

Maldon District Council Devolution Consultation Response

Purpose of Document	Maldon District Council (MDC) response to seven questions in HMG public consultation on Devolution for Greater Essex. Draft document for input from Leader and Group Leaders.
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Date	
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Date Approved	

Consultation Questions

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What best describes your response?

- I am a member of the public, giving my views as an individual.
 I am responding on behalf of, or as a representative of, a business or organisation.

Please tell us how you found out about this consultation?

- Social media
 Email
 GOV.UK website
 Local council website
 Poster/ leaflet
 In Person Event
 Word of mouth
 News outlet (newspaper / TV / online)
 Other: Communication with Government

What is the first part of your postcode where you live or are based? For example, if your postcode is AB1 2CD, you would write AB1

CM9

We ask this so that we can identify what Local Authority you are in and understand a bit more about the area where you located. We do not use this information to identify you.

For those responding as an Organisation

Organisation details

Organisation Name: **Maldon District Council (MDC)**

What is the first part of your postcode where you are based: **CM9**

Your position: **Assistant Director, Strategy, Partnerships and Communications**

What best describes your organisation?

- Business
- County Council
- Unitary council
- District Council**
- Town Council
- Parish Council
- Health Body
- Registered Provider
- Voluntary and community sector or charity
- Academic
- Elected representative
- Other (Please Specify)
- Prefer not to say

Consultation Questions

Question 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Before setting out MDC's views, we would like to state that there is a significant difference between the words "will" and "could" as set out in the questions below.

Therefore, MDC has scored all of the questions in this consultation on the basis of them stating that the mayor and MCCA "will improve/provide benefits" when actually at this moment in time, "could" is far more appropriate, based on the current level of unknowns.

Potential benefits to the Maldon District area

The Maldon district is one of the most rural areas in the county of Essex providing homes and premises to 66,000 residents and 3,690 businesses. As a rural and coastal community, just 40 miles from London, it is in severe need of investment in transport options and further education provision to be able to access local services and to gain skills and jobs. Maldon is a beautiful coastal district with a maritime heritage and 75 miles of saltmarsh coastline. The district is known for its world leading brands including Maldon Salt and is famous for its Michelin star restaurants, oysters, and award-winning breweries and vineyards. It offers a great place to live, work and visit and welcomes over 4 million visitors a year. The mayor's ability to attract funding for culture, heritage and sport would help to sustain and raise the district's tourism and culture offer.

Transport improvements led by the mayor could better connect the district's isolated rural and coastal communities.

The district faces a severe lack of access to key services including hospitals and access to GPs. Crucially, the Mayor will have a statutory duty to improve public health and reduce inequalities, integrating efforts across the NHS, local authorities, and economic planning.

The Devolution White Paper outlines Climate and Environment as one of the core competencies for Strategic Authorities. This will provide Greater Essex with a strong mandate for local, place-based leadership to unlock low carbon initiatives, clean power; ensure our natural environment is protected from the impacts of climate change; and provide

the basis for enhancing the environment for the benefit of residents, visitors, businesses, and future generations.

Mayoral Devolution if done well could offer an opportunity to unlock funding and deliver infrastructure and services where they are needed the most in the district.

MDC is concerned it will lose the ability to voice the needs of the district and its community. It would support the inception of a locality board to ensure the needs of the district are prioritised and act as a fast track to access the devolved powers and resources to deliver the Council's five priorities in its Corporate Plan, they are: Supporting our Communities, Growing our economic growth, Investing in our District, Protecting our Environment and Delivering good quality services.

Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed **governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined Authority?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree**
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

MDC does not support the proposed governance arrangements set out in the consultation document and do not think they will serve the people of the Maldon district well.

Although this consultation relates to what is likely to be an 'interim' structure, if all Essex councils are abolished in 2028 through LGR, it is important that the MCCA starts well and wins the trust of all residents.

MDC strongly believes that the proposed 3:2:2 membership (ECC, Thurrock, Southend respectively) does not give fair representation to the 66,000 residents who live in the Maldon district area and across the north of Essex. A 3:2:2 voting distribution gives a disproportionate weight to Southend and Thurrock as constituent members. It also concentrates voting power in the South of the devolved area. Southend and Thurrock represent less than 20% of the region's residents and the south of the county less than 40%.

We propose a higher membership to ensure districts and north Essex are fairly represented and to ensure all political representation is part of the membership as currently this only includes the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. MDC hopes that the CCA members will be able to take a pan Essex view and operate on the basis of the best interests of the whole region, but it is likely that sense of collective purpose will change over time.

The proposed governance arrangements must be changed to initially increase representation from district councils before LGR completes in 2028, to ensure a balance between the north and the south and to give all residents of Essex, not just those in the south of the county fair weight in decision making.

Question 3

To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority **will support the economy of the area?**

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

The region faces economic, social, climate and infrastructure challenges that could limit its long-term economic growth and exacerbate the need for access to key services and transport in the district as well as the need for investment in further education vocational provision. A Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) offers a transformative opportunity to address these issues, attract investment, and secure vital investment in the Maldon district.

