



GREATER ESSEX TRENDS

June 2024



INEQUALITY IN GREATER ESSEX

This document has been prepared by the **Essex County Council Policy Unit**.

The Policy Unit supports the Chief Executive, the Council's Cabinet and the whole organisation in the overarching strategic direction and leadership of the County Council. Its objectives are to:

- Work closely with the County Council's political leadership to set and influence policy direction and help the organisation to determine its key objectives;
- Generate insight – to underpin effective decision making and to ensure the Council is evidence led and learning orientated;
- Lead our equalities and levelling up work and responsible for our strategic relationships with partners;
- Lead on performance and evaluation for the whole Council; and
- Communicate with our key audiences to support the achievement of our objectives.

Information on data sources

More detailed research, analysis and statistical information on Greater Essex, its component administrative areas and comparator areas can be found on the Essex Open Data Platform. This can be accessed at: <https://data.essex.gov.uk/>.

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Foreword

Greater Essex Trends has been developed to describe and communicate some of the key challenges and drivers of change that are shaping the lives of people across our diverse communities. It describes some of the strengths of Greater Essex and the opportunities we will have to grow, learn, and prosper in the years ahead. By bringing these different threads together, the document provides a high-level summary of the context in which public service partners across Greater Essex, do business.

Greater Essex Trends is based on a synthesis of some of the research and analysis that has been used to inform our strategic plans and policy positions. Inevitably in this type of document, as soon as it is published 'the world moves on' and further analysis is required to keep it up to date. This document therefore represents a starting point for what will be ongoing work. We are continuing to build and develop an evidence base for policy and, as part of this, will provide online updates to this document to reflect more recent trends and developments.

Greater Essex Trends is not a document about local government per se. It does not say how public service partners intend to address the challenges facing our region, what we have achieved so far, or how we will finance our ongoing work. Nor does it make specific recommendations for what specific partners and agencies ought to do.

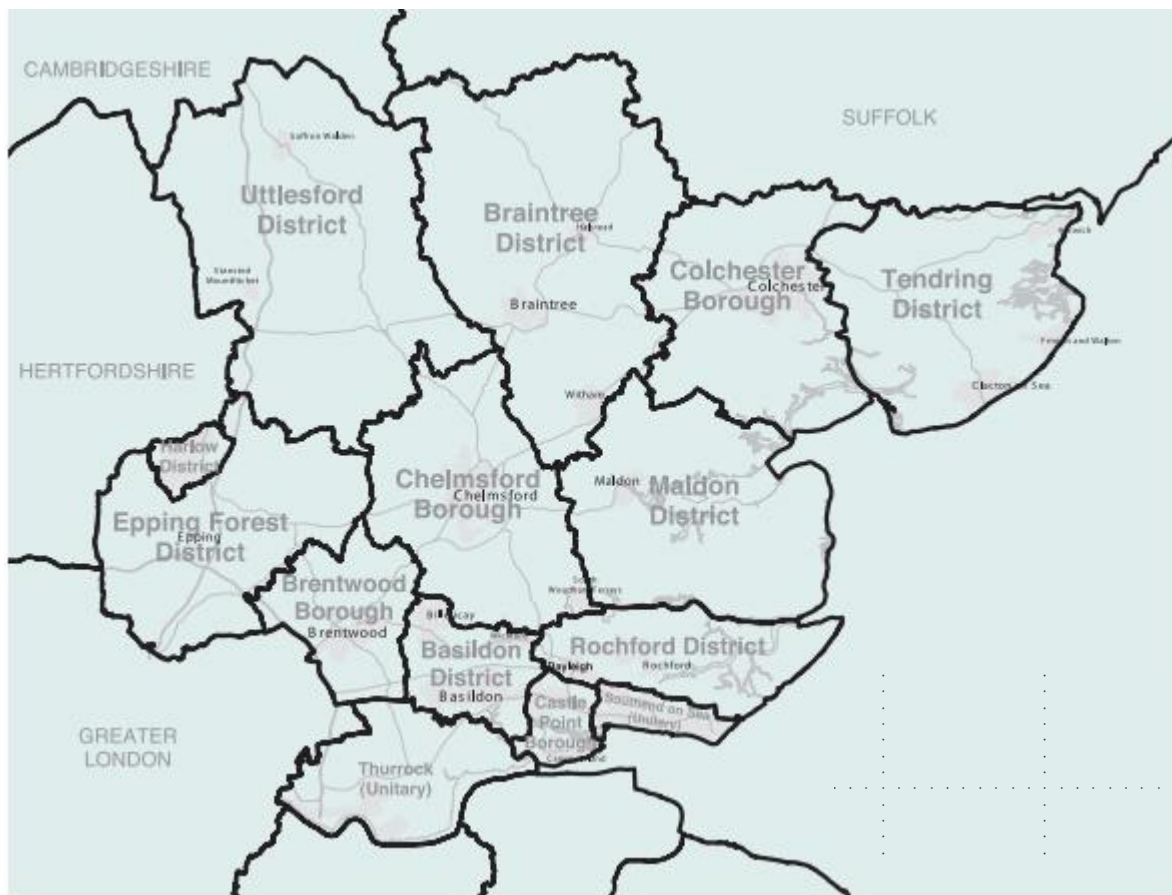
Rather, Greater Essex Trends provides information at a more fundamental level. It presents the information that allows us to make these decisions. It paints a picture of our county's population profile, economy, environment, and infrastructure as it is today and how it might develop in the future. In preparing this document, we have let the evidence tell its own story.

We hope you will find this useful. If you would like to discuss or develop thinking on any of the issues raised in this paper, please do get in touch.

This chapter focuses on Inequalities.

Our Geography

Reference map: Greater Essex and its constituent areas



This map above provides an overview of Greater Essex’s geography and highlights the region’s administrative divisions. It shows the twelve local authority districts that make up the Essex County Council area, together with the neighbouring areas governed by the unitary authorities of Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council.

The majority of statistics reported in this document relate to the Greater Essex area. There are, however, some exceptions which are noted throughout the document. In general, when we refer to “Greater Essex” within this document we refer to the area covered by Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea Council and Thurrock Council.

In some cases, the document also makes reference to statistics gathered on the North Essex Councils (NEC) area (Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forrest, Harlow, Maldon, Tendring and Uttlesford), and the South Essex Council (SEC) area (Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock).

Inequality in Greater Essex

Summary

Overall Greater Essex appears to be a prosperous place. The region has a £44.8bn economy, average incomes exceed national benchmarks and unemployment is generally low. The region also supports some 750,000 jobs and is home to nearly 81,000 businesses. But this high-level picture masks significant and stark economic and social inequalities – there are major disparities in the experience of, and the opportunities available to, different people across the region.

Inequality in Greater Essex is complex. Inequality affects different neighbourhoods, towns and cities, different groups and populations and different generations in different ways. There are clear geographical inequalities across the region: while some places thrive and prosper, others experience significant poverty and deprivation. There are inequalities that affect specific groups and population segments regardless of where they live within the region. Then there are entrenched inequalities, where the opportunities available to those from wealthier backgrounds outstrip those available to their less well-off counterparts, reducing opportunity and limiting social mobility.

Levels of inequality have increased markedly in Greater Essex since the turn of the century. Structural changes in the economy, the 2008 financial crash, periods of ‘austerity’ in public spending and the COVID-19 pandemic have variously highlighted and accentuated inequalities in income, education, and health.

It is vital that local partners across Greater Essex work collectively to halt further increases in inequality and to reverse recent trends. Public service partners have a moral imperative to act – it is simply not right that public services stand by while parts of our population do not experience the outcomes and quality of life that many others take for granted. But there are also economic and sustainability imperatives. In a highly competitive national and global economy, success will go to those places that are most productive – this means making the most of the talents of all local people. Finally, inequality increases pressure on public services through increased welfare spending, increased demand for services, and through the need for crisis-based intervention and support. Public services will not be able to sustain their performance, in a climate of tight financial constraints and demographic pressures, if they have to absorb demand pressures linked to widening inequalities.

Local public services can have a profound impact on local inequality. Between them, they have a shared mandate to lead on development of the local economy, infrastructure, education and skills provision, and population health and wellbeing. Although welfare and tax policy may be controlled at the national level, many of the policy and operational levers that can effect change are held by local partners. The challenge will be for local partners to work together to build sustainable change for people and places – enabling aspiration, enterprise, and opportunity, and taking action to tackle the root causes of inequality, rather than merely addressing its symptoms in the short-term.

Understanding inequality in Greater Essex

There are stark inequalities across Greater Essex. The region is home to some of the most affluent communities in England and also to some of its poorest. While many residents enjoy stable work, high salaries and send their children to some of the best schools in the country, others struggle to make ends meet and find their choices and opportunities limited as a result of where they live, their personal circumstances or their family background.

