



Delivery Plan

April 2026

Sponsored by:



Essex County Council

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Chair's Foreword

It has been a privilege to chair the Essex Caring Communities Commission over the past two years.

When we began this work, our ambition was clear: to understand how we could build a future in which people, organisations, and communities across Essex feel empowered to play an active role in the things that matter most to them. We believe deeply that the strength, resilience, and wellbeing of our county rests not only in the services we provide, but in the relationships we nurture and the capacity we unlock within our communities.

The Commission has listened to hundreds of voices: residents, volunteers, community groups, local partners, and system leaders. Their contributions have shaped a shared vision of an Essex where everyone can influence, connect, and belong; where communities are supported to act; and where public services work alongside people as partners, not solely as providers.

This Delivery Plan translates that vision into the now twenty-two concrete actions, each stewarded by individuals, organisations and partnerships committed to taking this work forward. It reflects a whole-system endeavour, rooted in collaboration, reciprocal generosity, trust, and a belief that real change happens closest to communities themselves.

As my formal role with the Commission comes to a close, I am proud to hand custody of this important work to the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board. The Board is well placed to continue championing these principles and to support our action stewards as they turn ambition into sustained impact. Their leadership will be essential in ensuring that the plans set out here continue to move forwards, grow, evolve, and deliver meaningful benefits for residents across our county.

My deepest thanks go to everyone who has been part of the Commission. Your insight, passion, and determination have been the driving force behind this movement.

I am confident that, together, we have laid the foundations for a more connected, compassionate, and caring Essex: one where communities flourish and where the wellbeing of all our residents is strengthened for years to come.



Councillor Beverley Egan,
Chair of the Essex Caring
Communities Commission

Background

The Essex Caring Communities Commission (“The Commission”) has been an independent, two-year Commission that began its work in May 2024.

Its objective was to understand what changes are needed to respond to rising and unsustainable pressures across health and social care in Essex. Central to this was recognising and valuing the vital contribution that community stakeholders and citizens make to society. The Commission’s core purpose was to cultivate, develop, and recommend radical, preventative, community-focused solutions that improve wellbeing and reduce long-term demand on services and that enable citizens and communities to have more agency on decisions that affect them.

Year 1 of the Commission brought together eleven independent Commissioners who gathered primary and secondary evidence from sectors including the National Health Service (NHS), charities, universities, political groups, and think tanks. The Commission engaged with national and local experts in their fields including community groups, residents and service users. At the end of year 1 **The Essex Caring Communities Commission report** (www.essex.gov.uk/adult-social-care-and-health/essex-caring-communities-commission), set out twenty three actions focussed on delivering radical change that would shift Essex toward a more preventative state, and strengthen community connections to improve health, wellbeing, and the sustainability of public services.

The report was well supported by our Essex system leaders and stakeholders, all of whom contributed to the Commission, and was welcomed by national experts in the field of health and social care and Members of Parliament where the report was celebrated at an event in July 2025.

Year 2 has seen the work of the Commission being taken forward by key Essex System Leaders who have acted as custodians of the Commission and ensured there has been a maintained momentum to shape the now twenty two actions into this delivery plan. The group is formed of senior leaders from the County and District Councils, health and social care, the voluntary and community sector, and the police, and maintained cross party-political representation. Their role has been to:

- Be custodians of the Commission and preserve the integrity of the intentions of it.
- Maintain momentum and create urgency and buy-in.
- Galvanise system response to deliver the actions.
- Use their span of influence to capitalise on this opportunity to generate culture and behavioural change.

We are moving through an era of significant and unprecedented change in Essex: the imminent forming of a Greater Essex Combined Authority; the transition to five new unitary councils under Local Government Reorganisation (“LGR”) and from April 2026 a new single Greater Essex Integrated Care Board.

These new structures offer significant opportunities to support the delivery of the Commission’s agenda.

Key Themes

The Commission recognised that communities and civil society are a major source of strength, with carers, neighbours, voluntary groups and social enterprises contributing significantly to wellbeing across the county.

However, widening inequality and rising deprivation, deepened by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, mean many residents are increasingly vulnerable, reinforcing the need for collective action to tackle the wider determinants of health and to build health rather than simply responding to illness.

The Commission emphasised that public services must be redesigned around prevention, as current reactive models are unsustainable under rising demand pressures. With the advent of devolution and LGR in Greater Essex, there is a golden opportunity to reshape the local state around community empowerment and preventative approaches.

Underpinning all of this is the need for a major cultural and operational shift: moving away from hierarchical, top-down public service delivery towards shared purpose, co-design and genuine community influence over decisions that affect their lives.

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Communities and civil society are a source of huge strength
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Collective action is needed to tackle the wider determinants of health and to build health rather than just prevent illness
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Public services need to be redesigned and reconfigured to put prevention first
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Public services need to change not just the what but also the how
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Devolution and LGR in Greater Essex


The Vision

The Commission's vision is for Essex to become a place where communities are healthy, active, empowered and inclusive, supported by strong economic, social, physical and natural foundations.

It called for a fundamental shift towards prevention and community-led approaches, where public services work differently, in partnership with local people, focused on strengthening social capital, dismantling barriers to wellbeing, and enabling residents to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

In doing so we can build a more resilient, connected and equitable Essex in which community capacity, early action and shared responsibility underpin long-term health and wellbeing.



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Healthy:
have high levels of health and wellbeing
- 

Active:
have access to work and physical and social activity
- 

Empowered:
have a sense of agency in creating their own future and involvement in decisions that affect them
- 

Inclusive:
that the benefits of the above apply to all members of our communities including those who are most disadvantaged; there can be no one left behind

≡ The Commitments

Our Places

Commit to renewing our places as thriving communities by dismantling the barriers to wellbeing and opportunity.

Work

Commit to preparing all our residents for the future world of work and ensuring the right access to training and employment.

Civil Society

Commit to vitalising community capacity by igniting the potential in civil society.

Community Influence

Commit to reshaping decision making by ensuring that communities have an active role in decisions that affect them.

Prevention

Commit to prioritising prevention by putting in place a new “prevention first” approach across public services.

These commitments anchor a shift towards prevention, advocating for a system-wide move to a **prevention-first** model across public services so that root causes are addressed early, demand pressures are reduced, and long-term wellbeing is strengthened.

Together, these commitments form the foundation for a transformed approach to care and community life in Essex, rooted in partnership, empowerment and shared purpose.



≡ The Enablers

The Commission emphasises that achieving its vision will depend on a set of system-wide enablers that create the right conditions for change.



Together, these enablers provide the foundation for embedding prevention, strengthening community influence, and ensuring the 22 actions can be delivered meaningfully and sustainably across Essex. Strong stewardship, underpinned by a clear collective purpose, will be critical to ensuring the actions result in learning and change at the dawn of new local government structures.

- **Residents have an active voice** – political decisions are the product of fair and reasonable debate among residents. Residents need to be involved in decision making in a way where we all have a real say.
- **Strategic and Place-based Planning** – decisions around planning and the make-up of a place cannot be taken in isolation. We all need to see the bigger picture and take decisions in respect to key policy areas which benefit the wider place and community and create efficiencies and maximise resources.
- **Cross agency resourcing focused on the most urgent matters** – organisations need to collaborate and align or integrate their funding and capacity to maximise impact. This will ensure a more coherently planned focus on the right things for maximum impact.
- **Understanding lived experience** – the Commission regularly heard how the lived experience of residents and service users is important to all that we do. Policy and strategy should start with the lived experience of our residents, service users and communities so that the decisions taken reflect their realities and needs.
- **Co-production** – agencies need to commit to co-production, the processes through which public bodies and communities work in equal partnership, with equal weight, and those using services are consulted, included, and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them.
- **Adopting fit for purpose routes to commissioning with purpose-focused organisations** – the Commission heard about the need to move away from traditional institutionally driven procurement models and adopt new routes to commissioning public value services with purpose-focused organisations taking a collaborative approach to delivering outcomes.
- **Freeing up community assets** – communities need organisations to enable them to do the things they want to and can do for themselves. Having access to assets held by public bodies was something which came up throughout the commission’s work. Organisations need to free up their assets for community use.
- **Eliminating bureaucracy that prevents resident engagement in decision making and access** – public services and their processes are often clunky and do not always lend themselves to supporting engagement with residents and communities and involving them in a meaningful way. Organisations need to remove the barriers to effective engagement.

