



## **Working Together in Essex**

**This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes a commitment between the Leaders of Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council to develop closer working arrangements.**

**Through coordinated governance and supporting management arrangements for our Councils this provides a solid foundation for the challenging times ahead. It enables us to more easily work across geographical, organisational and professional boundaries in the best interests of our citizens.**

### **1. Rationale**

Our Councils recognise that the public sector has a challenging and uncertain future. We face a period of austerity that, whilst not of our making, will mean significant financial impact for all tiers of local government. Now is the time for bold actions that do not recognise bureaucratic boundaries. There is no logic or rationale to maintaining the status quo and to continue to build in inefficiencies that are avoided in other sectors.

That the public sector does not act as one is at best a cause of frustration for many, at worst it has the potential to undermine an individual or family's quality of life irreparably. This is no longer tenable in Essex. We can no longer afford to stop at conventional public service boundaries. We need to develop a new model, specifically for two-tier local government, that is focused on better outcomes for people, matures above a control mentality and accepts that even in an era of austerity, there are huge opportunities to ensure greater value is achieved in all aspects of our activity. This requires a cultural and attitudinal shift for all of us involved in the governance, commissioning and delivery of services.

A locality-focused approach to joining up our capabilities will help tackle the organisational mindset that militates against a 'single public sector' approach. We are confident that this will provide an improved customer experience for all and allow us to take advantage of the new freedoms and responsibilities offered by the new coalition government.. The strength of this agreement is its explicit commitment that our authorities will tackle these concerns head on, ruthlessly removing inefficiency and doing everything possible to tackle duplication, commissioning quality, value for money, services with the perspective of our citizens uppermost in our thinking.

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will ensure that for our Councils there is a clearly understood framework for cooperating to address these issues collectively. Our collaboration will be watched by many in the sector, and we are open-minded about scaling the partnership upwards to ensure wider engagement is not ruled out-of-scope with other public sector partners.

With Community Budgets set to transform the relationship between places and central government, and a shared belief in 'Big Society' values, this agreement sees our authorities well-placed to exploit the potential these offer for the benefit of our citizens.

### **2. Objectives**

- To improve the efficiency and effectiveness regarding the use of all resources and the delivery of services across two-tier local government, to improve the customer experience at a lower cost to the tax payer.

- To establish effective governance arrangements between the signatory Councils to manage a programme of partnership activity, which drives greater efficiency through integration and sharing management and services, as appropriate.
- To develop closer governance that brings a more holistic approach to the commissioning of services to meet local needs through more effective use of resources.
- To establish a new model of public service delivery that is a shared commitment, yet open for other Councils and other public bodies to join in with as and when appropriate.
- To establish a system of integrated professional management across the signatory Councils, or groups of them, that delivers greater efficiency and resilience. This does not prohibit the pursuit of integrated management arrangements with Councils outside this agreement.
- To consider any options for greater efficiency and effectiveness of improved working and delivery of service across our Councils and other partners, including shared service arrangements as appropriate.

*See Appendix for an outline programme of work for the first three months (Jan – Apr 2011).*

### **3. Principles**

This agreement is built on the following core principles:

*Localism:* ensuring that local needs, defined through local democratic decision making processes, rather than centrally developed programmes, take precedence in the design of local services.

*Subsidiarity:* devolving responsibility for decision-making, commissioning and service delivery to the lowest practicable level.

*Prevention:* redesigning and reconfiguring services to avoid the costs associated with social failures rather than focusing on addressing these failures where they arise.

*Pragmatism:* prioritising work that builds on the synergies that already exist between our authorities and service providers and, through a clear governance process, minimising complexity.

*Flexibility:* responding to new challenges and opportunities where they arise, changing Essex's service mix over time without the need for complex, time-consuming restructures and reviews.

*Collaboration:* taking advantage of the contribution of all partners from the public sector. Working also with central government to ensure that lessons are learnt and that local experience can inform future policy development.

### **4. Governance**

Consisting of the Leaders of the signatory Councils, a Leaders' Board will initially meet monthly and be chaired in rotation by each of the partner Councils. All decisions would be reached by consensus with no voting. Administration of the Board meetings will rotate with the Chair. The Chief Executives of the signatory Councils will professionally support the Board.

Recognising the imperative desire to maintain local control and in the spirit of the localism agenda, formal decision making processes in each Authority (be that through a Cabinet or Committee system) will be retained and respected at all times.

## 5. Behaviours

It is expected that signatories to this MOU will:

- Always act in the interests of our residents and this shared agreement, representing their relevant Authority and protecting their interests accordingly through a partnership based approach.
- Work openly and transparently and where relevant, sharing each authority's emerging policies at an early stage, allowing all signatories to consider potential impacts and inviting other partner organisations to understand the nature of this collaboration;
- Not pursue any other agendas or interests that could be harmful to the integrity of this MOU without prior discussion at the Leaders' Board; and
- Ensure that all communications with Members, Staff and other stakeholders, including customers, are coordinated at all times in respect of this MOU.

## 6. Responsibilities

To enable this work to progress, a joint programme team of senior managers from each authority, led by the Chief Executives, will be established to take this work forward on behalf of the Leaders. This will be at each authority's own cost, with membership to reflect the service areas and governance issues under consideration.

Essex County Council will undertake to resource the costs of a joint project manager; provide venues for meetings of the authorities if necessary; and bring independent external challenge to the process. Lead officers for each authority will be appointed to serve as official contacts and coordinate the activities of each authority in respect of this MOU.

A Leaders' Board will be convened to oversee the delivery of this MOU, consisting of the signatories from each Council below, to ensure timely decision from the outset

## 7. Authorisation

*"We the undersigned will strive to reach, to the best of our ability, the objectives stated in the MOU."*

Signed



Cllr Graham Butland, Leader of  
Braintree District Council

Signed



Cllr Louise McKinlay,  
Leader of Brentwood Borough Council

Signed



Cllr Peter Martin DL, Leader of  
Essex County Council

**20<sup>th</sup> December 2010**

## **Appendix**

### **Outline work programme – first three months**

By April 2011, it is our intention to have:

- Reached formal agreement in principle from each Council to proceed with this MoU as written.
- Developed a clear work programme for the next 12 months and put in place the programme management capacity to manage this.
- Established joint governance and supporting management arrangements between our authorities to enable clear, collective and transparent political leadership and decision making.
- Agreed and communicated a 'framework for devolution' to articulate which responsibilities are held at what levels, and why, and how political oversight and accountability will be assured as appropriate for each authority.
- Taken clear steps to share, integrate or devolve a number of key service areas, including a new Regulatory Services Hub and Procurement Centre of Excellence.
- Developed plans to integrate tier one and tier two management structures, as appropriate to produce a preferred blend of savings and business improvement potential.
- Engaged with parishes, other partners and the voluntary and community sector to develop a sustainable, value for money model of service integration.
- Synchronised our budget planning processes in good time to develop and agree common areas of our 2012/13 budgets jointly.
- Helped lead the transition to 'Community Budgets' in Essex.
- Shared information about this collaboration with other public sector bodies in Essex.