Examining inequalities in Greater Essex is complex. There is a geographical dimension to inequality. There are towns and neighbourhoods across Greater Essex where residents are more likely to experience extreme deprivation and poverty than those living a short distance away. These differentials have a profound effect on residents' opportunities, their quality of life and on their health. Residents in Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea, Tendring, Basildon and Harlow are more likely to die prematurely and to live in poorer health than those in more affluent areas, such as Uttlesford or Brentwood. Those living in more deprived areas are also more likely to experience unemployment, challenges in access to transport, digital exclusion, lower educational attainment, poorer housing conditions, and be more exposed to climate risks such as flooding and overheating whilst having the least ability to recover from climate shocks, which puts them at an automatic disadvantage compared to those in more affluent areas.

There are also particular groups and cohorts who experience poorer outcomes in education, in the workplace and with respect to their health irrespective of where they live. There are also deep disparities in the opportunities available, particularly to young people, with those living in deprived communities most likely to see their life chances limited. The resulting impacts on social mobility risk perpetuating patterns of inequality across the generations.

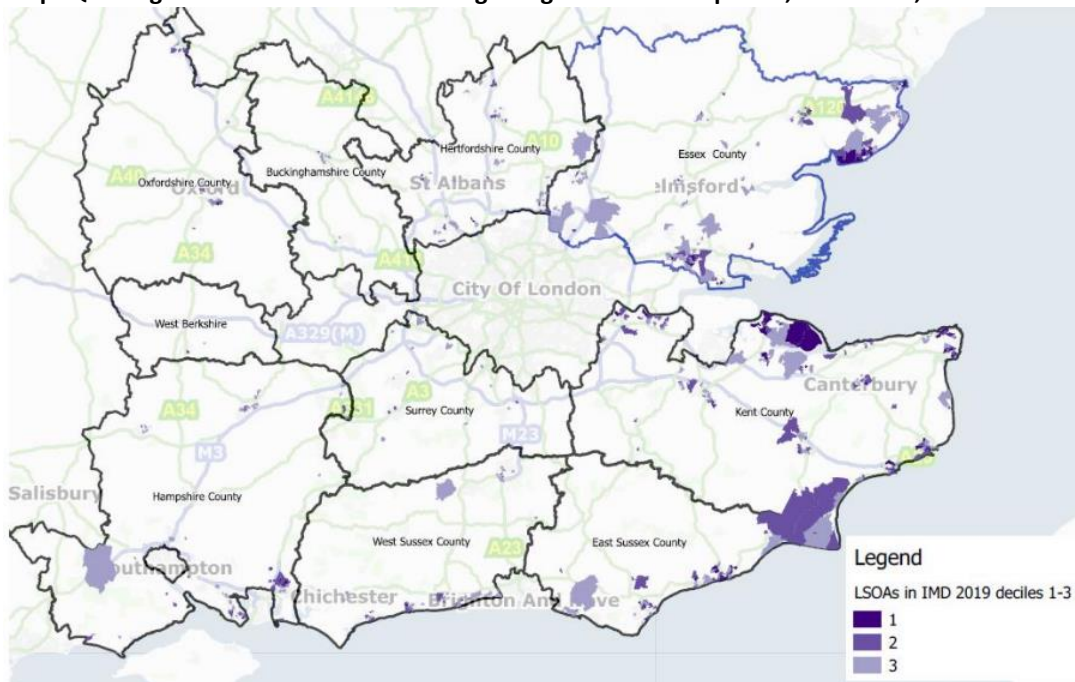
These different dimensions of inequality in Greater Essex – geographical deprivation, populations and cohorts who face specific challenges, and social mobility – are explored further below.

Geographical patterns of deprivation

Although Greater Essex generally compares well against England as a whole in measures that assess local deprivation, it compares less favourably against other regions in the wider South East. When the last national Index of Multiple Deprivation was published (2019), some 10.1% of the region's population were living in areas that rank among the most deprived 20% in England – only Kent and East Sussex had a higher percentage of residents in this group.

There is also a large and growing gap between the most and least deprived city, borough, and district areas within Greater Essex. Castle Point and Tendring districts have seen marked declines in their relative position compared to other local authorities across the country.

Map IQ1: Neighbourhoods that rank amongst England’s most deprived, South 10%, 20% and 30%



Source: *Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019*

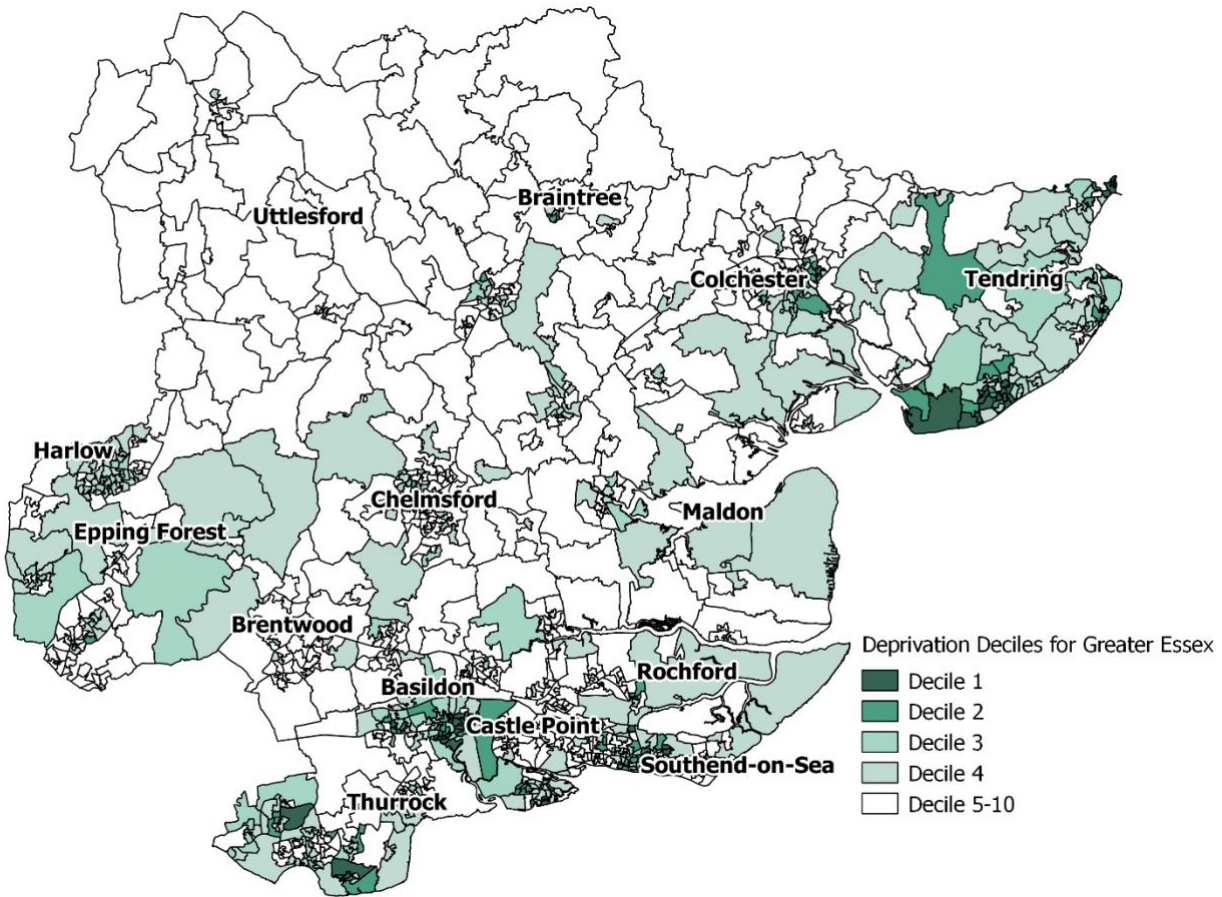
Definitions: LSOAs are Lower Super Output Areas – units of England’s statistical geography with a typical population of between 1,000 and 3,000 people

In absolute terms, there were around 188,000 people across Greater Essex living in the most deprived 20% of areas. Of this group, some 49,000 were children. This signals a significant increase in levels of relative deprivation across Greater Essex over the preceding 12 years. In 2007, approximately 110,000 residents lived in similarly deprived communities. In 2019, just over 75,000 lived in the most deprived 10% of areas, compared to around 32,000 in 2007.

