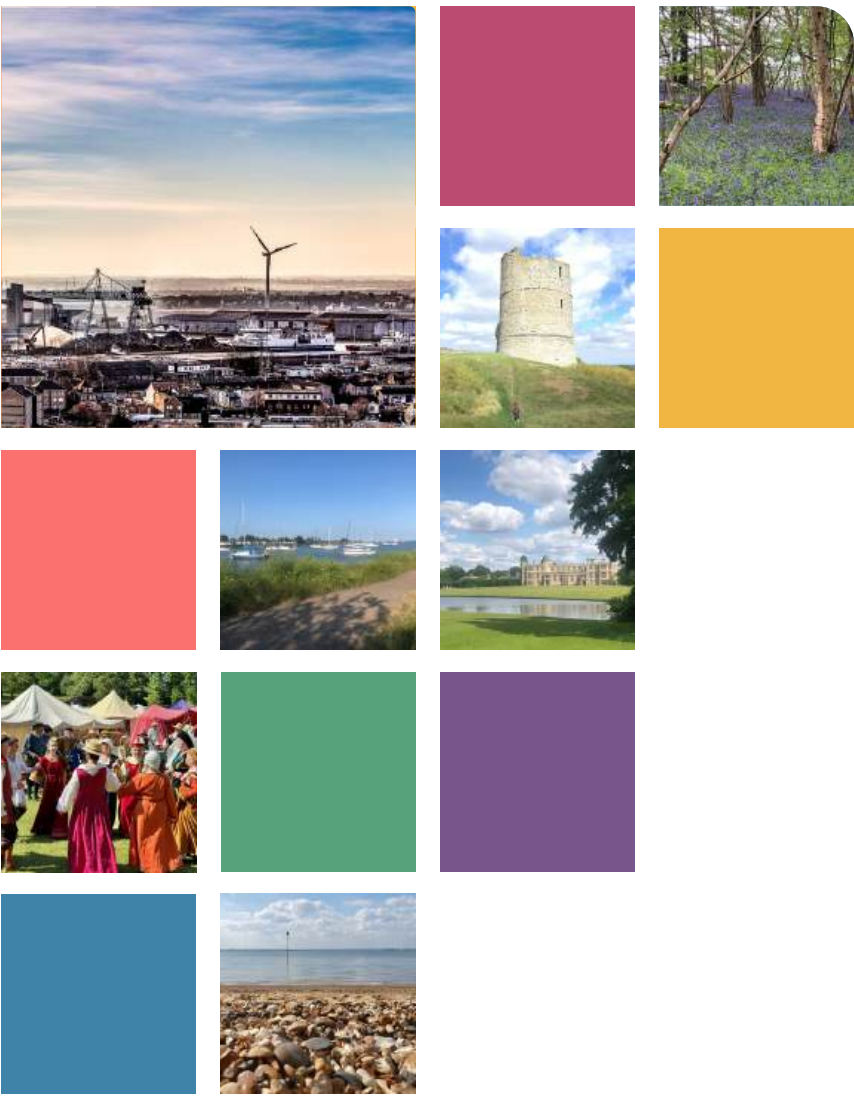# The right balance

Creating financially sustainable councils close to communities in Greater Essex

# Contents

# Foreword

We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform local government for the people of Greater Essex. If we get this right, we will create councils that are tough enough to weather any storm, deliver excellent services and change the relationship between councils and communities into something more mature and empowering.

With opportunity comes risk. Getting this wrong means more councils doomed to failure before they even begin. In Thurrock we are still feeling the pain of the financial mistakes of the past, and so we know better than anyone the importance of creating strong, financially sustainable councils. We also know first-hand the importance of working with communities to build trusting relationships and focus public resources on delivering the services local people need.

It is not a time for political point scoring or plans that only work for the few. The stakes are too high.

Our proposal for four unitary councils in Greater Essex is driven by evidence and equity: evidence of what stacks up financially; evidence of what local people expect to see from their new councils and what they will need over time; evidence about how people move around the county; evidence of where the opportunities lie and how we can make sure everyone in Greater Essex benefits from the success these plans will bring.

Our role in shaping these plans is a privilege but also a huge responsibility. I have lived in Essex my whole life and I care deeply about its future. We must make sure we maintain what makes this place what it is, but also embrace the future and address the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead. We must create a system that drives prosperity for all and continues to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. We must step forward and think afresh what local government can and should be for the rest of this century.

Our proposal for four new councils is carefully thought through. All that matters to me is that it works for the people of Greater Essex, for the long term. I believe our plans create the right balance to secure a bright, prosperous and sustainable future for everyone.

**Cllr Lynn Worrall**

**Leader of Thurrock Council**

# Introduction

**We don't live our lives according to council maps or public service boundaries. But we do need our public services to work well to keep our communities and lives running smoothly.**

On any given street in Greater Essex, the people charged with keeping us safe, providing schools for our children, caring for our loved ones as they age and ensuring our access to good medical care, work for a multitude of organisations. Our residents have told us that their identity is not defined by the boundaries in which their local council operates. But the continuation and quality of services are of paramount importance. This is why the future sustainability of local government has been the guiding principle in developing our vision and proposal for local government reorganisation.

**A once-in-a-generation moment of change**

Local government reorganisation provides a once-in-a-generation chance to think again. We have a responsibility to simplify this picture, create long term sustainable services, ones which meet current and future demand, run smoothly and quietly in the background, supporting our everyday lives.

Thurrock's intervention journey should not be seen as a weakness. We are a council that has had to regain the trust of its communities. We know what it means to rebuild services and make difficult decisions. The lessons we have learned and the hard work we have undertaken in the toughest of times, makes us a strong partner in Greater Essex. This, combined with our experience and expertise of service delivery as a unitary, means we understand and can overcome the challenges of creating a new approach to local government in our region.

**Getting the balance right**

Our analysis has focused on identifying the right environment to achieve strong foundations for sustainable local government which support the services communities want. We have been careful to consider the benefits of commonly held beliefs and approaches. We recognise the advantages to both smaller and larger authorities, but there is too much risk in going to the extremes. Size does bring financial stability but compromises service delivery and creates distance from communities. Favouring one priority over the other risks destabilising the foundations and purpose of local government.

**Building on what works well**

Local authorities do not deliver in a vacuum. Our four new councils build on commonality in the way residents interact with travel, work and the local economy. The geographies are coterminous with police and health partners and are big enough to wield a strong, equal and influential voice in the governance of Greater Essex but are also sufficiently grounded in communities to remain attuned and responsive to residents and partners.

We have carefully considered the place-leadership role of local authorities. Each of the four authorities in our model has the right conditions to convene partners to support social cohesion and create capacity to generate meaningful collaboration in communities.

**Delivering better outcomes for the people of Greater Essex**

These pragmatic groupings, with the right level of demand and geographical spread, provide the foundation for optimal service delivery and unlock the potential for early intervention and prevention. The balance of wealth and deprivation in each of the new councils, alongside the potential for economic growth, provides an equal footing for addressing the social determinants of health both at a local level and within the new Greater Essex (mayoral) Combined County Authority (GECCA). Each council has the conditions to marshal strong partnerships which will deliver the right housing, transport and employment infrastructure required for each place.

Our vision for local government in Greater Essex is based on what residents tell us are the areas of most importance to them: financial sustainability and improving services. The four-unitary councils in this model provide the best environment in which to achieve that vision, providing the optimal blend of financial sustainability, resilience, demand management and responsiveness to local needs.

Our model delivers the best opportunities for the people of Greater Essex. It is only this model which will deliver both financial sustainability and the services which people want and need. It is only this model which fairly distributes residents' needs, ensuring no one council carries too much burden and falls at the first hurdle. It is only this model which provides an equal playing field for the members of GECCA Board to deliver the strategic infrastructure which will enable all corners of Greater Essex to thrive.

**Strong foundations**

Thurrock Council's financial history is well known. The lessons we have learned bring into sharp focus the importance of creating financially sustainable and resilient authorities. The challenge of sustaining good services within current budgets, however, is not unique to Thurrock. We recognise that to achieve our purpose, local government must be built on strong financial foundations. Each of the four-unitary councils in our model are financially viable.

Continuing the status quo will leave Thurrock Council with an unsustainable level of debt which the Government knows poses a significant pressure on public finances. Reorganisation must provide an alternative approach which lessens that pressure. The Government has a decision to make about any support they provide and our four proposal models a one-off long-term solution, whereas other options, including Thurrock continuing in its current form, may require greater or ongoing support from the Government.

Each council within the four-unitary model can achieve ambitious economic growth, shares a balance of GVA, council tax and business rates and has an international gateway to trade, as well as an equal say within GECCA.

**Delivering on our purpose**

Delivering vital but effective services for people and businesses is best achieved when we understand the needs and challenges of local areas. Successful local democracy works when councillors who understand their local place use their knowledge to inform decision making. There is a balance to be struck through the economies of scale in larger authorities and delivering fit for purpose services. We believe we have struck that balance.

Each council within the four-unitary model is designed to create an even distribution of population and need, including health and social care outcomes. This avoids creating concentrations of demand, 'deserts' of service delivery and poor and weak relations among partner authorities. While the idea of creating 'mega' unitary authorities with high savings on paper may seem attractive, in reality this route is proven to risk the failure of care services, which would be an expensive mistake both financially and in the impact on the lives of individuals.

The four-unitary model helps to de-risk disruption to the continuation of support to our most vulnerable communities. It does this by taking full advantage of the existing good and outstanding capability in the current system. The existing upper tier authorities in Greater Essex will be leaders in this space and support two of the new councils. The county's upper tier capacity will support the remaining two new councils. This is particularly important when it comes to the continuance of statutory services, especially adults and children's social care, ensuring they are legal and robust from Day 1.

Our model provides the closest alignment to coterminous boundaries with local partners, making sure we elicit the biggest benefits when reforging partnerships.

**Why these four?**

Because that is where the data points. Not only have we carefully considered a balanced distribution of key metrics and demographic characteristics of our residents. We have also considered the equal opportunity for growth through economic hubs, ports, housing growth, tourism and leisure facilities. We have grouped sensible geographic areas that share similar features and outlooks. These attributes, combined with the equal distribution of populations, means an even playing field when collaborating with the mayor and other partners, meaning no one corner of Greater Essex is immediately disadvantaged nor disproportionately powerful.

# Section 1:
# Executive Summary

## Purpose and Approach

This proposal sets out a four-unitary model for the future of local government in Greater Essex. It has been developed in response to the Government's February 2025 invitation to submit options for reorganisation alongside the issues which residents tell us matter the most.

The English Devolution White Paper set out the challenges facing local government and the experience in Greater Essex is no exception. The status quo is not a sustainable option and was discounted due to the scale and urgency of the challenges facing the system and the need for LGR to provide a platform for transformational change. A two-unitary solution was also ruled out due to large geographies not aligning with government criteria and presenting significant risks.

A four, five and three-unitary model has been evaluated against the six criteria set out by Government:

1. Establishing a single tier of local government

2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

3. High quality and sustainable public services

4. Working together to understand and meet local needs

5. Supporting devolution arrangements

6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

The analysis finds that the four-unitary configuration provides the most balanced option, aligned with coherent geographies, with the right scale to deliver services effectively and support financial resilience.

## The Greater Essex Context

Greater Essex is a large and economically significant region, home to 1.9 million people and forecast to exceed 2 million by 2043. It includes a mix of urban centres, coastal communities and rural areas, with 72% of the land designated as rural. The region supports a £50 billion economy, anchored by major ports, two international airports and nationally important growth corridors such as the Thames Estuary and UK Innovation Corridor. Sector strengths include logistics, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and digital technology, supported by a growing network of innovation hubs and skills programmes. Strategic housing and regeneration schemes are in progress, alongside ambitious plans for green growth and inclusive development.

Despite these strengths, Greater Essex faces deep-rooted challenges. Pockets of deprivation, particularly in coastal and urban areas, limit life chances and drive demand for public services. Productivity is uneven, health inequalities persist and infrastructure is under strain. An ageing population is increasing pressure on adult social care, while housing delivery and homelessness vary widely across districts. Climate risks such as flooding and coastal erosion are growing and fragmented governance makes it difficult to respond at scale. Thurrock's financial position, alongside wider sustainability concerns, highlights the need for structural change.

The current local government setup is complex and fragmented, with 15 councils operating across two tiers including two unitary councils. This creates duplication, inconsistency and confusion for residents and limits the region's ability to coordinate services, plan strategically and respond to demand. The Devolution Priority Programme provides a clear opportunity to address these issues. The creation of the Greater Essex (mayoral) Combined County Authority (GECCA) and new unitary councils offers a route to simplify governance, unlock investment and deliver better outcomes for residents.

See Appendix 3: Strengths and challenges of Greater Essex for further detail.

## The Vision for unitary government in Greater Essex

A vision has been developed to provide a simple articulation of what the four-unitary model will provide for the people of Greater Essex. It sets out a shared ambition for transformational change, rooted in the priorities of communities and the strengths of place. The vision was shaped by what residents in Essex tell us is important to them and provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Greater Essex.

> "The residents of Greater Essex deserve councils that are strong and resilient, and that understand and respond to their ambitions and needs. Our proposal will deliver sustainable public services, focused on the priorities of our communities. By building on local strengths, removing duplication, and enabling joined-up delivery, we will support inclusive growth, tackle inequality, and ensure every corner of Essex can thrive. Together, we can build a new kind of local government, one that truly works for local people."

Four unitary authorities representing the North, South, East and West of Essex are best placed to deliver this vision:

### West Essex (Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow and Thurrock)

- The abundance of forest and country parks compliments the urban areas of Harlow and along the Thames estuary.

- Connected by the M25 and strong transport links into London.

- Balance of wealth and deprivation within its communities.

- Looks to London for work, travel and leisure but with a strong and protective sense of pride in their distinct identity.

### North Essex (Braintree, Chelmsford and Uttlesford)

- Combines the economic strength of Chelmsford, the rural and historic character of Uttlesford and the industrial and logistical capacity of Braintree.

- Strong links to Hertfordshire and Cambridge

- Strong transport infrastructure and strong rail and road links to London, Cambridge and the wider East of England.

- High quality of life and capacity to deliver sustainable growth.

- Home to major employers in advanced manufacturing, logistics, life sciences, public services and Stansted Airport.

### East Essex (Colchester, Maldon and Tendring)

- Nationally significant heritage sites and a strong visitor economy.

- Strategic infrastructure such as Harwich International Port and the A12/A120 corridors.

- Enables further strengthening of Colchester-Tendring relationship.

- Joining with Maldon and its similar coastal terrain will enable a more strategic approach to infrastructure and unlock housing and employment growth.

- Strong links to Suffolk.

### South Essex (Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford and Southend-on-Sea)

- Framed by the sea and rivers to the north, east and south and served by the A13 and A127 and Southend international airport.

- Balanced mix of urban density and rural communities.

- Lively seaside resort in Southend-on-Sea supported by major centre of employment in Basildon.

- Brings together strengths in advanced manufacturing, health, logistics and tourism.

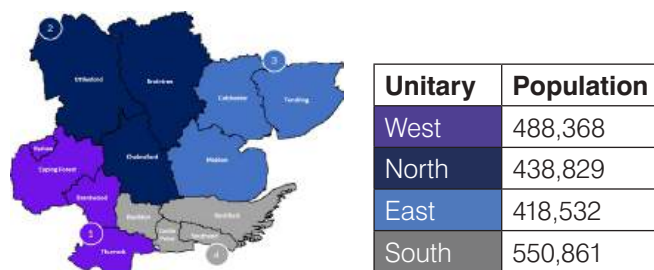# How we have met the government's criteria to deliver for our residents

| Criteria | Why the four-unitary model meets the criteria and offers the best option for residents of Greater Essex |
|---|---|
| **1 Establishing a single tier of local government** | ✓ The design of four resilient and balanced single-tier authorities means that Greater Essex residents receive high-quality services, delivered according to their needs and how they live their lives, no matter where they live.<br>✓ Economic balance (e.g. GVA, an international port in each area) means equal access to opportunity for all.<br>✓ Residents can rely on a council that is close to their communities, equipped with the right experience and resources to respond effectively to local priorities. |
| **2 Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | ✓ The financial case makes prudent, realistic and evidence-based assumptions to show that residents can be assured that the four-unitary model offers the best possible value.<br>✓ Residents can be sure that their council is fit to withstand financial shocks with the four-unitary model best-placed to deal with legacy issues, as well as manage future demand.<br>✓ Continued access to crucial services will be safeguarded during the transition led by three high-performing top tier authorities, while creating the platform to maximise their future financial efficiency. |
| **3 High quality and sustainable public services** | ✓ Making best use of strong service leadership and experience means that valued and crucial services to the most vulnerable adults and children will remain high-performing, while becoming ever more efficient through the effective management of future demands, are equipped to meet future demands and avoid the drop-offs in performance experienced by other unitarisations.<br>✓ Postcode lotteries are eliminated through a model that spreads demand and service capabilities evenly.<br>✓ The structure creates strong foundations for joint working and place leadership, aligning with health and police to ensure better integration of services and improved public safety for residents. |
| **4 Working together to understand and meet local needs** | ✓ All residents can see that local views from across Greater Essex have been listened to in the development of this proposal with clear links to outputs from engagement and joint working with partners.<br>✓ The proposal is built to deliver the residents' priorities to keep decision-making local, financial stability and not disrupt the local towns and villages with which they identify.<br>✓ Residents will recognise carefully considered geographic areas which share similar characteristics (such as sharing a unique coastline in the North, to sharing an outlook to London for work and play in the West) and match their travel habits. |
| **5 Supporting devolution arrangements** | ✓ The model is best placed to unlock devolution and ensures that residents can benefit from a mayor who can champion their interests<br>✓ No area is left behind with fair representation from balanced constituent councils with an equal voice.<br>✓ Supports good, sustainable growth which will have direct benefit and opportunity to residents. |
| **6 Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | ✓ All residents benefit from a balanced landscape across Greater Essex with a council large enough to ensure financial sustainability, while small enough to effectively hear and respond to them.<br>✓ Residents have access to a Neighbourhood Area Committee that will actively connect with existing forums, partnerships, community networks and voluntary organisations to listen to and champion their needs to ensure that their views are central to council decisions.<br>✓ The proposal has been developed from best practice, which demonstrates how to elicit strong engagement and coproduction of services with residents. |

Section 1

## Options Appraisal

To identify the most effective model, a structured options appraisal was undertaken. A long list of configurations was tested against red-line criteria covering geography, population scale, financial viability and implementation feasibility. This proposal reflects a refined shortlist based on objective evaluation. The four-unitary model emerged as the strongest option and is the focus of this business case, alongside evaluation of and comparison with three-unitary and five-unitary models.
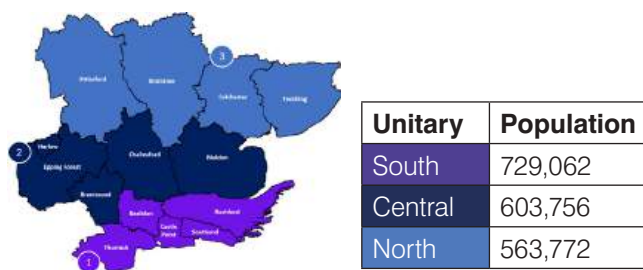
| Four-unitary authorities | Three-unitary authorities | Five-unitary authorities |
| --- | --- | --- |



| Unitary | Population |
| --- | --- |
| West | 488,368 |
| North | 438,829 |
| East | 418,532 |
| South | 550,861 |

| Unitary | Population |
| --- | --- |
| South | 729,062 |
| Central | 603,756 |
| North | 563,772 |

| Unitary | Population |
| --- | --- |
| Southwest | 368,745 |
| Northwest | 325,609 |
| Central | 331,757 |
| Northeast | 510,162 |
| Southeast | 360,317 |

**Assessment against government criteria 1 - 6**

| 1. High | 2. Medium | 3. High |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 4. High | 5. High | 6. Medium |

**Assessment against government criteria 1 - 6**

| 1. Medium | 2. Medium | 3. Medium |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 4. Medium | 5. Low | 6. Low |

**Assessment against government criteria 1 - 6**

| 1. Low | 2. Low | 3. Medium |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 4. Medium | 5. Medium | 6. Medium |

**The only model that performs well across all criteria without requiring additional external financial support.**

- Provides the optimal environment to achieve residents' priorities for financial sustainability and quality service delivery.

- Most balanced population with each unitary close to the 500,000 population guideline, with sufficient scale to deliver services efficiently and absorb financial shocks.

- Thurrock's debt can be managed within the new authority by £400 million of government support, without the risk of additional ongoing support.

- All four areas are coherent geographically and economically viable, with recognised hubs and ports supporting future growth.

**Most significant challenges relate to large geographic areas that do not align to sense of place or functional economic areas.**

- Potential to take advantage of greater economies of scale, with one unitary at c.730,000 population.

- Achieves balance across key metrics but does so by joining areas which do not align to functional economic areas and recognised geographies.

- Larger geographies over less established footprints risk distancing decision-making from communities

- Significantly larger South population and economy and creates imbalance in representation.

**Most significant challenges relate to financial sustainability and increased fragmentation of crucial services.**

- Most councils fall well below the 500,000 population guideline, even factoring in growth up to 2047.

- Lack of scale risks financial sustainability and ability to invest in critical services.

- Performs poorly on efficiency and resilience.

- Smaller councils would struggle to absorb £4.1 billion in regional debt and may require ongoing support to the value of £400–600 million in government support.

- Increased fragmentation risks reduced delivery capacity and therefore quality.

Section 1

- Reflects local identity and sense of place, enabling tailored, prevention-focussed services.

- Avoids the additional complexity of merging existing unitaries and provides a stable foundation for transformational change.

- Equal representation is built into the combined authority, with the mayor holding a tie-breaking vote, providing the best environment for unlocking devolution.

- Aggregating Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea while disaggregating county services introduces significant additional transition complexity and risk.

- Potential for decision-making deadlock within the combined authority.

- Creates an imbalance in representation of the combined authority, with a significantly larger North population.

- Faces a significant imbalance of need in the Southwest region due to combining Thurrock and Basildon.

## Case for Change: key arguments for the four-unitary model aligned to Government Criteria

**Below are key reasons why a four-unitary model is best placed to deliver for the people of Greater Essex. In development of this proposal, we have directly considered the views of residents, partners, and other stakeholders and this is incorporated within arguments across all criteria (see Section 4: Criteria 4). We have also considered lessons from previous LGR submissions and the strengths of the models which were ultimately selected and implemented.**

| | | The argument for four-unitaries | Comparison to other proposed models | Key Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Strong economic growth prospects for each unitary** | The four new councils are aligned to functional economic geographies and balanced in strength and potential. Each unitary has a recognised economic hub and international port (including airports), providing each with a gateway to trade, a key enabler of growth. There is balance in GVA, council tax base and business rates tax base, enabling long-term financial sustainability. | **3U** does not align to functional economic geographies, connecting areas without obvious links over large geographic areas. **5U** has highly uneven population and economic indicators with the greatest variance between councils. | **1** |
| 2 | **Recognisable and coherent council geographies** | All four councils are internally coherent, reflecting sense of place and with strong transport links, avoiding the need to travel outside authority boundaries to access core services. | **3U** or **5U** do not align to sense of place or functional economic areas. **3U** has weak internal public transport, high car dependency and limited internal connectivity across large geographic areas. | **1** |
| 3 | **Balanced and equal unitary population sizes** | Populations are equally distributed and close to the government guideline 500k figure and is best positioned once population growth projection. | **3U** is less balanced, with one unitary at c.730k significantly larger than the others. **5U** has four councils under 400k, well under government guidelines, with the added imbalance of one significantly larger authority at c. 510k. | **2** |
| 4 | **Financial sustainability** | Costs of LGR are expected to be paid back within 4 years and the long-running annual benefit is estimated to be £28.3m. | **3U** creates additional complexity and risk (and therefore cost) in implementation due to combining the two existing councils. **5U** will struggle to payback the upfront cost of implementation. | **2** |

Section 1

| | | The argument for four-unitaries | Comparison to other proposed models | Key Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | **The answer to the debt challenge** | Essex councils have combined external debt of £4.1billion, with Thurrock's well publicised financial challenges a significant element of this. All four councils have sufficient scale and strong growth prospects. With almost 500,000 people across Thurrock, Brentwood, Epping Forest and Harlow, the new West authority would be well connected to London, with nationally significant infrastructure projects and ability to deliver growth at scale across housing, employment and regeneration.<br><br>Following initial government support, as modelled in table 4.11, this new authority is best placed to be on a stable footing to deliver the future services required. | **3U** Over burden of debt in the new South authority creating an unequal playing field in the new configurations.<br>**5U** combines Thurrock with Basildon and likely requires on-going government support in the region of £400-600m for this authority to be financially viable. | **2** |
| 6 | **Avoiding unbalanced concentrations of need** | The model avoids over-concentration of need into a single authority, including for adult social care and children's services. We know that these services account for a major proportion of spend and it is too risky to over concentrate need, especially given projected increases in demand. | **3U** concentrates high-pressure districts such as Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and Basildon into one authority, which could reduce responsiveness and increase long-term costs.<br>**5U** may struggle to sustain complex services or respond to demand shocks given concentrations of need such as in the Northeast region which has both the highest SEND support levels and adults 18-64 accessing long-term support. | **3** |
| 7 | **Benefiting from capability of existing unitaries** | The model builds on the existing infrastructure, capability and skills within the existing Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea unitary authorities and therefore avoids unnecessary additional complexity and implementation cost. | **3U** includes Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and three districts in one new unitary authority. We know from experience of recent LGR programmes (e.g. BCP Council in Dorset) that this added complexity can directly lead to major delivery challenges in critical services post-LGR. | **3** |
| 8 | **Creates the environment which best responds to resident priorities and local needs** | The model provides the best balance for responding to issues such as financial stability, service quality and local decision making, which residents tell us matter to them the most. | **3U** does not provide the optimal environment for local decision making which reflects community needs, given the size, scale and disconnected geographies of new councils.<br>**5U** risks inadvertently creating artificial and impractical boundaries, and cannot meet residents' needs on ensuring financial sustainability | **4** |

| | | **The argument for four-unitaries** | **Comparison to other proposed models** | **Key Criteria** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | **Delivering public service reform and improved outcomes** | The model prioritises long-term outcomes, recognising that public service reform through outcome-focussed service delivery and prevention will reduce service demand and costs longer-term. Demand is so large in the system that neither efficiency nor prevention alone will deal with the growing pressures. | **3U** creates overly large authorities that dilute local responsiveness and complicate place-based and partnership working, particularly at the neighbourhood level. **5U** lacks the scale and capacity for strategic partnership and risks fragmentation and inconsistent performance of smaller authorities in delivering services and transformational change. | 3 |
| 10 | **Equal representation to unlock devolution** | The model creates four balanced new unitary authorities, enabling effective representation from all four corners of Greater Essex. Four authorities are more effective than three or five as it provides the mayor with tie-break power and the ability to unlock progress where it may otherwise stall or deadlock. Four balanced councils can build on existing district strengths to deliver locally while supported by the strategic scale of the combined authority to deliver major programmes across the region. | **3U** or **5U** models creates an imbalance in voting, exacerbated by having one unitary with a significantly larger population. | 5 |
| 11 | **Hardwiring community engagement into governance and delivery** | The four new councils will support a size of population and geographic area that allows for effective community and neighbourhood engagement. | **3U** creates councils across large, incoherent geographies, bringing challenges which meaningfully link local engagement with council operations. **5U** brings the risk of excessive fragmentation, which could complicate the coordination of engagement across broader public sector systems. | 6 |

# Financial Case for Change

The four-unitary model is the most fiscally secure approach for the future of Greater Essex. It will establish four financially sustainable authorities, each well-positioned to manage resources effectively, withstand financial shocks and deliver high-quality local services.

The financial costs and benefits associated with LGR have been estimated for the four-unitary model, as well as three and five-unitary models for comparative purposes. The four-unitary model performs strongly. It offers the best return on investment longer-term. This combination of four unitaries prevents the imbalances seen in alternative models and will enable stable, long-term delivery for all communities across the region.

The financial model is underpinned by realistic, prudent assumptions, developed in line with best practice, taking a similar approach to the County Councils Network (CCN) and PwC model. It draws directly on benchmarks and evidence from previous successful local government reorganisations and is tailored to the unique context of the 15 existing councils in the region.

Our financial modelling shows:

- The **four-unitary model** will have net annual savings of **£28.3m,** after one-off costs of implementation of **£80.8m,** meaning an estimated payback period of **less than 4 years.**

- A **three-unitary model,** whilst avoiding long-running disaggregation costs, introduces additional complexity and therefore implementation cost and risk by combining two current unitary authorities (Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea).

- A **five-unitary model** will result in a very similar cost of local government delivery to the current position and therefore may never deliver a return on the significant upfront investment in implementation costs.

The four-unitary model provides a credible structure to place local government in Greater Essex on a firmer financial footing, including in areas currently subject to Best Value intervention and Exceptional Financial Support. It enables a viable, place-based solution to legacy debt issues, while maintaining overall system stability.

The fundamental principle that reducing the number of councils lowers the cost base of local government is valid. However, it is essential to recognise the unique landscape of authorities within Greater Essex, as well as the experience of previous unitarisations. Any proposed model must build upon the strengths of existing top-tier authorities that are already delivering high-quality services. By doing so, savings will be sustainable, and the transition can be simplified at a reduced cost and minimal risk to service continuity.

LGR is proven to deliver savings, but it should not be seen as a silver bullet for realising financial savings in service delivery. The experience of previous reorganisations show that the bulk of realised savings have been concentrated within administrative functions and improved buying power, so any proposal that is based on reduction of unit costs of services, such as social care, would not be grounded in reality.

Crucially, the four-unitary approach creates a stable platform to design and deliver whole-system solutions with partners that will lead to better management of demand and financial savings, but does not obligate future authorities to deliver unrealistic and potentially harmful short-term savings in service areas such as social care. The approach will empower the four new authorities to make informed, sustainable decisions by providing a framework for a long-term solution to increasing pressures through early intervention and prevention.

**Summary of financial modelling**

| LGR option | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Recurring revenue savings (£m)* | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Net annual impact after five years (£m) | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Three-unitary model | 43.4 | - | 43.4 | (93.7) | 73.5 | Within 4 years |
| Four-unitary model | 55.0 | (26.7) | 28.3 | (80.8) | 49.5 | Within 4 years |
| Five-unitary model | 52.1 | (44.4) | 7.7 | (86.7) | (51.5) | Over 10 years |

*Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs



Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option

## Implementation Plan

Delivering local government reorganisation in Greater Essex will require a structured, multi-phase programme supported by robust governance, targeted workstreams and active risk management. The programme is designed to ensure safe and legal Day 1 delivery while enabling long-term transformation.

The implementation programme will follow five defined phases:

1. **Discover (to Oct 2025):** Initiate stakeholder engagement, begin data collection and remediation, submit proposal.

2. **Prepare (Oct 2025 – Mar 2026):** Mobilise governance, define service requirements, baseline data and agree communications and engagement strategy. Develop the high-level implementation plan and critical path.

3. **Design (Mar 2026 – May 2027):** Expand programme delivery, develop service blueprints, plan elections and legal compliance and begin ICT and contract planning.

4. **Transition & Launch (May 2027 – Mar 2028):** Appoint leadership, finalise service and financial plans, test systems and governance and prepare Day 1 readiness.

5. **Go-Live (Apr 2028 – Onwards):** Launch new authorities, ensure service continuity, embed governance and begin post-LGR transformation.

A structured governance framework will oversee delivery. The LGR Programme Board will manage strategic oversight, supported by Unitary Delivery Groups, Shadow Authorities, District Area Representatives and a Day 1 Board focused on operational readiness.

Key risks include service disruption, staff retention, leadership clarity and missed transformation opportunities. These are actively managed through a programme-wide risk register, with mitigations embedded in governance and delivery plans.

Experience from Cumbria's successful LGR programme highlights the importance of early mobilisation, strong programme management, collaborative governance and clear accountability. These lessons have informed the design of Greater Essex's implementation approach. Critical success factors include:

● Starting early and planning proactively

● Maintaining service continuity

● Designing around residents and communicating clearly

● Establishing transparent governance

● Supporting staff and building inclusive culture

● Balancing technical delivery with cultural change

● Ensuring financial sustainability and rigorous assurance

# Section 2:
# Purpose and Greater Essex context

## Purpose of this report

**This proposal outlines a proposed four-unitary model for the future of local government in Greater Essex. In line with the Government's letter and additional feedback provided, the report focuses on why the four-unitary model is best placed to deliver on the Government's six criteria.**

### Responding to the Government's request

On 5 February, the then Minister for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all leaders within Greater Essex inviting them to submit options for local government organisation (LGR).

The letter reiterated the government's ambition to see the current two-tier system replaced with larger unitary authorities that are better able to deliver services, support economic growth and operate effectively within a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA).

### The option being put forward: four unitaries for Greater Essex

This submission sets out a proposal for a four-unitary model for Greater Essex, in response to the Government's invitation for local government reorganisation.

The status quo was discounted due to the scale and urgency of the challenges facing the system and the need for LGR to provide a platform and catalyst to help tackle them. A two-unitary model was also ruled out, as the large geographies do not align with government criteria and presented significant risks.

Three models were evaluated through a structured options appraisal process: a three-unitary, four-unitary and five-unitary model. The focus of this report is the proposed four-unitary model; however, the three-unitary and five-unitary options are referenced throughout this report, with full detail on each set out in Section 7: Options Appraisal.

Figure 2.1 – Four-unitary model for Greater Essex

| Unitary | Areas | Population |
|---|---|---|
| **West Essex** | Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Thurrock | 488,368 |
| **North Essex** | Braintree, Chelmsford, Uttlesford | 438,829 |
| **East Essex** | Colchester, Maldon, Tendring | 418,532 |
| **South Essex** | Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea | 550,861 |
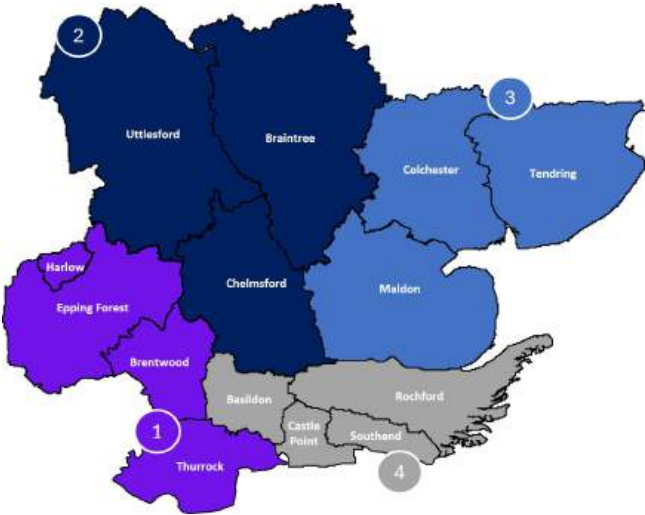
**Why this four-unitary model**

A range of four-unitary options were considered in our initial appraisal. This specific configuration was selected because it:

- Maintains a balanced population range around the 500k government guideline and avoids creating one authority which is almost double the size of another

- Maintains a balance of key metrics such as GVA and deprivation, supporting the economic growth potential of each new unitary area

- Avoids combining areas that lack functional alignment or natural geographic coherence

- Avoids the complexity associated with grouping two existing unitary authorities within the same new unitary

- Avoids groupings that create an unsustainable financial position due to the concentrated debt burden

The model provides the greatest balance and stability and avoids the structural, financial and service delivery risks present in other variants. It is the only four-unitary model that meets all government criteria consistently.

**How we have structured this document**

This report sets out the context for Greater Essex, including strengths and opportunities LGR and devolution can build upon alongside challenges in the system and area that LGR and devolution can seek to resolve. The process of options appraisal and evaluation is summarised, which led to focus on the four-unitary model and the definition of the vision for unitary local government in Greater Essex. Finally, a high-level implementation plan highlights the key areas of consideration to get to Day 1 and beyond.

The six government criteria have been used to structure the key content of this report, providing a clear narrative as to why the four-unitary model is the best option for LGR in Greater Essex. Comprehensive evaluation of the model against each criteria can be found in Section 4 of this report. The full approach is set out in Section 7.

## Greater Essex context

**Greater Essex operates one of the most complex local government systems in the country, with 15 councils across two tiers including two small unitaries. This fragmented structure creates duplication, inconsistency and limits strategic coordination. The area faces persistent challenges including deprivation, low productivity, health inequalities and rising demand for services. At the same time, Greater Essex is full of opportunity. Local government reorganisation, alongside devolution, provides a chance to simplify governance, strengthen leadership and deliver reform at scale.**

### The Greater Essex place and economy

Greater Essex is a large and diverse region with a population of 1.9 million, forecast to exceed 2 million by 2043. It includes a mix of urban centres, market towns, coastal communities and rural areas, with 72% of the land designated as rural. The region is home to two international airports (London Stansted and London Southend), four international ports (London Gateway, Harwich, Tilbury, and Purfleet), two Freeports (Thames Freeport and Freeport East) and is served by nationally significant economic corridors including the Thames Estuary and the UK Innovation Corridor.

The economy is valued at £50 billion and supports over 94,000 businesses. Key sectors include advanced manufacturing, clean energy, construction, logistics, digital technology and life sciences. Strong transport links to London, Cambridge, East Anglia and the wider South east support a highly mobile and skilled workforce.

Further detail on the key economic growth opportunities in Greater Essex is set out in Appendix 3. These opportunities are discussed in relation to the proposed four-unitary model in Section 4: Criteria 1.

### Local Government landscape in Greater Essex

Essex currently operates one of the most complex local government systems in the country. There are 15 councils: 12 district, borough and city councils, one county council and two unitary authorities - Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council. This structure creates duplication, inconsistency and confusion for residents, with services split between tiers and varying delivery models across the county.

The mixed service delivery model presents challenges for strategic coordination, financial sustainability and service reform. In the two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for services such as planning, housing, waste collection and leisure, while Essex County Council delivers adult social care, children's services, education, highways and libraries. In contrast, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock operate as unitary authorities, delivering all local services directly.

### The Devolution Priority Programme

The English Devolution White Paper set out government's vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power from Whitehall to local mayors and combined authorities through devolution.

The Devolution Priority Programme will accelerate the transfer of powers from central Government to strategic authorities – empowering Greater Essex to take control of decisions that directly affect their economies, infrastructure and public services. Greater Essex is working towards the formation of the Combined County Authority (GECCA) and election of a Mayor in May 2026.

GECCA will be a dynamic strategic organisation focused on driving economic growth and public service reform across Greater Essex. It will operate alongside new unitary authorities, providing scale and capacity that individual councils cannot achieve alone.

**Challenges to be addressed through LGR**

Greater Essex faces a complex set of challenges that impact residents, services and places. Pockets of deprivation, low productivity, health inequalities and ageing demographics place growing pressure on public services. Infrastructure is under strain and climate change is already affecting communities through flooding, coastal erosion and overheating.

Local government in the region is constrained by structural and systemic issues that limit its ability to respond strategically and sustainably. These challenges are long-standing and interconnected and while LGR is not a solution to every issue, it provides a platform for transformational change.

LGR can enable stronger governance, clearer accountability and more coherent service delivery. When combined with devolution, it offers the opportunity to convene partners, unlock new powers and take a more joined-up approach to economic growth, public service reform and place leadership.

This proposal sets out how LGR can support a more balanced, sustainable and strategic model of local government for Greater Essex. Further detail on the key challenges in Greater Essex is set out in Appendix 3. These challenges are discussed in relation to the proposed four-unitary model throughout Section 4: Case for Change.

Section
2

Figure 2.2 – Current boundary lines in Greater Essex
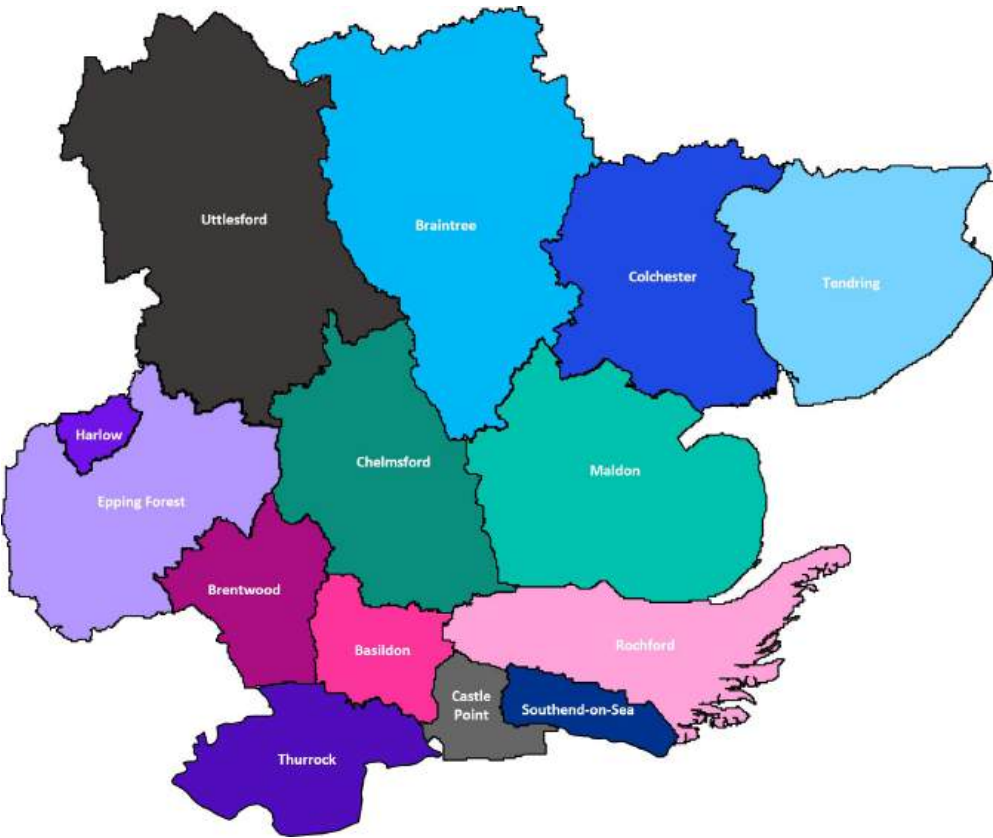


Figure 2.3 – Characteristics of areas in current boundary lines

| Council | Population [1] | Geography [2] (sq km) | Councillors | Net Revenue Budget [3] (£m) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basildon | 190,544 | 110.46 | 51 | 38.0 |
| Braintree | 159,957 | 611.71 | 57 | 19.5 |
| Brentwood | 78,152 | 153.12 | 43 | 8.2 |
| Castle Point | 89,858 | 63.61 | 44 | 4.2 |
| Chelmsford | 185,278 | 342.99 | 66 | 28.9 |
| Colchester | 196,998 | 346.77 | 59 | 15.3 |
| Epping Forest | 135,975 | 338.98 | 61 | 18.7 |
| Harlow | 96,040 | 30.54 | 38 | 13.9 |
| Maldon | 68,327 | 428.03 | 34 | 10.7 |
| Rochford | 88,188 | 262.94 | 44 | 11.4 |
| Tendring | 153,207 | 366.18 | 55 | 21.7 |
| Uttlesford | 93,594 | 641.15 | 44 | 11.6 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 182,271 | 67.97 | 51 | 156.7 |
| Thurrock | 178,201 | 184.44 | 49 | 177.2 |
| Essex County | 1,536,118 | 3696.48 | 75 | 1,016.3 |

# Section 3:
# The vision for unitary government in Greater Essex

**Our vision sets out what the four-unitary model will deliver for residents across Greater Essex: a system of local government that is financially sustainable, locally accountable and focused on delivering better outcomes for residents. It reflects what matters most to communities and provides a clear direction for future decision-making.**

> The residents of Greater Essex deserve councils that are strong and resilient and that understand and respond to their ambitions and needs. Our proposal will deliver sustainable public services, focussed on the priorities of our communities.
>
> By building on local strengths, removing duplication and enabling joined-up delivery, we will support inclusive growth, tackle inequality, and ensure every corner of Essex can thrive.
>
> Together, we can build a new kind of local government - one that truly works for local people.

**How this vision was developed**

The vision for unitary government in Greater Essex has been shaped through local engagement, drawing on resident surveys, focus groups and consultation with partners to understand community priorities and ensure the vision is grounded in local needs and aspirations. Residents tell us that financial sustainability and service quality are top priorities for them.

The vision is consistent with national priorities, such as financial sustainability, public service reform and inclusive growth, but reflects the distinct challenges and opportunities of Greater Essex.

**How the vision will be used**

This vision provides a clear strategic direction for the future of local government in Greater Essex. In the development of this proposal, the vision has provided a set of principles in which to evaluate the unitary model options alongside the government's criteria. It will guide future design discussions, inform service transformation and tie in with the region's approach to devolution.

It will be used to align decision-making, support engagement with residents and partners, and ensure that implementation remains focussed on outcomes for people and communities.

**Why the four-unitary model is best placed to deliver on our vision**

The four-unitary model is best placed to deliver a system of local government that is financially sustainable, locally accountable and focussed on better outcomes. It scores highly across the six government criteria and represents a balanced configuration - large enough to operate efficiently and deliver at scale, but small enough to remain connected to communities. The detail behind this argument is set out in Section 4: Case for Change with detailed scoring and evaluation in Section 7: Options appraisal.

# Section 4:
# Case for Change

**The Case for Change includes a section for each of the six Government criteria:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Criteria 1:**<br>**Establishing a single tier of local government** | • Four thriving economies within Greater Essex<br>• The most sensible council geographies for Essex<br>• Effective structures for local government delivery |
| **Criteria 2:**<br>**Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | • The right population size<br>• Delivering efficiencies to support council finances<br>• Minimising transition complexity and enabling transformation<br>• Managing debt and establishing a firmer financial footing |
| **Criteria 3:**<br>**High quality and sustainable public services** | • Consolidating and improving service delivery<br>• Delivering value for money through public service reform<br>• Protecting crucial services |
| **Criteria 4:**<br>**Working together to understand and meet local needs** | • Engaging to better understand priorities and needs across Greater Essex<br>• Four authorities grounded in local identity, culture and history |
| **Criteria 5:**<br>**Supporting devolution arrangements** | • Unlocking the devolution vision in Greater Essex<br>• Equal representation from all four corners of Greater Essex |
| **Criteria 6:**<br>**Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | • Strong community engagement across Greater Essex<br>• Building on best practice community engagement |

# Criteria 1:
# Establishing a single tier of local government

**This section includes:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Four thriving economies within Greater Essex** | **Criteria 1a** |
| **The most sensible council geographies for Essex** | **Criteria 1b** |
| **Effective structures for local government delivery** | **Criteria 1d** |

Criteria 1c 'Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement' is delivered through all sections in this proposal, with the underpinning options evaluation exercise.
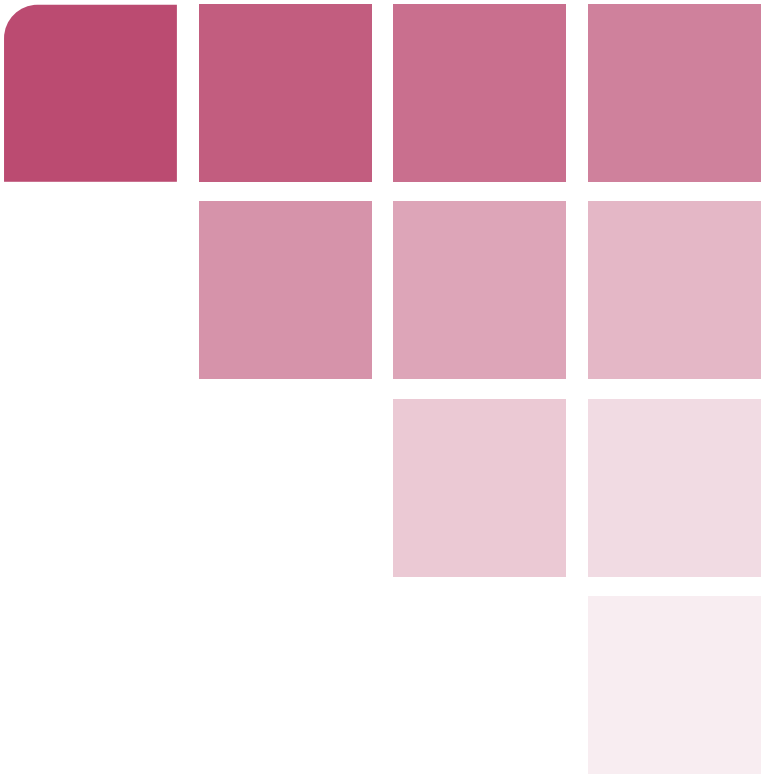
Criteria
1

# Four thriving economies within Greater Essex

**Criteria 1a.** Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area

**Each of the four new unitary authorities is economically viable, with balanced GVA and tax bases supporting long-term financial sustainability. The model brings together places with complementary strengths, ensuring no area is left behind. Each unitary has a recognised economic centre and international port (including airports), providing each with a gateway to trade and supporting future economic growth prospects. This creates a fairer and more resilient foundation for long-term growth.**

## Balanced economy and tax base

Figure 4.1 – Economy and tax base metrics for four-unitary model options

| | **West Essex** | **North Essex** | **East Essex** | **South Essex** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Current authority areas** | Brentwood, Epping Forest Harlow, Thurrock | Braintree, Chelmsford Uttlesford | Colchester, Maldon, Tendring | Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea |
| **GVA[4]** | £15,556m | £13,108m | £8,714m | £13,440m |
| **GVA per capita (productivity)[4]** | £31,853 | £29,870 | £20,820 | £24,398 |
| **Council tax base (no. of band D equivalent properties)[5]** | 173,324 | 169,545 | 126,477 | 186,896 |
| **Council tax average band D rate (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes)[5]** | £2,086 | £2,051 | £2,060 | £2,109 |
| **Business rates tax base[6]** | £115.0m | £76.5m | £43.8m | £67.8m |
| **Unemployment rates (Oct 2023 - Sep 2024)[7]** | 4.03% | 2.86% | 3.53% | 3.36% |
| **Deprivation score (2019)[8]** | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.12 |

The four-unitary model ensures balance between strength of key economic indicators and alignment to functional and recognised geographies which enable and support economic growth.

