



GREATER ESSEX TRENDS

June 2024



ECONOMY

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.

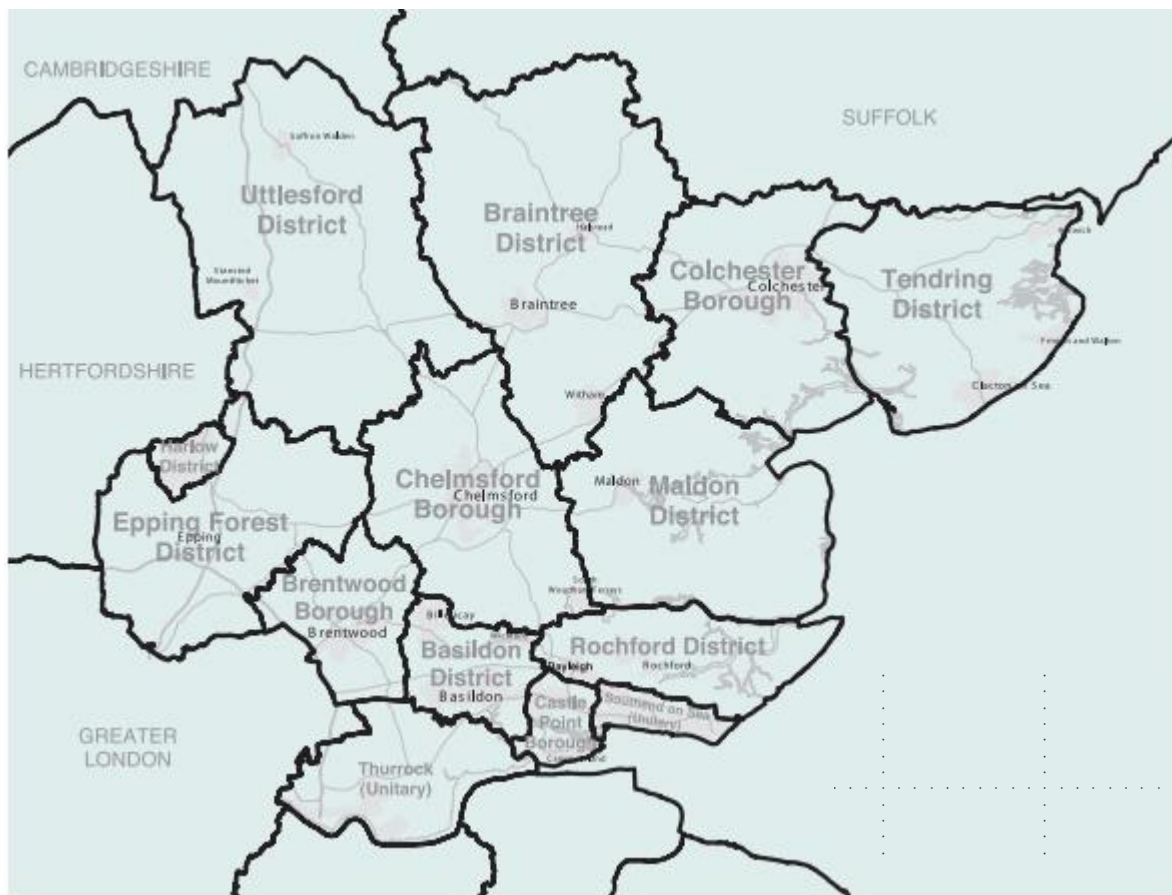
Rather, Greater Essex Trends provides information at a more fundamental level. It presents the information that allows us to make these decisions. It paints a picture of our county's population profile, economy, environment, and infrastructure as it is today and how it might develop in the future. In 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 Economy.

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).

Economy

Summary

Greater Essex is a dynamic, thriving, entrepreneurial and creative region with the potential to outpace the economic growth of other parts of the country. Economic output in Greater Essex is similar in scale to that of Northern Ireland at c.£45 billion per year. The region is home to c.81,000 businesses, including some of the best known and most innovative companies in the world, employing more than 700,000 people. We have a history of low unemployment and average incomes that exceed national and regional benchmarks.

We are a gateway to trade and investment with two international airports (London Stansted Airport and London Southend Airport) and two emerging Freeports – Thames Freeport and Freeport East, building on the strengths of the Haven ports (Harwich and Felixstowe) and London Gateway and Port of Tilbury, as well as being well connected to London, Cambridge and the M11 corridor. We have the opportunity to build on our assets to accelerate the pace of growth in key sectors of our economy – construction and retrofit; clean energy; advanced manufacturing; digitech; life sciences – to the tune of 50,000 additional jobs by 2030.

We have world class businesses with whom partners and policy makers in Greater Essex have excellent relationships – including Manchester Airport Group (owners and operators of Stansted) and DP World on logistics; Ford, Raytheon, and Teledyne on advanced manufacturing; Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult for life sciences; Kao Data and Global Marine Systems on digitech.

Greater Essex is home to two universities: the University of Essex, and Anglia Ruskin University, both of which generate research with world-leading impact. As well as some of the most outstanding schools in the country – four of which, the girls' and boys' grammar schools in Chelmsford and Colchester, regularly feature amongst the top 20 schools in the whole country.

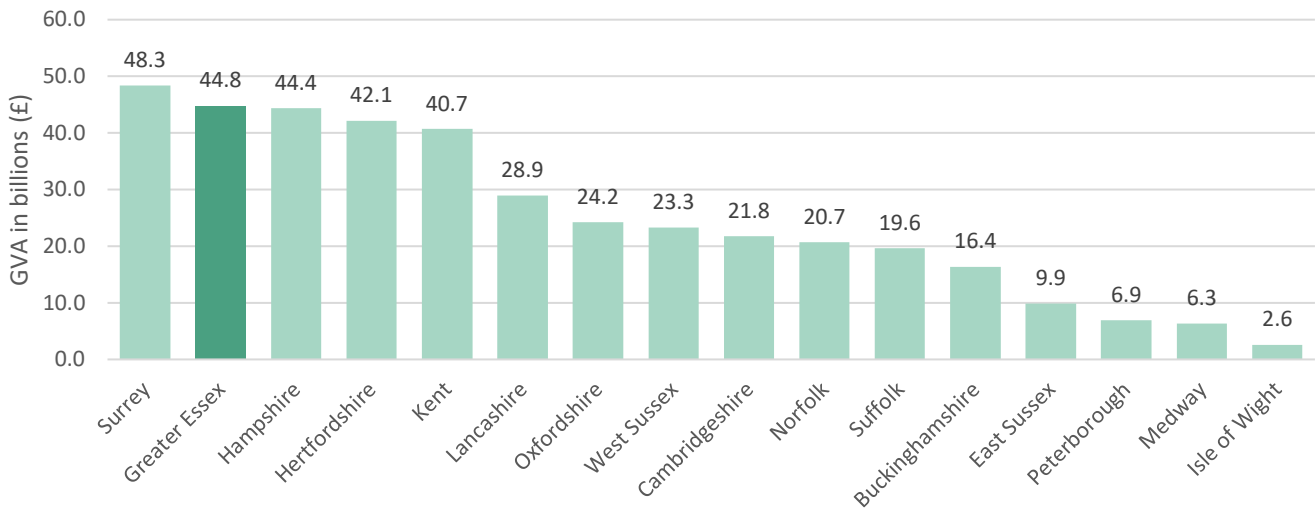
Despite these strengths and opportunities, in recent years we have seen Greater Essex fall behind its neighbours in the wider South East in terms of the pace of economic growth and levels of productivity. A growing population, combined with relatively slow growth in the number of jobs, and particularly high-value jobs, across some of our towns and cities has fuelled high levels of commuting, placing a strain on our local transport infrastructure, and driving high claimant counts in some parts of the region, leading to lower financial resilience and reliance on support services such as food banks and emergency funding schemes.

Around 188,000 Greater Essex residents now live in areas that are amongst the most deprived 20% in England, compared to only 106,000 in 2007. The COVID-19 pandemic, shocks to the global energy market and food supply chains, and the current cost of living crisis further exacerbates these pressures and amplifies inequalities, including gender inequalities.