The scale of this increase in relative levels of deprivation has not been felt evenly across all parts of Greater Essex. The latest data suggest that there are no neighbourhoods in Brentwood, Maldon or Uttlesford that rank amongst England’s most deprived – nor have there been at any point of measurement since at least 2007. The greatest shifts, and as a result, the most acute deprivation, can be found in:

- a. coastal towns such as Southend-on-Sea, where 23% of the population (40,800 residents) live in areas among the most deprived 20% in England; Canvey Island, or Harwich and Clacton, where 31% (44,000 residents) live in areas of acute deprivation;
- b. larger towns such as Colchester and Tilbury, with 18,700 (10%) and 16,400 (12%) residents, respectively, living in areas of acute deprivation; and
- c. purpose built new towns of the 1950s such as Basildon and Harlow where over 45,000 residents live in areas of acute deprivation.

Map IQ2: Neighbourhoods that rank amongst England's most deprived



Source: Indices of Deprivation 2019, (DLUHC)

Chart IQ1: Proportion of residents living in neighbourhoods ranked within the most deprived 20% in England



Source: Indices of Deprivation 2019, (DLUHC)

The inequalities in outcomes, opportunity and experience that exist between places in Greater Essex are, in large part, a reflection of differences in levels of poverty and material

deprivation across these places. But it is also a reflection of the resilience of our places and communities.

The crucial factors in examining the resilience of communities are not merely related to the material wealth of the population – although clearly this contributes to the reliance of specific individuals and households. Rather, they are reflected in the shared spaces and social infrastructure that are available to the community; the social and physical connections that exist within the community and with others beyond; the health of the local voluntary and community sector, and the engagement of citizens.

Places that are rich in assets, connections and engagement have an underlying ‘strength’, enabling them to bear many of the challenges associated with economic downturns and to absorb the impacts of external shocks, areas that are less well-equipped exhibit higher levels of *Community Need*.

Objectively quantifying levels of *Community Need* is complex. However, measures developed for use in Essex by independent researchers suggest that, on average, communities across Essex have higher levels of ‘community need’ than communities in comparable regions and across England as a whole. Table IQ1 below shows the average rank for wards in Essex, and comparator areas, on the ‘Essex Community Needs Index.’ It suggests that, overall, Essex ranks above other counties, the East of England region and England as a whole on key dimensions of community need. It suggests that many areas of Essex experience significant levels of community need, with 22% of wards in Essex ranking amongst the highest 10% nationally on key measures of community need.

Table IQ1: Essex Community Needs Index

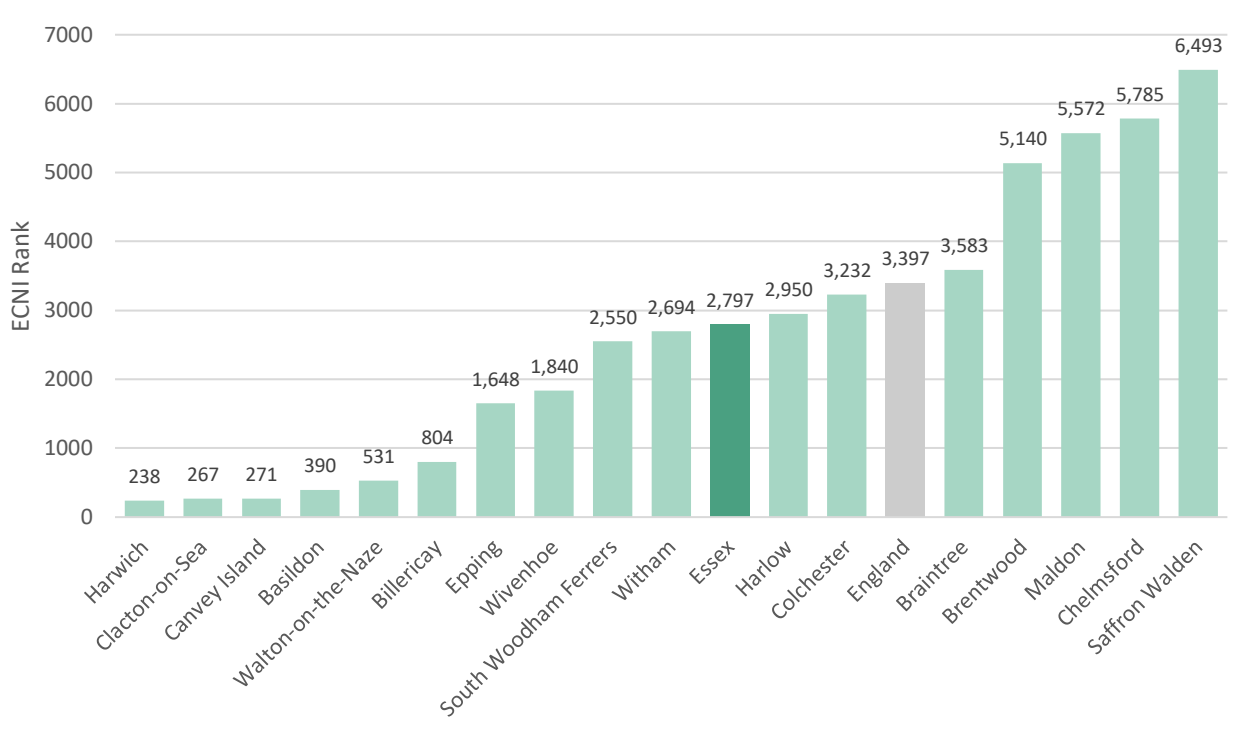
Area	Average ward rank	% of wards within the most acute 10% nationally
Essex	2,797	22%
Buckinghamshire	4,337	2%
Cambridgeshire	4,644	6%
East Sussex	2,748	11%
Hertfordshire	4,627	2%
Kent	3,171	12%
Norfolk	2,613	26%
Oxfordshire	5,087	<1%
Suffolk	3,742	11%
Surrey	5,484	0%
West Sussex	3,943	5%
East of England	3,527	14%
England	3,397	10%

Source: Essex Community Needs Index, OCSI/ Local Trust, 2021

Note: A Rank of 1 is assigned to the ward with the highest level of community need in England as measured by the index. A rank of 7,190 is applied to the ward with the lowest. Average ward ranks are weighted by population to give a indication of relative levels of community need that is not distorted by the large difference in ward size.

There are also stark differences in the strength and resilience of local communities within Greater Essex. While communities in Saffron Walden, Chelmsford, Maldon, and Brentwood are among the best equipped, the majority of towns have more acute levels of community need than England as a whole. Four of the five towns with the most acute needs are in coastal communities – Harwich, Clacton, Canvey, and Walton, but the levels of need highlighted in Billericay, Epping and Wivenhoe present a challenge to the view that acute challenges are focused exclusively in coastal areas.

Chart IQ2: Essex Community Needs Index, Rank of Essex towns (population 10,000+) and comparable areas, 2021



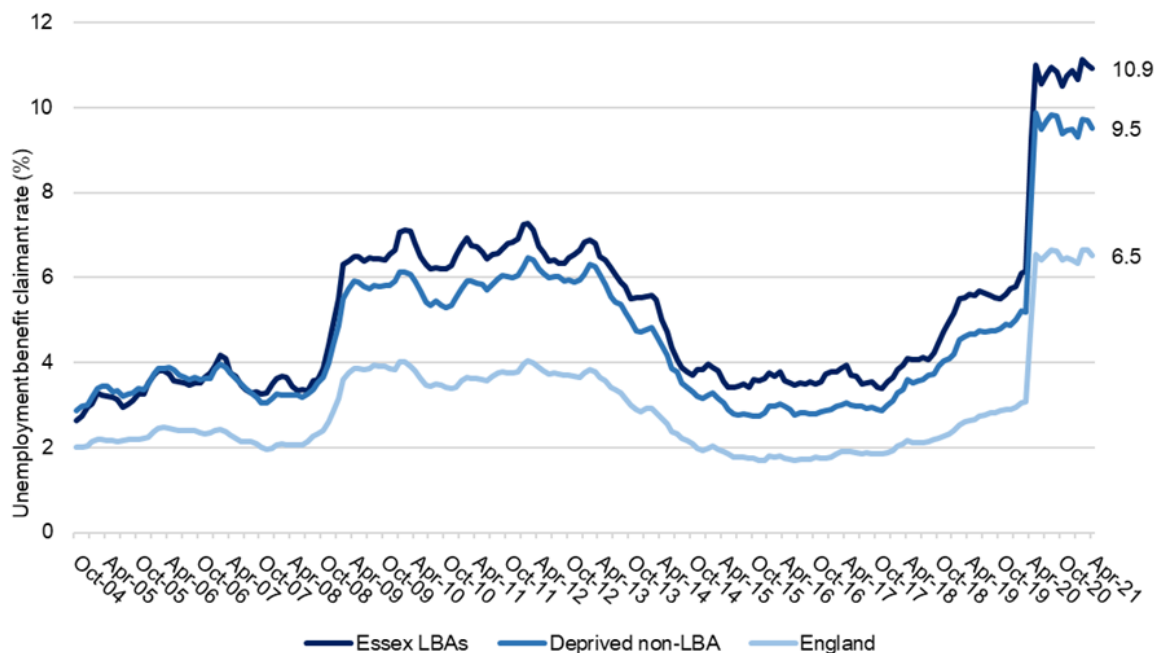
Source: Essex Community Needs Index, OCSI/ Local Trust, 2021

There is good evidence to suggest that levels of community need have a significant influence on the outcomes enjoyed by local communities. This influence is particularly clear in areas that experience high levels of poverty and deprivation, and where higher individual and household incomes cannot mask the effects of poor community and civic infrastructure, relative isolation, and low levels of participation. These areas often lack the resources to weather short-term economic challenges, and bounce-back from external shocks. They are at greater risk of being ‘left behind’ – with markedly worse outcomes on a range of socio-economic measures than areas that are similarly deprived, but which have lower levels of community need.