The Action Plans

During the nine months since the Commission was published there has been extensive engagement with partnerships, people and organisations, as well as different sector leaders, primarily through meetings and workshops.

In total, over 400 people have engaged with the actions to develop them further so that they can be delivered in a meaningful way. This has meant thinking strategically about what fits with the future intentions for local government in Essex, central government policy and strategies and importantly, the successful work that is already happening in Essex.

The actions have been categorised as follows:



Actions that align to the in-coming Combined Authority



Actions that enable new cultures and behaviours



Actions that are driven by communities and directly support community stakeholders



Actions that complement current delivery and/or support national policy and reform

Most of the actions have been through several iterations, shaped by the people who know the themes and work best, and as a result there are now 22 actions with two having been combined. As with all effective work, this evolution will continue as we progress, learn, and put the actions into practice. What remains constant, however, is that each of them is anchored in the Commission's findings and has a clear, purposeful objective.

Each action is led by an **Action Steward** who will be the convener of those stakeholders critical to ensuring effective delivery. Action Stewards are either individuals, organisations or partnerships. The stewardship approach is a deliberate recognition that no single organisation or individual can 'own' the solutions. Instead, it is designed to foster the collective leadership, shared problem-solving and joint accountability needed to make progress.

This collaborative way of working will be especially critical as the system navigates significant change, where strong, trust-based partnerships will be essential to maintaining momentum and delivering meaningful behavioural cultural change.



Actions that align to the in-coming Combined Authority



Establish an Office of Prevention within the new Mayoral Combined Authority that will support the shift to a more preventative system of public services. The Office of Prevention should work with system partners to sustain and increase effective spending on prevention and agree guidelines for how this should be done.

Action Steward: Essex County Council's Policy Unit and the Greater Essex Combined Authority.

Why it matters: Health and social care account for two fifths of central and local government spending and demand and costs continue to rise. Public services are struggling to manage this demand. The Commission highlighted the imperative to shift funding towards prevention and early intervention to prevent, reduce, or delay demand for more expensive statutory and specialist health and social care services.

The Challenge: To embed a prevention first culture at the heart of the new Greater Essex authorities, supporting people earlier and reducing demand on health and social care by focusing on the wider determinants of health.

Aims and Objectives: An Office of Prevention will enable the new Greater Essex Mayoral Combined Authority to support a coordinated, system-wide drive towards preventative public services. It will strengthen and grow investment in prevention, generate robust evidence for what works, and promote best practice across the system. By informing long-term strategic decision-making and supporting greater integration across health, education, social care, housing, transport and community services, the Office will enable more joined-up, preventative approaches that deliver better outcomes for residents and reduce demand.

The Plan: These intentions will be developed by a local government reorganisation working group that brings together the health, social care and other key partners. A cross-sector taskforce will then define the remit and governance arrangements for the new Office of Prevention. Its work will focus on developing methodologies to audit existing spend and activity to identify gaps and duplication; creating an impact framework aligned with Department for Health and Social Care and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy guidelines; and producing a business case that sets out the delivery model, funding requirements and resource plan.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national health and social care prevention priorities, the Care Act prevention duty, the Families First Partnership children's social care reforms, and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill that strengthens early intervention. It also reflects NHS commitments to expand prevention and integrated care as set out in national NHS planning priorities to tackling health inequalities and is consistent with parliamentary recommendations calling for stronger local governance and clearer frameworks for prevention spending across health, housing and community services.



Develop and implement the statutory Greater Essex Transport Plan that will set the strategic transport priorities for the future Mayor and the Combined Authority, guiding investment, connectivity and long-term infrastructure planning across the region, which will include a focus on connecting places at a local level.

Action Steward: Highways and Transportation and the Greater Essex Combined Authority.

Why it matters: Transport is a critical enabler of community wellbeing, independence and opportunity. For many residents, especially those in rural, coastal and underserved areas, limited transport is a major barrier to accessing essential services, employment, education, social connection and healthcare. Poor connectivity contributes directly to poorer health outcomes, higher demand on health and social care, and deeper inequalities across the county.

Aims and Objectives: The new Greater Essex Combined Authority (GERA) will inherit the existing Local Transport Plans (LTPs) from Essex, Southend and Thurrock and then will build from these a new integrated Greater Essex Local Transport Plan. This will provide the strategic framework needed to support a single, coordinated transport strategy for the whole area. We will take this unique opportunity to close the gap between strategic transport planning and community realities, ensuring that improved connectivity becomes not only a stated policy intention but a lived experience for residents across rural, coastal and under-served areas.

The Plan: Short term, work will focus on progressing what is phase 2 of the shared transport evidence base to support development of the future Greater Essex LTP, and on agreeing the scope of preliminary LTP work. At the same time, adoption of the existing LTPs for Essex, Thurrock and Southend will be completed by December 2026.

The long-term intention is to embed these transport aims within future unitary authority strategies and develop a more integrated, place-based approach to transport planning across Greater Essex. This includes capturing community insight into lived transport barriers, identifying local enablers and gaps through mapping community-level assets, and supporting pilot projects that test community-led transport solutions with potential to scale.

Over time, these activities will feed into a **Community Connectivity Briefing**, providing insight-driven input into the future Greater Essex Transport Plan and shaping early mayoral priorities.

Policy Links: These short-term and long-term transport intentions align with national policy, particularly the Government's emerging Integrated National Transport Strategy, which promotes an integrated, people-focused approach to designing and delivering transport systems across England. They also reflect the national shift toward vision-led, place-based planning that prioritises active travel, local needs and multimodal connectivity, and supports wider government objectives to improve access to jobs, education, services and healthier places through better transport infrastructure and planning.



Set up a Local Community Wellbeing Transport Fund within the new Mayoral Combined Authority to embed community connectivity as a central pillar of strategic transport planning and to align funding from across the system to improve wellbeing and access to social and economic opportunities, particularly in rural and coastal communities.

Action Steward: Highways & Transportation and the Greater Essex Combined Authority.

Why it matters: Many of Essex's most disadvantaged communities, particularly in rural and coastal areas, face greater barriers to accessing employment, essential services, and opportunities for social connection. These communities also tend to have higher reliance on health and social care services. The Commission highlighted that transport plays a critical enabling role in connecting people to public services and wider economic and social opportunities, especially where public transport is limited. Improving transport connectivity therefore offers one of the highest returns on investment for health and wellbeing in isolated areas.

The Challenge: To better align transport provision with the location of health, social care and community services by bringing together funding, planning and decision making across the system. This requires placing transport at the heart of how we design and deliver community and health infrastructure, ensuring strategic coordination rather than siloed interventions.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to explore how funding from across the system can be aligned to support shared outcomes through targeted investment in transport connectivity. Combined with new Mayoral powers, this approach will enable more inclusive, accessible and sustainable transport solutions that directly improve wellbeing and unlock opportunities for communities that are currently underserved.

The Plan: Partners will work together to agree shared goals that define the transport challenges that must be addressed to improve wellbeing and opportunity. This will be supported by an audit of existing internal and external funding to identify current transport related investment, highlight opportunities for alignment, and explore new funding sources from partners with shared outcomes. Community insight will be captured to understand residents' lived experiences of transport barriers and priorities for accessing essential services. Using this evidence, a joint investment framework will be developed to enable flexible pooling of resources, with the option to pilot joined up transport solutions in selected communities where funding allows. Finally, these insights and learning will form the basis of a briefing to inform the Connectivity Briefing for the incoming Mayor's strategy for improving connectivity in isolated areas.

Policy Links: This action aligns with the Government's emerging Integrated National Transport Strategy, which aims to create a more joined-up, people-focused transport system and improve connectivity in rural and coastal areas. It also reflects national priorities for vision-led, locally driven planning that integrates transport with wider social outcomes such as health, education and employment. In addition, it supports the Government's transport objectives to reduce inequalities and enhance access to essential services through more coordinated investment and better regional transport planning.



