



**MINUTES of
COUNCIL (EXTRAORDINARY)
25 FEBRUARY 2025**

PRESENT

Chairperson	Councillor K M H Lagan
Vice-Chairperson	Councillor R G Pratt
Councillors	M G Bassenger, S J Burwood, M F L Durham, CC, A Fittock, A S Fluker, L J Haywood, J C Hughes, K Jennings, S J N Morgan, C P Morley, M G Neall, R H Siddall, N D Spenceley, P L Spenceley, E L Stephens, J C Stilts, N J Swindle and M E Thompson

566. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting.

567. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors V J Bell, D O Bown, J Driver, W J Laybourn, U G C Siddall-Norman, W Stamp, S White and L L Wiffen.

568. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor M F L Durham declared that he was a cabinet member at Essex County Council and had on occasions been privy to information of a privileged nature. It noted that it would not prevent him from taking part and confirmed it was not a pecuniary interest.

569. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None had been received.

570. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson advised that he would be suspending the need to stand in accordance with Part 4 Rule 8(3) of the Constitution.

The Chairperson referred to the sad passing of Councillor N G F Shaughnessy and the other recent tragic loss relating to Councillor M F L Durham. He advised that on behalf of the Council heartfelt wishes, condolences and sympathies were being sent to Councillor Shaughnessy's husband and family. The Chairperson spoke about Councillor Shaughnessy's commitment to the community and environment and how

she would leave an indelible mark on the Council and all who served with her. Those present then stood for a moments silence in memory of Councillor Shaughnessy.

571. MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

The Council noted the list of Committees that had met before and since the last meeting of the Council, up until Monday 17 February 2025 for which Minutes had been published.

572. QUESTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 6(3) OF WHICH NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN

There were none.

573. DEVOLUTION REPORT

The Council considered the report of the Chief Executive providing a summary of the Government's English Devolution White Paper published on 16 December 2024 in respect of its proposals in this policy area and the Government's intentions for local government re-organisation; including the relevant timelines for the two separate but parallel strands of Government policy. The report also set out Essex County Council's (ECC) response to this paper to be a devolution priority area along with the Secretary of States decision in relation to Essex being accepted as a priority area and the deferral of elections scheduled for May 2025 and 2026.

The report provided detailed background information regarding devolution and Local Government Re-organisation (LGR). The default position for the Government was that Strategic Authorities should cover areas with a population of 1.5million or above and Appendix 1 to the report set out the powers of Strategic Authorities.

It was noted that 15 Councils in Essex had commissioned Grant Thornton to carry out a piece of work explore the costs, complexities and options for LGR within Essex and the results of this document were set out in the report and Appendix 2.

The Chief Executive took the Council through the different options, the indicative timeline and the recommendations set out in the report. He emphasised the importance of continuous updates and briefings as devolution and the LGR agenda progressed.

The Leader of the Council referred to meetings of the North Essex Leaders and Essex Leaders and provided the Council with details of the meetings that had taken place. It was noted that at these meetings ten authorities had voted in favour of the five unitary model, the details of which were set out in the report. Work was therefore taking place across all authorities regarding the principle of putting forward a model for five authorities. The Leader advised there was a need to move forward and supporting the model for five authorities would not preclude the Council from changing its view at a later point.

The Chairperson advised that he had called this extraordinary meeting as it was an important subject and for Members to receive an update, debate the conditions and review the recommendations. He then moved the recommendations as set out in the report and these was duly seconded.

During the debate that following a number of Members commented on the proposals, and there was some length discussions regarding the five unitary authority model.

Some Members felt that to agree in principle that this five unitaries option was the preferred model was premature. Reference was made further data due to be published within the next week which it was commented would show whether there was financial benefit to be gained from the different models.

Councillor M F L Durham updated the Council that Essex County Council had not expressed a precedence over the different models, but had decided to wait until further evidence (currently being collated) had been received. In response the Chief Executive acknowledged the point regarding the awaited evidence but highlighted the complexity of the process and the need to focus on one model (from the 16 that had been modelled) and explore the viability of that model. The report was seeking Members' support of the preferred model.

Following further discussion Councillor A S Fluker proposed that recommendation (v) be amended to read "*based on the information available* agrees in principle...".