A clear example of this can be seen in patterns of unemployment. Chart IQ3 compares the percentage of working-age residents receiving unemployment benefits in Essex’s ‘left-behind areas,’ Essex’s wider deprived areas, and across England at various points over the past twenty years. In 2008, in the wake of the global financial crisis, unemployment benefit claims increased nationally. They increased by substantially more in Essex’s deprived communities, and to an even greater level in those deprived communities that have the most acute community need. The data show that, while claimant levels returned to pre-

crisis levels in most deprived communities from mid-2013, those areas with limited community assets, relative isolation and lower levels of engagement have yet to fully recover.

Chart IQ3: Percentage receiving unemployment benefits (JSA and Universal credit) 2004-21, in Essex's deprived and 'left behind' communities



Source: Department for Work and Pensions

Populations and cohorts experiencing inequality

The geographical distribution of poverty and deprivation can help us understand these issues within Greater Essex, but they do not tell the full story. While many who experience inequality and disadvantage will live in deprived communities, there are significant populations, groups and cohorts who are at risk of experiencing poor outcomes regardless of where they live. For these residents, their experience of inequality has its root in specific economic, family, and personal circumstances rather than in their address or postcode.

While the challenges facing specific individuals and families will often be unique and personal, these groups will often face common barriers: to education; to labour market opportunities; in accessing public services; and to good health and wellbeing.

Children with special educational needs

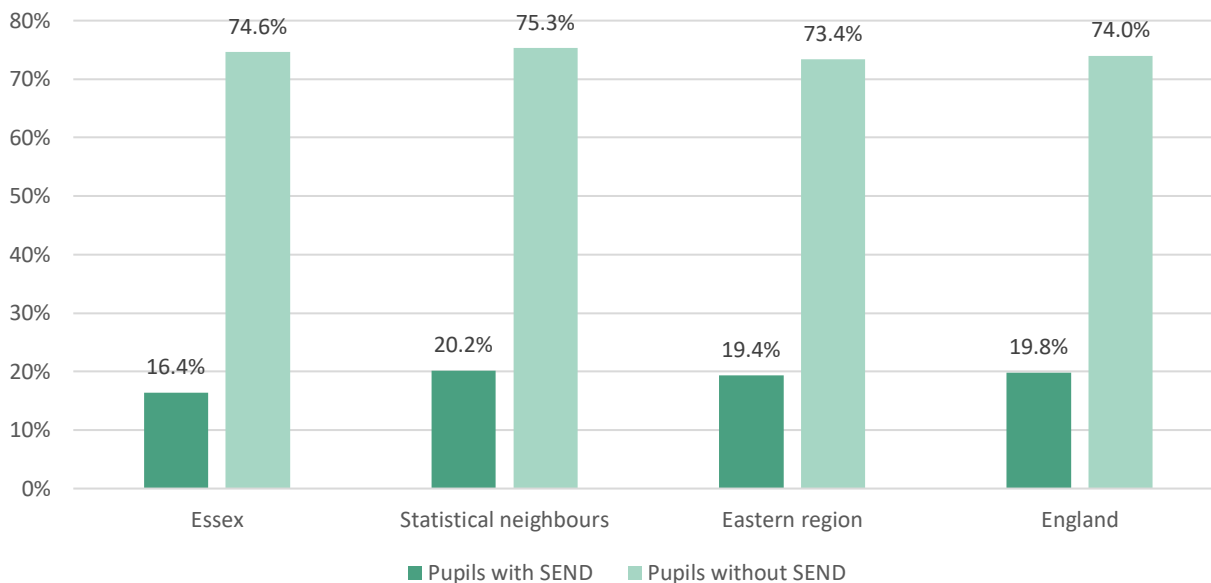
There are around 44,000 pupils in Greater Essex who have been assessed as having Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND). This equates to c.16% of all pupils (below the national average of 17%). The full number with SEND is likely to be slightly higher as some children and young people may not yet have received an assessment or be known to services.

Proportions of pupils with a learning disability across Greater Essex have also been steadily increasing year on year since 2018/19, rising from 13.5% in Essex, 15% in Thurrock, and 11.6% in Southend-on-Sea.

The needs of children with SEND can be complex and unique to the individual. Nevertheless, local data indicate that some 17.5% of children with SEND in the Essex area have profound and multiple learning difficulties, 13.9% have physical disabilities, while 13.8% have needs relating to their social emotional and mental health. Of this final group five out of every six are boys.

In common with national patterns, outcomes of children with SEND in Greater Essex are generally poor compared to outcomes for those without SEND. Around 16% of children with SEND achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age 5 compared to almost three-quarters of those without SEND. The proportion of children with SEND in Essex achieving a GLD at age 5 is slightly below the national average, statistical neighbours, and the Eastern region.

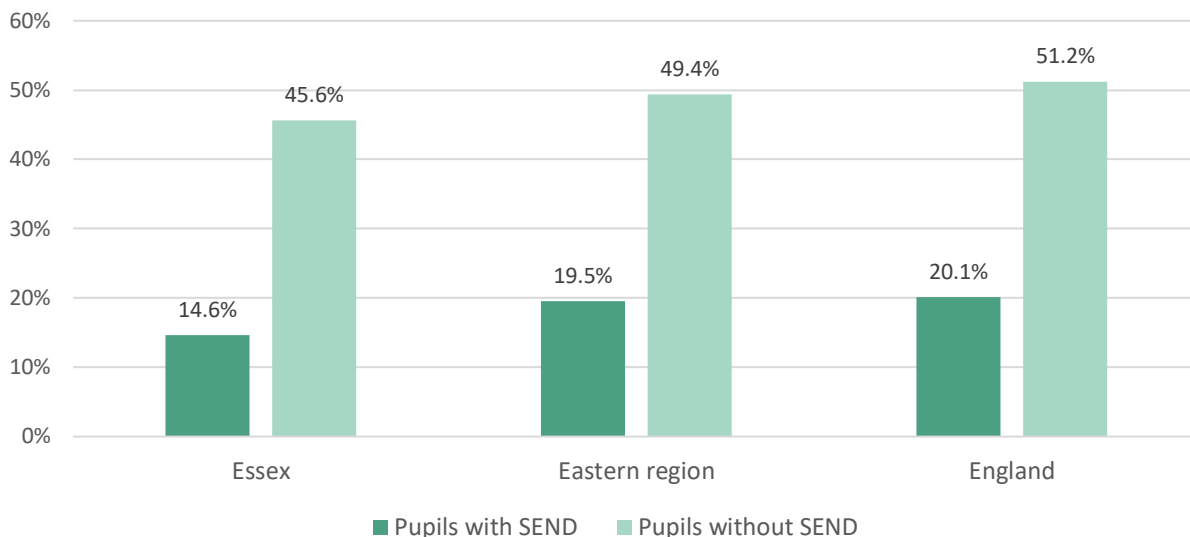
Chart IQ4: Percentage of pupils with and without SEND achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age 5, 2023/23



Source: Essex County Council (2024) 'SEND JSNA dashboard'

This pattern is replicated at all key education milestones between age 5 and up to higher education. A student with no SEN is around three times as likely to progress to higher education than a student with SEN in Essex (45.6% compared to 14.6% respectively). The proportions of pupils progressing to higher education for both those with and without SEN are lower within Essex compared to the wider Eastern region and national average.

Chart IQ5: Percentage of pupils with and without SEND progressing to higher education, 2021/22



Source: Essex County Council (2024) 'SEND JSNA dashboard'

Adults with learning disabilities

There are around 10,000 adults in Greater Essex with a learning disability who are known to services. This includes 7,935 adults in Essex, 1,253 in Southend and 815 in Thurrock. As with children and young people, this relates to those who are known to services, and figures may be higher when considering adults with learning disabilities who may not have received a formal assessment.

