

Meeting: Council
Date: 20 March 2025
Classification: Part 1
Key Decision: No
Title of Report: **Submission of an Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex**

Executive Director: Claire Shuter, Executive Director of Strategy and Change
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Executive Councillor: Cllr Daniel Cowan, Leader of the Council

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise Council of a report to Cabinet which presents the “Interim Plan” for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Essex and will seek Cabinet’s endorsement ahead of submission to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- 1.2. The Interim Plan has been developed collaboratively by the fifteen county, district and unitary councils of Greater Essex in response to the Government’s agenda of LGR and devolution, as outlined in the English Devolution White Paper, and correspondence containing a statutory invitation to make a LGR proposal received from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (the Minister) in February 2025.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1. **Consider the Cabinet report attached at Appendix 1 which sets out the Interim LGR Plan as requested by the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution and makes such Recommendations to Cabinet as it sees fit.**
- 2.2. **Engage in a programme of engagement and briefings for Members as the agenda around LGR develops between now and the final submission deadline in September 2025.**

3. Background

- 3.1. The Government aims to shift power from Whitehall to local communities via empowered local leaders via a national programme of devolution, fostering economic growth and improving public services.
- 3.2. The Government considers that a parallel programme of LGR can “unlock” devolution by bringing remaining two-tier areas in line with the unitary

authority government system that operates across most English regions and in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, creating a foundation of resilient, efficient local government to receive devolved powers and funding.

- 3.3. The Minister confirmed that Greater Essex had been allocated a place on the Devolution Priority Programme, an accelerated path to mayoral devolution and LGR, in his letter of 5th February 2025. This commits the Council to establishing a mayoral combined county authority by May 2026. A separate letter received on the same date contained a statutory invitation for LGR proposals and set out that Greater Essex must prepare an Interim LGR Plan by March 21, 2025, and a final LGR proposal by September 26, 2025.
- 3.4. As set out in the attached Cabinet report, at present a five unitary model is favoured by a majority of Greater Essex council leaders. If this position is maintained and a five-unitary model is proposed to Government in the Final LGR Proposal, this would see a new unitary authority with a population of approximately 356,000 people created from the existing unitary authority of Southend-on-Sea, the existing borough council of Castle Point, and existing district council of Rochford.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations to this report. Future potential implications are highlighted in the attached Cabinet report. The Council will maintain a close watch on any financial implications arising from these decisions that may benefit or disadvantage the Authority.

5. Legal Implications

6. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation to this report. However, there will be significant legal implications arising from accepting to the statutory invitation to submit a proposal for LGR in Greater Essex. These implications will be considered in future reports to Council and Cabinet at the appropriate stage of the LGR process.

7. Appendices

- 7.1. **Appendix 1: Submission of an Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation in Greater Essex, Cabinet report 21 March 2025**

8. Report Authorisation

This report has been approved for publication by:		
	Name:	Date:
Executive Director(s)	Claire Shuter	07/03/2025
S151 Officer	Joe Chesterton	07/03/2025
Monitoring Officer	Susan Zeiss	11/03/2025
Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Daniel Cowan	11/03/2025