



REPORT of CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**to
COUNCIL
4 FEBRUARY 2016**

DEVOLUTION FOR GREATER ESSEX

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the development of a proposed deal to devolve a range of resources and powers from Central Government to Greater Essex authorities.

2. AREA FOR DECISION / ACTION

This report is for Members' information only.

2.1 Background

- 2.1.1 A report to the September meeting of the Council provided an update on the work underway to explore an ambitious Greater Essex devolution proposal (Minute No. 393 refers). The Council agreed that a Devolution Member Task and Finish Working Group be set up and be authorised to consider and agree on behalf of the Council the Greater Essex Council's more detailed devolution submission to Government.
- 2.1.2 Since then, the Greater Essex authorities have continued to work together to explore devolution ideas and prepare a draft submission. Progress updates have been provided to the Member Task and Finish Working Group.
- 2.1.3 A high-level submission was made to Government on 4 September 2015 to confirm the Greater Essex Partnership's continued interest in a devolution deal. The letter was signed by all fifteen Leaders across Greater Essex. This submission received good feedback from civil servants and in addition, a positive response from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government; a copy of this letter is included in **APPENDIX 1**. Since then a number of activities have been taken place as follows:
- 7 October Further detailed submission to Government
 - 17 November Engagement with Education and Skills Board
 - 24 November Engagement with Greater Essex Business Board
 - 3 December Leaders' Meeting
 - 11 December Engagement with South East Local Enterprise Partnership
 - 11 December Submission to Government
 - Late December Draft deal document shared with civil servants

January Updated draft submission

22 January Leaders Meeting

- Updated draft deal document presented and agreement reached that it should form the basis for ongoing informal engagement with civil servants and internally within councils to brief members and officers
- Agreed the governance work Stream lead to engage with authorities and quadrants about the preferred composition of Growth Area Boards.

2.1.4 A series of meetings with Government officials (civil servants) are now scheduled for January and February which may result in a ministerial challenge session in March or April. Following this, an evening Member workshop for Maldon District Council's Members will be scheduled to provide a detailed update on deal position reached.

2.1.5 Any final devolution deal with Government, including proposed new governance arrangements will need to be considered by the Council. It is envisaged this will be around June / July 2016.

2.2 Work Streams

2.2.1 The key work streams are being led by lead Leaders (as set out below) working closely with lead Chief Executives or senior officers, often from other authorities and with a good mix in the groups to ensure reasonable geographical representation from across Greater Essex. External partners are also involved in the different work streams as appropriate for example, the Essex Skills Board, businesses and colleges are closely involved in the employability and skills work programme to develop new ideas and offers and asks of Government.

Fiscal: Councillor Louise McKinlay (Brentwood) supported by Councillor David Finch (Essex)

Economic Growth, Infrastructure and Connectivity: Councillor Phil Turner (Basildon) supported by Councillor Paul Smith (Colchester)

New Homes and Communities: Councillor Graham Butland (Braintree) supported by Councillor Colin Riley (Castle Point)

Employability and Skills: Councillor Ron Woodley (Southend) supported by Councillor Miriam Lewis (Maldon)

Governance: Councillor Neil Stock (Tendring) supported by Councillor Jon Clempner (Harlow) and Councillor Terry Cutmore (Rochford).

Communication: Councillor Kevin Bentley (Essex) supported by Councillor Colin Riley (Castle Point).

2.3 Engagement with Business and Other Partners

- 2.3.1 The Greater Essex Partnership has published two newsletters which have been shared widely; copies are included at **APPENDIX 2** of this report. The newsletters set out what the devolution story is, focusing on the key themes and messages around greater local accountability. The newsletters are written assuming that people do not have a detailed knowledge about devolution and offer an opportunity to keep promoting why we are working together to develop a devolution bid.
- 2.3.2 A Greater Essex Devolution website is now live (www.greateressex.org.uk) and content will be added and updated as the programme progresses.
- 2.3.3 At the Leaders meeting on 3 December 2015, Leaders agreed to change their meetings to operate as a Devolution Board, with business conducted as a Board with agendas and reports produced in advance and minutes to be agreed. The Devolution Board met on 22 January 2016.

2.4 Devolution Governance Proposals

- 2.4.1 Greater Essex is developing proposals for a model of governance to enable decisions to be taken in an open and transparent way. Emerging proposals include an aspiration to work towards establishing a Greater Essex Combined Authority (GECA), which is the governance model preferred by Government.
- 2.4.2 It is hoped that a GECA will receive new powers and resources from Central Government to Greater Essex. There is no intention to take existing powers from local authorities without agreement.
- 2.4.3 The governance work stream is also developing the model for the relationship and level of delegation between any GECA and the Growth Area Boards; currently there are four growth areas (often referred to as quadrants) operating (e.g. Haven Gateway, Heart of Essex, South and West areas). It was agreed at the Devolution Board on 22 January that the composition of the quadrants will be reviewed as part of the governance work stream. It was further agreed that individual authorities and representatives from their constituent quadrants be engaged to assess options for future Growth Area Board arrangements. Conclusions from these discussions will be reported back to the February meeting of the Leaders' Devolution Board and recommendations will go before a meeting of the Planning and Licensing Committee for decision.

2.5 Next Steps

- 2.5.1 Members are asked to note the progress of the devolution programme and the emerging shape of the devolution deal, as summarised in the latest newsletter in **APPENDIX 2**, for further negotiation and development.
- 2.5.2 Members will be kept updated on progress and further reports will be taken to the Working Group as required, including the details of any shadow governance arrangements as they emerge.

3. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

- 3.1 Devolution of decision making and control from Government has the potential to impact on all of the Council's Goals.

4. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Decision making closer to the locality to which it affects, should mean that services take greater account of local needs.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None identified.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – None identified.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Funded within budget.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Senior officer resource is allocated to this project.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None identified.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Considerable progress has been made in developing draft Greater Essex Devolution proposals. An iterative approach to the development of submission document is being taken. A workshop will be organised to engage Members on the content of the detailed proposal following feedback from senior Government officials which is expected in March / April.

6. RECOMMENDATION

That the contents of this report be noted.

Background papers: None.

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