We know that adults with learning disabilities can experience challenges and barriers to achieving the same life outcomes as their peers. People with learning disability and autism are more likely to have been excluded from school, to have received poor healthcare to be underemployed and to be poorly served by the criminal justice system. Many are less independent than they would like to be. These factors, together contribute to reduced wellbeing, increased suicide risk and lower life expectancy.

Securing employment can be an important lifeline for adults with learning disabilities, particularly when it comes to accessing employment. Those who secure and sustain employment value the opportunity and impact it has on their lives – developing self-worth and independence. Employers too, identify a number of benefits to employing someone with a learning disability, most notably loyalty, dedication, and a strong work ethic.

Yet, many adults with learning disabilities struggle to access employment and take up these opportunities. At a national level, pupils with special educational needs are 25% less likely to be in sustained employment at age 27 when compared to their peers, with only 17.6% of adults with a learning disability were in employment nationally in 2022/23.

In the same year, of those known to local authorities this figure drops to 5% who are in paid employment nationally, whilst Essex is slightly below the national average at 4.5%. Thurrock

is slightly above the average with 5.3% in paid employment, and Southend-on-Sea performs significantly better with 9.6% of adults with learning disabilities in paid employment.

The principal barriers to employment - identified through local research into the lived experience of adults with learning disabilities and autism – include a lack of support services, lack of information about available employment opportunities, challenges with typical application processes, fear of failure, and lack of understanding from employers around necessary adjustments required.

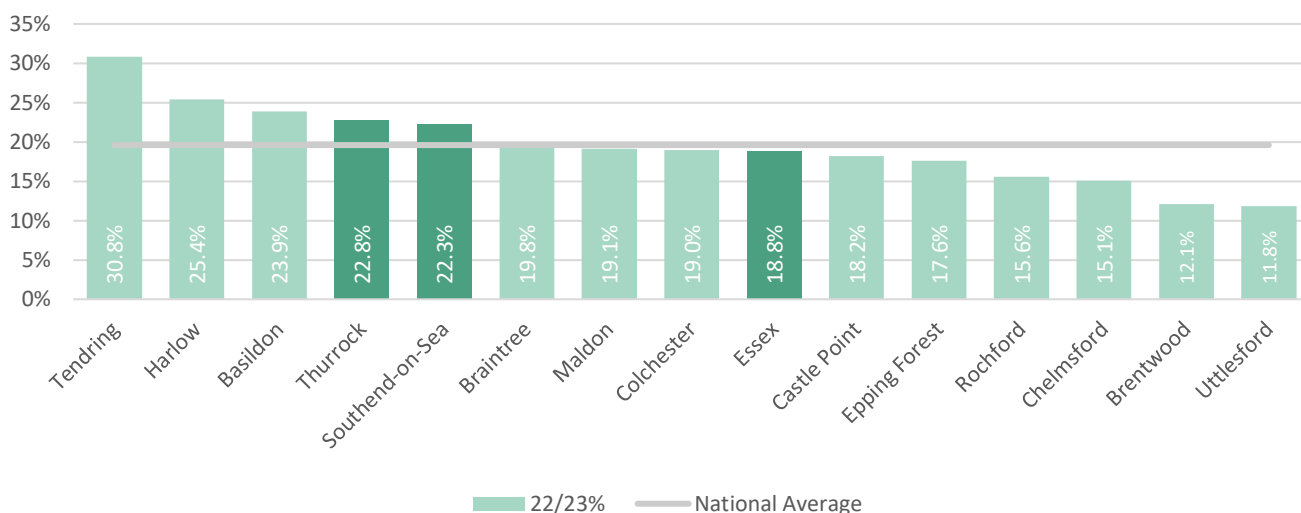
Nevertheless, there are opportunities which can be considered to help lower these barriers and to support adults with learning disabilities to take up new opportunities. The challenge will be for education and care providers to work with families to discuss employment opportunities, and with schools and colleges to build greater careers support and advice, encouraging raising aspirations beyond education. The provision of volunteering and work experience roles across a range of sectors, as well as support with application processes, work with employers to adopt alternative hiring processes, and the development of peer support between families could be important in securing progress.

Children on free school meals

There are around 35,000 children in Greater Essex eligible for free school meals (FSM), accounting for 18.8% of all pupils in Essex, 22.3% in Thurrock, and 22.8% in Southend-on-Sea in 2022/23. The national average in 2022/23 was 19.6%, meaning Essex is slightly lower than average whereas Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea are above average.

There is also significant variation within the county, with Tendring, Harlow and Basildon experiencing the highest proportions of children eligible for FSM, and Brentwood and Uttlesford among the lowest. This aligns closely with the geographic areas of disadvantage across the county.

Chart IQ6: Percentage of all pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in Greater Essex, 2022/23



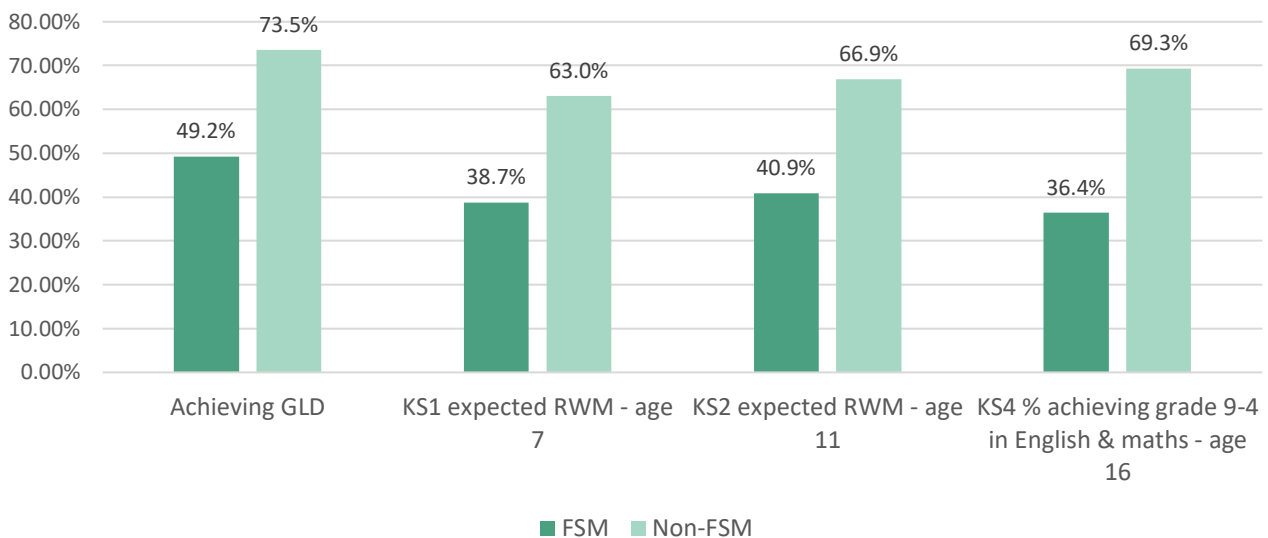
Source: Department for Education (DoE), Statistics: school and pupil numbers

The proportion of children in Greater Essex eligible for FSM has steadily increased between the academic years of 2018/19 and 2022/23, rising from 11.5% in Essex, 13.4% in Thurrock, and 13.8% in Southend-on-Sea in 2018/19. The national average also increased from 11.7% in 2018/19, meaning rates of increase are broadly similar.

Whilst not a perfect measure, eligibility of free school meals can provide a good indicator of socioeconomic status, and data suggest that those eligible for FSM experience inequalities in terms of the outcomes they achieve throughout their education and into adulthood.

When it comes to educational attainment, there is a significant gap in the attainment levels of children eligible for FSM compared to their peers. In Essex, 49.2% of pupils on FSM achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD) at age 5, compared to 73.3% of pupils not receiving FSM (2023). This gap persists throughout education, with fewer pupils eligible for FSM achieving expected standards in reading, writing and maths (RWM) in KS1 and KS2, and fewer achieving grades 9-4 in English and maths at GCSE level.

Chart IQ7: Outcomes at different stages of education – children who receive free-school meals and children who do not



Source: Essex County Council (2024) 'FSM dashboard'

There is also a significant gap between pupils on FSM entering Higher Education (HE) compared to non-FSM pupils. Within Greater Essex, 21.8% of pupils on FSM enter HE compared to 44.4% of non-FSM pupils. Whilst a larger proportion of both FSM and non-FSM pupils enter HE nationally, the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils entering HE within Greater Essex is slightly larger than the national average (22.6% compared to 20.2% nationally). However, the gap within Greater Essex is smaller than within both the East of England (24.6%) and South East (27.4%).

