



# School Voucher Case Study

Essex County Council  
Katie Rees  
Programme Manager

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# Essex County Council

## Background

Essex County Council has 560 maintained schools including; specials, primary & secondary schools and colleges. All of these education providers have free school meal requirements.

## The Challenge

As the country went into the first national lockdown, the County Council and their schools were working with incredibly short timescales and significant uncertainty as to how best support their vulnerable families. The Council had some schools using hampers, some using Edenred and others using Wonde. When the Winter COVID Grant was launched by the government, Essex County Council were able to centralise funding and through controlling the budget, they performed an information gathering exercise and reviewed how best to support their schools in a united way.

## The Solution

Following an initial conversation with Wonde and subsequent positive feedback from some of their schools, Essex County Council began proceedings to make Wonde their preferred voucher scheme provider.

Working in collaboration with Wonde, the contract, procurement process and budget requirements were all in place within 8 days - unprecedented in the Council. In addition to this, whilst 350 schools were already integrated with Wonde a further 120 needed to be set up as new customers. Wonde completed this task seamlessly and to deadline.

A principal concern for Essex County Council was the amount of pressure the schools were under - especially as the new 'Essex' variant was beginning to impact attendance figures. In order to ease the burden on schools, Essex County Council, supported by Wonde, held a series of training sessions, provided guidance packs and templates for letters to go out to parents.

The council appointed a member of their team to filter the various queries coming through from schools and parents however these have been minor and there have been no complaints. If any issues require escalating, Wonde has been on hand to resolve it.

From this potentially highly stressful project, Essex County Council has come away with a very positive relationship with Wonde. Because of the strength of collaboration and Wonde's responsiveness, Essex County Council were able to distribute 35,000 (equivalent to £1.1 million) within 3 weeks.

For the schools within Essex County Council, they have benefitted from significant levels of support from both the council and Wonde. This has helped lessen the learning curve and minimised the burden of the task they were faced with.

## **The Future**

Following such a successful project rollout, of which Essex County Council are very proud of, they see a future for vouchers (outside of free school meals) within their schools. The functionality provided by Wonde to allocate vouchers easily without the end user (the school or parent) having to do a lot means there's scope for future initiatives.