Increase the provision of retirement and specialist housing significantly to meet needs, support independent living and strengthen representation of community voice, lived experience, and place-based insight so that they are meaningfully embedded in discussions and decisions on new supply.

Action Steward: Essex Sustainable Growth Team - Housing.

Why it matters: Well-designed housing and places can make a positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of residents offering safe and supportive places to live. Good quality supported housing enables independent living into old age and unlocks better outcomes for vulnerable people. There is a growing need for Extra Care housing for older people and people with disabilities, with provision across social rent and for sale tenures. This is driven by increasingly complex needs among residents requiring more tailored support, including mental health. The Commission highlighted that homelessness, poor quality housing, affordability and a lack of independent living accommodation present significant challenges for Essex, which contribute to poor outcomes.

The Challenge: Essex must significantly increase the supply of retirement and specialist homes to meet this rising need, making more effective use of grant funding, the public estate and brownfield sites. A 2025 needs assessment found that one in eight new homes required by 2040 must be supported or specialist accommodation. Ensuring that this type of housing is embedded in strategic planning, housing growth discussions, and the development of new governance structures, including unitary authorities and the Mayoral Combined Authority, is essential to meeting future demand.

Aims and Objectives: This action will be delivered through existing housing forums, such as the Supported Housing Partnership Board, and in collaboration with the Mayoral Combined Authority. New Mayoral planning

powers will be used to increase specialist housing supply, support independent living and strengthen links between housing, health and wellbeing. Local planning policies will be shaped to ensure they support the requirement that one in eight new homes across Essex must be specialist and supported accommodation.

The Plan: Preparatory work will focus on ensuring that specialist and supported housing are embedded at the heart of new strategic planning arrangements as unitary authorities and the Mayoral Combined Authority are established. We will promote the importance of specialist housing to funders and developers so that it is fully reflected in investment pipelines and business plans. Lived experience will be captured to shape housing design and ensure it meets the needs of residents.

Community assets that complement specialist and retirement housing will be mapped, and a community-insight briefing will be produced to influence strategic housing plans and the incoming Mayor's agenda. We will champion inclusive design principles that prioritise accessibility, wellbeing and social connection, support innovation through pilot projects testing new models with local authorities and communities, and advocate for community-led planning in the use of brownfield and public estate through the Essex One Public Estate programme.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national priorities to expand specialist and supported housing, improve independent living, and integrate housing with wider health and wellbeing outcomes. It reflects the Government's emphasis on vision-led, locally driven planning, better use of public estate and brownfield land, and coordinated investment to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.



Actions that enable new cultures and behaviours



Set up a Social Networking Programme to strengthen the social ties that support greater wellbeing (bonding social capital); and support greater opportunities (bridging social capital). It will focus in our most disadvantaged communities and will strengthen the networks that connect them to local economic geographies.

Action Steward: ECC Policy Unit, Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and Colchester City Council.

Why it matters: The Commission identified stronger social connections as essential for improving health, wellbeing and opportunity. Social capital, the relationships, trust and networks that connect people, helps communities thrive and reduces reliance on public services. Evidence shows stronger social connections are linked to better health, resilience and life chances, while weaker connections contribute to poorer outcomes, lower trust and fewer opportunities, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

The Challenge: To strengthen bonding and bridging social capital for residents facing the greatest disadvantage. The RSA's work will support young people to improve their career and life chances by building the diversity, depth and quality of their social connections helping build confidence, aspiration, and access to opportunity. This includes creating more opportunities for trusted relationships to develop, alongside wider connections across different backgrounds, communities and networks.

Aims and Objectives: The pilot will apply the RSA's Connected Places approach in Greenstead, Colchester to test how stronger social connections can improve outcomes at neighbourhood level. It will generate practical learning about how local relationships, community activity and wider connections can be strengthened in ways that are sustainable and shaped by local priorities.

The Plan: Greenstead has been selected for the pilot because it offers a strong opportunity to maximise impact by building on existing local strengths, partnerships and community capacity. The pilot will strengthen relationships between residents, community groups, services and employers; support practical, community-led activity that improves everyday connections; build evidence on what improves trust, participation and opportunity locally; and develop a model that can be replicated across Essex. Together, existing programmes and the Connected Places pilot will create a unique opportunity to coordinate and amplify the impact of several programmes in a way that best serves residents. Over time, this will help create a stronger neighbourhood where residents feel more connected, supported and able to access opportunities.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national commitments to strengthen public participation and civic engagement set out in the UK's Open Government Action Plan and supports NHS duties to work in genuine partnership with people and communities. It is also consistent with national youth policy, including the Youth Guarantee and the National Youth Strategy, which prioritise connection, participation and improved life chances for young people.



Pilot a Greater Essex Residents Assembly to enable residents to genuinely shape how we move to more preventative and enabling conditions in Essex, including considering tough choices and trade-offs.

Action Steward: Greater Essex Integrated Care Board, Essex Public Health and Wellbeing and ECC Policy Unit.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted the need to engage residents in decision making about health and social care and the proposed shifts from treatment to prevention and hospital to community health delivery. Residents' assemblies enable inclusive and participatory decision-making. They bring together a diverse group of residents to deliberate on key issues, helping to shape policies and services that reflect the needs and values of the wider community. By fostering dialogue, building trust, and encouraging shared ownership of solutions, an assembly will lead to democratic engagement that will result in more informed, legitimate, and effective outcomes.

The Challenge: To pilot a Greater Essex Residents Assembly (GERA) that will engage residents in a deliberative democratic process around a key health and social care issue with the aim of shaping strategic decision making across the public sector.

Aims and Objectives: This action aims to run a GERA designed to deliver inclusive participation in decision-making on topics or issues, ideas and recommendations through deliberation and learning; enhanced trust and legitimacy, and actionable recommendations grounded in community values and realities.

The Plan: A GERA will be established by the Essex Research and Citizen's Insight team with the purpose of deliberating and make recommendations to local policy makers on a key challenge facing the local health and care system. A phased approach is planned to help establish the most effective way to embed the model. The first phase is to develop a proposal for a residents assembly approach. Public Health and the Greater Essex Integrated Care Board will inform the design of this proposal and will define the key challenge which will focus on prevention, with a clear route to decision-making.

The second phase will be to pilot the proposed assembly model centred on the challenge identified in phase one. An independent body or agent will manage the deliberative process, ensuring that residents can make well informed recommendations. If the pilot is successful, the final phase will be to explore the supporting infrastructure required to fully embed the residents assembly model in decision-making across the public sector. By building community insight into decision making, future policy and service delivery may secure more legitimacy and better outcomes.

Policy Links: Piloting a Greater Essex Residents' Assembly on prevention aligns with the UK's Open Government commitments on public participation and empowering communities. It also aligns with the NHS and Integrated Care System duties to involve people and communities in setting prevention strategy.



Set up a Greater Essex Bold Commissioners Group that will support commissioners of public services across the system to go further in adopting relational routes to commissioning for public benefit. This will mean greater co-design of services with communities and local providers.

Action Steward: Public Digital and ECC Commissioners.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted the need to commission services differently to build local community capacity. Relational commissioning in public services is an approach that emphasises building strong, collaborative relationships between commissioners and service providers, particularly the Voluntary and Community Sector and Social Enterprises. The aim is to focus on mutual trust, shared values and ongoing communication to ensure that services are tailored to meet the needs of individuals and communities effectively. This approach contrasts with traditional commissioning methods that often focus more on procurement, purchasing and contracting as isolated activities.

The Challenge: To support public sector commissioners to adopt relational commissioning with local service providers. This cultural transformation requires expedited governance, diverse decision-making and a removal of competitive barriers that currently stifle collaboration. By aligning with the Community Investment and Prevention System action, the group can bridge the deficit through authentic co-design.

Aims and Objectives: This action aims to deliver greater social value and impacts for public funding. We will co-design services that meet local needs more effectively and efficiently. We will share and improve knowledge among service providers and commissioners. This aims to build trust in public services and improve their sustainability.