The Maldon district has the potential to advance in growth sectors such as clean energy, advanced manufacturing, construction, and Agri-Tech. Alongside economic opportunity devolution needs to support climate action, helping to future-proof businesses and homes against the increasing risks of flooding, coastal erosion, and overheating.

Partnership working must continue. North Essex plays a significant role in contributing to the Greater Essex economy, one of the UK's most competitive regions. A Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) would have the opportunity to drive economic growth by attracting investment, improving infrastructure, and developing a skilled workforce.

MDC is a member of the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB). It is through this board that a tactical approach is taken to support local business and the North Essex Economy. MDC is also contributing to the development of the North Essex Growth Plan; a clear opportunity for the Mayor and MCCA to energise growth in North Essex and to secure longer term investment.

The Maldon District currently offers no further vocational education provision and economic growth is limited by a lack of skills attainment in high value sectors. The adult workforce in

the district is lower skilled, this is compounded by a lack of educational provision in the district. The percentage of students in the district achieving Grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE is lower than the national average. The district also has lower than national average attainment for RQF3 and above qualifications for those aged 16-64.

A dedicated Employability and Skills Hub would help to align the NEEB strategy to employer needs, offer training, expand apprenticeships, and improve workforce mobility, ensuring residents benefit from emerging job opportunities.

The Maldon district has 3,690 businesses. Over 85% of these employ between 0-9 employees. Access to further business support, training, and skills through any forms of funding through a MCCA will be of benefit to the area.

MDC would expect to see the Mayoral Combined County Authority taking a strategic approach to skills development, ensuring that the workforce is equipped for the jobs of the future. The creation of a Greater Essex Employability and Skills Hub could align local and national funding to create a system that is fully responsive to employer demand. By improving engagement with SMEs and streamlining access to training and workforce development, a Mayoral Combined County Authority will help MDC enable a skilled and future ready workforce to support the fastest growing economy outside of London. If the MCCA creates a dedicated Greater Essex Growth Agency this could help to simplify business support and attract inward investment, it could potentially open up investment and skills opportunities for the Maldon district.

The district also needs more homes to meet the demand of the growing population and government targets (Previously 276 per annum, now set at 569 per annum), including affordable homes and temporary housing. In the current housing market, an average priced house (374k) will cost 11.1 times the average wage in the district. MDC and ultimately the unitary Council that forms in 2028 would need to work with the MCCA and Homes England to address housing and infrastructure that are key to economic expansion.

As a District Authority, MDC would want to have a voice in how the MCCA will streamline planning, accelerate housing delivery, and integrate transport and energy strategies to support sustainable growth. It would need to address infrastructure challenges, such as energy supply delays and poor public transport and road links to the wider network and the A12.

Public transport improvements must be addressed by the MCCA including road and rail. Two-thirds of residents living in more rural areas live in transport deserts. Maldon district has the highest travel time to key services and one of the highest reliance on car use in the county, meaning residents have little or no access to reliable transport links. High traffic congestion and air pollution persists, and public transport usage is lower, with only 11% of residents in the county cycling to work and 44% unwilling to walk more than 20 minutes for their commute. This is due to the extremely poor travel and transport network and accessibility in the district.

Transport infrastructure is also at risk from increasing climate change, with flooding, subsidence and water pollution being key and growing issues.

MDC would expect the Mayoral Combined County Authority to take a long-term approach to infrastructure investment, seeking to ensure that transport, energy, water, and digital connectivity keep pace with economic and housing growth, whilst also protecting its coastline and investing in flood defences.

All of this however will require input from locality boards/input from districts to ensure the **Maldon District's needs are evidenced and resources are allocated fairly.**

Question 4

To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will improve **social outcomes in the area?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Historically, the Maldon District is in good health with a life expectancy higher than the England average. The data on children's health tells us that 22.9% of reception age children in the district are obese compared to the national average of 12.9%. With a population of 25% of people over the age of 65, the main concerns are increasing social isolation, slips, trips and falls, in addition to prominent levels of male suicide. Other concerns relate to the lack of mental health support services and a severe lack of SEND provision in the district.

Partnership working must be maintained. MDC and its One Maldon District Partnership already deliver a range of health and wellbeing programmes and activities. It also uses vital Thriving Places data to help set targeted activities and identify cohorts to engage with to deliver better health outcomes and prevention of declining health, and future burden on the NHS.

MDC works directly with the Mid and South Essex NHS-led Alliance to ensure a place-based approach to tackling health inequalities in local communities.

The Council also works directly with Sport England and Active Essex to raise levels of physical activity across the district, especially in our most disadvantaged areas and young families.

Our Community Safety Partnership working must be maintained. With the lowest crime rate in the County, we must not become complacent. Through our Community Safety Partnership, we work together to address community safety issues. As a rural district this is vital in helping to maintain good levels of safety and of the perception of safety.