Chart IQ8: Percentage of FSM and non-FSM pupils entering Higher Education



Source: Department for Education (2023) 'Widening participation in higher education'

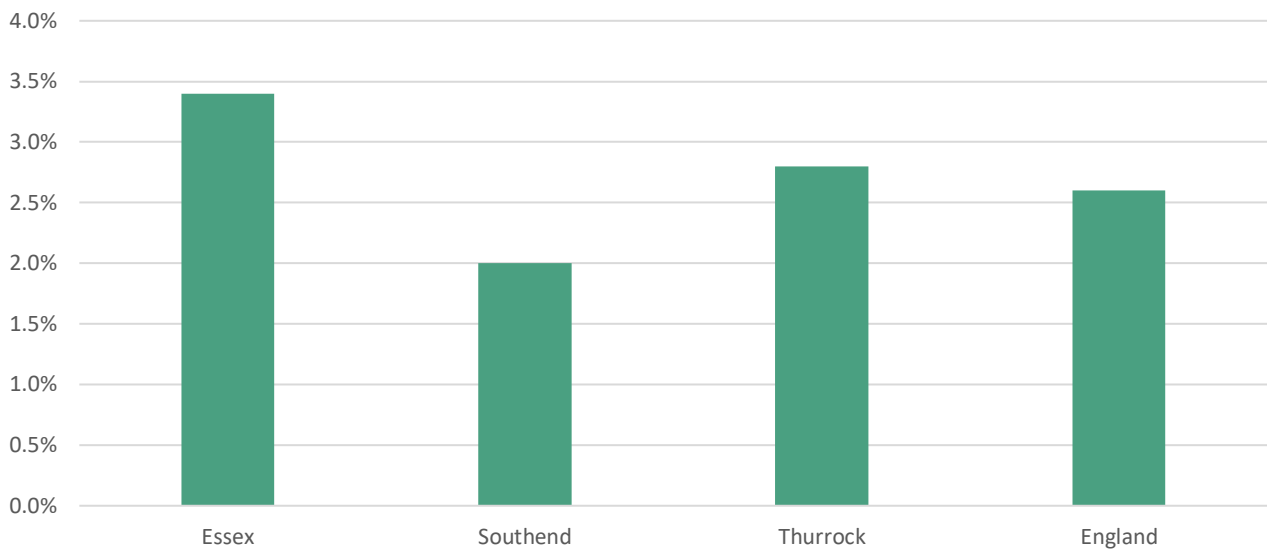
This gap between FSM-eligible pupils and their peers also persists into adulthood. Nationally, FSM-eligible pupils are 23% less likely to be in sustained employment aged 27 when compared to their peers, and will experience a gap in earnings at age 30. At the age of 30 the top 10% from independent schools were earning upwards of £71,000 a year, while the top 1% were earning more than £180,000. In contrast, the top 1% of non-FSM state school pupils were earning more than £85,000, while the top 1% of FSM pupils were on £63,000.

Variations in educational attainment may account for part of this, however it does not explain the persistent employment and earnings gap as data show that even when adults who received FSM as children achieve the same level of qualifications and similar attainment in secondary school, they will still go on to earn less than their more affluent peers.

Young adults who are not in education, training, or employment (NEET)

In Greater Essex, there are around 174,000 young people aged between 16-24 years old. Of the 97,500 actively seeking work, 11.7% are unemployed. Within Essex, 3.4% of 16–17-year-olds are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), which is slightly higher than the national average of 2.8%, according to the Department of Education. In Thurrock, 2.8% of 16-17 year olds are NEET, and 2% in Southend-on-Sea.

Chart IQ9: Proportion of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment, or training (NEET)



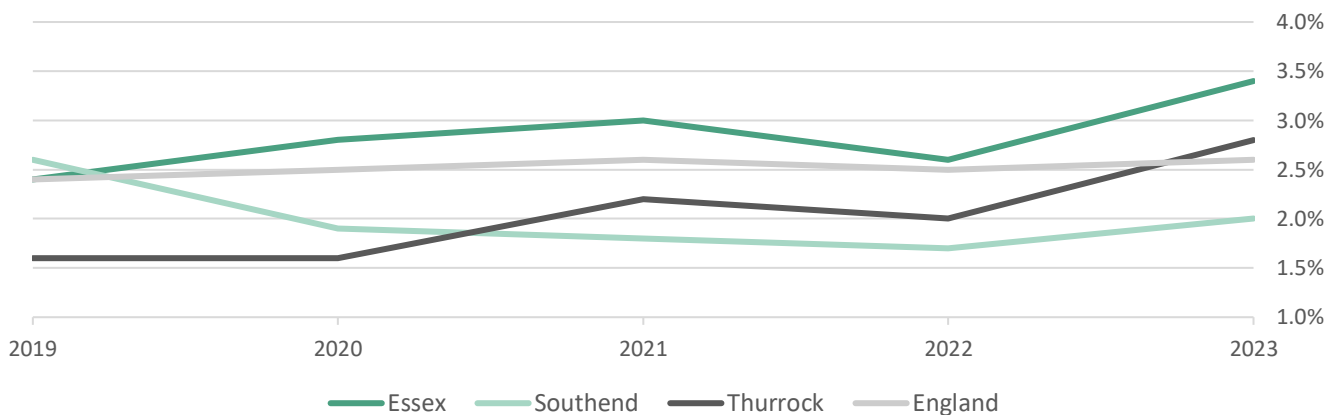
Source: Department for Education (2023) 'NEET and participation'

This is a cohort of young people who are experiencing reduced opportunities and are at increased risk of challenges in adulthood, including lasting impacts on future employment outcomes and earnings, and on physical and mental health.

There are a number of risk factors which have been identified as influencing a young person's chance of being NEET, which are strongly linked with inequalities and socioeconomic disadvantage. This includes low family income, living in social housing and living in a single parent household, caring responsibilities, teenage pregnancy, having a special educational need or health condition, and low educational attainment among other factors.

The number of 16-17 year olds who are NEET within Essex has steadily increased between 2019-2023, rising from 2.4% in 2019 to 3.4% in 2023. A steady increase can also be observed for Thurrock, rising from 1.6% in 2019, whilst Southend-on-Sea experienced fluctuations but has decreased overall from 2.6% in 2019.

Chart IQ10: Proportion of 16-17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), from 2019-2023



Source: Department for Education (2023) 'NEET and participation'

The future outlook is therefore uncertain; however, we may expect to see a continued increase in the proportions of NEET young people as a whole. This trajectory is indicative of wider socioeconomic trends at both a local and national level, however there are a range of interventions which may help to shift the dial and increase numbers of young people into education, employment, and training. A range of Essex wide activity is already underway that support NEETs objectives and interventions, and a new £516k delivery plan to support NEETs aged 16-25 aims to support wider education and skills interventions to support employment opportunities for young people in Essex into 2026.

Low income working families

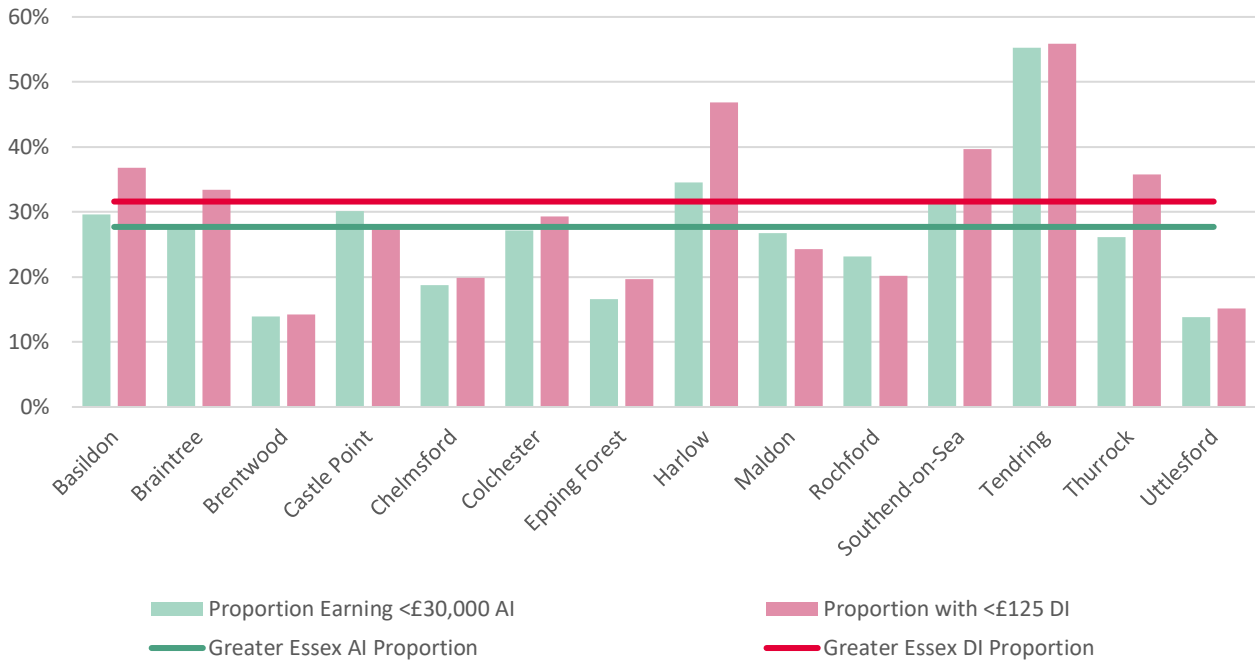
There are 205,490 households in Greater Essex on relative low incomes (under £30k per year), representing 27.7% of all households (2023). Data suggest that those with household incomes under £30k per year are likely to experience greater financial challenges.