Each unitary has a sufficient council tax base to support service delivery, ranging from c.126,000 to c.187,000 Band D equivalent properties. Differences in average band D rates between councils within each proposed unitary are modest, ranging from £2,051 to £2,109, minimising disruption for residents and reducing administrative complexity during transition.

Business rates tax bases are also strong, with each unitary generating between £44 million and £115 million in retained business rates. All four authorities have the economic capacity to operate independently and sustainably.

Any minor imbalances between proposed councils are countered by strong growth potential, which will support longer-term economic growth and prosperity across the whole of Greater Essex. Each authority will be able to tailor economic and employment strategies to local needs, while aligning with the wider strategic ambitions of GECCA.

---

[4] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[5] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[6] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[7] LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics
[8] Mapping income deprivation at a local authority level - Office for National Statistics

Criteria 1

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model is relatively balanced on some metrics but creates this balance through joining up areas which do not align to functional economic areas and sense of place.

In the 5U model, the imbalance in GVA per capita is significantly greater, ranging from £35,032 in the Southwest to £17,035 in the Southeast.

**Growth and opportunity in Greater Essex**

LGR brings an opportunity for Greater Essex to redefine geographies and boundaries and create the economies of the future that will benefit the people of Greater Essex for generations to come.

The four-unitary model brings together places with complementary economic profiles and infrastructure. It reflects the distinct economic geographies of the region but brings them together in a way that will support future growth and development.

Each new authority will benefit from its own gateway to international trade and tourism either through a major port or international airport. These gateways provide the new authorities with the opportunity to consider ambitious growth plans for the future so that increases in GVA can be made through assets (such as Freeports) achieving their full potential.

**Embracing the economic growth opportunity through GECCA**

Each unitary has the scale and assets to set an ambitious and effective economic strategy, engage effectively with business and education partners, and align with devolved powers under GECCA. The model supports simplified engagement for investors, clearer branding of growth zones, and more consistent planning and regulatory frameworks across each area. Under the Devolution Priority Programme, GECCA will hold strategic functions across transport, housing, skills, economic development, public health and climate action.

The four-unitary model ensures each authority can contribute meaningfully to these functions, with clear local delivery responsibilities and equal representation on the GECCA board. This alignment enables joined-up planning across key sectors and supports the development of regional strategies such as the Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and Skills Strategy. This structure enables Greater Essex to unlock the full potential of its sectoral strengths, while ensuring that all areas benefit from targeted investment and inclusive growth.

Criteria
1

**Growth opportunities across the four-unitary areas**

**West Essex**

- Brings together nationally significant infrastructure and sectoral assets.
- Thurrock's Thames Freeport and port logistics are complemented by Harlow's life sciences and innovation cluster.
- Harlow's innovation assets include Kao Data and Charles River Laboratories, supporting its role in the UK Innovation Corridor.
- Brentwood adds strategic connectivity via the Elizabeth Line and M25, supporting commuter flows and business access to London.
- Epping Forest contributes green infrastructure and proximity to Harlow's growth zone.
- The area is well positioned to lead on clean growth, digital innovation and infrastructure delivery, supported by the Lower Thames Crossing and supporting housing led growth such as at Harlow & Gilston Garden Town.

**North Essex**

- Includes Chelmsford, Braintree and Uttlesford, combining the county town's public sector and professional services base with advanced manufacturing and logistics capacity.
- Stansted Airport provides international connectivity and supports a strong aerospace and engineering supply chain.
- The area is also home to major employment sites such as Horizon 120 (Braintree) and Freebournes Industrial Estate.
- Chelmsford's Garden Community will deliver 100,000 sqm of employment space and a new rail station in addition to new housing, enhancing its role as a public sector and professional services hub.

**East Essex**

- Focuses on regeneration and inclusive growth, with a strong foundation of sectoral assets and place-based opportunities.
- Colchester's Knowledge Gateway and university presence support digital and creative industries, while Harwich International Port and the coastal economy in Tendring offer potential in tourism, logistics and green energy.
- Maldon contributes further through its Causeway employment zone and year-round tourism, with over 4 million visits annually and more than 1,000 historically significant sites.
- While East Essex has a lower starting tax base than the other three proposed councils, it is forecast to experience the highest population growth, which will expand its tax base over time.
- East Essex population growth may increase service demand, but the area's regeneration pipeline, including the Tendring–Colchester Borders Garden Community, Freeport East and Knowledge Gateway, positions it to attract investment, improve productivity and build long-term financial resilience.
- The four-unitary model enables East Essex to pursue tailored strategies to address issues common to existing authorities that respond to local challenges and unlock its economic potential by giving the new authority a stronger platform and voice to engage at a regional level and with businesses.

**South Essex**

- It has a diverse economy with strengths in health, advanced manufacturing and aviation.
- Southend Airport and the A127 corridor support logistics and business growth, while Basildon's Centre for Digital Technologies and strong advanced manufacturing base, including employers like Leonardo and Ford position it as a key driver of innovation and employment.
- The wider South Essex region will be able to learn from Basildon's success in enabling economic growth and generating one of the highest business startup rates in the UK.

Criteria 1

# The most sensible council geographies for Essex

**Criteria 1b.** Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs

**The model creates geographies that make sense for how people live and work. It supports better planning, more consistent services and a more even spread of need. This helps councils respond to local priorities while working more efficiently.**

## Geographies and population

The model achieves a balanced distribution of population, geographic area and population density across Greater Essex. This balance enables effective governance, manageable service delivery footprints and equitable representation.

Figure 4.2 – geographies and population in 2023 and 2032 forecasts

| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population 2023 ONS[9]** | 488,368 | 438,829 | 418,532 | 550,861 |
| **Geographic area (sq km)[10]** | 707 | 1,596 | 1,141 | 505 |
| **Population density (people per sq km)** | 691 | 275 | 367 | 1,091 |
| **Forecast population 2032 ONS[11]** | 506,096 | 469,091 | 456,578 | 564,551 |
| **Forecast growth** | 4.7% | 8.2% | 10.4% | 3.3% |

## Sensible geographies

The model reflects the diversity of Essex's geography, from dense urban areas to rural and coastal districts. Areas range from 707 sq km (West Essex) to 1,596 sq km (North Essex). This avoids the creation of overly large rural authorities that would be difficult to manage operationally, or very small urban authorities that lack spatial flexibility.

Densities range from 275 people per sq km (North Essex) to 1,091 people per sq km (South Essex). This spread reflects the natural variation in settlement patterns across Essex, while maintaining a reasonable level of consistency. Other models show much wider disparities, which can create challenges in designing consistent service models.

The model avoids the pitfalls of fragmentation or over-consolidation. It ensures that each authority has a population size that supports financial sustainability and strategic capacity, a geographic footprint that is large enough to plan effectively but small enough to engage communities meaningfully, and a density profile that allows for consistent service delivery models across urban and rural areas.

**Travel infrastructure and travel to work in Greater Essex**

Essex is served by a strong strategic transport network, including the A12, A13, A127, A120, M11 and M25, and two key rail lines: Greater Anglia and C2C Line. Additionally, some parts of the county are served by Transport for London through the Elizabeth line.

These routes connect major towns such as Chelmsford, Colchester, Southend-on-Sea, Basildon, Harlow and Grays to London and each other. However, east–west and cross-county travel can be less direct, particularly for those not commuting into London. There is a strong reliance on the road network and public bus transport when travelling across different district lines.

Further detail on travel to work patterns and connectivity is set out in Section 4: Criteria 4 in relation to understanding local needs and preserving local identity.

**Supporting strategic connectivity through functional geographies**

The Greater Essex devolution proposal identifies several systemic transport challenges. The current network is overly reliant on car journeys, lacks capacity on key corridors and suffers from poor integration across transport modes. North–south travel is particularly constrained and some of the most deprived communities are also the least connected.

Aligning unitary boundaries with Travel-to-Work Areas (TTWAs) will support the development of a more connected, resilient and inclusive transport system. This approach enables coherent economic planning and more efficient service delivery, while ensuring that residents can access services without needing to travel through other unitary areas. See Section 4: Criteria 4 for more detail on TTWAs.

Embedding the four-unitary model within the strategic corridor framework ensures each unitary area is positioned to benefit from targeted infrastructure investment, including rail upgrades, road improvements and mass transit schemes. This strengthens the case for the four-unitary model and supports long-term connectivity and growth.

This approach also ensures that the new authorities are grounded in how people actually move around Essex, supporting both local responsiveness and regional coordination.

The model also aligns with strategic corridors identified in the Transport East Strategy[12], which underpin regional movement and economic connectivity.

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Thurrock survey, residents were asked where they travelled to most often to work or socialise. **52%** said London, **35%** said Basildon, **33%** said Southend and **29%** said Brentwood. The issue of proximity to London was raised many times throughout the engagement, with residents making it clear they enjoy living near London but do not want to become part of it, as they feel their identity is distinct living in Essex.

**Strategic transport corridors across the four-unitary regions**

| West Essex | • Harlow, Epping Forest, Brentwood and Thurrock border London and are supported by good road and rail links.<br>• The M25 runs through Thurrock and provides direct access to Brentwood and Epping Forest, supporting movement across the sub-region and into London.<br>• Harlow is served by the M11, which connects to the M25.<br>• The A128 connects Orsett to Chipping Ongar<br>• The proposed Lower Thames Crossing and Thames Freeport will further enhance connectivity and economic opportunity. |
|---|---|
| North Essex | • The M11, A12, A120 and A131 corridors provide strong connections between Uttlesford, Braintree and Chelmsford.<br>• All districts have direct rail access to London.<br>• Excellent road links and efficient rail and bus connectivity between Braintree and Chelmsford.<br>• Chelmsford is one of the best-connected districts in Essex. It's strategic geographical position and transport infrastructure have allowed it to grow as a key economic and residential hub and it will provide a key transport connector for the North Essex geography, supporting areas such as Uttlesford with rural transport issues.<br>• Uttlesford is strategically served by the M11, which provides direct links to London, Cambridge, and Stansted Airport |

| East Essex | • Maldon, Colchester and Tendring are connected by the A12, A120 and A133 corridors.<br>• The Greater Anglia rail network links Colchester to coastal destinations such as Clacton and Walton via the Sunshine Coast Line. |
|---|---|
| South Essex | • Includes the A127 and A13 corridors, with Southend-on-Sea located at the eastern end and Basildon positioned centrally between the two.<br>• Rochford is served by the A127, while Castle Point connects via the A13. The area benefits from strong internal road connectivity and direct rail access to London via the c2c and Greater Anglia networks.<br>• Southend Airport is located on the Southend Victoria branch of the Greater Anglia line.<br>• East–west travel beyond the main corridors is more constrained, particularly for cross-district movement. |

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model creates large, internally disconnected geographies which do not align to transport and travel patterns.

• In Central Essex, rail infrastructure is predominantly radial, linking towns to London but not to each other. This results in weak internal public transport, high car dependency and limited connectivity, particularly for areas like Maldon, which lacks a rail station altogether.

• In North Essex, long journeys between extremities and poor direct links, such as between Uttlesford and Colchester, reduce internal cohesion and limit access to services.

The 4U model breaks up these disconnected groupings, aligning boundaries with functional travel patterns and enabling more coherent, place-based transport planning.

Criteria 1

**The housing and homelessness challenge in Greater Essex**

Greater Essex faces significant and complex housing pressures. While some areas have consistently met delivery targets, others are constrained by land availability, viability challenges or infrastructure gaps.

Residents across Greater Essex consistently raise concerns about the impact of new housing on local infrastructure, including roads, schools, health services and utilities.

While the South faces higher demand and more constrained land supply, the North has greater physical capacity to absorb growth. However, areas such as the A120 corridor already experience congestion at peak times, and further development will increase pressure on local transport networks.

Homelessness rates vary significantly, with some districts experiencing rates of up to 1.95 per 1,000 households . Unemployment, which indirectly affects housing stability, ranges from 2.86% to 4.03% , and pockets of deprivation persist across both urban and coastal areas.

Housing growth across Greater Essex is currently driven by the ambition and delivery capacity of some individual districts. Areas such as Harlow, Chelmsford and Colchester have driven growth. Braintree has the ambition but struggles with delivery, and Uttlesford has available land but a limited appetite for growth.

**Why the four-unitary model delivers on housing and homelessness**

LGR provides the opportunity to think differently and more strategically, beyond current district boundaries. We must use this opportunity to learn from the areas with the strongest track record of delivery and apply best practices across the new councils.

The four new councils, with all authorities working with GECCA, will:

● Be ideally positioned to coordinate spatial planning, helping to ensure that growth is both deliverable and supported by the infrastructure residents expect.

● Provide a stronger platform for joined-up place-shaping and regional coordination, with balanced distribution of housing and infrastructure investment across the region.

● Reflect local housing markets while retaining sufficient scale to plan strategically and negotiate effectively with government and developers.

● Avoid the dilution of focus that can occur in overly large geographies.

● Avoid the fragmentation risks of a model with more, smaller councils, which may lack the capacity to manage housing pipelines or respond to homelessness effectively.

**Complementary housing profiles and challenges in the four-unitary model**

Figure 4.3 – Housing and homelessness metrics for four-unitary model option

| Metric | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)** | 1.20 | 0.99 | 1.26 | 1.46 |
| **Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement (%)** | 0.73 | 1.07 | 1.31 | 0.50 |

[13]  Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[14]  LI01 Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities - Office for National Statistics
[15]  Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[16]  Housing Delivery Test: 2023 measurement - GOV.UK

Criteria
1

| | Current housing and homelessness challenges | Opportunities enabled by four-unitary model |
|---|---|---|
| **West Essex** | • Highest average homelessness rate.<br><br>• Housing delivery is below target, reflecting viability constraints and infrastructure pressures.<br><br>• High house prices and availability challenges, driven by increasing demand and values across East London.<br><br>• Capital spillover pushes up prices and limits affordability. | • A more coordinated approach to investment in affordable housing and regeneration, capitalising on planned infrastructure investment in the Thames Freeport and the Lower Thames Crossing.<br><br>• A strategic approach to temporary accommodation to address overspill issues as part of a strategy for temporary accommodation procurement and tenancy sustainment across areas with similar urban pressures.<br><br>• Take advantage of known growth opportunities in Epping Forest and Harlow, providing a strong foundation for future coordinated delivery and investment. |
| **North Essex** | • Strong housing delivery average.<br><br>• Lowest average unemployment rate. | • Strategic planning would support delivery of garden communities and unlock stalled sites through pooled infrastructure investment.<br><br>• Better coordination of rural housing needs and affordability challenges in market towns and villages. |
| **East Essex** | • Strongest average housing delivery performance<br><br>• Homelessness is relatively high.<br><br>• Affordability and deprivation challenges, particularly in coastal areas. | • Targeted regeneration and housing mix strategies, with scope to align with clean growth and tourism investment.<br><br>• More joined-up approach to homelessness prevention and outreach in areas with seasonal housing pressures and limited social housing stock. |
| **South Essex** | • Most urbanised and densely populated area.<br><br>• Weakest housing delivery average.<br><br>• Homelessness is relatively high.<br><br>• Largest population aged 65 and over. | • Coordinated brownfield development and infrastructure planning.<br><br>• More effective management of housing pressures linked to ageing population, urban density and constrained land supply. |

**Comparison to other proposed models**

Housing and homelessness pressures are concentrated in large authorities in the 3U, making them harder to manage effectively. Responsibilities are fragmented across smaller authorities in the 5U, limiting capacity to respond strategically. The 4U model enables each authority to tailor its approach to local conditions while benefiting from strategic coherence and shared capacity.

Criteria
1

# Effective structures for local government delivery

**Criteria 1d.** Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described

**The four-unitary model simplifies governance by reducing duplication and clarifying accountability. It reduces the number of councillors and Cabinet roles while strengthening local leadership. This makes decision-making quicker, clearer and more effective.**

### Efficient and locally focused democratic arrangements

The four-unitary model will create a new democratic model that is more efficient and delivers savings but remains at a scale that allows for local focus. It reduces duplication, simplifies decision-making and ensures that the right powers are held at the right level to deliver effective, accountable leadership.

Each new unitary authority will operate with a Cabinet system, with no more than 10 Cabinet members. This provides the opportunity to reduce the total number of councillors across Greater Essex by around 60%. This reduction would allow councillor-to-electorate ratios to be designed to remain within acceptable thresholds, maintaining democratic representation while improving efficiency. This reduction would achieve similar savings seen in previous LGR areas where the reduction is of the same magnitude.

In accordance with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) guidance on how to determine council size, a full review by the new unitary authority will consider how to strike the right balance between strategic leadership, community leadership and accountability.

### Effective governance and decision making at each level

The model enables strategic thinking at the right scale, while maintaining a strong connection to local communities.

Figure 4.4 – Councillor numbers of the four-unitary model

| Unitary | Current councillors (District plus County) | Future councillors (estimate) | Current councillor to electorate ratio | Future councillor to electorate ratio | Net reduction in Members |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| West | 190 | 69 | 2,008 | 5,001 | 64% |
| North | 166 | 65 | 1,999 | 4,882 | 61% |
| East | 150 | 63 | 2,382 | 4,813 | 58% |
| South | 190 | 83 | 2,417 | 4,916 | 56% |
| TOTAL | 696 | 280 | 2,202 (average) | 4,903 (average) | 60% |

Criteria 1

Figure 4.5 – Future Greater Essex governance structure

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model risks creating councils that are too expansive to effectively govern and connect with communities, potentially becoming overly reliant on Neighbourhood Area Committees to address this democratic shortfall. Such committees are unlikely to be adequate and could inadvertently re-establish complex district-level structures, demanding substantial officer and member resources to function effectively.

A 5U model would significantly dilute strategic capacity by creating smaller authorities that lack the scale to effectively deliver complex services or attract senior leadership. It would also increase the number of Cabinets and governance structures required, reintroducing duplication and reducing the efficiency gains expected from reorganisation. This fragmentation risks inconsistent decision-making and weaker alignment with regional priorities.

**GECCA** aligns local governance with the wider strategic devolution agenda. The model ensures that local voices are represented in regional decision-making, while enabling councils to focus on local delivery and priorities. See Criteria 5 for further detail.

**The four unitary authorities** will have the powers and capacity to make decisions on key issues such as housing, infrastructure and public health, supported by a clear governance framework and strong officer leadership.

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)** are expected to be embedded into each new unitary authority's governance framework, providing a formal role for ward councillors in local engagement and service influence. They are proposed to operate within the unitary structure – not as a new tier of government – and be geographically flexible to reflect community identity. This approach aligns with emerging government plans for neighbourhood governance and complements existing parish and town councils. Ultimately, decisions about how the model will be implemented will be taken locally and informed by the councillors who represent and understand the local area.

Full detail on NAC design and implementation is set out in Section 4: Criteria 6 and joint working arrangements in service delivery are considered in Section 4: Criteria 3.

# Criteria 2:
# Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

**This section includes:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **The right population size** | **Criteria 2a and 2b** |
| **Delivering efficiencies to support council finances** | **Criteria 2c** |
| **Minimising transition complexity and enabling transformation** | **Criteria 2d** |
| **Managing debt and establishing a firmer financial footing** | **Criteria 2e** |
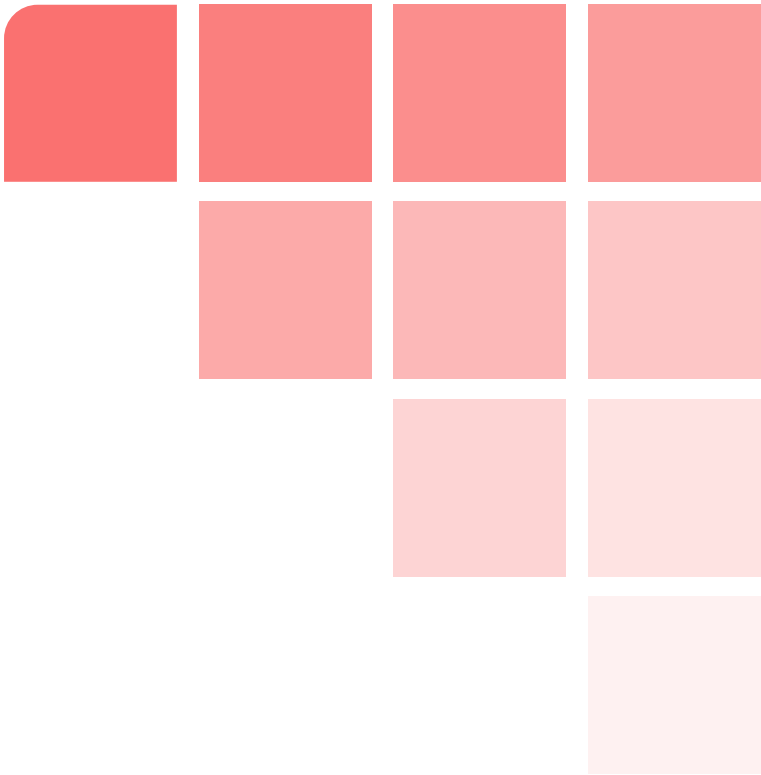
Criteria
2

# The right population size

**Criteria 2a.** As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more

**Criteria 2b.** There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal

**Populations are well balanced across the four new councils, each close to the 500,000 guideline with room to grow. This ensures they are large enough to withstand financial pressures and deliver services efficiently, but small enough to stay connected to communities and support effective place-based service delivery. It strikes the right balance between scale and local focus.**

**Balanced populations with room for growth**

The government has stated that the population size of 500,000 or more is a guiding principle, not a target. Under the four-unitary model, all four councils will have between 418k - 550k starting population.

These new authorities are expected to be in place for the long term, and it is therefore appropriate to look to long term population growth estimates. The new West Essex unitary is projected to reach 500,000 by 2029, the year after vesting day, with the North and East Essex also growing over the next decade to c.469k and c.457k respectively.

The four-unitary model provides a balanced population distribution that supports resilience and strategic capacity. Each authority is large enough to deliver services efficiently, withstand financial pressures, and invest in transformation, while remaining connected to place. This balance ensures that no single authority is overburdened, particularly in areas with higher levels of need, and that each has the scale to attract and retain specialist expertise. The model is set up to absorb future shocks and manage demand in high-pressure services such as adult social care and children's services.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model creates a very large "mega unitary" in the South, with population exceeding 700,000, and approaching 800,000 by 2047. This scale risks democratic deficit, reduced responsiveness to local needs, and future cost escalation due to complexity and concentration.

In contrast, the 5U model fragments the system, with four authorities under 400,000. These smaller units lack the scale needed to manage demand and deliver crucial services such as adult social care and children's services, absorb financial pressures, or invest in long-term transformation.

**The right size and balance to enable effective devolution**

The four-unitary model also complements the strategic role of GECCA. GECCA will provide scale for regional infrastructure, transport and economic development, allowing the new unitary authorities to focus on local delivery and place-based reform. This dual structure ensures that strategic and local priorities are both addressed without requiring excessively large unitary councils.

Criteria
2

Figure 4.6 – Population size forecasts



Population size forecasts (ONS)
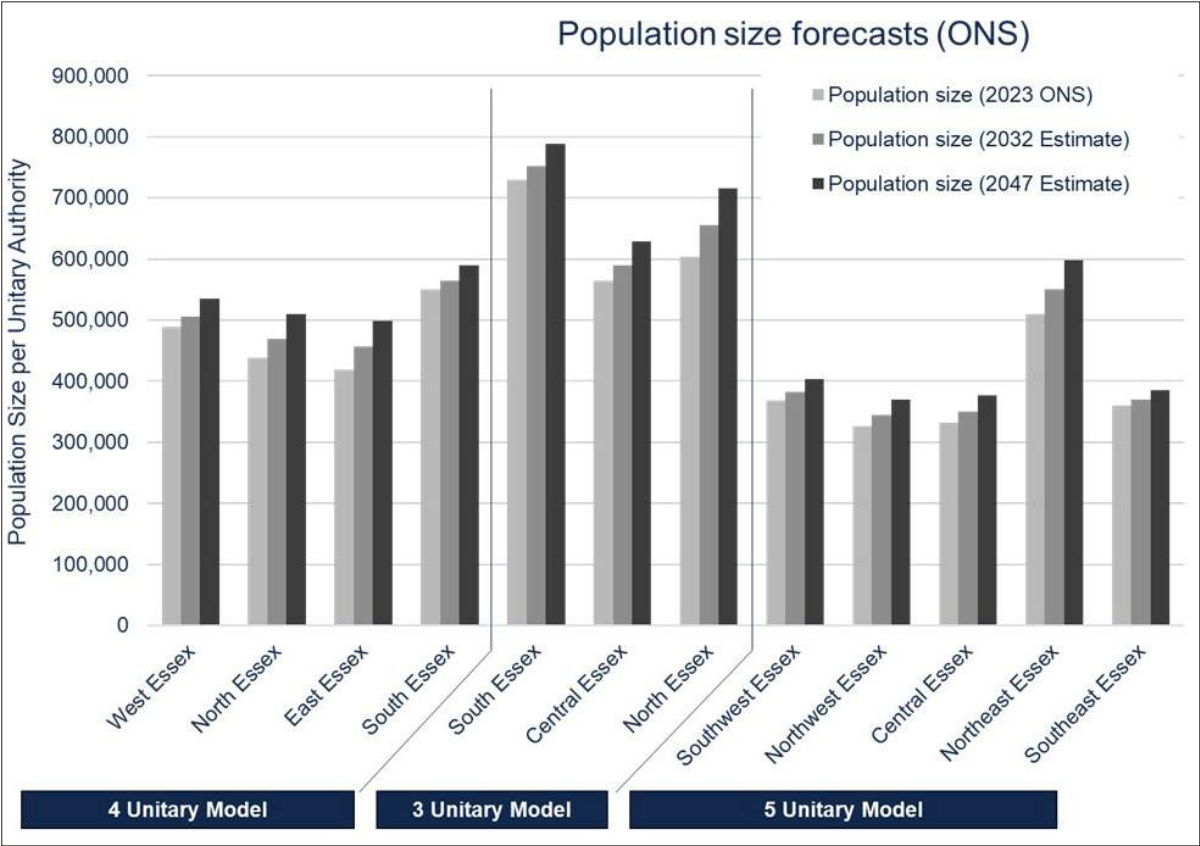
| | Unitary Authority | 2023 | 2032 | 2023-2032 Growth Rate (%) | 2047 | 2023-2047 Growth rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4 Unitary Authorities** | **West** | 488,368 | 506,096 | 3.6% | 535,615 | 9.7% |
| | **North** | 438,829 | 469,091 | 6.9% | 509,451 | 16.1% |
| | **East** | 418,532 | 456,578 | 9.1% | 498,636 | 19.1% |
| | **South** | 550,861 | 564,551 | 2.5% | 589,668 | 7.0% |
| **3 Unitary Authorities** | **South** | 729,062 | 751,987 | 3.1% | 789,031 | 8.2% |
| | **Central** | 563,772 | 589,574 | 4.6% | 628,670 | 11.5% |
| | **East** | 603,756 | 654,755 | 8.4% | 715,669 | 18.5% |
| **5 Unitary Authorities** | **Southwest** | 368,745 | 382,754 | 3.8% | 403,323 | 9.4% |
| | **Northwest** | 325,609 | 343,960 | 5.6% | 370,284 | 13.7% |
| | **Central** | 331,757 | 350,481 | 5.6% | 376,402 | 13.5% |
| | **Northeast** | 510,162 | 549,888 | 7.8% | 597,653 | 17.1% |
| | **Southeast** | 360,317 | 369,233 | 2.5% | 385,708 | 7.0% |

Criteria 2

# Delivering efficiencies to support council finances

**Criteria 2c.** Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money

**Financial modelling shows the four-unitary model will deliver recurring savings of £28.3m a year, which can be enhanced further through post-LGR transformation. It also has the lowest one-off implementation cost of the options considered, given it limits transition complexity through avoiding the combination of existing unitary authorities. This makes it the most cost-effective and financially sustainable model.**

### Calculating the financial impact of LGR: our approach

Refer to Section 5: The financial case for change for assumptions and benchmarking approach underpinning the financial model.

The approach taken utilises evidence and data as a basis for making well-informed and prudent assumptions. Analysis carried out by the County Councils Network generally assumes that efficiencies are best achieved by moving to the smallest possible number of unitary authorities. The financial case takes a similar approach to the PwC model, with estimated savings and implementation costs calculated with reference to a series of benchmarked LGR programmes and the local reality of LGR in a Greater Essex landscape consisting of twelve districts, two unitaries and one county council.

The fundamental principle that reducing the number of councils lowers the cost base of local government is valid. However, it is essential to recognise the unique landscape of authorities within Greater Essex, as well as evidence from the experience of previous unitarisations, so the answer is not so straightforward. Any proposed model must build upon the strengths of existing top-tier authorities that are already delivering high-quality services. By doing so, savings will be more sustainable, the transition can be simplified and costs reduced, minimising the risks associated with combining multiple top-tier authorities.

LGR is proven to deliver efficiency savings. Empirical studies show that all the 2009 LGR authorities met or exceeded their business case savings targets and the bulk of realised savings from previous reorganisations have been concentrated within administrative functions and improved buying power, rather than reducing the cost of frontline services[17,18].

Therefore, LGR alone should not be seen a panacea for driving savings in service delivery and any proposal that is based on reduction of unit costs of services, such as social care, would not be grounded in reality.

The proposed model would create four new unitary authorities with a stable platform from which to design and adapt their operating models in response to the priorities and characteristics of their communities. This will lead to better management of demand and financial savings will likely be available based on transformation and reform of frontline services, including from social care.

However, the realisation of any savings from further public service reform will require a whole system approach. There are a range of other factors beyond LGR that need to occur, not least the prioritisation of this work by the new administrating authorities. Therefore, our modelling takes a prudent approach by assuming no savings will be drawn from frontline service budgets.

Crucially, this approach does not obligate future authorities to deliver unrealistic savings in areas where efficiencies will not be realised as a direct result of reorganisation, but instead empowers them to make informed, sustainable decisions for the long term.

[17]  Rhys Andrews, "Vertical consolidation and financial sustainability: evidence from English local government", Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, 2015, 33, p1538
[18]  Lord (Michael) Heseltine, No Stone Unturned in pursuit of growth, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012, p.52

Criteria
2

**The results of our financial modelling**

Our financial modelling shows:

- The **four-unitary model** will have net annual savings of **£28.3m,** after one-off costs of implementation of **£80.8m,** meaning an estimated payback period of **less than 4 years.**

- A **three-unitary model,** whilst avoiding long-running disaggregation costs, introduces additional complexity and therefore implementation cost by combining two current unitary authorities (Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea).

- A **five-unitary model** will result in a very similar cost of local government delivery to the current position and therefore may never deliver a return on the significant upfront investment in implementation costs.

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Greater Essex research, more than half of respondents (52%) said that ensuring public funds are spent efficiently and prioritised was their top priority for LGR. Only 44% of Greater Essex respondents said they would support service improvements through slightly higher council tax. In the Greater Essex and Thurrock qualitative engagement, concerns about increased council tax as a result of LGR were raised regularly by residents. These findings highlight the importance of efficiencies and economies of scale in LGR plans.

Criteria
2

Figure 4.7 – Financial modelling summary of the three unitary model options

| LGR option | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Recurring revenue savings (£m)* | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Net impact after five years (£m) | Estimated payback period | Key features of each option driving level of costs and benefits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Three-unitary model | 43.4 | - | 43.4 | (93.7) | 73.5 | Within 4 years | • No recurring disaggregation costs because there are the same number of 'upper tier' authorities as currently.<br><br>• Implementation complexity and costs are highest due to need to integrate two unitaries and some County functions into a single unitary, as well as disaggregate the remainder of the County into two.<br><br>• Does not make best use of the current existing capability in the existing two unitary authorities creating an opportunity cost.<br><br>• Delivery across larger, less coherent geographies is unlikely to deliver efficiencies as effectively due to increased complexity in management.<br><br>• Timing of benefits realisation within the three-unitary model would be further delayed due to the complexity of delivery. |
| Four-unitary model | 55.0 | (26.7) | 28.3 | (80.8) | 49.5 | Within 4 years | • Some recurring disaggregation costs exist due to four unitary authorities rather than three.<br><br>• Implementation complexity and costs are still relatively high due to need to integrate and disaggregate to form four authorities, but lower than other models. |
| Five-unitary model | 52.1 | (44.4) | 7.7 | (86.7) | (51.5) | Over 10 years | • Significant recurring disaggregation costs exist due to the formation of five authorities.<br><br>• Implementation complexity and costs are high due to the number of new authorities being created. |

*Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs

Criteria 2

**Payback period**

As shown in Fig 4.8, the four-unitary model is estimated to pay back within four years, not factoring in the potential benefits from transformation.

Figure 4.8 – Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option
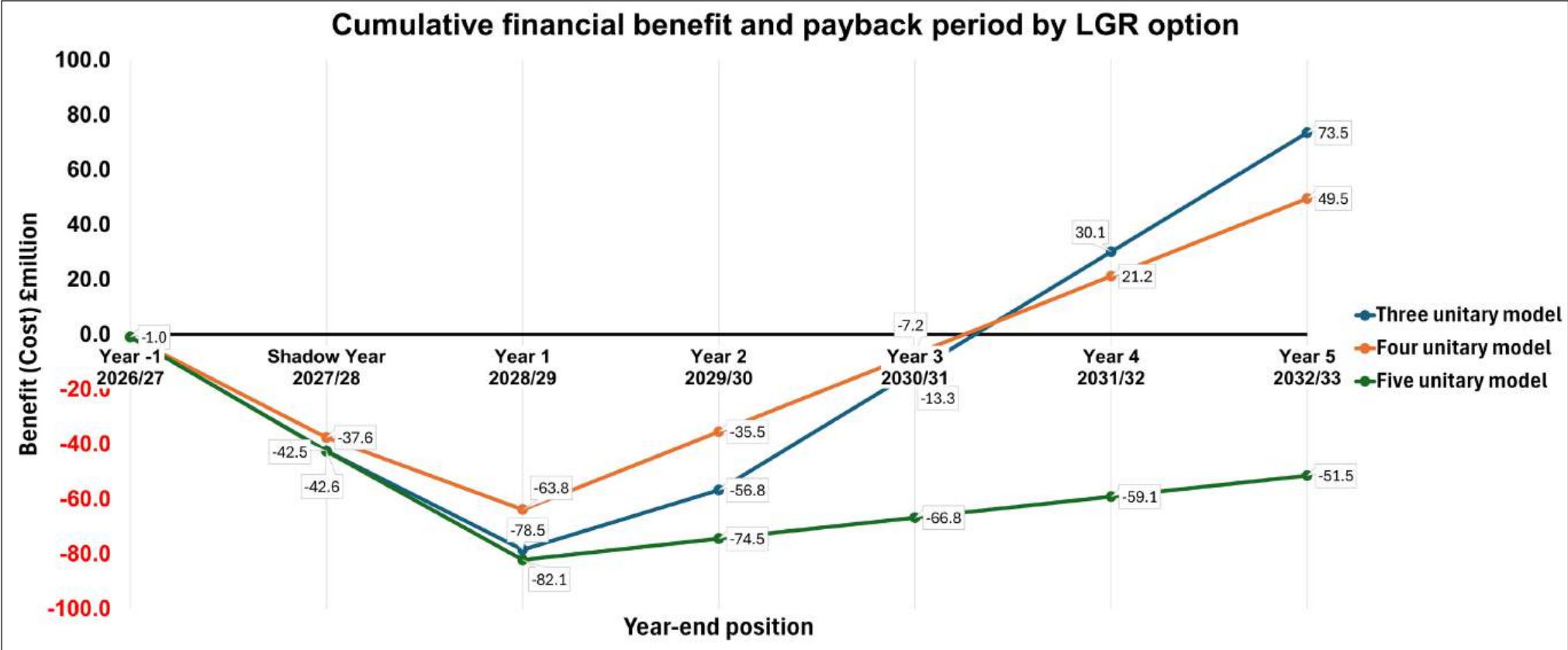


Criteria
2

**Phasing and calculation of payback period**

The payback calculation is made up of reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs, and implementation costs. Phasing of costs and savings in the model has been set out in Section 5. Percentages of costs and benefits are allocated out by each year, using experience of past LGR cases (see table above) to estimate the appropriate phasing of delivery. Savings and reorganisation costs are phased over three years. Assumptions have been applied to adjust for features of specific models where appropriate. This includes a delay to the timing of benefits realisation within the three-unitary model due to the complexity of delivery. Implementation costs are phased over two years in all models.

As shown in the table above, the four-unitary model is estimated to pay back within four years, not factoring in the potential benefits from transformation.

**Avoiding the costs of additional implementation complexity**

Greater Essex has two existing unitary authorities in addition to the County Council, reducing the overall implementation complexity and risk, as there is increased capacity and capability in the system.

Generally, implementation costs are likely to rise as the number of future unitary authorities increases. However, this assumption is complicated when additional complexity is introduced, for example where existing unitary authorities are combined. See the following sub-section for further detail on implementation complexity.

**Assumptions on financial modelling**

Assumptions within the model have deliberately focused on what we know now and have not tried to pre-empt decisions that will be taken by the new councils. However, there is a strong argument that effective long-term delivery, grounded in a sense of place and the ability to deliver meaningful public service reform, will ultimately impact demand and therefore the long-term financial health of future authorities. The four-unitary model is best placed to deliver at scale whilst remaining grounded in local identity with manageable geographies for service delivery.

The model does not attempt to reflect the potential impact of the Fair Funding Review, which is expected to significantly affect council finances. While this has been considered, it is too complex and uncertain to model accurately at this stage. Importantly, it does not alter the overall narrative or strategic case for local government reorganisation. The implications of the review will continue to be monitored and assessed as further detail emerges.

The model also does not include detailed consideration of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) pressures. Demand and cost in this area are growing and will require careful balancing. The DSG funding picture is evolving and may have implications for future financial planning, but it is also too fluid and complex to reflect meaningfully in the current modelling.

Criteria
2

# Minimising transition complexity and enabling transformation

**Criteria 2d.** Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects

**The model builds on existing strengths in Essex County, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea. This reduces transition risk, particularly around critical services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services and allows new councils to start strong. It provides a stable base for transformation from Day 1.**

Note: this section sets out some key elements of Transition and Transformation. Refer to Section 3 for further detail on how this impacts service delivery.

**Simplifying transition complexity by building on existing structures**

It has become apparent that reorganisation can damage public service performance in the short term. Councils preparing for unitary status in 2006-8 saw a significant drop in scores on the comprehensive performance assessment and there are more recent examples of impacts on service continuity (see Dorset case study below). This is hardly surprising, as councils that are spending time focussed on reorganisation have less capacity to focus on improving services.

The four-unitary model is designed to minimise transition costs and implementation risk by building on the stability of existing systems. It avoids the complexity of aggregating current unitary structures in Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea and instead builds upon existing capacity, capability and infrastructure. Change is still inevitable in the formation of four new authorities, but this approach reduces the need for wholesale restructuring and allows the new authorities to start from a position of strength and focus on transformation from Day 1.

There is a net increase of one upper-tier authority, but a reduction from 15 to 4 in the number of organisations delivering services across Greater Essex. This consolidation enables long-term efficiencies while avoiding the disruption and cost of entirely dismantling functioning systems. It also allows the new authorities to retain experienced leadership and operational teams, reducing the need for interim structures and costly consultancy support.

**Case Study: Dorset Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**

The Dorset LGR programme, and particularly the creation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council in 2019, was one of the most complex reorganisations for decades. The new BCP Council combined two former unitaries - Bournemouth and Poole - with Christchurch, previously a district of Dorset County Council, culminating in a single authority needing to unify three diverse structures, cultures and systems.

The challenges of this highly complex integration significantly hindered progress post-merger at BCP Council:

- Staff continued to identify with their former employers, delaying the emergence of a coherent 'BCP Culture'.

- For over three years, BCP lacked a single system for Children's Social Care, leading to underdeveloped quality assurance and operational inconsistencies.

- It took until 2024 to align pay structures for frontline staff, meaning qualified social workers worked on different terms for years, undermining recruitment and retention.

- It took four years post-LGR to establish a unified finance and HR system. Until April 2023, the council relied on manual processes for key functions - hampering budget monitoring, forecasting and staff management.

Criteria 2

- The council faced difficulties in establishing the true cost base for the new authority, particularly, for Children's Services. For several years post-LGR, budget setting was inaccurate, evidenced by a £7 million overspend in Children's Services in 2022. DSG deficits increased to £92m in 2024/25.

- In December 2021, Ofsted judged BCP's Children's Social Care as "Inadequate". A further statutory direction in SEND services was also imposed.

- BCP was issued with a Best Value Notice in August 2023, and in principle £20 million of financial support. The DfE also awarded several million pounds of exceptional grant funding for Children's Social Care and SEND improvement work.

New councils in Greater Essex should seek to avoid the unnecessary additional complexity and cost associated with combining existing unitary authorities. Under a potential three-unitary model the level of complexity would be greater than in Dorset.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model proposes to merge Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea into a single new unitary authority while simultaneously disaggregating services from Essex County Council. This dual process of aggregation and disaggregation introduces significant additional complexity, particularly for critical services such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The experience of BCP Council in Dorset illustrates the risks: loss of control over agency costs, unclear workforce deployment, and service delivery failures that led to financial shocks and long-term instability.

The 5U model requires the creation of three entirely new unitary authority structures and the disaggregation of county services across all areas. This represents the highest transition cost and complexity of any model under consideration.

**Accelerated opportunities for transformation**

The four-unitary model provides a strong foundation for transformation, but with the opportunity to design new organisations that are modern, efficient and fit for the future. It enables councils to build on proven capabilities in Essex County, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea, while creating space to rethink delivery models, embrace digital transformation and drive long-term efficiency. Drawing on experienced management teams and tested operating models through the process of forming new unitary authorities, particularly in Adult Social Care and Children's Services, reduces implementation risk and allows transformation to begin earlier.

Transformation must be embedded from the outset, not treated as a secondary phase. The model supports prevention-led, place-based operating models that integrate services around neighbourhoods. It enables each authority to design services around the lives people lead, rather than inheriting legacy structures. With 15 councils currently taking different approaches, the model offers a clear opportunity to consolidate best practice, simplify access to services through a single front door, invest in digital platforms and embed neighbourhood governance that supports early intervention and prevention.

**Case Study: Thurrock Council**

Thurrock Council has undergone significant transformation following government intervention. In response to financial and governance challenges, the council redesigned its operating model, reshaped services and embedded more sustainable practices. This included strengthening internal controls, improving transparency and rebuilding organisational capability.

This experience offers valuable lessons for the new unitary authorities. It shows how transformational change can be delivered while addressing legacy issues and provides a tested blueprint for managing risk and driving change from Day 1.

Criteria 2

**Continuation and acceleration of modernisation and digital transformation**

Like all local authorities, all councils across Greater Essex have taken steps to modernise and introduce digital approaches to service delivery. The ability to invest in and accelerate digital transformation is a distinct advantage of the proposed approach:

- Investment at scale: With robust resource bases and manageable transition costs, the four-unitary authorities have the scale to invest in digital infrastructure, including shared customer platforms, data analytics, artificial intelligence and cloud-based service management systems.

- Modern customer experience: Using LGR as a catalyst, residents will benefit from simplified access to services across all channels, with unified digital portals, real-time case tracking, AI assistance and self-service tools – removing the barriers created by the current patchwork of systems.

- Enabling service redesign: Digital transformation provides the foundation for new models of care and support (e.g., remote monitoring, virtual consultations, predictive analytics for early help), supporting both efficiency and improved outcomes.

**Potential for further service integration**

Integration between current two-tier services and other public services can open up further transformation opportunities, for example in supporting the elderly and vulnerable to live independently, reducing demand for expensive social care support (see Criteria 3). The four-unitary model provides a stable platform for integration of services and will enable the future administrations to take decisions based on the needs of their residents to improve service delivery. The opportunities here are infinite and as such it is not prudent to model savings based on this potential.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U configuration, despite potentially greater aggregate savings, faces much higher transition complexity and risk – particularly when merging or disaggregating existing unitaries with legacy systems.

The 5U structure, on the other hand, lacks the scale to invest meaningfully in digital modernisation, risking technological stagnation and digital exclusion.

**What our residents have told us is important**

When asked to place different aspects of new councils in order of importance, 99.3% of respondents to the 5U survey said efficient use of council tax and public funds was most important.

Criteria
2

# Managing debt and establishing a firmer financial footing

**Criteria 2e.** For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable

**Essex councils have combined external debt of £4.1billion. Thurrock's financial challenges are well known and their debt is a significant proportion of the overall position. The new West Essex authority, which includes Thurrock alongside Brentwood, Epping Forest and Harlow, has the scale and economic potential to manage this risk. West Essex would be well connected to London, with nationally significant infrastructure projects and ability to deliver at scale across housing, employment, and regeneration. This ensures all four councils are financially viable and able to invest in the future.**

**The overall financial context**

Councils across Greater Essex are facing sustained financial pressures. Rising demand in adult social care and children's services, rising costs and legacy debt placing significant strain on budgets. The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery across county and districts.

**The financial position of Thurrock**

Thurrock Council's challenging financial position is well understood by Government and across Greater Essex.

The estimated capital financing requirement (CFR) of Thurrock is £1.1billion as at 31 March 2025. £297m of this CFR relates to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), leaving £803m as non HRA CFR. However, as shown below, the Thurrock CFR, whilst significant, makes up only 27% of the total debt in Greater Essex authorities.

Figure 4.9 – debt modelling

| | Thurrock | Rest of Greater Essex (excluding Thurrock) | Greater Essex |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total external debt including HRA debt (2024/25) (£m)** | 1,100 | 3,000 | 4,100 |

**Debt analysis**

The authorities across Greater Essex have jointly commissioned CIPFA to undertake an analysis of debt under different unitary options with reference to latest available 2024/25. Headline results from this analysis are shown below.