The Plan: This action will focus on innovation and future-proofing public service delivery through strategic collaboration and expert-led training. In collaboration with Public Digital and Stone King, a **Bold Commissioners** learning programme will be designed with and for public sector partners. Chief Executive Officers of public service authorities and organisations will be invited to nominate representatives to participate in a relational commissioning learning programme that aims to ensure that following devolution more local and impactful services are delivered for people in Essex.

Policy Links: This supports national policy shifts toward more collaborative, community-centred public services. It aligns with the recent Procurement Act's move toward more flexible, transparent and social-value-driven commissioning and with government policy emphasis on strengthening social capital and empowering local places. It also reflects NHS and wider local government public sector duties to involve communities and work in partnership, reinforcing the national direction toward co-design, prevention and relational models of delivery.





Actions that are driven by community and that directly support community stakeholders



Maximise investment in Civil Society to increase its capacity to deliver sustained impact for Essex residents and communities.

Action Steward: Essex Community Foundation.

Why it matters: Civil Society is defined as the collective actions and organisations of citizens who come together to advance shared interests, values, or causes. It describes the “third sector” distinct from the public sector and private sector. The Commission highlighted a significant external funding gap and the need continuously to improve leadership skills and capabilities in the voluntary and community sector (VCSE) in Essex to unlock its full potential. VCSE organisations in Essex are too often asked to deliver long-term outcomes through short-term, disconnected funding, without the influence or support needed to shape the system. There is an opportunity to mobilise long-term investment, to reform how funding flows and to build the system leadership needed to deliver community-led, preventative outcomes across Essex.

The Challenge: The challenge is to reshape the funding, commissioning and leadership environment so that communities benefit from long-term, coordinated and insight-driven investment. This requires creating a system where public bodies, funders and the VCSE sector work in genuine partnership, with shared priorities and aligned resources. By building a more connected and sustainable approach, Essex can ensure community-led organisations have the stability, influence and support needed to plan confidently and deliver long-term, preventative outcomes.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to develop a system that enables VCSE organisations to plan, lead and deliver long-term, preventative outcomes by shifting from fragmented short-term funding to long-term, trust-based investment. It seeks to strengthen VCSE influence in commissioning and system leadership, grow community and system leadership to steward investment, and ensure funding, commissioning and prevention are aligned to support sustainable community-led change.

The Plan: We will work with commissioners, funders and VCSE organisations to address core system challenges and benchmark Essex against areas with higher levels of investment. It will develop system and community leadership capacity, enabling leaders to shape funding and commissioning decisions and strengthen the sector’s influence. Through collaboration with the Bold Commissioners Group, the work will help position local VCSE organisations as suppliers of choice and ensure Essex is ready for long-term, shared investment.

Policy Links: This action supports national priorities to strengthen civil society and community capacity, reflected in the Open Government Action Plan’s emphasis on deeper public participation and in NHS partnership duties that highlight the importance of community-led models.



Establish a Network of Public Sector Assets to enable people to utilise more public sector assets for community benefit and to exercise greater agency over their lives and the places that they live.

Action Steward: Maldon District Council.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that giving communities greater access to both physical and non-physical public sector assets deliver significant social and wellbeing benefits. When residents can use local spaces, equipment and expertise, they are better able to act on what matters to them, strengthening community agency, confidence and local ownership of solutions. Over time, this builds stronger relationships with public services, enhances social connection and enables more sustainable use of the assets already present in our places.

The Challenge: Communities currently lack clear or consistent routes to access public sector assets. The challenge is to create simpler, more transparent and more equitable pathways that enable residents to make full use of the spaces, resources and knowledge available within the system.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to identify assets and access mechanisms that make it easier and more effective for communities to use public sector resources. This will reduce duplication, support optimal use of public assets, and empower residents to have greater influence over local spaces and opportunities. The action will be piloted in Maldon with the intention of scaling across Greater Essex.

The Plan: Building on the strong foundations of the One Maldon District Partnership, the pilot will map physical and non-physical public sector assets, understand current access routes, and identify barriers and duplication. Working with local partners and community groups, the programme will design simple, effective mechanisms for accessing spaces, equipment and expertise. Learning from the pilot will be used to develop a scalable model that enables communities across Greater Essex to use public assets more easily and exercise greater agency in shaping their local areas.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national policy goals to strengthen participation and transparency in public life, as set out in the UK’s Open Government Action Plan, and with NHS statutory guidance emphasising the role of community partnership and locally led wellbeing initiatives.





Celebrating Essex: recognising and celebrating the impact that community projects and outstanding individuals are having on improving health and wellbeing in communities.

Action Steward: The Essex VCS Alliance.

Why it matters: The efforts of people and organisations doing exceptional work in their communities often go unseen and uncelebrated. The Commission highlighted the importance of elevating these contributions, so they are valued, recognised and visible. Celebrating local action strengthens community pride, reinforces positive behaviours and helps build the confidence and connection that underpin strong, caring communities.

The Challenge: To raise awareness of the outstanding contributions residents and organisations make to improving local wellbeing, and to ensure these stories receive the recognition they deserve.

Aims and Objectives: To increase public awareness of exceptional community work across Greater Essex and inspire more residents and organisations to get involved, contribute and support local community life.

The Plan: We will work with community organisations to identify existing recognition activities and pathways. It will gather, coordinate and amplify compelling stories and case studies that showcase the tangible difference residents and groups make. The work will explore what forms of recognition communities most value, to inform future approaches that strengthen civic pride and deepen the visibility of community contribution.

Policy Links: This action aligns with the Government's mission to restore local pride and belonging, which emphasises the value of strong civic institutions and celebrating community contribution to strengthen social capital and local identity.



To embed the use of Asset Based Community Development approaches across Essex by co-developing best practice for working with communities in a strengths-based approach and enabling local people to know, access and utilise local assets.

Action Steward: Active Essex Foundation.

Why it matters: Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a sustainable, community-driven approach that focuses on identifying, connecting and mobilising the strengths already present in communities: people's skills, local associations and physical resources, rather than concentrating on deficits. The Commission highlighted the need for greater consistency in how ABCD is applied, as well as the importance of making community assets more visible and accessible to residents. Public sector organisations also need to open up more of their spaces and resources to enable communities to act on the things that matter to them.

The Challenge: Traditional top-down approaches can erode community trust and limit agency by doing things to communities rather than with them. A more collaborative and transparent system is needed to ensure that the strengths of communities and their assets are consistently recognised, accessible and visible to residents and community groups, particularly at a time when change and low trust mean that communities need to be engaged differently.

Aims and Objectives: Embedding a unified and consistent approach to ABCD will create an inclusive and scalable model that empowers communities, strengthens local relationships and supports strategic planning across Greater Essex.



The Plan: The Essex ABCD Network will be developed to support commissioners, partners and organisations to adopt strength-based methods in a consistent and practical way. A stakeholder survey will establish current understanding and use of ABCD across Essex, informing a comprehensive toolkit and support offer. This will include access to the ABCD network, practical workshops, peer support, and a partner hub on the Active Essex Foundation website (shared via Your Essex Community and the E-Portal) featuring best practice, tools and templates. This will ensure ABCD can be embedded effectively across local systems and communities.

Policy Links: This action aligns with Open Government Action Plan's focus on community voice, participation and co-production as well as national policy commitments in NHS statutory guidance requiring systems to work with people and communities. It also supports the government's long-term direction for procurement to have asset-based, community-led approaches.





Grow active citizenship across Essex by expanding inclusive, accessible volunteering opportunities that empower more people to support their communities, boost their wellbeing, skills and opportunities.

Action Steward: Wellbeing Public Health.

Why it matters: Volunteering strengthens skills, confidence and purpose, helping people connect with others, improve their wellbeing and feel part of something meaningful. Many volunteers also gain experience that enhances employability and broadens future opportunities. The Commission emphasised the need to create a compelling purpose for volunteering and to design flexible, accessible ways for residents to contribute, supported by clear, inspiring communication of opportunities.

The Challenge: To increase the number of Essex residents getting involved in their local communities and to improve the co-ordination, communication of, and routes to, volunteering opportunities.

