

Leader's Executive Statement to Full Council, October 13

Progress towards devolution of powers to Essex

One step closer to a devolution deal for Essex

I would like to update the Council on progress towards devolution for Greater Essex.

Mr Chairman, devolution is an opportunity to become an Essex powerhouse and have a greater say over the issues that matter to Essex residents.

All of us here know that having a greater say over decisions made, and the money spent, in Essex will mean more jobs, faster growth and better services for the people of Essex.

Mr Chairman, I am pleased to inform the council that we are now in formal discussions with the Government about a devolution deal for Greater Essex.

At the start of last month, all 15 leaders of councils across Greater Essex signed a letter to Government outlining our shared ambitions for devolution.

It is a testament to all who were involved, from my Cabinet colleagues, ECC officers, and our partners across Essex that it was very well received.

The Government has now committed to working with Greater Essex partners to develop the deal further.

In the letter, we outlined our ambitions.

Ambitions to grow the economy from £33bn to £60bn by 2025.

To create more jobs and, increase wages and productivity and deliver 20% more higher apprenticeships.

To attract more investment to Essex and double the number of Essex businesses exporting to overseas markets.

And to cement Essex's place as the UK's gateway to Europe and beyond by getting Essex building the homes and infrastructure we need to succeed.

At the heart of the proposal is the establishment of "gainshare agreement" with Government and the creation of an Essex Infrastructure Fund.

This would allow Essex to retain a share of the growth that comes from investing in key infrastructure so that we are able to ensure our residents and communities benefit by reinvesting the money back into the economy.

But to deliver on all our ambitions we need to have a greater say over areas like economic growth, infrastructure, transport, skills, and funding to local government such as business rates.

Devolution of business rates

The Chancellor's announcement last week that councils will fully retain Business Rates income is good news.

This positive step is very much in the spirit of devolution and local democracy and signals the Government's seriousness about giving local areas a greater say.

For a number of years we have been very clear in saying that local authorities are better placed than central Government to support local economic growth and help grow the business base in their areas.

Taking control of the business rates system will allow us to reinvest more back into Essex's communities and into the infrastructure that will help grow the Essex economy and create jobs.

It will give us more power to act more creatively and respond quickly.

We will be able to have more influence on business and the local economy, and ultimately local control over local taxation can only strengthen local democracy.

But, as ever, the devil is in the detail.

We do not yet know what redistribution mechanisms will be put in place and there will still be a system required to move taxation collected between authorities.

And with further announcements to come on what this means for other funding streams we must wait to find out precisely what this means for Essex.

And we will be working closely with government to ensure that Essex businesses and residents get a fair deal from this fundamental change.

Announcement of changes to portfolio responsibilities

Mr Chairman, I would also like to inform Council of changes I will be making to cabinet portfolios, which will be published following Full Council today.

I am proud of the work our Cabinet team has been able to achieve, delivering on our priorities and providing security for Essex residents.

As such I am leaving the team unchanged as we enter into the second half of our term in administration, where we will continue to deliver for Essex.

The changes I am announcing today will see a re-profiling of portfolio responsibilities to reflect our priorities, particularly around devolution and infrastructure delivery. Firstly, the **Leader's portfolio** will now include formal responsibility for devolution.

As one of the council's top priorities, it is important that the Leader of the Council has overall responsibility for leading discussions with partners and Government to secure a devolution deal for Essex residents.

Cllr Bass, the current Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation will oversee the newly created **Infrastructure portfolio**.

Connectivity around our county, whether it be by road, rail, sea or plane, is vitally important for the growth of the Essex economy as well as the prospects of every single person who lives in our great county.

With devolution deals on the table, it is important that Essex has a champion to work with other authorities and ensure our transportation network is planned to be the best in the UK.

The Infrastructure portfolio will bring together to responsibility for a range of key transport infrastructure to provide a greater strategic focus, with Cllr Bass bringing decades of experience to the job.

It will be responsible for strategic highways and infrastructure commissioning, the highways capital programme (including major highways improvement schemes), rail strategy, ports and airports, the Local Transport Plan, and Local Transport Boards.

Cllr Bass will also be the lead member advising the leader on constitutional issues and the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The current portfolio Highways Maintenance and Small Scheme Delivery will become the **Highways Delivery** portfolio with Cllr Johnson gaining responsibility for traffic regulation, road safety, public rights of way, school crossing patrols, street lighting, and parking.

The additional responsibilities for highways delivery recognise the achievements made by Cllr Johnson and his team to reduce the number of potholes on our major roads to under 500.

The Customer Services, Libraries, Planning and the Environment portfolio becomes the **Transport, Planning and Environment** portfolio picking up responsibility for passenger transport including buses, cycling and concessionary fares.

Bringing together passenger transport with responsibility for the environment, as well as planning, will help ensure the council is best positioned to deliver its outcome of providing a sustainable environment for all Essex residents.

The Cabinet Member for Transformation, Corporate and Traded Services will pick up additional responsibility for customer services, including libraries, the contact centre, members enquiries, coroner, and registration services.

This portfolio is will now be called **Corporate Services**.

Cllr Louis, who has helped save the Essex taxpayer millions pounds in the portfolio, will also pick up Performance and Business Intelligence, as well as Emergency Planning and Community Safety.

Cllr Spence, Cabinet Member for **Finance** will pick up additional responsibility for housing strategy and delivery, as well as culture, heritage and the arts.

Cllr Spence currently chairs the Housing Board and his expertise will see us deliver a number of exciting housing initiatives.

In addition, Cllr Spence is our lead member developing the fiscal workstream of the devolution deal.

There are no changes to portfolio responsibilities for the Cabinet Members for Economic Growth and Waste and Recycling; Adults and Children; Education and Lifelong Learning; and Communities and Healthy Living, all of whom have been doing outstanding jobs in their respective portfolios.

Mr Chairman, we have the right team. We have the right priorities. And we will deliver for our residents and secure more powers for Essex.