

Report to Cabinet

Report Title	Greater Essex Devolution, Consultation
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 19 March 2025
Report Author	Stephen Taylor, Head of Freeport
Corporate Director	Alex Powell, Assistant Chief Executive
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr John Kent, The Leader and Cabinet Member Strategic Relationships, Reputation and Influence
Why is this a key decision?	1. Expenditure over £500K no 2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards yes
Wards Affected	All

Is report Urgent?	No
Appendices (if any)	1. Add title here 2.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Government published its white paper on English Devolution on 16 December and invited areas to express interest in joining the devolution priority programme to establish a new Mayoral Combined Authority by May 2026. Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Essex County Council expressed interest, and the Government accepted the Greater Essex area into the devolution Priority Programme in February this year. Since then, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has launched a consultation on devolution proposals. This report seeks Cabinet approval for Thurrock Council's proposed response to the government's Greater Essex Devolution consultation.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in this report, the Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 **Agree the content of Thurrock Council's response to government's consultation on devolution in Greater Essex as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2.2 **Delegate the submission of the consultation response including authority to make minor changes and alterations to the Assistant Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader.**

3. Commissioner's Comments

- 3.1 Commissioners note the importance of ensuring that the devolution arrangement recognises and addresses the needs and opportunities associated with the Thames Freeport and the wider economic opportunities of the Thames estuary, currently addressed through the Thames Estuary Growth Board.

4. Proposals – the rationale and evidence for the recommendations

- 4.1 The government published the English Devolution white paper on 16 December 2024, setting out its plans to move power out of Westminster and to local communities. The devolution proposals centre upon the creation of mayoral combined county authorities led by a regional mayor with a view to the first elections in 2026. Upper tier authorities were invited by the Secretary of State to indicate their wish to be included in the priority programme for devolution by 10 January. Council leaders from Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend-on-Sea City Council wrote to government expressing their interest and received confirmation from the Secretary of State that Greater Essex would be included in the priority programme.
- 4.2 The White Paper sets out how devolution to local areas within England can help deliver economic growth and more joined-up delivery of public services and increase trust in politics. Devolution can achieve this through enabling more decisions to be taken at a more local level, thereby making it easier to tailor decisions to local needs and priorities; enabling more coordinated action in a place; giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them; and driving innovation in policy and delivery.
- 4.3 Before making a final decision on whether to proceed with the making of the necessary legislation, the government is undertaking a formal consultation process in Greater Essex seeking views from interested parties, including those who live and work in the area. The consultation remains open until 13 April 2025 and is open for everyone to respond including the Council.
- 4.4 The Council's draft response is attached at Appendix 1. The response supports the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority and Cabinet is asked to consider, comment and agree the response.
- 4.5 Southend-on-Sea City Council and Essex County Council are also expected to submit supportive responses to the consultation. The only area of divergence is likely to be the response to the governance arrangements and in particular the voting rights of constituent members. The Council and Southend-on-Sea City Council support the voting rights proposed by Government but Essex County Council may propose a different governance model.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 Thurrock Council could choose not to submit a response but would miss the opportunity to show its support for the proposal and opportunities it could bring to both Thurrock and Greater Essex.

6. Consultation

6.1 This report relates to the council's consultation response to government, and it is under no duty to consult on its response.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct finance implications associated with the Government's consultation questions or the responses set out in the Appendix to this report .

Implications verified by: Sima Khiroya
Assistant Director Financial Management & Procurement

Date 6 March 2025

8. Risk Implications

8.1

RISK DESCRIPTION & CONSEQUENCE	MITIGATIONS	RESIDUAL RISK STATUS (after mitigations)
Not submitting a response to the consultation, risks our preferred options in the best interest of Thurrock not being taken into consideration.	We submit the consultation and continue to be an active participant and work alongside partners across Greater Essex and the government to develop plans.	Green
Not submitting the consultation, may risk our ability to influence governments decision. The consequence of a lack of support for devolution may risk a missed opportunity for Thurrock and Greater Essex to benefit from the benefits a Mayoral Combined Authority may bring.	We submit the consultation and continue to be an active participant and work alongside partners across Greater Essex and the government to develop plans.	Green

Implications verified by: Kelly McMillan
Corporate Risk Manager

Date 6 March 2025

9. Legal and Governance Implications

9.1 The Council is not required to submit a consultation response but if it does so the Secretary of State is required to take it into account. The Council can rely on its powers under s.1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the general power of competence) to agree the submission and there is nothing in the limitations on this power is s.2-4 of the Act to restrain its use in this decision. The general power of competence is an executive function to be determined by Cabinet

and this is a key decision due to the significance of its impact across the council or alternatively the Cabinet may choose to exercise any executive function it has delegated under the LGA 2000.

- 9.2 The Cabinet has power under the act to delegate its powers to an officer and these powers may be subject to the condition of consultation as set out in 2.2 and 2.3.

Implications Verified by: Dan Fenwick
Executive Director, Corporate Services &
Monitoring Officer

Date: 5 October 2025

10. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 10.1 There are no equality implications to this submission.

Implications Verified by Rebecca Lee
Community Development Manager

Date 6 March 2025

11. Other Relevant Implications

- 11.1 There are no other implications at this time.

12. Background Documents

English Devolution White Paper – gov.uk

13. Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Draft response to the Greater Essex Devolution Consultation