Aims and Objectives: To build a more inclusive and accessible foundation for volunteering across Greater Essex by developing a shared baseline of current activity, increasing awareness of opportunities, and strengthening the skills and confidence people need to take part. This includes recognising diverse forms of volunteering, both formal and informal, and ensuring that residents can contribute in ways that match their circumstances and motivations.

The Plan: We will convene stakeholders to build a shared understanding of what volunteering and active citizenship looks like in practice across its full spectrum. It will identify the different types of opportunities that enable residents to participate in ways that suit their lives, capacities, and motivations. This action will give clear insights into gaps, challenges, and opportunities across the system and propose practical ideas for creating inclusive opportunities that reflect the diversity of residents' needs and capacities to increase the numbers getting involved in their local communities.

Policy Links: This action supports national commitments to broaden civic participation through the Open Government Action Plan and reflects NHS duties to involve communities meaningfully in shaping local wellbeing and prevention approaches.





Actions that complement current delivery and/or support national policy and reform



Establish a 50+ Task Force to double the numbers of 50+ residents in employment.

Action Steward: Essex Growth Agency.

Why it matters: The Commission identified that Essex faces persistent workforce shortages while increasing numbers of over-50s leave the labour market early due to ill health, caring responsibilities and inflexible work options. This represents a substantial untapped community asset. With an ageing population and rising dependency ratios, supporting more people to remain active, connected and economically involved is a critical lever for prevention, improved wellbeing and system resilience.

The Challenge: Residents aged 50+ are under-represented in the labour market and too often encounter barriers: outdated or misaligned skills; limited access to training and progression; health and caring pressures: age bias and inflexible working conditions. These lead to avoidable exit or under-employment and lost productivity for local businesses.

Aims and Objectives: Through a coordinated effort between training providers, employers and the Department for Work and Pensions, expand tailored training and employment support, widen access to flexible and age-positive jobs, and target interventions that enable the 50+ workforce to contribute fully, so employers can meet demand and local areas benefit from the skills, experience and potential of this demographic.

The Plan: A multi-agency steering group will develop a shared vision, commission insight on barriers and motivations, and co-design inclusive pathways for example, training, mid-career reviews, return-ships, employer toolkits. A coordinated communications campaign will shift public and employer perceptions and promote age-positive practices. Progress will be tracked against a common outcomes framework (participation, retention, progression, health and wellbeing), with a published impact report to embed learning, inform scaling, and sustain results.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national priorities to boost workforce participation, reduce economic inactivity among over-50s, and strengthen prevention through employment, consistent with government commitments to improve health, independence and productivity, expand opportunities for older workers, and promote partnership working across employment, health and skills systems.



Set up an Apprenticeship Programme for care leavers & young people with disabilities.

Action Steward: Essex Employment Board.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that care leavers and young people with disabilities in Essex face significant barriers to accessing quality training, work experience, and long-term employment. Thirty nine percent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 and 30% of young people with a disability are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This average NEET rate is 12.7% of all 16 to 24 year olds. Despite existing efforts, there remains a gap in inclusive opportunities that support these groups in transitioning successfully from education or training into sustainable work.

Essex Anchor Institutions and large businesses have a critical role to play in addressing this challenge by expanding apprenticeship programmes and implementing supported job opportunities. Without co-ordinated action, many individuals will continue to be excluded from the economic and social benefits of meaningful employment.

The Challenge: There is a significant shortage of inclusive opportunities that support these young people in transitioning successfully from education or training into sustainable meaningful work. Employers are often reluctant to recruit from these cohorts because of lack of understanding, and they inadvertently miss out of the value of their skills, diligence and loyalty by not being inclusive in their employment practices.

Aims and Objectives: We will encourage local employers to use the Growth and Skills Levy and the Youth Guarantee to increase inclusive employment opportunities by expanding the number of apprenticeship and work experience opportunities available to care leavers and people with disabilities across Essex. Improved access to training, work and tailored support will ensure these cohorts can secure sustainable employment.

The Plan: The Essex Employment Board will work to enhance inclusive career pathways through new and additional targeted apprenticeships and supported employment involving job coaching, ongoing support and workplace adjustments. The action will engage employers with best-practice guidance and toolkits to encourage them to adopt inclusive recruitment methods and openness to flexible working. Participants will be engaged and will receive wraparound support, including mentoring and mental health resources, to ensure long-term success.

The action will monitor progress through targets for job starts and retention and employee satisfaction metrics, ensuring these opportunities lead to sustainable career progression and empower care leavers and young people with disabilities to thrive in their roles.

Policy Links: This programme aligns with corporate-parenting duties and support for care leavers (Care Leaver Covenant; Children and Social Work Act 2017), uses current apprenticeship funding rules and levy arrangements (moving to the Growth & Skills Levy), and fits the Youth Guarantee's push for more apprenticeships and paid opportunities. It also meets Equality Act duties with reasonable adjustments and Access to Work, plus Disability Confident for inclusive hiring, and follows SEND/Supported Internship Guidance for young people with Education Health Care Plans.



Establish School (Reception) Ready Task Forces in priority areas to increase the number of children who are school ready so they can achieve at least the minimum expected Key Stage 2 standards by the age of 11.

Action Steward: Essex Better Start Board.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that a quarter of children fail to achieve a good level of development (GLD) by age five in communication & language; physical development; personal, social & emotional development; literacy; and mathematics – with many being (and remaining) years behind their classmates. A poor level of development strongly correlates with lower academic attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, with gaps often widening over time. Disadvantaged pupils are 1.5 times less likely to meet expected standards at Key Stage 2 and 1.7 times less likely at Key Stage 4. Key factors driving this correlation include persistent disadvantage, high absenteeism, and a lack of support for Special Educational Needs.

The Challenge: To meet our Best Start in Life target by increasing the percentage of pupils that are reception ready (have a good level of development) to 78.4% with at least 60% of children in the Free School Meals cohort achieving a GLD. The 2022 GLD average was 74.4% and the current lowest figure by district is 67.7%. At least 700 children would need to be identified and supported to achieve GLD in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This scale of intervention will help to increase school readiness levels to 78.4% of all children – securing them the best start to meet the minimum expected Key Stage 2 standards by age 11.

Aims and Objectives: We will establish School (Reception) Ready Task Forces in deprived communities. These task forces will work alongside families to understand what will help their children to be equipped with the social and emotional skills and support necessary to be ready to enter school reception classes.

The Plan: The Best Start in Life Board will set up a Task Force to add value to existing provision. It will use data to target high-need neighbourhoods and map services and gaps in provision. It will engage parents to understand their unique challenges and strengths with a view to empowering them with bespoke support. To meet the overall target, at least 700 children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods will need to be supported to reach GLD by age 5. Success relies on local champions and clear communications, with impact tracked through family feedback, management information and metrics for achievement of good level of development and over time Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 outcomes.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national early years policy by supporting the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework and GLD expectations. It reinforces the Family Hubs and Start for Life strategy to improve early development and the home learning environment, delivering early intervention within the Healthy Child Programme, meeting SEND Code of Practice duties, and strengthening progression towards national Key Stage 2 attainment standards.



Set up Essex Retirement Connections to support retirees to remain socially connected, active and contribute to their communities after they retire.

Action Steward: Provide CiC and Citizens Advice.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that older people already make a substantial contribution to society. People in their 50s and 60s provide the majority of unpaid care for disabled and older relatives, friends and neighbours, while those aged 65 to 74 are the most likely to volunteer both formally through clubs and community organisations and informally by supporting others. Yet this positive contribution sits alongside a stark contrast: social isolation and loneliness among retirees can severely damage physical and mental health, increasing the risk of heart disease, stroke, frailty, dementia and even premature mortality. Together, these insights underline both the enormous value older residents bring and the importance of supporting them to stay active, connected and involved in their communities.

The Challenge: As people retire, many face a decline in social connection, purpose, and opportunities to remain active and engaged in their communities. This can lead to increased isolation, reduced wellbeing, and under utilisation of the valuable skills and experience retirees possess. There is no one co-ordinated response across Essex to supporting retirees in maintaining meaningful activity and community involvement.

