

Report title: Devolution: Developing the Deal	
Report to: Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council	
Date: 14 December 2023	For: Discussion
Enquiries to: Richard Puleston, Director: Policy	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose

To provide an update to Corporate Scrutiny on current progress with the devolution work.

2. Action Required

It is suggested that, at this point in time, Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee note the report. There are ongoing discussions at Scrutiny Board and amongst Scrutiny Chairmen regarding arrangements for future scrutiny.

3. Update

High Level summary

The detail of the Greater Essex devolution deal is largely settled and the arrangements to consult and to begin design work on a new Combined Authority are well-developed. The government is currently in the process of gauging support amongst Essex's MPs. We expect clarity about whether we can proceed with the deal, subject to public consultation, by the end of the year. A high level update on elements of the work is set out below.

Autumn Statement

The Autumn Statement kept up momentum for devolution deals by announcing four new deals: at Level 3 for Hull and East Yorkshire; and for Greater Lincolnshire; and at Level 2 for Cornwall and Lancashire (attached link to Press Notice [Lancs Devo PN](#) and [deal documents on the Gov.uk website](#)). Alongside these deals the government announced its intention to move forward additional Level 2 deals with county areas; published a new Level 4 to the devolution framework; and set out further detail for

the trailblazing single funding settlements in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

Deal Progress

The Greater Essex deal text has largely been agreed and is in its final draft. As well as the elements for a L2 Deal around skills, transport, inward investment and net zero, the Deal also includes reference to the new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP); a health improvement duty and £20m of new capital investment. It is likely to be most similar in substance to Lancashire's deal which is also a L2 deal and was negotiated at broadly the same time as ours.

Governance

The high level governance arrangements are incorporated into the deal text. They include two members and votes for ECC and one each for Southend and Thurrock. There will also be two non-voting representatives from North Essex Councils and one non-voting rep from South Essex Councils. The PFCC may also have a vote inside the CA on matters pertaining to the PFCC's remit, depending on the nature of precisely what is devolved to the new institution. There will also be a representative of business on the board. All of these matters will be kept under review.

MP Engagement

The Secretary of State and the Minister met with MPs on 31st October and subsequently wrote to them, responding to the issues raised in the meeting, and asking MPs to respond indicating their support for the Greater Essex devolution deal. We are also continuing to engage with MPs and shared more detail of the deal with their offices in November.

Business Engagement

Business Engagement is continuing through a number of different forums and channels with officers continuing to reach out to employers to secure letters of support to local MPs. Planning for further engagement and business communications is also underway ready for the final announcement and launch of the public consultation.

Consultation Planning

Consultation proposals have been developed (still work in progress) and we are ready to undertake delivery and analysis of both the open public consultation and a targeted sample survey. The confirmed start date for the consultation will be shared once we have a date for the deal to be announced. The aim remains to conclude the

consultation and allow a final decision to be put to Leaders before the local election period.

Building the Combined Authority

We have begun working up the structure for the next phase of the work programme which, alongside delivery of the public consultation, will be focussed on the design and set up of the new combined authority. A high-level timeline is being developed that would include having proposals for the CCA design, including clarity about ongoing running costs, so that this information can be incorporated into any final decision on the deal. It is our intention to ensure that the design work is as collaborative as possible, engaging fully with city, district, and borough councils as we have done throughout the process. We will need to work through the synergies and links with South and North Essex Councils, as well as the transition of LEP functions (which will happen regardless of devolution). We need to anchor this in a clear vision of where we want to be by April 2025, and focus energy on driving growth and productivity not just internal process as we risk being left behind and unprepared for a post General Election Spending Review.