

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 JANUARY 2026

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – PLANNING AND COMMUNITY

A.5 Reference from the Council’s Task and Finish Group on Joint Working with Town and Parish Councils – Update Report

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT/INQUIRY

To provide an update on the Task and Finish work to date in respect of Joint Working with Town and Parish Councils and to recommend that the workstream be extended and refocussed in the context of forthcoming Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

SCOPE - THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

The scope of this task and finish working group had originally been to look at opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between Tendring District Council and Town and Parish Councils within the district. However, shortly after the group had its inaugural meeting on 18 November 2024 (the only meeting held to date), there was the publication of the English Devolution White paper and announcements in respect of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Essex as well as major changes in national planning policy.

These resulted in significant attention from Members and Officers being diverted onto understanding the potential implications for Tendring and in resources being focussed on considering and providing input into the business case submissions in respect of LGR and engaging Town and Parish Councils in early discussions, particularly around the potential implications for growth in the Local Plan as well as future governance arrangements and stewardship of assets.

Whilst there were agreed actions from the inaugural meeting on 18 November 2024 (as set out in this report and the attached minutes), they were not progressed as intended at the time for the reasons above; and so it is recommended that the timeframe for the Task and Finish workstream be extended for a six month period to July 2026; that the inquiry is refocussed on positive joint working with Town and Parish Councils in the context of forthcoming Devolution and LGR; and the group reflects on some of the constructive and collaborative work that has taken place in the last year, including respect of engagement on the Local Plan and exploring the implications and opportunities around assets.

INVITEES

The working group has, to date, only met once – on 18th November 2024 at which the attendees were TDC's Cllr. Graham Steady (chairman), Cllr. Dan Casey, Cllr. Jayne Chapman BEM and invitees the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Tendring Association of Local Councils (TDALC), Cllrs. Frank Belgrove and Danny Botterell; with Gary Guiver and Ian Ford providing Officer support. The minutes of that meeting are attached as an appendix. The actions from that inaugural meeting included extending a future invite to TDC's Monitoring Officer to discuss governance matters relating to Parish and Town Councils.

BACKGROUND

The task and finish working group was originally set up to inquire into and explore opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between Tendring District Council and Town and Parish Councils. The inaugural meeting was held on 18 November 2024 and the minutes are attached as an appendix. However, that was the only meeting of the working group because shortly after that meeting, there was both the publication of the English Devolution White Paper (December 2024) and announcements in respect of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Essex (February 2025) as well as significant changes in national planning policy (namely the introduction of mandatory housebuilding targets for all Councils in December 2024).

Whilst the discussion in that first meeting of the working group was constructive with some agreed actions points, the entire landscape in respect of the future of Local Government changed quickly and significantly in the subsequent weeks and months and a second meeting of the group has yet to take place.

Most notably, Greater Essex is part of the priority programme for Devolution and LGR with the setting up of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) with Mayoral Elections (now) expected in May 2028 alongside LGR that will result in Tendring District Council and other Essex authorities (including Essex County Council) being replaced with a small number of unitary authorities come April 2028 covering a wider geography – and options for three, four or five unitary authorities under consideration by the Government – with an announcement on the proposed configuration of the future authorities expected in the Spring of this year.

This changing landscape, alongside the changes in national policy, has resulted in attention and resources being re-focussed to understand and engage in the future programme of change. However, it has also resulted in the focus of engagement between TDC and Town and Parish Councils changing and examples positive collaboration in terms of discussing potential implications of Devolution and LGR; and also in respect of planning for a significant increase in housing growth through the Local Plan following the change in national planning policy and exploring implications and opportunities around assets.

It is therefore recommended through this report that any future work of the task and finish group be extended over a longer timeframe and the inquiry is refocussed in the context of the significant changes in local government anticipated going forward.

RELEVANT CORPORATE PLAN THEME/ANNUAL CABINET PRIORITY

Collaborative working with Town and Parish Councils can support all of the Council's priorities, particularly around:

- Pride in our area and services to residents;
- Working with partners to improve quality of life; and
- Financial sustainability and openness.

Furthermore it aligns with the general principle that has emerged from the Council's discussions and decisions about forthcoming Devolution and LGR and the need to put the Tendring area and its residents in the best possible position.

DESIRED OUTCOME OF THE CONSIDERATION OF THIS ITEM/INQUIRY

Whilst there has only been one meeting of the task and finish group to date, primarily for the reasons set out above, there may still be merit in concluding the inquiry into looking at opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between Tendring District Council and Town and Parish Councils within the district – albeit in the context of forthcoming changes in respect of Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and national planning policy on housebuilding. The recommendations are therefore to extend the timeframe for the inquiry up to July 2026, reflecting on the engagement and collaboration that has taken place between TDC and Town and Parish Councils over the last year.