Although many of these households will not meet the threshold required for financial support and may not be experiencing the most acute forms of deprivation, they may be struggling to make ends meet and vulnerable to taking on debt.

Rising costs of living have squeezed levels of discretionary income across the income spectrum. An estimated 234,000 households in Greater Essex have a discretionary income of less than £125 per month (c.32% of households). Discretionary income is the amount of net income remaining after all basic necessities are covered. Again, this provides an indication of households' ability to achieve a good standard of living, with those having below £125 per month likely to experience challenges.

Local analysis suggests that those who are most vulnerable to pressures on their income are likely to be living in households with children (particularly single parent households); older women living alone (aged 65+); and households from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Increases in low income households have also been felt more in Harlow, Colchester, Braintree and Tendring.

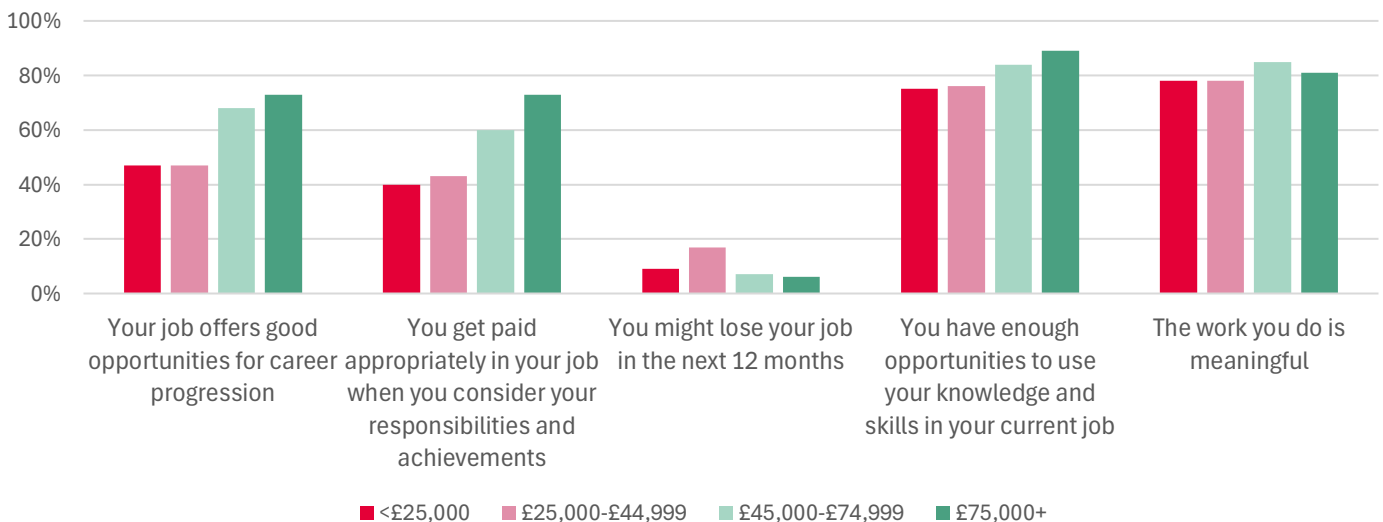
Chart IQ11: Proportion of Households earning less than £30k annually and with Discretionary Income less than £125, by district and Greater Essex



Source: Consumer View Data Jan 2024, Mosaic Experian

Low income families report that the challenges they face include lack of financial stability and resilience to deal with unexpected costs. The experiences of low income families were also characterised by persistent worries about finances which takes considerable time and mental energy, leaving limited ‘bandwidth’ to think beyond the here and now or plan for the future. The basic need to ‘get by’ from month to month crowds out any focus on self-improvement and income progression. Many are also reporting being in low paid jobs with limited opportunities to progress, and travel costs also present barriers to seeking higher paid work further afield.

Chart IQ12: Job quality responses by household income in Essex
To what extent do you agree or disagree that...(% strongly/slightly agree)



Source: Essex Residents survey, 2023. Please note, data for Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock is unavailable.

Areas which were particularly challenging included juggling work and childcare, with many being heavily reliant on informal networks due to formal childcare costs being prohibitive. Challenges around childcare also mean many working parents, particularly mothers, have to limit their hours of employment when caring for younger children. The pressures for single parents are even greater. With recent increases in the cost of living, cohorts already struggling are likely to feel the impacts more keenly than others, with disparities between higher and lower income households likely to increase.

Experiences of digital exclusion

Many people have come to rely on the internet and digital devices for many daily services, and this reliance has undoubtedly increased since the pandemic. Fewer people are living entirely offline, digital engagement is increasing, and people are becoming more digitally capable than ever before. The majority of Essex residents are well connected to the internet, with nearly all having access to the internet at home. In a 2023 survey, 91% reported having access via a fixed broadband connection, however this is less likely for those living in more deprived areas, and digital access is an issue for some.

Those who have internet access through routes other than fixed broadband are more likely to be younger, female, from an ethnic minority background, a single person household or single parent family, and living on a relatively low income. They are more likely to be living in Chelmsford, Harlow and Tendring.

For the 2% of Essex residents reporting no internet access at home, they are most likely to be female, aged 75+, with a disability or health condition and living in social housing and receiving a household income under £25k per year. They are most likely to be living in Tendring, in the most deprived IMD quintile. Those living in the most deprived areas are also less likely to say they use the internet on a regular basis, and more likely to say they lack confidence using the internet.

Lacking digital access presents a host of challenges for participating in daily life, including limiting access to employment opportunities, health services, as well as accessing the most cost effective products and services. This means that those who are already experiencing financial challenges face additional barriers. Whilst there are some physical infrastructure challenges to access within particularly rural communities in Essex, those who experience digital exclusion are more likely to struggle with affordability of broadband connectivity, access to devices and a lack of skills.

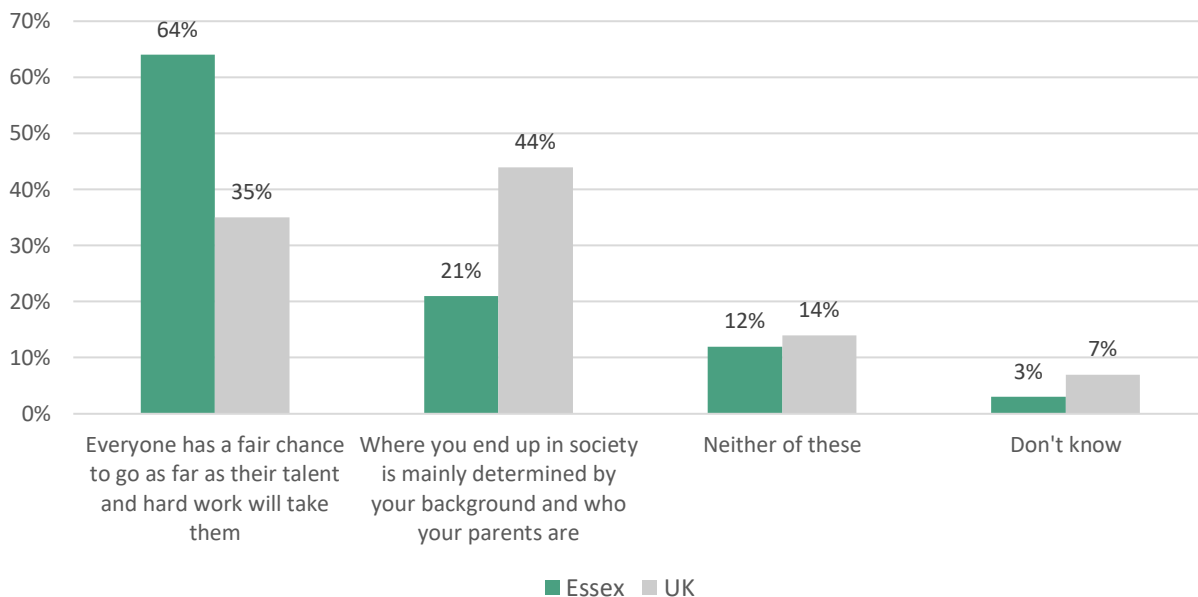
Inequalities in Greater Essex: looking ahead

There is a risk that patterns of inequality between different places, and between different groups and populations in Greater Essex, persist across generations. There is a risk that children born into deprived or low-income households themselves go on to experience poor outcomes in education, low incomes in their adult lives, and limited opportunities to build financial security for their own families.

