

Leader's Summary

These elections present a real opportunity to influence the future of local government in Essex at a time of great change. We seek to return power to people and communities to make their own decisions.

A Liberal Democrat run county council will be committed to the issues that matter most to all our residents, from halting the decline in our highways, to improving how we address the special educational needs of our children. From safeguarding our libraries to protecting and enhancing our local environment. Standing up for hope, not hate, for inclusion and community.

These elections decide important things about our lives locally. We urge people to vote Liberal Democrat for a greener, fairer and better Essex.

Mike Mackrory

Leader of the ECC Liberal Democrats

Our Key Pledges

We will:

- Invest more in our highways, and pavements, pressing Government to help us halt the national and local decline in our highways.
- Introduce '20 is plenty' speed limits near schools and in residential areas to help make walking and cycling safer, improve air quality and reduce road accidents.
- Reduce the amount of waste going to incineration and fight against pollution, fly tipping and water company releases of sewerage.
- Reverse the cuts to the Essex Youth Service to help our young people build skills, confidence and a sense of community. And reverse fees and cuts in our library services.
- Work with the National Health Service and other partners to tackle the causes of ill health and inequality.
- Invest in our parks and bring more trees into our towns and cities, helping reduce summer heat and air pollution.
- Support Local Government Reorganisation that keeps a local sense of identity, community and place, where all services come from one local council, built around our key towns and cities of Chelmsford, Colchester, Basildon, Harlow and Southend.

Our Priorities for Essex

Local Government Reorganisation

The government has, almost at the last moment, finally announced the number of Unitary Councils in Essex that will, from April 2028, replace the existing Essex County Council, the twelve District and two existing unitary councils that make up Greater Essex. They will be replaced by five new Unitary Councils. Therefore, councillors elected on 7th May will only serve for one year and eleven months. Unless of course the government changes its plans!

Liberal Democrats, who supported the five unitary proposals, have welcomed this announcement as the three Unitaries proposed by Essex County Council Conservatives, would have meant mega councils with populations of between 600,000 and 700,000. So comparable in size to Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow. We believe Essex is different. Our local identities and sense of place being very important to our local communities. People need a local government that understands their local community, that's effective, that listens to them and most importantly that they can influence.

After the election and until April 2028, when the new Unitaries take over, the County Council must concentrate on working with its successor councils to ensure the smooth transition of services to five Unitary Councils whilst maintaining a high-quality outcome for our residents.

A Greener Essex

Liberal Democrats have always promoted policies for safeguarding our environment. We have led the campaign both in Parliament and outside, to stop water companies pumping filthy sewage into our rivers and seas. The Conservatives gave water companies free rein to pollute our waters, damaging local wildlife and making swimmers sick.

Priority must be given to retrofitting all council-owned buildings to meet carbon-neutral standards by installing solar panels on its buildings and to save energy costs.

We will preserve council owned public green open spaces and continue implementing ambitious tree planting strategies. Working with District Councils we can reduce the amount of waste going to incineration with incentives to increase recycling rates to at least 60%.

Reducing the amount of short car journeys taking place in Essex is critical to reducing emissions and congestion. In acknowledgement of this, ambitious schemes for improved cycling and walking in inner urban areas must be brought forward. Prioritising the implementation of these plans, alongside a major programme of pavement and footway repairs will enable modal change. Introducing '20 is plenty' speed limits near schools and in residential areas will help make walking and cycling safer, improve air quality and reduce road accidents.

A Fairer Essex

To achieve a fairer Essex, we need to focus on providing better care for the elderly and improving prospects for young people. By reversing the cuts to the Youth Service budget, we can increase the availability and accessibility of Essex's facilities and youth services.

This has particular benefits for difficult to reach young people as it provides them, and the outreach workers providing help, with a base.

With regard to child poverty and hunger, we believe a county council has a duty of care and as such needs to identify those families who need additional support and continue to provide free school meals both in term and holiday time.

As the country's understanding of the importance of mental health increases, Liberal Democrats will promote access to regular exercise, employment opportunities, and days out which are key to healthy residents.

We will ensure fair access for all, overcoming disadvantage and discrimination by providing:

- School places for all avoiding long distance travel
- Providing properly funded support to struggling, "failing" schools
- Swimming concessions for the under 16's
- Reinstating funding cuts to the Youth Services budget
- Protection to concessionary transport fares for pensioners
- Concessionary transport fares for those on Universal Credit, or equivalents, or undertaking Apprenticeships
- Continued access to libraries; no closures, cuts to opening hours or reservation charges
- Extend the Safer School Streets programme
- Challenge the Government's refusal to fund capital spending schemes ie the A12 and A120 widening schemes
- Challenge the postponement of the A127/A1245 Fairglen junction scheme
- We will ensure the £43m of developer contributions is spent on highway improvements rather than sitting in the County Council's bank account.

A Fairer Essex: Adult Social Care

The demand for adult social care is growing and cannot be met without more expenditure. This accounts for 47% (net) of ECC expenditure so there is an urgent need for all-party agreement for a long-term plan. The long-awaited Adult Social Care White Paper has been published but has yet to be implemented. This must be properly funded by the government so that people are treated with care and dignity either in their own home or in a care home setting.

A Better Deal for Essex

Good education is the key to fair opportunities for all, and we would look to end the shortage of school places where they exist.

The current countywide approach results in pupils travelling unreasonable distances or busing pupils to schools which have surplus places as an alternative to providing new places and in some cases, new schools. We will continue to question why £117.9m of developer contributions for new schools, extensions and improvements is sitting in the Council's coffers waiting to be spent.

To help with pupil performance we would ensure the educational support services are properly funded. This includes the School Improvement Team who keep a check on pupil progress by termly data and intervene where required.

The government's white paper on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is cautiously welcomed while we wait to see if the proposals for new Special Schools and placements in mainstream schools, are properly funded.

The Liberal Democrats would tackle crime by supporting properly resourced Neighbourhood Policing Teams. Our plan to abolish the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner to save money for front line policing, was voted down by the Tories. We would return democratic control to locally elected councillors instead saving £2.1m pa. Further savings could be made by for example scrapping the failed facial recognition scheme. We will oppose any more police station closures.

Over the last four years Conservative-run Essex County Council has let down residents, especially young people, the elderly and vulnerable people. Cuts to budgets have caused years of delays to local road safety schemes, and a massive backlog of pavement repairs. Extra funding must be found for the safety of pedestrians and road users alike.

Whilst we must recognise the realities of our national spending situation, this doesn't always have to be at the resident's expense. All public bodies must play their part in cutting costs and increasing revenues where they can. Liberal Democrat run councils up and down the country do just that and we would do the same.

MJM/DK 13/4/26