

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL,
HELD ON TUESDAY, 11TH MARCH, 2025 AT 7.30 PM
IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, AT THE TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-
ON-SEA, CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors Davidson (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Alexander, Amos, Baker, Barrett, Barry, Bray, Bush, Calver, Chapman BEM, Codling, A Cossens, M Cossens, Doyle, Everett, Fairley, Ferguson, Fowler, Goldman, Griffiths, Guglielmi, Harris, I Henderson, J Henderson, P Honeywood, S Honeywood, Keteca, Kotz, Newton, Oxley, Placey, Platt, Scott, Smith, G Stephenson, M Stephenson, Sudra, Talbot and White
In Attendance:	Ian Davidson (Chief Executive), Lisa Hastings (Director (Governance) & Monitoring Officer), Katie Wilkins (Head of People), Ian Ford (Committee Services Manager), William Lodge (Communications Manager), Bethany Jones (Committee Services Officer), Katie Koppenaal (Committee Services Officer) and Kai Aberdeen (Theatre General Manager (Technical))

113. CHAIR

In the absence of the Chairman of the Council (Councillor Casey), the Chair was occupied by the Vice-Chairman (Councillor Davidson).

114. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bensilum, Casey, Morrison, Skeels, Steady, Thompson, Turner and Wiggins.

115. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson and:-

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Budget and Council Tax setting meeting of the Council held on 11 February 2025 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

116. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by a Member on this occasion.

117. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - A.1 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Council had before it a detailed report of the Chief Executive (A.1) which set out an update in relation to Local Government Reorganisation, following the decision made by Council on 21 January 2025, and in readiness for the submission of an Interim Plan to Government by 21 March 2025, as formally required by the invitation from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to all Leaders of Councils in two-tier areas and Unitary Councils in Essex.

Council recalled that, following the submissions by Essex County Council, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea Unitary Councils on 10 January 2025 to join the Government's new Devolution Priority Programme and committing to local government reorganisation, an announcement had been made by the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February 2025 confirming 'Greater Essex's' inclusion on the Priority Programme.

The Government had also legislated that the elections scheduled for May 2025 for Essex County Council and Thurrock Council would be suspended, as confirmed by the Local Authorities (Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections) (England) Order 2025.

Members were reminded that, on 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution had written to Leaders of Councils in two-tier areas and Unitary Councils in Essex, formally inviting them, together with the other council leaders in the area, to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation. The formal invitation had set out further detail on the criteria against which proposals would be assessed, guidance for the development of the proposals and the timeline for this process. The formal invitation was attached as Appendix A to the Chief Executive's report (A.1).

Councils would be expected to submit a final proposal on Local Government Reorganisation by 26 September 2025 and the formal invitation required an Interim Plan to be provided to Government on, or before, 21 March 2025, setting out progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that was possible at this stage might vary from place to place but the expectation was that one Interim Plan would be jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It might be the case that the Interim Plan described more than one potential proposal for the area, if there was more than one option under consideration. The invitation set out a list of matters the Interim Plan should cover which were set out at (a) to (h) in the aforementioned Appendix A.

The Invitation had also stated that the final proposals must be made by 26 September 2025, and have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to the invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to the invitation received from the Secretary of State. An authority responding to the invitation might either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Guidance within the Schedule set out the Criteria for unitary local government (* relating to the final proposal) such as:

- 1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.*
- 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.*
- 3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.*
- 4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.*
- 5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.*
- 6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.*

The Interim Plan, as set out at Appendix B to the Chief Executive's report (A.1) detailed the progress made to date by Greater Essex's local authorities in developing proposals for local government reorganisation within the area. It had been developed by councils working collaboratively, both to explore new unitary structures, and the working arrangements required to enable the development of full reorganisation proposals, in the interests of local residents.

Members were informed that the development of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals was being led by Essex's local authority Leaders, through Greater Essex's Leaders and Chief Executives' Forum (which included the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner). All were committed to taking forward the joint work within the context of the Nolan principles - ensuring honesty, respect, integrity, accountability, openness, objectivity, and selflessness and had begun work on a vision for change.