The CIPFA analysis shows that in all models there will be two authorities expected to start with a debt in excess of £1billion. However, in the three-unitary model, the authority including Thurrock has external debt of over £2billion, prior to any debt support, which is almost half the total debt for the region.

Criteria
2

Figure 4.10 – Debt modelling of the unitary model options[20]. (Reference to CFR is Capital Financing Requirement)

| Three-unitary model | | | | Four-unitary model | | | | Five-unitary model | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unitaries | External Debt (£m) | Financing costs (CFR) (£m) | Financing costs as % NRE | Unitaries | External Debt (£m) | Financing costs (CFR) (£m) | Financing costs as % NRE | Unitaries | External Debt (£m) | Financing costs (CFR) (£m) | Financing costs as % NRE |
| South Essex* | 2,131 | 166 | 16% | West Essex* | 1,830 | 144 | 19% | Southwest Essex* | 1,653 | 133 | 24% |
| Central Essex | 1,092 | 70 | 4% | North Essex | 548 | 50 | 4% | Northwest Essex | 1,051 | 61 | 10% |
| North Essex | 901 | 70 | 4% | East Essex | 485 | 39 | 2% | Central Essex | 405 | 32 | 2% |
| | | | | South Essex | 1,261 | 73 | 8% | Northeast Essex | 537 | 47 | 2% |
| | | | | | | | | Southeast Essex | 478 | 33 | 5% |

*Includes Thurrock prior to any government debt support

### Scenario modelling for Thurrock debt support

Conversations are ongoing with Government regarding financial support that may be provided. The outcome of these conversations is unknown, and the scenario below of 50% debt support is for illustrative purposes only. Continuing the status quo will leave Thurrock Council with an unsustainable level of debt. The four-unitary model proposes a one-off long-term solution whereas other options may require further future support from Government.

Under the four-unitary model, Thurrock combines with Brentwood, Epping Forest and Harlow to form a 'West Essex' authority with external debt, excluding HRA debt, of £1,533m. If 50% of Thurrock's debt was to be written off, this would bring the West Essex external debt figure down to a level more comparable with other unitaries. This would significantly reduce financing costs for the new council, creating a more balanced and financially sustainable starting position post LGR.

Figure 4.11 – Scenario modelling of potential Thurrock non-HRA debt support

| | External debt excluding HRA (CFR) | Write off of 50% (illustrative) | External debt, excluding HRA post write-off |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Thurrock (£m)** | 803 | (401.5) | 401.5 |
| **West Essex (unitary including Thurrock) (£m)** | 1,533 | (401.5) | 1,131.5 |

Criteria 2

**Four unitaries driving long term financial sustainability**

The four-unitary model provides a credible structure to place local government in Greater Essex on a firmer financial footing, including in areas currently subject to Best Value intervention and Exceptional Financial Support. In particular, the new unitary authority including Thurrock's legacy debt, has higher financing costs, but this is offset by a strong tax base and economic capacity. Council tax bases are sufficient across all four authorities, and while reserves vary, they remain within a manageable range.

The model ensures that this challenge is contained within a single authority, allowing for targeted financial planning and transparent risk management. By contrast, other configurations would either dilute accountability or create unsustainable financial pressure across multiple new authorities. The four-unitary model enables a viable, place-based solution to legacy issues, while maintaining overall system stability

All four proposed authorities have sufficient council tax bases to support service delivery. While reserves vary, they remain within a manageable range. Financing costs are generally low, with the exception of one authority affected by legacy debt. This is addressed transparently within the proposal and does not undermine the overall financial sustainability of the model.

Criteria
2

Figure 4.12 – Key financial metrics for the four-unitary option

| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total GVA (£ million) (2022)[21]** | 15,556 | 13,108 | 8,714 | 13,440 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2022)[19]** | 31,853 | 29,870 | 20,820 | 24,398 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2025-26)[22]** | 173,324 | 169,545 | 126,477 | 186,896 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2024-25)[20]** | 2,086 | 2,051 | 2,060 | 2,109 |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[23]** | 115.0 | 76.5 | 43.8 | 67.8 |
| **Non-Earmarked Reserves (£m) (2023-24)[24]** | 44.9 | 43.4 | 32.0 | 37.7 |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m) (2023/24)[22]** | 423.2 | 350.4 | 324.6 | 454.3 |

**Linking growth and financial sustainability**

"The returns to the public purse from growing economies, building housing, preventing future needs and restoring trust are far more significant than the short-term savings that accrue from consolidating existing functions.[25]."

The four-unitary model is designed to respond to and embrace growth across Greater Essex, not simply to accommodate it. Growth is already happening through housing delivery, population increases and business investment and the role of local government is to ensure that this growth is planned for, shaped and leveraged to deliver long-term sustainability for residents, communities and local businesses.

Economic growth is not a standalone objective. It is the foundation for financial resilience. A growing economy expands the tax base, increases business rates income and supports higher levels of employment. These are the core revenue streams that underpin sustainable public services. Without a governance model that can plan for and manage growth effectively, councils risk being overwhelmed by rising demand without the fiscal tools to respond.

The four-unitary model enables this by aligning governance with functional economic areas and travel-to-work patterns. It creates the right scale to plan infrastructure, housing and services around growth corridors, while maintaining local accountability. This is critical to ensuring that growth is not just absorbed but actively used to strengthen the financial position of each authority.

[21] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[22] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[23] National non-domestic rates collected by councils in England: forecast 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK
[24] Respective district council and unitary authority Non-earmarked Reserves webpages
[25] ICC/DCN - Creating places that deliver the promise and potential of local government reform

Criteria 2

**Comparison to other proposed models**

In contrast, the 3U model risks diluting this connection. Larger geographies may struggle to reflect local economic dynamics, weakening the link between growth and reinvestment.

The 5U model, while more localised, may lack the scale to capture the full economic potential of key growth areas or to deliver the infrastructure required to support them.

Financial sustainability is not just about managing costs. It is about building the capacity to withstand future pressures, rising demand in adult social care, SEND, housing and homelessness and to invest in prevention and transformation. The four-unitary model provides the scale and coherence to deliver efficiencies, but also the flexibility to reinvest in local priorities. It enables councils to manage current pressures while preparing for the next wave of demand.

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Thurrock survey, 97% of respondents said it is important that a council is financially stable and when asked about priorities for the new councils, the top priority for respondents is 'value for money' followed closely by 'council finances'.

Criteria
2

# Criteria 3:
# High quality and sustainable public services

**This section includes:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Consolidating and improving service delivery** | **Criteria 3a** |
| **Delivering value for money through public service reform** | **Criteria 3b** |
| **Protecting crucial services** | **Criteria 3c** |
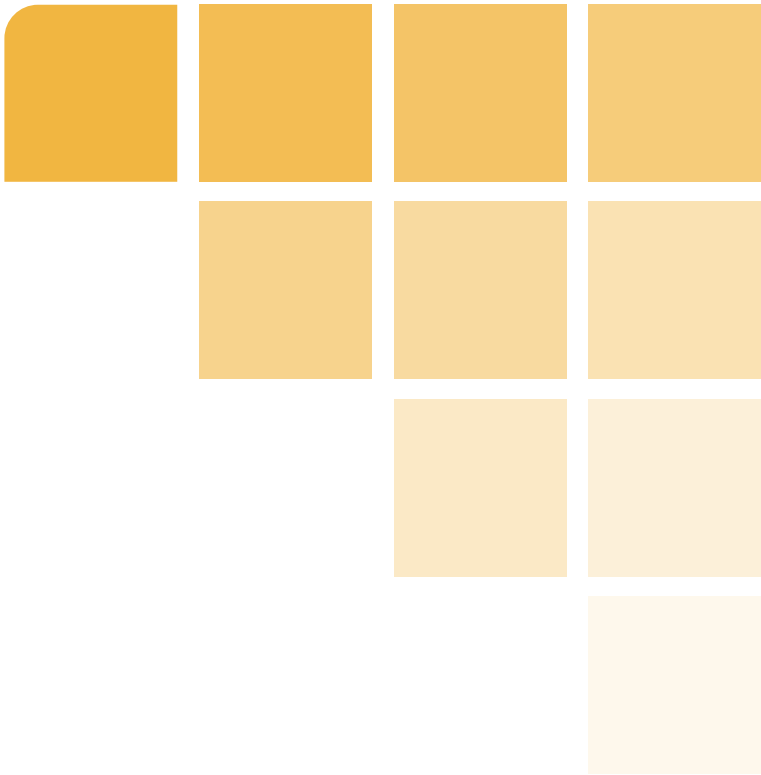
# Consolidating and improving service delivery

**Criteria 3a.** Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services

**The model supports high-quality, place-based services by aligning structures with how people access support. It avoids unnecessary fragmentation by building on the existing capacity of the current top-tier authorities Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea, while ensuring that all newly created authorities are operationally viable. It equitably distributes resources aligned to an even distribution of demand. Residents will get consistent services wherever they live.**

**Meeting the needs of the people and communities across Greater Essex**

The four-unitary model reflects the needs of people across Greater Essex. It is built around the principle that local government should be able to respond flexibly to where need and demand for services is highest, particularly in adult social care, children's services, and public health.

The four-unitary model spreads demand across new authorities, avoiding over concentrations of deprivation and complex service demand on a single council. It balances areas of higher need with areas of relative strength, creating more sustainable units that can plan and deliver services effectively.

The model is designed not only to respond to areas of high deprivation, but also to tackle the less visible but equally important service delivery challenges in more affluent communities. In places like Brentwood, high housing costs and limited availability of affordable accommodation make it difficult to recruit and retain care staff, teachers, and other frontline workers. These pressures are often overlooked in traditional deprivation metrics but have a direct impact on service resilience.

By balancing areas of higher need with areas of relative strength, the four-unitary model creates units that are better equipped to manage both ends of the spectrum. It enables strategic workforce planning across a wider geography, supports targeted investment in housing and transport to improve access to jobs, and allows for more flexible commissioning of services. This approach ensures that councils can respond to the full range of local needs, whether that's tackling entrenched deprivation in Tendring or addressing workforce shortages in Brentwood.

The four-unitary model also supports councils to pool resources, share expertise, and plan for long-term prevention, rather than reacting to crisis. This is essential for managing pressures in adult social care, children's services, and public health, and for ensuring that services remain viable across diverse communities.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model would concentrate the region's most significant areas of need (for example, by clustering Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea with Basildon and other high-pressure districts). Similarly, the smaller and less resilient 5U model, risks fragmenting capacity and leaving the smallest councils ill-equipped to absorb shocks or deliver complex services. The 4U structure deliberately avoids extreme concentrations.

Criteria
3

The figure below shows scoring against wider determinants of health across Greater Essex. The areas in the green are performing better than their peers, with red areas being notably lower performers.

Figure 4.13 – Wider determinants of health (homelessness, employment, average attainment, and violent crime)[26]



| Average Rank | Wider determinants of health |
|---|---|
| Basildon | 11.6 |
| Braintree | 7.4 |
| Brentwood | 3.2 |
| Castle Point | 8.2 |
| Chelmsford | 3.6 |
| Colchester | 7 |
| Epping Forest | 5.2 |
| Harlow | 12.2 |
| Maldon | 6.2 |
| Rochford | 4.6 |
| Tendring | 12.4 |
| Uttlesford | 3.6 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 8.8 |
| Thurrock | 11 |

The table below shows scoring against a range of public health metrics, including the same wider determinants of health metric shown in the previous figure. Lower scores are positive and show stronger performance against each metric.

The chart clearly shows a strong balance across the four-unitary areas, with the only outlier being North Essex which is an outlier in the positive direction. The worst performing four areas, Tendring, Harlow, Basildon, and Thurrock are well distributed into three separate unitary areas. Thurrock and Harlow are within the same unitary; however, Harlow is much smaller in size than any of the other low performing areas.

Figure 4.14 – Public health metrics across the four-unitary model

| Metric | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wider determinants** | 7.90 | 4.87 | 8.53 | 8.30 |

**Comparison to other proposed models**

In the 5U model, the Southwest region has a wider determinants of health score of 11.30 due to the pairing of Thurrock and Basildon, each with significant deprivation and inequality issues. The 3U model also scores poorly in the South region with 8.84 due to the grouping of Thurrock, Basildon, Castle Point, and Southend-on-Sea. These areas are only counteracted by the inclusion of Rochford who score strongly.

26  Life expectancy for local areas of Great Britain - Office for National Statistics

**Four balanced unitaries with the ability to meet local needs**

|  | Areas of relatively higher need | Areas of relatively lower need |
|---|---|---|
| **West Essex** | **Thurrock** has some of the highest levels of need in Greater Essex. It records below-average healthy life expectancy, elevated rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and significant levels of child poverty and digital exclusion. This is reflected in its higher scores for child health (7.63), inequalities (7.50), and wider determinants of health (7.90). | **Brentwood** scores well across most indicators, with a higher proportion of residents in good health, lower unemployment, and stronger educational outcomes. |
| **North Essex** | **Braintree** has a mixed socio-economic profile, with pockets of deprivation, lower educational attainment, and higher need in areas such as child health and wider determinants. | **Chelmsford,** one of the least deprived areas in Essex, contributes strong outcomes in health, education, and employment. |
| **East Essex** | **Tendring** has some of the highest deprivation levels in Essex, including the lowest male life expectancy and high rates of long-term illness. This is reflected in East Essex's high scores for behavioural risk (8.20) and inequalities (8.11). | **Colchester** which is growing rapidly, has stronger health outcomes and a more diversified economy. |
| **South Essex** | **Southend-on-Sea** faces challenges around health inequalities, housing need, and concentrated deprivation in urban wards. | **Rochford** has lower levels of deprivation, higher life expectancy, and a more stable housing market. |

**Balanced and equitable funding and expenditure**

Grounded in the principle of financial resilience and fairness, the four-unitary model, provides more uniform distribution of tax base, business rates, GVA, and service delivery costs, supporting equitable access to resources and minimising the risk of fiscal disadvantages by any one authority.

The model's geographies ensure that expenditure on statutory and discretionary services can be planned on a fair and sustainable basis. Disaggregation of budgets and reallocation of grant funding becomes simpler, avoiding previous examples of poor reallocation of resources, such as in the Berkshire reorganisation, and the creation of Plymouth and Torbay Councils. Grant funding, such as Public Health funding, can more easily be allocated according to need.

Predicted spending on education has not been modelled in detail in this proposal. While DSG allocations are expected to shift in response to growing demand and cost pressures, the current DSG picture is too fluid to reflect accurately. This will need to be kept under review as the funding landscape evolves.

Criteria
3

Figure 4.15 – Total expenditure on Social Care

| Total Expenditure (based on 2023/24 spending)[27] | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education (£m) | 215,029 | 214,577 | 204,652 | 258,979 |
| Children's Social Care (£m) | 100,714 | 68,523 | 65,354 | 105,799 |
| Adult Social Care (£m) | 195,124 | 183,471 | 174,985 | 220,643 |

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model creates pronounced inequalities in size and resources, with one unitary (covering South Essex) exceeding 700,000 residents and carrying a disproportionate share of the region's debt and service demand. As a result, disaggregation of budgets and grant funding on the basis of need would create poor partners, and postcode lotteries for residents.

The 5U model would fragment the region into five smaller units (significantly under the Government's recommended 500,000 threshold), sacrifices economies of scale and exposes each authority to greater financial instability, risking higher ongoing costs and the need for significant government support to remain viable.

Criteria 3

# Delivering value for money through public service reform

**Criteria 3b.** Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money

**By combining scale with local knowledge, the model enables meaningful public service reform across Greater Essex. By drawing on the strengths of existing service delivery arrangements across Greater Essex and aligning with partner agencies, a four-unitary model is best placed to unlock devolution potential, greater efficiency, higher service standards, and better value for money. It provides a balance of sufficient scale to invest in digital transformation and commissioning reform, with strong localism that supports the joined-up delivery of a step-change in prevention and early-intervention. This creates the right conditions for long-term improvement and better value for money.**

### Removing duplication and levelling up performance

A central tenet of LGR is the removal of duplication across a fragmented system, but the four-unitary model does so with a purposeful focus on not "levelling down" to the lowest common denominator, instead driving all services upwards to the highest standards. The model enables:

- **Streamlined delivery:** Services previously split between county and district tiers (such as housing, social care, waste management, and public health) can be integrated, eliminating overlaps in management, procurement, and frontline provision.

- **Consistent standards and efficient deployment of resources:** The proposed model provides the ideal scale for benchmarking, sharing best practice and deployment of resources based on intelligence, ensuring that exceptional performance (e.g., in children's services or digital access) becomes the baseline everywhere, rather than the preserve of a few localities.

- **Greater purchasing power and economies of scale:** By levelling up authority size and enhancing opportunities for joint commissioning, all authorities will have the ability to commission and procure services on an optimum level. For example, some contracts in the smaller top-tier authorities and district councils do not attract suppliers due to the contract size. This will result in a better offering (e.g. in areas such as child mental health services (CAMHS)) as well as efficiencies from economies of scale.

- **Service improvement and unified customer experience:** Residents will enjoy streamlined, consistent access to services via single digital portals, AI-assisted support, and self-service options. Early findings from Thurrock's use of AI show measurable value and efficiency gains which can be replicated across the region.

- **Simplified processes:** The move to a unified CRM system and consolidated customer contact platforms reduces complexity, improves response times, and enables a single view of the customer – eliminating the need for agents to navigate multiple systems.

- **Equitable access:** Digital inclusion efforts – tailored to local contexts – will bridge gaps in broadband, confidence, and accessibility. Rural communities and those with low digital skills will benefit from targeted support and robust outreach.

- **Data-driven decision making:** Integrated digital platforms will allow councils to use real-time feedback and analytics, driving evidence-based improvements and more responsive service design.

- **Innovation and modernisation:** The four-unitary model supports investment in advanced technologies – AI for call handling, cloud-based systems, automated workflows – accelerating digital transformation and future-proofing services.

- **Enhanced staff capability:** Rationalised systems and targeted digital skills training empower staff to operate efficiently, focus on complex needs, and innovate in partnership with residents.

Criteria
3

**Comparison to other proposed models**

Unlike the 5U model, which risks fragmentation and inconsistent performance due to reduced scale, or the 3U model, which may create overly large and impersonal authorities that dilute local responsiveness, the 4U model achieves a balanced configuration. It is large enough to leverage economies of scale while maintaining footprints that communities recognise and trust.

**Case Study: Somerset Council's Local Government Reorganisation and Financial Crisis**

Somerset Council was created in April 2023 through the merger of Somerset County Council and four district councils, forming a single unitary authority. The reorganisation aimed to simplify governance and deliver long-term savings. However, the council inherited complex systems, rising service demands, and significant financial pressures. The council launched a transformation programme to modernise operations and achieve financial sustainability. Phase 1 involved workforce reductions, saving £34 million. However, Phase 2, focused on deeper structural reforms, was delayed due to operational complexity and lack of a unified framework.

Failure to deliver LGR-related savings and deal with rising demands for services. Despite the promise of savings from LGR, Somerset Council struggled to realise them or deal with rising demands, particularly in social care. By early 2025, the council faced a £52.2 million budget gap for the upcoming financial year, even after identifying £48 million in savings. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy projected a cumulative deficit of £190 million by 2029/30. To avoid issuing a Section 114 notice the council requested Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). The Government granted a Capitalisation Direction of £43 million, allowing Somerset to borrow or sell assets to fund day-to-day operations. Somerset Council was permitted to raise council tax by 7.49%, exceeding the usual 4.99% cap. This increase generated approximately £9.2 million in revenue, helping to reduce the budget gap. For residents in band D properties, this meant an annual increase of £129.43.

**Somerset's experience highlights the risks of delayed transformation and insufficient structural planning in single-unitary reorganisations. In contrast, the four-unitary model enables earlier transformation by building on existing upper-tier structures, reducing operational complexity and avoiding the disruption Somerset faced. It also allows for distributed financial risk and more targeted investment, helping to avoid the scale of financial crisis Somerset encountered.**

Criteria
3

**Prevention and early intervention delivered through stronger public sector partnerships**

The four-unitary model is intended to deliver prevention and early intervention by fostering stronger, locality-focused partnerships with key strategic organisations across Essex and the wider region - such as the NHS, Police, Fire and Rescue, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), schools, and the voluntary sector.

By reducing the current 15 councils to four strategic unitaries, the model aims to transform engagement, joint working, and the sharing of data and intelligence. Integrated collaboration across health, education, and social care will support more targeted interventions and help deliver national reforms, including the Government's 10 Year Health Plan and the Families First Partnership Programme.

**Key benefits of the four-unitary model:**

- Each unitary has the scale to lead place-based partnerships with the NHS, Police, schools, and voluntary sector, co-designing services around real-life communities and shared challenges.

- Direct alignment to the Policing boundaries enabling seamless collaboration.

- Four equal partners in the Greater Essex ICB facilitating simplified collaboration with health services.

- Supports joint commissioning and co-located neighbourhood teams (e.g. social care, public health, mental health), enabling wraparound care and holistic responses to complex needs.

- Enables strategic data sharing and intelligence, supporting targeted interventions in areas such as rough sleeping, school absenteeism and health inequalities.

- Enables delivery of the Domestic Abuse Strategy for Greater Essex, with four balanced unitaries aligned to policing boundaries able to strengthen partnership working and enhance data sharing to reduce offending.

- Strengthens market development for social care, housing and community support, with shared procurement capacity and consistent engagement with providers.

- Enhances the voice of authorities in cross-boundary partnerships, such as West Essex's increased influence with the Metropolitan Police on child protection and safeguarding.

Figure 4.16 – Policing boundaries[28]



**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model's larger scale complicates partnership working, particularly at the neighbourhood level, and it may lose the granularity needed for effective place-based partnership. The 5U model lacks the scale and capacity to be a strategic partner for major regional initiatives and engage strategically across all partnership platforms. They are both shortcomings the 4U model overcomes.

Criteria
3

**A solid platform for sustainable transformation**

The four-unitary model stands apart as the optimal route for public service reform across Greater Essex. It uniquely combines the advantages of scale, local connection, and operational coherence – removing duplication, levelling up services to the highest standards, and enabling modern, digitally enabled delivery. By aligning with public sector partners and embedding a culture of prevention and early intervention, it creates the right conditions for both immediate improvement and long-term transformation.

Building on the strong foundations already present within Greater Essex, the four-unitary model offers a stable, resilient, and opportunity-rich platform for the future – delivering better value for money, harnessing the power of partnership, and placing the needs and aspirations of residents at the heart of change.

**What partners have told us is important**

Businesses and service partners value existing relationships and see opportunities to streamline services and reduce duplication. The four-unitary model simplifies engagement by consolidating multiple councils into a single point of contact, supporting strategic planning and service co-design.

Criteria
3

# Protecting crucial services

**Criteria 3c.** Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety

**Ensuring the delivery of high-quality, sustainable services – particularly in areas such as adult social care, children's services, SEND, homelessness, and wider public safety – stands at the heart of the proposed four-unitary model for Greater Essex. All four authorities face similar demographic pressures, including ageing populations and rising demand for specialist services. Homelessness rates are relatively balanced, supporting consistent and coordinated responses. Each authority can deliver services at a manageable scale, while maintaining the flexibility to tailor provision to local needs. The four-unitary model provides "service continuity through simplicity" offering a robust platform for safeguarding the most vital services while enabling transformation and innovation that makes services fit for future demand and pressures.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Social Care | ✔ | With four equal authorities that balance strategic scale with local insight and delivery, the 4U model creates a framework for partnership with health to enable effective integrated and preventative services. |
| Children's Services | ✔ | The four-unitary model builds on the strengths of three top-tier authorities delivering high quality services to ensure a smooth transition, mitigating the risks that led to the failure of Children's Services in past unitarisations. |
| SEND | ✔ | The 4U model proposes four financially stable authorities that offer the best answer to the debt challenge and rising DSG deficits. |
| Homelessness | ✔ | Geographies are planned to ensure balanced need, distribution of housing and infrastructure supporting joined-up place-shaping and regional coordination. |
| Public Safety | ✔ | Crime is falling in Greater Essex. The model aligns boundaries with the Police which will create opportunities to further enhance public safety. |
| Wider Public Services | ✔ | The 4U model is best placed to tackle issues with recruitment and retention. Geographies aligned with travel patterns facilitate service delivery. |

**Bigger is not always better**

Evidence from local government across England demonstrates that larger unitary authorities do not reliably deliver better outcomes in critical services. The well-publicised problems of Birmingham City Council (the country's largest local authority) demonstrate that. In fact, smaller or mid-sized unitaries consistently achieve "outstanding" ratings for services such as children's social care and perform equally well on adult social care.[29]  Excellence is often rooted in proximity to communities, local responsiveness, and the ability to tailor services to diverse needs, rather than in the pursuit of ever-larger authorities.

**Minimising risk of disruption to critical services**

Failures of critical local government services are not only highly damaging and risk the safety of the most vulnerable residents, but they can also cause unintended financial costs across the system. Previous local government reorganisations have been noted to be the cause of disruption in crucial services in the new unitaries formed from Cheshire County Council and at BCP Council:

● **Difficulties in implementing shared finance and HR systems across multiple authorities.** These crucial corporate systems enable services to forecast, monitor budgets, and manage staff. This proves to lead to spiralling costs through inefficient use of agency staff and poorly managed sickness.

● **Complexity of merging multiple top tier authorities** leading to lack of single client index system for social care and education services. Without a functioning single view of care clients there are enhanced safeguarding risks, problems in quality assurance, and inability to intervene early and prevent high cost, high complexity care placements.

29 DCN-Bigger-is-not-better-Report.pdf

Criteria
3

- **Equal pay problems.** Difficulties in harmonising terms and conditions in over-heated labour markets creates problems in recruiting and retaining staff, leading to a loss of skills and increased use of agency staff at increased cost.

By building on the existing, stable capacity of top tier authorities (Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea's unitary authorities and Essex County Council), the four-unitary model minimises disruptive change. It avoids some of the complexities of merging or disaggregating large existing structures, systems and processes, as would be required by the three-unitary model. Instead, it preserves continuity in the delivery of crucial services like adult social care, children's services, and SEND, ensuring uninterrupted support for the most vulnerable. At the same time, it prevents the dilution of expertise and operational resilience that would threaten the smallest units in a five-unitary structure.

**Strong leadership and governance**

The four-unitary approach enables each authority to operate at a scale that supports strategic oversight and operational agility. With a manageable number of councillors each unitary can ensure strong leadership, focused Cabinet structures, and clear accountability. Skilled leadership teams in children's, adults and public health services within each of the top tier authorities would be retained. This supports rapid decision-making, effective performance management, continuity of service leadership, and greater accessibility for residents and partners.

In contrast, the three-unitary model risks leadership being remote from local communities and disruption from the merging of two top-tier authorities. While the five-unitary model may struggle to attract and retain senior leadership, skilled Directors of Adults, Children's or Public Health Service are a rare commodity.

**Fit for the Future: Reform and Resilience**

The four-unitary model is designed not only to protect the current quality of critical services, but to create a platform for ongoing transformation and improvement. It enables collaborative commissioning, place-based partnerships, and resource pooling – critical for innovations such as digital transformation, integrated health and care, and neighbourhood delivery. The model is future-ready, enabling authorities to adapt to demographic change, rising demand, and the evolving expectations of residents. It avoids the implementation risk, governance confusion, and capacity dilution that could hinder transformational change in both the larger and smaller models.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model creates a 'mega-unitary' in the south, bringing together services from three top-tier services. Experience elsewhere suggests this presents a high-risk to crucial services due to complex implementation, risking failures in adult social care, children's services and SEND services that damage outcomes for vulnerable service users, as well as creating high costs. This could also lead to 'delivery deserts' in the north and centre of the county due to inequitable resources and challenges in recruitment and retention of staff.

A 5U model does not have the scale to integrate services and sufficiently address future demand pressures.

Criteria
3

**Impacts on crucial services**

Figure 4.17 – Children's and Adults Social Care[30]

| Metrics | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total SEN support** | 9,019 | 7,161 | 7,503 | 10,387 |
| **Total EHCP support** | 3,452 | 2,398 | 2,145 | 3,696 |
| **Number of children in care** | 426 | 187 | 347 | 532 |
| **Number of children with a CP Plan** | 406 | 459 | 462 | 390 |
| **Number of children with CiN Plan** | 523 | 178 | 211 | 352 |
| **18 – 64 Accessing long-term care** | 1,625 | 1,582 | 2,105 | 2,133 |
| **65+ Accessing long-term care** | 3,109 | 2,565 | 2,881 | 3,759 |

The four-unitary model is grounded in service delivery data, providing a clear and balanced view of demand across the proposed authorities. Our approach has specifically used total numbers rather than rates per population, to ensure true visibility of overall demand pressure points, avoiding the masking effect that averages can create.

The distribution of demand across the proposed authorities is broadly even, with no single unitary disproportionately burdened across all metrics. For example, while South Essex shows higher demand in SEN and adult social care, West Essex has elevated levels in EHCPs and children in care, and East Essex has the highest number of child protection plans. This balance supports a fairer allocation of resources and enables each authority to plan and deliver services at a manageable scale.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

3U concentrates high-pressure districts such as Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and Basildon into one authority, which could reduce responsiveness and increase long-term costs.

5U may struggle to sustain complex services or respond to demand shocks given concentrations of need such as in the Northeast region which has both the highest SEND support levels and adults 18-64 accessing long-term support.

The preferred four-unitary model deliberately avoids the pitfalls of over-centralisation seen in some 3U configurations and the fragmentation risks inherent in the 5U model.

Criteria 3

| Area | Challenges for crucial services | Addressing needs through the proposed model |
|---|---|---|
| **Demand** | **Growing demand from changing demographics, health challenges and inequalities**<br><br>• As of 2023, the region's population is both growing and ageing, with three of the four proposed unitary areas having 20% or more of their residents over the age of 65, and East Essex reaching 23% – well above the national average.<br><br>• Locally, public health indicators reveal a disproportionate burden of chronic conditions – particularly cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses. At both a local and national level, demand for SEND services are increasing and facing unprecedented pressures.<br><br>• Concentrated deprivation in areas such as Thurrock, Tendring, Basildon, Southend, and Harlow, and high levels of homelessness in South Essex. | **Balance of strategic scale with local insight and delivery**<br><br>• This model would be large enough to absorb cost shocks and enable strategic commissioning, while remain close enough to communities to maintain local insight and respond to community needs.<br><br>• These community-focused councils allow for preventative service models, closer engagement with local providers, and rapid responses to emerging needs.<br><br>• Residents will experience more consistent access to high-quality services, regardless of where they live, with each authority containing a major hospital and a broad range of education providers, ensuring local points of access and reducing out-of-area placements. |
| **Integration** | **Fragmented delivery, complex systems and market failure**<br><br>• Financial constraints and market fragility, coupled with fragmented commissioning in care services. The misalignment and imbalance in purchasing power between Essex County Council and existing unitary authorities, hinder strategic planning and service delivery.<br><br>• The current structure struggles to respond flexibly to nuances, and without transformation, the sustainability and quality of services, particularly adult social care services in Essex are at risk.<br><br>• Slow decision-making, inconsistent planning between services (e.g. transport and housing), and the vulnerability to climate risks like flooding and heat stress. The duplication, inefficiencies and limited strategic coordination undermines coherent spatial strategies, slows infrastructure investment, and hinders the ability to respond collectively to economic shocks, social challenges, and environmental threats.<br><br>• There are inconsistencies in eligibility criteria, thresholds, and outcomes, in addition to disparity of academisation. This leads to the persistence of postcode lotteries in access to services, especially education, inclusion programmes, and SEND support. | **Integration of services**<br><br>• This model supports integrated services, e.g. health and social care, through stronger place-based partnerships and joint commissioning arrangements.<br><br>• It encourages collaboration and breaking down silos across housing, health, and care, allowing for tailored solutions which involve partners in health and voluntary sectors.<br><br>• Deprivation and challenges are balanced across the four councils which prevents overburdening any single authority and spreads risk more evenly.<br><br>• By aggregating resources, the model builds resilience to demand spikes.<br><br>• This model aligns with existing partner geographies, such as the police, and will create the right balance of challenges and scale to work with partners to tackle challenges. That can create the opportunity for place-based neighbourhood teams and joint commissioning to strengthen collaboration across health, housing, and social care, improving outcomes and user experience. The configuration supports regional alignment with NHS, policing, and voluntary sector partners, essential for holistic support to vulnerable service users. |

| Area | Challenges for crucial services | Addressing needs through the proposed model |
|---|---|---|
| **Integration (continued)** | • A number of different organisations providing a variety of services across different footprints, including within councils such as trading standards and other regulatory services. This is especially true with regards to homelessness, which can be one of many areas residents require support with, which is made harder by the fragmented system.<br><br>• There are currently 14 waste collection authorities and 3 disposal authorities. This legacy structure results in duplication, inefficiency, inconsistent service standards, and strategic disconnection between planning and delivery. | • Residents across all four authorities can expect consistently high-quality services, for example waste, recycling, and green services, designed to meet both local priorities and national mandates. |
| **Prevention** | **Focus on core provision at the expense of prevention**<br>• Preventative spending has dropped sharply. The July 2025 Association of Directors of Adult Social Services' member survey showed only 5.6% is now spent on prevention, down from 8.4% in 2019-20. Nearly three quarters of directors doubt they can meet legal prevention and wellbeing duties.<br><br>• Despite ECC, Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea all having highly rated Children's services (Outstanding, Outstanding and Good, respectively), the wider environment for services represents the pressures seen nationally, driving an urgent need for transformational change. | **Sufficient scale bringing purchasing power, strong leadership and consistent practice**<br>• Sufficient scale improves commissioning flexibility and the ability to invest in early help, innovation and prevention.<br><br>• Existing strengths of each of the three top-tier authorities are preserved and built upon, while avoiding the key risks in implementation experienced elsewhere. For example, this structure allows for consistent, high-quality social work practice, embedded local knowledge, while local teams develop targeted responses to the specific needs of their communities.<br><br>• A more consistent use of local health data will enable preventative approaches and personalised care delivery, further enhancing service effectiveness. |
| **Workforce** | **Recruitment and retention**<br>• Workforce instability and challenges to recruit in both rural and affluent areas puts tremendous pressure on services, particularly in care.<br><br>• Acute shortages of specialists, e.g. social carers and educational psychologists, results in service users experiencing delays in receiving the right level of care they need. | **Workforce planning**<br>• Strategic workforce planning, supported by partnerships with education providers and flexible employment contracts, will address recruitment challenges and support sustainable staffing.<br><br>• Tailored workforce strategies on a wider scale increase recruitment and retention, particularly in rural and high-cost areas. |

Criteria
3

| Area | Challenges for crucial services | Addressing needs through the proposed model |
|---|---|---|
| **Transport** | **Transport pressures**<br>● Over 5,000 miles of roads and 58 rail stations connect communities. Car dependency is high (84% of households own at least one vehicle) and public transport is unevenly distributed, leaving rural and coastal areas with "public transport deserts" and persistent congestion along strategic corridors such as the A12, A13, A120, and A127. | **Coherent governance and coordination**<br>● Aligning transport management to functional economic areas and travel-to-work patterns, each unitary authority gains the scale and coherence to plan, commission, and deliver transport services strategically opening up improvements in service provision.<br>● It enables consistent standards in infrastructure, housing, and skills delivery, as well as more effective engagement with national government, investors, and regional partners. |

**Continuity through simplicity is a guiding principle of the proposed model**

By striking the optimal balance between scale and localism, this structure protects and strengthens the delivery of Greater Essex's most vital services, guards against disruption, and creates the conditions for long-term public service reform. In a landscape where "bigger is not always better"[31], and where fragmentation breeds risk, the four-unitary model offers a stable, resilient, and future-ready platform for public service excellence.

Across all services, the case for change is clear. The current fragmented system cannot reliably meet the needs of Greater Essex's residents, respond to local pressures, or deliver efficiency, equity, and innovation. The proposed four-unitary model offers a strategic solution – balancing scale with local responsiveness, enabling integrated service delivery, unlocking investment, and laying the foundation for sustainable, high-performing public services throughout Greater Essex.

**Summary Benefits**

● Local responsiveness and community engagement: Smaller, community-focused units enable tailored, preventative service models and closer engagement with local needs and voices.

● Strategic capacity and integration: Larger scale supports strategic commissioning, investment, and integration across health, social care, housing, and digital services.

● Consistency and equity: Elimination of postcode lotteries ensures all residents access consistently high-quality services, regardless of location.

● Operational efficiency and value for money: Streamlined governance, unified systems, and contract consolidation unlock economies of scale and reduce duplication.

● Resilience and risk management: Aggregating resources, infrastructure, and contract risk mitigates shocks, ensures legal compliance, and supports long-term sustainability.

● Workforce sustainability and development: More strategic workforce planning, education partnerships, and flexible staffing address recruitment and retention challenges.

● Innovation and digital transformation: Larger, coherent authorities can invest in advanced technologies, data-driven decision making, and modernised service delivery.

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Greater Essex research, **85%** said they would agree with LGR if it led to better services, and **42%** of respondents rated improved quality of public services as the main opportunity of LGR for the wider community. **65%** of respondents to the 5U research placed high quality services that work well as their top priority for their new council.

31  DCN-Bigger-is-not-better-Report.pdf

Criteria
3

# Criteria 4:
# Working together to understand and meet local needs

**This section includes:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Engaging to better understand priorities and needs across Greater Essex** | **Criteria 4a and 4c** |
| **Four authorities grounded in local identity, culture, and history** | **Criteria 4b** |
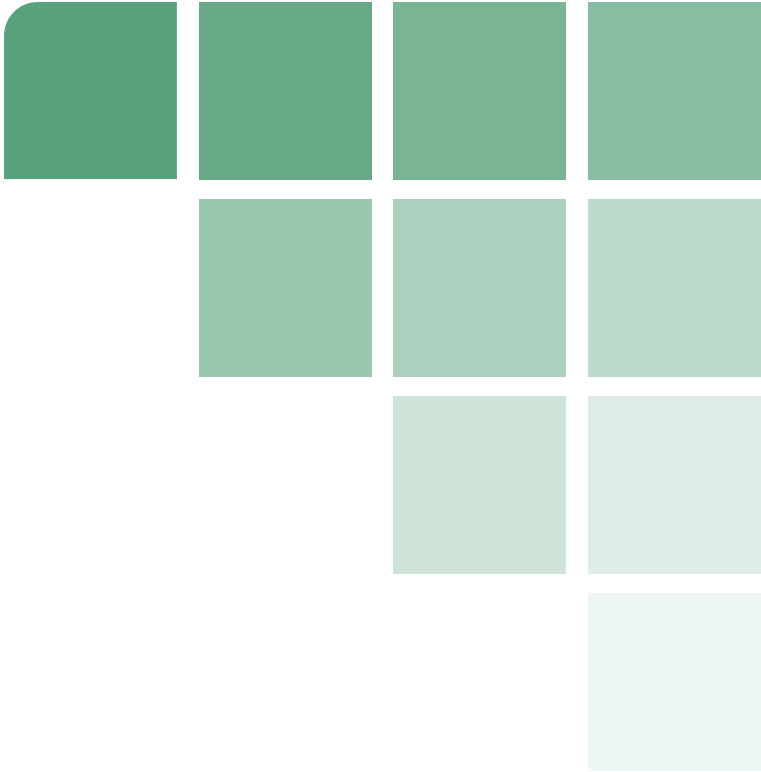
Criteria 4

# Engaging to better understand priorities and needs across Greater Essex

**Criteria 4a.** It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal

**Criteria 4c.** Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed

**Councils across Greater Essex engaged widely with residents, partners and businesses including surveys, focus groups and consultation exercises. People want better services, financial stability and a stronger local voice. The four-unitary model is designed to deliver on these priorities by balancing scale with proximity to communities.**

## Co-ordinated engagement across Greater Essex

Councils across Greater Essex undertook coordinated engagement to understand the priorities, concerns and expectations of residents, businesses and partners. This included Essex-wide research, local engagement activity, and targeted consultation with stakeholders. Over **10,000** responses were received across multiple strands of engagement.

A county-wide survey of **1,477** residents was jointly commissioned across Greater Essex, alongside focus groups and a partner survey. The councils backing the five-unitary model also ran their own survey of **7,391** residents across Essex, more than half of whom were from Basildon, Southend and Chelmsford.

Thurrock Council also ran its own engagement programme, including resident surveys, public meetings and drop-in sessions at local events and libraries. Almost all the respondents were from Thurrock. Businesses and service partners across Essex were invited to share views on current performance and future priorities.

## Key themes from the research

### 1)  Resilient and efficient finances

The most dominant and consistent theme across all the research was the importance of ensuring council finances are resilient and offer value for money.

- In the Greater Essex research, more than half of respondents **(52%)** said that ensuring public funds are spent efficiently and prioritised was their top priority for LGR.

- When asked to place different aspects of new councils in order of importance, **99.3%** of respondents to the 5U survey said efficient use of council tax and public funds was most important.

- In the Thurrock survey, **97%** of respondents said it is important that a council is financially stable, and when asked about priorities for the new councils, the top priority for respondents is 'value for money' followed closely by 'council finances'.

> See Section 4: Criteria 2 for further detail on how the four-unitary model supports resilient and efficient finances.

### 2)  Local identity matters

In all the surveys, the majority of respondents (**86%** in Thurrock, **74%** across Greater Essex, **63%** in the 5U survey) said they identified most strongly with their local village, town or city, rather than their borough or county. In the 5U survey, **64%** said maintaining local identity, cultural, and historic importance was a priority for council services.

In the Thurrock survey, residents were asked where they travelled to most often to work or socialise. **52%** said London, **35%** said Basildon, **33%** said Southend and **29%** said Brentwood. The issue of proximity to London was raised many times throughout the engagement, with residents making it clear they enjoy living near London but do not want to become part of it, as they feel their identity is distinct living in Essex.

> See Section 4: Criteria 1 for further detail on how the four-unitary model defines functional and coherent geographies and later in this section for further detail on how the four-unitary model maintains local identity.

Criteria
4

**3)  Service quality is top priority for LGR**

Residents think that delivering high quality services should be the top priority for new councils created through LGR. **65%** of respondents to the 5U research placed high quality services that work well as their top priority for their new council. In the Greater Essex research, **85%** said they would agree with LGR if it led to better services, and **42%** of respondents rated improved quality of public services as the main opportunity of LGR for the wider community. In the Thurrock research, ambitions for improved services were voiced by many respondents, from hopes for more investment in local community services, through to a desire to see improvements in areas like public transport.

See Section 4: Criteria 3 for further detail on how the four-unitary model supports high quality and sustainable service delivery.

**Other relevant findings**

**Limited willingness to pay more:** Only **44%** of Greater Essex respondents said they would support service improvements through slightly higher council tax. In the Greater Essex and Thurrock qualitative engagement, concerns about increased council tax as a result of LGR were raised regularly by residents. These findings highlight the importance of efficiencies and economies of scale in LGR plans.

**Concern about loss of local services:** In the Greater Essex research, services not being delivered at a local level was seen as the greatest risk, raised by 38% of respondents. Similarly, of those not supportive of the 5U proposals, the most frequently expressed concern was about less local representation. Thurrock residents also raised this issue, questioning whether they would still have a say in decisions made by larger councils.

**The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is a key partner for LGR:** Regular meetings with Thurrock CVS, and wider learning from representative groups across Greater Essex, indicate the sector has concerns about the risk of larger councils losing touch with communities. However, they have helpfully set out the conditions in which they feel we can succeed together, and we have used this insight to inform our proposals. They have asked that all LGR proposals:

- Commit to community-level governance structures across all areas

- Ensure these bodies have clear remits, resources, and real influence

- Reflect natural communities and neighbourhoods, including cultural and thematic identities, not just administrative borders

- Actively connect with parish/town councils, community networks, and trusted local individuals, groups and voluntary organisations

While new operating models will be decided by the new councils, the four-unitary model will 'bake in' local decision-making and partnership working as a key to the success of the new councils, and we have been clear that the VCS will have an important role to play going forwards.

Criteria
4

# Four authorities grounded in local identity, culture, and history

**Criteria 4b.** Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance

**Each new council reflects and respects the distinct local identities across the area, ensuring that each unitary authority is rooted in coherent and recognisable communities. It builds on established partnerships and avoids arbitrary boundaries, supporting geographies that make sense both culturally and operationally. This strengthens civic pride and makes governance more meaningful.**

### Maintaining local identity across Greater Essex

Greater Essex is a large and diverse region with a rich history, strong civic traditions and distinct local identities. From coastal towns and rural villages to historic market centres and modern urban hubs, the geography and culture of Essex have shaped how communities live, work (see travel to work map below) and relate to their local institutions.

We know from engagement with our residents that they associate their identity with their local town and not their local authority. They do not live their lives according to administrative boundaries. Their daily experience is shaped by functional geographies - commuting patterns, access to hospitals, schools, and community services - that often extend beyond council borders. The lived reality is that every road, bus route, and service network crosses boundaries. New authorities must recognise this and work together to create coherent, strategic plans that reflect how people move and access services. This includes transport, health, and preventative care, which are most effective when delivered through local, community-based interventions. The geography must support both strategic coordination and planning across council boundaries, as well as local responsiveness.

The four-unitary model reflects the diversity of the place. It avoids arbitrary boundaries driven by administrative considerations and instead builds on established relationships between places, services and communities. Each unitary has been designed to support the integrity of towns and align them to coherent and recognisable geographies, supporting effective governance and strengthening civic pride.

We have avoided clusters which span long and unwieldy distances from one end of the county to the other. Instead, there is a natural separation between the four clusters, shaped by transport corridors, settlement patterns and cultural heritage. These divisions reflect how people identify with their local area and how services are accessed.

### Travel to work patterns across Greater Essex

Figure 4.18 below highlights the number of workers within areas across Greater Essex and the number of commuters moving to and from those areas. This shows clear alignment in travel patterns across the region, aligned most coherently with the four-unitary model. A summary of travel to work alignment with each new unitary council is set out in the table below. Detailed figures are within Appendix 1: Key data sets.

Criteria
4

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **West Essex** | Brentwood<br>Epping Forest<br>Harlow<br>Thurrock | • West Essex borders London and has significant outbound commuting beyond Greater Essex into London.<br>• Thurrock is largely self-contained, with around 25,000 residents living and working locally.<br>• A key commuter route exists between West Thurrock and Grays.<br>• Harlow and Epping Forest have strong mutual commuter links, with each being the other's top destination for work outside their area of residence. |
| **North Essex** | Braintree<br>Chelmsford<br>Uttlesford | • Chelmsford is the county's main transport hub, with the busiest train station and strong links across North Essex, including into Braintree.<br>• Chelmsford will be key to improve rural connectivity and better integrate Uttlesford.<br>• Most Braintree residents work locally, but there are notable commuting patterns to Uttlesford and Chelmsford. |
| **East Essex** | Colchester<br>Maldon<br>Tendring | • Colchester and Tendring share one of Essex's strongest commuting relationships, with approximately 10,000 people travelling between the two.<br>• The Clacton–Colchester route is a recognised key corridor.<br>• Maldon remains largely self-contained in terms of work travel. |
| **South Essex** | Basildon<br>Castle Point<br>Rochford<br>Southend-on-Sea | • South Essex is highly interconnected, particularly between Basildon and Southend-on-Sea and Castle Point and Southend-on-Sea.<br>• Basildon is the most common work destination (outside of residence) for Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford and Thurrock, and is the highest across Greater Essex which is expected given its strong economic performance and job prospects.<br>• Rochford sees more residents working in Southend-on-Sea than locally, with additional commuting to Basildon, Castle Point and Chelmsford. |

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Thurrock survey, residents were asked where they travelled to most often to work or socialise. **52%** said London, **35%** said Basildon, **33%** said Southend and **29%** said Brentwood. The issue of proximity to London was raised many times throughout the engagement, with residents making it clear they enjoy living near London but do not want to become part of it, as they feel their identity is distinct living in Essex.

