



Chelmsford City Council Cabinet

14th November 2023

North Essex Councils joint working arrangements

Report by:

Leader of the Council

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

To update Cabinet on progress since agreeing the North Essex Authorities (NEA) Memorandum of Understanding in January 2023 and to seek approval to establish the North Essex Councils partnership.

Options

1. To support the recommendation. The preferred option is for the Council to support the recommendation 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.
2. To not support the recommendation.

Preferred option and reasons

1. Option 1 - The preferred option is for the Council to support the recommendation 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. Alternatively, not supporting the recommendation risks this Council jeopardising the increasingly positive relationships between North Essex Councils and missing out on the considerable potential benefits set out in this report.

Recommendation

1. To agree that Chelmsford City Council (the Council) will work in partnership with those Councils set out in paragraph 1.1 and will be collectively referred to as the North Essex Councils (NEC).

1. Summary of Issues

- 1.1 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
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 The councils in the south of Essex already have a well-established strategic partnership, which was known as ASELA now the South Essex Councils (SEC), and a joint committee is in place enabling SEC to take formal decisions collectively and to agree joint delivery arrangements to achieve improved outcomes in South Essex, for example with Homes England.
- 1.4 In 2022 a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed with the other North Essex councils (Appendix 1) setting up the basis for a new strategic partnership to deliver place leadership across North Essex.
- 1.5 During 2023, Chief Executives 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.
- 1.6 At a meeting of North Essex Council leaders on 20 July 2023, it was agreed to formalise the partnership and for each authority to formally take a report through their relevant governance processes, hence this report.
- 1.7 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 appropriate.
- 1.8 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 & 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 LEP across North Essex
- 1.9 The outcomes listed in 1.8 will be achieved at different levels, with the partnership allowing for projects across a subset of councils, all North Essex councils and influence beyond North Essex.
- 1.10 Delivering this ambitious approach to sub-regional working will not be possible without each partner council contributing some resources to the NEC programme both existing resource and where appropriate new resources.
- 1.11 Each constituent council has agreed to contribute £20,000 in 2023/24, enabling the partnership to put in place the initial resources necessary to take forward NEC work on behalf of all councils. This contribution is in addition to the annual contribution of £20,000 committed to drive forward the work of the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB)
- 1.12 Further resources may be allocated to support the work of the NEC however these will be dependent upon a clear business case highlighting the anticipated benefits accruing to the Partnership.

2. Next Steps

- 2.1 If the recommendation in this report is supported, the North Essex Councils strategic partnership will be able to progress the initial resourcing of the NEC. This will also help to mitigate known resource risks associated with key North Essex programmes of work e.g. NEEB and Shared Services.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Contributions for the core costs of NEEB are already budgeted for as is the one-off contribution towards the extended work of NEC any future contributions to NEC will be decided on a case by case basis.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Memorandum of understanding, January 2023

Background papers:

None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional:

Financial:

Potential impact on climate change and the environment:

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030:

Personnel: N/A

Risk Management: N/A

Equality and Diversity: N/A

Health and Safety: N/A

Digital: N/A

Other: N/A

Consultees:

North Essex District Councils

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

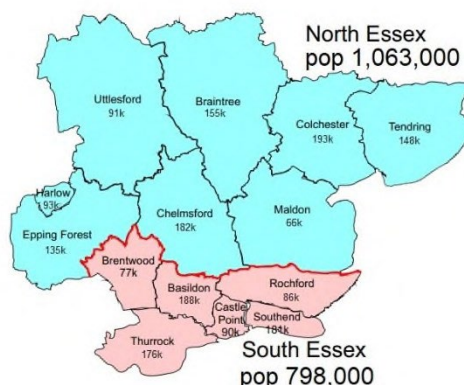
N/A

Association of North Essex Local Authorities

Memorandum of Understanding

Between:

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



1. Background

- 1.1 Together, we are responsible for delivering services to over a million residents, equivalent to the City of Birmingham. The area delivers significant gross value added at over £17bn and supports almost 41,000 businesses.
- 1.2 This new partnership of North Essex Authorities is well placed to deliver local ambitions, to respond to emerging opportunities and Government policies, as well as being able to promote North Essex as desirable place for living, leisure and to do business in.
- 1.3 The Authorities have established a good track record of partnership working in various previous collaborations.
- 1.4 The nine Authorities wish to record their intention to establish the basis of our collaboration through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and to form this new partnership, building on previous joint working successes.

2. Core Purpose and aims

- 2.1 The core purpose of NEA is to provide for a platform for enhanced cooperation across North Essex, to achieve better outcomes for our residents and businesses, by working together rather than separately. Through our collaborative approach we are best placed to develop and deliver a vision for North Essex, promoting sustainable growth for our economies and communities up to 2050.
- 2.2 NEA will focus on the strategic opportunities, regardless of individual local authority boundaries, for North Essex to influence and secure the collaboration and investment that will help our individual areas to flourish and realise their full economic, social and environmental potential.

2.3 The aims of NEA will be to:

- a. Agree a 2050 vision for North Essex.
- b. Provide strong and collective place leadership and a voice into Government.
- c. Increase the ability of all authorities to cope with public spending restrictions and increased demands on services.
- d. Influence Government powers and attract Government funding to North Essex.
- e. Raise the profile and reputation of North Essex as a desirable place for living, leisure and to do business in.
- f. Improve transport and digital connectivity, securing funding for strategic infrastructure.
- g. Provide sufficient new homes to meet the needs of a growing and ageing population.
- h. Attract investment and stimulate economic growth, focusing on key sectors and the low carbon economy.
- i. Increase productivity by improving educational attainment and access to skills relevant to our future labour market.
- j. Enable North Essex to respond and adapt to Climate Change
- k. Support wellbeing and healthy life expectancy by tackling the wider determinants of health with our health partners and the voluntary and community sector.
- l. Develop innovative approaches to funding to deliver shared objectives, including developing joint bids where appropriate.
- m. Work together to help harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities.

3. Principles of collaboration

- 3.1. Working together on strategic priorities irrespective of local authority boundaries.
- 3.2. Creating collective scale, resilience, and impact for the benefit of our residents and businesses.
- 3.3. Tackling problems and issues that we cannot solve individually.
- 3.4. Collaborating to gain something, without losing something (including local identities).
- 3.5. Governance arrangements proportionate to our shared ambition.
- 3.6. Opportunities to discharge certain functions jointly, and pooling of resources, should be considered where this can have collective and measurable impact.

4. Term and Termination

- 4.1. This MoU shall commence on the date of the signature by each Authority and shall expire if NEA dissolves, with its area of influence reducing should any individual signatory authority withdraw

5. Variation

- 5.1. The MoU can only be varied by written agreement of all the Authorities, save for any individual authority withdrawing

6. Charges and liabilities

- 6.1. Except as otherwise provided, the Parties shall bear their own costs and expenses incurred in complying with their obligations under this MoU.

7. Status

- 7.1. This MoU cannot override the statutory duties and powers of the parties and is not enforceable by law. However, the parties agree to the principles set out in this MoU

Signed by

Local Authority	Leader/Chairman of Policy and Resource Committee	Chief Executive	Date
Braintree District Council			
Chelmsford City Council			
Colchester City Council			
Epping Forest District Council			
Harlow Council			
Essex County Council			
Maldon District Council			
Tendring District Council			
Uttlesford District Council			