MDC would expect to see the Essex Mayor and Combined Authority, working in partnership with local authorities, the NHS, and other partners, to deliver and empower partnership working and provide funding to improve social outcomes.

MDC would want to see the mayor's leadership of the broader economic and environment agenda to help improve these drivers of health and wellbeing. The mayor's representation on the current three Integrated Care Boards in Essex must not dilute the voice of the Maldon district and its 'Community of Practice' to deliver health integration between the NHS and local partners.

There is also an opportunity for the MCCA to deliver a long-term plan to enable significant improvements in delivering healthy housing to improve health and social outcomes and to help ease the pressure on the NHS.

Question 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve **local government services in the area?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

Maldon District Council currently receives 11 pence in every pound of council tax collected. The remainder is distributed across Essex County Council, Parishes and Emergency Services including the PFCC.

With a growing population and a higher older population in a rural district, service demand is increasing. Residents face the ongoing challenges of cost-of-living pressures. This is exacerbated by a lack of affordable and available transport options. The district has seen a year-on-year increase in the demand for foodbanks and is currently running social supermarket, low-cost sessions to help support its residents.

The MCCA must not lose sight of the importance of service delivery at a local level and the value this brings to communities and partnership working. Delivery of services will require whole system working but cannot simply be funded on high level data and levels of deprivation as Maldon District Council will be at risk of being overlooked.

The transformation of public services is essential to ensure financial sustainability in the face of rising demand, to meet changing public expectations, and to take advantage of the benefits of data and innovative technologies like AI. MDC wants to be at the forefront of opportunities to provide value for money services and to make best use of resources.

There needs to be clarity of roles and responsibilities that align to the plans for Local Government Reorganisation. The Mayoral Combined Authority will be the strategic body rather than a service delivery body. However, through the future unitary councils and potential locality boards the mayor will have a significant role in commissioning and improving services.

An example of this is public transport. Once the Buses Bill is enacted, the mayor will be able to significantly improve local bus services through bus franchising, an enhanced partnership, or publicly owned bus companies. The Maldon District is in dire need of better bus services and wants to see this significantly improve.

The mayor will have the opportunity to set long-term strategic plans, for example the Local Growth Plan, the Local Transport Plan, and the Local Skills Improvement Plan, which will help join up service delivery around common objectives and priorities. The mayor will also play an important convening role and will sit on the Integrated Care Boards. MDC would expect to see a greater join up of services in areas like education, skills, and employment; health and social care integration; and housing and transport.

Question 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve the **local natural environment and overall national environment**?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree**
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

The Devolution White Paper outlines Climate and Environment as one of the core competencies for Strategic Authorities. As a rural and coastal district, MDC would want to see place-based leadership that unlocks the ability to achieve net zero targets, creates sustainability and investment to protect our environment. The MCCA could use its devolved

power to help residents and businesses to transition to a low carbon, clean power economy and help to ensure our natural environment is protected from the impacts of climate change.

Climate resilience is vital. Sea levels are sets to rise and thousands of homes in Essex are at risk of flooding. As a coastal district this is a great concern. Investment in defences and flood prevention is needed and must be prioritised.

The MCCA will have the responsibility to produce a Local Power Plan. The white paper sets out new responsibilities for the MCCA regarding energy (solar, wind, hydrogen, heat networks). However, the MCCA will need to be properly resourced to fulfil these new duties. Delivering climate action and energy production is costly and requires partnership working.

The work Maldon District Council has done to support and help set up local Climate Action Groups must not be overlooked. These groups are the local hearts and minds that bring their time, passion, and expertise in helping to care for the environment and take ownership at a local level. The MCCA must harness the potential of these groups.

Protecting our environment and making sure residents in the district have access to green space delivers a wealth of physical and mental health benefits for residents.

Biodiversity is a net good for our ecosystem health, and essential for farmers in the district who are reliant on pollinators and other natural actors in agriculture. The MCCA will need to actively listen to the farming community to ensure food security is prioritised and sustainability supported.

Question 7

To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority **will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree**
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Please explain your answer.

There is a risk that the establishment of the MCCA will overshadow the voice of the local community and place identity. The inception of Locality boards that represent the community, the voluntary sector, local faith groups, culture, heritage, and local arts groups would help play a key role in maintaining a sense of place.

The mayor will have the tools and the system leadership role to address the quality-of-life issues that matter to communities and to foster an approach to economic growth that is grounded in place. This is reflected also in our other answers on economic outcomes, social outcomes, and environmental outcomes.

If the local voice of the community is maintained and devolved powers from central government gives local leaders the ability to better serve the needs of our communities, then there is potential for benefits to be delivered. How this will work is clearly yet to be seen.

The Combined Authority itself will need to demonstrate effective accountability and transparency. The Government's consultation document sets out the role that Overview and Scrutiny Committees will play. MDC wants to see transparency and accountability for what the MCCA spends and what it delivers.

It is vital that there is continued engagement with parish and town councils. The MCCA will need to ensure strong partnership working with districts – as non-constituent members of the Combined Authority, they must still be engaged in decision making.