



DEVOLUTION IN ESSEX

Member Update- February 2025

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S PLANS FOR DEVOLUTION

Essex County Council alongside Thurrock Council and Southend on Sea Council have been confirmed by the Government as part of the Priority Devolution Programme.

Devolution will mean Essex getting more money and powers from central government, and a directly elected Mayor to direct investment in areas like transport and skills and our economy.

Local government re-organisation would mean doing away with the current two-tier council structures we have in most of Essex, in favour of a smaller number of new 'unitary' councils.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- **Creation of a Strategic Authority**- A new single body, known as a Strategic Authority, will be established with a directly elected Mayor.
- **Local Government Reorganisation**- Participation in the devolution priority programme will also commit authorities to local government reorganisation. This reorganisation would see the existing 12 borough and district councils replaced by 3 or possibly 4 unitary councils.
- **Postponement of Elections**- The Government have agreed to the postponement of 2025 elections in Essex and Thurrock to allow the to pursue the timeline below. Southend were not due to have elections in 2025.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

Although details are not yet clear the Local Government Reorganisation will almost certainly mean the devolution of some services/assets down to the Parish and Town Council sector.

This represents both an opportunity for Parish & Town Councils to deliver better services to their communities (as they understand the local communities needs better) but also a threat as there may well not be any funding allocated to enable them to take on these additional duties.

Areas which are not currently parished may wish to become parished in order to have someone to represent their community with the Unitary authority.

TIMELINE

March '25– Intrim Plans to be submitted

September '25– Full Plans to be submitted

May '26– The first Mayoral Election

May '27– Shadow Authorities could occur, with new Unitary Councils going live in April 2028

WHAT ARE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NALC) DOING?

NALC have submitted a [response](#) to the [Government's White paper](#) in which they have emphasised the importance of nurturing neighbourhood governance to ensure its success. They have stated,

"Parish and Town Councils have already demonstrated their ability to deliver on key government priorities at the local level, and with the proper devolution framework, they can achieve even more.

During ongoing discussions about the white paper and its implications, we will advocate for several critical measures to enhance neighbourhood governance:

- **Investment in neighbourhood governance** — *Building local capacity enables parish and town councils to address community needs effectively.*
- **Easier establishment** — *Simplifying processes to set up parish and town councils in areas without them.*
- **Promoting civility and respect** — *Attracting more community involvement by strengthening standards regimes.*
- **Modernised processes** — *Allowing hybrid council meetings where local communities see fit.*
- **Fair access to funding** — *Simplifying grant procedures and ensuring communities are compensated for new financial burdens, such as increased national insurance costs.*
- **A tailored audit framework** — *Developing an audit system suitable for small authorities that reflects local spending changes."*

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) is committed to keeping its members informed with regards to the latest developments on devolution for Essex.

There will be a regular newsletter outlining the latest developments and associated online forums to keep Clerks updated on the latest developments and be able to raise questions they may have regarding the situation. This is a fast-moving situation with much still unknown, but the EALC will do their best to answer questions based on the current understanding of the situation.

The EALC will continue to hold fortnightly meetings with all the other County Associations (CALCs) to keep abreast of developments elsewhere in the Country and what the implications of those developments are to Essex.

The EALC will continue to support those areas which wish to become Parish or Town Councils working alongside Monitoring Officers and shadow councils to ensure the best practice is followed during the process and that the new councils are well equipped to take on the role of community governance.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are now awaiting the publication of the interim proposals and in due course the final plans. We will of course keep you fully informed throughout the process. Please check our dedicated webpage on Devolution in Essex where we will be posting the most up to date information as and when received.

Please send all enquiries relating to this document and future updates to- memberenquiries@ealc.gov.uk.