Criteria
4

Figure 4.18 – Travel to work patterns across Greater Essex[32]

Criteria
4
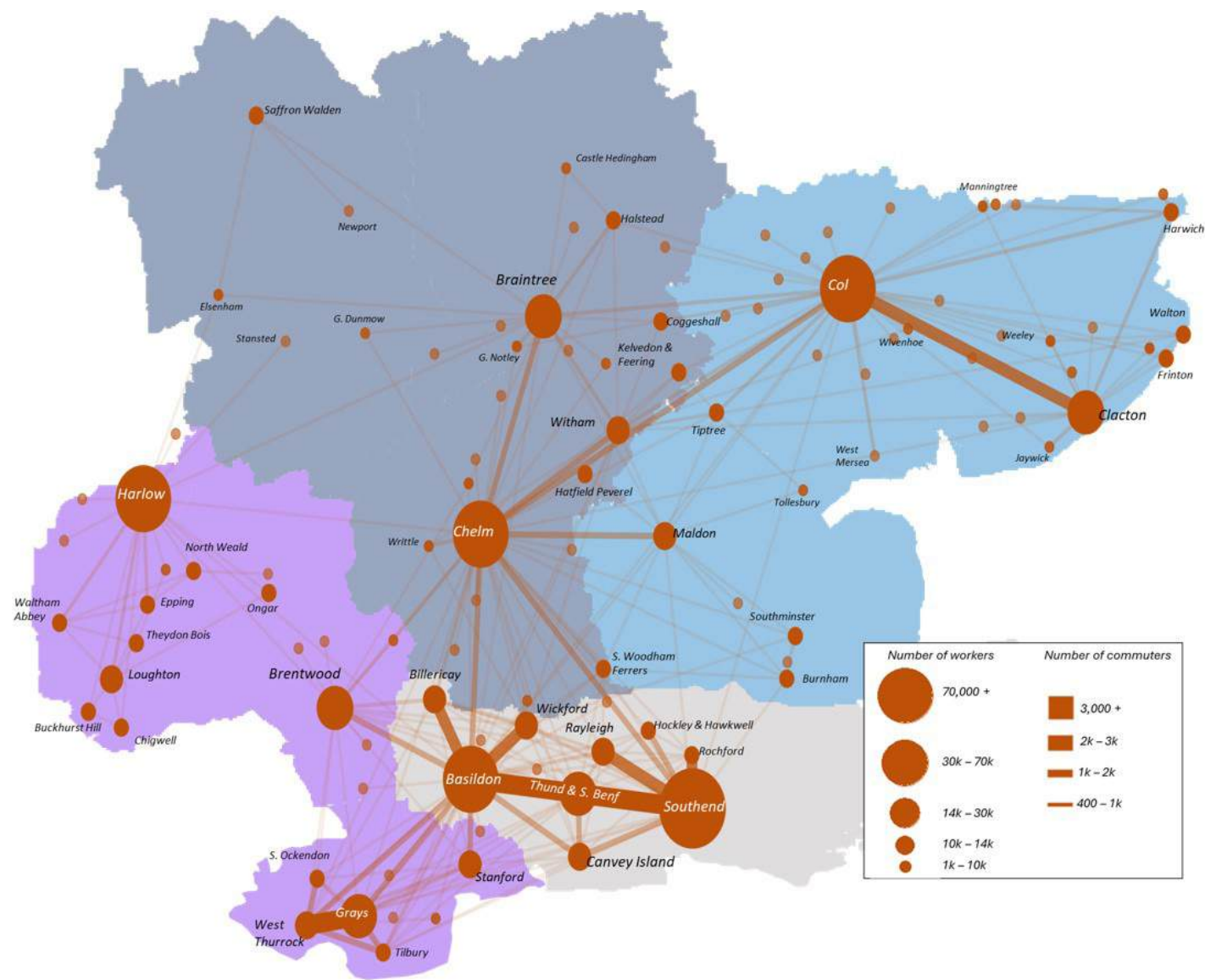
**Four new unitaries built on distinct and meaningful local identity**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **West Essex** | Brentwood<br>Epping Forest<br>Harlow<br>Thurrock | Connected by its proximity to London with a shared outlook to the leisure, work and economic opportunities that it brings<br>● Thurrock's port economy and industrial heritage anchor the area.<br>● Connected historically via the A128.<br>● Brentwood's cultural assets include Ingatestone Hall and Brentwood Cathedral.<br>● Harlow has a strong civic identity as a post-war new town with a defined urban centre.<br>● Natural boundaries and recreation in Epping Forest and Lee Valley. |
| **North Essex** | Braintree<br>Chelmsford<br>Uttlesford | Connected by their outer proximity to London but also by their outlook to Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, with picturesque villages around economic and leisure hubs of the City of Chelmsford<br>● Chelmsford, Braintree and Uttlesford combine rural character with historic depth.<br>● Chelmsford is the county town and a public service hub.<br>● Braintree's heritage includes Cressing Temple Barns and Hedingham Castle.<br>● Uttlesford's market towns and countryside support local distinctiveness. |
| **East Essex** | Colchester<br>Maldon<br>Tendring | Connected by a shared coastline and nature reserves, with coastal towns and international assets of importance<br>● Colchester, Tendring and Maldon form a coastal and cultural region.<br>● Colchester is Britain's first recorded city with Roman heritage and home to the infamous Boudicca.<br>● Tendring includes seaside towns like Clacton and Harwich with strong identities and regeneration needs.<br>● Maldon's maritime heritage and global brand reinforce its distinctiveness. |
| **South Essex** | Basildon<br>Castle Point<br>Rochford<br>Southend-on-Sea | Hugged by the Rivers Crouch and Thames with strong internal work travel patterns, its residents frequently travel to Southend-on-Sea City's seaside and theatres<br>● Densely populated and economically varied area.<br>● Southend-on-Sea is a city with strong civic and coastal identity.<br>● Basildon's post-war urban culture is supported by venues like Towngate Theatre.<br>● Castle Point includes Canvey Island and Hadleigh, with active community programmes.<br>● Rochford contributes market towns and green spaces. |

**What our residents have told us is important**

In all the surveys, the majority of respondents (**86%** in Thurrock, **74%** across Greater Essex, **63%** in the 5U survey) said they identified most strongly with their local village, town or city, rather than their borough or county. In the 5U survey, **64%** said maintaining local identity, cultural, and historic importance was a priority for council services.

Criteria
4

# Criteria 5:
# Supporting devolution arrangements

**This section includes:**

| Unlocking the devolution vision in Greater Essex | Criteria 5a |
|---|---|
| Equal representation from all four corners of Greater Essex | Criteria 5c |
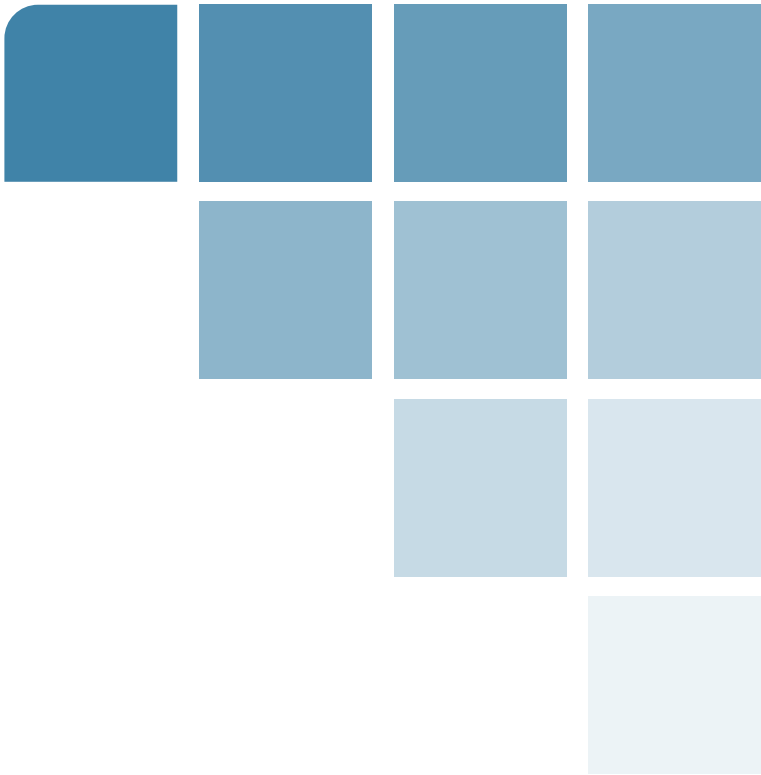
Criteria
5

# Unlocking the devolution vision in Greater Essex

**Criteria 5a.** Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor

**The model aligns with the new Greater Essex Combined County Authority (GECCA). Each council will be an equal partner, helping to deliver shared priorities. This supports joined-up working, from infrastructure and inclusive economic growth to public service reform and community wellbeing, and unlocks the benefits of devolution.**

### The functions of GECCA

Greater Essex has been selected as part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and is progressing towards the establishment of a Combined County Authority (CCA), with a target to hold mayoral elections in May 2026. GECCA will operate across the four proposed unitary authorities, taking on functions and powers devolved from Government that require a strategic, regional approach.  Functions of GECCA will include:

- Providing strategic leadership and representing Greater Essex nationally
- Convening partners to drive public service reform and regional collaboration
- Managing funding for skills, transport, infrastructure and growth
- Developing shared strategies and using data to guide investment
- Ensuring accountability for delivery and outcomes

While GECCA will lead on strategy, funding and regional coordination, the four-unitary authorities will be equal partners on its board. They will focus on local delivery, ensuring that programmes reflect community priorities and are implemented effectively on the ground.

### Progress towards devolution

Since joining the Government's Devolution Priority Programme in February 2025, Greater Essex has established a cross-authority programme team and developed a delivery plan with a critical path and PMO oversight. The guiding principles of the programme include:

- Set GECCA up for success.
- Ensure it is safe, legal and ready to deliver statutory functions.

- Prepare for growth without constraining the future mayor.
- Focus on strategy and commissioning, not direct delivery.
- Align plans with available budget.

Four workstreams are underway including:

1. **Finance –** managing pre-setup costs, establishing year 1 budget, and ensuring financial governance.
2. **Legal and Governance –** preparing for mayoral elections, drafting the constitution, and setting up assurance and scrutiny frameworks.
3. **Establishing the Authority –** designing the operating model, digital and staffing requirements, and preparing a Day 1 plan.
4. **Policy and Functions –** defining GECCA's functions, building capability, preparing strategies and an evidence base, and developing a project pipeline.

The existing constituent authorities are committed to launching a strategic, capable organisation from Day 1, ready to deliver and grow under mayoral leadership.

### How the four-unitary model supports devolution

Devolution is a transformative opportunity to unlock potential, drive growth and create a place where people want to live, work and visit. Our area is dynamic, thriving, entrepreneurial and creative and our ambition is to create a growing economy that improves local living standards and to enable public service reform to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and viability of public services. Devolution is the mechanism to unlock this potential by giving local leaders the powers, resources and policy levers to drive change at pace and scale.

Criteria
5

The four-unitary model aligns to, and supports the delivery of, the government's Industrial Strategy. The new unitaries will have a good balance of the highest-potential sectors identified in the strategy, including advanced manufacturing, creative industrials, life sciences and digital technologies; as well as each having a significant gateway to trade through either an air or sea port.

Devolution, coupled with strong unitary local government, will unlock the strong growth potential at Thames Enterprise Park, Freeport East and Harlow Innovation Park, as well as across all areas of opportunity as outlined in further detail in Criteria 1 and Appendix 3.

Working with the mayor and GECCA, the four authorities will be better equipped to tackle the barriers to growth (such as planning and skills) and be a strong partner to government departments and the Office for Investment to make it easier for businesses to get the certainty they require to invest in Greater Essex.

The four-unitary model is designed to complement and strengthen devolution arrangements through:

1. **Alignment with GECCA:** Each of the four unitary authorities will act as a relatively equal constituent member of GECCA, supporting strategic coordination across seven competencies outlined in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

2. **Enabling delivery of devolved functions:** The model supports the delivery of devolved powers across:

   a. Skills and employment (including control of the Adult Skills Fund)

   b. Transport and local infrastructure (including establishing a combined authority level Local Transport Authority, bus franchising, key route networks and rail partnerships)

   c. Housing and strategic planning (including brownfield development, affordable housing)

   d. Economic development and regeneration (including inward investment and business support)

   e. Health and wellbeing and public service reform

   f. Public Safety (including integration of PFCC functions)

   g. Environment and net zero

3. **Supporting integrated governance and public service reform:** The model complements the coterminous footprint of Essex Police and Fire services and supports integration with ICSs. It enables joined-up planning across health, housing, education and transport, and supports a public health approach to community safety and wellbeing.

4. **A platform for long-term investment and accountability:** The four-unitary model provides the foundation for a strategic authority capable of managing a long-term investment fund, coordinating infrastructure delivery and driving inclusive growth. It supports transparent, accountable governance and meets the Government's four tests for devolution: effective leadership, appropriate geography, flexibility and accountability.

### Comparison to other proposed models

The 3U model creates large authorities with wide geographies, making it harder to advocate for place-based projects and risking uneven delivery, for example, a council responsible for a project based around Stansted will also be responsible for delivery in Harwich which is c.70 miles away.

The 5U model fragments scale and resilience, with smaller authorities potentially unable to take on delivery risk or attract investment given their weaker financial position.

In contrast, the 4U model creates four balanced, capable partners with sufficient scale to deliver projects, financial stability to manage risk, and geographic focus to support local priorities.  Four authorities will make it easier to agree voting arrangements and ensures effective delivery of devolved functions across Greater Essex.

# Equal representation from all four corners of Greater Essex

**Criteria 5c.** Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities

**Four equal councils mean fair representation across the region. An even number of local authorities means the mayor could have a tie-break vote if necessary, helping to avoid deadlock and strengthen their position as a strong democratically elected leader for the whole of Greater Essex. Four balanced councils can build on existing district strengths to deliver locally while supported by the strategic scale of the combined authority to deliver major programmes across the region. This creates a balanced and effective governance structure.**

**Strengthened local delivery through balanced representation**

The four-unitary model provides a balanced and effective governance structure that supports both local delivery and strategic leadership. The model ensures a sensible and balanced population distribution across Greater Essex, with each authority serving between approximately 418,000 and 550,000 residents.

Each of the four new unitary authorities will have equal representation on GECCA, with one vote per council and a fifth vote held by the mayor. This structure supports majority voting, where at least two authorities and the mayor must be in agreement for decisions to proceed. This helps avoid deadlock and strengthens the position of the directly elected mayor while still requiring collaboration and consensus across the geography.

This model is aligned with the legislative direction set out in the English Devolution White Paper, which confirms that mayors must be in the majority for decisions to be valid.

The model also supports the mayor's ability to drive strategic functions such as housing, transport, skills and growth, while enabling each unitary to focus on local delivery. It creates a firm foundation for regional collaboration and ensures that each corner of Greater Essex has a voice in shaping the future. This is particularly important for cross-boundary issues such as infrastructure planning, relationships with neighbouring mayors, and engagement with London. The four-unitary model provides the clarity, balance and functionality needed to unlock devolution and deliver for residents across the region.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model risks over-concentration of population and voting power in a single authority. It consolidates the existing capability of the current constituent authorities, but this centralisation may undermine balanced representation and equity across Greater Essex.

The 5U model introduces complexity and imbalance by diluting the capacity of existing authorities and makes majority voting more difficult to achieve, potentially hindering effective decision-making and the drive for growth.

The 4U model provides a stable and balanced platform for strategic decision-making. It avoids the risks of over-concentration and dilution by creating new councils supported by an existing authority and distributing the county's capability across the remaining two. This configuration ensures equal weight is given to each part of Greater Essex and is the only model that delivers this balance effectively.

Criteria
5

# Criteria 6:
# Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

**This section includes:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strong community engagement across Greater Essex** | **Criteria 6a** |
| **Building on best practice community engagement** | **Criteria 6b** |
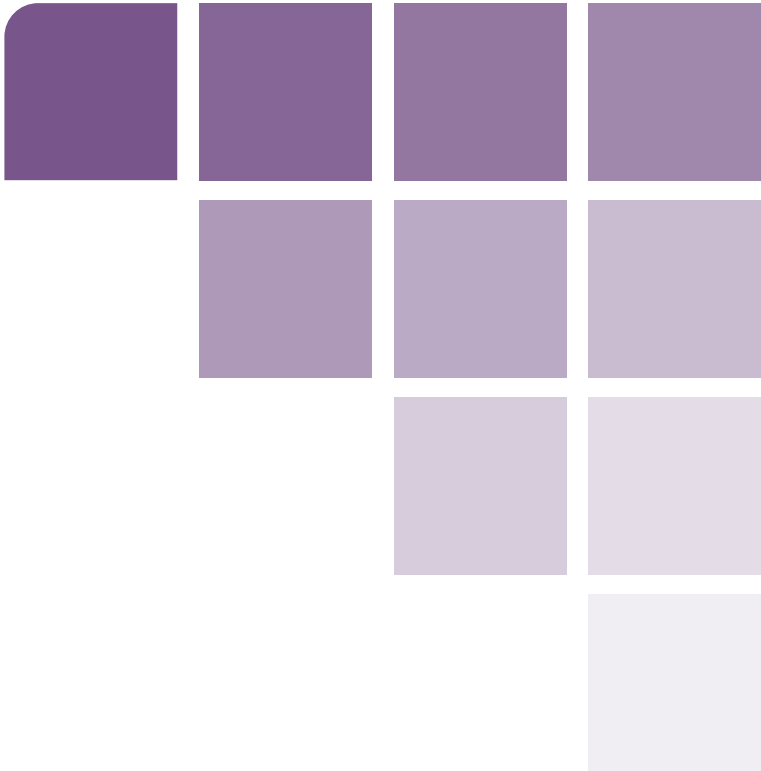
Criteria 6

# Strong community engagement across Greater Essex

**Criteria 6a.** Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged

**Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) give residents a direct voice in local decisions. They put people and place at the heart of the new system by giving residents a direct voice in local decisions. The four-unitary model is a balanced, practical, and scalable foundation for community engagement, and avoids the risks of larger, more distant councils in overuse of NACs to bridge the democratic deficit.**

**Effectively empowering our neighbourhoods**

We are aware of the Government's outline plans to legislate to establish a duty on councils to create effective neighbourhood governance. The former Minister had stated a preference for Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs), which:

- are made up of 'front-line' ward councillors.

- are often empowered to establish local priorities and plans.

- have delegated powers to allocate funding for neighbourhood budgets.

- can bring together the council and partners to engage directly with communities in their local area.

The above aligns with the emerging neighbourhood model trialled by Thurrock Council, offering clear and transparent governance whilst allowing room for local solutions to local issues. See response to Criteria 6b in the next section for more detail on this case study.

This approach directly responds to the wider challenge of declining public trust in institutions, as set out in the 'Creating places that deliver the promise and potential of local government reform' report[33] and community engagement (see Section 6: Criteria 4a). The report highlights that local government reorganisation must be used to rebuild legitimacy and confidence in the local state. NACs provide a visible and accountable mechanism for residents to shape decisions and hold services to account. This would help avoid the risk of patchy or tokenistic engagement and ensure that all communities benefit from a clear and accountable system of local area working.

**How the four-unitary model will enable strong community engagement**

The four-unitary model provides a practical and scalable foundation for meaningful community engagement across Greater Essex. While the model allows for both strategic and localised decision making without the need to compromise on either, neighbourhood governance such as NACs are a valuable part of maintaining the local connections to communities.

The four-unitary model is not dependent on the boundaries or presence of parishes. It is a flexible, minimum viable approach that can be tailored to local context and scaled over time. It avoids creating new layers of governance and instead focuses on strengthening what already works, particularly where there are existing parish and town councils to connect with. By embedding NACs, alongside existing arrangements, into the unitary operating model from the outset, the four-unitary model meets the government's expectations while reflecting local context and learning from experience.

**Comparison to other proposed models**

The 3U model risks creating councils that are too expansive to effectively connect with communities, potentially becoming overly reliant on Neighbourhood Area Committees to address this democratic shortfall. Overuse of NACs to bridge the democratic deficit could inadvertently re-establish complex district-level structures, demanding substantial officer and member resources to function effectively.

The 5U model brings the risk of excessive fragmentation, which could complicate the coordination of engagement across broader public sector systems.

**Design principles for Neighbourhood Area Committees**

The below principles, built on past experience and planning conversations to date, reflect current thinking on how NACs can be effectively implemented in Greater Essex. Ultimately, decisions about how the model will be implemented will be taken locally and informed by the councillors who represent and understand the local area.

1. **Ward councillor-led:** NACs are led by ward councillors, providing a formal role for 'frontline' members and ensuring democratic accountability at the neighbourhood level.

2. **Embedded in the unitary operating model:** NACs are structurally integrated into an authority's governance and service delivery arrangements.

3. **Geographically flexible and locally defined:** NAC boundaries reflect local identity, functional geographies and existing community footprints based on wards. They would not follow a uniform template across the county and would be encouraged to explore a range of engagement mechanisms to allow diverse communities to take part.

4. **No new governance layers:** NACs do not create additional tiers of government. Where parish or town councils exist, NACs complement rather than duplicate their role. No new parishes will be created.

5. **Minimum viable structure:** NACs are designed to deliver meaningful engagement without unnecessary bureaucracy. They will have clear terms of reference, defined roles and proportionate officer support.

6. **Resourced and supported:** How NACs are integrated into the operating model of councils can ensure they have access to dedicated officer capacity (e.g. area coordinators) so they are effective, sustainable and able to influence local delivery.

7. **Business and economic engagement:** NACs provide a platform for engaging local businesses and supporting town centre partnerships, particularly in market towns and high streets.

8. **Outcome-focused and influential:** NACs have a defined role in shaping local priorities, influencing service delivery and monitoring outcomes. They are not symbolic or tokenistic.

9. **Aligned with existing structures:** NACs will actively connect with, not replicate, existing forums, partnerships, community networks and voluntary organisations. They build on what already works and avoid duplication.

**What our residents have told us is important**

In the Thurrock survey, residents were asked where they travelled to most often to work or socialise. **52%** said London, **35%** said Basildon, **33%** said Southend and **29%** said Brentwood. The issue of proximity to London was raised many times throughout the engagement, with residents making it clear they enjoy living near London but do not want to become part of it, as they feel their identity is distinct living in Essex.

## Building on best practice community engagement

**Criteria 6b.** Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement

**The four-unitary model builds on existing community engagement structures which can be scaled to support strong local involvement in all four councils. This ensures residents remain at the heart of decision making and services reflect local needs.**

Resident engagement tells us that our communities value and want services based on need and where councils listen to local voices (see Criteria 4a). Many councils are already on a journey towards better community involvement in local decisions and neighbourhood-level service delivery.  The desire to channel community power into place-shaping and sharing responsibility for designing and delivering the right services in the right way is strong in Greater Essex and there are many good examples of councils listening properly to local people and being more effective and efficient as a result.

The neighbourhood model, once further collaboratively developed, will give Greater Essex a strong blueprint for local involvement, empowerment and co-production. LGR must strengthen rather than dilute the influence and involvement of local people – something residents raise as really important to them.

**Case Study: Communities in Action – Chadwell St Mary**

The Communities in Action pilot tested a new approach to place-based engagement, co-producing a Community Plan with residents through targeted outreach, events and surveys. Over 120 residents contributed, alongside local councillors, businesses and community groups.

The pilot made use of existing community infrastructure, including the library, family hub, community church and local voluntary organisations. These assets played a central role in engagement and delivery, showing how NACs in Greater Essex could be rooted in local neighbourhoods.

Key outcomes included:

- Six clear local priorities identified: green spaces and environment, public transport and road safety, health and wellbeing, community safety, activities for young people and community events, and better engagement and communication.

- A published Community Plan sets out actions already underway, including new play equipment, community clean-ups and expanded health and wellbeing initiatives.

- A new community led steering group is being established to oversee delivery and maintain momentum – 'Chadwell in Action'.

The pilot highlighted challenges that NACs would need to address, including low baseline trust in councils, consultation fatigue and a lack of clear local information. However, it showed that with the right support and coordination, residents are willing to engage and lead change, and that engagement can build stronger connections across different communities, building cohesion.

**This pilot evidences that in some areas the foundations for NAC-style neighbourhood working are in place. It shows how a structured, ward-level approach, supported by local councillors and community partners, can deliver meaningful engagement and local accountability across Greater Essex.**

Criteria
6

**Case Study: Essex Caring Communities Commission – Community Engagement for Prevention**

The Essex Caring Communities Commission was established in 2024 to explore how community capacity can be harnessed to reduce demand on health and care services. Its work provides a clear example of how community engagement can underpin a shift to prevention.

The Commission found that many of the drivers of poor health and wellbeing - such as isolation, poor housing, and lack of access to services - can be addressed more effectively through local, community-led action. It highlighted the importance of civil society, carers and community infrastructure in supporting early intervention and reducing reliance on acute services.

Key findings included:

- Essex has some of the highest levels of community need in England, with six of the ten highest-need wards nationally.

- Community-led initiatives such as community supermarkets, triaging hubs and local safety funds are already delivering preventative outcomes.

- The voluntary sector in Essex is underfunded by an estimated £2 billion compared to national averages, limiting its potential impact.

The Commission proposed a series of actions to strengthen community engagement and prevention, including:

- Establishing a Greater Essex Office of Prevention to coordinate system-wide preventative work.

- Creating a residents assembly to embed community voice in decision-making.

- Launching a Volunteering Olympics and a civil society leadership programme to build capacity.

- Developing a network of multi-agency triaging hubs to bring services closer to residents.

**This case study shows how Greater Essex is already building the foundations for neighbourhood-level engagement that supports prevention. It provides a model for how new unitary authorities can embed community voice and capacity into their operating models from Day 1.**

**The four-unitary model is best placed to deliver effective community engagement**

All models can work towards creating the right infrastructure to support NACs, with opportunities to make use of existing community resources. The use of existing infrastructure will provide a more 'local' feeling, as this was flagged by residents across Essex as being important to them when engaging with their councils.

The existing neighbourhood and community engagement systems will support strong community engagement, as they have the pre-existing relationships with the citizens of the area and will be able to share lessons learned. The learnings that will be provided by the existing systems will support the development of future initiatives across Greater Essex.

However, the four-unitary model is most suited to deliver best practice community engagement due to its cohesive geographical structure and balanced population. This will reduce the strain on any one unitary authority to run significantly more NACs. The four-unitary model having a relatively smaller population size in each boundary line compared to larger proposed models, will allow for operation at scale while being close enough to deliver locally.

Criteria
6

# Section 5:
# Financial case for change

**This section includes:**

| Financial context |
| --- |
| The financial position of new councils |
| Approach to LGR financial modelling |
| Financial modelling summary results |
| Reorganisation savings |
| Disaggregation costs |
| Implementation costs |
| Phasing and payback period |

# Financial context

**Councils across Essex are under pressure from rising costs and demand, and Thurrock's debt adds further strain. Reorganisation is a chance to reset and build a more sustainable system for all.**

### National financial context

The local government sector faces a major financial challenge with an estimated £4 billion funding gap over the next two years. Demand for critical services is increasing because of population growth and ageing populations. Local authorities are also facing rising costs, with adult social care costs estimated to have increased by 9% and children's social care costs by 18% in real terms over the past five years.

### The Greater Essex financial context

Combined net revenue expenditure across the 15 councils of Greater Essex is £1,552 million[34] with 65% in Essex County Council, 11% within Thurrock and 10% in Southend-on-Sea, the authorities delivering complex statutory people services.

Across Greater Essex, councils are facing sustained financial pressures. Rising demand in adult social care, children's services and SEND, alongside inflationary cost pressures and legacy debt, are placing significant strain on budgets. The current two-tier system contributes to inefficiencies through duplication in democratic arrangements and overlaps in service delivery.

Total external debt across Greater Essex stands at £4.1 billion[35], with Thurrock accounting for £1.1 billion of this. While Thurrock's financial challenges are well documented, it is important to note that its debt represents only 27% of the total across the region.

[34]  Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2023 to 2024 individual local authority data - outturn - GOV.UK
[35]  CIPFA Essex LGR – Debt and Non-Current Assets July 2025
[36]  Individual council budget reports

Similarly, the model does not include detailed consideration of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) pressures. Predicted spending on education is expected to rise, and the DSG funding picture is evolving. This may have implications for future financial planning but is too fluid and complex to reflect meaningfully in the current modelling. A balance will need to be struck between growing demand and available resources.

Further detail on debt analysis and scenario modelling for Thurrock is included in the main body of the proposal within Section 4: Criteria 2, with reference to CIPFA modelling.

Figure 5.1 – Net revenue budget across Greater Essex

| Council | Non-Earmarked Reserves (£m) (2023-24)[37] | Net Revenue Budget (£m)[38] |
|---|---|---|
| Basildon | 3.0 | 38.0 |
| Braintree | 10.0 | 19.5 |
| Brentwood | 9.3 | 8.2 |
| Castle Point | 5.5 | 4.2 |
| Chelmsford | 11.9 | 28.9 |
| Colchester | 6.9 | 15.3 |
| Epping Forest | 6.6 | 18.7 |
| Harlow | 4.3 | 13.9 |
| Maldon | 2.6 | 10.7 |
| Rochford | 1.9 | 11.4 |
| Tendring | 4.0 | 21.7 |
| Uttlesford | 2.1 | 11.6 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 11.0 | 156.7 |
| Thurrock | 10.9 | 177.2 |
| Essex County | 68.0 | 1,016.3 |
| Total | 158.0 | 1,552.3 |

[37] Respective district council and unitary authority Non-earmarked Reserves webpages

[38] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn

# The financial position of new councils

**The four-unitary model creates a fair balance between the new councils. Each has the scale and resources to be financially sustainable. This avoids creating weak or overburdened authorities.**

## Modelling key data sets for the new councils

The table below shows financial and demand data sets consolidated for each unitary authority under each of the models being proposed. It shows the strong balance achieved across the four unitary authorities – each with a healthy tax base and no significant outliers in terms of reserves. The financial health of the new councils will also be largely determined by demand pressures.

Figure 5.2 – Key data comparison of the unitary model options regarding financials and demand

| Metric | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| See Appendix for further data sets split by unitary for each option | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| **Financial** — Net revenue expenditure (£m)(2023/24)[39] | 423.2 | 350.4 | 324.6 | 454.3 | 631.5 | 453.4 | 467.6 | 341.3 | 259.6 | 267.3 | 394.1 | 290.2 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties)(2024)[40]** | 173,324 | 169,545 | 126,477 | 186,896 | 241,010 | 197,250 | 217,980 | 115,722 | 125,250 | 112,552 | 177,428 | 125,288 |
| **Non-Earmarked Reserves (£m)(2023/24)[41]** | 44.9 | 43.4 | 32.0 | 37.7 | 48.6 | 59.7 | 49.7 | 22.4 | 27.4 | 38.5 | 43.5 | 26.3 |
| **Demand** — Total SEN support[41] | 9,019 | 7,161 | 7,503 | 10,387 | 14,212 | 9,003 | 10,855 | 7,403 | 5,364 | 5,140 | 9,354 | 6,809 |
| **Total EHCP** | 3,452 | 2,398 | 2,145 | 3,696 | 5,554 | 2,943 | 3,194 | 2,924 | 1,392 | 1,861 | 2,884 | 2,630 |
| **Number of children with a CP Plan on 31st March[41]** | 406 | 459 | 462 | 390 | 511 | 537 | 669 | 309 | 321 | 290 | 595 | 202 |
| **Number of clients accessing long term support at the end of the year: 18-64[42]** | 1,625 | 1,582 | 2,105 | 2,133 | 2,867 | 1,731 | 2,847 | 1,415 | 913 | 1,075 | 2,590 | 1,452 |
| **Number of clients accessing long term support at the end of the year: 65+[41]** | 3,109 | 2,565 | 2,881 | 3,759 | 5,107 | 3,150 | 4,057 | 2,334 | 1,828 | 1,792 | 3,587 | 2,773 |

[39] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn
[40] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[41] Respective district council and unitary authority non-earmarked reserves webpages
[42] Received from Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, and Thurrock Council

# Approach to LGR financial modelling

**The financial costs and benefits associated with LGR have been estimated for the four-unitary model, as well as three and five-unitary models for comparative purposes. Calculations are based on latest available revenue budget figures, benchmarked costs and benefits from previous LGR proposals, with assumptions adjusted to reflect key characteristics of the proposed models including the number of unitary authorities. The four-unitary model performs strongly, with realistic assumptions and clear financial advantages. It offers the best return on investment longer-term.**

### Key elements of the financial calculations

The calculation of costs and benefits is made up of three key calculations which combine to provide a view of the payback period and net benefit for each of the shortlisted options.

Figure 5.3 – elements of the financial calculations

| Reorganisation savings | Disaggregation costs | Implementation costs |
|---|---|---|
| The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale. | The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities. | The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model. |

**Payback period and 5 year net benefit/(cost)**

The savings and costs calculated for each option phased to show payback period and the cumulative benefits over a 5 year period.

Section
5

**Benchmarking, data sources and assumptions**

● Data has been gathered from a combination of publicly available data and data shared across the Greater Essex Councils.

● The model applies benchmarking from past LGR cases and relies on experience of local government reorganisation implementation in the refinement of assumptions.

● Our financial calculations are underpinned by benchmarking of previous LGR proposals and the estimated costs and benefits modelled in those reports. The figures are estimated costs and benefits, not the actual amounts delivered; however, we have factored in evidence from reports on post-LGR implementation. For example, the financial impacts of unitary re-structuring in 2008-09 were modelled in a 2016 report which stated that each council had delivered the same levels of savings or greater than the projected savings figures estimated in their proposals[43]. The report also references an estimated level of savings per abolition of each unitary council to total c.£4.5m, which is consistent with the modelling undertaken in this proposal and level of savings estimated[44].

● The model does not attempt to reflect the potential impact of the Fair Funding Review, which is expected to significantly affect council finances. While this has been considered, it is too complex and uncertain to model accurately at this stage.

● The model also does not include detailed consideration of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) pressures. The DSG funding picture is evolving and may have implications for future financial planning, but it is also too fluid and complex to reflect meaningfully in the current modelling.

● Each element of the model applied is explained separately within this section of the report.

[43]  Unitary local government, House of Commons Library Research Briefing, 2025
[44]  As Tiers Go By, NLGN, 2014

Section
5

# Financial modelling summary results

**The three-unitary and four-unitary models both reduce costs, but the three-unitary model is harder and more complex to deliver. Its large, disconnected geographies create complexity and risk. The four-unitary model is simpler, more practical and offers more greater long-term sustainability.**

Our financial modelling shows:

- The **four-unitary model** will have net annual savings of **£28.3m**, after one-off costs of implementation of **£80.8m**, meaning an estimated payback period of **less than 4 years**.

- A **three-unitary model**, whilst avoiding long-running disaggregation costs, introduces additional complexity and therefore implementation cost by combining two current unitary authorities (Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea).

- A **five-unitary model** will result in a very similar cost of local government delivery to the current position and therefore may never deliver a return on the significant upfront investment in implementation costs.

Figure 5.4 – Summary of financial modelling

| LGR option | Reorganisation savings (gross) (£m) | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Recurring revenue savings (£m)* | Implementation costs (one-off) (£m) | Net annual impact after five years (£m) | Estimated payback period |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Three-unitary model | 43.4 | - | 43.4 | (93.7) | 73.5 | Within 4 years |
| Four-unitary model | 55.0 | (26.7) | 28.3 | (80.8) | 49.5 | Within 4 years |
| Five-unitary model | 52.1 | (44.4) | 7.7 | (86.7) | (51.5) | Over 10 years |

* Recurring revenue savings = gross reorganisation savings less disaggregation costs

The calculation of each element of the financial model is explained within this report section.

# Reorganisation savings

**All models deliver savings by removing a tier of government. But larger, harder-to-manage councils risk recreating bureaucracy. The four-unitary model avoids this and delivers savings more reliably through a simpler model of reorganisation.**

**Reorganisation savings (gross) definition:** The estimated annual savings from efficiencies achieved through reorganisation, moving from two tiers to one tier of local government, by removing duplication, consolidating services and operating at greater scale.

**Method of calculation:**

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of savings per capita achievable through LGR.

- Multiplied the benchmarked savings per capita figure by the total population of Greater Essex to arrive at an estimated total saving for each unitary model (broken down by cost categories in figure 5.6).

- Applied a dilution of savings for the number of unitary authorities being created, due to reduced ability to operate at scale. This equated to a reduction of 5% for the four-unitary model and 10% for the three-unitary model.

- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Greater Essex and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included a reduction in the total savings achievable by the three-unitary model and a delay in the realisation of those benefits as set out in figure 5.5.

**Reorganisation savings for each model**

Figure 5.5 – Reorganisation savings summary

|  | Gross reorganisation savings (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **Three-unitary model** | 43.4 | Delivery across larger, less coherent geographies is unlikely to deliver efficiencies as effectively due to increased complexity in management and need to establish additional structures.<br><br>Timing of benefits realisation within the three-unitary model would be further delayed due to the complexity of delivery. |
| **Four-unitary model** | 55.0 | Significant savings achievable from removing a tier of local government (note – gross savings exclude disaggregation costs). |
| **Five-unitary model** | 52.1 | Significant savings achievable from removing a tier of local government (note – gross savings exclude disaggregation costs). |

**Categories of saving**

As part of benchmarking LGR revenue savings, categories of savings have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of savings. The exact proportion of savings will vary by option.

Figure 5.6 – Savings categories

| Cost Category | Estimated % of Total Savings |
|---|---|
| Optimising Leadership | 20% |
| Right Sizing the Organisation | 24% |
| Consolidating Corporate Services | 10% |
| Service Contract Consolidation | 10% |
| Procurement & 3rd Party Spend | 10% |
| Digital & IT Systems | 9% |
| Asset & Property Optimisation | 9% |
| Democratic Services | 4% |
| Other | 4% |

# Disaggregation costs

**Disaggregation costs only apply where more than three unitaries are created. The four-unitary model keeps these costs manageable, whereas they are higher in the five-unitary model due to the additional unitary authority being created.**

**Disaggregation costs definition:** The estimated additional recurring expenditure that results from dividing upper tier (i.e. county level) services into multiple new unitary authorities. Note: Disaggregation costs are only considered for the four and five-unitary options as there is no increase in the number of 'upper tier' authorities post reorganisation in a three-unitary model.

**Method of calculation:**

- Identified core service categories where disaggregation will drive cost increases were as: Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Housing, Place Services, and Corporate and Support Services.
- Allocated Essex County Council net revenue spend against cost categories defined.
- Applied percentages of additional spend to each cost category to uplift total costs in line with benchmarking from previous LGR cases, to estimate the future level of spend of each cost category.
- Applied an additional uplift to the level of disaggregation costs for each additional unitary being proposed.

**Disaggregation costs for each model**

Figure 5.7 – Disaggregation summary

| | Disaggregation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **Three-unitary model** | - | No recurring disaggregation costs because there are the same number of 'upper tier' authorities as currently. |
| **Four-unitary model** | (26.7) | Some recurring disaggregation costs exist due to four-unitary authorities rather than three. |
| **Five-unitary model** | (44.4) | Significant recurring disaggregation costs exist due to the formation of five authorities |

**Categories of disaggregation costs**

As part of calculating disaggregation costs, costs increase by category of spend have been calculated, as summarised below.

Figure 5.8 – Cost categories

| Cost Category | Standard disaggregation cost uplift % |
|---|---|
| **Adult Social Care** | 2 – 3% |
| **Children's Services** | 1 – 2% |
| **Place Services** | 1 – 2% |
| **Corporate & Support Services** | 3 – 4% |

# Implementation costs

**Implementation costs generally rise with the number of councils. The three-unitary model is especially complex due to merging two existing unitaries alongside the disaggregation of County services. The four-unitary model avoids this complexity and keeps costs lower.**

**Implementation costs definition:** The estimated one-off transition costs associated with moving to a new unitary model.

**Method of calculation:**

- Reviewed past LGR cases to estimate and benchmark an indexed average level of implementation costs per capita.
- Multiplied the benchmarked costs per capita figure by the total population of Greater Essex to arrive at an estimated total implementation cost per unitary model (broken down by cost categories in figure 5.10).
- Applied an uplift of costs per additional unitary authority being created, due to additional costs through establishing governance structures, IT systems, administrative frameworks, etc.
- Applied specific adjustments based on the characteristics of Greater Essex and assumptions around the models being proposed. This included an increase in the total implementations for the three-unitary model as set out in figure 5.9.

**Implementation costs for each model**

Figure 5.9 – Implementation cost summary

| | Implementation costs (£m) | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **Three-unitary model** | (93.7) | Implementation complexity and costs are highest due to need to integrate two unitaries and some County functions into a single unitary, as well as disaggregate the remainder of the County into two (see Criteria 2 for relevant case studies). |
| **Four-unitary model** | (80.8) | Implementation complexity and costs are relatively high due to need to integrate and disaggregate to form four authorities, but lower than other models. |
| **Five-unitary model** | (86.7) | Implementation complexity and costs are high due to the number of new authorities being created. |

Note: Implementation costs are assumed to be phased 50% in Pre-Vesting Day and 50% in Year 1.

**Categories of implementation cost**

As part of implementation cost benchmarking, categories of implementation costs have been identified to provide an indication of the expected breakdown of costs, for any of the LGR options.

Figure 5.10 – Implementation cost categories

| Implementation cost category | Estimated % of Total Implementation Costs |
|---|---|
| Workforce exit (including redundancy) | 46% |
| Transition Team | 13% |
| Processes harmonisation | 8% |
| Estates and Facilities | 8% |
| Systems consolidation | 7% |
| Workforce development | 5% |
| Culture and communications | 4% |
| Contingency | 10% |
| Other | 4% |

Section
5

# Phasing and payback period

**The four-unitary model is expected to pay back its implementation costs within three years. This is faster than the five-unitary model and comparable to the three-unitary model. It delivers early value and long-term savings. This does not factor in the potential transformation and other decisions taken within each authority beyond Day 1.**

**Payback period definition:** The period taken to reach a net positive financial impact of LGR, once all one-off and recurring savings have been taken into account.

**5-year net benefit / (costs) definition:** The combined benefit or cost of LGR considering all one-off costs and recurring benefits.

**Method of calculation:**

- Percentages of costs and benefits are allocated out by each year, using experience of past LGR cases (see table below) to estimate the appropriate phasing of delivery.

- Assumptions have been applied to adjust for features of specific models where appropriate. This includes a delay to the timing of benefits realisation within the three-unitary model due to the complexity of delivery.

- Calculate net benefit (cost) for each year of the model and show a cumulative total impact.

- Identify the year in which there is a cumulative net benefit (i.e. payback has been achieved).

**Phasing and calculation of payback period**

The payback calculation is made up of reorganisation savings, disaggregation costs, and implementation costs. Phasing of costs and savings in the model has been set out below. Percentages relate to the proportion of total savings realised or total costs incurred within the specified time period.

Figure 5.11 – Payback period summary

| | Three-unitary model | | | | Four-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-Vesting Day | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 onwards | Pre-Vesting Day | Year 1 | Year 2 onwards | Pre-Vesting Day | Year 1 | Year 2 onwards |
| **Reorganisation savings** | - | 25% | 50% | 100% | 10% | 50% | 100% | 10% | 50% | 100% |
| **Disaggregation costs** | - | - | - | - | 10% | 50% | 100% | 10% | 50% | 100% |
| **Implementation costs** | 50% | 50% | - | - | 50% | 50% | - | 50% | 50% | - |

Section
5

**Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR options**

Set out below is the year-by-year breakdown of the financial impact of LGR, considering both one-off costs and recurring benefits / costs.

Figure 5.12 – Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option

| Modelling year | Financial year | Three-unitary model | | Four-unitary model | | Five-unitary model | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Net benefits (cost) by year (£m) | Cumulative benefit (cost) (£m) | Net benefits (cost) by year (£m) | Cumulative benefit (cost) (£m) | Net benefits (cost) by year (£m) | Cumulative benefit (cost) (£m) |
| Shadow Year | 2027 / 28 | -42.5 | -42.5 | -37.6 | -37.6 | -42.6 | -42.6 |
| Year 1 | 2028 / 29 | -36.0 | -78.5 | -26.2 | -63.8 | -39.5 | -82.1 |
| Year 2 | 2029 / 30 | 21.7 | -56.8 | 28.3 | -35.5 | 7.7 | -74.5 |
| Year 3 | 2030 / 31 | 43.4 | -13.3 | 28.3 | -7.2 | 7.7 | -66.8 |
| Year 4 | 2031 / 32 | 43.4 | 30.1* | 28.3 | 21.2* | 7.7 | -59.1 |
| Year 5 | 2032 / 33 | 43.4 | 73.5 | 28.3 | 49.5 | 7.7 | -51.5 |

* Payback year



Cumulative financial benefit and payback period by LGR option
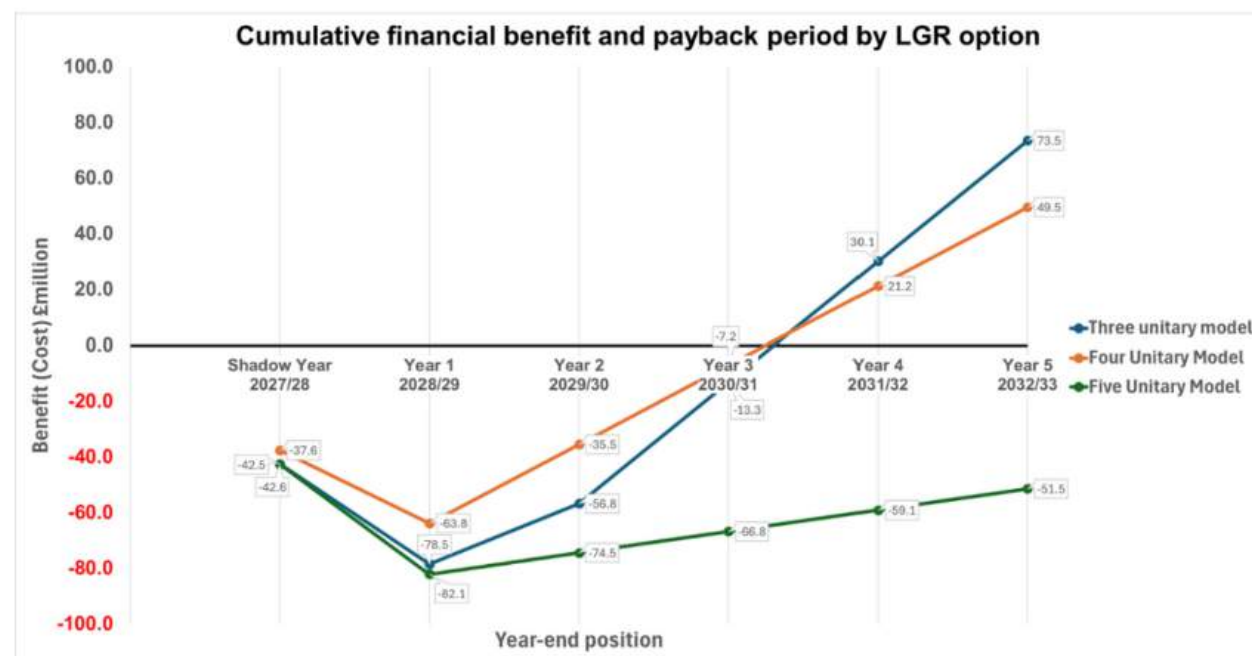
# Section 6: Implementation plan

**This section includes:**

Learnings from previous LGR programmes

Key implementation phases and activities

Implementation governance and workstreams

# Learnings from previous LGR programmes

**Successful delivery of LGR programmes depends on strong planning, governance and engagement. Lessons from other areas have shaped this approach and the critical success factors defined. The approach is designed to be deliverable and resilient, with stakeholder engagement vital to its success, ensuring transparency, trust and alignment throughout the transition.**

Greater Essex has already benefited from learning drawn from recent LGR programmes. This approach has informed both our analysis and early implementation planning. Continued engagement with peers across the country will be essential as we move into the next phases of delivery.