Aims and Objectives: To develop Essex Retirement Connections to support more retirees to stay socially connected, active and empowered to contribute to their communities as they prepare for and move through retirement so that both individual wellbeing and collective social capital is enhanced.

The Plan: A working group will be convened to work with people with lived experience to co-design and pilot an Essex Retirements Connections approach. The group will link with the Active Citizenship Action Group to develop a pathway to opportunities, as well as developing or making available resources that help retirees with their post-retirement wellbeing needs. By evaluating early success and celebrating retiree contributions, the action aims to build momentum by communicating a shared vision to scale up and mainstream these inclusive opportunities in other communities across Greater Essex.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national policy commitments on healthy ageing, including the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities/Healthy Ageing Consensus Statement promoting active and connected later life. It also aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan's shift towards prevention and community-based support for an ageing population, and the UK Loneliness Strategy's focus on strengthening social relationships and reducing isolation across society. It reflects national evidence from Age UK and parliamentary briefings on the need to tackle loneliness and enable older people to continue contributing to their communities.



Set up Multi-agency Triaging Hubs, bringing services and support directly to residents, fostering collaborative working and easy access for residents, and ensuring that people do not have their needs medicalised prematurely.

Action Steward: Health and Wellbeing Board Partners.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted the need to shift towards a healthcare model that is more preventative, community based and involves greater collaboration between services. Multi-Agency Triaging Hubs will bring services and support directly to residents in need, giving them access to the right services and support at the right time, in the right place. If implemented effectively, the hubs will meet the Commission’s aims and will complement the NHS 10 Year Plan’s drive for Neighbourhood Health Services. Together, these will improve wellbeing and reduce unnecessary demand on more acute services.

The Challenge: To establish Multi-Agency Triaging Hubs to improve collaborative working between public sector organisations so that people in need can access the right services at the right time, in the right places, in order to improve their wellbeing and reduce unnecessary demand on more acute services. It also fosters collaborative working between services.

Aims and Objectives: Essex currently has a wide range of multi-agency hubs, including Family Hubs, Community Safety Hubs, Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, Early Help Hubs, alongside various neighbourhood health models, community networks and connector roles. While each plays an important role, the sheer number of access points across the system can create confusion for residents and professionals; slowdown access to early help, and drive higher demand in the future. As NHS and Social Care reforms progress, and with LGR on the horizon, there is a clear opportunity to simplify and strengthen the system. Our aim is to make it easier for people to access the right support, in the right place, at the right time, ultimately helping to prevent, reduce and delay the need for more intensive services and increasing residents’ ownership of their health and wellbeing.

The Plan: Partners of the The Health and Wellbeing Board will set up a multi-agency task group to oversee a comprehensive review of Essex’s current hub landscape, mapping existing initiatives to maximize impact and identify best practices. The review will clarify each hub’s purpose, referral pathways, and outcomes as well as identifying gaps and duplication. It will provide system and local authority leaders with recommendations for future operating models and the potential development of integrated, multi-agency hubs.

Policy Links: This action aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan’s neighbourhood based integrated care and with Integrated Care System statutory guidance on working with people and communities. It also aligns with the Care Act prevention duty, so residents get timely, non-medicalised support and unnecessary demand on acute services is reduced and is consistent with children’s early help and safeguarding reforms, set out in the Families First Partnership programme.



Set up a Health at Home Programme that enables personal health planning and good lifestyle choices.

Action Steward: Health and Wellbeing Board Partners.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted the need to shift towards a healthcare model that is more preventative, community based and involves greater collaboration between services. Significant gaps remain in the ability of residents aged 50 and over, particularly those in high-risk categories and the most deprived areas, to manage their health proactively. Many lack access to basic training in self-health checks and simple procedures, and engagement with health planning remains low in the top 20% most deprived communities. This limits opportunities for early intervention and lifestyle changes that could prevent more serious health issues.

The Challenge: To create an offer of training to all residents over 50 and in higher risk categories in Essex to carry out basic health checks so that they can monitor, and take early action to improve, their own health independently.

Aims and Objectives: To empower residents aged 50+, and other high-risk groups, to manage their health proactively, by providing basic training in self-health checks and simple procedures; increasing uptake of personal health planning in the top 20% most deprived areas in Essex; and supporting lifestyle changes that reduce, prevent and/or delay future health and care specialist services.



The Plan: A multiagency group of practitioners from across relevant services will be convened to map health provision gaps for the 50+ demographic in deprived areas. They will engage older adults to identify barriers, they will co-design with them a “Health at Home” offer focused on self-help health care skills and early warning signs. Following pilots in high-need communities, the programme will evaluate uptake and impact, sharing key learning to embed good practice across the wider health and social care system.

Policy Links: This action aligns with the NHS Long Term Plan and Universal Personalised Care by strengthening prevention and self-management in neighbourhood care, extends the NHS Health Check offer and uptake in deprived areas, and supports the Care Act duty to prevent, reduce and delay needs through early identification, health planning and lifestyle change.





Set up a Youth Activity Guarantee that will enable young carers and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to have access to, and benefit from, informal social and educational activities to keep them physically active, develop their potential and raise aspirations.

Action Steward: Essex Youth Service and Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services.

Why it matters: Physical activity, access to green space and contact with nature all boost wellbeing and strengthen community cohesion, yet disadvantaged young people often lack access to and benefit from such opportunities. The Commission called for a co-designed Youth Activity Guarantee that gives young carers and young people in deprived areas greater access to sporting, cultural and nature-based opportunities, complementing emerging national programmes. This includes the Government's own Youth Guarantee for 16 to 24-year olds, offering access to education, training and employment support alongside 350,000 employability opportunities.

By widening access to informal social and educational opportunities, the Youth Activity Guarantee strengthens pathways into the Government's Youth Guarantee, building the skills, confidence and readiness young people need to take up its education, training and paid work offers.

The Challenge: Disadvantaged young people face limited, fragmented routes into enriching, health-promoting activity. Without inclusive local pathways, many are less able to build the confidence, networks and readiness needed to take up the education, training and paid work offers within the national Youth Guarantee.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to co-design a Youth Activity Guarantee that gives young carers and disadvantaged young people fair and consistent access to sporting, cultural and nature-based opportunities, helping to overcome the limited and uneven provision that currently restricts their wellbeing and development.

By widening access to these informal social and educational experiences, the Guarantee will build young people's confidence, skills and readiness to engage with wider opportunities. In doing so, it will directly complement the Government's Youth Guarantee by ensuring more disadvantaged young people are equipped to benefit fully from education, training and employment pathways.

The Plan: The next phase is to bring together youth services, VCSE partners, leisure, culture and green-space providers to form a delivery group that will co-design the Youth Activity Guarantee with young carers and disadvantaged young people. This group will map existing provision, identify gaps, and agree priority communities for early pilots. Initial testing will focus on accessible, low-cost or free activity offers, supported by referral pathways linked to Youth Hubs, Jobcentre Plus and education providers so participation builds confidence and progression toward the Government's Youth Guarantee. Early learning on engagement, wellbeing impact and progression will be shared for consideration to be given to scaling a Greater Essex Offer.

Policy Links: This aligns with the Government's National Youth Strategy, Youth Matters, which sets out a 10-year plan to expand access to enrichment, trusted adults, safe spaces and meaningful activities for young people, particularly those in under-served communities. It also aligns directly with the Government's Youth Guarantee, which commits to ensuring all 16 to 24 year olds can access education, training and employment support.



Introduce a Public Services Experience Programme that will give young people an opportunity to see how local public services and democracy works and how decisions are made.

Action Steward: Essex Youth Service & Essex Growth Agency.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that many young adults in Essex lack meaningful opportunities to understand how local public services operate, how democratic processes function, and how decisions affecting their communities are made. This disconnect can lead to lower civic engagement, reduced trust in local institutions, limited awareness of public-sector career pathways, and fewer young people seeing themselves as future community leaders.

The Challenge: To raise awareness among young people about how democracy works, and of the work the public sector does and the diverse jobs, skills and career opportunities available across local public services.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to introduce a Public Services Experience Programme that gives young people first-hand exposure to the workings of public services and local democracy. This will build civic awareness, inspire future public-service careers, develop the next generation of community leaders, and strengthen the relationships between young residents and the institutions that serve them.