After further debate the Chairperson moved recommendations (i) – (iv) and (vi). These were duly agreed. At the request of the Chairperson, Councillor Fluker repeated his earlier proposed amendment to recommendation (v). This was duly seconded and upon a vote being taken this was agreed.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- (i) receives the report for information;
- (ii) acknowledges that work will continue to ensure that Maldon District Council is in the best possible position as devolution progresses and/or local government re-organisation goes ahead;
- (iii) mandates that the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive seek to ensure that the voice of Maldon District (and north Essex more generally) is as strong as possible in any negotiations around devolution and local government re-organisation recognising its opportunities and challenges;
- (iv) recognises that Members and Officers will continue to deliver this Council's best value and other statutory duties for the benefit of its residents, businesses and communities every day that it exists;
- (v) based on the information available agrees in Principle that five Unitaries for Essex is the preferred model. Whilst acknowledging other councils reserve the right to advance different models;
- (vi) welcomes the intention to provide periodically, briefings to Members (and reports to this Council, as necessary) as the agenda around devolution and local government re-organisation develops locally.

574. QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 1 (3)(M)

Councillor P L Spenceley advised that she had been asked to raise a question to the Leader of the Council on behalf of Councillor U G C Siddall-Norman who was unable to attend the meeting. She referred to amendments to the Tobacco and Vapes Bill tabled by Caroline Dinanage MP (Member of Parliament) which were being backed by a cross party of MPs including Mary Glinden and Dr Danny Chambers. The amendments related to:

- the secretary of state conducting a review into the prevalence of the contaminated e-liquid from Vapes in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- To place a ban on the supply of plastic cigarette filters.

Councillor Spenceley advised that according to Councillor Siddall-Norman it had been found that on average 6,000 cigarette butts were put into landfill every day by all district councils in our country. It was a concern regarding what was going into landfill and with this in mind she asked the Leader if the Council could ask its MP Sir John Whittingdale to write a letter in support of this bill. In response the Leader of the Council advised that he would request Officers to write to both of the Council's MPs (Dame Priti Patel and Sir John Whittingdale) asking them to support the amendment to the bill to try and prevent this from happening in the future.

Councillor A S Fluker referred to work of the Car Park Task and Finish Working Group and the proposed policy change to introduce car parking charges in Burnham-on-Crouch. He commented that when the Working Group recommendations were brought forward to Committee Members of the Working Group had not supported the policy or the recommendations leaving the officer presenting the report in a difficult position. He asked the Leader of the Council if he agreed with him that, given the circumstances, the Members should apologise to the officer concerned and the Council for wasting resources. The Leader of the Council thanked Councillor Fluker for his question and provided some further information regarding the debate of this matter at the Committee meeting. If any officer was put in a difficult position he apologised on behalf of Members. He advised that in the future better awareness of the process of reporting from a Working Group to a Committee or the Council was required.

Councillor P L Spenceley referred to the Boundary Commission pausing its work and how this left Parish Councils, particularly her own Parish of Heybridge, in a terrible position. She gave an example of the North Heybridge Garden Suburb and how with the current boundaries 60% of this was in Great Totham who as a result would receive the related precept. Councillor Spenceley spoke of Heybridge West ward being the most deprived Ward in the Maldon District and how the Parish did not have the funds to serve its community. She referred to the need for the Parish Council to request a Community Governance review and asked the Leader if he would give assurance that Heybridge Parish Council would not be left when this Council potentially ceased to exist. She also asked the Leader to support her in her call for a Community Governance Review for the parish boundaries of Heybridge. In response, the Leader of the Council referred to the law in terms of Parish and boundary reviews and how every parish should have a parish review every 14 years. He gave an example of Little Totham and the work it had done to undertake a parish review. The Leader hoped that the Chief Executive and Lead Legal Specialist would expediate a parish review in terms of the boundaries between Heybridge and Great Totham. At this point the Leader advised that any Parishes that had not had a review in 14 years should request one.

Councillor Fluker commented that the Council had not consulted with the public over the Leisure Contract and that Members had chosen not to consult with the medical center or local businesses in respect of car parking charges at Burnham-on-Crouch. He asked the Leader of the Council if he would ensure that such consultations took place from now on. In response, the Leader explained that the difficulty with the Leisure Contract related to timing of the consultation when a private and confidential contract was being negotiated. In respect of the car parking at Burnham-on-Crouch it was difficult to determine at what point a consultation on such matters should take place. He commented that although it was not his role as Leader to create consultations, he was always open to communication from residents would support and raise things on their behalf.

Councillor K M H Lagan asked the Leader of the Council if he agreed with him that thanks and acknowledgement should be given for seeking the contribution of the public consultation with regards to the Promenade Park Management Plan. He referred to QR codes which had been put up around the Promenade Park asking people to 'have their say'. In response the Leader of the Council agreed with Councillor Lagan.

Councillor A S Fluker asked the Leader of the Council if he agreed that if a Vice-Chairperson of a programme Committee was unable to answer a question at a Council meeting and agreed to provide a written response that this should be done in a timely matter and in any event within five days. In response the Leader advised that some flexibility had to be given as there could at times be circumstances which might prevent this.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.30 pm.

K M H LAGAN
CHAIRPERSON