**Principles for successful LGR delivery**
Evidence from past reorganisations and the 2024 Grant Thornton study highlights ten critical success factors for effective transition and delivery:

1. **Start early and plan proactively:** Early mobilisation supports better risk management, clearer timelines and smoother service continuity.

2. **Maintain continuity of public services:** Services must remain uninterrupted, with clear operational handovers and contingency plans in place.

3. **Design around residents and communicate clearly:** Structures and services should reflect resident needs, supported by timely, accessible communication.

4. **Establish transparent and accountable governance:** Decision-making should be open, with visible leadership, clear responsibilities and strong programme controls.

5. **Set a coherent vision and align transformation:** A single, shared vision should guide all change activity to avoid duplication and fragmentation.

6. **Support staff and build an inclusive culture:** Staff should be engaged early, supported through change and empowered to shape the future organisation.

7. **Balance technical delivery with cultural change:** Address both systems and governance ('hard' elements) and behaviours, values and leadership ('soft' elements).

8. **Understand and resource future workforce needs:** Map current and future capacity and ensure the right people are in place to deliver.

9. **Ensure financial sustainability and value for money:** Deliver efficiencies without compromising quality, underpinned by robust financial planning.

10. **Apply rigorous controls and assurance:** Confidence should be built through strong programme management, risk tracking and clear escalation routes.

**Stakeholder engagement**

Strong stakeholder engagement is critical to a successful transition to unitary governance. Councils that have undergone reorganisation consistently emphasise the value of involving stakeholders early and consistently. This helps build understanding of what is changing, when and why, reduces resistance, and builds trust.

Once the proposal is confirmed, a comprehensive engagement plan will be developed. This will ensure clear, timely communication and place stakeholder perspectives at the centre of delivery.

Key stakeholders include:

- Citizens of Essex
- UK Government
- Elected officials
- Local government employees
- Local businesses
- Community groups and non-profit organisations (e.g. parishes, neighbourhood groups)
- External service providers

# Key implementation activities

**Implementation will follow five clear phases, from discovery to go-live. The focus is on safe transition and long-term transformation. Successful implementation will require collaboration across existing councils, strong programme management and early mobilisation. This ensures services continue smoothly while change is delivered.**

Delivering local government reorganisation (LGR) in Greater Essex is a complex undertaking. The proposed four-unitary model presents its own complexities; however, it leverages existing upper-tier capacity in Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea, avoiding the risks associated with merging existing unitary authorities.

This provides a more stable foundation for transition and reduces implementation risk. Our approach goes beyond achieving safe and legal status on Day 1. It is designed to enable long-term transformation, with a clear focus on service improvement, financial sustainability and better outcomes for residents.

**High-level implementation plan**

The implementation programme will be structured across five main phases, with the Transition & Launch phase split into two sub-phases. The timeline is working to an overall vesting day of 1 April 2028. There are several key dates and milestones throughout:

| Milestone | Date | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **LGR Proposal Submission** | September 2025 | Formal submission of the proposed model for local government reorganisation in Greater Essex to the UK Government. |
| **Government Decision** | March 2026 (expected) | Anticipated date for the Government to confirm whether the proposal will proceed. |
| **GECCA Mayoral Election** | May 2026 | Election of the Mayor for the Greater Essex Combined County Authority (GECCA), subject to Government approval. |
| **Shadow Unitary Elections** | May 2027 | Elections to establish shadow unitary councils that will prepare for full transition. |
| **Vesting Day** | 1 April 2028 | Official launch of the new unitary authorities, with full powers and responsibilities transferred. |

Figure 6.1 – Plan on a page diagram of implementation
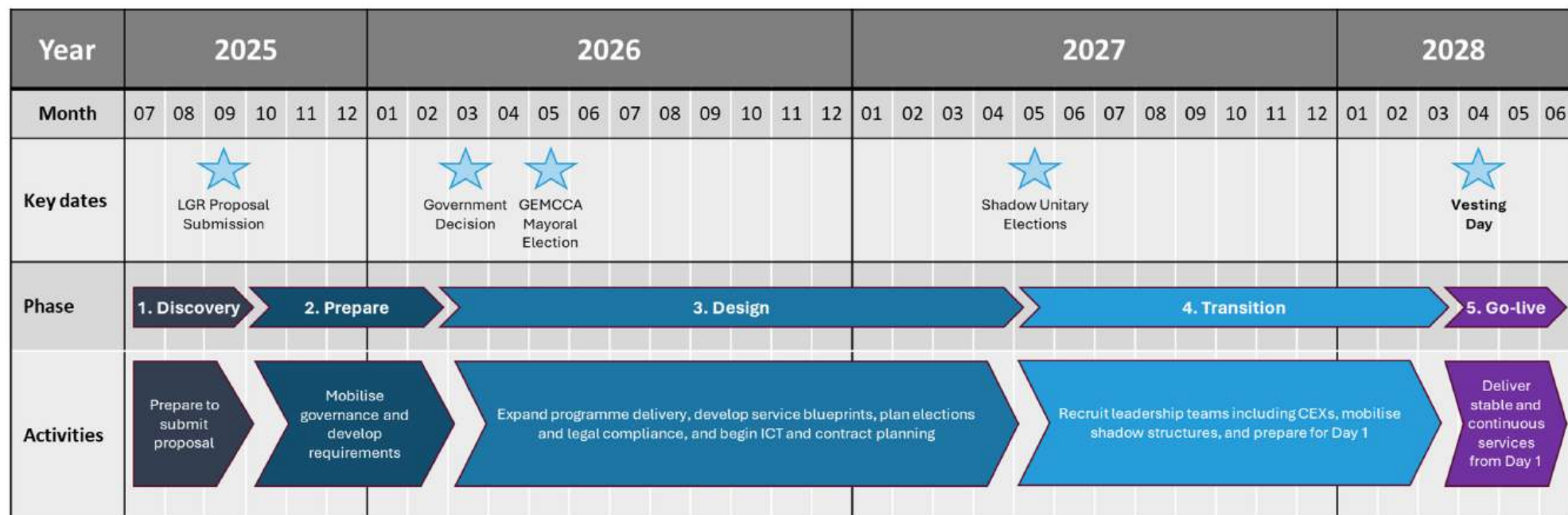
**Phases of implementation and priority activities**

The table below sets out the priority implementation activities in further detail.

| Phase | Timing | Priority activities |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Discovery** | **To Oct 2025** | - Establish programme structure, identify resources, and clarify roles and responsibilities for programme teams<br>- Recruit strategic partner to support programme design and delivery<br>- Strategic working protocols to take informed decisions and control the impact of LGR<br>- Set up a central data hub to gather and maintain consistent programme data<br>- Identify datasets and understand data quality, completing remediation before transfer to new systems<br>- Identify and engage stakeholders, gathering their thoughts on unitarisation and the best method for a smooth transition |
| **2. Prepare** | **Oct 2025 – Mar 2026** | - Establish programme governance, workstreams and financial controls, setting clear ownership of responsibilities and reporting lines<br>- Develop high-level implementation plan, timeline and critical path with a project manager to ensure key milestones are met allowing achievement of the critical path<br>- Confirm future service requirements and detailed service planning for the new unitary authorities<br>- Define and agree the scope of LGR-related decisions with sovereign councils<br>- Complete baseline of data currently held across the councils and identify any key differences, supporting the creation of a plan for merging all the repositories<br>- Agree upon communications and engagement strategy with key stakeholders and public<br>- Government decision and programme expansion (aligned with partners) |
| **3.  Design** | **Mar 2026 – May 2027** | - Begin expansion of programme, risk management and quality assurance<br>- Begin work on ICT infrastructure, systems, people and contract treatment review and planning<br>- Create organisation and service blueprints to align services and identify early transformation opportunities and risks<br>- Conduct options appraisals for key service areas, sourcing solutions that drive the best outcome for the communities<br>- Prepare for key legal and governance decisions<br>- Plan and deliver elections for shadow authorities<br>- Ensure compliance with Structural Change Order and legal assurance processes |

| Phase | Timing | Priority activities |
|---|---|---|
| 4. Transition | May 2027 – Mar 2028 | Shadow Authorities (May 2027 – May 2028):<br><br>- Appoint Chief Executives and statutory officers for each new authority<br>- Deliver member induction and service briefings<br>- Establish a timetable for key decisions and policy development<br>- Begin development of council plans and strategic priorities<br>- Shadow running of operational governance to test and refine<br>- Test and operationalise the systems to ensure smooth transition for go-live<br><br>Officer leadership (Oct 2027 – Mar 2028)<br><br>- Appoint tier 2 and tier 3 leadership teams<br>- Finalise service planning and operating models<br>- Develop Medium-Term Financial Plans and draft budgets<br>- Prepare key policies and strategies including constitutions, risk registers and corporate plans<br>- Allocate staff and confirm organisational structures, keeping them up to date with ongoing engagement / change management<br>- Finalise Day 1 readiness plans |
| 5. Go-Live | Apr 2028 – Onwards | - Ensure stability and continuity of services from Day 1<br>- Monitor and manage early operational performance<br>- Begin delivery of post-LGR transformation priorities<br>- Embed new governance, culture and leadership arrangements |

**Day 1 Ambitions**

The priority for Day 1 is to ensure safe and legal service delivery, with no disruption to residents. Shortly after, targeted transformation activities will begin to improve services, strengthen financial sustainability and enhance outcomes.

| Absolute requirements for a safe and legal Day 1 | Targeted transformation activities pre-Day 1 | Stretch target and post-Day 1 |
|---|---|---|
| Minimum targets to allow the new councils to deliver services safely to their communities | Activities that begin integration of the new councils and begin set up for a successful integrated council | Activities showing full integration for the new councils |
| ● **Clear vision and strategy:** Each new council must have a defined direction to guide initial operations.<br><br>● **Service integration – data:** Existing data structures must be reviewed and aligned to a single, agreed format to support unified service delivery.<br><br>● **Service integration – people:** Staff must be kept informed through regular updates and training to prepare for new ways of working.<br><br>● **Skills and capacity mapping:** The new councils must identify and fill any gaps in skills and capacity to support transition.<br><br>● **Contract mapping:** Reviewing existing contracts will help identify integration opportunities and ensure continuity of service.<br><br>● **Financial and commercial arrangements:** Plans must be in place to transfer financial responsibilities from existing councils to the new authorities. | ● **Creation of Unitary Delivery Groups:** Teams of specialists from each of the new councils who will support the delivery of unitarisation and share best practices across councils.<br><br>● **Bringing service leads together:** To compare policies and processes, enabling identification of alignment opportunities.<br><br>● **Development of a plan for further transformation:** Unitarisation is the starting point - councils should agree a roadmap for ongoing transformation and improvement. | ● **Fully integrated service delivery model:** Support the new unitary area with seamless services for all citizens.<br><br>● **Enhanced and consistent ways of working:** Ensure all staff use aligned processes through integration and training.<br><br>● **Consistent functional processes:** Improve structure, reliability and effectiveness by reducing errors..<br><br>● **Single, secure system for each unitary:** Enable cross-service delivery while protecting sensitive data.<br><br>● **Cross-system integrated governance: :** Provide strong oversight and accountability through unified reporting.<br><br>● **Single data system:** Ensure data integrity and continuity across services with one secure source of truth. |

# Implementation governance and workstreams

**The four-unitary model will be delivered through a clear governance structure, including a central Programme Board, Unitary Delivery Groups and Shadow Authority Boards. Dedicated workstreams will manage key areas like finance, digital, workforce and legal readiness. This ensures strong oversight and coordinated delivery.**

A structured governance framework will be established across Greater Essex to oversee the unitarisation process. This will be formally defined through the preparation phase but will include:

- **LGR Programme Board:** Reports to the Leaders Group and GECCA joint committees. Led by the Chief Executives of the new unitary authorities and a Programme Director, it will manage strategic issues and risks.

- **Unitary Delivery Groups:** Sub-groups under the Programme Board focused on area-specific issues such as elections, planning and policy. These will become increasingly important as Shadow Authorities are formed and interim Heads of Paid Service are appointed.

- **Shadow Authority Boards:** Created for each new unitary, led by the appointed Chief Executive. Responsible for reviewing and executing strategies ahead of full implementation.

- **District Area Representatives:** Representatives from the new clustered councils will provide local insight and ensure area-specific impacts are considered.

- **Day 1 Board:** Oversees preparations for go-live, including delivery of the programme plan, milestone tracking and completion of Day 1 activities.

### Key workstreams for implementation

To deliver a successful transition to unitary governance, Greater Essex will establish a set of focused workstreams. These will address the core operational and strategic areas required for safe and legal Day 1 delivery, while laying the foundation for long-term transformation. Each workstream will be supported by dedicated leads, clear objectives and robust governance.

| Key workstreams | Delivery focus |
|---|---|
| **Culture and Change Management** | Deliver a cultural change programme alongside staff transfer processes, supported by staff engagement, communications and coproduction of branding and values. |
| **Service Organisational Design** | Design new service structures informed by comparative analysis of legacy models, policies and skill levels. |
| **HR and Workforce** | Plan and deliver TUPE processes, consult with staff and develop a workforce strategy to support recruitment and retention. |
| **Digital Systems and Data** | Map systems, cleanse data and develop secure, unified platforms to support integrated service delivery. |
| **Partnerships and Stakeholders** | Maintain strong external relationships through joint working protocols and stakeholder engagement in organisational design. |
| **Contracts, Commercial, Assets and Estates** | Align procurement pipelines, map contracts and establish governance to ensure continuity and value for money. |

| Key workstreams | Delivery focus |
|---|---|
| **Finance and Budgeting** | Manage budget disaggregation, transition funding and long-term financial planning. |
| **Legal and Governance** | Establish compliant governance structures, support elections and ensure legal readiness. |
| **Communications and Engagement** | Coordinate internal and external messaging to support staff, stakeholders and public understanding. |
| **Programme Management** | Deliver efficient programme management, resource planning and milestone tracking to manage risks, maintain continuity and enable transformation. |

## Risks and mitigations

There are significant risks inherent to any LGR implementation. The size and population of Essex means that the level of risk will be greater than some other programmes. We have therefore sought to minimise risk in the selection of our preferred model, and have also progressed our thinking on how key risks can be mitigated through effective planning and governance.

Alongside the risks, there is also potential additional upside to the approach set out in this proposal. A prudent approach has been taken, for example with regards to the assumptions underpinning the financial model. The four-unitary also limits some of the wider risks of LGR, for example in aggregating and disaggregating upper tier services simultaneously. With successful mitigation of implementation and delivery risks it is also possible that LGR and implementation of the four-unitary model can bring benefits additional to those set out in this proposal.

| Risk | | Impact | Likelihood | Mitigation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Disaggregation complexity** | All LGR options involve splitting county councils and existing unitaries. This is a complex process that must avoid disruption to service delivery during transition. | High | High | Start detailed planning early to identify service transition risks. Use the two existing unitaries to support new ones, sharing best practice and experience with more complex service areas. |
| **ICT and systems integration** | Multiple systems are in use across Greater Essex. A decision is needed on which systems to retain and how to integrate data without affecting services. | High | Medium | Set up a dedicated ICT workstream to map current systems and licences. Identify preferred systems early and plan integration to avoid service disruption. |
| **Capacity constraints** | Staff will need to maintain current services while preparing for transition. This dual workload may stretch capacity and impact delivery. | High | Medium | Review roles and map skills to enable flexible resourcing. Share capacity where possible and bring in external support or SMEs to fill gaps. |
| **Programme slippage** | The timeline for implementation is tight. Given the scale and complexity, there is a high risk of delays. | High | Medium | Establish clear governance and track milestones regularly. Use early escalation routes to address emerging delays. |

| Risk | | Impact | Likelihood | Mitigation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cultural misalignment** | Newly formed councils will bring together different organisational cultures and ways of working, which may lead to friction and misalignment. | Medium | Medium | Engage staff early and visibly. Set clear organisational design principles and appoint leadership early to build confidence and clarity. |
| **Council tax harmonisation** | Council tax rates will change under the new structure. This will affect residents and may be met with resistance. | High | High | Communicate changes clearly and early. Use government frameworks to support implementation and provide clear justification to residents. |
| **Aggregation of services** | Services will need to be merged across new areas. This poses risks to continuity and consistency in delivery. | High | High | Plan early to align similar services. Test rigorously to ensure data integrity and continuity during system merges. |
| **Financial uncertainty** | Financial pressures across the system, including unresolved DSG deficits, MTFS gaps and FFR challenges, may limit capacity to invest in transformation and affect implementation timelines. | High | High | Establish a dedicated financial oversight group within the LGR programme to monitor and manage financial risks across all authorities. This group should align transformation plans with existing financial recovery strategies, ensure early visibility of pressures in areas like DSG and MTFS, and coordinate the use of capital receipts and invest-to-save funding. |

**What our residents have told us is important**

In Thurrock, **51%** of respondents were unaware of what LGR would mean for them. This highlights the need for ongoing communication and transparency.
Councils will continue to engage with communities throughout implementation. See Section 4: Criteria 4.

# Section 7:
# Options appraisal

Section
7

## This section includes:

Identifying and shortlisting options for evaluation

The three options analysed in this report

Summary scoring and commentary against government criteria

Options appraisal conclusion
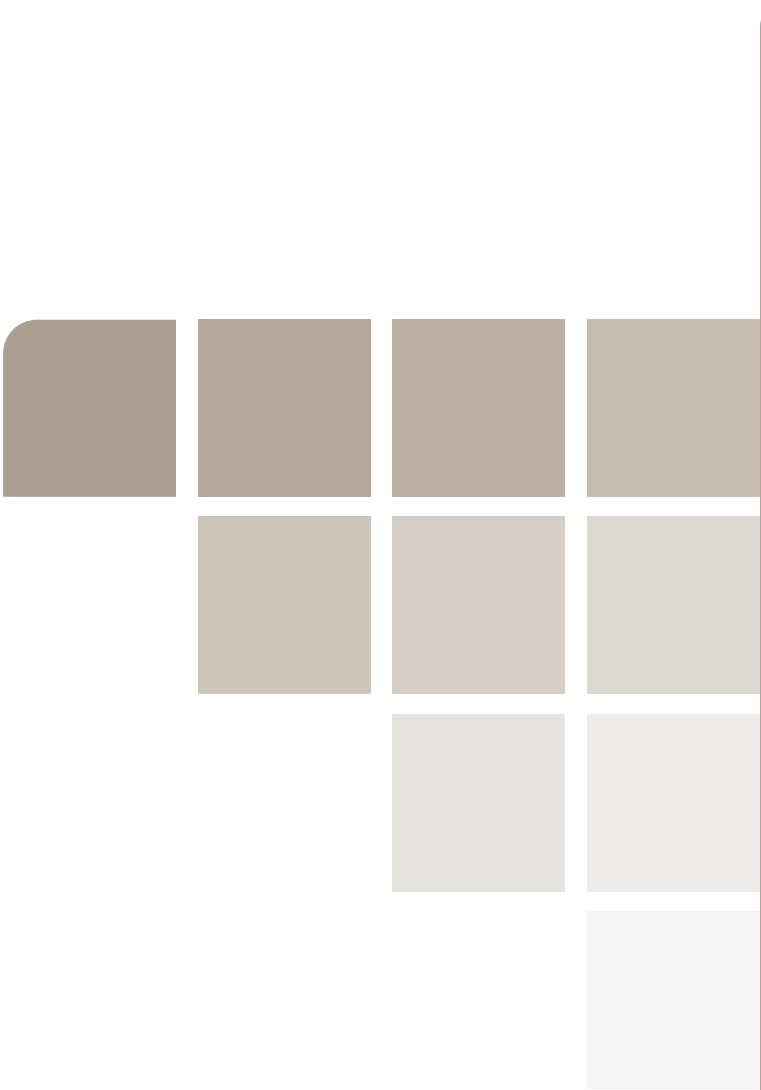
# Identifying and shortlisting options for evaluation

**A longlist of options was tested against a set of red-line criteria. Only three models met the threshold for detailed evaluation.
The four-unitary model emerged as the most balanced and viable option for Greater Essex.**

**Identifying options**

To support selection of a preferred option, a long list of all potential options was assessed against an initial set of 'red lines', allowing a significant number of potential options to be disregarded.

1.  Geographic continuity and travel: Options should not include areas which would require travel outside of the local authority area to deliver key services.

2.  Options with an obviously more feasible alternative: Ensuring options are attractive to all Greater Essex and do not bias a particular regions.

3.  Proposed unitary authorities should be close to the population threshold of 500,000: These options meet criteria set out by the government to gain the benefit of economies of scale. To allow more options to be considered we set tolerances of 5-20%.

4.  Proposed unitary authorities should be financially sustainable: GVA and usable reserves should be sustainable in comparison to other unitary authorities. Financing costs as a percentage of NRE should be below 20%.

5.  Separation of pre-existing unitary authorities: Bringing together the two existing authorities brings a new set of implementation complexity and integration issues.

**Evaluation of options**

An initial assurance exercise confirmed that shortlisted options met the government's baseline criteria, enabling more detailed analysis to identify a preferred model for Greater Essex.

Options were assessed against six core government criteria using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Fourteen evaluation metrics were developed directly from the requirements set out in the government's letter dated 6 February 2025. These metrics were selected where they enabled meaningful comparison between options. Requirements that were considered non-differentiating were excluded from scoring.

Each option was scored using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) framework to indicate how well it aligned with the definition of "what good looks like":
**High (Green):** Fully meets the criteria;
**Medium (Amber):** Partially meets the criteria;
**Low (Red):** Does not meet the criteria.

This scoring was supported by a summary of evidence and rationale, drawing on both data and qualitative insights. The process ensured a consistent and transparent comparison of options against government expectations. The summary of this evaluation is provided below.

# The three options analysed in this report

**For presentational purposes, the evaluation process completed is shown with a focus on the three models put forward by authorities across Greater Essex. (The alternative four-unitary model presented by Rochford District Council was not published with enough time to include within the options appraisal).**

Figure 7.1 – Unitary options under review and population figures

| | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  | | | |  | | |  | | | | |
| | **West** Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Thurrock | **North** Braintree, Chelmsford, Uttlesford | **East** Colchester, Maldon, Tendring, | **South** Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea | **South** Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock | **Central** Brentwood, Chelmsford, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon | **North** Braintree, Colchester, Tendring, Uttlesford | **Southwest** Basildon, Thurrock | **Northwest** Harlow, Epping Forest, Uttlesford | **Central** Brentwood, Chelmsford, Maldon | **Northeast** Braintree, Colchester, Tendring | **Southeast** Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea |
| **Population[45]** | 488,368 (26%) | 438,829 (23%) | 418,532 (22%) | 550,861 (29%) | 729,062 (38%) | 603,756 (32%) | 563,772 (30%) | 368,745 (19%) | 325,609 (17%) | 331,757 (17%) | 510,162 (27%) | 360,317 (19%) |
| **Geographic area[46]** | 707 | 1,596 | 1,141 | 505 | 689 | 1,294 | 1,966 | 295 | 1,011 | 924 | 1,325 | 395 |
| **Population density** | 691 | 275 | 367 | 1,091 | 1,058 | 436 | 307 | 1,250 | 322 | 359 | 385 | 913 |
| **GVA[47]** | 15,556 | 13,108 | 8,714 | 13,440 | 19,056 | 17,567 | 14,195 | 12,918 | 9,404 | 10,866 | 11,492 | 6,138 |
| **GVA per capita[44]** | 31,853 | 29,870 | 20,820 | 24,398 | 26,138 | 31,160 | 23,511 | 35,032 | 28,881 | 32,753 | 22,526 | 17,035 |
| **Deprivation[48]** | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.13 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.12 | 0.11 |
| **Homelessness[49]** | 1.20 | 0.99 | 1.26 | 1.46 | 1.66 | 0.80 | 1.14 | 1.95 | 0.64 | 1.02 | 1.17 | 1.36 |
| **Wider determinants of health[50]** | 7.90 | 4.87 | 8.53 | 8.30 | 8.84 | 6.08 | 7.60 | 11.30 | 7.00 | 4.33 | 8.93 | 7.20 |

45  Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
46  Standard Area Measurements for Administrative Areas (December 2023) in the UK
47  Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
48  https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/mappingincomedeprivationatalocalauthoritylevel
49  https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
50  https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/datasets/lifeexpectancyforlocalareasofgreatbritain?utm

# Summary scoring and commentary against government criteria

The evaluation focused on three models, and each were scored High, Medium or Low against the six government criteria. This enabled consistent comparison and supported identification of the four-unitary model as the best option for Greater Essex. Summary rationale for scoring is set out against each of the six government criteria, comparing the performance of the three-unitary, four-unitary, and five-unitary models.

Figure 7.2 – Summary scoring and commentary against government criteria

| | Four-unitary model | Three-unitary model | Five-unitary model |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **HIGH** | **MEDIUM** | **LOW** |
| **1. Establishing a single tier of local government** | • Balances key economic indicators including GVA, council tax base, and business rates<br><br>• Ensures each new unitary aligns to a functional and recognised geography<br><br>• Strong economic growth prospects for each unitary, with an economic centre and international port in each authority<br><br>• Aligns boundaries with functional travel patterns and supporting place-based infrastructure investment and transport planning<br><br>• Housing delivery and homelessness pressures are distributed evenly, enabling each authority to tailor its approach to local conditions while benefiting from strategic coherence and shared capacity | • Total GVA and GVA per capita is relatively balanced; however, the model creates this balance through joining areas which do not align to functional economic areas and recognised geographies<br><br>• Creates large, disconnected geographies that undermine transport coherence<br><br>• Large size of South Essex may create challenges for local representation and service responsiveness<br><br>• Central Essex rail infrastructure is predominantly radial, resulting in weak internal public transport, high car dependency, and limited internal connectivity<br><br>• North Essex requires long journeys between extremities and poor direct links, reducing internal cohesion and limiting access to services<br><br>• Housing pressures concentrated in South Essex with high homelessness and low housing delivery rates | • Highly uneven population and economic indicators with greatest variance between councils, e.g. Southwest Essex has a GVA per capita nearly double that of Southeast<br><br>• Increased fragmentation risks inconsistent decision-making and weaker alignment with regional priorities<br><br>• Housing and service pressures are dispersed across smaller units, making it harder to coordinate responses and pool resources effectively<br><br>• Travel to work links are strong, grouping districts with both high internal commuting and strong bilateral flows<br><br>• Smaller authorities lack the scale to deliver complex services or attract senior leadership, diluting strategic capacity<br><br>• Increases the number of Cabinets and governance structures required, reintroducing duplication and reducing efficiency gains expected from reorganisation |

| | Four-unitary model | Three-unitary model | Five-unitary model |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **MEDIUM** | **MEDIUM** | **LOW** |
| **2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | • Most balanced configuration, with evenly distributed populations that align with government guidelines and allows for future growth<br><br>• Each authority has sufficient scale to deliver services efficiently and absorb financial shocks. Following an initial injection of government support, as modeled in table 4.11, this new authority is best placed to be on a stable footing to deliver the future services required<br><br>• West Essex unitary including Thurrock, has sufficient scale and growth potential to deliver long-term resilience<br><br>• Avoids the extremes of over-centralisation or fragmentation, enabling tailored service delivery while maintaining strategic coherence<br><br>• Scale of each unitary supports investment in transformation, recruitment of specialist expertise and delivery of demand-led services such as adult social care | • Greatest population imbalance, creating a "mega council" in the South, with population exceeding 700,000, and approaching 800,000 by 2047<br><br>• Based on high-level financial modelling has the lowest long-term running cost due to lowest number of authorities<br><br>• Carries greater risk of future cost escalation, with evidence showing that larger councils do not consistently deliver greater efficiency or cost savings<br><br>• Introduces greater complexity in transition, particularly in South Essex where Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea are aggregated alongside disaggregating Essex County Council services, creating a major risk to realisation of financial and efficiency benefits | • Includes four councils with populations below 400,000, which risk being too small for sustainable operation even after accounting for future growth<br><br>• Fragmentation in the five-unitary model would dilute strategic capacity and increase duplication, undermining the efficiency gains expected from reorganisation<br><br>• Would require significant financial support, estimated between £400 million and £600 million, to be viable<br><br>• Smaller units may struggle to attract and retain specialist expertise, invest in transformation or manage demand-led services |

| | Four-unitary model | Three-unitary model | Five-unitary model |
|---|---|---|---|
| **3. High quality and sustainable public services** | **HIGH** | **MEDIUM** | **MEDIUM** |
| | • Distributes areas of deprivation and service demand evenly across the new authorities, preventing excessive pressure on any single unitary | • The South region has a wider determinants of health score of 8.84 due to the grouping of Thurrock, Basildon, Castle Point, and Southend-on-Sea, which are only counteracted by the inclusion of Rochford who score strongly | • The Southwest region has a wider determinants of health score of 11.30 due to the pairing of Thurrock and Basildon which each have significant deprivation and inequality issues |
| | • Wider determinants of health scores are balanced across all four councils, the only outlier being North Essex which is an outlier in the positive direction | • Evidence from past LGR programmes, such as BCP Council in Dorset, shows that additional complexity of aggregating unitaries alongside disaggregating counties can lead to significant service delivery failures, unclear workforce deployment, and financial instability. | • Fragments the region into smaller authorities, which may struggle to sustain complex services, absorb demand shocks or invest in transformation |
| | • Service delivery built on footprints that are manageable and recognised by communities | • Greater geographic size may hinder the ability to tailor services effectively at a local level | • Sacrifices economies of scale and exposes each authority to greater financial instability, risking higher ongoing costs and the need for significant government support to remain viable |
| | • Aligns strongly with policing boundaries and provides balanced partnership to future Greater Essex ICB | • Concentrates high-pressure districts such as Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and Basildon into one authority, which could reduce responsiveness and increase long-term costs | • Risks greater inconsistency in performance, limited strategic capacity, and reduced ability to engage with regional initiatives |
| | • Enables tailored service design around community needs while retaining sufficient scale to achieve short-term efficiencies | • Scale could complicate partnership working and may reduce democratic accountability by creating authorities that speak for disproportionately large and diverse populations | • Lacks the scale to fully support digital modernisation, increasing the risk of technological stagnation and digital exclusion |
| | • Makes best use of existing upper-tier service capabilities in Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea and Essex County Council, reducing transition risk | | • Risks diluting influence and generating deadlock, as smaller councils struggle to assert their needs effectively at the regional level |
| | • Limits the risks associated with combining critical services like adult social care and children's services, avoiding the disruption seen in other reorganisations | | |
| | • Maintains a scale that supports strategic partnerships and investment in digital | | |

| | Four-unitary model | Three-unitary model | Five-unitary model |
|---|---|---|---|
| **4. Working together to understand and meet local needs** | **HIGH** | **MEDIUM** | **MEDIUM** |
| | • Establishes unitary authorities that are internally cohesive, easily navigable, and align with sense of place<br><br>• The four-unitary model provides the best balance for responding to the issues which residents tell us matter to them the most (financial stability, service quality and local decision making) | • The geographic size of the councils makes it more challenging to recognise and represent varying local identities, connecting areas without obvious links over large geographic areas<br><br>• The scale of councils in this model does not provide the optimal environment for local decision making which reflects community needs, as identified as a priority by residents | • Smaller councils risk inadvertently creating artificial boundaries that are neither practical nor align with resident expectations<br><br>• Financial sustainability is a priority for local residents, and scale of councils in this model risks their ability to achieve this outcome |
| | **HIGH** | **LOW** | **MEDIUM** |
| | • Establishes four-unitary authorities of equal standing, ensuring balanced representation across Greater Essex, avoiding over-concentration of power and ensures equal weight is given to each part of the region<br><br>• Supports effective GECCA governance by enabling the mayor to hold a tie-breaking vote, which helps avoid deadlock and ensures decisions can progress | • Consolidates existing capabilities but may undermine balanced representation and strategic equity<br><br>• Risks over-concentration of population and voting power in a single authority<br><br>• Larger size of one unitary could dominate decision-making, reducing the influence of the others and creating governance imbalance | • Introduces complexity and imbalance, diluting the capacity of existing authorities and making majority voting more difficult to achieve<br><br>• Smaller scale of some councils may reduce their ability to influence regional decisions, increasing the risk of fragmentation and inconsistent coordination |
| | **MEDIUM** | **LOW** | **MEDIUM** |
| | • Having a relatively smaller population size in each boundary line compared to larger proposed models, will allow for operation at scale while being close enough to deliver locally and avoiding the risk of diluting community voices too far<br><br>• The balanced population size in each of the new authorities avoids strain on any one authority to administer significantly more NACs | • Risks creating councils that are too expansive across incoherent geographies to effectively connect with communities, potentially becoming overly reliant on Neighbourhood Area Committees<br><br>• Such committees are unlikely to be adequate and could inadvertently re-establish a two-tier structure, demanding substantial officer and member resources | • Likely to be able to engage effectively with residents on a local level given the smaller size and scale<br><br>• May lack broader perspectives and representation on how larger scale infrastructure could benefit a wider population outside of their immediate area, and require partnership with neighbouring authorities to deliver effectively |

# Options appraisal conclusion

The four-unitary model scored highest overall in evaluation, with strong performance across all areas. It is the most balanced and deliverable option, and it is the only model that meets all criteria consistently and avoids the need for external support. It provides the best platform for reform and delivering better outcomes for residents.

| | Four-unitary model | Three-unitary model | Five-unitary model |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Establishing a single tier of local government** | HIGH | MEDIUM | LOW |
| **2. Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** | MEDIUM | MEDIUM | LOW |
| **3. High quality and sustainable public services** | HIGH | MEDIUM | MEDIUM |
| **4. Working together to understand and meet local needs** | HIGH | MEDIUM | MEDIUM |
| **5. Supporting devolution arrangements** | HIGH | LOW | MEDIUM |
| **6. Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment** | MEDIUM | LOW | MEDIUM |

Following a structured options appraisal, it is clear there is no one perfect model. However, the four-unitary model demonstrates the strongest alignment with the government's criteria. It scores 'High' in four key areas:

- **Establishing a single tier of local government**
- **High quality and sustainable public services**
- **Working together to understand and meet local needs**
- **Supporting devolution arrangements**

These are critical success factors for long-term resilience and transformation in local government and provides the optimal opportunity for success.

While the four-unitary model's performance is assessed as medium in **efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks** and **stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment**, when combined they provide a middle ground avoiding the extremes of both three-unitary and five-unitary models. The four-unitary model avoids the larger geographies which may struggle to reflect local economic dynamics, weakening the link between growth and reinvestment.

The five-unitary model, while more localised, may lack the scale to capture the full economic potential of key growth areas or to deliver the infrastructure required to support them. The four-unitary model provides the most balance across all criteria, it generates sufficient economies of scale to be viable whilst depriving the benefits of community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment from smaller unitaries. Most important it is the four-unitary model which provides the best environment for success, avoid the extremes of both the five-unitary and three-unitary models.

# Appendix 1: Key data sets

Figure 8.1 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Demographics

| Metric | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| Population (2023)[51] | 488,368 | 438,829 | 418,532 | 550,861 | 729,062 | 563,772 | 603,756 | 368,745 | 325,609 | 331,757 | 510,162 | 360,317 |
| Geographic area (sq km) (2023)[52] | 707 | 1,596 | 1,141 | 505 | 689 | 1,294 | 1,966 | 295 | 1,011 | 924 | 1,325 | 395 |
| Population density (people per sq km) (2023) | 691 | 275 | 367 | 1,091 | 1,058 | 436 | 307 | 1,250 | 322 | 359 | 385 | 913 |
| 65+ Population (2023)[53] | 81,319 | 88,964 | 98,187 | 111,341 | 135,656 | 110,515 | 133,640 | 56,854 | 60,868 | 69,393 | 113,894 | 78,802 |
| Population 2032 estimate[54] | 506,096 | 469,091 | 456,578 | 564,551 | 751,987 | 589,574 | 654,755 | 382,754 | 343,960 | 350,481 | 549,888 | 369,233 |
| Population 2047 estimate[50] | 535,615 | 509,451 | 498,636 | 589,668 | 789,031 | 628,670 | 715,669 | 403,323 | 370,284 | 376,402 | 597,653 | 385,708 |

[51] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[52] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/da8590c5f55f4664b32ad4339f43419c/about
[53] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales
[54] Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics

Figure 8.2 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Financials

| Metric | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **West Essex** | **North Essex** | **East Essex** | **South Essex** | **South Essex** | **Central Essex** | **North Essex** | **Southwest Essex** | **Northwest Essex** | **Central Essex** | **Northeast Essex** | **Southeast Essex** |
| **Total GVA (£m) (2022)[55]** | 15,556 | 13,108 | 8,714 | 13,440 | 19,056 | 17,567 | 14,195 | 12,918 | 9,404 | 10,866 | 11,492 | 6,138 |
| **GVA per capita (£) (2022)[56]** | 31,853 | 29,870 | 20,820 | 24,398 | 26,138 | 31,160 | 23,511 | 35,032 | 28,881 | 32,753 | 22,526 | 17,035 |
| **Council tax base (number of band D equivalent properties) (2024)[57]** | 173,324 | 169,545 | 126,477 | 186,896 | 241,010 | 197,250 | 217,980 | 115,722 | 125,250 | 112,552 | 177,428 | 125,288 |
| **Council Tax band D average (exc. Fire, Police and Parishes) (£) (2023)[53]** | 2,086 | 2,051 | 2,060 | 2,109 | 2,095 | 2,091 | 2,046 | 2,094 | 2,090 | 2,071 | 2,051 | 2,096 |
| **Retained Business Rates (£m) (2024-25)[58]** | 115.0 | 76.5 | 43.8 | 67.8 | 138.4 | 85.1 | 79.6 | 104.8 | 56.8 | 50.6 | 57.3 | 33.6 |
| **Non-Earmarked Reserves (£m) (2023-24)[59]** | 44.9 | 43.4 | 32.0 | 37.7 | 48.6 | 59.7 | 49.7 | 22.4 | 27.4 | 38.5 | 43.5 | 26.3 |
| **Net revenue expenditure (£m)* (2023/24)[60]** | 423.2 | 350.4 | 324.6 | 454.3 | 631.5 | 453.4 | 467.6 | 341.3 | 259.6 | 267.3 | 394.1 | 290.2 |
| **Financing costs (£m)*(2023/24)[56]** | 80.1 | 15.3 | 7.2 | 34.2 | 98.2 | 19.9 | 18.5 | 82.8 | 24.9 | 5.0 | 8.7 | 15.4 |
| **Financing Costs as % Net revenue expenditure (inc. County allocations) (23-24)** | 19% | 4% | 2% | 8% | 16% | 4% | 4% | 24% | 10% | 2% | 2% | 5% |
| **External Debt (£m)[61]** | 1,830 | 548 | 484 | 1,261 | 2,130 | 1,092 | 900 | 1,653 | 1,051 | 405 | 536 | 478 |
| **Financing costs (£m)[57]** | 144 | 50 | 39 | 73 | 166 | 70 | 70 | 133 | 61 | 32 | 47 | 33 |

[55] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[56] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/datasets/regionalgrossdomesticproductlocalauthorities
[57] Respective district council and unitary authority council tax webpages
[58] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-non-domestic-rates-collected-by-councils-in-england-forecast-2024-to-2025
[59] Respective district council and unitary authority non-earmarked reserves webpages
[60] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2023-to-2024-individual-local-authority-data-outturn
[61] CIPFA Essex LGR – Debt and Non-Current Assets July 2025

Figure 8.3 – Key data set for government criteria analysis: Housing and Homelessness

| Metric | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| Deprivation score (2019)[52] | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.13 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.12 | 0.11 |
| Homelessness Rate (per 1,000 Households) (Apr-Jun 2024)[63] | 1.20 | 0.99 | 1.26 | 1.46 | 1.66 | 0.80 | 1.14 | 1.95 | 0.64 | 1.02 | 1.17 | 1.36 |
| Unemployment rates (%) (Oct 2023-Sept 2024)[64] | 4.03 | 2.86 | 3.53 | 3.36 | 3.47 | 3.51 | 3.46 | 3.91 | 3.96 | 2.88 | 3.62 | 3.17 |
| Total Crime Rate per 1,000 Pop. (2024)[65] | 83.65 | 69.05 | 77.07 | 82.42 | 83.98 | 77.21 | 72.97 | 91.68 | 76.57 | 71.59 | 76.25 | 76.10 |
| Housing Delivery Test 2023 Measurement %[66] | 0.73 | 1.07 | 1.31 | 0.50 | 0.46 | 1.20 | 1.15 | 0.35 | 0.79 | 1.25 | 1.37 | 0.59 |
| Rough Sleeper Count (Autumn 2023) [67] | 18 | 25 | 11 | 43 | 49 | 30 | 18 | 10 | 11 | 19 | 18 | 39 |
| Number of Households in TA per 1,000 pop. Apr-Jun 2024[68] | 17 | 7 | 6 | 18 | 25 | 16 | 7 | 16 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 9 |
| Total number of households in B&B Hotels Apr-Jun 2024[69] | 39 | 64 | 153 | 166 | 173 | 77 | 172 | 58 | 41 | 49 | 159 | 115 |
| Total number of households in TA in another local authority district Apr-Jun 2024[70] | 72 | 140 | 20 | 157 | 225 | 133 | 31 | 148 | 10 | 133 | 21 | 77 |

[62] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/mappingincomedeprivationatalocalauthoritylevel
[63] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness
[64] https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/li01regionallabourmarketlocalindicatorsforcountieslocalandunitaryauthorities?utm
[65] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/policeforceareadatatables
[66] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-delivery-test-2023-measurement
[67] Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023 - GOV.UK
[68] Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK
[69] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics
[70] Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics

Figure 8.4 – Children's Services and Education

| Metric* | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| Number of school pupils[71] | 75,335 | 57,644 | 53,707 | 83,338 | 115,050 | 76,742 | 78,232 | 59,491 | 42,263 | 45,892 | 66,819 | 55,559 |
| Total SEN support[67] | 9,019 | 7,161 | 7,503 | 10,387 | 14,212 | 9,003 | 10,855 | 7,403 | 5,364 | 5,140 | 9,354 | 6,809 |
| % of students receiving SEN support | 12.0% | 12.4% | 14.0% | 12.5% | 12.4% | 11.7% | 13.9% | 12.4% | 12.7% | 11.2% | 14.0% | 12.3% |
| Total EHCP[67] | 3,452 | 2,398 | 2,145 | 3,696 | 5,554 | 2,943 | 3,194 | 2,924 | 1,392 | 1,861 | 2,884 | 2,630 |
| % of students on EHCP | 4.6% | 4.2% | 4.0% | 4.4% | 4.8% | 3.8% | 4.1% | 4.9% | 3.3% | 4.1% | 4.3% | 4.7% |
| Number of children in care on 31st March[67] | 426 | 187 | 347 | 532 | 808 | 261 | 423 | 419 | 159 | 127 | 398 | 389 |
| Number of children with a CP Plan on 31st March[67] | 406 | 459 | 462 | 390 | 511 | 537 | 669 | 309 | 321 | 290 | 595 | 202 |
| Number of children with a CiN Plan on 31st March[67] | 523 | 178 | 211 | 352 | 762 | 222 | 280 | 494 | 107 | 129 | 266 | 268 |

* most recent figures provided have been taken for all metrics

[71] Received from Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, and Thurrock Council

Figure 8.5 – Adult Services

| Metric* | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| Number of clients accessing long term support at the end of the year: 18-64[72] | 1,625 | 1,582 | 2,105 | 2,133 | 2,867 | 1,731 | 2,847 | 1,415 | 913 | 1,075 | 2,590 | 1,452 |
| Number of clients accessing long term support at the end of the year: 65+[68] | 3,109 | 2,565 | 2,881 | 3,759 | 5,107 | 3,150 | 4,057 | 2,334 | 1,828 | 1,792 | 3,587 | 2,773 |

* most recent figures provided have been taken for all metrics

Figure 8.6 – Public Health[73]

| Metric* | Four-unitary model | | | | Three-unitary model | | | Five-unitary model | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | West Essex | North Essex | East Essex | South Essex | South Essex | Central Essex | North Essex | Southwest Essex | Northwest Essex | Central Essex | Northeast Essex | Southeast Essex |
| Wider determinants of health | 7.90 | 4.87 | 8.53 | 8.30 | 8.84 | 6.08 | 7.60 | 11.30 | 7.00 | 4.33 | 8.93 | 7.20 |
| Life expectancy and causes of death | 7.66 | 5.92 | 8.42 | 7.81 | 8.28 | 6.15 | 8.19 | 9.31 | 6.67 | 4.46 | 10.04 | 7.58 |
| Injuries and ill health | 6.70 | 8.67 | 8.47 | 6.70 | 6.60 | 7.88 | 8.15 | 6.90 | 7.33 | 8.60 | 8.07 | 6.40 |
| Behavioural risk factors | 6.10 | 6.67 | 8.20 | 9.00 | 9.00 | 5.68 | 7.90 | 9.40 | 6.33 | 5.20 | 8.47 | 8.73 |
| Child health | 7.63 | 5.00 | 9.08 | 7.00 | 8.10 | 5.95 | 7.63 | 10.63 | 4.83 | 5.92 | 9.33 | 6.42 |
| Inequalities | 7.50 | 3.89 | 8.11 | 9.33 | 9.60 | 5.73 | 6.67 | 12.17 | 4.11 | 5.78 | 8.56 | 7.89 |
| Health protection | 10.75 | 6.50 | 5.33 | 6.63 | 7.80 | 8.30 | 6.13 | 9.75 | 8.33 | 7.17 | 6.50 | 6.50 |

[72] Received from Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, and Thurrock Council
[73] Life expectancy for local areas of Great Britain - Office for National Statistics

Figure 8.7: Number of people living in [row] and working in [column]. Does not include people who mainly work from home.[74]

| | | Place of work | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Basildon | Braintree | Brentwood | Castle Point | Chelmsford | Colchester | Epping Forest | Harlow | Maldon | Rochford | Southend-on-Sea | Tendring | Thurrock | Uttlesford |
| Place of residence | Basildon | **23,353** | 234 | 2,219 | 1,080 | 2,415 | 120 | 321 | 183 | 200 | 856 | 1,427 | 20 | 3,749 | 147 |
| | Braintree | 486 | **19,302** | 322 | 84 | 5,405 | 2,736 | 296 | 434 | 998 | 80 | 106 | 543 | 174 | 3,584 |
| | Brentwood | 1,288 | 92 | **5,328** | 84 | 919 | 62 | 515 | 168 | 62 | 82 | 159 | 6 | 699 | 98 |
| | Castle Point | 3,451 | 96 | 276 | **6,711** | 904 | 52 | 69 | 22 | 106 | 1,178 | 3,111 | 6 | 1,449 | 71 |
| | Chelmsford | 2,755 | 1,701 | 1,373 | 401 | **24,622** | 622 | 526 | 343 | 1,179 | 544 | 859 | 86 | 645 | 852 |
| | Colchester | 280 | 3,031 | 113 | 51 | 1,983 | **32,912** | 92 | 74 | 1,001 | 59 | 96 | 3,329 | 118 | 503 |
| | Epping Forest | 274 | 68 | 455 | 16 | 384 | 25 | **8,786** | 1,882 | 27 | 19 | 50 | 11 | 221 | 395 |
| | Harlow | 204 | 82 | 172 | 6 | 228 | 20 | 2,540 | **14,225** | 8 | 10 | 21 | 5 | 157 | 1,042 |
| | Maldon | 818 | 1,097 | 232 | 177 | 3,085 | 736 | 69 | 51 | **6,514** | 260 | 482 | 47 | 291 | 124 |
| | Rochford | 2,062 | 114 | 251 | 1,249 | 1,156 | 66 | 65 | 18 | 240 | **4,972** | 5,372 | 3 | 542 | 63 |
| | Southend-on-Sea | 2,921 | 136 | 303 | 1,963 | 1,105 | 98 | 89 | 43 | 296 | 3,589 | **25,652** | 19 | 1,116 | 93 |
| | Tendring | 102 | 774 | 73 | 9 | 580 | 6,731 | 74 | 30 | 187 | 30 | 37 | **20,691** | 102 | 232 |
| | Thurrock | 3,905 | 94 | 1,000 | 367 | 534 | 50 | 269 | 159 | 59 | 188 | 516 | 18 | **25,199** | 99 |
| | Uttlesford | 84 | 1,051 | 83 | 12 | 812 | 245 | 606 | 1,037 | 50 | 16 | 17 | 96 | 75 | **9,064** |

# Appendix 2: Approach to developing this proposal

**This proposal has been developed through joint working across Greater Essex councils, supported by shared governance, coordinated data analysis, and structured engagement with partners and residents.  A detailed options appraisal identified the four-unitary model as the most balanced and sustainable configuration.**

**Communication and Engagement**

Development of the interim plan → Engagement with Greater Essex → Engagement with residents → Engagement with partners → Development of Financial Model → Implementation planning → Writing of proposal
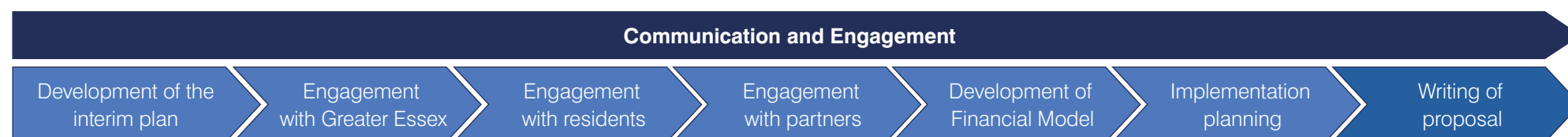
**Development of the interim plan**

The interim plan was developed between January and March 2025 and submitted to government in April 2025. This was prepared through wide-scale collaboration led by local authority leaders in Essex. Four thematic working groups were established to coordinate evidence gathering and analysis, alongside several key officer and member forums including:

- **Leaders and Chief Executives:** Regular meetings through the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Forum (ELCE) to test and agree the approach to options appraisal, governance and engagement. This ensured a consistent and transparent process across all councils.