The Plan: A steering group of public-service practitioners and youth advisors will be established to set the vision, objectives and measurable goals. Existing programmes and opportunities will be mapped, and the new offer co-designed with young people to ensure relevance and accessibility. The programme will then be piloted, tested and refined ahead of a wider rollout across Greater Essex.

Policy Links: This action reflects national concerns set out in the Government's National Youth Strategy, Youth Matters, which identifies that young people want stronger connections to their communities, better understanding of how decisions are made, and more opportunities to participate in civic life and local institutions. The Strategy commits to expanding enrichment, trusted adults, safe spaces and meaningful activities for young people as part of a ten-year plan to strengthen civic engagement and trust in public institutions.



Develop and implement a Caring Essex Employer Pledge to adopt carer friendly workplace policy and practice.

Action Steward: Essex Growth Agency.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that unpaid carers and foster carers across Essex face significant barriers to entering and sustaining employment. Despite the vital contribution they make to society, many experience social and economic disadvantage, reduced wellbeing, and limited opportunities for career progression. Supporting carers to stay in work is therefore essential both for their own financial security and wellbeing, and for strengthening the wider labour market.

The Challenge: Many of the employment barriers faced by unpaid carers and foster carers could be addressed if employers were better supported to adopt tailored policies, flexible working practices and greater awareness of carers' needs. However, employer practice is inconsistent, and the absence of a shared standard means carers do not always receive the support they need to remain and progress in work.

Aims and Objectives: The aim is to embed carer-friendly employment practice across Greater Essex by helping employers to better recognise, value and support unpaid carers and foster carers within their workforce. This includes improving employer awareness, offering simple practical guidance, and enabling carers to stay, succeed and thrive in work. In doing so, the action seeks to improve workforce retention, wellbeing and productivity whilst contributing to more inclusive economic growth and healthier, more resilient communities.

The Plan: Working with the sector and subject-matter experts, we will engage the Greater Essex Business Partnership to co-design a simple and practical Caring-Friendly Employer Pledge, Charter or Standard. This will involve identifying early employer champions, creating clear guidance and tools that organisations of all sizes can adopt, and establishing a light-touch approach to tracking progress so that impact can be demonstrated over time. The model will be iteratively refined based on employer and carer feedback, before being scaled to embed carer-friendly employment practice consistently across Greater Essex.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national policy commitments set out in the National Carers Strategy and the statutory rights created by the Carer's Leave Act, both of which prioritise carer-friendly employment, improved workplace flexibility and stronger employer awareness to help unpaid and foster carers stay in, return to and progress in work.



Set up a Decade of Opportunity. This will build on the Essex Year of Opportunity, working across the system to scale up and embed the initiatives to increase people's skills.

Action Steward: Essex Growth Agency.

Why it matters: The Commission highlighted that Essex faces a rapidly evolving social and economic landscape, where individuals of all ages must continuously adapt to new challenges and opportunities. While the recently launched Year of Opportunity has successfully mobilised efforts to support young people in building skills and expanding their horizons, many adults in Essex encounter barriers to personal growth, employment, wellbeing, and community participation. These challenges are often compounded by inequalities in access to education, digital resources, health services, and social networks.

The Challenge: To build on the Year of Opportunity to develop a sustainable Decade of Opportunity for adults.

Aims and Objectives: The Decade of Opportunity aims to embed and scale up proven initiatives over the long-term offering an inclusive framework that empowers people of all ages to increase their skills and confidence; broaden their horizons and aspirations; and access meaningful opportunities for growth, wellbeing, and contribution. This decade-long commitment will require co-ordinated action across public services, businesses, communities, and voluntary sectors to ensure that opportunity is not a one-off event, but a lasting feature of life in Essex.

The Plan: The action will establish a steering group to define the long-term vision, undertake a mapping exercise and an analysis of need. It will then establish a multi-annual delivery programme with clear objectives and measurable goals and will convene training pathways and secure funding to fill gaps in provision. An annual report will evaluate the action's success and lessons will be factored into delivery in subsequent years.

Policy Links: This action aligns with national priorities on adult skills and employability, including the Government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which will give adults flexible access to retraining from 2026/27, and the Growth & Skills Levy reforms, which expand short, job-relevant training for working-age adults. It also supports the mission of Skills England, which is tasked with addressing skills gaps and improving access to training for adults across regions.



Evaluating Impact

The Essex Caring Communities Commission's actions are designed to catalyse a long-term shift towards more preventative, community-led approaches capable of addressing the rising challenges in health and social care.

Evaluating the success of this work will focus on understanding the extent to which the Caring Communities enablers have been adopted across the system, embedding ways of working that are relational, strengths-based, collaborative and rooted in local contexts. It will also examine how far behaviours and culture have shifted across public services, voluntary and community organisations, and local partners, enabling a genuine sense of shared ownership over challenges and solutions. A further dimension of evaluation will explore whether communities themselves have gained capacity and confidence to act, organise and lead locally.

Success will also be reflected in improved outcomes for residents through more coordinated support, stronger social connections, earlier help and reduced reliance on formal intervention.

Ultimately, the evaluation will consider whether a more efficient and joined-up system has emerged: one where public, voluntary and community sectors work collectively around place-based priorities and where residents, partners and community organisations experience tangible improvements.

Evaluating the success of the Commission's vision

The first dimension of evaluation will assess how effectively the Commission's core enablers have taken root across the system. This includes examining whether partners are beginning to use a shared language and set of principles consistently, and whether relational and strengths-based practice is increasingly visible in commissioning, service design and day-to-day delivery.

Evaluation will also look for evidence that community-led approaches are genuinely shaping strategies, plans and decision-making processes, and that collaboration between public, voluntary and community sectors is becoming more routine. To understand this, evaluators will draw on indicators such as changes in commissioning frameworks and organisational policies, survey insights into culture and collaboration, case studies showing new ways of working, and the documented use of enablers in programme and project materials.

Evaluating the impact of the actions

The second dimension of evaluation will focus on the outcomes generated by the twenty two actions for communities, partners and residents. At a system level, the evaluation will examine whether partnership working has strengthened, whether residents face fewer barriers in navigating support, and whether duplication has reduced as activity becomes more aligned around local priorities. It will also assess whether investment is beginning to shift upstream into prevention and early community responses, and whether pressures on health and social care have eased as a result.

For community stakeholders, including voluntary organisations, faith groups and local associations, the evaluation will consider whether organisational capability and sustainability have improved, whether participation in co-design and shared leadership has increased, and whether access to support, funding and partnership opportunities has expanded. Positive shifts in relationships with statutory agencies will also be an important marker of progress.

At the level of communities, the evaluation will explore whether local groups have developed greater capacity to organise, support one another and lead community-driven initiatives. Increased social connection, reduced isolation and visible improvements in resilience and wellbeing will all be key indicators of success.

Finally, the evaluation will focus on the experience of residents themselves. It will seek evidence that people feel a greater sense of belonging, connection and support; that they are accessing informal and community-based help earlier; and that their outcomes, such as wellbeing, independence and reduced escalation of need are improving. Central to this will be understanding whether residents feel listened to, valued and connected to their communities.

