



Minutes of the special meeting of Council held on 16 September 2025 when there were present: -

Deputy Mayor: Cllr K Knott

Cllr S Ainsley	Cllr R Langley
Cllr N Benson	Cllr R Lillis
Cllr D Blackwell	Cllr D Macpherson
Cllr K Bowker	Cllr P May
Cllr L Breading	Cllr L McCarthy Calvert
Cllr T Copsey	Cllr S Mountford
Cllr M Cortes	Cllr N Pachy
Cllr M Dearson	Cllr B Palmer
Cllr L Dixon	Cllr C Sach
Cllr A Edwards	Cllr R Savage
Cllr M Fuller	Cllr D Silk
Cllr T Gibson	Cllr D Thomas
Cllr G Howlett	Cllr G Watson
Cllr J Huntman	Cllr B Wimbledon
Cllr D Jones	Cllr G Withers
Cllr J Knott	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs B Campagna, S Brooke, W Gibson, A Harbinson, N Harvey and J Payne.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Hutchings	- Chief Executive
C Adlem	- Director, Corporate & Customer
I Butt	- Director, Places & Communities
M Harwood-White	- Director, Commercial & Assets
A Law	- Assistant Director, Legal & Democratic Services (MO)
L Wosko	- Assistant Director, Finance & Procurement (S151 Officer)
B Brook	- Assistant Director, Performance Policy & Customer
S Garner	- Assistant Director, Development Services
S Jarvis	- Assistant Director, Environment
A Parrott	- Assistant Director, Climate & Growth
S Williams	- Assistant Director, Recreation
S Worthington	- Democratic Services Manager (DMO)

G Middlemast - Senior Planning Policy Officer
L Piatto-Hill - Civic & Democratic Services Officer
A Mead - Electoral & Democratic Services Apprentice

183 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

184 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Council meeting held on 23 July 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Deputy Mayor.

185 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Members considered the report of the Chief Executive presenting the options for the implementation of local government reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Essex with particular reference to the submission of a final plan to Government.

The Chief Executive referenced that there had to date been a number of briefings on LGR. Cabinet would be making a decision to endorse a proposal to government in a meeting that followed this special meeting of Council; Council was, in effect, pre-scrutinising the report to Cabinet.

She emphasised that LGR was not the same as devolution; although Greater Essex was in the devolution priority programme and would elect its first mayor in 2026. On 1 April 2028 this Council and all other councils in Essex would be dissolved and replaced by new unitary councils. These new unitary councils would be elected to on 6 May 2027.

There were four different submissions to government proposing how many unitary councils there should be and in what configuration. The deadline for submission was 26 September, by which time this Council should state which proposal it supports - it can only support one. The submissions must meet the 6 specified criteria set out at paragraph 4.3 of the report, otherwise they will be rejected by Government. Government will put out to public consultation those proposals meeting the criteria and Government will ultimately decide which proposal to implement.

She outlined the timetable for next steps after submission of proposals, as set out at paragraph 4.8 of the report.

She emphasised that this Council had been working on a model for 5 unitary councils and that was the proposal that Cabinet would consider this evening. The 5 unitary model was based on:

- Five urban centres - reflecting existing travel to work patterns - where people live and work and socialise and where their children go to school; where generations of families live and what people view as their local economy.

- Identity - each of the proposed 5 unitary councils represents a specific geography with its own cultural identity, shared history, societal mores and roots.
- Voice - the proposed 5 unitary councils are right sized to ensure that they are big enough to be financially sustainable but small enough to be properly representative. Each of the new councils will have representation calculated on the basis of 2 or 3 councillors per ward of 6,000-9,000 electors using existing lower tier council ward boundaries rather than Essex County Council division boundaries which would give ratios nearer to 1:5,000.

The 5 unitary model supports delivery of successful devolution in Greater Essex because it is vital to ensure that all of Essex is represented to the Mayor as reflective of place and local need. It is important to ensure that local communities are properly represented.

She stressed that there was no more money in the system for local government and the costs of effecting the change would be considerable. The new unitary councils created by LGR must therefore achieve savings and efficiencies that existing councils cannot; they must be transformative and embrace public sector reform.

The 5 unitary council proposal recommends a reform of adult and children's social care that is prudent, realistic and deliverable. No financial changes in any proposal being put forward will be binding on the new councils. However, by basing the modelling on demonstrable fact based on evidence and the experience of other authorities that have gone through this process, the financial part of the 5 unitary business case has the confidence of the officers who have been an integral part of its creation.

Public and stakeholder support had been sought and was reflected in the report and in the business case. What appears to be the case is that most people don't have an opinion about what form local government takes, so long as it achieves better outcomes. The 5 unitary council model had been designed to achieve those better outcomes without diluting democratic representation.

In conclusion, she stated that the other models for LGR that were being proposed were also referenced in the report.