- **Section 151 Officers:** A dedicated finance working group co-ordinated on data collection, validation of assumptions and modelling of options.

- **Monitoring Officers and Democratic Services:** Officers worked together to consider future governance arrangements, including electoral implications and transitional structures.

This collaborative approach enabled the development of a shared evidence base, consistent assumptions and a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the region which has supported subsequent proposals.

**Collaborative working since the interim plan**

Following submission, it became clear that all councils in Greater Essex could not align on a single preferred option. However, collaboration has continued through regular meetings of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Forum (ELCE), supported by shared programme coordination and data exchange. Councils have worked together to refine the evidence base, test assumptions and maintain alignment on core principles for public service reform

**Engagement with our partners**

Engagement with partners has taken place throughout the process, including:

- Dedicated sessions with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Thurrock Commissioners through ELCE

- Dialogue with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to understand implications for health and care integration

- Engagement with anchor institutions including the University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University

- Engagement with the Essex Association of Local Councils to reflect neighbourhood-level perspectives

This engagement has informed the development of the proposal and helped shape the configuration of the preferred four-unitary model.

**Engagement with our residents**

The four-unitary model is grounded in meaningful local engagement and a clear understanding of community perspectives. Councils across the area have taken steps to involve residents, partners and stakeholders in shaping the proposal.

- **Essex County Council** commissioned Greater Essex-wide resident research on behalf of all the boroughs, and led targeted focus groups to explore resident views on local identity, service priorities and governance. An Essex-wide partner engagement survey was also carried out and shared by all councils with local stakeholders.

- **Thurrock Council** has carried out a resident engagement exercise including a resident survey, webinar, public meeting, and drop ins at local events and libraries. Its resident perception survey also asked questions about local identity and links.

- **Southend-on-Sea City Council** ran a public consultation to inform its position on local government reform.

This insight has been used to shape the proposal, including the configuration of the four-unitary authorities, the emphasis on local identity and the focus on service integration and prevention. *More detail is set out on this in Section 4: Criteria 4.*

**Options appraisal and focus on the four-unitary model**

A detailed options appraisal was undertaken between April and June 2025. This assessed multiple configurations against government criteria, including population size, financial sustainability, service delivery and local identity. As part of this process, councils reviewed quantitative and qualitative data, tested assumptions and evaluated implementation complexity.

The four-unitary model emerged as the preferred option due to its balance of scale and localism, financial viability, and alignment with strategic infrastructure and service geographies. Further analysis was then undertaken to test the four-unitary model in detail and inform this final proposal.

**Developing the vision and principles for LGR**

A vision and set of principles for local government reorganisation have been developed following engagement with other councils, partners and residents. These are included in Section 5 and provide a strategic framework for public service reform, guiding the design of new authorities and informing future service transformation.

**Financial modelling**

The financial modelling process followed a consistent, structured methodology, grounded in learning from other LGR processes and aligned with government guidance.

The appropriate basis for estimation of costs and benefits were agreed through discussion with finance contacts and review of analysis undertaken - both nationally and within Greater Essex.

Three calculators, consistent with those being used to support other cases for Local Government Reorganisation, were then used to calculate the three core elements of the financial model: disaggregation costs, implementation costs, and gross revenue savings.

**Implementation planning**

A high-level implementation plan has been developed and is set out in Section 6. It includes four phases:

1. **Discovery:** Programme setup, stakeholder mapping, data hub creation

2. **Preparation:** Governance, service planning, communications strategy

3. **Design:** Organisational blueprints, elections, legal compliance

4. **Transition and Launch:** Shadow authorities, officer leadership, go-live

The plan draws on lessons from other LGR programmes and includes risk mitigation, governance structures and Day 1 readiness planning.

# Appendix 3: Strengths and challenges in Greater Essex

**Greater Essex is a £50 billion economy with strong transport links, international ports and airports, and sectoral strengths in logistics, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. Growth is being driven by Freeport investment, innovation hubs, housing and regeneration programmes, and targeted skills initiatives supporting inclusive and green economic development.**

## Economic strengths and opportunities

**Below is a summary of the key economic growth opportunities in Greater Essex.
These are discussed in relation to the proposed four-unitary model in Section 4: Criteria 1.**

**Greater Essex economic growth opportunities**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Trade and logistics** | The geography and infrastructure of Essex make it a strategic location for trade, logistics and growth. Basildon's A127 Enterprise Corridor supports advanced manufacturing and distribution, while Braintree and Witham host major logistics parks such as Horizon 120 and Freebournes Industrial Estate. The region's strategic location, with access to the M25, A12, A13 and A120, underpins its role in national and international supply chains.<br><br>Major projects position Essex as a future economic powerhouse supporting regional and national economic growth:<br><br>● Stansted Airport is undergoing a £1.1 billion expansion, expected to create 5,000 jobs.<br><br>● Thames Freeport, which includes London Gateway Port and Port of Tilbury, is driving over £4.5 billion in planned investment and 21,000 new jobs.<br><br>● Freeport East features tax sites and innovation centres across north Essex and Suffolk, and plans to create 13,500 new jobs. |
| **Innovation and enterprise** | Innovation is supported by a distributed network of assets across Essex, including:<br><br>● Southend-on-Sea is establishing a hub for micro and small enterprises, with strengths in creative industries, medical technologies and aviation. The LaunchPad innovation hub and Airport Business Park are key assets.<br><br>● The Knowledge Gateway in Colchester, the Ford Dunton Campus in Basildon, and the Lakes Innovation Centre in Braintree, supporting growth in digital, clean tech and advanced engineering.<br><br>● Harlow and Stansted provide key assets in the UK Innovation Corridor linking London with Cambridge, with the recent decision to locate the UK Health Security Agency in Harlow, providing a catalyst for further growth and innovation in the health sector. |

**Greater Essex economic growth opportunities**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Skills and workforce** | Programmes such as Multiply, the Essex Apprenticeship Hub and the Greater Essex Careers Hub have already supported thousands of residents into training and employment. The Greater Essex Skills Council and Local Skills Improvement Plan are already aligning provision with employer needs across all districts, with place-based delivery through institutions such as Colchester Institute, Basildon's Centre for Digital Technologies, South Essex College (with campuses in Southend and Grays), and the University of Essex, which has a significant local student population and strong links to regional employers. |
| **Housing and regeneration** | Strategic planning powers sought through devolution would enable delivery of sustainable, well-connected communities, and support the delivery of the 200,000 new homes needed by 2040. Growth is planned across the county, including the Tendring-Colchester Garden Community, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, Dunton Hills in Brentwood, and regeneration in Basildon and Harlow town centres. These complement brownfield opportunities in Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock, including relocation of industrial uses and waterfront regeneration. |
| **Green growth** | Greater Essex aims to create 19,000 green jobs by 2030, supported by retrofit programmes, clean energy infrastructure and local energy systems. Investment in solar, hydrogen and offshore wind is being pursued through partnerships with Freeports and private sector investors. Local initiatives include Maldon's Causeway employment zone, Basildon's EV infrastructure programme, and Thurrock's green business grants. |
| **Inclusive growth** | The Levelling Up Essex programme has targeted deprivation including areas across Canvey Island, Basildon, Clacton and Jaywick, delivering community hubs, digital inclusion and skills support. Over 140,000 residents have been supported to date.

These efforts are complemented by regeneration initiatives supported through the Towns Fund and other programmes in places such as Tilbury, Colchester, Harlow, Purfleet-on-Thames and Southend-on-Sea. GECCA's ambition is to reduce differences in economic, social, and infrastructure outcomes between different geographic areas across the region. |

## Local Government challenges

**Below is a summary of the key local government challenges in Greater Essex.**
**These are discussed in relation to the proposed four-unitary model throughout Section 4: Case for Change.**

| Local Government challenges in Greater Essex | | Key Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Financial sustainability** | Thurrock's financial position is a key driver for change. The council has been under a Best Value intervention since September 2022 and issued a Section 114 notice in December 2022 linked to its failed investment strategy and following the departure of the Section 151 Officer. While progress has been made, Thurrock continues to face significant debt and structural financial pressures and can currently only set balanced budgets with exceptional financial support from government via capitalisation directives. | 2 |
| **Rising service demand and costs** | Demand for services continues to rise and create additional financial pressures on authorities. In 2023/24, total expenditure on adult social care rose to £32 billion, an annual increase of 12.8% in cash terms and 6.3% in real terms. Gross current expenditure excluding NHS income increased to £27.2 billion, up 8.1% in real terms.[75] Council costs to provide care and support for working age adults is estimated to grow to reach £17bn by the end of 2030. If the current growth in working-age adult social care support continues, this will lead to a total increased cost to local authorities of at least 50% – or £6bn more per year.[76] | 2 |
| **Ageing population** | Greater Essex has an ageing population, with all areas experiencing growth in the number of residents aged 65 and over[77], with Rochford, Chelmsford, Colchester and Brentwood particularly impacted. This is amplified by the relatively flat growth in the 20-64 age range. This demographic shift is increasing demand for adult social care, housing adaptations, health services and community support. Rising complexity of care needs, workforce shortages, and fragmented service delivery are contributing to financial strain and operational challenges. | 3 |
| **Deprivation** | Several areas across Greater Essex, particularly coastal and urban districts such as Thurrock, Tendring, Basildon and Southend-on-Sea, experience persistent deprivation and figures in the lowest 10% nationally. These areas face lower life expectancy, higher rates of long-term illness, and increased demand for support services. There is a contrast with some neighbouring areas which are in the top 10% nationally. This presents broad challenges and requires differentiated service delivery approaches. | 3 |
| **Health inequalities** | There are clear disparities in health outcomes across the region. Public health metrics show that areas such as Thurrock, Tendring, Basildon and Harlow have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and respiratory conditions[78]. These inequalities drive demand for adult social care and increase long-term costs. | 3 |
| **Productivity** | Districts with high deprivation often also have limited access to high-value employment and a lower GVA per capita. Despite proximity to strategic assets like Freeports, ports and airports, places such as Tendring and Thurrock have struggled to attract sustained investment and diversify their economies. This limits growth and constrains councils' ability to generate revenue through business rates and employment. The majority of businesses in Greater Essex are also small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), employing fewer than 10 people. This creates challenges in job creation including through apprenticeships and other entry level schemes. | 1 |

[75] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/social-care-360-expenditure
[76] The Forgotten story of social care, A County Councils Network and Newton Research Programme
[77] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[78] Life expectancy for local areas of Great Britain - Office for National Statistics

Appendix
3

| Local Government challenges in Greater Essex | | Key Criteria |
|---|---|---|
| **Skilled employment** | Greater Essex has a shortage of high skilled jobs. Around 100,000 additional workers qualified at level 4+ would be needed to match national averages. Districts such as Braintree, Castle Point and Epping Forest have limited access to higher education and advanced employment opportunities. | **1** |
| **Infrastructure** | Transport infrastructure is under pressure, particularly in east–west connectivity and rural areas such as Maldon and Rochford. Rural areas including Uttlesford and parts of Braintree also face challenges with public transport access. The current system is heavily reliant on car travel, with limited public transport options in some districts. This affects access to services and limits economic mobility. | **1** |
| **Neighbourhood governance** | The current landscape of town and parish councils across Greater Essex is uneven. Some areas have no formal local structures, while others have multiple. This variation presents a risk of inconsistency, duplication or democratic gaps. | **6** |
| **Climate change** | Flooding, coastal erosion and overheating are affecting communities across Essex. These environmental risks are particularly acute in coastal districts such as Maldon, Southend-on-Sea, and Tendring and require coordinated planning and investment in resilience. | **1 and 5** |
| **Housing and homelessness** | Greater Essex has uneven housing delivery and rising homelessness. While areas like Colchester and Chelmsford consistently meet housing targets, others such as Basildon and Southend-on-Sea fall short. Maldon and Tendring face viability and infrastructure constraints, while Braintree and Uttlesford have land availability but limited delivery capacity. Homelessness rates vary significantly, with some districts exceeding 1.4 per 1,000 households[79]. For Temporary Accommodation, there are some councils who will exceed 5.3 households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 household[75]. | **1** |
| **Green growth delivery** | Essex has set ambitious targets for green growth, including 19,000 new green jobs by 2030. However, delivery is fragmented across districts. Maldon's Causeway zone, Basildon's EV infrastructure programme and Thurrock's green business grants are promising but lack strategic coordination. Councils need joined-up planning across transport, energy and land use to realise environmental goals and unlock investment in clean energy infrastructure. | **1 and 5** |
| **Inclusive growth disparities** | Despite targeted programmes like Levelling Up Essex – disparities in economic and social outcomes persist. Areas such as Jaywick, Canvey Island and Clacton continue to experience entrenched deprivation. Regeneration efforts are underway but require sustained coordination across councils to ensure inclusive growth reaches all communities. | **1 and 5** |
| **Innovation and enterprise fragmentation** | Innovation assets are distributed across Essex, Southend's LaunchPad, Colchester's Knowledge Gateway, Basildon's Ford Dunton Campus – but are not strategically aligned. Councils lack mechanisms to coordinate investment and link innovation to local delivery priorities. This limits the ability to scale enterprise zones and attract high-value sectors. | **1** |
| **Governance complexity** | The current two-tier system with 15 councils creates duplication and inconsistency in service delivery. This fragmentation limits strategic coordination, slows decision-making, and reduces responsiveness to demand. It also creates confusion for residents and partners navigating overlapping responsibilities. | **1 and 6** |

79  Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK

# Appendix 4: CIPFA Template

| Total Summary Position | | | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Total Year 0 to Year 10 |
| Comparison model | Source | Units | | | | | | | | | | | | |

**Region/Option/Component/Scenario**

**Header inputs**

| | |
|---|---|
| County | Greater Essex |
| Council names / type of councils | See next box |
| Component | |
| Scenario | Four Unitaries |
| Author | |
| Version | |
| Date | |
| Short description/ comment | |

Council names / type of councils
Proposal:
West Essex: Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Thurrock
North Essex: Braintree, Chelmsford, Uttlesford
East Essex: Colchester, Maldon, Tendring
South Essex: Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea

**Financial information**

**Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)**   £000s       Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve.

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | 1,000 | 24,665 | 25,665 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 51,330 |
| Premises | - | 3,233 | 3,233 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,467 |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | 1,617 | 1,617 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3,233 |
| ICT | - | 2,829 | 2,829 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5,658 |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | 4,042 | 4,042 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8,083 |
| Other (please specify in commentary) | - | 3,031 | 3,031 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,063 |
| | 1,000 | 39,417 | 40,417 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 80,834 |

**Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)**   £000s       Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve.

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | 1,693 | 8,465 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 145,605 |
| Premises | - | 213 | 1,067 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 18,344 |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | 107 | 533 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 9,172 |
| ICT | - | 187 | 933 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 16,051 |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | 267 | 1,333 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 22,930 |
| Other (please specify in commentary) | - | 200 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 17,197 |
| | - | 2,666 | 13,331 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 229,299 |

**Annual On-going Incremental benefits/savings (without inflation)** £000s       Sign convention - Savings -are -ve in brackets.

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | (2,420) | (12,100) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (208,127) |
| Premises | - | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (42,571) |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | (550) | (2,750) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (47,302) |
| ICT | - | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (42,571) |
| Third Party Payments | - | (1,100) | (5,500) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (94,603) |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | (220) | (1,100) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (18,921) |
| Other (please specify in commentary) | - | (220) | (1,100) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (18,921) |
| | - | (5,500) | (27,501) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (473,016) |
| **Grand Total** | 1,000 | 36,583 | 26,247 | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (162,882) |

**Base Template**

| Comparison model | Source | Units Year | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Total Year 0 to Year 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Option/Component/Scenario**

**Header inputs**

| County | Greater Essex |
|---|---|
| Council names / type of councils | See next box: Proposal |
| Component | |
| Scenario | Four Unitary Model |
| Author | |
| Version | |
| Date | |
| Short description/comment | |

Proposal:
West Essex: Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Thurrock
North Essex: Braintree, Chelmsford, Uttlesford
East Essex: Colchester, Maldon, Tendring
South Essex: Basildon, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea

**Financial information**

Enter the incremental transitional and ongoing costs and benefits in the relevant section below - column M to W
Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve. Record figures in £ 000's.

**Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)**  £000s

Details of source files or reference to meeting or document can be recorded here for each cost line

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Key Assumptions/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | 1,000 | 24,665 | 25,665 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 51,330 | This includes costs related to workforce exist, development and a transition team |
| Premises | - | 3,233 | 3,233 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,467 | This includes the cost of reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | 1,617 | 1,617 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3,233 | |
| ICT | - | 2,829 | 2,829 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5,658 | |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | 4,042 | 4,042 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8,083 | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | 3,031 | 3,031 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,063 | |
| **Total** | 1,000 | 39,417 | 40,417 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 80,834 | |

**Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)**  £000s

Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve.

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Key Assumptions/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | 1,693 | 8,465 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 145,605 | This includes costs related to workforce exist and |
| Premises | - | 213 | 1,067 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 18,344 | Ongoing estates management and maintenance costs |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | 107 | 533 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 9,172 | |
| ICT | - | 187 | 933 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 16,051 | |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | 267 | 1,333 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 22,930 | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | 200 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 17,197 | Work required to harmonise processes, and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures. |
| **Total** | - | 2,666 | 13,331 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 26,663 | 229,299 | |

£000s

Sign convention - Savings - lower costs or gains of income are -ve in brackets.

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Key Assumptions/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | (2,420) | (12,100) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (24,201) | (208,127) | This includes savings related to optimised leadership and a right-sized organisation in a business as usual state |
| Premises | - | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (42,571) | This includes asset and property optimisation |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | (550) | (2,750) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (47,302) | This includes the impact of consolidating corporate services |
| ICT | - | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (42,571) | Digitisation and IT systems |
| Third Party Payments | - | (1,100) | (5,500) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (94,603) | This includes both service contract consolidation, procurement and third-party spend |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | (220) | (1,100) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (18,921) | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | (220) | (1,100) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (18,921) | Estimated savings related to Democratic Services |
| **Total** | - | (5,500) | (27,501) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (55,002) | (473,016) | |

-ve is a net savings +ve is a net cost.

| **Grand Total** | 1,000 | 36,583 | 26,247 | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (28,339) | (162,882) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Appendix 4

## Base Template

| Comparison model | Source | Units | Year | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Total Year 0 to Year 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Option/Component/Scenario**

**Header inputs**

| | |
|---|---|
| County | Greater Essex |
| Council names and type of councils | |
| Component | |
| Scenario | Three Unitary Model |
| Author | |
| Version | |
| Date | |
| Short description/comment | |

Further Description if required.

**Financial information**

Enter the incremental transitional and ongoing costs and benefits in the relevant section below - column M to W
Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve. Record figures in £ 000's.

**Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)** £000s

Details of source files or reference to meeting or document can be recorded here for each cost line

| | Y0 | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 | Y7 | Y8 | Y9 | Y10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | 1,000 | 28,750 | 29,750 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 59,500 |
| Premises | - | 3,748 | 3,748 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 7,496 |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | 1,874 | 1,874 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3,748 |
| ICT | - | 3,280 | 3,280 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,559 |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | 4,685 | 4,685 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9,370 |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | 3,514 | 3,514 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 7,028 |
| **Total** | **1,000** | **45,850** | **46,850** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **93,700** |

Key Assumptions/Notes
- This includes costs related to workforce exist, development and a transition team
- This includes the cost of reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.

**Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)** £000s

Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve.

| | Y0 | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 | Y7 | Y8 | Y9 | Y10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Premises | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| ICT | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Total** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** |

Key Assumptions/Notes
- This includes costs related to workforce exist and development. Ongoing estates management and maintenance costs
- Work required to harmonise processes, and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.

**Annual On-going Incremental benefits/savings (without inflation)** £000s

Sign convention - Savings - lower costs or gains of income are -ve in brackets.

| | Y0 | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 | Y7 | Y8 | Y9 | Y10 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | - | (4,774) | (9,548) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (19,096) | (147,994) |
| Premises | - | - | (977) | (1,953) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (30,272) |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies and Services | - | - | (1,085) | (2,170) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (4,340) | (33,635) |
| ICT | - | - | (977) | (1,953) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (3,906) | (30,272) |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | (2,170) | (4,340) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (8,680) | (67,270) |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Contingency | - | - | (434) | (868) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (13,454) |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | - | (434) | (868) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (1,736) | (13,454) |
| **Total** | **-** | **-** | **(10,850)** | **(21,700)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(336,350)** |

Key Assumptions/Notes
- This includes savings related to optimised leadership and a right-sized organisation in a business as usual state
- This includes asset and property optimisation
- This includes the impact of consolidating corporate services
- Digitisation and IT systems
- This includes both service contract consolidation, procurement
- Estimated savings related to Democratic Services

-ve is a net savings +ve is a net cost.

| **Grand Total** | **1,000** | **45,850** | **36,000** | **(21,700)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(43,400)** | **(242,650)** |

## Base Template

| Comparison model | Source | Units | Year | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Total Year 0 to Year 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

### Option/Component/Scenario

**Header inputs**

| | |
|---|---|
| County | Greater Essex |
| Council names and type of councils | |
| Component | |
| Scenario | Five Unitary Model |
| Author | |
| Version | |
| Date | |
| Short description/comment | |

Further Description if required.

### Financial information

Enter the incremental transitional and ongoing costs and benefits in the relevant section below - column M to W

**Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)**  £000s

Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve. Record figures in £ 000's.

Details of source files or reference to meeting or document can be recorded here for each cost line

Key Assumptions/Notes

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | 1,000 | 26,527 | 27,527 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 55,055 | This includes costs related to workforce exist, development and a transition team |
| Premises | - | 3,468 | 3,468 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,936 | This includes the cost of reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases. |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | 1,734 | 1,734 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3,468 | |
| ICT | - | 3,035 | 3,035 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,069 | |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | 4,335 | 4,335 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8,670 | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | 3,251 | 3,251 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6,503 | |
| **Total** | 1,000 | 42,350 | 43,350 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 86,700 | |

**Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)**  £000s

Sign convention - additional costs or loss of income are +ve.

Key Assumptions/Notes

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | 2,819 | 14,097 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 28,194 | 242,468 | This includes costs related to workforce exist and development |
| Premises | - | 355 | 1,776 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 3,552 | 30,547 | Ongoing estates management and maintenance costs |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | 178 | 888 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 1,776 | 15,274 | |
| ICT | - | 311 | 1,554 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 3,108 | 26,729 | |
| Third Party Payments | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | 444 | 2,220 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 4,440 | 38,184 | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | 333 | 1,665 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 3,330 | 28,638 | Work required to harmonise processes, and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures. |
| **Total** | - | 4,440 | 22,200 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 44,400 | 381,840 | |

**Annual On-going Incremental benefits/savings (without inflation)**  £000s

Sign convention - Savings - lower costs or gains of income are -ve in brackets.

Key Assumptions/Notes

| | Year 0 | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Total | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee costs | - | (2,292) | (11,462) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (22,924) | (197,146) | This includes savings related to optimised leadership and a right-sized organisation in a business as usual state |
| Premises | - | (469) | (2,345) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (40,325) | This includes asset and property optimisation |
| Transport | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Supplies and Services | - | (521) | (2,605) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (5,210) | (44,806) | This includes the impact of consolidating corporate services |
| ICT | - | (469) | (2,345) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (4,689) | (40,325) | Digitisation and IT systems |
| Third Party Payments | - | (1,042) | (5,210) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (10,420) | (89,612) | This includes both service contract consolidation, procurement and third-party spend |
| Income | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| Contingency | - | (208) | (1,042) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (17,922) | |
| Other (specify in commentary) | - | (208) | (1,042) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (2,084) | (17,922) | Estimated savings related to Democratic Services |
| **Total** | - | (5,210) | (26,050) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (52,100) | (448,060) | |

-ve is a net savings +ve is a net cost.

| **Grand Total** | 1,000 | 41,580 | 39,500 | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | (7,700) | 20,480 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## Additional Worksheet (services)

This sheet can be copied and used to breakdown costs category of your choosing. It does not automatically summarise into the base case or totals. Please enter the title of the activity in cell A1 and types of cost or savings in the yellow cells. Amounts in £000's. There are some blank areas in case you need to add more bespoke types of costs or savings. If you need to add an extra row - please copy and past an existing row but do not copy and paste the top or bottow row of a group.

Explain the aspect of the scenario that is being worked out here:

| £000s | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Key Assumptions/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Costs per Business Case** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SETUP: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Processes Harmonisation and Service Transit | | 3,032 | 3,032 | | | | | | | | | | Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition |
| Supplies and Services - Culture and Commur | | 1,617 | 1,617 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Premises - Estates and Facilities | | 3,234 | 3,234 | | | | | | | | | | Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees |
| Totals | - | 7,882 | 7,882 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| ANNUAL ONGOING COSTS: | | | | | | | | | | | | | Key Assumptions/Notes |
| Premises | | 213 | 1,067 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | 2,133 | Maintaining additional civic premises |
| Supplies and services | | 107 | 533 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | 1,067 | Commissioning and contracting inefficiencies |
| Process harmonisation and ongoing transforn | | 200 | 1,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | 2,000 | |
| Contingency | | 267 | 1,333 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | 2,666 | Prudent allowance of 10% |
| Totals | - | 787 | 3,933 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | 7,866 | |
| ANNUAL ONGOING BENEFITS/SAVINGS: | | | | | | | | | | | | | Key Assumptions/Notes |
| Consolidating corporate services | | (550) | (2,750) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | |
| Service contract consolidation | | (550) | (2,750) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | |
| Procurement and third party spend | | (550) | (2,750) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | (5,500) | |
| Proportionate democratic services | | (220) | (1,100) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | (2,200) | |
| Asset and property optimisation | | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | |
| Customer engagement | | (110) | (550) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | |
| Consolidating fleets and optimising routes | | (110) | (550) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | (1,100) | |
| Totals | - | (2,585) | (12,925) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | (25,850) | |
| Grand Total | - | 6,083 | (1,111) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | (17,984) | |

Appendix 4

## Employee  - Worksheet

Note -This sheet is to support understanding of typical employee cost/benefit categories and does not automatically link into the Summaries. There are some blank areas in case you need to add more bespoke types of costs or savings. If you need to add an extra row - please copy and past an existing row but do not copy and paste the top or bottow row of a group.

| £000s | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 | Key Assumptions/Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Employee activity as per Business Case** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | | Key Assumptions/Notes |
| Project Management costs | 1,000 | 4,052 | 5,052 | | | | | | | | | |
| Redundancies and early retirement (inc. Pension Strain) | | 18,592 | 18,592 | | | | | | | | | |
| Workforce - development | | 2,021 | 2,021 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals** | 1,000 | 24,665 | 25,665 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | |
| **Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | | Key Assumptions/Notes |
| Front Line Service Inefficiencies | | 1,111 | 5,554 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | 11,108 | Includes pay harmonisation, management, staff across frontline services |
| Back Office Service Inefficiencies | | 466 | 2,328 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | 4,656 | Includes pay harmonisation, management, staff across corporate and support |
| Other (transformation) | | 117 | 583 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | 1,166 | Ongoing additional staff (e.g. transformation) |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals** | - | 1,693 | 8,465 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | 16,931 | |
| **Annual On-going Incremental benefits/savings (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | | Key Assumptions/Notes |
| Optimising leadership | | (1,100) | (5,500) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | (11,000) | Reducing managerial roles |
| Right sizing the organisation | | (1,320) | (6,600) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | (13,200) | Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals** | - | (2,420) | (12,100) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | (24,200) | |
| **Grand Total** | 1,000 | 23,938 | 22,030 | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | (7,269) | |

## ICT Worksheet

This sheet is to support understanding of typical ICT activity cost/benefit categories and does not automatically link into the Summaries. There are some blank areas in case you need to add more bespoke types of costs or savings. If you need to add an extra row - please copy and past an existing row but do not copy and paste the top or bottow row of a group.

| £000s | Year 0 Forecast Apr 26 - Mar 27 | Year 1 Forecast Apr 27 - Mar 28 | Year 2 Forecast Apr 28 - Mar 29 | Year 3 Forecast Apr 29 - Mar 30 | Year 4 Forecast Apr 30 - Mar 31 | Year 5 Forecast Apr 31 - Mar 32 | Year 6 Forecast Apr 32 - Mar 33 | Year 7 Forecast Apr 33 - Mar 34 | Year 8 Forecast Apr 34 - Mar 35 | Year 9 Forecast Apr 35 - Mar 36 | Year 10 Forecast Apr 36 - Mar 37 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ICT Activity per Business Case** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Set up Transitional Costs (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Systems alignment (ERP, CRM, local information) | | 1,273 | 1,273 | | | | | | | | |
| Network | | 566 | 566 | | | | | | | | |
| Infrastructure | | 708 | 708 | | | | | | | | |
| Others (see notes) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Video Conferencing/Hybrid working | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Programme Management | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interim Measures | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Licences | | 283 | 283 | | | | | | | | |
| Organisational Change | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals** | - | 2,830 | 2,830 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Key Assumptions/Notes

See Employee Worksheet

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Annual On-going Incremental costs (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Running an additional set of ICT systems | | 187 | 933 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 |
| **Totals** | - | 187 | 933 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 | 1,866 |

Key Assumptions/Notes

Data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate systems

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Annual On-going Incremental benefits/savings (without inflation)** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Improved Digital and ICT Systems | | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) |
| **Totals** | - | (495) | (2,475) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) | (4,950) |
| **Grand Total** | - | 2,521 | 1,288 | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) | (3,084) |

Key Assumptions/Notes

Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads

Appendix
4

# Appendix 5: Engagement activity outcomes

## 1. Background

This report presents the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data captured through Thurrock Council's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) survey.

The survey, which ran from 16 July until 27 August 2025, was designed to gather residents' and stakeholders' views on proposed changes to local government structures. The survey ran for 6 weeks. Alongside the survey, the Council also hosted an online webinar and a public question time event to support wider engagement and ensure transparency throughout the process. Pop up engagement events also took place in various locations across the borough e.g. libraries.

The following sections summarise traffic sources, response levels, respondent profiles and the key themes emerging from the feedback received through the online survey.

## 2. Traffic Sources and page views

A high-level implementation plan has been developed and is set out in Section 6. It includes four phases:

- In total there were 3,260 page views. Of those views, 26 people visited the Key Dates page and 30 people visited the FAQ page.

- Those that completed the survey were mostly directed from council newsletters (253 direct (which is expected from Enewsletter, and 241 from EHQ newsletter)

| Source | Number of responses |
|---|---|
| **Enewsletter (direct)** | 253 |
| **android-app** | 17 |
| **email.bt.com** | 3 |
| **thurrock.nub.news** | 44 |
| **thurrockcouncil-newsroom.prgloo.com** | 1 |
| **Google** | 22 |
| **EHQ newsletter** | 241 |
| **Facebook** | 33 |
| **Council website** | 39 |

### 3.  Number of Responses and Location of Respondents

- The survey prompted **670 responses** from residents, community organisations and stakeholders, providing valuable insight into local views on potential changes to the way services and governance should be structured.

- Most respondents are local residents (642 or 96%), with additional views shared by a small number of other stakeholders (e.g. businesses based in Thurrock and VCS organisations also based in Thurrock).



Are you responding as:
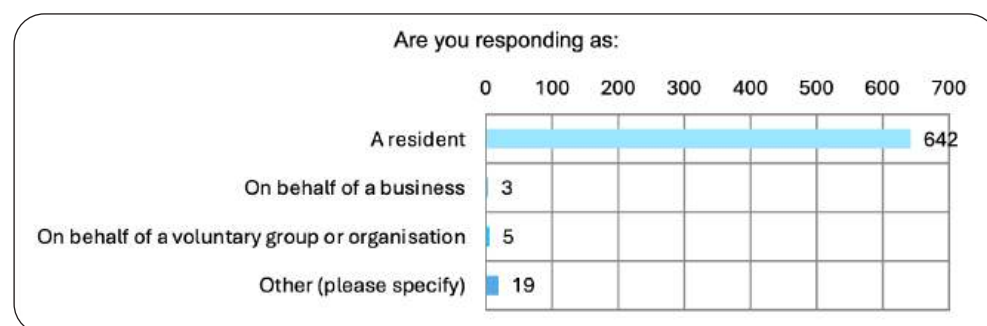
- Just 6 respondents (0.9%) live somewhere else in Essex. These areas included: Rayleigh, Southend, Sheering, Canvey Island and Chelmsford.

### 4.  Identity and Connection with Place

- When asked to state where they live, most respondents name either their town (416 or 62%) or village (158 or 24%).

- A smaller number of respondents name their 'Council' (46 or 7%), or the 'County' (43 or 6%).

- Just 6 (1%) respondents state 'I don't know'



When you're asked where you live, do you name your:
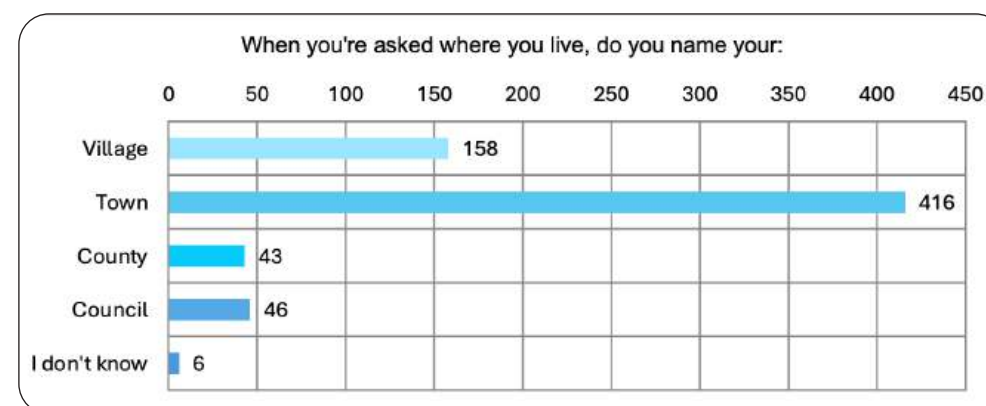
**5. Areas outside of Thurrock where people work and/or socialise**

● Over half of respondents (348 or 52%) report visiting London.

● Other popular destinations included Basildon (233 or 35%), followed by Southend (224 or 33%), Brentwood (191 or 29%) and Leigh on Sea (179 or 27%).

● Epping Forest was the least selected location with just 26 (or 4%) respondents.

● 74 (26%) residents selected 'Other', these other locations included: Bedfordshire, Benfleet, Billericay, Braintree, Burnham On Crouch, Clacton-on-Sea, Cranham, Dagenham, Durham, East Barnet, France, Halstead, Harlow, Hertford, Hornchurch, Kent, Leeds, Mersey Island, Rayleigh, Reading, Romford, Scotland, Southampton, South Woodham Ferrers, Swaffham, Suffolk, Sutton, Takely, Thailand, Thundersley, Tiptree, Twickenham, Upminster, Walton on the Naze, Wickford, Woodford Bridge, York, or a specific area in Thurrock e.g. Purfleet.



In which areas, outside of Thurrock, do you work and/or socialise?

| Area | Value |
|---|---|
| Epping Forest | 26 |
| London | 348 |
| Basildon | 233 |
| Brentwood | 191 |
| Canvey Island | 96 |
| Chelmsford | 119 |
| Colchester | 35 |
| Leigh-on-Sea | 179 |
| Maldon | 84 |
| Romford | 100 |
| Southend-On-Sea | 224 |
| Westcliff | 105 |
| Other (please specify) | 174 |
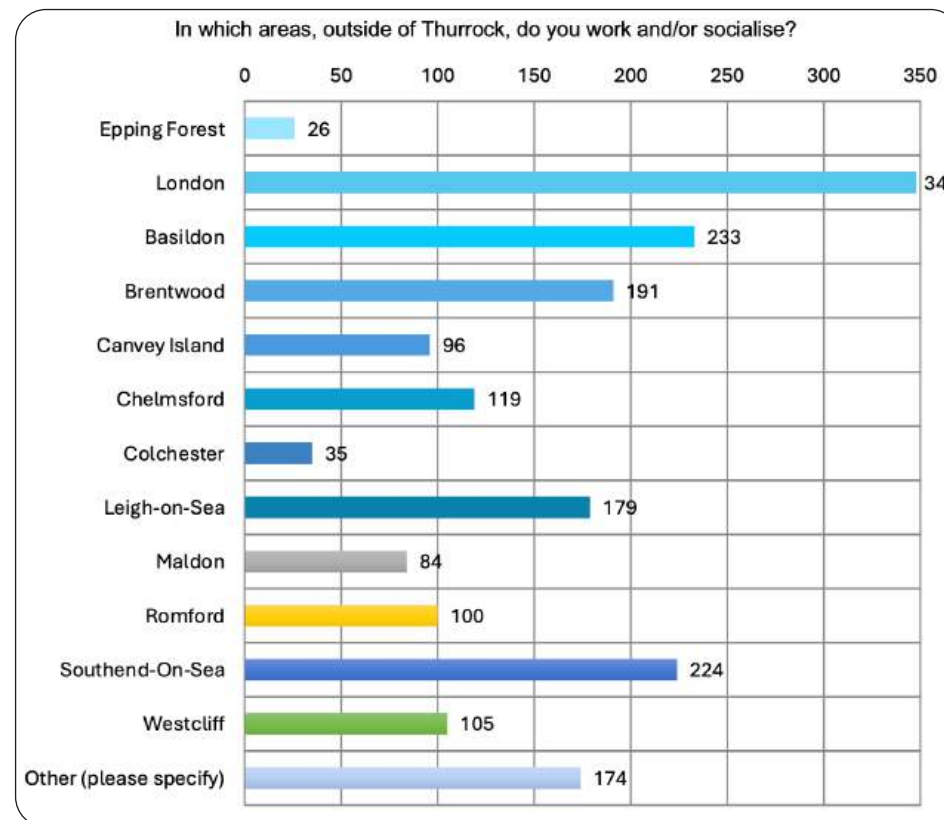
**6.  Do you agree that joining with neighbouring councils to provide services could make services better and provide value for money for residents?**

● Respondents were fairly evenly split between agreeing or disagreeing.

● 76 or (11%) either 'strongly agree', or 'agree' (155 or 23%).

● 116 (17%) 'disagree' with 140 (21%) stating they 'strongly disagree'.

● A further 129 (or 19%) of respondents neither agree nor disagree, with the remaining respondents to this question stating 'I don't know' (53 or 8%).

Do you agree that joining with neighbouring councils to provide services could make services better and provide value for money for residents?

| | Count |
|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 76 |
| Agree | 155 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 129 |
| Disagree | 116 |
| Strongly disagree | 140 |
| I don't know | 53 |
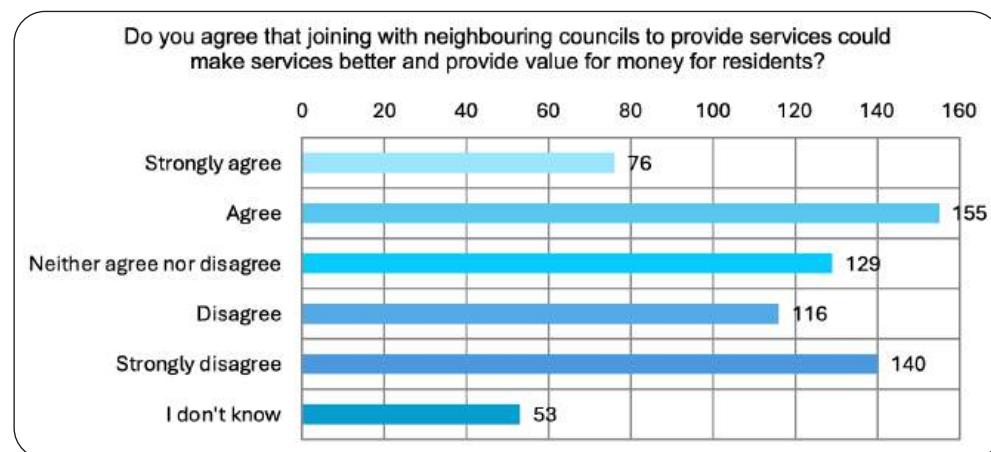
**7.  How important is a financially stable council to you?**

● The vast majority of respondents (530 or 79%) state it is 'very important' that their council is financially stable, with a further 121 (18%) stating that it is 'important' to them.

● Only a very small number described themselves as 'neutral' (13 or 2%) or 'not important' 1 (or 0.1%) or 'very unimportant' 3 (or 0.4%).

How important is a financially stable council to you?

| | Count |
|---|---|
| Very important | 530 |
| Important | 121 |
| Neutral | 13 |
| Not important | 1 |
| Very unimportant | 3 |
| I don't know | 1 |
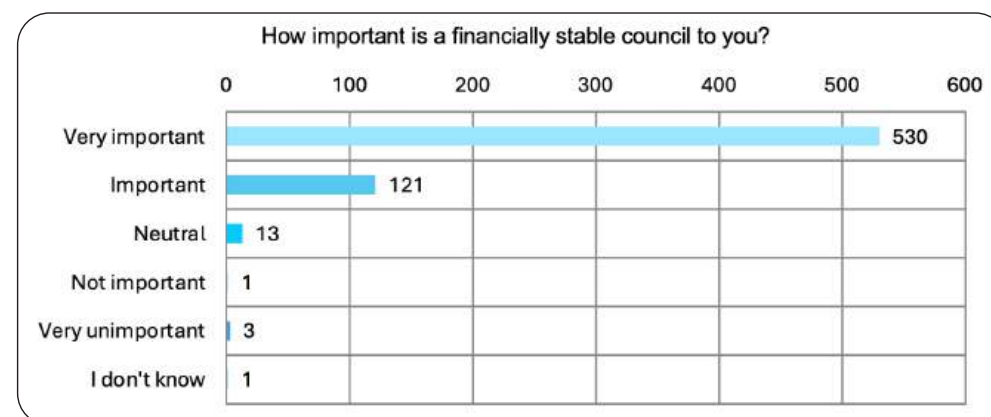
**8. What issues are important to you to prioritise in any changes to local government?**

- The top priority for respondents is 'value for money' chosen by 470 (or 70%), followed closely by 'council finances' (465 or 69%).

- Other priorities included 'Access to local decision making' was the third most popular (401 or 60%) with 'Transport and connections' fourth (368 or 55%) and 'Local identity' in fifth position (322 or 48%).

- The least frequently selected issue was 'Council size' (193 or 29%).
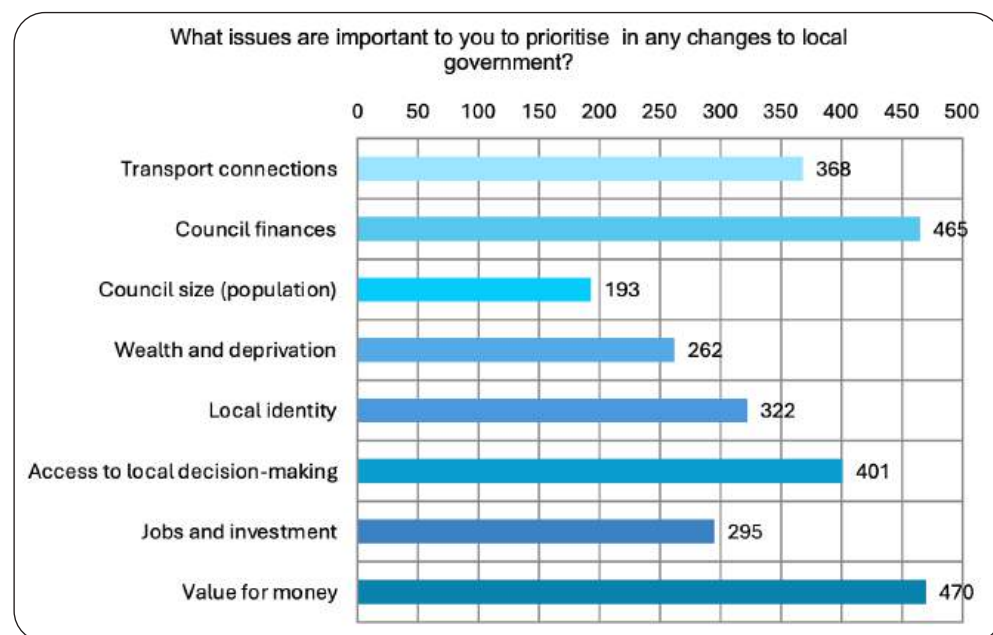
**9. Would you be happy to attend a public meeting to discuss plans about local government reorganisation in more detail?**

- Almost half of respondents indicate they would be happy to attend a public meeting (306 or 46%), with 132 (or 20%) stating 'no' and a further 231 (or 34%) stating 'I don't know'.

- As noted, the council hosted an online webinar and in-person Public Question Time event during the engagement period, which were well publicised. Those that provided an email address were sent a direct invitation to these events.

**What issues are important to you to prioritise in any changes to local government?**

| Issue | Value |
|---|---|
| Transport connections | 368 |
| Council finances | 465 |
| Council size (population) | 193 |
| Wealth and deprivation | 262 |
| Local identity | 322 |
| Access to local decision-making | 401 |
| Jobs and investment | 295 |
| Value for money | 470 |

**Would you be happy to attend a public meeting to discuss plans about LGR in more detail?**

| Response | Value |
|---|---|
| Yes | 306 |
| No | 132 |
| I don't know | 231 |

**10. How would you like to be updated on local government reorganisation news?**

- The most popular option was 'email updates via the Thurrock Council Enewsletter' chosen by 492 (or 73%) respondents.