The Greater Essex Economy

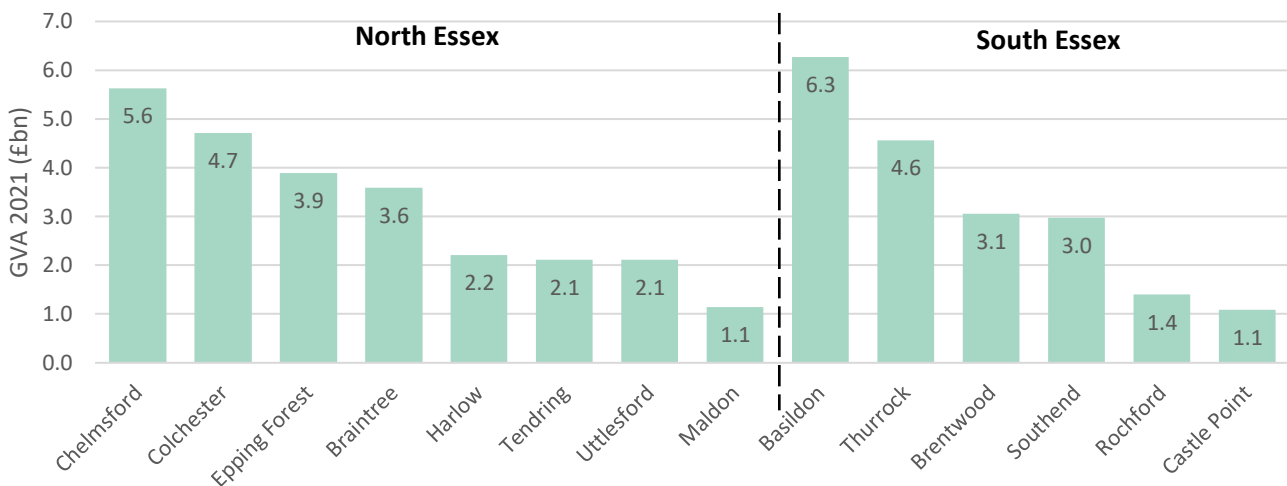
Greater Essex historically has a large and highly productive economy. The total value of the economy in 2021, measured as total Gross Value Added (GVA), was £44.8 billion. This is similar in scale to Northern Ireland and larger than several major UK cities. Total GVA for the North Essex Councils (NEC) area was £25.4 billion and for the South Essex Councils area (SEC) was £19.4 billion.

Chart EC1: Total economic output (Gross Value Added – GVA), Greater Essex and comparators, 2021.



Source: UK small area gross value-added estimates, NOMIS

Chart EC2: Regional real GVA figures for Greater Essex districts, 2021



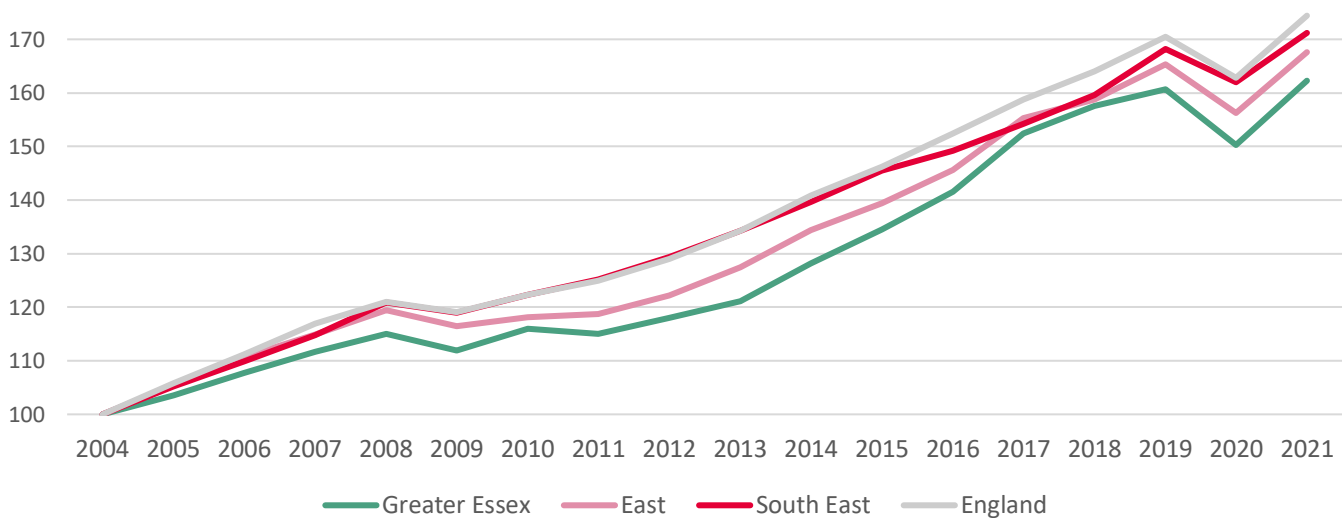
Source: UK small area gross value-added estimates, NOMIS

The value of economic output varies widely across the Greater Essex region. Basildon (£6.3 billion) and Chelmsford (£5.6 billion) continue to generate the largest economic outputs. By contrast Rochford, Maldon and Castle Point have the smallest economies, each around £1 billion per year, reflecting the wide variation between urban, rural, and coastal places in Greater Essex.

Looking back over the last 20 years, Greater Essex has experienced lower levels of economic growth, as measured by GVA, compared to all other comparator regions, behind the South East and East of England. Compounding this challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a profound shock to the Greater Essex economy. In 2020, the value of output fell below 2018 and 2019 levels. In the same year, some business sectors experienced reductions in outputs of over 60%, with the air transport sector being even higher. We also saw increased economic uncertainty and decreased confidence, with high numbers of business closures and the largest spike in unemployment in almost 30 years.

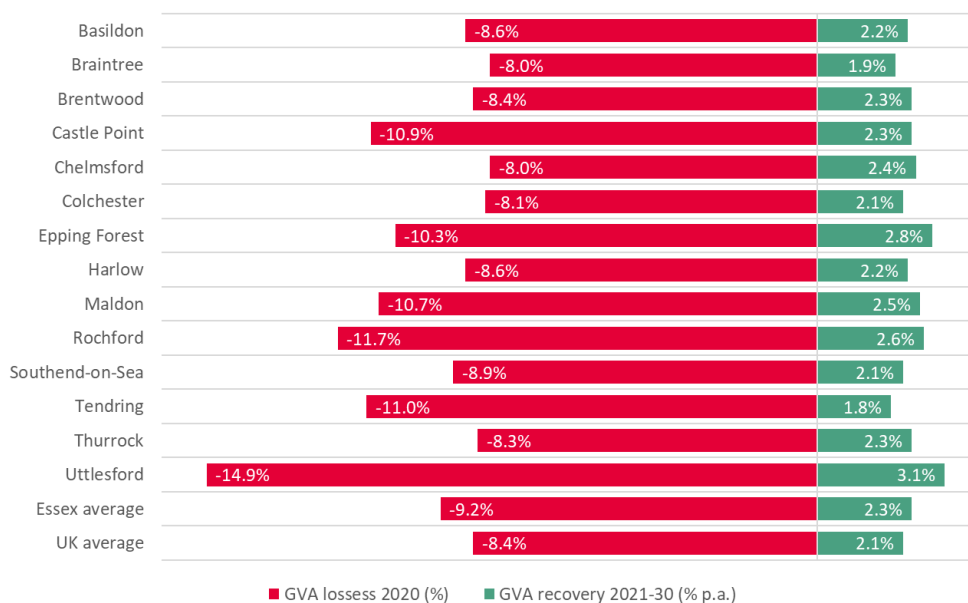
Along with post-pandemic increases in inflation and the cost of living, these economic impacts have the potential for lasting repercussions, with an increase in inequalities in income, wealth, education, and skills.

Chart EC3: Economic growth of Greater Essex and comparators, 2004-2021 (Base rate=100 in 2004)



Source: UK small area gross value-added estimates, NOMIS

Chart EC4: Projected GVA impact and recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, unitary and local authority area in Greater Essex, 2019-2030

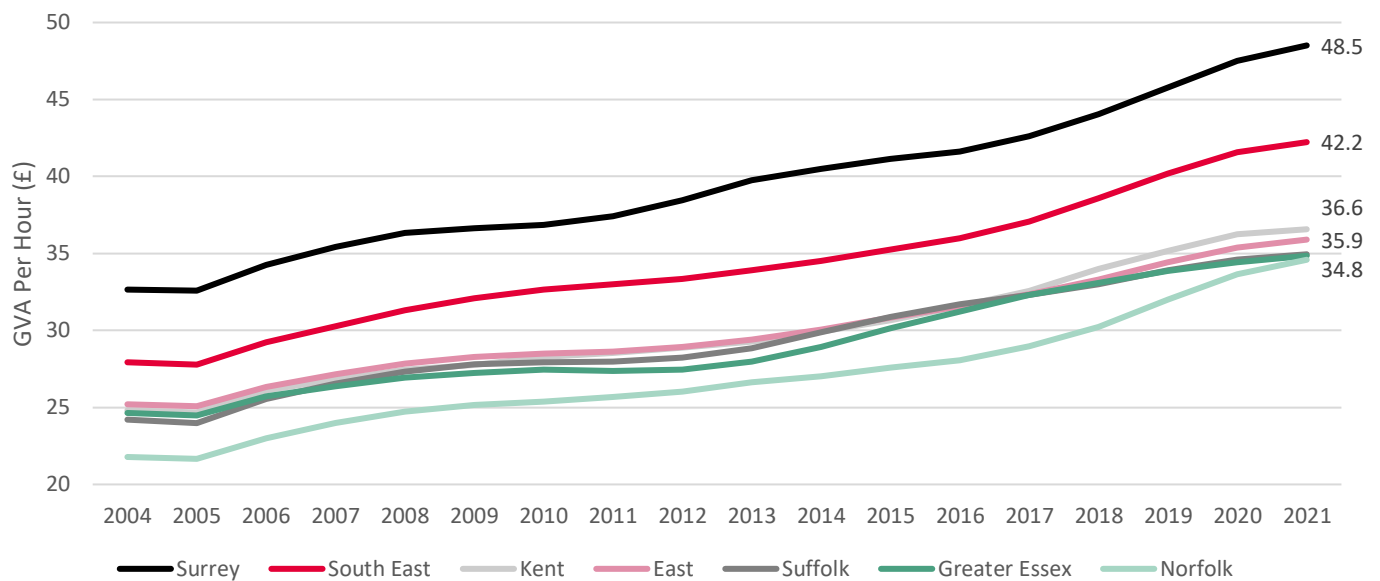


Source: Cambridge Econometrics Projections for Essex

Local productivity

Even before the pandemic, levels of productivity in Greater Essex were well below those seen in similar areas across the South East. Based on productivity levels for each hour worked, Greater Essex ranks significantly lower than other, often smaller, economies in the South East and East of England. Lower productivity matters to the everyday lives of people across Greater Essex – it reflects that our businesses generate less value for the work they do, and means local workers typically earn less than counterparts in other areas. In 2021, Surrey had a GVA per hour worked of £48.5, compared to Greater Essex at £34.8. If Greater Essex had the same productivity rate as Surrey in 2021, the Greater Essex economy would be worth some £62.5bn.

