

**Proposed response to questions raised through the consultation**

**Question 1: do you agree that the proposal to enable local authorities that do not have contiguous boundaries to form combined authorities and economic prosperity boards will reduce a burden to collaboration? Why?**

Yes, Southend on Sea Borough Council strongly agrees with this proposal. As identified within Lord Heseltine's 'No Stone unturned in pursuit of growth' paper, economic development partnerships should be based on functional economic areas and not constrained by artificial administrative boundaries.

Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock Councils are two unitary authorities that have aligned and related economic interests as part of the functional economic area across 'South Essex'. However our boundaries are not contiguous as Castle Point and Basildon are located in between. Southend and Thurrock areas are home to important transport gateways, namely London Gateway Port and Port of Tilbury in Thurrock and London Southend Airport. Both economies are very heavily influenced by their proximity to London, in particular in logistics, tourism, and creative industries. London also dominates the transport corridors and movements. The transport corridors, A13, A127, Greater Anglia and C2C rail lines also serve to knit together the local economy, supporting business supply chains, market accessibility and commuting.

The existing economic partnership (Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership) will end on April 1, as a result of Essex County Council's decision to withdraw. Both Councils, via Cabinet decisions made in December 2014, are committed to forming a new economic partnership for South Essex and a favourable option could be to form a Combined Authority (CA).

A CA will strengthen and reduce burdens to collaboration between our two authorities by:

- enabling a streamlining of business support arrangements building on the excellent progress being made through the Southend Growth Hub and the ERDF low carbon business programme
- streamlining business networks and support
- strengthening collaboration between our complementary economic sectors, including logistics operations at our ports and airports and the cultural collaboration along the Thames Estuary
- underlining the significance of the partnership within the LEP as one of four federated areas within the South East Local Enterprise Partnership

Important opportunities for economic collaboration through an EPB or CA will be enabled by this proposal. The artificial constraint on partnership working caused by the requirement for contiguous boundaries should be removed and thereby enable like-minded authorities to work together, alongside business to promote and support business productivity and competitiveness. This is a position also backed by our

business led partnerships and was supported by the Thames Gateway Minister on a recent visit to the area.

**Question 2: do you agree that the proposed safeguards are necessary and sufficient? Why?**

Safeguards are important to challenge the robustness and impact of proposals. Government should require the Councils concerned to thoroughly apply all safeguards including the impact on surrounding areas. This decision should be reached by the local authorities concerned in conjunction with the relevant neighbouring authorities.

A further safeguard should be included to support authorities bringing forward proposals by introducing a presumption in favour of approving CA or EPB proposals. While full consultation with neighbouring authorities and other partners is a pre-requisite such a presumption would guard against frivolous objections, driven perhaps by opposition to economic growth or for political reasons. Such objections could undermine the very reason for Lord Heseltine's recommendations.

**Question 3: do you agree that the proposal to enable a county council to delegate its function to a combined authority for part of the county council's area will reduce a burden to collaboration? Why?**

Yes, Southend on Sea Borough Council agrees with this proposal.

The argument and justification for CA and EPB Boards is that they cover a sensible and practical economic geography, with strong economic interdependencies and where growth in one part of the area is generally beneficial to the remainder. This is the case across South Essex and between Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock Councils. It is less likely to be so across the geography of historic county council areas.

This is particularly the case in Essex where the economic relationship between South Essex and the rest of the County is very limited, with different economic drivers, sectors, markets, and little by way of commuting interdependence. It is for these reasons that the South East Local Enterprise Partnership recognises South Essex as a separate economic geography and federated area to the rest of Essex.

Enabling a County Council to delegate a function, such as transport, to a combined authority for part of its area, will localise decision making, bring it closer to meeting the aspirations of businesses and communities in that area, and ensure the alignment of public sector policy and decision making behind the growth objectives of the CA or EPB area.

**Question 4: do you agree that the proposal to remove the review and scheme requirements for changes to a combined authority's or economic prosperity board's constitution, functions or funding will reduce a burden to collaboration?**

Yes, this will reduce a burden to collaboration and enable the CA or EPB to operate in a more agile and flexible way in response to changing circumstances.

**Question 5: do you agree that the three proposed changes meet the preconditions for use of a Legislative Reform Order as set out above, in particular:**

- **Do you have views regarding the expected benefits of the proposals as identified in chapter 3 of this consultation?**

The benefits of the proposals in chapter 3 are set out above in the answer to question 1.

- **Is there any empirical evidence that you are aware of that supports the need for these reforms? Please provide details.**

Evidence has to be based upon the practical benefits in specific areas. Across Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock there is ambition to deliver over 30,000 jobs and over 20,000 homes. The potential is greater when the three South Essex districts are added to this. The withdrawal of Essex County Council from the current South Essex partnership arrangement presents a risk and a barrier to growth. A Combined Authority between Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock Councils, which do not have contiguous boundaries, will help address those risks, overcome the barriers and maintain the growth momentum. The proposal to enable part of a two tier County Council area to join a CA will provide a mechanism for the whole of the South Essex economic geography to benefit from inclusion.

- **Are there any non-legislative means that would satisfactorily remedy the difficulty which the proposals intend to address?**

These proposals are necessary.

- **Are the proposals put proportionate to the policy objective?**

Yes.

- **Do the proposals taken as a whole strike a fair balance between the public interest and any person adversely affected by it?**

Yes, the safeguards and consultation arrangements provide for this.

- **Do the proposals remove any necessary protection?**

Sufficient protections remain in place.

- **Do the proposals prevent any person from continuing to exercise any right or freedom which he might reasonably expect to continue to exercise? If so, please provide details.**

No.