- 293 (44%) respondents selected 'Website' followed by 'Local press (161 or 24%)

- The least preferred options were 'LinkedIn' selected by just 21 or 3% of respondents or X selected by 24 or 3%.
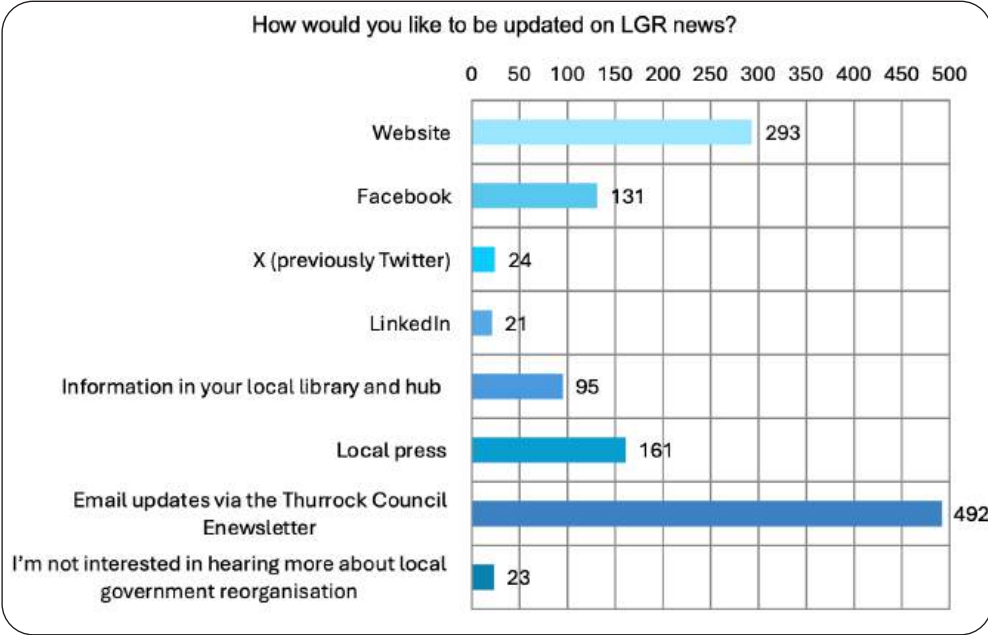


**Other issues and priorities for residents**

The tables on the following pages provide a thematic analysis of the free-text responses captured from two survey questions that invited respondents to share additional views:

1. If there are any other issues not included that are important to you to prioritise, please provide details below.

2. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about local government reorganisation?

Of the total 670 respondents, 233 (35%) provided further thoughts on their priorities for local government reorganisation, while 314 (47%) offered other comments.

Responses have been grouped into themes and ordered by priority, based on the number of mentions and % responses. Each theme is accompanied by a short narrative and illustrative quote/s from respondents.

It should be noted that some respondents provided detailed feedback that covered more than one theme. As a result, the total number of mentions recorded exceeds the total number of respondents to these questions.

| **If there are any other issues not included that are important to you to prioritise, please provide details below.** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Mentions** | **Summary** | **Comments** |
| Community Services & Access | 49 mentions (20.6%) | • Strong emphasis on maintaining local services, improving accessibility, and ensuring face-to-face support.<br>• Frustration with remote or online-only contact and lack of responsiveness. | "Investment into local community services (libraries, schools, transport services, cost of living)…"<br>"Access to council departments and officers must be reestablished". |
| Housing & Planning | 31 mentions (13.3%) | • Concerns about overdevelopment, especially on green belt land.<br>• Calls for better planning, infrastructure, and affordable housing. | "Less houses being built on green built which is disappearing at an alarming rate in Thurrock".<br>"Increase AFFORDABLE social housing". |
| Transport & Roads | 31 mentions (13.3%) | • Issues with road conditions, potholes, parking, and public transport.<br>• Requests for more frequent buses, better traffic management, and footpath repairs. | "The roads fall apart every year and speed humps wearing away".<br>"Transport, more buses". |
| Waste & Environmental Services | 29 mentions (12.5%) | • Complaints about bin collections, fly tipping, and street cleanliness.<br>• Desire to protect and maintain green spaces and improve environmental upkeep. | "Possibly put more rubbish bins on the roads hopefully to rid all the rubbish thrown everywhere".<br>"Given how much council tax I pay, maintaining the local park properly" |
| Financial Accountability | 24 mentions (10.3%) | • Deep concern over council debt, misuse of funds, and lack of transparency.<br>• Calls for value for money and legal accountability for past financial mismanagement. | "Stop making Thurrock residents suffer and pay for the money lost".<br>"Let the council go bankrupt and cancel the debt which has nothing to do with the residents". |
| Education & Youth | 24 mentions (10.3%) | • Requests for better schools, SEND support, and youth facilities.<br>• Emphasis on affordable access to education and leisure. | "Youth clubs and sports education centres for kids".<br>"Improved leisure offer". |

| Theme | Mentions | Summary | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crime & Safety | 23 mentions (9.9%) | ● Concerns about antisocial behaviour, policing levels, and public safety.<br>● Desire for visible police presence and crime prevention measures. | "Police numbers are too low, population is growing".<br>"Dealing with crime and safety for residents". |
| Healthcare & Social Care | 17 mentions (7.3%) | ● Issues with GP access, hospital services, and adult social care.<br>● Calls for investment in health infrastructure and support for disabled residents. | "Hospital growth and services".<br>"Disabled children's access to what is needed. Adult care". |
| Governance & Transparency | 11 mentions (4.7%) | ● Desire for honest leadership, clear decision-making, and public accountability..<br>● Support for strong governance principles. | "Transparency, honesty, accountability, resident participation in decision making (not just 'access')". |
| Immigration & Integration | 11 mentions (4.7%) | ● Mixed views on immigration, with some expressing concerns about integration and local impact. | "Less immigration and lack of integration in local community" |
| Local Identity & Autonomy | 8 mentions (3.4%) | ● Concern about losing Thurrock's identity through reorganisation or merging with other councils.<br>● Preference for local decision-making. | "Maintaining local identity".<br>"In my opinion, the council can be too large, take Essex for example, the whole area has to fight for funding that they believe necessary for their area". |
| Culture & Heritage | 6 mentions (2.5%) | ● Interest in preserving local heritage, riverside identity, and community pride. | "Highlighting and developing heritage sites and buildings in Thurrock not only for locals but also for visitors". |

## Any other important issues?

| Issue | Value |
|---|---|
| Culture & Heritage | 6 |
| Local Identity & Autonomy | 8 |
| Immigration & Integration | 11 |
| Governance & Transparency | 11 |
| Healthcare & Social Care | 17 |
| Crime & Safety | 23 |
| Education & Youth | 24 |
| Financial Accountability | 24 |
| Waste & Environmental Services | 29 |
| Transport & Roads | 31 |
| Housing & Planning | 31 |
| Community Services & Access | 49 |

| | | **Is there anything else you would like to share with us about local government reorganisation?** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Mentions** | **Summary** | | **Comments** |
| Local Identity & Autonomy | 90 (28.8%) | <ul><li>Strong resistance to losing Thurrock's distinct identity.</li><li>Many respondents fear being absorbed into larger or London-based authorities, which they believe would dilute local voice and control.</li></ul> | | "I believe that it is important that Thurrock retains its identity, whilst progressing and providing improved services for the community". <br><br>"Would be totally against joining in to a London borough or council". |
| Financial Accountability | 66 (21.1%) | <ul><li>Deep frustration over past financial mismanagement, debt, and lack of consequences.</li><li>Calls for transparency, restitution, and safeguards to prevent future failures.</li></ul> | | "I don't think it has anything to do with a better future for Thurrock and it's more about passing the buck and spreading the debt out". <br><br>"Decisions and spending needs to be aligned with the residents best interests and there's needs to be transparency and accountability for this". |
| Public Services & Access | 53 (16.6%) | <ul><li>Concerns about the quality and accessibility of healthcare, education, social care, and other essential services.</li><li>Many fear that reorganisation will worsen service delivery.</li></ul> | | "Thurrock remains an industrial and commercial powerhouse/ engine for the County but this never seems to equate into increased funding in key infrastructure (schools, medical facilities, etc) to sustain the area leading to a continual "drain" into London, or loss towards the "leafier" parts of Essex". <br><br>"I cannot see how merging with larger areas can help local facilities running better. In fact I would expect facilities to get worse". |
| Representation & Democracy | 27 (8.3%) | <ul><li>Strong sentiment around democratic rights, including anger over cancelled elections and lack of referendums.</li><li>Many feel decisions are being made without public consent.</li></ul> | | "Cancelling local elections is certainly NOT the way to do it. It's antidemocratic". <br><br>"Every area in Essex has different requirements, local decisions should be made at local level". |
| Governance & Transparency | 24 (7.6%) | <ul><li>Desire for clearer decision-making, accountability, and ethical leadership.</li><li>Respondents want more openness and less bureaucracy.</li></ul> | | "Governing from afar will no doubt add more expense and bureaucracy". <br><br>"We need local accountability by having elected members who reflect our wishes rather than looking to juggle resources and funding across a larger area". |

| Theme | Mentions | Summary | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure & Planning | 14 (4.4%) | • Issues raised around housing developments, transport, and road maintenance.<br><br>• Concerns that infrastructure is not keeping pace with population growth. | "Noticing the amount of new builds being erected with thousands of new residents with nothing to support the local infrastructure. Schools? Dr? Dentist? Parking ?"<br><br>"We are already fighting numerous housing developments in Corringham and we don't need to be taken over and become a larger council as this will lead to more green belt being lost". |
| Communication & Engagement | 8 (2.5%) | • Calls for better public engagement, clearer messaging, and more inclusive consultation processes. | "Thurrock based news is disappearing. It's virtually become just grapevine hearsay".<br><br>"Transparency shouldn't be hidden behind jargon that most people don't understand, or behind graphs that make sense only to lawyers and council officials. If you expect to be trusted by residents in what is clearly a huge and complex undertaking, communication needs to be much clearer". |
| Opposition to Reorganisation | 7 (2.2%) | • Direct opposition to the concept of merging councils or introducing a mayoral system. Many see it as unnecessary or politically motivated. | "We need to stay in a smaller Council and not be swallowed up in a larger organisation with differing needs and elected parties". |
| Crime & Safety | 6 (1.9%) | • Concerns about policing levels, antisocial behaviour, and public safety.<br><br>• Requests for more visible enforcement. | "The lack of police in Ockendon and Aveley on the ground and not in car's crime is bad anti social behaviour and lack of morals". |
| Environmental Concerns | 5 (1.6%) | • Desire to protect green spaces and improve environmental upkeep. Some link this to planning and development pressures. | "…will local services like maintenance, waste, cleansing and parks improve…". |
| Youth & Community Facilities | 3 (0.9%) | • Requests for more investment in youth services, clubs, and community hubs to support social cohesion. | "More money to spend on youth clubs activities" |

Anything else you would like to share with us about LGR?

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Youth & Community Facilities | 3 |
| Environmental Concerns | 5 |
| Crime & Safety | 6 |
| Opposition to Reorganisation | 7 |
| Communication & Engagement | 8 |
| Infrastructure & Planning | 14 |
| Governance & Transparency | 24 |
| Representation & Democracy | 27 |
| Public Services & Access | 53 |
| Financial Accountability | 66 |
| Local Identity & Autonomy | 90 |
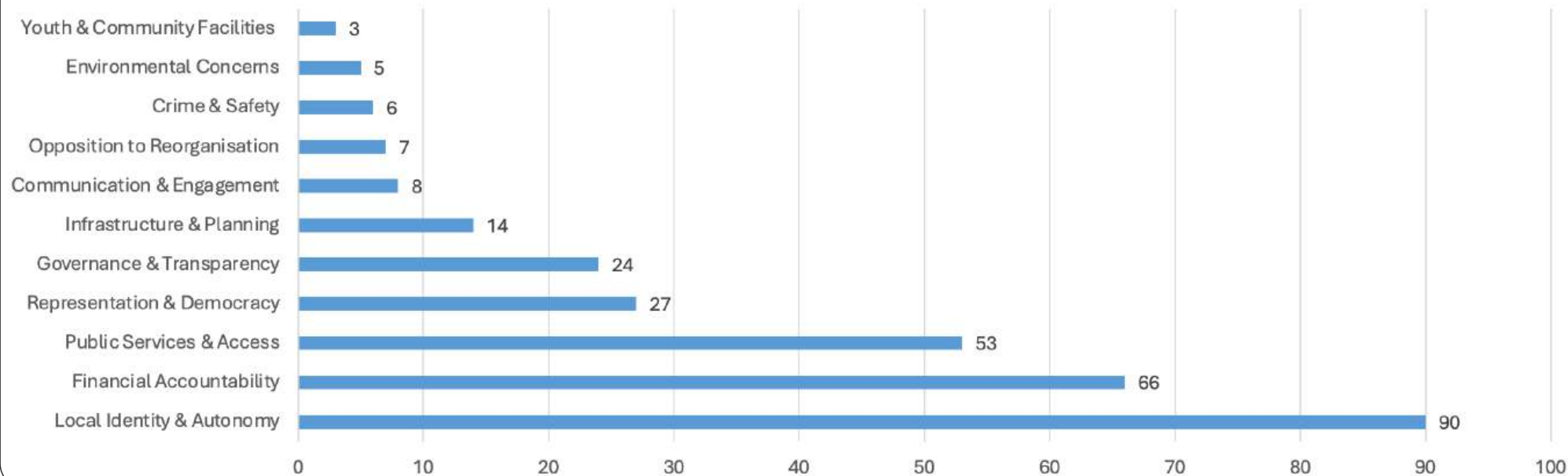
# Diversity Profile of Respondents

### Gender

- Most respondents identify as 'female' (336 or 50.1%), or 'male' (305 or 45.5%).

- 1 respondent identifies as 'gender neutral' with 26 choosing not to disclose.

- 2 respondents highlighted 'Other', but their response to this question was not in relation to their gender.
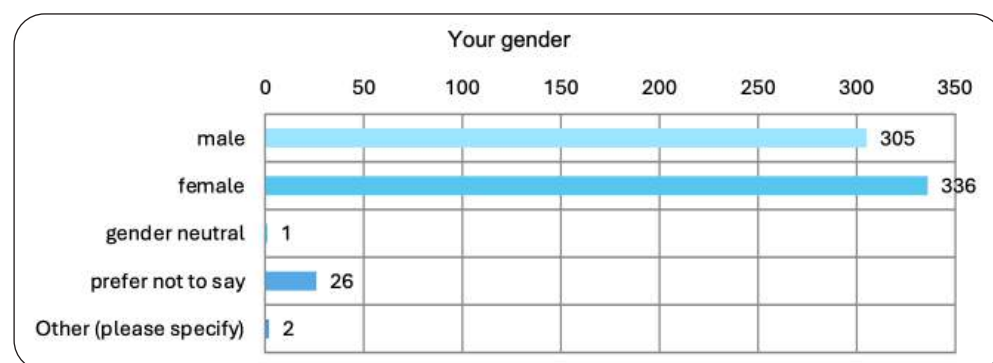


### Age

- A large portion of respondents are aged 50+ with 279 (41.6%) aged 60+ and 162 (24.3%) aged 50-60.

- Just 6 (or 0.9%) of respondents are aged 18-24 years old with a further 38 (or 5.7%) aged 25 to 34 years old.
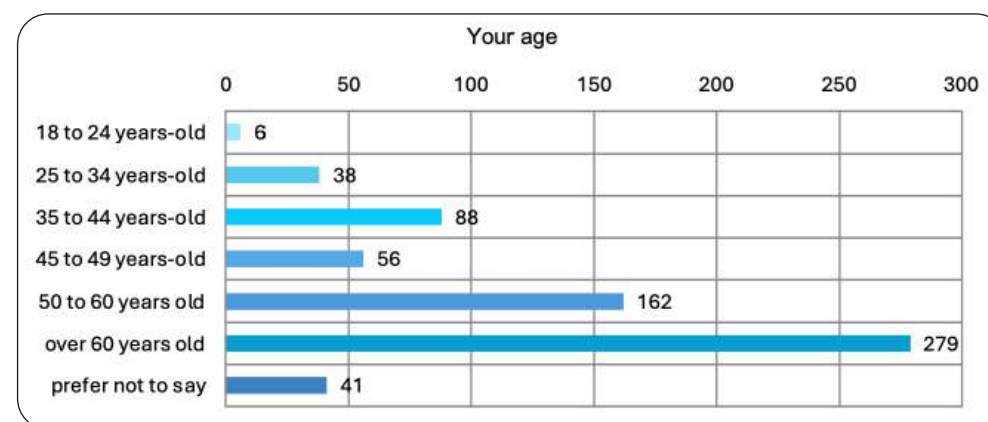
**Ethnicity**

- The majority of respondents (523 or 78%) describe themselves as 'White British'. Of the 40 respondents that selected 'Other', they self-described as 'White English'.

- The second most popular description for respondents is 'White Irish' (54 or 8.1%)

- A small number of respondents (16 or 2.4%) describe themselves as 'Black African'.
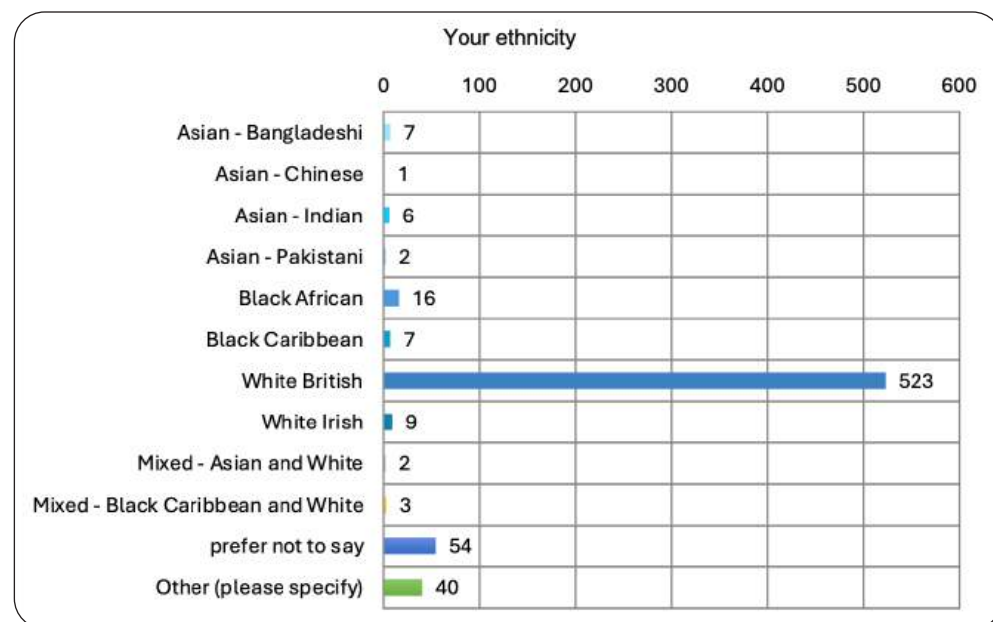
**Disability**

- Of those that completed the survey, 530 (79%) do not consider themselves disabled.

- 81 (12.1%) do consider themselves to be disabled, with 59 (8.8%) preferring not to say.



Your ethnicity

| | |
|---|---|
| Asian - Bangladeshi | 7 |
| Asian - Chinese | 1 |
| Asian - Indian | 6 |
| Asian - Pakistani | 2 |
| Black African | 16 |
| Black Caribbean | 7 |
| White British | 523 |
| White Irish | 9 |
| Mixed - Asian and White | 2 |
| Mixed - Black Caribbean and White | 3 |
| prefer not to say | 54 |
| Other (please specify) | 40 |



Do you consider you consider yourself disabled?

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes | 81 |
| No | 530 |
| prefer not to say | 59 |
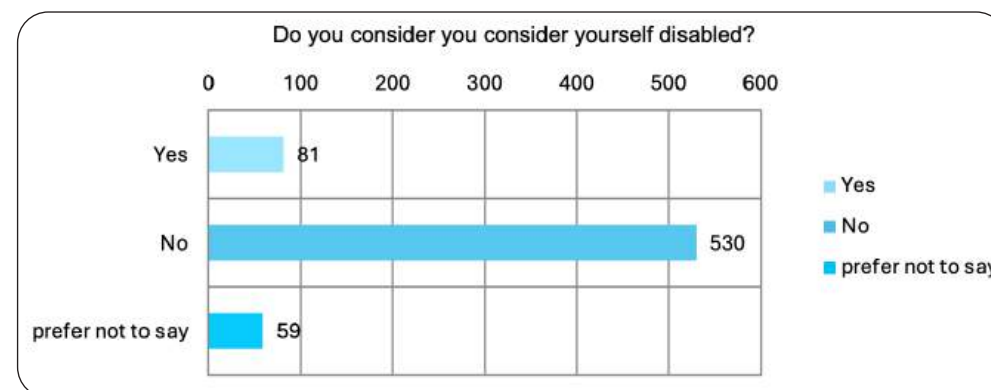
# Thurrock Council, Resident Survey, June 2025

### Additional information in response to member questions

In addition to the Thurrock Council survey and wider public engagement, and the other public consultations led by other councils that are referenced in the four-unitary proposal, The Right Balance, wider sources of data and insight, including a recent survey of Thurrock residents on a range of issues, have also been considered. In this survey Thurrock residents were asked what they thought were the best things about living in Thurrock. The most popular answer was 'location – close to London' (see table below), and the second was 'transport links'.
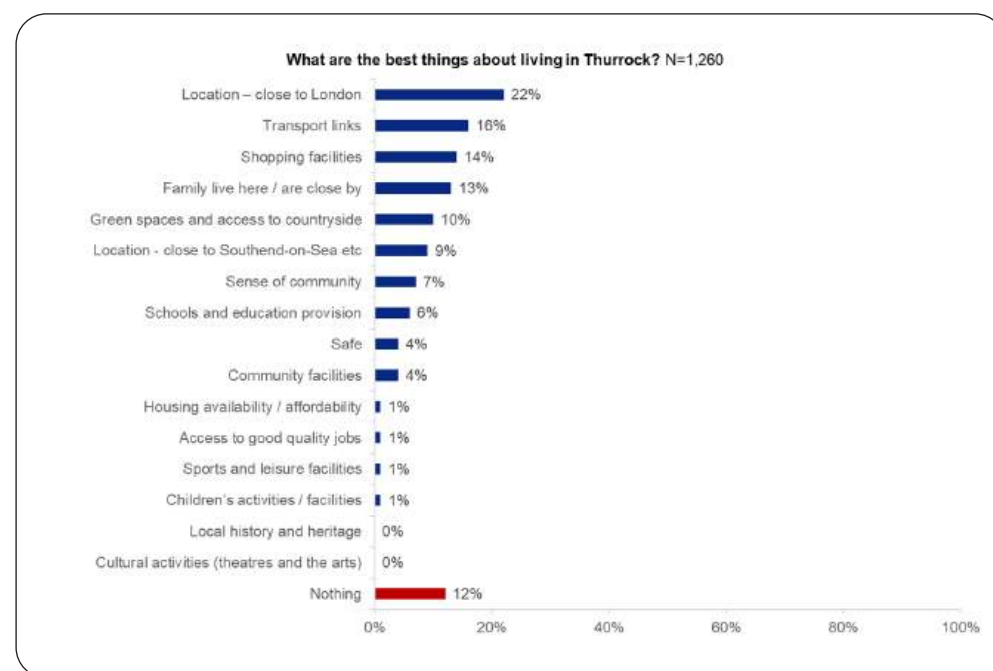


Residents were also asked where people tend to go on day out and London (central plus other) scored highest with 29% of respondents selecting London. The next most popular location was Southend-on-Sea at 18%.
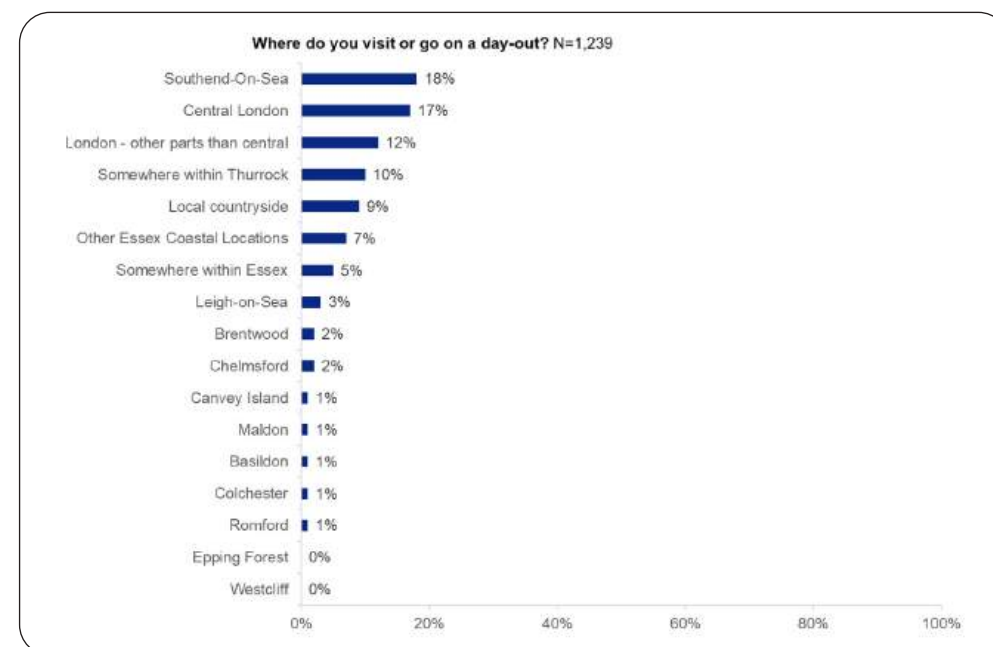


Alongside the large amount of data and insight available from multiple LGR-specific surveys, this statistically significant information has helped to shape thinking around the best geographical split, and triangulate what we were hearing from residents about London ie that many value the proximity to the capital, but do not want to become a part of it.

Source: Thurrock Council resident survey June 2025, sample size 1,274, carried out by Public Perspectives

# Place and identity

Exploring Essex residents' sense of community

March 2025

## Sense of identity and belonging

Understand how **connected** residents feel to the place they live, explore what drives **community identities** within Essex, how sense of **place identity** is formed

## Perception of locality

Understand what residents mean by '**local**' and how this looks **geographically**, explore the **role of travel** within local communities and how **services and amenities** are used

## Local democracy & decisions

Explore the role of **groups** and **democracy** in fostering a sense of community, the sense of **empowerment** in **influencing** decisions, and views on **how decisions are made** currently

4 focus groups were held in Feb-Mar 2025
Recruited via the Essex Residents' Panel managed by Beehive

FG1, 25 Feb: 4 participants
- 1 from large inland town
- 1 from small inland village
- 1 from coastal area
- 1 from mid sized inland village

Mix of age groups; social grades ABC1

FG2, 26 Feb: 5 participants
- 2 from mid sized inland towns
- 2 from large inland towns
- 1 from large inland village

Working age residents; social grades C2DE

FG3, 5 Mar: 4 participants
- 1 from large inland town
- 1 from mid sized coastal town
- 1 from mid sized inland town
- 1 from large coastal village

Retired residents; mix of social grades

FG4, 6 Mar: 5 participants
- 1 from rural inland hamlet
- 1 from large inland town
- 2 from mid sized inland town
- 1 from large inland village

Working age residents; social grades ABC1

# Considerations for policy-makers in the context of local government reform

**BEEHIVE**

This research did not specifically explore options for local government reform (LGR) in Essex.
However, there are key insights from the research that policy-makers may wish to consider as they develop thinking about LGR:

| Residents' sense of identity and belonging is hyper-local | All unitary solutions bring risk of feeling remote to residents | Community engagement should be at the centre of UA configuration | Gaining support for UA options |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Identity and belonging is driven by personal connections**; appreciation of local environments, history and heritage; **and by engagement with the local community** (e.g. through schools, sports clubs and volunteering opportunities).<br><br>There is also **clear affection for regional-level** (Essex-level) **landmarks and symbols**, and a sense that **Essex has a strong identity** (albeit one that many are concerned is misunderstood). | Whether Greater Essex moves towards a two, three, four or five unitary solution is **unlikely to have a bearing on residents' personal sense of identity**.<br><br>Similarly, **there is little** in residents' own subjective sense of identity **to help guide policy-makers' choice on the right number of authorities**, or where boundaries should be drawn on the map. | **There is a clear appetite for effective and meaningful involvement**. Residents made clear their **desire for very local control over local infrastructure, transport, planning and amenities**. They also highlight an appetite to have **decisions taken close to the community**.<br><br>The important thing, therefore, will be to **invest in effective mechanisms to enable meaningful community engagement and empowerment**. | This research suggests that **the UA options that are most likely to enjoy popular support** will be those which **demonstrate enhanced community-level involvement in decision-making** on issues such as road repairs, public realm maintenance, neighbourhood planning etc.<br><br>**Resourcing levels for local/parish councils, and their decision-making remit** was a key theme, as was the ability of any UAs to **gather and act on intelligence from the local level**. |
| Local government structures simply do not figure as a significant factor in shaping people's sense of local identity. | All UA configurations risk being remote from the hyper-local level where identify is formed and developed. | Engagement and empowerment will enable UA proposals to best reflect a sense of local identity, rather than the definition of geographical boundaries. | UAs should not be overly focused on larger population centres and instead make freedoms and resources available to smaller, rural and coastal communities. |

Sense of place

# Resident introductions of where they live can range from purposely vague to very specific



| General description of local area | Geographical relation, without saying Essex | Naming Essex, without going into detail | Local area, specific to city, town or village |

**General description of local area**

- Rural or coastal area
- The middle of nowhere
- Identity is about their environment, rather than location

**Geographical relation, without saying Essex**

- Just outside of London
- Near Stansted
- Mostly reserved for someone who doesn't know the area

**Naming Essex, without going into detail**

- I'm from Essex
- General description (N/E/S/W)
- Avoid relation to areas with bad press/ reputation

**Local area, specific to city, town or village**

- Name the local area
- Detailed description of where within their area
- Mostly when meeting someone from Essex

**Vague** → **Specific**

# BEEHIVE

**Residents are proud to be from Essex, but they are sensitive to negative external perceptions of the county and its towns**

## Essex pride: A Beautiful & Well-connected County

### Residents describe Essex as:

- **Green** & beautiful
- **Well-connected** to London & beyond
- Vibrant with **strong community spirit**

### Frustration with media stereotypes:

- Essex is **more than just TOWIE**
- A sense of **injustice** about how it's portrayed
- A **desire to defend the county**

> " **Essex is important to me**. I think a lot of people go, 'Oh, Essex,' and **they think of Essex girls**, they get the **wrong impression**. Essex is **beautiful**.
>
> *Resident of small inland village*

## Town pride: Mixed with Realism

### Hesitation to say where they are from:

- **Fear of being judged** based on perceptions
- **Some towns face stronger** reputational **challenges**

### Despite this, residents highlight positives:

- Strong **community identity**
- **Rich history** & character
- A desire to **challenge outdated perceptions**

> " **I'm from Basildon and I survived**. It has its **pockets of lovely places**, but also **really rough areas** which people hear and know about.
>
> *Resident of large inland town*

## Heritage & History: A Surprising Strength

*"This may come as a surprise, but our town is full of history"*

- Essex residents take pride in **historical depth**, often overlooked by outsiders
- **Understanding local heritage** helps shape residents' identity and connection to place
- A desire to **set the record straight** on Essex's historical and cultural value

## Connectivity: the best of both worlds

*"A nice commuter belt town just outside of London"*

- **Proximity to London** is a major benefit
- Enables access to **work opportunities, entertainment, and leisure** while maintaining a **quieter lifestyle**
- Offers a **balance between urban excitement and rural peace**

## Green Spaces & Nature: A Well-being Factor

*"I love the woodlands, we visit the woodlands daily."*

- Whether in towns or rural areas, **green spaces are highly valued**
- Strong links to **health, well-being, and quality of life**
- Countryside, woodlands, and open spaces create a **balanced lifestyle**

We have a **local church**, we have a **lovely school** that gets really **involved in the local community** and that's why we moved to [the village]. We wanted to **start a family and live that life**. We're lucky enough to be, at the moment, at least, **surrounded by fields and lovely woodland walks**. It's just a lovely, lovely environment to **live in and grow a family**.

*Resident of mid sized inland village*

**BEEHIVE**

# Negative factors are often linked to the changes that come with development

## POPULATION GROWTH A THREAT TO ESSEX LIVING

*"THE PLACE THESE PEOPLE ARE MOVING INTO ISN'T THE PLACE WE MOVED TO."*

- **Unmatched infrastructure**: developments are not supported by adequate transport, schools, or services
- **Changing community identity**: incomers are altering the social fabric of smaller towns and rural areas
- **Loss of green space**: emotional resistance to new housing developments, especially if they encroach on countryside
- **Crime & safety concerns**: Town dwellers perceive rising crime rates due to population growth

> When I travel around Essex one of the biggest concerns I have is I go to Maldon a lot and when you see **the amount of development** there and **remember what it used to be like**, it's **quite upsetting**.
> *Coastal area resident*

## PERCEIVED POOR PLANNING IS CHANGING THE FACE OF ESSEX

*"I NO LONGER VISIT THE TOWN CENTRE BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING THERE FOR ME."*

- **Declining town centres**: Out-of-town developments are accelerating the demise of local high streets
- **Loss of community feel**: Independent businesses are closing, replaced by homogeneous out-of-town brand giants
- **A shift in local identity**: Convenience is winning over heritage and character

> When I knew everybody who lived in the area, I felt it. That was what it was all about for me. But now there's a lot of people who've **just been there for a year** and they **move somewhere else**, and you'd always have got that, but I'm **noticing it a lot more now** than I did 10, 15, 20 years ago.
> *Resident of mid sized inland village*

Community

# Community identity is closely linked to volunteering and special interest groups, but sense of community is in decline

**BEEHIVE**

## Community Engagement Drives Belonging

### Key positive factors:

**Scouting & sports clubs**: encourage social cohesion & **youth development**

**School-based events**: provide a **hub for engagement**, especially for families

**Volunteering opportunities**: offer **purpose & fulfilment**, especially for older residents

**Daytime activities**: local hubs like **village halls** host a variety of classes

> " There's a **plethora of things** you can involve yourself with. A lot of them are **run out of village halls** and **various other local facilities** like that. You can do anything from chair yoga, carpet bowls, painting, all kinds of stuff.
>
> *Resident (retired), mid sized coastal town*

## Hypothesis: A Declining Sense of Community

### Key concerns:

**Decline in participation post-COVID**: fewer local events & **lower engagement levels**

**Working-age detachment**: commuters & those without school connections feel **less rooted in their communities**

**Community engagement gap**: those without children or who have grown children are **less involved** in local life

**Large community growth**: local identity, safety, and access to services are **all being affected**

> " We're **less community minded**. The **digital age** has **taken away the ordinary things** in life. People are keeping themselves to themselves.
>
> *Resident of small inland village*

# For most residents, their sense of belonging is tied closely to home

## How far residents' sense of belonging extends

Chat data source: Focus group recruitment survey

My immediate area

My local town or village

My part of Essex

Essex as a whole

> I'd say my **sense of community extends to where I live**, so the eight households, but I always fe**el that warm glow of being home when I see the sign** for Stansted.
> *Resident of rural inland hamlet*

> That's easy, once you go off the island. I think it's the **mere fact that we go over a bridge**.
> *Resident of coastal area*

> I probably go a mile and a half up the road, and I **still very much part of my community**, and I probably go **three miles up the road** into Chelmsford and **it starts to disappear now**.
> *Resident of small inland village*

> Once I've come **over the M11 and I'm on to the home stretch into Harlow**, I feel comfortable, and it doesn't matter whether I've been, **once I come into Harlow, I feel comfortable**, and I'm in my domain again.
> *Resident of large inland town*

> As soon as you see that **sign saying you've come to Essex,** you're like, "oh, yeah, **I'm home**".
> *Resident of large inland town*

Q. Thinking about where you live, what would you describe as being your 'local area'?
Base: 162 residents from across Essex

# When discussing how they travel in and around Essex, it becomes clear that most residents rely heavily on their cars

## Driving

Most residents drive but find traffic levels problematic, particularly associated with new housing - being built, or built but seen to be overloading existing roads.

> Drive, drive. GP is 10 minutes. There's a little local Spar 10 minutes. **It's driving everywhere**.
> *Resident of rural inland hamlet*

> The biggest issue we have is **traffic**. Nobody listens; all they're interested in is, can they get any **more houses** on the island without doing anything with the infrastructure? Recently, the island **came to a standstill** at a weekend. **Buses wouldn't even come on to the island** because it was delaying the service everywhere else.
> *Resident of coastal area*

## Active Travel

Those who like to cycle often feel it is too dangerous because of traffic and lack of dedicated paths.

Walking is popular but difficult in more rural locations.

Chelmsford's electric scooters are well thought of.

> I can cycle where there are cycle paths, and **I will cycle into town**. What I won't do is cycle down any of the main roads, because **there's no cycle paths**, and the traffic is... it just **can't deal with cyclists**.
> *Resident of large inland town*

> **My preference** would be to cycle, **but I now refuse to**, because it's really just **too lethal**. So, I do not cycle anymore.
> *Resident of mid-sized inland village*

> One thing **I love** about where I live is **that I can walk into town**.
> *Resident of large inland town*

> We have the little TIER scooters, which I really like**... I could go to anywhere in Chelmsford**. I think.
> *Resident of large inland town*

## Public Transport

Views of public transport in urban areas is mixed, with both fans and critics.
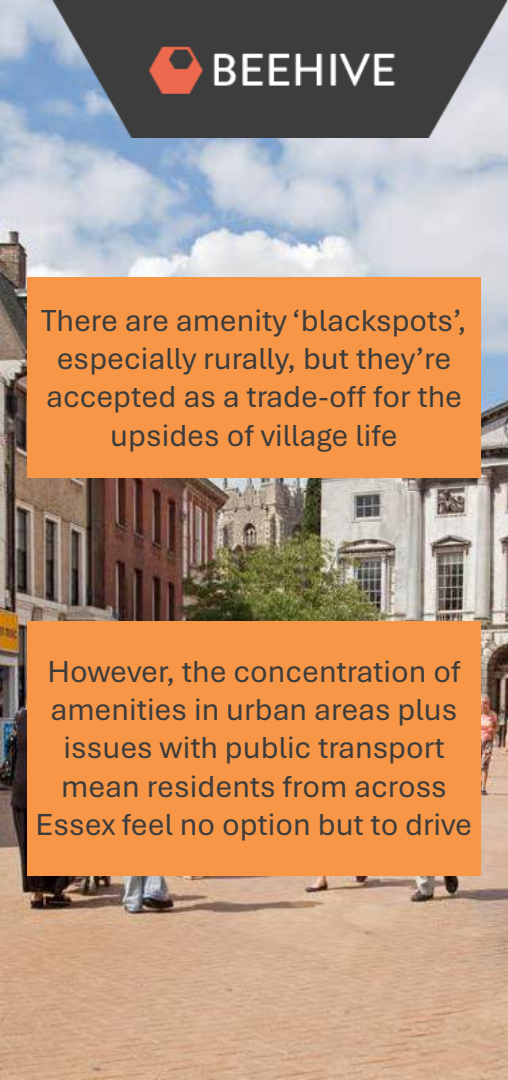
Bus services - if they exist - are poor rurally.

> **The buses are great**, and I like the [£3] bus fare.
> *Resident of large inland town*

> **I never use the bus**, although it stops right outside our house, simply because **it's thoroughly unreliable**. You have no visibility on when they're going to be arriving. And that **just doesn't really work**. In particular if you're getting the bus to go to catch the train.
> *Resident of large inland town*

# Linked to the feeling infrastructure isn't keeping pace with new home building, some find themselves a long distance from amenities

There are amenity 'blackspots', especially rurally, but they're accepted as a trade-off for the upsides of village life

However, the concentration of amenities in urban areas plus issues with public transport mean residents from across Essex feel no option but to drive

> **We don't have a GP surgery** because we are such a small village. So that's **all remained the same in terms of healthcare**. There are some pros and cons to for me to [living here].
>
> *Resident of mid-sized inland village*

> **There's nothing as far as services**. I have to go to Ingatestone for the doctor; the library's in Ingatestone, all the shops. Then I would have to go into Chelmsford for main shops. **Forget about the bus**. There is one an hour, and Sunday, one in two hours. **You have to go by car**.
>
> *Resident of small inland village*

> We've seen a lot of **retail moving out of town centres** to these parks, but they force people into using a car to get to them. And **I thought we were supposed to be being encouraged to leave the car at home**. You can get a bus out of the town centre, and you have to take your life in your hands to cross two lots of dual lane roads to get to that development, **because no bus goes near**.
>
> *Resident of mid sized coastal town*

**BEEHIVE**

# Concerns about accessing amenities are particularly acute when it comes to emergency healthcare

Being able to access healthcare, particularly hospitals, is a concern for many with driving seen as the only viable option

" The only main issue we have is **where the hospitals are**. For us, they're 10 miles either way, that's to Basildon or Southend, which, again, is **very difficult when you've only got two roads**, and that, again, does cause major issues.

*Resident of coastal area*

" **I want to be able to drive to hospital** because the ambulance probably isn't going to show up. So, we are very close to Broomfield, but **Broomfield is on its knees. I mean, it's like a war zone**. Don't go there if you're ill, basically. I can live without a sports centre. I can manage without the buses and things like that. I can manage without all of that. At the moment I drive, but **if I really need emergency medical** care, I actually think my **chances of survival would be higher in London** than where I currently live.

*Resident of large inland town*

" Broomfield is my local hospital, but I've been sent to Southend yesterday, which, ok, I'm driving at the moment, **but if you can't drive, you're scuppered** because taxi prices are through the roof.

*Resident of small inland village*

Action and accountability

## Day-to-day: what I see when I leave my front door

**How residents view their local area:**
- Potholes & **state of the roads**
- General maintenance & **cleanliness**
- Pockets of **run-down areas**

**Desired process:**
- Issues **should be able to be resolved by** contacting **local representatives**

**Issues with current approach:**
- Local/parish councils are **under-resourced** or **decision-making powers have been taken away** ( e.g., local roads are overseen by Essex highway)

"**I tried to take issue** with things that I care greatly about, and I **tried to push them** as much as I can, what you find is, oh no, **that's not our problem. Speak to highways or ECC**. That went on and on until actually, no decision is made at all, or arguably, sometimes the wrong decision.

*Resident of large inland town*

## Over time: the state of wider Essex

**What residents experience:**
- **Education** system
- **Housing** plans & investments
- **Town centre** development

**Desired process:**
- **Local knowledge** and understanding should **feature more strongly** in plans

**Issues with current approach:**
- Councils must be seen to not only listen, but communicate why decisions are made, how they have been influenced, and why it's the right thing to do; not roll over to loud protests

"I was very pro what the council wanted to introduce [traffic calming], and I still to this day **feel kind of sickened that the council didn't fight** for it. Even the Green Party were like, well, you know, **maybe it's not such a good idea if it's causing that much anger**. And I just thought, wow, **you're just all the same**.

*Resident of large inland town*

# Belief that local areas should have decision making powers, but there is tension between local needs and centralised control

> **There is a meaningful connection between feeling you can have a say in decision making and having a sense of belonging to the place you live**

## STRONG DESIRE FOR LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

*"IT'S ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL THAT COLCHESTER IS ABLE TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR COLCHESTER."*

- **Communities want more control:** local issues such as highway maintenance and public services
- **Confusion over decision-makers:** people don't know **who to contact** or **who is responsible** for key issues, creating frustration
- **Sense of powerlessness:** a feeling that decisions are made **without community input**

> "They try to make it so **difficult to get through to a real person** these days... I would like a **very straightforward route** that everybody can understand, **to get in touch with the people in charge of the area**.
>
> *Resident of mid sized inland town*

## CONCERNS LARGER UNITARY COUNCILS

*"THEY'D BE TOO FAR REMOVED TO UNDERSTAND OUR LOCAL CHALLENGES"*

- **Likely to be overly focused on larger population centres** and will ignore small, rural and coastal communities
- More distant/ **even less accountable** due to being centralised
- There should be **local experts with decision making powers**
- **and the resources** to deliver for local people

> **As soon as things get too big, you don't feel in any way connected, and you feel like your voice isn't heard**. There is no power in the people that you can talk to. Like the parish council, they have no power to do anything. Then it feels pointless. Anyway, it's somehow going to be devolved down. I get that there's going to be a governance and a trust issue with that.
>
> *Resident of large inland town*

# The 'contact us' conundrum that undermines residents' trust in local authorities

Multiple layers of local government is confusing: Who is responsible?

→

Residents describe going around in circles trying to get to the right person/ dept

There's been a lot of **loss of identity** from these **bodies of power that no longer have that definition**. We've grown up being used to having a **town council doing certain things**, and then **suddenly it doesn't exist**, or in not in that format anymore. And, yeah, I think it's **very confusing**.
*Resident of large inland town*

Making contact online to log issues isn't possible for all, older people more likely to be excluded

→

For those who can go online, raising a ticket doesn't instil confidence in being heard

When I try and talk to my dad, he's just got **no idea of how things work**, and **who to contact** or whatever. He **can't even use a computer**.
*Resident of mid-sized inland village*

By phone, council staff often simply repeat online content rather than give more nuanced answers

→

Result is a sense of lack of accountability and powerless on the part of the resident

**BEEHIVE**

# Residents' negative views of planning and development are rooted in a belief that their needs are ignored

**PERCEIVED LOSS OF LOCAL CONTROL AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES**

*"THE CITY COUNCIL HAS NO POWER TO GET ECC TO DO ANYTHING AT ALL."*

- **Rapid housing development:** residents feel that large-scale building projects are being approved **without matching investment in infrastructure**
- **Traffic and transport struggles:** roads can't handle **increased traffic**, and **public transport is unreliable**
- **Healthcare pressures:** services are becoming **increasingly stretched**, leaving some areas **worse off than others**

| 'They don't listen' | 'They don't project manage' | 'They don't collaborate' |
|---|---|---|
| • Housing developments spring up on green spaces despite local opposition | • Contractors get away without having to upgrade roads and paths to cope <br> • Works drag on | • Health and education services are not developed or expanded |

" I think ever**yone understands that there is a need for housing**. I think the frustration is **it's simply being forced upon people**. They're **not being consulted** appropriately, but **we're not being involved** in the decision making. And I think having that **involvement is so important to a sense of community**.

*Resident of mid sized inland village*

" One thing that's really miffed me off is the fact that there are absolutely **no footpaths or roads** anywhere **between the old village and the new. People in the new development can see the school** that the kids go to, but **to get to it, they have to drive two to three miles** all the way through the estate. **It's an absolute nonsense**. Persimmons built a six foot wide path over a ditch to a fence, and that's where it stopped.

*Resident of mid-sized inland village*

Summary

# 4 key takeaways summary

**BEEHIVE**

### 1 — RESIDENTS VALUE THEIR LOCAL IDENTITY AND ARE MOSTLY PROUD OF WHERE THEY LIVE

- Essex residents want their local areas to thrive in terms of being good places to live with healthy communities at their heart
- While there is a sense of injustice around how Essex can be portrayed, there is truth to some of the criticism; particularly around rapid population growth, unsatisfactory infrastructure development and declining town centres

**DRIVER**

### 2 — COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS ALIVE, BUT SEEMS TO BE DECLINING

- There seems to be considerable pressure from population growth, but a sense of community remains quite strong in Essex, particularly in rural areas
- Balancing growth with preserving local character is critical for sustaining this community identity and quality of life
- It's also worth noting that those without children and of working age do not have the same sense of community that is shared elsewhere

**DRIVER**

### 3 — RESIDENTS WANT TO SHARE THEIR VIEWS, BUT OFTEN DON'T FEEL HEARD

- Even our focus group participants, drawn from the Essex Residents' Panel, say that it's not easy to raise concerns and contact the correct people about issues close to their hearts
- This risks residents feeling increasingly disconnected to their local areas

**THREAT**

### 4 — A PERCEIVED LOSS OF LOCAL CONTROL FUELS FRUSTRATION WITH GOVERNANCE

- There is a definite link between feeling your views and needs matter to your local representatives and your sense of connection to the place you live
- Input from residents strongly suggests that decision-makers must have the mechanisms in place to ensure they can understand communities at the local level

**THREAT**

Beehive:
Your partner in
Actionable, Clear, Trusted insight

# Executive Summary

Overall, there was a good level of responses across the district/unitary authorities and inclusion of respondent types. With 7391 responses received in this public consultation, with the highest number of responses from Basildon, Chelmsford, and Southend-on-Sea.