Chart EC5: Local productivity and Gross Value Added per Hour, Greater Essex and comparators, 2004-2021



Source: Subregional productivity in the UK: June 2023, ONS

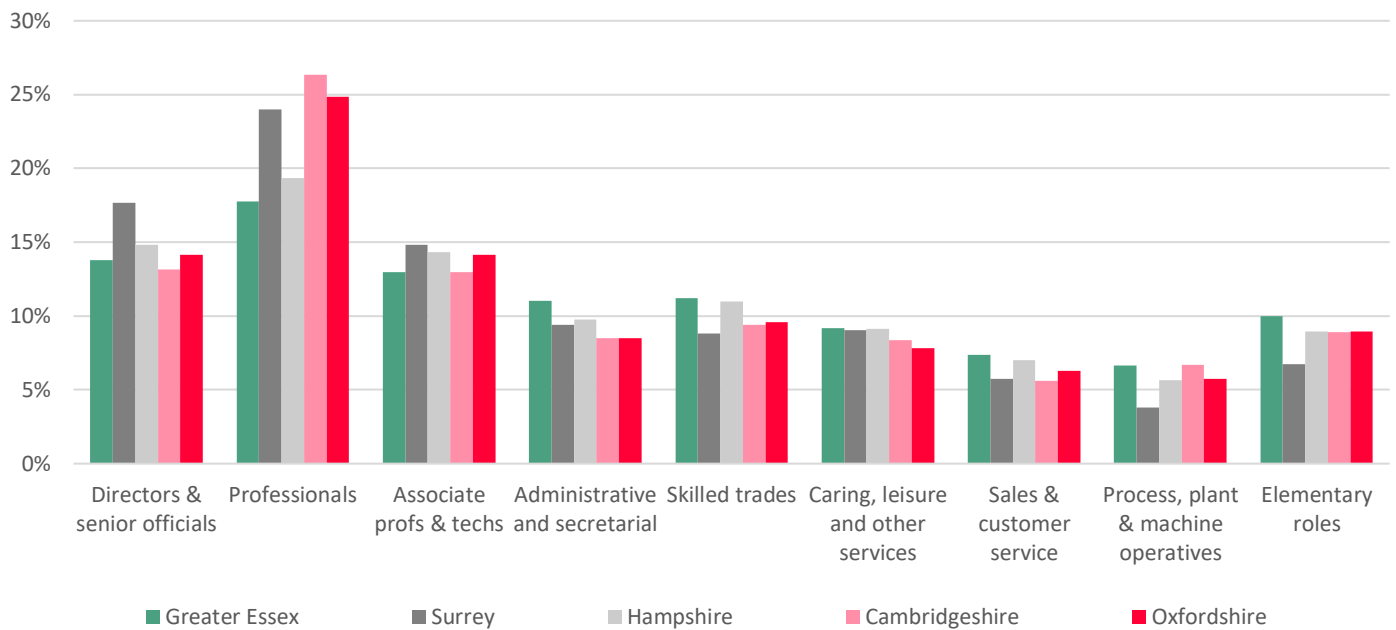
One of the key factors underlying lower levels of productivity in Greater Essex is the relative shortfall in local jobs. There are fewer jobs – and fewer high-value jobs – per head of working-age population in Greater Essex than in other areas. To bring Greater Essex into line with other counties across the East and South East regions, an additional 100,000+ jobs would need to be created, around 30,000 of which would need to be high value ‘professional’ roles.

The relative shortage of high-quality local jobs has implications for communities across Greater Essex. It lies behind the fact that the workforce tends to be less well qualified – less highly skilled – than comparator areas; that talented young people from Greater Essex too often leave the county to study and cannot find appropriate work to enable them to return. It is also reflected in the substantial difference in earnings between residents who work in Greater Essex and those who commute to neighbouring areas.

This shortage of high-quality local jobs also constrains opportunities and drives inequality within Greater Essex too. The places that are most affected tend to be our most isolated coastal communities. The people who are affected the most are those who cannot travel

significant distances for work. This can include vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and/or limiting health conditions, and those with family and/or caring responsibilities.

Chart EC6: Occupational group of the workplace population for Greater Essex



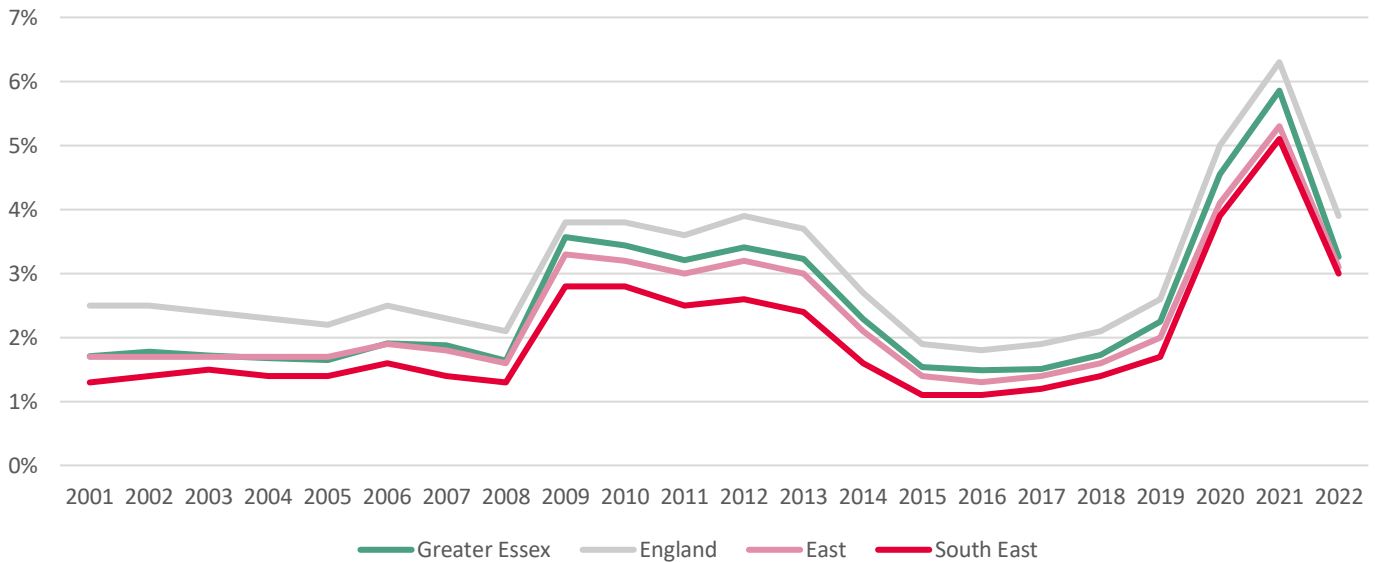
Source: Annual population survey - regional - occupation (SOC2020) by sex by employment type

Despite the challenges of historically slow growth and lower productivity than in comparator areas, Greater Essex maintains a level of relative prosperity. Communities across the region benefit from lower levels of unemployment and households benefit from incomes that exceed national and regional benchmarks.

There are, however, early signals to suggest that we cannot take this prosperity for granted.

Although the claimant count unemployment rate in Greater Essex has been lower than the England average for the last five years, the number of claimants remains high compared to regional benchmarks. The claimant rate also remains above pre-pandemic levels – broadly similar to levels experienced in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and recession.