It was reported that four working groups of political leaders and chief officers had been established, so far, to respond to the invitation from the Minister and to ensure that the evidence was marshalled to support the business case collaboratively. Those working groups were focused on:

- 1) **Scale and Value for Money**, to ensure that our new structures are capable of delivering great services and securing good outcomes at best value to taxpayers.
- 2) **Quality public services**, to ensure that as we engage in the complex disaggregation and aggregation of sensitive service systems, we do so without compromising our ability to serve our residents effectively and maximise the opportunities to accelerate our transformation ambitions.
- 3) **Identity and Community**, to ensure that our new councils continue to reflect the identities and communities of our residents to support their sense of control, agency and trust in local government.
- 4) **Supporting Devolution**, to ensure that the new arrangements we put in place dovetail with the new Greater Essex Combined County Authority (GECCA) and enable us to capture the benefits of undertaking both of these fundamental change activities simultaneously.

Further working groups would be established around other priority topics as the programme developed.

Council was advised that, at the meeting of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executive's forum held on 28th February 2025, all Leaders had agreed to support the Interim Plan finalised through their discussions being taken through each authority's formal governance arrangements.

Apart from initial details around the signatories to the Interim Plan, an overview of Greater Essex, the Interim Plan had been structured under separate sections with the following headings:

- Section 1 – working together to develop proposals for reorganisation.*
- Section 2 - working with others to develop and refine our proposals.*
- Section 3 – emerging concepts for reorganisation.*
- Section 4 – shaping LGR to support our devolution ambitions.*
- Section 5 – the costs of mobilising change.*
- Section 6 – support from Government.*

The response had been structured covering the areas set by Government but whilst each section referenced the relevant criteria as set out by the Minister in his formal invitation, they would not necessarily be referenced under the same headings.

All councils had supported the need for a robust evidence base, in accordance with the Government's criteria in order to help them decide how many unitary authorities were appropriate for Greater Essex. The evidence as to the best configuration was multi-dimensional, including:

- *Financial sustainability*
- *Socio-demographics*
- *Geography (coastal, urban and rural)*
- *Economic corridors*
- *Travel corridors, such as work / home routes*
- *Communities and community clusters*

Council was reminded that the decision to agree the Interim Plan was an Executive Decision to be made by the Cabinet or Leader of the Council, although the views of all District Councillors could be sought and fed into the overall process. Through this report and the holding of the extra-ordinary meeting of Council, the views of all Councillors were being sought.

The Chief Executive (Ian Davidson) introduced his report and outlined the salient points contained within it.

Councillors M E Stephenson, Chapman BEM, Guglielmi, Harris, Bush, Bray, Talbot and I J Henderson addressed Council during the debate on the Chief Executive's report. Concerns, views and matters raised included:-

- *Contracts present and future;*
- *Other functions missing from the document, such as waste disposal, planning & minerals, social care & Essex Pension Fund Board;*
- *Adequacy of capacity funding provided by the Government;*
- *Communication strategies;*
- *Consultation & engagement with residents;*
- *Impact on the delivery of services by TDC under the pressure of the tight deadlines being imposed by the Government*
- *Understanding the impact on staffing between existing and new authorities; and*
- *Relationships with Town and Parish Councils and the timing of the planned Community Governance Review.*

It was moved by Councillor M E Stephenson, seconded by Councillor I J Henderson and:-

RESOLVED that Council -

- i) notes the update on Local Government Reorganisation for Greater Essex and the formal invitation, as set out in Appendix A to the Chief Executive's report (A.1);
- ii) supports the opportunity for Full Council to provide its views through debate prior to the Leader of the Council making an Executive Decision on the Interim Plan setting out progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance;

- iii) acknowledges the efforts of both the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive in representing Tendring District Council on the development of the Interim Plan;
- iv) subject to the feedback through the debate, endorses the direction of discussion on developing plans, as set out in the Interim Plan, as set out in Appendix B to the Chief Executive's report (A.1); and
- v) welcomes the continuation of providing, periodically, briefings to Members (and reports to this Council as necessary) as the agenda around devolution and local government reorganisation develops locally.

The Meeting was declared closed at 8.17 pm

Chairman