

## **Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held online, on Tuesday 24 November 2020**

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### **In attendance:**

Councillor M Mackrory (Chairman)  
Councillor A Turrell  
Councillor M Buckley  
Councillor G Butland  
Councillor M Garnett  
Councillor J Abbott  
Councillor I Grundy

Councillor V Metcalfe  
Councillor J Moran  
Councillor M Platt  
Councillor S Lissimore  
Councillor D Louis  
Councillor J Young

### **1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

There were no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

Cllr Maddocks sent in his apologies for this meeting, and was substituted by Cllr Grundy

Cllr Louis sent in partial apologies for the beginning of the meeting.

Cllr Butland declared a code interest as leader of Braintree District Council.

### **2. Minutes**

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2020.

### **3. Questions from the Public**

There were no requests to speak from members of the public.

### **4. Local Government Reform – Update and Position statement**

The panel for this item was:

- Cllr Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Performance, Business Planning and Partnerships
- Margaret Lee, Executive Director for Corporate and Customer Services

Members noted report CPSC/13/20. Cllr Madden introduced the item and talked members through the position statement. Key points raised in addition to the paper included:

- ECC supports in principle the idea of LGR as it represents a simpler, more transparent and more cost-effective form of local government.
- ECC leadership met with local government ministers and began a process of working with district and unitary leaders across greater Essex to explore what LGR might look like in the county.
- The aim was to put together a series of working principles to form part of an early submission to central government following the expected publication of the local government reorganisation white paper in October/November.
- Since Autumn, the position of the government with regards to LGR appears to have changed and no longer appears to be a priority.
- District, County and Unitary leadership have subsequently paused all work with regards to LGR

Following this, members were invited to discuss the item. Key points raised by the committee included:

Lack of internal engagement with ECC members – Members raised concerns over the extent to which plans and proposals were reaching final stages without consultation with ECC members.

- Members were assured that, despite the amount of preliminary work that had taken place, no plans were even close to a final proposal ready for submission. The Leader did brief opposition leaders on progress to date with regards to potential avenues for reform. It was also noted that no public consultation had taken place to date and that this would be the first stage of any significant or complete submission.

Members distinguished between briefing opposition leaders and all members of the council. Members raised similar concerns around engagement with district and unitary membership.

- Members were reminded that this piece of work is not owned by ECC, it is owned by all councils across Essex. The onus is on district and unitary leadership to share progress with their own membership.

Members raised concerns over the lack of transparency with regards to the models for reform being pursued and ongoing work with consultants. It was particularly noted that CPSC should have greater oversight over the process if LGR comes back on the table.

- The cabinet member agreed to relay concerns over transparency to the leader for future reference if, and when, LGR is back on the agenda.

The lack of unanimity across greater Essex around the proper model for reform - Members raised concerns that views across the county differed broadly around the shape and scope of reforms. In reality, any final submission could only therefore represent a minority of support.

- Members were assured that no final proposal, or even close, was ready for submission. The process was still in early days, with engagement ongoing. Further engagement with members and district authorities was planned.

The timeliness of preliminary work – One member noted that there was a concerted effort on the part of central government to encourage councils to carry out his preliminary work as quickly as possible if they wanted to form part of the first wave of transformation areas. It was noted that beginning the work in a timely manner, and resourcing it effectively, meant that Essex was well placed to become an early adopter of LGR. The member did, however, raise concerns about how disjointed the process of putting forward proposals for reform had been at the start, with a number of authorities out of step with the rest of Essex, specifically referring to the combined work of Basildon, Southend and Thurrock local authorities in preparing proposals for a South Essex combined authority. It was noted that the indefinite delay in publication of the white paper was potentially a gift, allowing Essex leaders and chief executives more time to properly refine and scope the vision that they might have for potential reforms.

- The Cabinet Member thanked the member for their comments. It was acknowledged that this was always going to be a complicated and lengthy journey, which is why the evidence gathering exercise that has taken place was crucial to the success of any conversations with districts moving forward.

Engagement with NHS partners - Members raised concerns that the NHS had not featured significantly as part of work that had been carried out to date. This was especially important when considering that district boundaries are often different to NHS boundaries.

- The Cabinet Member welcomed comments and acknowledged that further engagement with all partners would be central to further discussion when LGR is next discussed.

Future relevance of work carried out to date – members raised concerns around how future proof the evidence gathered throughout the process might be, and how applicable it would be to future discussions around LGR in 2-3 years.

- The Cabinet Member and officer acknowledged the time sensitive nature of elements of the modelling process – particularly around budgeting and economic argument for reform. The benchmarking, model evaluation and engagement exercises however, would likely still be relevant to future discussions.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Officer for their time and drew the discussion to a close.

## **5. Date of Next Meeting**

The next full committee day was noted as Tuesday 26 January. Members of the committee were also reminded of their invitation to attend a joint meeting with the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 17 December. For discussion at this meeting is an update on the Ringway Jacobs contract.

## **6. Urgent Business**

None received

## **7. Urgent exempt Business**

None received

## **Close of Meeting**

The formal meeting was closed at 12.31