



**REPORT of  
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND RESOURCES**

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to  
**COUNCIL (EXTRAORDINARY)  
29 NOVEMBER 2023**

**NORTH ESSEX COUNCILS**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To update the Council on progress since agreeing the North Essex Authorities' (NEA) Memorandum of Understanding in December 2022, seek approval to establish the North Essex Councils Partnership (the Partnership) and commit resources to enable its objectives to be delivered.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) that Maldon District Council (the Council) will work in partnership with those Councils set out in paragraph 3.1 and will be collectively referred to as the North Essex Councils (NEC);
- (ii) that the Council contributes £20,000 from the Transformation Reserve in 2023 / 24 to enable resources to be put in place to manage the work of the partnership;
- (iii) that further funding in 2024 / 25 of up to £40,000 will be considered as part of the 2024 / 25 budget process, for the purposes of establishing a team to collectively represent NEC, establish a detailed term of reference for NEC and develop a clear programme of work.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 For the purposes of this report, the NEC is made up of those local authorities located in the north of Essex, and representing a population of 1.063m, namely:
- Braintree District Council;
  - Chelmsford City Council;
  - Colchester City Council;
  - Epping Forest District Council;
  - Essex County Council;
  - Harlow Council;
  - Maldon District Council;
  - Tendring District Council;
  - Uttlesford District Council.

- 3.2 Councils in North Essex have been working together for several years, with a range of formal and informal collaborations, perhaps most notably the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB).
- 3.3 The other councils in Essex already have a well-established strategic partnership, the Association of South Essex Authorities (ASELA), and a joint committee is in place enabling ASELA to take formal decisions collectively and to agree joint delivery arrangements to achieve improved outcomes in South Essex, for example with Homes England.
- 3.4 In December 2022, the Council agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with the other North Essex councils (**APPENDIX 1**) setting up the basis for a new strategic partnership to deliver place leadership across North Essex.
- 3.5 During 2023, Senior Officers from each of the North Essex councils have been meeting regularly to discuss and develop an action to deliver the aims in the memorandum of understanding.
- 3.6 At a meeting of NEC Leaders on 20 July 2023, it was agreed, in principle, to formalise the Partnership and partners committed to taking a common report through their relevant governance processes to confirm commitment to the Partnership, hence this report.
- 3.7 As a result of those discussions, the Leaders of NEC have agreed that:
- NEC will identify common issues and develop shared solutions that add value beyond what any individual council can do on their own
  - NEC will convene partnerships that deliver improved outcomes on Economic Development, through the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB), Finance, Housing, Climate Change, Shared Services and Devolution.
  - Within NEC, partnership working will happen at all levels, may involve different groups of NEC councils working together, and collaboration may reach beyond North Essex where this serves to the purpose of NEC.
  - NEC Leaders have reached a shared understanding of some of the key benefits of joint work, including but not limited to:
    - improving shared evidence, data, and insights to inform collaboration;
    - enhancing Organisational Capacity and Resilience;
    - improving core service quality, efficiency, and outcomes;
    - delivering key strategic programmes of work together;
    - influencing and supporting responses to legislative changes;
    - provide the basis for district, city, and borough nominations to a future Greater Essex Combined Authority;
    - achieving financial security and increased investment;
    - influencing policy through a stronger collective voice – nationally, regionally and within Greater Essex;
    - driving forward new Shared Services opportunities;
    - engaging businesses effectively to support the responsibilities of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) across North Essex.
- 3.8 The outcomes listed in paragraph 3.7 above will be achieved at different spatial levels, with the partnership allowing for projects across a subset of councils, all NEC and influence beyond North Essex.

- 3.9 The announcement of the proposed Level 2 Devolution Deal for Greater Essex also strengthens the case for the establishment of the NEC, as the route for all North Essex Districts to have a strong strategic voice within the proposed Combined Authority. Further details of the Devolution deal are provided in **APPENDIX 2**, and **APPENDIX 3** includes a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of potential impacts and opportunities for Maldon District in relation to the devolution proposals. Engagement with the devolution process through the NEC is highlighted as a key opportunity for Maldon District Council (MDC) to access funding, and to have a strategic voice within the Combined Authority.
- 3.10 Delivering this ambitious approach to sub-regional working will not be possible without each partner council contributing resources to the NEC programme.
- 3.11 Each constituent council will be required to contribute £20,000 in 2023 / 24, enabling the Partnership to bring in place the resources necessary to take forward NEC work on behalf of all councils.
- 3.12 It is proposed that Braintree District Council, building on the successful arrangements with the North Essex Economic Board, will be the accountable body for NEC.
- 3.13 From 2024 / 25 it is anticipated that the core costs of NEEB membership will be incorporated into overall NEC contributions from 2024/25 for the eight constituent councils, and it is estimated that the total contributions for 2024 / 25 will be in the region of £40,000. This requirement will need to be considered as part of the 2024 / 25 budget process.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The preferred option is for the Council to support the recommendations in this report, helping to mitigate a range of key strategic risks and opening-up additional opportunities that would not be available to the Council operating alone.
- 4.2 Alternatively, not supporting the recommendations risks this Council jeopardising the increasingly positive relationships between NEC and missing out on the opportunities outlined in this report.

## **5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2027**

### **5.1 Supporting our communities**

- 5.1.1 This is an opportunity to enhance support for our communities, by drawing in both best practice from partners and exploring the opportunities for shared initiatives and projects that build service resilience and capacity.

### **5.2 Enhancing and connecting our place**

- 5.2.1 The NEC is likely to be the conduit for MDC to access capital funding that may be secured through the proposed devolution deal and also the delegation of the South East LEP functions to Essex County Council. This partnership will enable shared approaches to place and connectivity to be developed and potentially improve access to strategic national funds.

### 5.3 **Helping the economy to thrive**

- 5.3.1 The work of the NEEB has given the Council a route to work in partnership with wider districts to develop strategic skills and business support programmes that we could not facilitate individually. The strategic approach also may strengthen our ability to attract capital funding with partners.

### 5.4 **Smarter finances**

- 5.4.1 Whilst investment is required to support the establishment of NEC there is the potential through the activities outlined for the initiative to increase income streams, highlight opportunities for joint working and additional efficiencies and resilience for the Council.

### 5.5 **A greener future**

- 5.5.1 Much of the work that each of the Districts is developing around climate action is similar and there may be opportunities for economies of scale and joint working, as well as the opportunity to explore and develop joint strategic schemes and attract funding, including to develop the green economy and business opportunities.

### 5.6 **Provide good quality services.**

- 5.6.1 There are a range of opportunities to look at how we collectively deliver services, and look at opportunities for sharing best practice, pooling resources, and building efficiencies and service resilience.

## 6. **IMPLICATIONS**

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Positive opportunities for improved services and investment in areas supporting customers.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – Will have a beneficial effect in improving partner engagement, increasing opportunities around economic growth, having a positive mitigating impact on corporate risk.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Additional investment initially that should result in further income and or efficiencies in the medium term.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Call on management time in engaging constructively with partnership but potential strategic and resource benefits through efficiencies and improved resilience.

#### Background Papers:

**APPENDIX 1:** Memorandum of understanding, as approved by the Council in December 2022

**APPENDIX 2:** Slides outlining Level 2 Devolution Deal

**APPENDIX 3:** SWOT Analysis of impact of Devolution Deal for MDC

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