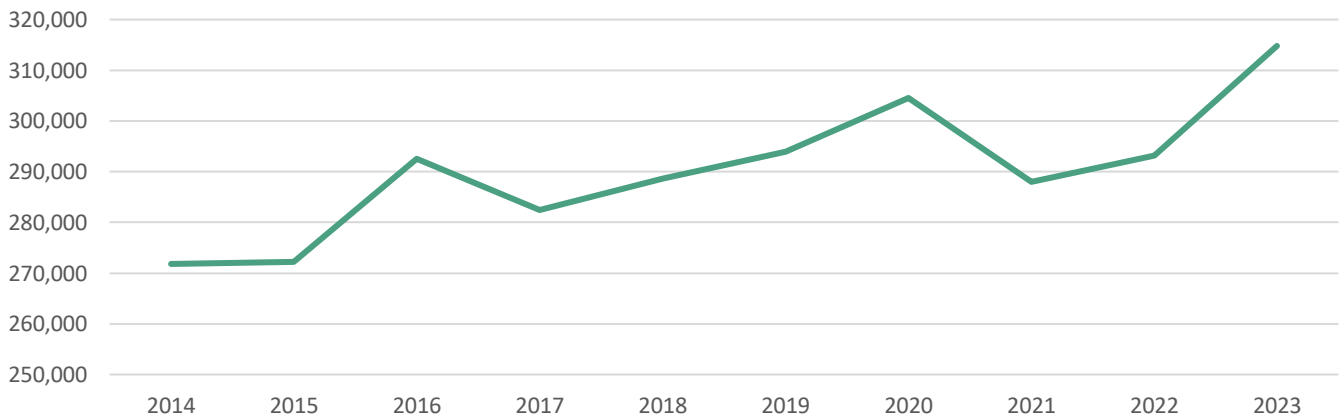
Chart EC7: Claimant rate (working age population), Greater Essex and comparators, 2001-2022



Source: Claimant count by sex and age, NOMIS

Furthermore, while unemployment rates in Greater Essex have remained low, the number of individuals aged 16+ who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness has increased by 16% from 271,800 in 2014 to 314,800 in 2023.

Chart EC8: Number of Economically inactive people with health conditions or illnesses lasting more than 12 months in Greater Essex (aged 16+)

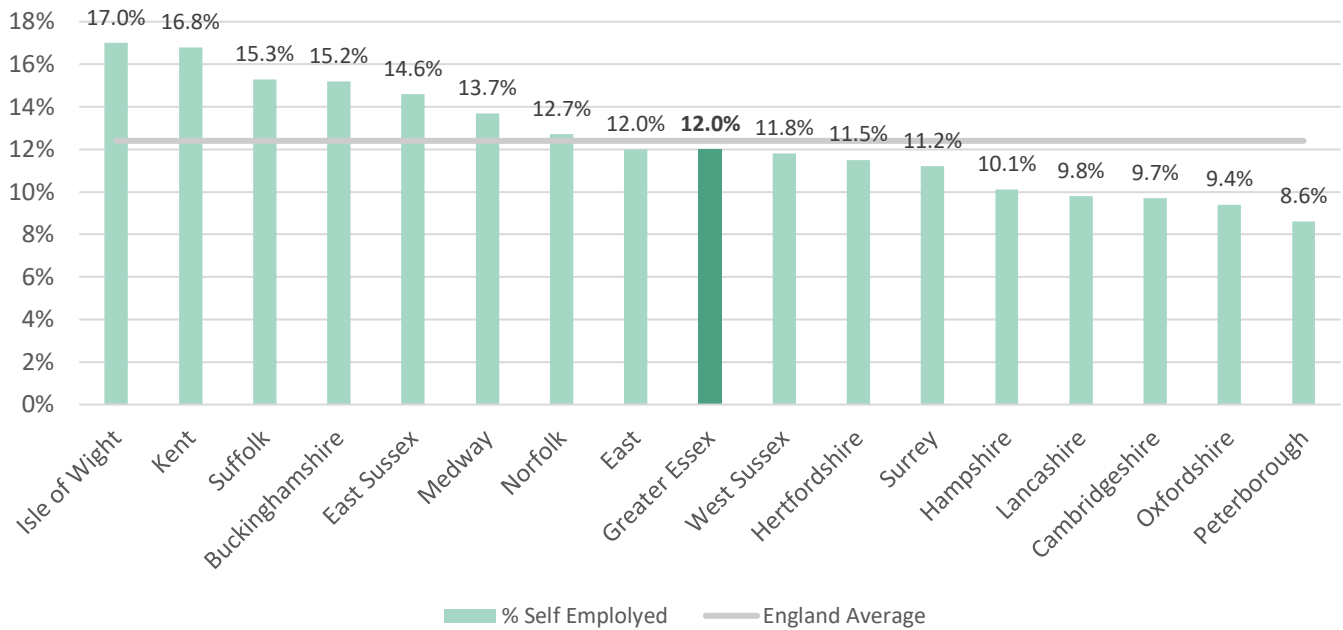


Source: Annual population survey, NOMIS

There are also signs of stress in Greater Essex’s business community. Traditionally, Greater Essex has a strong spirit of enterprise with a higher proportion of residents being self-employed than elsewhere. However, since the pandemic, the rate of self-employment in Greater Essex has reduced and has fallen behind England as a whole for only the second time in almost 20 years. The cost-of-living crisis has exposed vulnerabilities for new businesses. Rising interest rates have affected business loans and investment opportunities. Additionally, the pandemic and cost-of-living challenges have eroded consumer confidence, replacing optimism with pessimism among both consumers and entrepreneurs. However, the latest data suggests that levels of self-employment in Greater Essex are starting to recover, as the England average is falling. For the long-term, policymakers should focus on providing

targeted support, fostering collaboration, and adapting policies to the evolving business landscape, to avoid another dip in self-employment numbers.

Chart EC9: Self-employed as a percentage of all in employment aged 16-64, Greater Essex and comparators, 2023



Source: Annual population survey, NOMIS

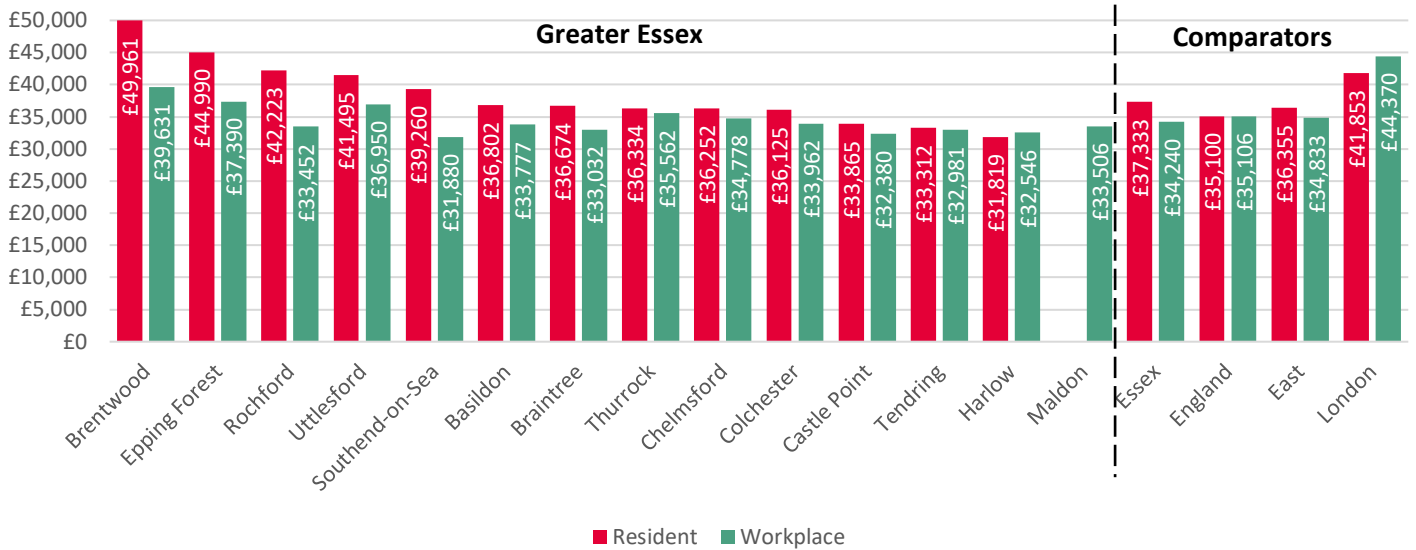
Chart EC10: Self-employed as a percentage of all employment aged 16-64, Greater Essex and comparator areas, 2004/05-2022/23



Source: Annual population survey, NOMIS

Greater Essex’s prosperity – reflected in higher incomes and lower levels of unemployment – is in large part a reflection of Greater Essex’s relationship with London, and its position within the London ‘city region’. Greater Essex’s economy and prosperity are directly interconnected with that of the capital city, which accounted for 28% of England’s total productivity in 2023. Nearly 100,000 Greater Essex residents travel to work in London (or have jobs that are based there), with similar numbers travelling into inner and outer London boroughs. Incomes of Greater Essex residents who work in London are around 40% higher than those working in Essex.

Chart EC11: Workplace vs resident earnings: median gross annual pay for full time workers by Greater Essex district and comparators, 2023



*Data for Maldon’s resident annual income has been suppressed as statistically unreliable.
 Source: Annual survey of hours and earnings – resident & workplace analysis, NOMIS

Chart EC12: Number of Commuters travelling to and from Greater Essex by origin/destination, 2011



Source: RF04AEW - Location of where people live when working and place of work, Census 2011

These higher salaries help support our local businesses. They generate demand for services and create local jobs. Historically, they have helped Greater Essex avoid large-scale deprivation and keep local benefit claims low, although levels of deprivation have increased in more recent years. Though it brings many benefits, our reliance on London does pose a risk, tying our prosperity to that of the capital and reducing the perceived need to invest in and improve Greater Essex’s own economic base.

