



Thurrock Council
The Town Hall, High Street, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL
www.thurrock.gov.uk

Email: Richard.Bingley@thurrock.gov.uk

Tel: 07889 150012

5 June 2026

Steve Reed MP

Secretary of State, for Housing, Communities and
Local Government

By email: PSSteveReed@communities.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

As I take up my new position as Leader of Thurrock Council, I do so with a significant majority, and strong mandate to act boldly in the best interests of our residents. Throughout the last few months, my Cabinet and I have heard first-hand what issues motivated residents to turn out, in record numbers, on 7th May.

People in Thurrock are deeply proud of where they live and, like me, they see the potential of our place. But they feel neglected. Neglected during a period of reflection and recovery from the financial mismanagement of the past, neglected by the big corporations who have benefited from Thurrock's strategic location but not given back to communities and neglected by government. My administration has not been elected to manage decline, but to reset and deliver visible local improvements and change.

We appreciate that the issues Thurrock Council face is due to decisions it made in the past. But for too long it has been the residents who have had to suffer the consequences with a lack of care and attention on the things which matter to them in their communities. The result is a breakdown of civic pride and a growing feeling of neglect.

The Council is now in a position to shape what comes next. Our recovery so far means we have solid foundations in place; the business of the Council is open and transparent for public scrutiny, and we have sound financial plans with robust controls in place. We have a capable workforce and are building strong partnerships with stakeholders.

My priority is to ensure that the Council is fully focused on continuing to work with Commissioners in stabilising our position but using that improved position to strengthen our local economy by maximising the significant potential that Thurrock offers and vitally ensuring its benefits give back to its people.

Over the past year, Thurrock has made substantial progress in addressing its financial challenges and rebuilding strong, transparent governance. This progress is real, but it is also fragile. Entering into Local Government Reorganisation at this stage would divert leadership capacity, officer time, and financial resources away from the essential work of economic recovery and growth. The scale and complexity of reorganisation would inevitably slow the momentum we have worked hard to build.

More so, the LGR model you have chosen will not create a sustainable future for public services because the five new unitary authority proposal is not financially viable. The combined debt of both Thurrock and Basildon alongside the unknown value of budget disaggregation from county creates too much risk. This is not the time for destabilising the solid foundations that have been hard earned by residents who have suffered the brunt of diminished services and higher than average tax rises.

Thurrock's economic potential

Thurrock is uniquely positioned to contribute to national economic priorities. As home to the Port of Tilbury, London Gateway, and a cluster of nationally significant logistics, manufacturing, and energy assets, Thurrock sits at the heart of the UK's trade and supply-chain infrastructure. Few local authority areas have such a concentration of strategic economic assets with direct national and international impact.

Nationally, Thurrock's ports handle a significant share of the UK's import and export activity. The borough's success is therefore not only a local concern but a matter of national economic resilience. Ensuring that Thurrock has the capacity to support business growth, infrastructure delivery, and inward investment is essential to maintaining the UK's position in global trade.

Within the wider Thames Estuary, Thurrock is a critical driver of growth. The borough already supports tens of thousands of jobs in logistics, construction, energy, and advanced manufacturing, and it is forecast to be one of the fastest-growing employment locations in the region. With the right focus and stability, Thurrock can accelerate investment in clean energy, port-related innovation, and high-value industrial sectors—areas that align directly with the Government's ambitions for productivity, decarbonisation, and global competitiveness.

For all its strengths, the local economic benefits of investment in Thurrock are not felt by those who live here, which is why my administration will work closely with industry to ensure they support the communities which have been so welcoming to them.

I am concerned that LGR will not help stability and confidence in the private sector and, as a result, have a negative effect on investment decisions, as well as undermine our negotiations with business to give back to communities. Moreover, the strong relationship Thurrock has developed with Thames Freeport will be further eroded through the uncertainty of our partners not knowing who they need to deal with to get things done.

LGR is counterproductive

At a time when we are rebuilding civic pride and asking residents to believe in their borough again, structural upheaval risks undermining that fragile confidence. Participating in LGR now would risk slowing or weakening this economic potential. Reorganisation would require extensive structural planning, negotiation, and transition work—activities that would inevitably draw attention away from the urgent tasks of renewing civic pride, economic development, financial recovery, and delivering change for Thurrock residents.

Thurrock's businesses, investors, and strategic partners consistently tell us that what they need most is stability, clarity, and a Council able to act quickly and decisively. Entering into years of planning and transitioning will mean we are not able to do that effectively, and our residents will remain frustrated while not feeling the benefit of promises made but not delivered.

Being swallowed up by Basildon is not the answer. Whilst Basildon and Thurrock are individually economically important, they operate in distinct economic ecosystems. Unlike the nationally significant port, logistics, energy and manufacturing assets of Thurrock, with an outward-facing economy, trade-driven, and strategically tied to national supply-chain resilience, Basildon has a more diversified local economy centred on advanced manufacturing, life sciences, retail, and service-sector employment.

Merging these two very different economic geographies into a single unitary risk diluting the strategic focus each area requires. A one-size-fits-all economic strategy would struggle to meet the needs of both a global-gateway economy and a more domestically oriented industrial and commercial centre.

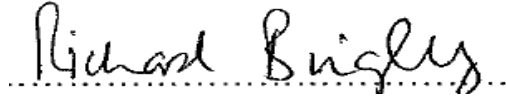
At a time when both councils face financial pressures, the costs of LGR would reduce the resources available for frontline services and economic development. The theoretical long-term savings of a unitary model are uncertain and often take many years to materialise. In addition, as is clear from even a brief review of the business cases submitted, the chosen proposal offers the least efficiency savings – so millions of pounds will be spent merging councils who don't want to merge in order to save not very much and erode local identity and civic pride. This is the wrong decision at the wrong time.

If the goal is greater efficiency or strategic alignment, there are less disruptive options which maintain local sovereignty and identity. By working more closely with neighbour authorities both in Essex and London we could achieve strengthened shared services, joint economic strategies that make sense and deliver for local people, combined infrastructure planning and enhanced partnership through the Thames Estuary or Freeport governance structures. These approaches would preserve local accountability while achieving many of the benefits associated with reorganisation—without the cost, risk, or loss of focus.

I therefore ask for your support in allowing Thurrock to continue its recovery and economic development work without the disruption of reorganisation. This approach will give us the time and space to consolidate improvements, strengthen our financial resilience, and fully unlock the economic opportunities that Thurrock is uniquely placed to deliver for the region and the nation.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. I would like to invite you to visit the Borough and witness first hand the potential I am seeking to realise and the support I need to achieve real and sustainable change.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Bingley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal dotted line.

Councillor Richard Bingley
Leader of Thurrock Council