

## CABINET

10 NOVEMBER 2023

### REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGENERATION AND TOURISM

#### A.4 NORTH ESSEX ECONOMIC BOARD STRATEGY AND DELIVERY PLAN

##### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

###### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To update Cabinet on the continued positive benefits of the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) partnership and to seek support for its refreshed strategic priorities and delivery plan, whilst noting that funding is not secured to deliver the activities identified.

###### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The NEEB is a partnership of councils across mid-and north Essex, who are working together to make the area more prosperous. The partnership provides cohesive strategic oversight of North Essex's diverse, inclusive and productive economic priorities, ensuring tangible actions are delivered to support residents' and businesses' goals and aspirations. Promoting the region's potential, the NEEB presents the strong strategic rationale for further central government and private sector investment, needed to deliver North Essex's long-term ambitions.

NEEB partners recently commissioned an updated North Essex economic strategy. This update reflects Maldon and Chelmsford Councils joining NEEB, the post-COVID landscape and current economic shocks and brings the strategy up to date with the current economic environment.

There are also talks with regards to Harlow and Epping Forest District Council's joining NEEB and this will be reflected at a later date.

Henham Strategy Ltd were appointed, via a thorough and a robust procurement process, to deliver the refreshed strategy and delivery plan. Extensive evidence gathering consisting of strategic analysis, data scrutiny and stakeholder workshops facilitated the development of the refreshed strategy and delivery plan. Officers from the partner authorities have been involved at every stage of this work to ensure parity in representation of need and opportunity.

The refreshed NEEB strategy and delivery plan sets out the following:-

North Essex Vision '*A proactive, productive and progressive North Essex that advances its economic potential through inward and outward-facing partnerships, with all residents, businesses and visitors benefitting from the region's economic prosperity*'

North Essex's Strategic Priorities

**Innovative businesses and skilled residents** - A resilient and outward-facing economy that

builds on its incumbent strengths and is positioned to deliver economic opportunities for North Essex's residents, and drive inward investment to support businesses within the region's critical growth sectors.

**A greener and high growth economy** - A forward-looking economy that utilises the diversity of its resources in a sustainable way that furthers North Essex's clean energy strengths, boosts growth, and promotes residents' prosperity through net zero commitments.

**A dynamic and connected region** - A well-connected and digitally-linked region that provides residents with quick and reliable access to key services, encourages inward investment, and makes the most of ties to regional and international neighbours.

**Prosperous and inclusive communities** - A thriving and inclusive region where all residents and businesses have the opportunity to contribute and prosper, exemplifying the region as a great place to live, work and visit.

A series of workshops have taken place during 2023 to develop specific actions to support the two-year delivery plan and ensure its success.

#### RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (a) supports the District Council's continued involvement in the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB), at which the Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration and Tourism represents the authority;
- (b) supports the North Essex's Strategic Narrative and Delivering for North Essex based upon four key strategic priorities produced for the NEEB, as set out in the attached appendices for the economic benefit of the District; and
- (c) notes that the majority of the NEEB's Action Plan to support the Delivery Plan is unfunded and there are no financial commitments to the Council, in supporting the strategic priorities.

#### REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

To ensure a continued partnership with North Essex Local Authorities and Essex County Council to provide greater opportunities for local businesses and to support economic growth in the District.

#### ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

To discontinue the partnership with NEEB. However, this would reduce the opportunity for collaborative working to support economic growth within the Tendring District and across North Essex. To not continue with the NEEB partnership will disadvantage our local businesses and will mean that we will no longer have the wider support from North Essex Districts.

## PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

### DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Corporate Plan (2020-2024)

The NEEB Strategy and Delivery Plan responds directly to the corporate priorities identified within the Council's 2020-2024 Corporate Plan and accords with the Community Leadership and Growing and Inclusive Economy, which are central to that Plan.

The strategy responds to a number of priorities in the Corporate Plan as set out below:

- Jointed up public services for the benefit of our businesses.
- Support existing businesses
- Develop and attract new businesses
- Maximise our coastal and seafront opportunities

### OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The NEEB's 'Delivering for North Essex' plan has been underpinned by a robust and comprehensive review of the region's key opportunities and challenges, outlined within the local strategies and initiatives of the seven NEEB authorities and collated through extensive engagement with councillors, officers and key external stakeholders, including local businesses, Higher Education and Further Education institutions, and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

'North Essex's Strategic Narrative' has been developed in partnership with Henham Strategy.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Is the recommendation a Key Decision (see the criteria stated here)	Yes	If Yes, indicate which by which criteria it is a Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant effect on two or more wards <input type="checkbox"/> Involves £100,000 expenditure/income <input type="checkbox"/> Is otherwise significant for the service budget
		And when was the proposed decision published in the Notice of forthcoming decisions for the Council (must be 28 days at the latest prior to the meeting date)	21 September 2023

X **The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:**

The is nothing to add to the content of the report however, I would wish to emphasise the Action Plan is unfunded and this report does not commit the District Council to funding these actions and further decisions would be required to do so.

## FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

A number of the proposed actions within the delivery plan have a potential cost which is yet to be established. However, it is anticipated that Councils will be able to opt into any of the initiatives being run by NEEB and therefore, it is not possible to establish a financial ask at this time. A further Cabinet report will come forward if there is a requirement for a budget as currently there is no funding for NEEB in the establishment.