The challenge for local policy makers is to help the Greater Essex economy to realise its full potential – creating the conditions for growth and increased prosperity by investing in the business base, developing the workforce, attracting investment in new growth sectors and providing the right infrastructure to enable growth.

Economy: Looking Ahead

How can Greater Essex boost its productivity levels? How can we attract more inward investment and create more local jobs? The evidence suggests that Greater Essex can do more to play to its strengths, as the economy continues to reset post-pandemic and in the context of its performance in relation to its neighbours in the South East and London.

Promoting Greater Essex enterprise

Greater Essex continues to have comparatively strong business start-up rates, higher than the South East and just ahead of the East of England. Before COVID-19, three-year survival rates for businesses in Greater Essex performed more strongly than national and regional comparators. However, in 2022, the national picture is that there has been a net loss of businesses in England with business closures exceeding the business birth rate for the first time since 2010 and the global financial crisis.

A traditionally strong enterprising streak is not enough in itself to guarantee high productivity, job growth or even commercial success. Local entrepreneurship is overwhelmingly focussed on small and microbusinesses. Of the 81,000 businesses in Greater Essex, 90 employed less than 9 people with a real scarcity of medium and large employers - less than 2% of businesses employed more than 50 people. These large businesses can bring an array of opportunity to the county, they tend to have more resources to invest in employees' skills and training, have a greater capacity to invest in innovation, and are able to employ more people on generally higher wages compared to smaller enterprises - all of which positively contributes to our local economy.

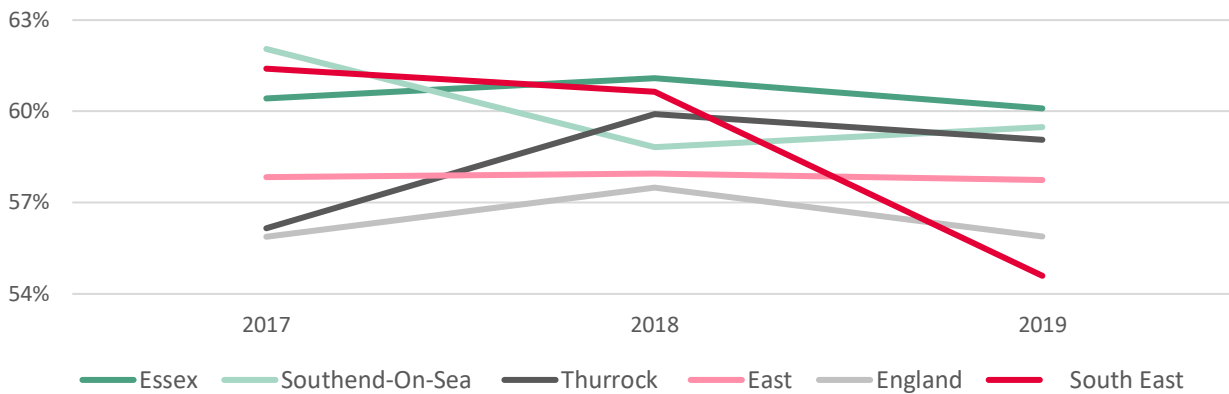
Yet, it is the smaller businesses which will provide the foundation for increasing prosperity in Greater Essex in the immediate term. The challenges facing them – staying competitive and continuing to grow in an extremely tough trading environment – are challenges for Greater Essex as a whole. Coordinated and effective business support, and capacity to support business scale ups and attract larger firms in strong growth sectors, are major opportunities.

Chart EC13: New business as a proportion of total business stock, Greater Essex and comparator areas, 2022



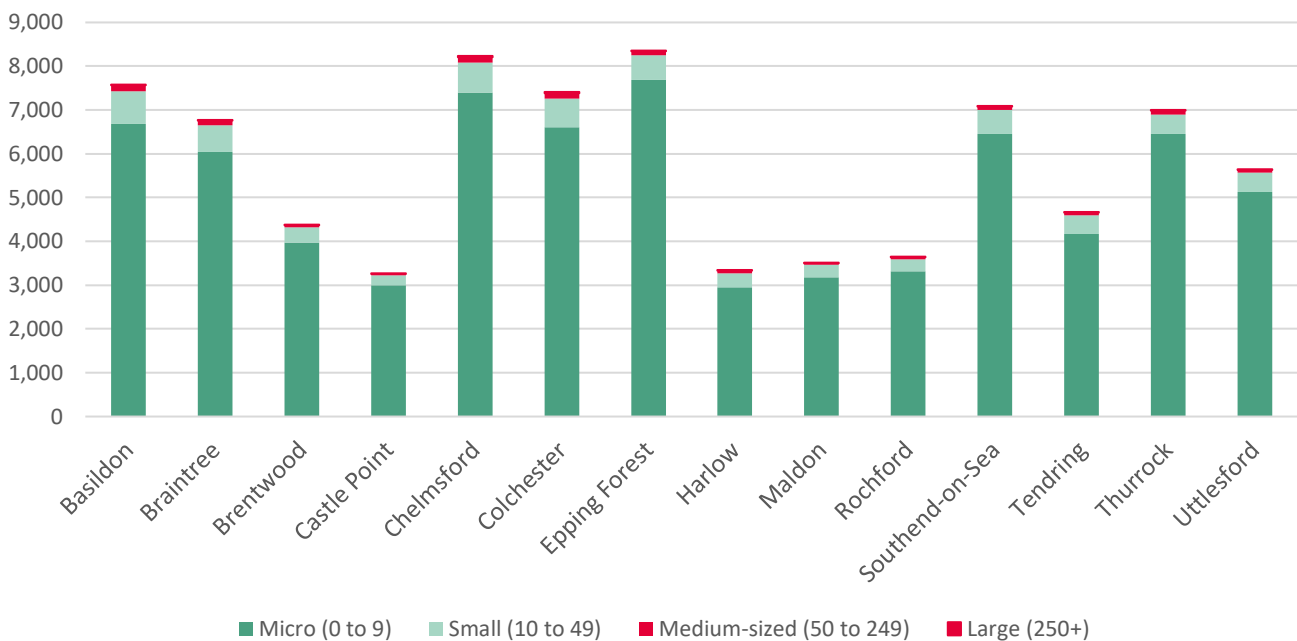
Source: Business demography, UK: 2022, ONS

Chart EC14: Three-year business survival rates in Essex and comparator areas for firms starting up between 2017-2019



Source: Business demography, UK: 2022, ONS

Chart EC15: Number of Greater Essex employers by size, 2022



Source: UK Business Counts - enterprises by industry and employment size band, NOMIS

Developing our workforce

The Greater Essex workforce is one of our most valuable assets. There are close to 750,000 employees in Greater Essex, a number which continues to rise year on year. The employment and job market has recovered well, nationally and across Greater Essex, since the COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a rise in job vacancies, more women re-entering the workplace, residents feeling more secure in their employment and less unemployment than predicted. Although, the rate of self-employment in Greater Essex, which is traditionally higher than in many other areas, has not yet recovered.

Our workforce is employed across a range of sectors including: health and care; logistics; tourism; arts; culture and creative; professional services; retail; agriculture. They remain major employers and contributors in different parts of Greater Essex. The future of these sectors will be shaped by the impact of a multiple of factors, for example, DigiTech, with rapid developments in automation and AI, and the need to decarbonise all sectors of the economy to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