DETAILED INFORMATION

It is proposed that more detailed information comes forward following the conclusions of the Task and Finish Working Group, if the Committee is minded to agree the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee agrees that:

- a) the Task and Finish Working looking into opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between Tendring District Council and Town and Parish Councils within the district should work to an extended timeframe to July 2026 and refocus its inquiry in the context of forthcoming Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR);**
- b) that the inquiry continues, where it left off, with the actions agreed at its**

inaugural meeting on 18 November 2025 (set out below and within the attached minutes) albeit, again in the context of the changing landscape around Devolution and LGR; and

- c) in so doing, reflects upon the engagement and collaboration that has taken place over the last year – including (but not limited) in respect of communicating and discussing the potential implications of Devolution and LGR, the review of the Local Plan against the backdrop of newly introduced government housing targets and implications and potential opportunities around assets.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS

From the first meeting of the Task and Finish Working Group on 18 November 2024:

AGREED that –

(a) the Council’s Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings) be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group to discuss governance matters relating to Parish & Town Councils including:-

- (1) Conduct;
- (2) Parish Members attending Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings as “witnesses / experts”;
- (3) Parish Councillors being appointed to TDC Committees et cetera as ‘Observers / non-voting’ members.

(b) in addition to the matters mentioned under (a) above, the Working Group will focus its enquiry on the following matters:-

- (1) fostering faster, more efficient channels of engagement and communication between TDC and parish councils;
- (2) TDC’s perceived reluctance / inability to prosecute perpetrators of fly tipping offences even when evidence is available;
- (3) ways in which TDC can support TDALC in pursuing its key objectives;
- (4) discovering whether Parish Councillors can be accredited to be able to issue FPNs for littering and dog fouling;

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(5) whether a Tendring local version of the Oxfordshire Councils Charter could/should be produced in partnership with TDALC that could in time be shared with EALC as the basis of an “Essex Councils Charter”; and

(6) whether the contents of the LGA’s publication entitled “*A councillor’s workbook on working with town and parish councils*” should be distilled in whole or in part to TDC Members.

BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

English Devolution White Paper (December 2024).
National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024).

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Minutes from the inaugural meeting of the Task and Finish Group – 18 November 2024.

REPORT/INQUIRY CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Name	Gary Guiver
Job Title	Corporate Director – Planning and Community
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Task & Finish Working Group - Joint Working
by TDC with Town & Parish Councils

18 November 2024

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP - JOINT
WORKING BY TDC WITH TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS,
HELD ON MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2024 AT 5.00 PM
IN THE CONNAUGHT ROOM, TOWN HALL, STATION ROAD, CLACTON-ON-SEA,
CO15 1SE**

Present:	Councillors Steady (Chairman), Casey and Chapman BEM
Also Present:	Frank Belgrove (Chairman of TDALC)) and Danny Botterell (Vice-Chairman of TDALC)
In Attendance:	Gary Guiver (Director (Planning & Communities)) and Ian Ford (Committee Services Manager)

1. WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman of the Working Group (Councillor Graham Steady) welcomed everyone to the meeting and those present introduced themselves.

The Chairman outlined that several Task & Finish Working Groups had been set up by TDC's two overview and scrutiny committees of which this Working Group was one. The scope of this Working Group was to look at opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration between TDC and the parish and town councils within the District.

The Chairman of TDALC (Parish Councillor Frank Belgrove) responded that they were very happy that this meeting had been called and put forward that parish/town councils would be quite happy to become involved in any of TDC's Task & Finish Working Groups to offer their perspective and suggestions.

Parish Councillor Belgrove and the Vice-Chairman of TDALC (Parish Councillor Danny Botterell) both praised the Leader of TDC (Councillor Mark Stephenson) for his dedicated level of involvement in the work of TDALC.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tanya Ferguson and Mark Cossens and, in addition, on behalf of Parish Councillor Linda Belgrove (TDALC).

3. DISCUSSION WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE TENDRING DISTRICT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (TDALC)

The Working Group then held an informal discussion of a range of matters with Parish Councillors Belgrove and Botterell with a view to understanding the viewpoint of the Town and Parish Councils.

Issues raised, information exchanged and suggestions put forward by Parish Councillors Belgrove and Botterell included:-

- (a) What works best in collaboration and why and can TDC spread good practice? What the ask from Parish and Town Councils might be and is it of TDC or ECC or both?

