

Cabinet	CAB/003/11
Date: 8 th February 2011	Part I Report

Working Better Together in Essex

Report by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Peter Martin

Enquiries to Officer Dan Gascoyne, Assistant Director for Partnership Delivery (ext 51302)

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to confirm Essex County Council's decision to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Council: 'Working Better Together'

2. Recommendations

The Memorandum of Understanding involves the County Council signing-up to a closer level of collaboration with two District Councils in order to explore and take forward closer partnership working and realise the benefits from improved working across the two tiers of local government.

Recognising the complexity and size of Essex, it is felt appropriate to 'prove the concept' with partner local authorities that are prepared to commit to this enhanced way of working.

3. Decisions

That Cabinet agrees the County Council should sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Council.

4. Background context

The MOU reflects an agreement between Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Council to progress joint work between the three authorities.

Essex County Council and Brentwood Borough Council have already been involved in close partnership working since 2007, including sharing a Chief Executive.

All three authorities have expressed an interest to look at how we can work more closely together to achieve mutually beneficial savings. This is even more important in the current financial climate where funding for local authorities is being squeezed. All three authorities are also determined to improve outcomes and services for our residents – the arbitrary organisational boundaries can sometimes inhibit progress at greater partnership working.

The 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.

It sets out several commonly agreed 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.

A Joint Leader's Board comprising the Leaders and Chief Executives of Essex County Council, Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Council has been established to take forward this work.

Options/Proposals

The Joint Leader's Board has agreed that work can be taken forward to explore opportunities in 4 areas:

- Regulatory services
- Procurement
- Asset Management
- Back office services – Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology

Business cases will be produced on a case-by-case basis and will be approved through the respective governance processes at each council.

5. Area of the County affected

The MOU is of most relevance to the Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Council areas, with the potential to apply to the whole of Essex if other authorities become signatories, which they may do if they are prepared to proceed at the same pace.

6. Relevance to Corporate Objectives and other strategic plans

The MOU has been written to enhance the provision of services across the signatory authorities whilst respecting each sovereign Council's corporate objectives and constitution. The agreement is consistent with the 'Putting our People First' transformation programme and the Essex Works Corporate Plan. It is also consistent with our commitment to 'delivering value for money.'

7. Internal and External Consultation

The Memorandum of Understanding is the culmination of extensive collaboration with Braintree District Council and Brentwood Borough Councils, each of which has formally approved the MOU through their own decision making procedures.

8. Legal Implications (Monitoring Officer)

Monitoring Officer comments - This paper does not raise specific governance issues however implementation of the initiative will raise such issues for all those involved in it. It is suggested that the implementation phase should involve governance colleagues from the participating authorities.

9. Finance and Resources Implications (Section 151 Officer)

S151 comments - There are no specific S151 issues arising from this report, which provides an update on partnership working with District and Borough Councils. This working has the potential to offer increased efficiencies and reduced public costs.

10. Human Resources Implications

The collaboration identified in the MOU is being managed with existing resources in the Policy, Community Planning and Regeneration Directorate. It's possible that collaboration on joint service delivery or integrated management could have additional Human Resources implications and these would be subject to appropriate consultation arrangements.

11. Equality Impact Assessment

There are no specific equality and diversity implications at this stage.

12. Background Papers

'Working Better Together' Memorandum of Understanding between Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council and Essex County Council.