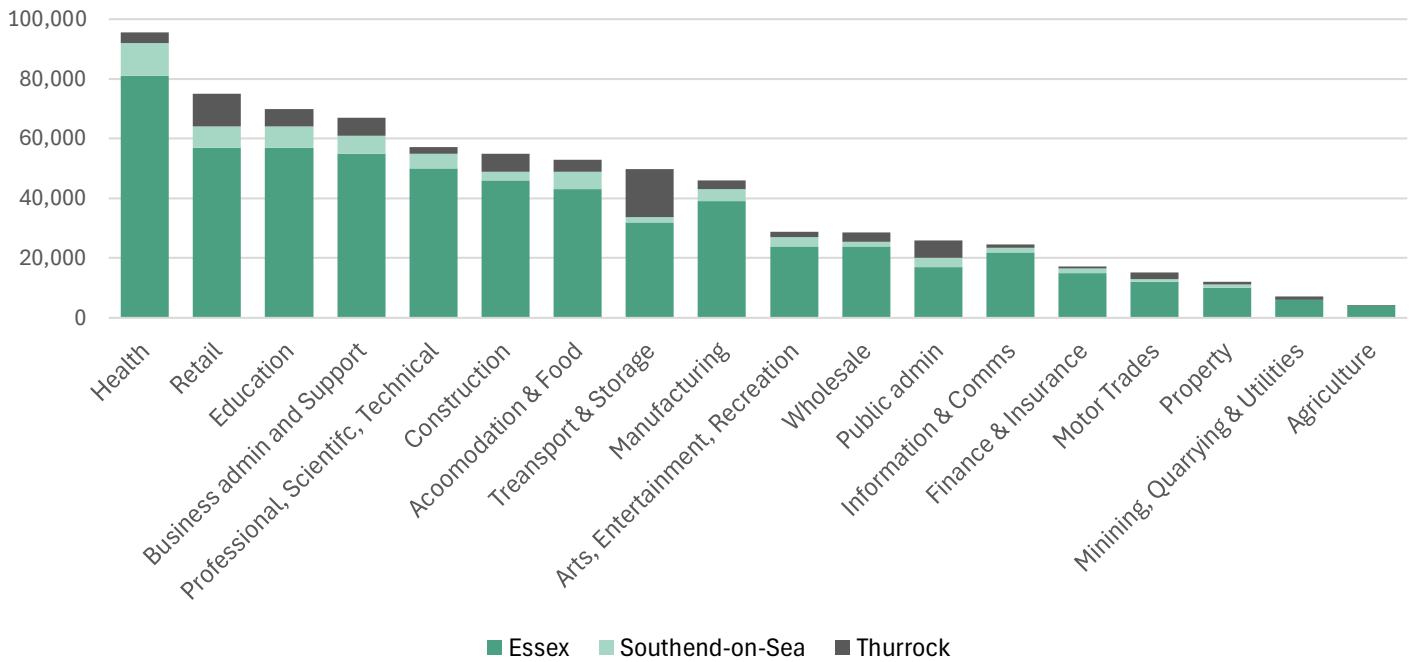
However, 42% of jobs in Greater Essex are within sectors identified by national government as 'vulnerable' – meaning they are more sensitive to long or short term economic shocks – these include manufacturing; construction; wholesale and retail trade; accommodation and food services. These sectors employed approximately 185,000 people in 2021. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, periods of double-digit inflation have impacted businesses with many reporting increased costs and reduction in turnover while also adjusting to post-Brexit changes to EU trading arrangements.

Additionally, in 2022/23, around 50,000 job posts in Greater Essex were for the care sector, making it one of the region's largest employers. This number is expected to grow significantly due to increasing pressures from an aging population, which will drive demand for more care services. Despite this rising demand, care workers are likely to continue facing challenges related to low-value and low-paid roles. The sector's growth does not necessarily translate to better wages or improved working conditions for these essential workers, highlighting a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure the sustainability and attractiveness of care roles in the future.

Greater Essex has the opportunity to build on our assets to accelerate the pace of growth in key sectors of our economy, to the tune of 50,000 additional jobs by 2030. These growth sectors include green construction and retrofit; clean energy; advanced manufacturing; digitech; life sciences. It is vital that public service partners play their full part in supporting and facilitating growth in these sectors.

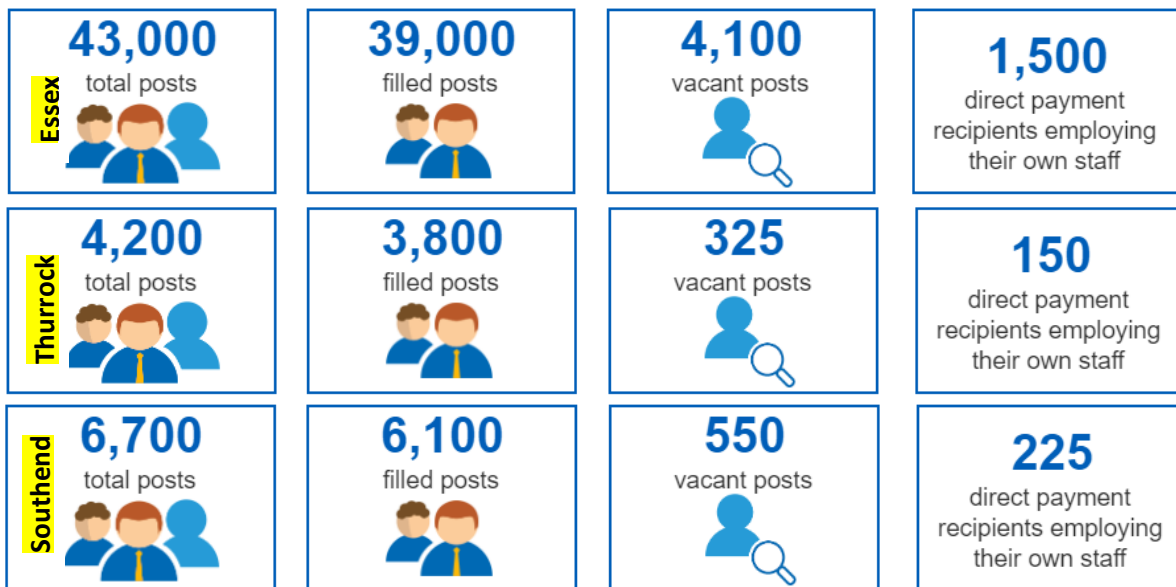
The Government's AI Opportunity Forum finds that the UK's AI sector already contributes £3.7 billion to the UK economy and employs 50,000 people across the country, with these figures set to grow. Google's UK Economic Impact Report highlighted the scale of this opportunity, with forecasts showing that AI-powered innovation could create over £400 billion in economic value for the UK economy by 2030.

Chart EC16: Number of employees across Greater Essex, by industry, 2021



Source: Annual population survey - workplace analysis, NOMIS

Chart EC17: Adult Social Care Workforce in Essex, Thurrock, and Southend-on-Sea



Source: Skills for Care Key Findings 2022/23

Building our skills base

A key enabler of economic growth is a workforce with the skills to support the needs of the Greater Essex economy and our businesses into the future. Greater Essex has 101,000 fewer people skilled to NVQ4+ than it should have (35% of 16-64 year olds are qualified to NVQ4+, well below the Great Britain average of 43%). We are also 8% below the national average at NVQ3+. Greater Essex also has low levels of Traineeships and T-levels, meaning fewer progression routes into skills-based education and training. The skills gap for our most deprived areas is even more stark.

In addition to this historic deficit, the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on learning and skills. The OECD estimates that pandemic lockdowns decreased workers' participation in learning by an average of 18%, and in informal learning by 25%, and will have prevented unemployed adults from accessing upskilling and training opportunities. This 'lost learning', along with historically relatively low skills, is a drag on productivity and an impediment to growth.

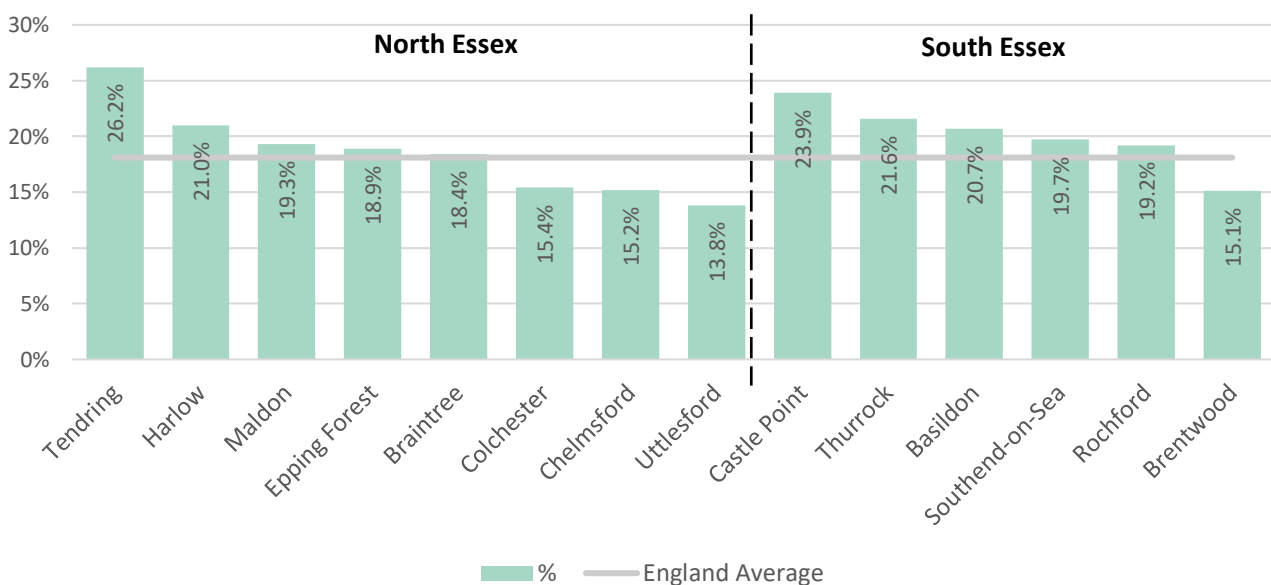
Currently our workforce is over-represented in lower skilled occupations and under-represented in managerial and professional occupations – leading to lower workplace earnings than both regional and national averages. This is in spite of having some of the largest global businesses in Greater Essex. All sectors will require new skills to unlock the opportunities in the transition to a low carbon, sustainable economy.