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- Would be useful for Parish Clerks to have a directory of TDC departmental telephone numbers and email addresses that they could use to report urgent matters;
 - Alresford PC had taken on much of the responsibility for grass cutting from ECC Highways;
 - Regretted the loss of TDC's 'Highways Rangers' team which was apparently due to the withdrawal of ECC funding. Queried whether the Parishes had been formally made aware of this and of related TDC staff shortages;
 - ECC were very difficult to contact and were unresponsive. Even County Councillors had to go through a 'Member Enquiry' system which was very slow;
 - Praised the Director (Planning & Communities) (Gary Guiver) for his excellent recent presentation at TDALC on the subject of the Government's proposed changes to the NPPF and house building targets;
 - At meetings of the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), many attendees have admitted that they don't have their local District/Borough/City Council Leaders attend their respective DALC meetings; and
 - That when Parish Councils put matters through to their local TDC Ward Councillors the speed of their response varies greatly.
- (b) Oxfordshire Councils Charter between Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, Oxfordshire County Council and the City & District Councils of Oxfordshire
- Agreed that this looked like an interesting idea and that it was worth pursuing to see if a TDALC / TDC Charter could be drawn up and implemented and possibly an Essex-wide Charter in time;
 - Currently, information disseminated by EALC is either too much by way of detail and volume or too vague.
- (c) Proposed Community Governance Review of Clacton-on-Sea, Holland-on-Sea and Jaywick Sands
- Very supportive of TDC pursuing this review.
- (d) TDALC Objectives
- Section 106 Funds – seeking diversification and flexibility as to what these funds can be spent on;
 - Advocating for the introduction of CIL;
 - Concerted action on resolving problems regarding potholes, pathways, signage, littering and fly tipping;
 - Reducing carbon footprint;
 - Seeking a change in criteria in order to secure the general lowering of speed limits in villages from 40mph to 30mph; and
 - Would like TDC's active support and assistance to "lobby" on the above matters.
- (e) General
- Believe that there can be more closer working arrangements between TDC and the Parish Councils;

- Suggested increasing parish involvement and contribution by allowing Parish Councillors to sit as Observers / non-voting members of TDC Committees et cetera;
- Investigate ways to bring about engagement / communication channels that were faster;
- Produce information sheets for residents that clearly sets out what Parish/District/County Councils can and can't do as residents get very frustrated/agitated when they raise a matter with their local parish council and then get told that the parish council can do nothing to resolve their issue;
- TDC should have a greater determination and commitment to prosecute fly tipping especially when there is substantial evidence of culpability to hand. The costs of pursuing the case should be considered against the ongoing clean-up costs following a fly tipping event. TDC should be prepared to inform parish councils of why it did not prosecute.
- TDC should use, promote and publicise Rapid Deployment CCTV cameras as a means to deter fly-tipping.
- TDC should investigate giving Parish Councillors accreditation to enable them to be able to issue FPNs for littering and/or dog fouling.

Following the aforementioned discussion, the Chairman thanked Parish Councillors Belgrove and Botterell for their attendance and their very welcome and helpful contributions to the discussion.

4. PRIORITISING THE NEXT STEPS IN THE WORKING GROUP'S ENQUIRY

The Working Group discussed the next steps it would wish to take in order to carry out its enquiry into the working and liaison arrangements between Tendring District Council and the Town & Parish Councils within the District.

The Working Group **AGREED** that –

- (a) the Council's Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings) be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group to discuss governance matters relating to Parish & Town Councils including:-
 - (1) Conduct;
 - (2) Parish Members attending Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings as "witnesses / experts";
 - (3) Parish Councillors being appointed to TDC Committees et cetera as 'Observers / non-voting' members.
- (b) in addition to the matters mentioned under (a) above, the Working Group will focus its enquiry on the following matters:-
 - (1) fostering faster, more efficient channels of engagement and communication between TDC and parish councils;
 - (2) TDC's perceived reluctance / inability to prosecute perpetrators of fly tipping offences even when evidence is available;
 - (3) ways in which TDC can support TDALC in pursuing its key objectives;
 - (4) discovering whether Parish Councillors can be accredited to be able to issue FPNs for littering and dog fouling;

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- (5) whether a Tending local version of the Oxfordshire Councils Charter could/should be produced in partnership with TDALC that could in time be shared with EALC as the basis of an “Essex Councils Charter”; and
- (6) whether the contents of the LGA’s publication entitled “*A councillor’s workbook on working with town and parish councils*” should be distilled in whole or in part to TDC Members.

5. **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman indicated that the next meeting of the Working Group would be held during January 2025.

The meeting was declared closed at 6.00 pm

Chairman