NEEB is currently funded by Essex County Council (ECC) who provided a budget alongside each local authority who provided 10 percent from their Government award COVID-19 Additional Restrictions Grant for business support – this latter funding ‘expired’ at the end of March 2023. The funding provided by ECC continues to support a dedicated officer for NEEB who is sited at Braintree District Council (BDC), a part-time communications lead sited at TDC and various actions taken by the partners to support the continued success of the group.

However, these funds from ECC are coming to an end so decisions will need to be taken in the coming months if the group is to continue in its current form.

✓ **The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:**

There are no further comments over and above those set out elsewhere in the report.

## USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY

The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:

A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	All decisions regarding the budget and use of resources are discussed with all authorities and full procurement exercises including tenders are done with the approval of the group.
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	Each authority actions their own governance The NEEB is not a separate decision making body, Portfolio Holders will be attending on behalf of their individual authorities, within their own Budget and Policy Frameworks.
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	Monthly updates on budgets and KPIs are provided to all group members. Failing KPIs are discussed, and solutions considered for agreement by the steering group.

## MILESTONES AND DELIVERY

The Strategy and Delivery Plan sets out the milestones and delivery.

## ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION

**Financial risks.** There are currently no financial risks. However, the North Essex Action Plan has a number of actions which will have a financial ask if there is a decision to take part in future projects. There is also the risk that once the funding for current resources diminishes

all authorities will be asked to contribute to the continuation of the partnership.

**Economic risks.** The Strategy and Action Plan set out to mitigate economic risks by identifying the opportunities and challenges and providing a plan that supports economic growth and prosperity. However, unexpected economic shocks can emerge, as evidenced under Covid and by recent inflation and interest rate rises. However, as shown during previous events, partners within NEEB are committed to acting proactively to changes in the climate and the plan provides the flexibility to adapt as required to meet any emerging needs.

**Strategic risks.** Plans for a Level 2 Devolution Deal are under discussion between the Government and Upper Tier Councils in Essex. If a Deal is announced, it would create a Combined Authority at the Greater Essex level, with powers and influence over some local economic development. The North Essex Action Plan and the NEEB partnership has the flexibility to adapt to any changes made due to devolution. In addition, the Council's Economic Strategy ends in 2024 providing the ability to align TDC's strategy to take devolution into consideration and the Strategy and Action Plan within NEEB.

### **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no groups with protective characteristics who will be disadvantaged by the strategy. The strategy supports a thriving and inclusive region where all residents and businesses have the opportunity to contribute and prosper, exemplifying the region as a great place to live, work and visit.

### **SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS**

Measure are taken to insure all districts have equal support for their local businesses. Tenders include social value questions.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2030**

The delivery plan aims to support a green and high growth economy by supporting businesses to understand how they can become more carbon neutral and to also encourage new, green energy companies to expand in the area.

### **OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OR IMPLICATIONS**

**Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.**

#### **Crime and Disorder**

By supporting economic growth, opportunities for building a thriving and inclusive region will support a reduction in crime and health inequalities and provide a great place to live and work

#### **Health Inequalities**

By supporting economic growth, opportunities for building a thriving and inclusive region will support a reduction in crime and health inequalities and provide a great place to live and work

<b>Area or Ward affected</b>	This strategy supports all areas and wards in the District.
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### PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

#### BACKGROUND

In 2019 Tendring, Colchester, Braintree, Uttlesford and Essex County Councils agreed to develop an economic strategy that would articulate the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the North Essex economic corridor. Initially inspired by the need to articulate a vision associated, but independent from, the North Essex Garden Communities.

The North Essex Economic Board (NEEB) was formed to oversee the development of the strategy. The informal Board consists of Leader and Cabinet Member representatives from each local authority. An officer steering group formed to deliver the work.

Chelmsford and Maldon Councils joined NEEB in May 2020, now covering half of the second-tier authorities in Essex.

Towards the end of the 2020, NEEB partners agreed (after approval from the previous Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) to allocate 10 percent of their Additional Restrictions Grant funding to support a coordinated programme of business and skills support.

This collaboration yielded over £1.6m in jointly commissioned projects, plus additional financial commitment from Essex County Council.

The business support and skills programme produced the following benefits to the District up to end of March 2023

<b>Business Support Programmes</b>	<b>Numbers Supported</b>
Business navigation sessions	46
Pre/start-up support	121
Debt and finance	52
Import/export support	7
Digital/ecommerce support	27

<b>Skills Programmes*</b>	<b>Numbers Supported</b>
Residents accessing training	42
Virtual job fairs held	3
Residents accession Construction CSC Training	27
Residents provided with equipment and connectivity	8

\*two programmes continuing delivery until end 2023 at no extra cost

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has provided a new opportunity for collaboration. In July 2022, Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to commit 10 percent of the Council's revenue allocation for years two and three of UKSPF to develop collaborative interventions with NEEB.

#### PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL**

None

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A – NEEB Strategic Narrative

Appendix B – North Essex's Economic Baseline

Appendix C – Delivering for North Essex

Appendix D – North Essex Action Plan

**REPORT CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

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