The challenge facing local policy makers is to steer the skills system to ensure that local learning provision is shaped in dialogues with local businesses with provision shaped to meet current and future skills needs. This will require more joined-up and co-ordinated working but has the potential to accelerate progress towards becoming a high wage, high skill, high productivity, net zero economy.

This has the opportunity to help young people to gain the skills they need to prosper in the modern workplace; enable businesses to find employees with the right skills to support their ambitions; and support UK plc by adding to the productivity, growth and sustainability of the economy.

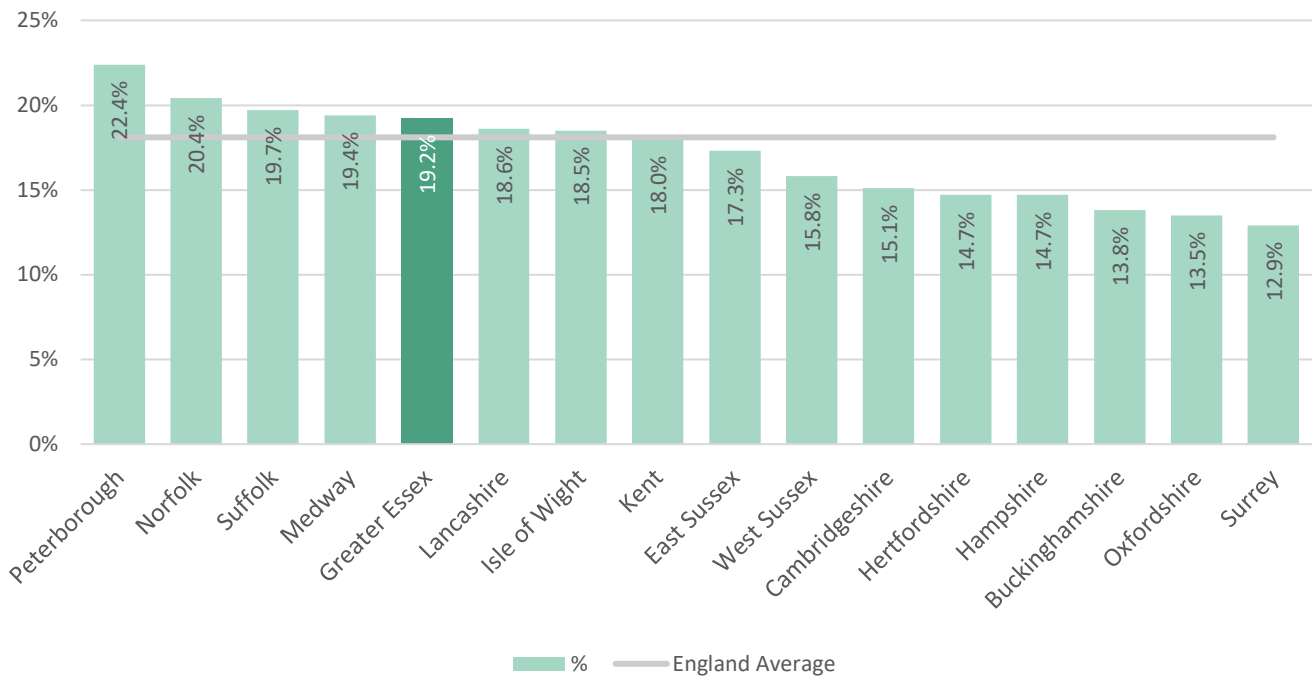
Importantly skills and wider economic prosperity should not only be seen as goods in their own right, but also as important in a range of other key strategic agendas for which a strong economy is foundational. Not least the health challenges faced in certain parts of Greater Essex.

Charts EC18: Percentage of adult population with *no qualifications*, Greater Essex, 2021



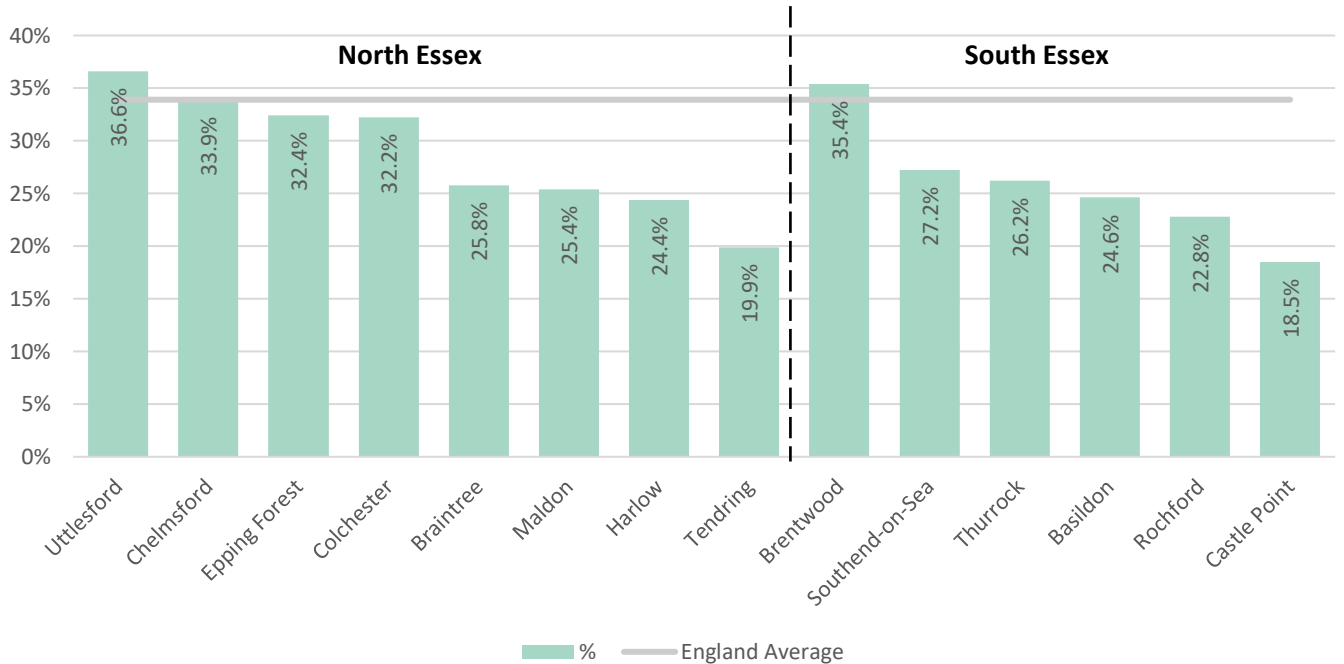
Source: TS067 - Highest level of qualification, Census 2021, NOMIS

Charts EC19: Percentage of adult population with *no qualifications*, Greater Essex and comparators, 2021



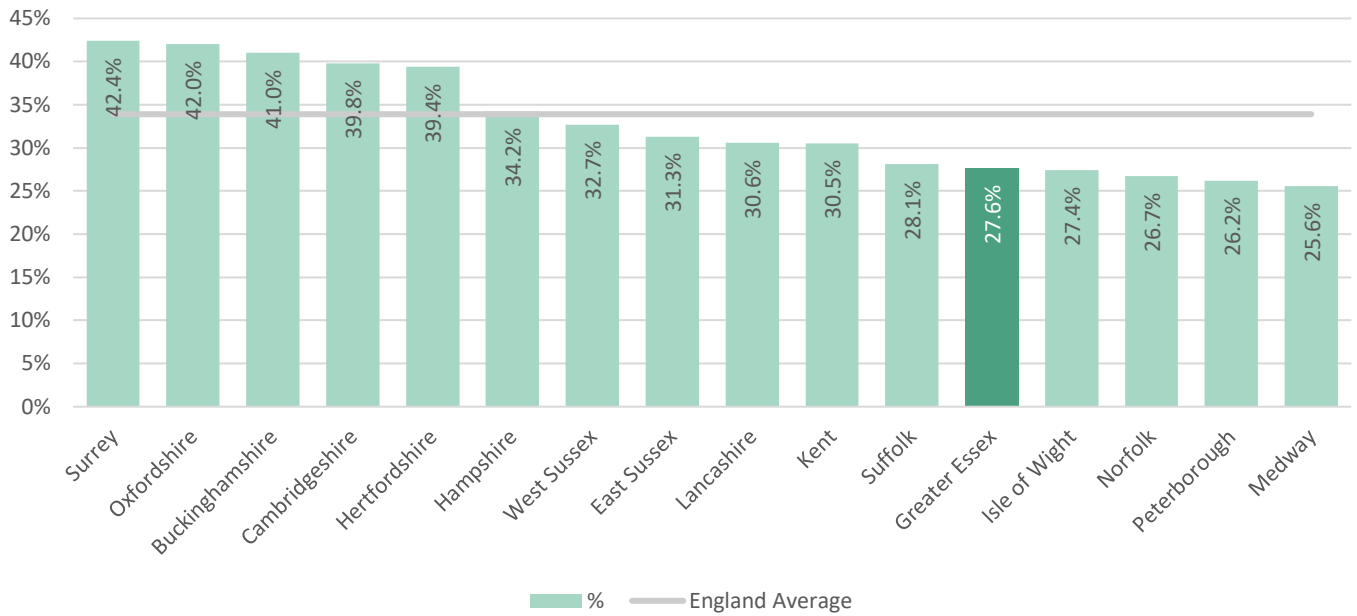
Source: TS067 - Highest level of qualification, Census 2021, NOMIS