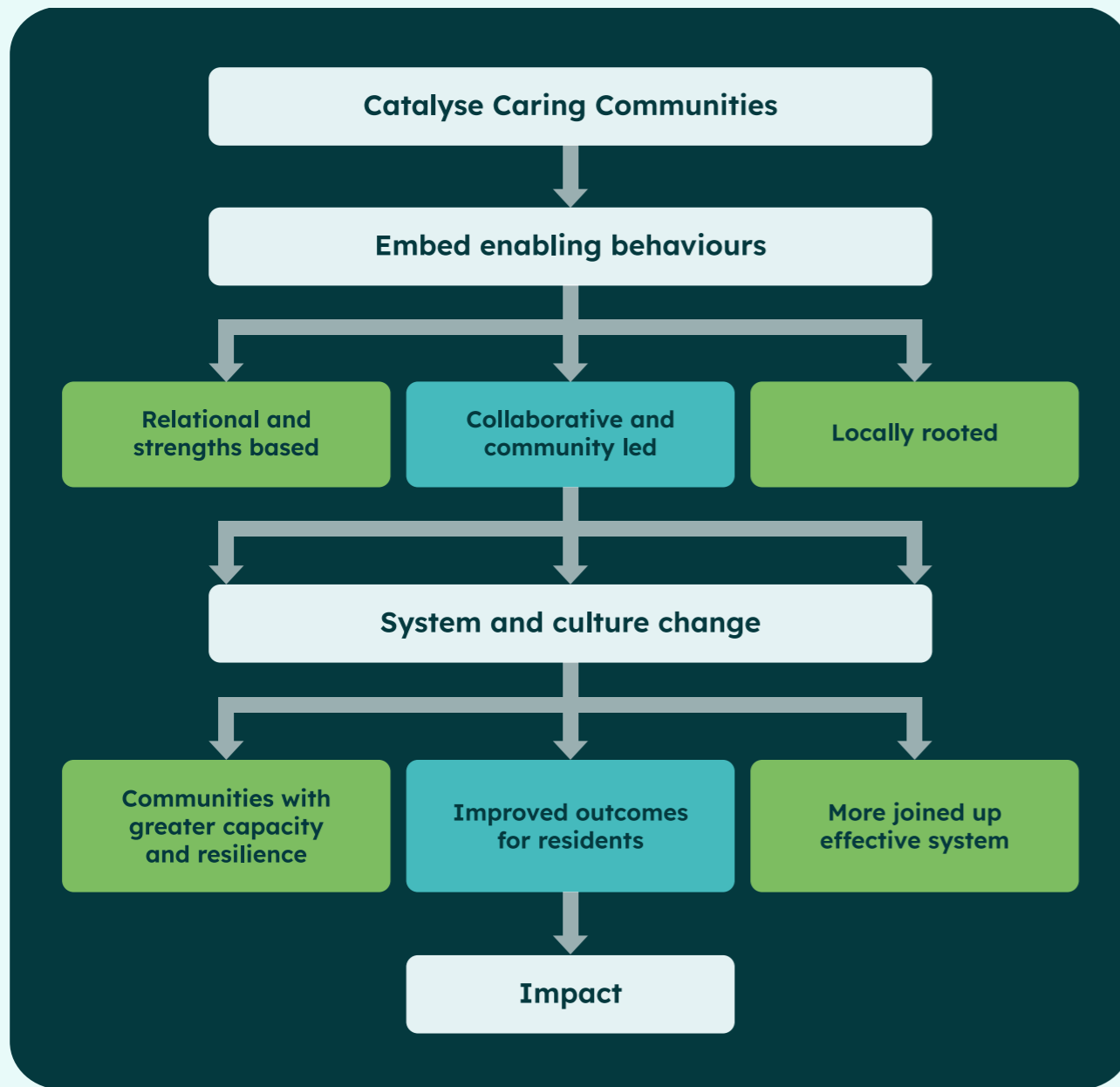
Evaluation Approach

Commission leaders and Action Stewards will develop a fit-for-purpose mixed-methods evaluation framework to understand both impact and how the overall theory of change is progressing. This may draw on a blend of approaches, for example, baseline and follow-up surveys to measure shifts over time, and qualitative insight such as interviews or stories to capture lived experience and cultural change. There will be progress reports as well as an annual impact review, with a final evaluation reflecting system change, cultural shift and longer-term outcomes.

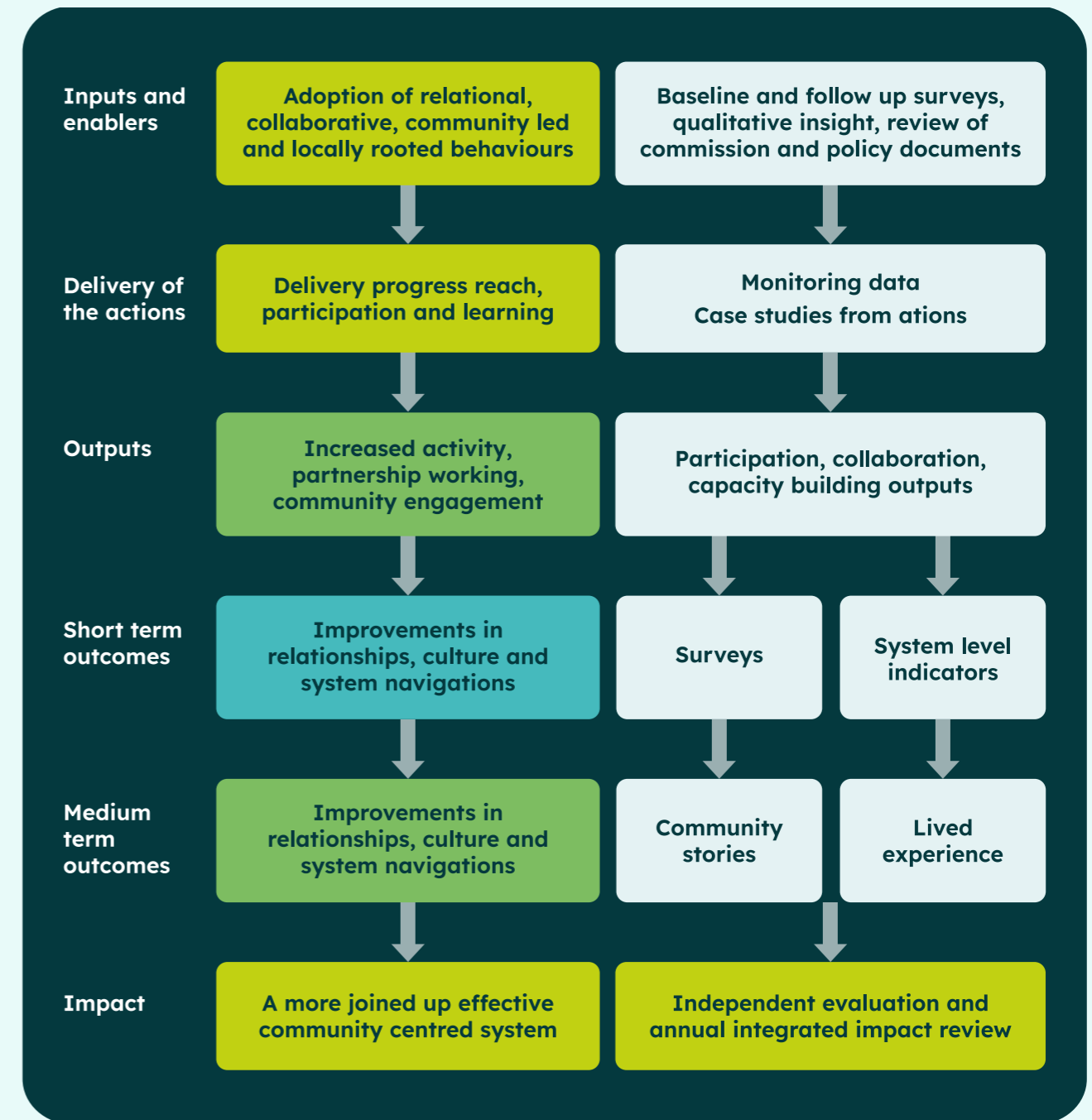
Taking a shared approach to designing this framework will ensure the evaluation remains proportionate, meaningful and capable of evidencing real, sustained change.

By the end of the Commission's delivery period, success will mean that the core enablers are visible, well understood and routinely applied across the system, with communities and partners reporting stronger relationships, higher levels of trust and more effective collaboration. We will see measurable improvements in residents' social connection, independence and wellbeing, and community-led approaches will be firmly embedded in mainstream practice. Most importantly, the actions will have catalysed sustainable system change that continues to evolve and deliver impact long after the Commission itself has concluded.

Overview of Evaluation Matrix



Logic Model Aligned Evaluation Matrix



Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks are extended to the local commissioners, politicians, partners, leaders and stakeholders and residents who have contributed their insight, expertise and time to the development of this Delivery Plan.

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