uses.

The £3.6 million will create 203 new homes through eight housing schemes across Essex.

We have received £1.4 million from the BLRF. The remaining amount will go towards Basildon, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea councils.

We will use the £1.4 million to redevelop the old Essex County Hospital in Colchester. This will be led by Essex Housing, our in-house developer.

The redevelopment will create 57 homes as part of a wider 120-home development.

Restoring the Grade II listed hospital, and other heritage assets, will help meet local housing needs.

[Find out more on GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Apply now for 2025 primary school places



If your child was born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021, you can now [apply for primary \(reception\) school places](#). The application window is open between 4 November 2024 and 15 January 2025.

Those received after the 15 January deadline will be considered once all on time applications are determined. This means applying late could reduce the chance of getting a place at your preferred school.

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

Starting primary school is an exciting milestone in a child's life and the application process is the first step.

"Applying on time and making sure you use all four of your preferences will help to ensure there is the best possible chance of securing a place at your preferred school next September."

Find out more about the [admissions process](#).