Breaking these persistent, intergenerational patterns of inequality requires a focus on social mobility. But the evidence suggests that, across the UK as a whole, rates of social mobility lag behind much of the developed world. In too many cases, a child's life chances are determined by where they live and their parents' socio-economic background, rather than their abilities and their willingness to work hard.

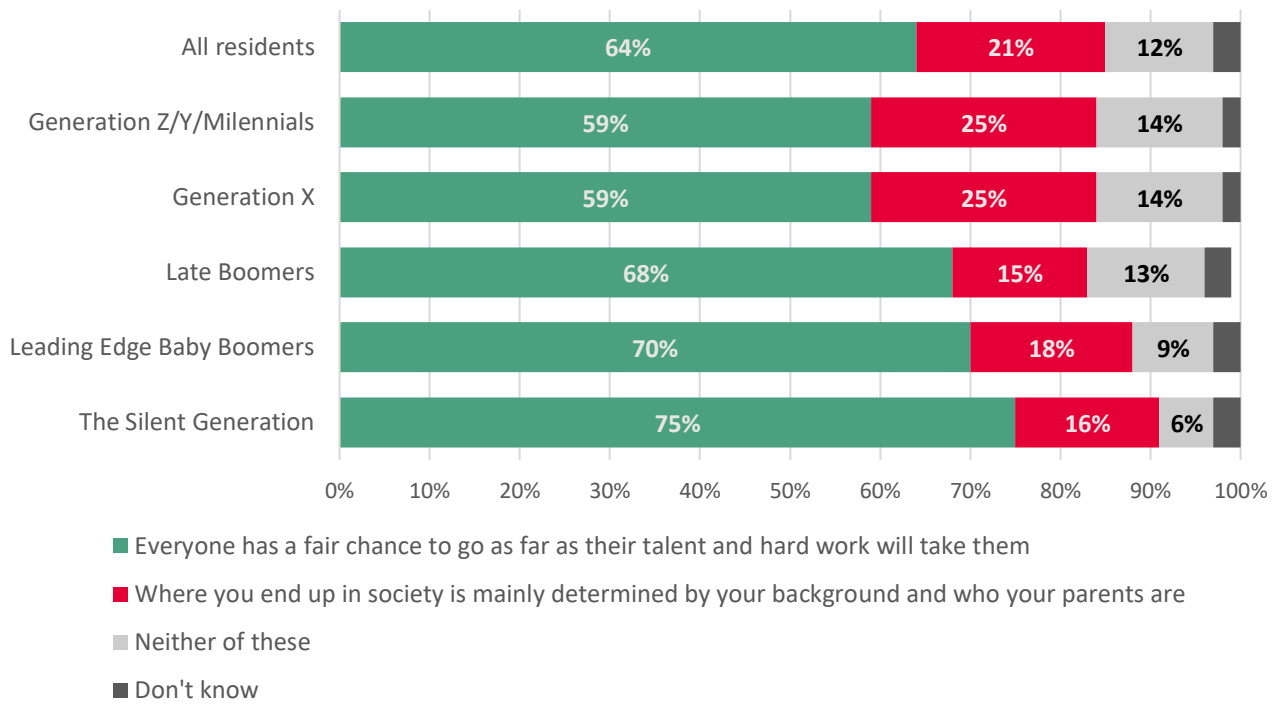
Despite these trends at national level, Essex residents have a firm belief in social mobility and are generally optimistic about their chances to succeed. Almost two thirds believe that an individual's success reflects talent and hard work, compared to only 35% across the UK as a whole, although younger generations are less optimistic.

Chart IQ13: Residents' attitudes towards securing social mobility, Essex vs UK, 2020



Source: Essex Residents survey (2020), Social Mobility Barometer (2020. Please note, data for Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock is unavailable.)

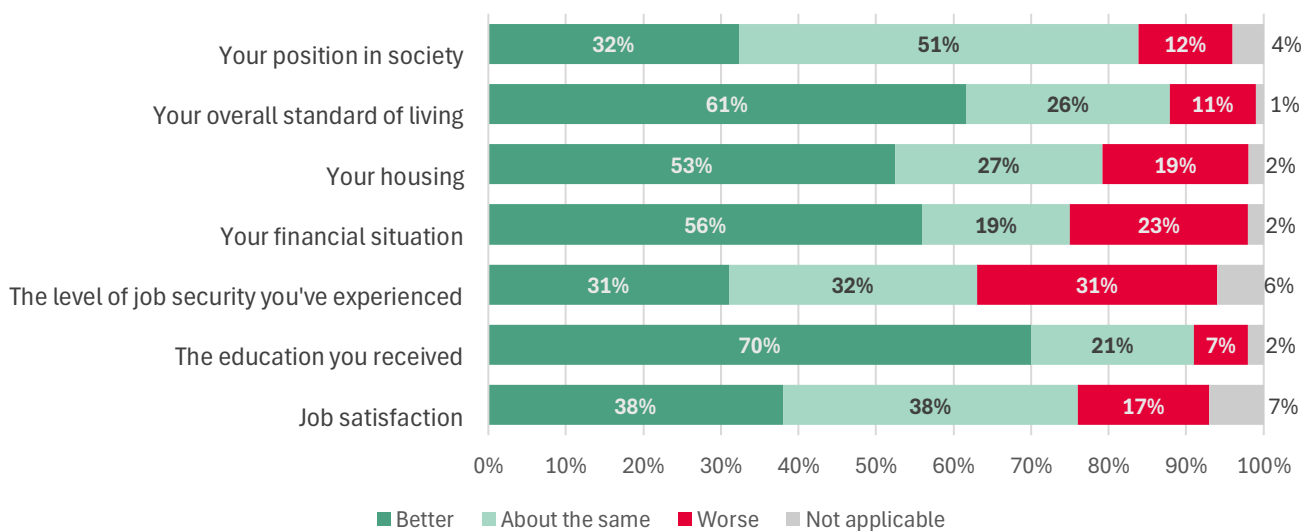
Chart IQ14: Residents' attitudes towards securing social mobility by generations, 2020



Source: Essex Residents survey, 2020. Please note, data for Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock is unavailable.

People in Essex also recognise that they have benefited from social mobility and improved opportunities in their own lives. Essex residents across generations and age groups recognise that they are better off than their parents across a range of areas.

Chart IQ15: Percentage of residents who believe they are better or worse off than their parents, in terms of...'



Source: Essex Residents Survey Dashboard 2020. Please note, data for Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock is unavailable.

Despite optimism and support for the idea of social mobility across Essex communities, there are signs that it is becoming harder for younger generations to secure success.

National research suggests that social mobility may be becoming more difficult for younger generations to achieve, and that millennials (those born between 1981-2000) may become the first generation to fare worse economically than their parents. The evidence suggests that younger generations are struggling to meet lifecycle milestones, like job security and home ownership, at the same age as their parents, and that household-income progress has stalled.

Millennials at age 30 typically earn c.8% less than their Generation X counterparts at the same age. This decline in earnings is significant as it suggests that millennials are not only starting their careers on a weaker economic footing but may also face long-term repercussions in terms of wealth accumulation and financial stability.

A consequence of this decline in economic mobility is stalling and declining living standards. This is likely to be a defining challenge for policy makers in Greater Essex, and at national level, over the next decade. With lower earnings, many find it difficult to afford homeownership, a key factor in wealth building – particularly as house price growth has remained consistently higher than wage growth, over the last 10 years. The decrease in homeownership rates among millennials further highlights the generational wealth gap, as owning a home is often associated with increased financial security and capital accumulation over time.

Stalling and declining living standards are likely to lead to increased pressure on public services in the long-term as the resources required to support social safety nets are squeezed, and as a generation that has enjoyed reduced financial security, progresses through the labour market and into retirement.

Chart IQ16: Annual Growth Rates of Real average weekly earnings, and annual house prices in the UK, 2013-2023



Source: ONS, Real earnings shows a positive annual growth rate for October 2023 & Annual house price rates of change for all dwellings, UK, January 2006 to January 2023

Appendices - Data Sources

Inequalities in Greater Essex

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