During debate, Members expressed concern about the other models being proposed. The Chief Executive emphasised that whilst Essex County Council (ECC) would vote for which option it supports, it nevertheless does not hold a majority vote. She further advised that Business Cases A, B and C can be found on the LGR website, with Business Case D yet to be uploaded, but that Appendix 4 of the report shared details of this proposed business case.

She also emphasised that although Government had been clear that local councils must put forward a preferred Business Case without considering politics this was, nevertheless, a political decision.

In response to a Member question as to which business case each of the councils supported, the Chief Executive confirmed that 10 of the 15 councils in Essex support Business Case A. Business Case B is supported by ECC, Epping and Braintree. Business Case C is supported by Thurrock Council and Business Case D is supported by Rochford District Council. Officers consider that Business Case A holds weight as the majority of Essex councils support it and they believe that this is the best option for their residents and that it is achievable.

Responding to a supplementary question as to whether the proposal for a 3 unitary model was more complex than that for a 5 unitary model, the Chief Executive advised that the 3 unitary model would include, for South Essex, the disaggregation of ECC functions as well as the smoothing across of 2 existing unitary councils. Having all 3 within such a small footprint was, in the Chief Executive's view, more complex and led to higher risk, particularly in respect of safe delivery of social care services, from day 1. It would create a degree of complexity marked by post code in terms of the level of service received by residents.

Responding to concern raised by Members about the process of amalgamation between councils – regardless of which business case was selected by Government - the Chief Executive reiterated that, in terms of the disaggregation of the functions of councils and the smoothing of services, Business Case B held the most complexity (as it involved, in South Essex, three upper tier authorities and three lower tier authorities). She further advised that the CIPFA report provided assurance that debt across the system was affordable and manageable and that therefore no particular case's configuration was affected by debt sharing. The assumption had been made, due to the experience of LGR in Surrey, that decisions in Essex were likely to replicate Surrey in regard to debt sharing; she emphasised that debt would carry from the current Essex councils to the new unitary authorities. She further stated that system integration was one strand of the business amalgamation needed and the modelling for Business Case A had taken a prudent approach with any anticipated initial savings to be achieved by the end of year 2 at the earliest.

Members queried what positive impact Business Case A would be expected to have in the local area. In response, the Chief Executive made reference to the Options Analysis set out in the Business Case that presented all criteria considered in recommending Business Case A for Castle Point Borough Council. This included the adult and children's social care costings provided by the business case, the consideration of local economy over scale of councils and the consideration of supply chains with businesses to supply them locally. There would be a direct route from the new unitary councils to the Mayor of Greater Essex that would ensure that the voices of local residents were heard and it was anticipated that Neighbourhood Committees would also be developed.

It was also emphasised that Castle Point Borough Council would continue to exist until 2028, therefore its statutory responsibilities would continue alongside a continuing commitment to delivering services as usual to local residents. If the Castle Point Plan was adopted it would be preserved and would continue to be in force post-LGR as any new local plans produced by the new unitary councils

would take time to be developed.

Resolved

To note the contents of the report.

186 COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Council received the following question on notice from Cllr R Langley:

"I absolutely do not want to see the use of any Green Belt, and I know Canvey doesn't either, but are our hands tied. Do we have a backup plan in the event this draft plan is found unsound for failing short of the objectively assessed needs?"

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning provided the following response: "It would be nice if the statutory and legal process of plan making allowed us to offer up a Plan B or even a Plan C or D, but it does not. We are obliged to present to the examining inspector our one and only proposal for the Borough which has been prepared and consulted upon in line with the criteria set out in law and in the NPPF.

That has to be right if you think about it - because if it was possible to have a Plan B then you could produce it to the inspector without having consulted on it and it wouldn't represent the feedback from our residents. The whole process would be subverted.

We don't have any secret plan up our sleeves. What we have is the plan we are currently consulting upon which is based on the feedback we had from residents in the Regulation 18 consultation. Residents told us to protect the Green Belt by taking an urban first approach and that is what the Castle Point Plan does.

In many ways the Castle Point Plan complies strongly with National Planning Policy, and it takes bold steps towards meeting our housing needs increasing housing delivery by over 300% compared to present levels. However, I acknowledge it does not meet the Government's target for housing set out through its standard method.

It is worth pointing out that the NPPF requires us to consider Green Belt sites and requires us to identify, where some of those Green Belt sites can be classified as Grey Belt in line with Government guidance. It is our job as Castle Point Borough Council, to then consider whether those sites can be brought forward for development. We have done the work and we believe that the evidence supports a conclusion that there are extensive and genuine planning reasons why those Green Belt and Grey Belt sites cannot be developed. That reasoning and that evidence base is wholly in line with the NPPF and the Government guidance and that is why we believe the Castle Point Plan is sound."

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm.

Chair

Date

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