Charts EC20: Percentage of adult population with *higher qualifications*, North Essex and South Essex, 2021



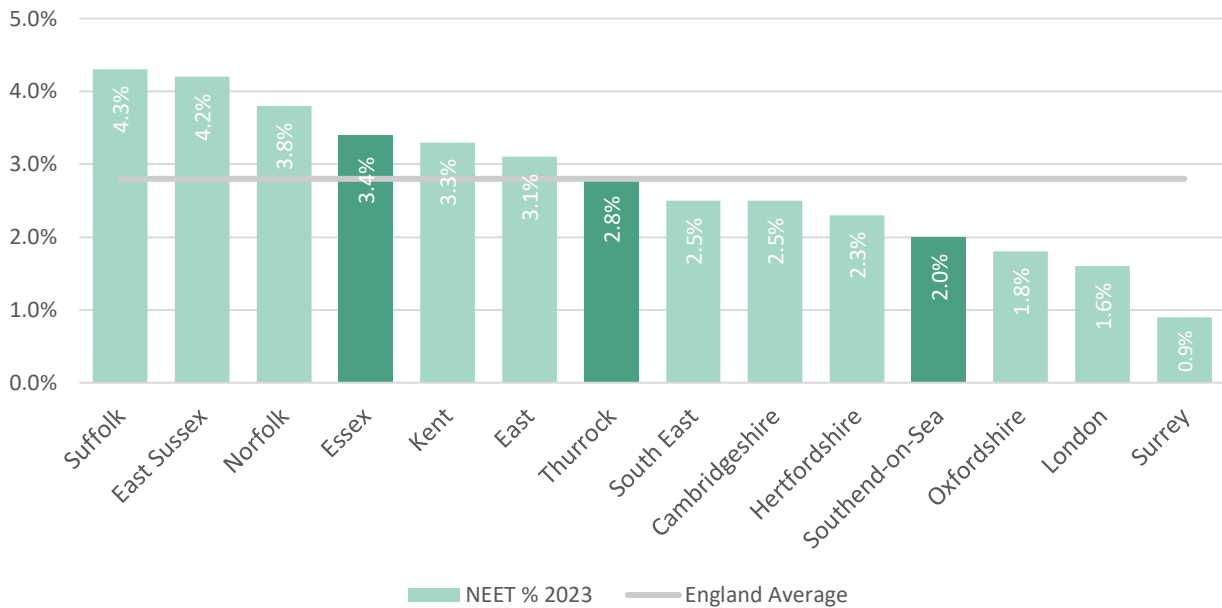
Source: TS067 - Highest level of qualification, Census 2021, NOMIS

Charts EC21 Percentage of adult population with *higher qualifications*, Greater Essex and comparators, 2021



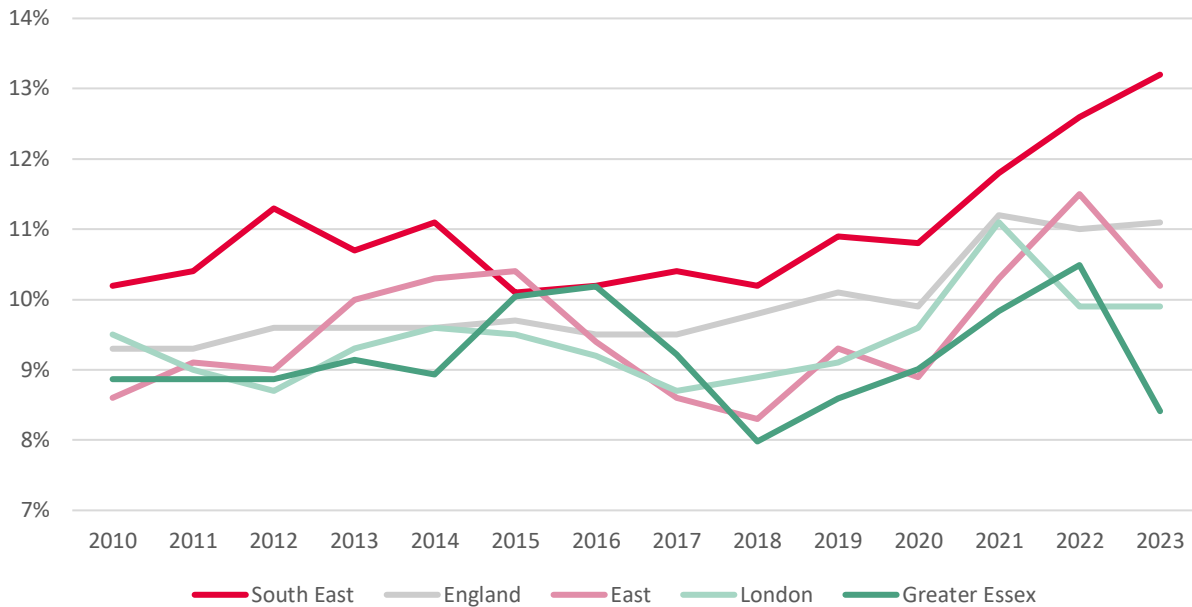
Source: TS067 - Highest level of qualification, Census 2021, NOMIS

Chart EC22: Participation: 16- and 17-year-olds not in education or work-based learning (NEET), 2023



Source: Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, Gov.uk Education statistics

Chart EC23: Percentage of working-age people receiving job-related training in the last 4 weeks, Essex and comparator areas 2010 to 2023



Source: Annual population survey – Job-related training, NOMIS

Gaining a competitive edge

There are shared ambitions across Greater Essex to exploit the sector strengths and maximise returns from our economic assets and the transition to net zero. Greater Essex has strengths in the MedTech and life sciences sectors and digital clusters in key cities.

The growth of advanced manufacturing (particularly in South Essex), and in logistics (focused around our two freeports and airports) represents a major opportunity. There are also major opportunities in clean energy generation through hydrogen, solar farms, and offshore wind, facilitated by our location on the energy coast.

Across Greater Essex there is an opportunity to create c.19,000 green jobs by 2030, transitioning the workforce into growing sectors of the economy and reducing Greater Essex’s environmental impact. There are also significant opportunities to reduce energy consumption, ease financial pressures on residents and improve their health while generating income through the development of smart local energy systems, and the roll out of retrofit programmes. An estimated 400,000 homes across Greater Essex are currently in need of retrofitting.

Taking advantage of the power of data and digital technology, digital skills and technology should be a key strength of an inclusive Greater Essex economy. Central to this is the roll out of digital connectivity, including remote and rural areas. This is a vital platform for future growth and improved productivity, and an essential element in promoting access to services, education and to social connections, while reducing pressures on transport systems. Currently, Essex, Thurrock, and Southend-on-Sea have Superfast Broadband coverage of 98.7%, 98.5%, and 99.5% respectively. This means that the majority of Greater Essex residents are receiving internet speeds of more than 30Mbps. On average, only around 6 in 10 homes and business in Greater Essex had access to Superfast Broadband in 2010.

It is also vital to help close the digital divide, equipping residents with the skills and tools they need for the digital age and to harness the power of data and digital technology to transform our public services, so they are faster, better, and cheaper.

Tackling these structural issues will require investment in the sustainable growth of Greater Essex's towns and cities. It will mean investing in infrastructure to unlock the development of new homes and employment space, but it will also require the regeneration of our town centres, and improvements in local schools and the local living environment to ensure that Essex can attract inward investment, retain growing local firms, protect businesses and residents from increasing climate risks, and ensure that the benefits of growth reach all parts of the county.

Appendices - Data Sources

Economy

- Department for Education (2023) 'Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority'
- Essex County Council (2023) 'Devolution Expression of Interest, Greater Essex, February 2023'
- Essex County Council (2023) 'Devolution Evidence Pack, Greater Essex'
- Essex County Council (2021) 'Organisation Evidence Base Paper'
- Essex County Council (2006) 'Essex Trends 2006'
- Essex County Council (2023) 'State of Essex'
- Essex County Council (2023) 'Essex Sector Development Report'
- Essex County Council (2022) 'JSNA Socioeconomic - Income dashboard'. Available: <https://data.essex.gov.uk/dataset/2r1ro/jsna-socioeconomic-income-dashboard>
- NOMIS (1998-2021) 'Total economic output (Gross Value Added – GVA)'
- Essex County Council (2019) 'Cambridge Econometrics Projections for Essex'. Available: <https://data.essex.gov.uk/dataset/23p73/cambridge-econometrics-projections-for-essex-dashboard>
- NOMIS (2013-2023) 'Annual population survey'
- NOMIS (2022) 'Claimant count by sex and age'
- NOMIS (2015-2023) 'Annual survey of hours and earnings'
- NOMIS (2015-2022) 'Job Density'
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