The most important functions of local authorities to respondents were efficient use of council tax and public funds, clear accountability on decision making, and **staff and councillors knowing and understanding the local area**

The functions of new authorities prioritised by respondents were most prioritised were high quality services that work well, infrastructure planning, ease of contacting your local council, the level of council taxes paid and, accountability to residents.

Overall levels of support indicate **a divided, but marginally negative, response to the proposal**: 28% strongly opposed it, 16% opposed it, 20% were neutral, 18% supported it, and 18% strongly supported it. With the proposal receiving the **highest levels of support in Southend-on-Sea, Chelmsford and Castle Point,** and the highest levels of opposition in Harlow, Basildon, Uttlesford, and Rochford.

There was a strong correlation with age and levels of support, with **younger respondents the most likely to support the proposal**. Additionally, those from a **minority ethnic group were more likely to support the proposal**. There was a **stronger level of support with men than women**, and similar levels of non-support between genders. Additionally, there was a slightly higher level of non-support with those who have a disability.

Analysis of respondents' priorities for current and new councils showed that **support was lowest for those who held concerns pertaining to the local character of the new councils**, such as the local identity, accountability to residents, and contactability of councillors and staff were the most likely to not support the proposal.

Semantic Analysis was conducted on the additional comments to respondents' support/non-support. Among those who left additional comments the **most common reason for opposing the proposal was that the 5UA model felt too remote or not sufficiently local** - a concern cited by 29% of respondents. This was followed by concerns centring the **impact of current councils' debt** with 19% raising this concern.  A further 16% **opposed the idea of Local Government Reorganisation in Essex more broadly**.

Among those who left additional comments **the most common reasons for supporting the proposal was that the 5UA model looked to be the right size** – noted by 32%. Secondly 22% hoped that the reorganisation process would act to **catalyse wider improvements**

Comparisons with wider public opinion polling on support for two-tiered and singe-tiered local government structured suggested **the specific 5 UA proposal is viewed more favourably than single unitary authorities are generally with the wider public.** This **suggests the 5UA model may be more acceptable than "unitarisation" in principle**, especially when locally defined.

# Survey Findings

# Weighting Methodology

Sample weighting was performed along the answers to demographic information within this survey.
The demographic weighting then followed along age and gender prevalence within the survey, weighted towards the greater Essex (current county, Southend, and Thurrock) population characteristics within the 2023 Mid year ONS population projections, from the 2021 Census.

- The weighting coefficients had an upper limit applied to reduce sampling bias through overrepresentation. A square root transformation was then used to reduce skew, bringing all weights closer to 1 and ensuring each respondent's input carried more equal influence.

- These Weighting coefficients, rather than count of Reponses, was then used in reporting the survey data insights, to account for any under sampling bias and make the reporting more representative of the wider population.

- Non-responses were evenly distributed against the Greater Essex relevant demographic information so that these responses were included in the reporting following sampling weighting.

# Total Responses – 7391
## *Weighted & Unweighted*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

Within this consultation a total of 7391 responses have been recorded. With the ambition to hear from around 0.5% of the proposed 'Greater Essex' population, including the Essex County Council boundary combined with Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. **The volume of responses represents a strong level of engagement from the public**.

This target was achieved in 6 of the 14 areas. These were: Basildon, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Maldon, Southend-on-Sea and Uttlesford.

As there was such a significant variation in response by authorities, weighting responses by area would introduce high levels of sampling bias, so a demographic based on identity factors was preferred, with the weighting having a negligible impact on the representativeness by area of these insights.

| Current Authority Area | *Population - post Weighting* | Unweighted Responses | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Basildon | 1509 | 1518 | **0.8%** |
| Braintree | 262 | 256 | 0.2% |
| Brentwood | 246 | 250 | 0.3% |
| Castle Point | 724 | 737 | **0.8%** |
| Chelmsford | 1035 | 1032 | **0.6%** |
| Colchester | 479 | 464 | 0.2% |
| Epping Forest | 37 | 37 | 0.0% |
| Harlow | 105 | 105 | 0.1% |
| Maldon | 435 | 441 | **0.6%** |
| Rochford | 319 | 320 | 0.4% |
| Southend-on-Sea | 1348 | 1347 | **0.7%** |
| Tendring | 90 | 88 | 0.1% |
| Thurrock | 37 | 35 | 0.001% |
| Uttlesford | 720 | 737 | **0.8%** |
| Other | 30 | 24 | - |

# Cross tabulation of responses by District/Unitary and role

*Number of Unweighted Responses*

As expected, there was a significant response across residents of most areas, with residents views the largest group heard from across all areas.

Notably there was a large response from residents across Basildon, Southend-on-Sea and Chelmsford.

There is also significant inclusion of those from public sector working backgrounds, business, and the voluntary sectors.

There is a wide distribution of councillors across each level and across the district/unitary areas.

| Current Authority Area | District, borough or county councillor | Business | Parish/Town council | Public services worker | Resident | Voluntary or community sector organisation | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basildon | 9 | 8 | 16 | 47 | 1415 | 10 | 13 |
| Braintree | 8 | 2 | 12 | 17 | 205 | 7 | 5 |
| Brentwood | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 228 | 4 | 2 |
| Castle Point | 25 | 4 | 1 | 47 | 640 | 13 | 7 |
| Chelmsford | 13 | 20 | 12 | 110 | 846 | 23 | 8 |
| Colchester | 5 | 10 | 7 | 47 | 382 | 10 | 3 |
| Epping Forest | 3 | | 1 | 4 | 28 | 1 | |
| Harlow | | 3 | | 13 | 87 | 1 | 1 |
| Maldon | 10 | 11 | 16 | 20 | 372 | 7 | 5 |
| Rochford | 2 | 1 | 3 | 23 | 281 | 5 | 5 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 23 | 14 | 2 | 140 | 1108 | 35 | 25 |
| Tendring | 1 | | | 6 | 78 | 3 | |
| Thurrock | | 2 | 1 | 4 | 28 | | |
| Uttlesford | 15 | 13 | 17 | 30 | 646 | 13 | 3 |
| Other | | | | 6 | 16 | | 2 |

# How did Respondents Identify their local Area?
*Weighted & Unweighted*

Respondents to the question that sought views on what each considered their local area found that **the majority see their local town, city, or village as their local area** with 63% of responses sharing this view. Following sample weighting this marginally increased to 64%

The second most common view was that the district respondents live or work in was viewed as their local area. With 24% sharing this view.

Additionally, 8% found that the immediate area between a 5- and 10-minute walk matched their view of the local area.

The **least common view was that the whole of Essex is a respondents' local area** with 2% holding this view

**How would you define your local area?**

| Category | Unweighted | Weighted |
|---|---|---|
| My local town, city or village | 4684 | 4713 |
| My district/part of Essex | 1798 | 1748 |
| The immediate area I live in (5-10 minutes' walk) | 620 | 625 |
| Essex as a whole | 157 | 160 |
| Don't Know/No response | 132 | 129 |

■ Unweighted   ■ Weighted

**Peopletoo**
it works better with you
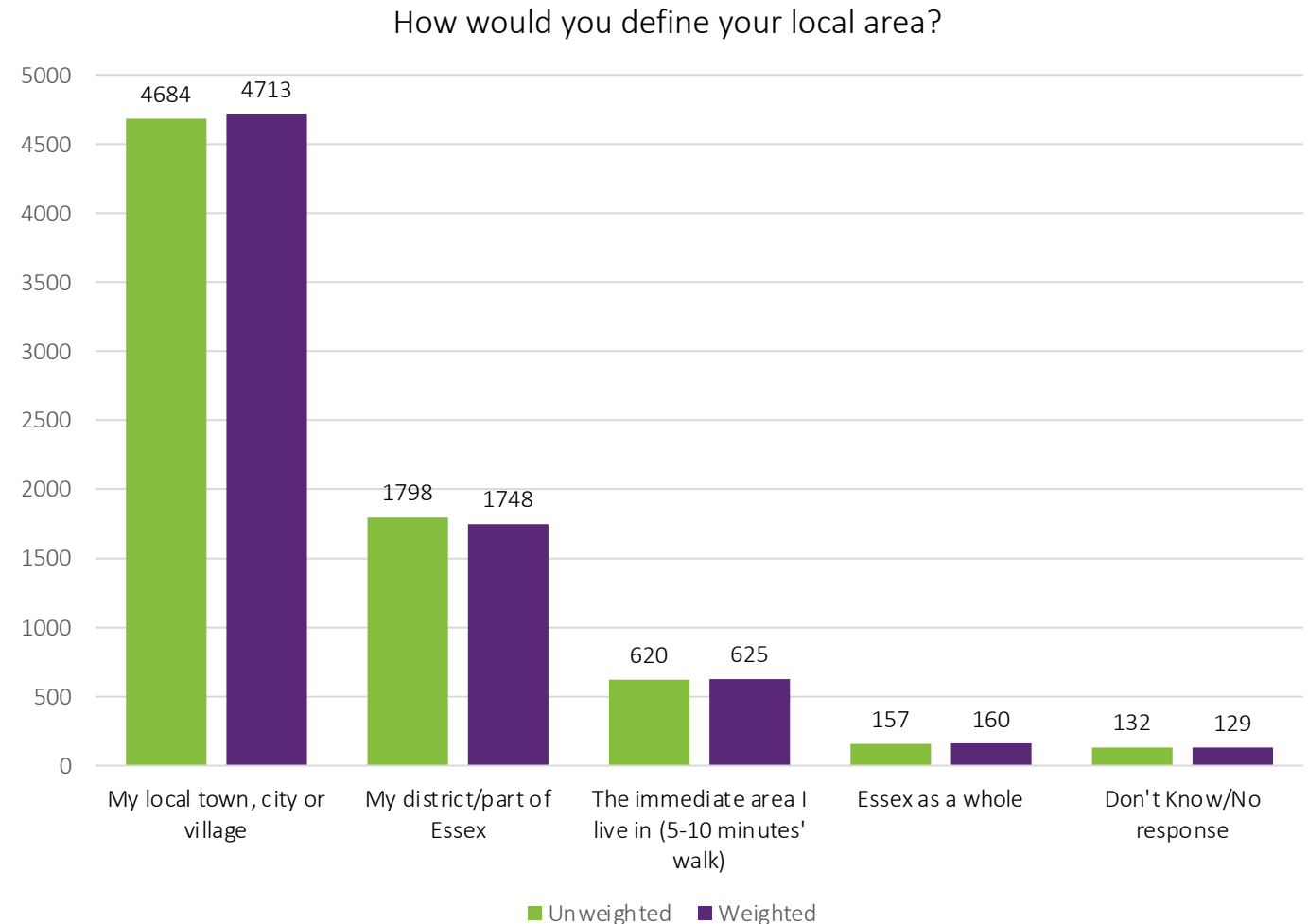
# How important are the following to you?
*Weighted Figures*

All council functions were seen by a majority of respondents to be important, with the lowest ranked, *'having a physical office in the local area'*, being viewed as important by 75% of respondents.

The most important functions were viewed as: **Efficient use of council tax and public funds** with 99.3% viewing it as important**, Clear accountability on decision making** with 98.6%, and staff and **councillors knowing and understanding the local area** with 97.9% importance.



How important are the following to you?

| Function | Very important | Fairly important | Neither important or unimportant |
|---|---|---|---|
| Efficient use of Council Tax and public funds | 6857 | 469 | 37 |
| Clear accountability on decision making and spending | 6357 | 917 | 76 |
| Staff and councillors know and understand your area | 6352 | 865 | 117 |
| Improving the quality of council services | 6077 | 1165 | 117 |
| Representation and participation of all communities in decision making | 5167 | 1795 | 299 |
| Accessible information available on council services and councillors | 4926 | 2070 | 294 |
| Supporting local businesses and community organisations | 4910 | 2102 | 283 |
| Reducing bureaucracy | 4511 | 2049 | 689 |
| Prioritising services for the most vulnerable | 3790 | 2594 | 776 |
| Having a physical council office in your local area | 3527 | 1993 | 1197 |

■ Very important   ■ Fairly important   ■ Neither important or unimportant   ■ Not very important   ■ Not important at all

# List of Council Services Accessed
*Weighted Figures*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

99.2% of respondents recorded that they had interacted with at least one council service. With 56 stating they had not used a council service.

The most used services with survey respondents was the **Environmental, Community, and Road, Transport and Infrastructure Services**.

There was a clear drop-off in engagement beyond the top three service areas, indicating these functions are more widely recognised and interacted with by the surveyed population.

The least interacted with services were the Economic development, Social Care & Support, and Public Health services.

Which of them have you, or someone living in your home, used at least once in the last year?

| Service | Used | Not Used |
|---|---|---|
| Environmental | 6882 | 493 |
| Community | 6434 | 940 |
| Road, transport and infrastructure | 5550 | 1825 |
| Regulatory functions | 2791 | 4583 |
| Education | 2172 | 5203 |
| Planning and building | 2194 | 5181 |
| Economic development | 1651 | 5724 |
| Social care and support | 1377 | 5997 |
| Public health | 1181 | 6193 |
| None of the above | 56 | 7318 |

■ Used  ■ Not Used

# Top 5 Priorities for Council Services
*Weighted Figures*

**Peopletoo**
it works better with you

The priorities that featured most frequently in respondents top 5 priorities, included:

1. Maintaining existing services that are based on local needs

2. Balancing cost savings to make sure existing local services are not disrupted

3. Maintaining local identity, cultural, and historic importance

4. More joined-up public services

5. Simpler council structures

While each is important, which was stated in multiple free text responses, the above were the most commonly prioritised of the 7 options.

## What are the top five priorities for you regarding council services?

| Priority | Top 5 Priority | Not a Top 5 Priority |
|---|---|---|
| Maintaining existing services that are based on local needs | 6105 | 1269 |
| Balancing cost savings to make sure existing local services are not disrupted | 5464 | 1911 |
| Maintaining local identity, cultural and historic importance | 4745 | 2630 |
| More efficiencies and potentially reduce costs | 4076 | 3299 |
| More joined-up public services | 3643 | 3732 |
| Simpler council structures | 2876 | 4498 |
| Creating a new council with existing neighbouring councils that are near to you geographically | 2061 | 5313 |
| Maintaining civic traditions | 1479 | 5895 |

■ Top 5 Priority    ■ Not a Top 5 Priority

# Priorities for the New Councils?
*Weighted Figures*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

The priorities for the functioning of the new councils, most frequently featuring in respondents top 5 priorities, included:

1. High quality services that work well
2. Infrastructure Planning
3. Ease of contacting your local council
4. How much Council Tax I pay
5. Local councils that are accountable to residents

It is important to note that there was a number of responses that highlighted a preference against having to rank council functions that they viewed as all important.

Furthermore, some response options covered overlapping themes  (such as ease of contact and knowing who to contact) which may have led to a degree of vote-splitting. As a result, individual priorities may appear underrepresented where respondents were required to choose between similarly worded statements

Thinking about how you would like your new local council to be run, please rank the following in order of importance

| | Top 5 Priority | Not a Top 5 Priority |
|---|---|---|
| High quality services that work well | 4810 | 2565 |
| Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health) | 3720 | 3654 |
| Ease of contacting your local council | 3608 | 3767 |
| How much Council Tax I pay | 3375 | 4000 |
| Local councils that are accountable to residents | 3259 | 4116 |
| Access to local representation/councillors to get my voice heard | 2959 | 4415 |
| Maintaining or improving local services | 2715 | 4660 |
| Council structures that are simple and easy to understand | 2461 | 4914 |
| Value for money | 1955 | 5419 |
| Impact on the local community and local identity | 1880 | 5494 |
| Regularly engaging with local residents about what they need and… | 1797 | 5578 |
| Knowing who to contact when I have a query or complaint | 1327 | 6048 |
| Funding and other support for voluntary and community… | 1173 | 6202 |
| Availability of business support | 321 | 7053 |

■ Top 5 Priority   ■ Not a Top 5 Priority

# Descriptions of Proposed Unitary Area
## *Describe your area to a Neighbour*

## Proposed Unitary 1  "Lovely and naturally beautiful countryside"

- *Epping Forest Resident: "Urban but with a beautiful and nationally important forest striped through the middle. Connected to London by sometimes fragile tube and bus links, and historically part of London's story as often as that of Essex. Forgotten by Chelmsford."*
- *Harlow Resident: "We live in the countryside, but with the benefits of only being 10 minutes away from our necessary utilities. Doctors, dentist, shops. Harlow's cycle tracks are the best. Can cover the whole of Harlow using the cycle tracks, which are through woods and field and countryside, staying away from the traffic. Harlow people are the best."*
- *Uttlesford Resident "Beautiful countryside, with great villages which hold lots of interesting events for people in the local area to go to. Vibrant small market town. Wonderful foodie market on Saturdays. Great choice of cafes Friendly. Culturally there is something for everyone including a Town Band, orchestra and Choral Society. Plus, various choirs Concert Hall and cinema, Scouts and Guides etc. Great for children and families Outstanding schools and nurseries. Very open and community minded Churches/a club for any taste."*

## Proposed Unitary 2  "Local & Historically significant country villages"

- *Braintree Resident: "My local area is a, peaceful village in rural North Essex, surrounded by open countryside and winding lanes. It has a traditional English charm, with historic cottages, a local pub, a village school, and a centuries-old church. Though quiet and remote in feel, it's well connected, just a short drive from Halstead, with Braintree and Chelmsford not far beyond. It's the kind of place where life moves at a slower pace, ideal for those who enjoy nature, community, and a break from the noise of town or city life."*
- *Colchester Resident: "Colchester is the first city of Britain (founded city) with a strong Roman heritage. Colchester has all the facilities and services of a medium size city balanced with access to the countryside twenty minutes in any direction by car, as well as access to Europe by ferry from Harwich and by air from Stanstead. Colchester is the base of Essex University supported by other education facilities such as Colchester Institute"*
- *Tendring Resident: "I've lived in Essex all my life – [childhood] in Waltham Abbey, early married life in Hatfield Peverel and for the last 30 years in Thorpe-le-Soken. Tendring is the most-friendly of all these neighbourhoods - with a great diversity of beautiful coast & countryside"*

## Proposed Unitary 3  "Beautiful scenes with close-knit communities"

- *Brentwood Resident: "It is a beautiful place to live in with a good connection to London. It has historic interest, and some close-knit communities brought together often by residents' associations. Schools are mainly excellent. Despite recent housebuilding, there is still beautiful countryside and parkland within close reach."*
- *Chelmsford Resident: "Essex is overlooked as a tourist destination, yet it is a 'sunshine state' and has many picturesque villages. Unfortunately, tourism has not been given much priority, but being fairly low-lying lends itself to excellent cycling and horse-riding possibilities and we have excellent beaches! The County Council has consistently cut staff supporting tourism and access to the countryside. Essex is beautiful and has much to offer holidaymakers and those interested in history and culture. It has excellent transport connections to London and world destinations."*
- *Maldon Resident: "An arcadian village, with numerous open vistas and places where one is reminded that one is in a village within open countryside and not just part of an urban sprawl. The feeling is quiet and peaceful, with properties generally well tended and parked cars tucked away"*

# Descriptions of Proposed Unitary Area
## *Describe your area to a Neighbour*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

## Proposed Unitary 4
### "Strong urban-based community feel"

- *Basildon Resident: "I would describe my neighbourhood as quite quiet, great community feel, nice shops and friendly people.  I'd like to see river access improvements and road repairs kept up to standard.   The biggest problem for us here is Stanford is the huge amount of traffic on the manorway heading to the port and I feel more needs to be done to the road, traffic lights and roundabouts to improve safety."*

- *Thurrock Resident: "It's home! I love and work in Wickford and have done so for over 20 years, I have the most amazing friends here! The town is small, but I love that it's a walk away or a short bus journey away, more shops would be welcomed, and I love walking around the market - again more stalls would be welcome! We have volunteer groups such as the Wickford feeders and Wickford in bloom who make the town and local park beautiful! We have a Wickford at Christmas group who puts on events at Christmas and now a summer event! It's a place where you can rely on your neighbours!"*

## Proposed Unitary 5
### "Mix of seaside urban living with accessible greenbelt land"

- *Castle Point Resident: "Castle Point is composed of Canvey Island, South Benfleet,  Hadleigh, Thundersley and Daws Heath.   They are five distinctly different areas, yet the people in them share a common bond of having worked hard to achieve what they have and recognise everyone with a similarly positive frame of mind. With our gardens and green spaces;  it is as close to nirvana as you will find anywhere. Locals share a strong sense of identity of manner and place;  being overwhelmingly well disposed to welcome people and offer them directions or conversation as appropriate. It is a calm area for the most part;  only disturbed when traffic on the A13 into or from Southend blocks up or is noisy."*

- *Rochford Resident: "It is beautiful and green, close to the sea, but the roads are terrible. Its' got very good selective schools, and very good state schools. Its' got reasonable access to health and social services if somewhat fragmented. Shopping is difficult on high street but that could be attributed to change in habits and increase of more availability of online shopping that has become prevalent in recent years. It requires investment in all areas, especially social care."*

- *Southend Resident: "Southend is a vibrant coastal town where seaside charm meets a strong sense of creativity and community. Alongside its famous beaches sand pier, it has a thriving cultural scene. The Beecroft Art Gallery showcases everything from historic artworks to contemporary exhibitions and fashion collections, while Southend Museums offer fascinating insights into local history, archaeology, and natural heritage. Focal Point Gallery adds to this with cutting-edge contemporary art and community-focused events. With regular exhibitions, workshops, and cultural festivals, Southend is a place full of energy, expression, and opportunities to connect through culture."*

# Survey Findings
*Level of Support*

# Do you Support the Proposal
*Weighted & Unweighted*

Overall levels of support **indicate a divided, but marginally negative, response to the proposal,** with opposition outweighing support by 8 percentage points.

There is a noticeable difference in the strength of feeling for those who did not support the proposal. With a larger proportion of those not supporting the strongly not supporting it, in comparison to the relative strength of feeling with those who supported.

Contextual Analysis follows in next section, providing greater understanding of the reasons why individuals are either in support or not in support of the proposal.

**Peopletoo**
it works better with you

How much do you support the proposal to form five new unitary councils which would each serve between 326k and 510k people?

| | Unweighted | Weighted |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly do not support | 2029 | 2049 |
| Do not support | 1222 | 1212 |
| Neutral | 1407 | 1385 |
| Support | 1302 | 1293 |
| Strongly support | 1431 | 1436 |

■ Unweighted  ■ Weighted
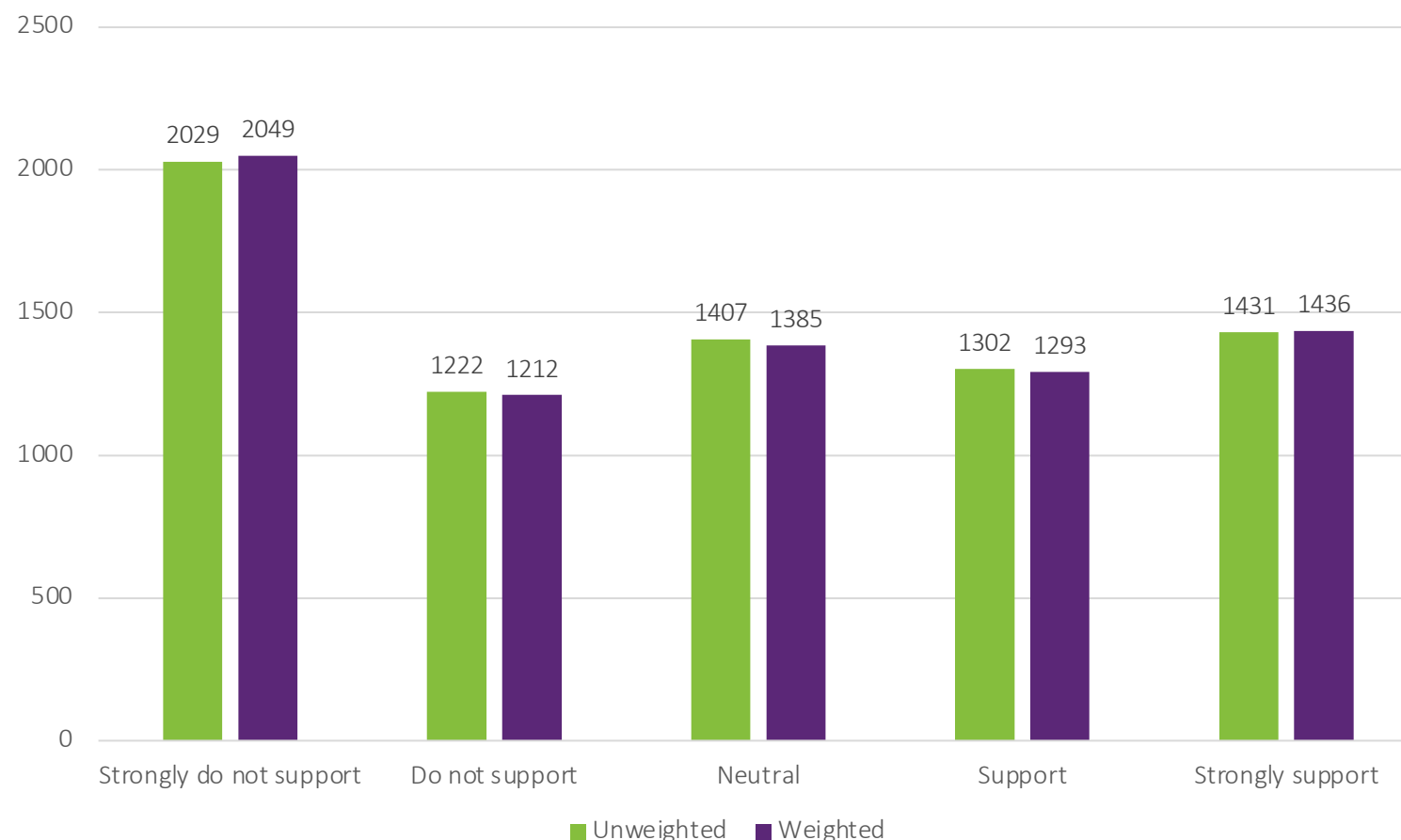
# Understanding Levels of Support
## *Support by District/Unitary Area*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

The level **of support for the 5 Unitary Authorities proposal was highest in Southend-on-Sea** (54%), **Chelmsford** (48%) and **Castle Point** (42%). However, in Castle Point more respondents were not in support of the proposal than in support.

The **areas with the highest proportion of respondents who did not support the proposal** include **Harlow** (63%), **Basildon** (62%), **Uttlesford** (56%), **Rochford** (53%) and **Tendring** (49%)

Support was more evenly split (within a net support of 10) in Thurrock, Colchester, Braintree, Epping Forest, Maldon, and Brentwood

Across all current Districts and Unitary Authorities **there is a high level of neutrality**, with majority support/opposition only present in 4 of the 14 areas.

### Level of support for Proposal by Area

| Area | Strongly do not support | Do not support | Neutral | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Southend-on-Sea | 235 | 178 | 210 | 295 | 430 |
| Chelmsford | 158 | 146 | 230 | 228 | 273 |
| Castle Point | 212 | 108 | 100 | 96 | 208 |
| Thurrock | 9 | 4 | 8 | 11 | 4 |
| Epping Forest | 13 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Colchester | 97 | 88 | 111 | 100 | 82 |
| Braintree | 58 | 39 | 71 | 56 | 38 |
| Maldon | 107 | 76 | 96 | 81 | 74 |
| Rochford | 118 | 52 | 36 | 58 | 55 |
| Brentwood | 56 | 50 | 53 | 45 | 43 |
| Tendring | 33 | 12 | 21 | 10 | 15 |
| Uttlesford | 230 | 171 | 146 | 85 | 89 |
| Basildon | 669 | 262 | 271 | 207 | 100 |
| Harlow | 46 | 20 | 17 | 8 | 13 |

■ Strongly do not support  ■ Do not support  ■ Neutral  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
## *Support by Demographic Groups*

![Peopletoo logo - it works better with you]

**Age Group:**

- There was a noticeable trend with the level of support by age. The **level of support was strongest within younger respondents,** with the highest level of support with respondents aged under 18 and between 18 and 24. However, there was a very low response rate with under 18s.

- Levels of **non-support were more concentrated in the older population**. However, there is a slight increase in support for those aged 75 and over, which bucks this trend.

**Gender:**

- Overall, the level of enthusiasm was low across both men and women, with **men more likely to state they *strongly* did not support the proposal. Women were less likely to either support or oppose the proposal** with 24% responding with a neutral position.

- Conversely, the **net support, while overall opposing, was marginally higher with men than women by 2%,** as the numbers of non-support were consistent at 41%, but men were more likely to be in support of the proposal (40% compared to 37%).

**Ethnicity:**

- The **groups most in support of the proposal were Asian/Asian British** (58%), and **respondents from mixed or multiple ethic groups** (47%).

- **Respondents identifying as 'White' were less in support of the proposal** with 26% strongly and 16% not in support of the proposal.

**Disability Status:**

- The **levels of support from those who recorded having a disability and those who did not was similar**. With those who have a disability slightly more likely to not be in support of the proposal.

*Those who did not return an answer the demographic question on any of the demographic questions were much more likely to not be in support of the proposal than those who did provide this information.*

### Level of Support by Age Group
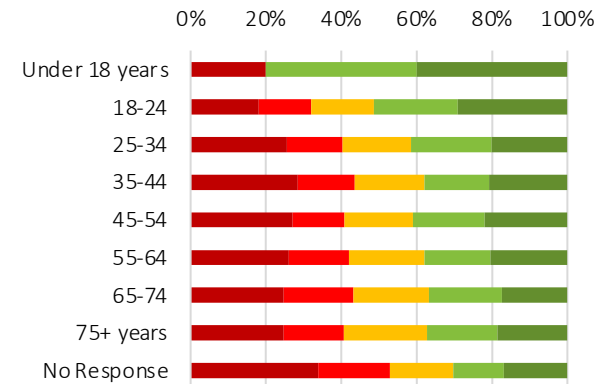


### Level of Support by Gender
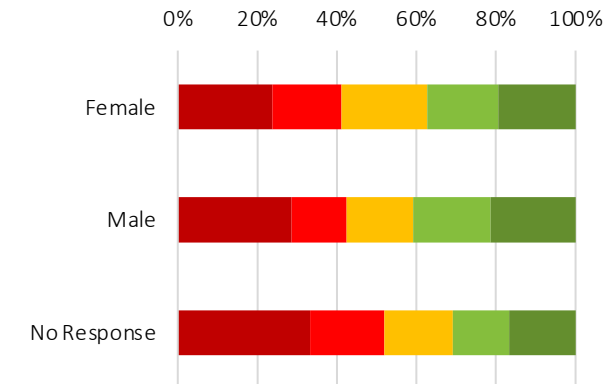


### Level of support by ethnic group
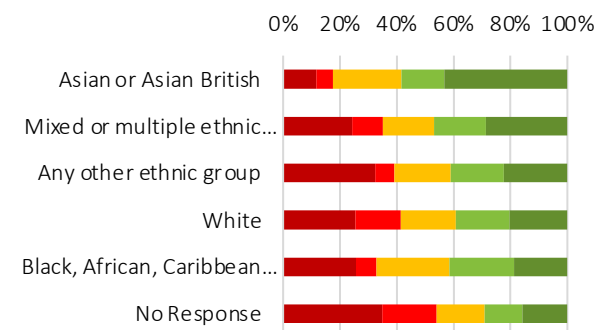


### Level of Support by whether the respondent has a disability
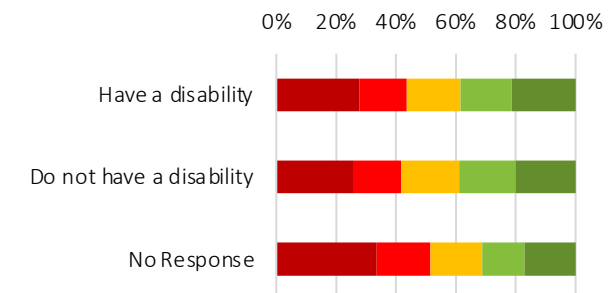


■ Strongly do not support ■ Do not support ■ Neutral ■ Support ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
*Familiarity with the Proposal*


Peopletoo
it works better with you

While overall enthusiasm was low across the levels of familiarity, there is a strong correlation that **respondents that reported a higher level of familiarity with the proposals were more likely to take a supportive position towards the proposal**. With 46% supportive and 46% not supportive with those very familiar.

With the provided trend lines, it is clear that while the proportion of those who were not in support only gently increased from those not at all familiar, to those who were very familiar. This was compared to the much stronger impact of those who self-reported higher familiarity increasingly supportive of the proposal. This **may suggest there is a knowledge/familiarity gap that if closed could shift sentiment in Essex towards support of the proposal**.

This familiarity gap is also evidenced by the larger number of respondents reporting that they were neutral to the proposal with 34% of those not at all familiar reporting they are neutral to the 5 unitary proposal compared to 8% of those very familiar with the proposed changes.



Levels of support for the proposal by familiarity with the proposal

| Familiarity | Strongly do not support | Do not support | Neutral | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very familiar | 522 | 152 | 125 | 167 | 506 |
| Somewhat familiar | 1117 | 649 | 652 | 737 | 731 |
| Not very familiar | 272 | 287 | 420 | 309 | 158 |
| Not at all familiar | 122 | 114 | 180 | 72 | 36 |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly do not support   ■ Do not support   ■ Neutral   ■ Support   ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
## *Priorities for New Unitary Authorities*

Peopletoo
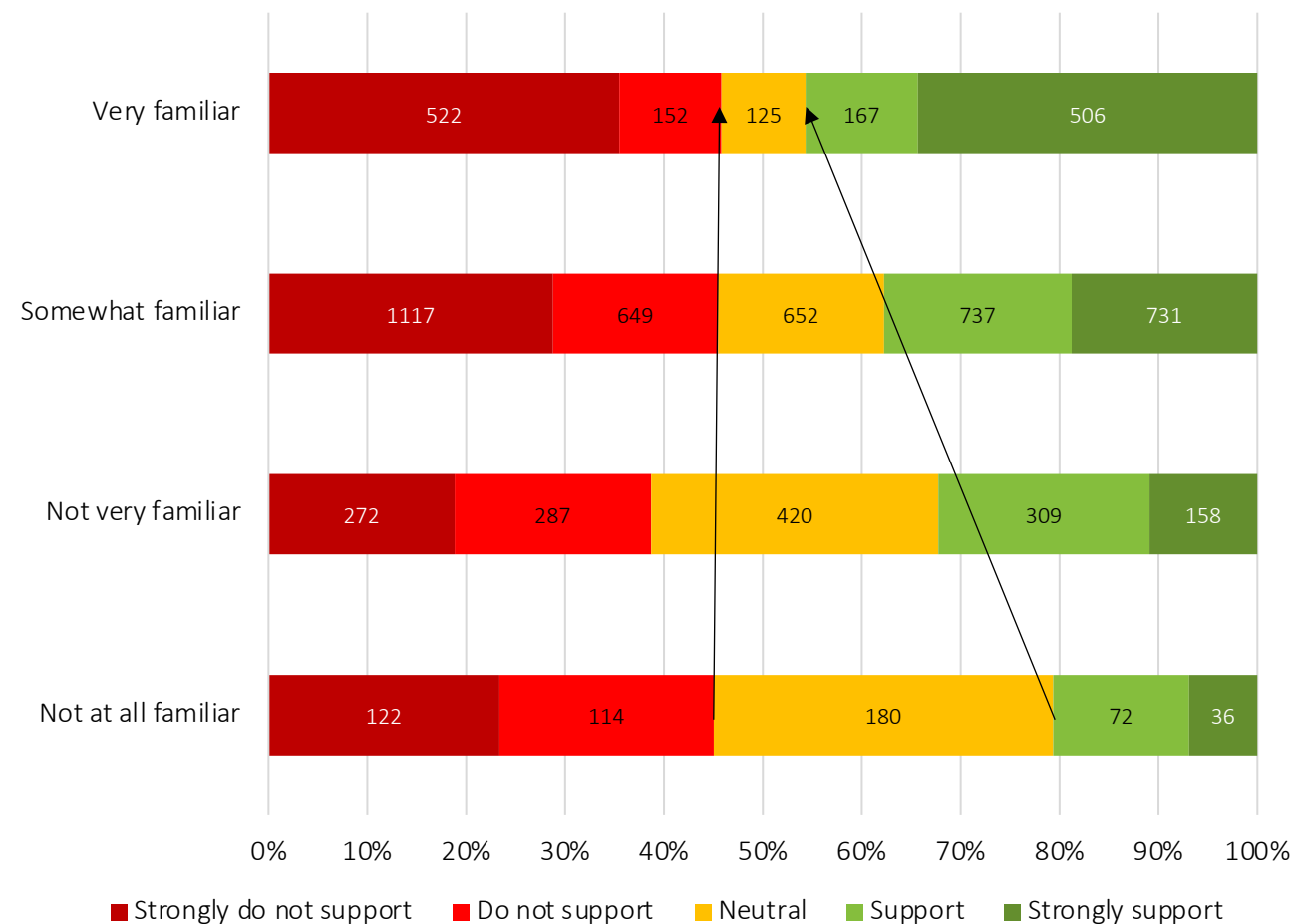it works better with you

- The recorded levels of support against whether each of the corresponding was in respondents top 5 priorities for the new unitary authorities shows significant variation.

- The priorities that corresponded with higher levels of support were:
  - Availability of business support (46% support – 36% opposed)
  - Funding & other support for Voluntary and community organisations (46% support – 34% opposed)
  - Maintaining or improving local services (45% support – 35% opposed)
  - **This could suggest that respondents believed the proposal could serve these priorities effectively.**

- The priorities that corresponded with lower levels of support include:
  - Impact on the local community & identity (31% support - 53% opposed)
  - How Much Council Tax I pay (30% support – 51% opposed)
  - Local councils that are accountable to residents (34% support - 50% opposed)
  - **This could suggest that respondents believed the proposal would not support these priorities sufficiently.**

## Level of support by Priorities for New Authorities

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

| Priority | Strongly oppose | Oppose | Neither support nor oppose | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Availability of business support | 71 | 46 | 57 | 62 | 86 |
| Funding and other support for voluntary and… | 209 | 189 | 238 | 230 | 307 |
| Maintaining or improving local services | 531 | 414 | 554 | 589 | 627 |
| Council structures that are simple and easy to… | 531 | 370 | 483 | 522 | 555 |
| High quality services that work well | 1144 | 777 | 973 | 927 | 989 |
| Infrastructure planning (e.g. roads, schools, health) | 926 | 588 | 774 | 703 | 729 |
| Ease of contacting your local council | 979 | 587 | 674 | 652 | 716 |
| Value for money | 521 | 307 | 412 | 374 | 341 |
| Regularly engaging with local residents about… | 531 | 317 | 304 | 296 | 348 |
| Access to local representation/councillors to get… | 943 | 503 | 456 | 452 | 605 |
| Knowing who to contact when I have a query or… | 366 | 247 | 269 | 222 | 224 |
| Local councils that are accountable to residents | 1077 | 545 | 547 | 496 | 594 |
| Impact on the local community and local identity | 659 | 336 | 297 | 234 | 353 |
| How much Council Tax I pay | 1125 | 591 | 654 | 516 | 489 |

■ Strongly oppose  ■ Oppose  ■ Neither support nor oppose  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support

# Semantic Analysis

# Semantic Analysis Methodology

- The response to question 7 *"How much do you support the proposal to form five new unitary councils which would each serve between 326k and 510k people?"* was combined with the free text question 10 *"Please tell us if you have any additional thoughts about the changes that could come with the creation of 5 new unitary councils."*

- Semantic analysis based on those who reported they were Neutral, not in support, and strongly not in support of the proposed changes. A separate split of those who reported they were in support or strongly in support was then semantically analysed.

- Within semantic analysis, the amalgamation of Q7 and Q10 were then coded into themes, which are types of qualitative data (non-numerical information, for example written or spoken language) that share a repeated pattern of meaning.

- The prevalence of codes were then counted, with the strongest resonating theme taking primacy in responses where there were multiple present and used to provide context into the wider thoughts and feelings towards the proposal, compared to what response was given for Q7. These prevalences then underwent the same weighting process.

# Semantic Analysis of Support Levels
*Not in Support – overall*

- 60% of those who responded to their level of support with strongly not in support, not in support, or neutral. Provided additional comments in the free text option.

- From this semantic analysis of where respondents gave additional context was performed to understand the themes of sentiments expressed. Finding:
  - The **most frequently expressed sentiment was a concern over less local representation** with 29%
  - The **next most frequent sentiment was a concern over councils' debt and their impact for the new unitaries** with 19%, although there was concentration in areas closer to Thurrock, notably Basildon.
  - The third most frequent was **raising a local boundary concern** at 8%, with this ranging from wanting their town to fit with a different district area, or feeling their area is more in tune with a wider structure that is not Essex.
  - **Notably 16% were opposed to the changes of LGR in Esssex more generally** with concerns around the costs, wanting to retain district councils or more generally preference for the status quo raised.
  - **15 stated that despite not supporting the proposal it would be preferable to others** such as the 3 Unitary proposal.

| Sentiment Expressed | Prevalence | Prevalence (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Concern over less local representation | 701 | 28.7% |
| Concerns of impact of other council's debt | 471 | 19.3% |
| Raised a concern with their current district/unitary boundary | 205 | 8.4% |
| Concern about services worsening/ wants more focus on improvements | 185 | 7.6% |
| Opposition to LGR – general | 164 | 6.7% |
| Would prefer Fewer Unitaries | 158 | 6.5% |
| Opposition to LGR – prefer current districts | 121 | 5.0% |
| Concern with the grouping of the 5 unitaries | 111 | 4.5% |
| Opposed to LGR – Cost | 110 | 4.5% |
| Raised a non-LGR specific issue | 48 | 2.0% |
| Concern about ease of contacting representatives / services | 41 | 1.7% |
| Concern of staff impact | 39 | 1.6% |
| Asked for greater clarity | 38 | 1.6% |
| Dissatisfaction with loss of vote in LE2025 | 35 | 1.4% |
| Would support 5 Unitaries over 3 | 15 | 0.6% |

# Semantic Analysis of Support Levels
## *Support – Overall*

- 42% of respondents that responded with a supportive or strongly supportive level of support for the proposal gave additional comments to their response.
  - The **most common sentiment expressed** was **that the size of the 5 looked right (32%)**. This was in terms of retaining a local view while being able to deliver efficiencies.
  - The next most frequent theme was the **hope that with the proposal greater improvements could be catalysed** (23%).
  - A further **11% raised their concern that the 5 Unitaries could not be local enough**.
  - 19 Stated that while supporting the proposal they would prefer fewer unitaries for Essex.

| Semantic Theme | Prevalence | Prevalence (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Size of Unitary Authorities looked right | 324 | 32.4% |
| Hope that these changes can catalyse wider improvements | 227 | 22.7% |
| Concern over less local representation | 110 | 11.0% |
| Asked for greater clarity | 69 | 6.9% |
| Concerns of impact of other council's debt | 50 | 5.0% |
| Opposition to LGR | 45 | 4.5% |
| Raised a non-LGR specific issue | 38 | 3.8% |
| Concern with the grouping of the 5 unitaries | 38 | 3.8% |
| Raised a concern with their current district/unitary boundary | 34 | 3.4% |
| Concerns of services impact | 20 | 2.0% |
| Prefer a different number of Unitary Authorities | 19 | 1.9% |
| Concerns of staff impact | 10 | 1.0% |
| Uncertain it will deliver | 8 | 0.8% |
| Dissatisfaction with loss of vote in LE2025 | 7 | 0.7% |

# Semantic Analysis of Support Levels
## *Overall Support & non-support split*

Peopletoo
it works better with you



Prevalence of Sentiments that supported the proposal
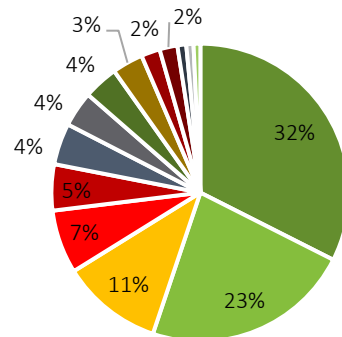
- Size of Unitary Authorities looked right
- Hope that these changes can catalyse wider improvements
- Concern over less local representation
- Asked for greater clarity
- Concerns of impact of other council's debt
- Opposition to LGR
- Raised a non-LGR specific issue
- Raised a grouping issue
- Raised a concern with their current district/unitary boundary
- Concerns of services impact
- Prefer a different number of Unitary Authorities
- Concerns of staff impact
- Uncertain it will deliver
- Dissatisfaction with loss of vote in LE2025

Overall Level of Support
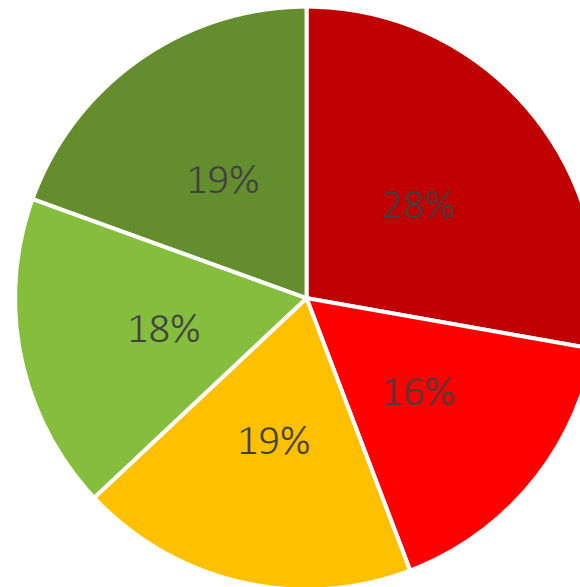
- Strongly do not support
- Do not support
- Neutral
- Support
- Strongly support

Prevalence of Sentiments of those who did not support the proposal
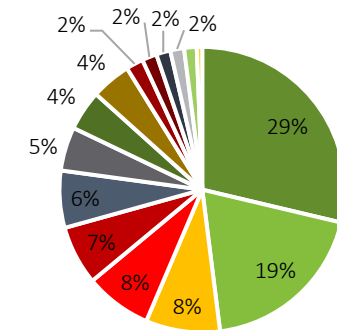
- Concern over less local representation
- Concerns of impact of other council's debt
- Raised a concern with their current district/unitary boundary
- Concern about services worsening/ wants more focus on improvements
- Opposition to LGR – general
- Would prefer Fewer Unitaries
- Opposition to LGR – prefer current districts
- Concern with the grouping of the 5 unitaries
- Opposed to LGR – Cost
- Raised a non-LGR specific issue
- Concern about ease of contacting representatives / services
- Concern of staff impact
- Asked for greater clarity
- Dissatisfaction with loss of vote in LE2025
- Would support 5 Unitaries over 3

# Ipsos polling on the state of local government

- Ipsos polled a sample of the UK public that stated:
  - **26%** believed Unitary Authorities had the best outcomes
  - **38%** believed that 2 two-tier County and District councils had the best outcomes
  - **15%** believed there is no difference
  - **22%** did not know

- The charts to the left demonstrate the UK wide opinion polling on the best form of local government, with don't knows removed, compared to levels of support for the 5 Unitary proposal.
  - The comparison of these show that **the specific 5 UA proposal is viewed more favourably than single unitary authorities are generally with the wider public.**
  - Additionally, a lower proportion than the 48% who view 2-tiered county and district local governments as delivered the best outcomes, were not in support of the proposal (44%)
  - This **suggests the 5UA model may be more acceptable than "unitarisation" in principle**, especially when locally defined.

What council structure produces the best outcomes? (Ipsos Polling March 2025)



Single Unitary 33%

Combination of District & County Councils 48%

No difference 19%

28%

16%

19%

19%

18%
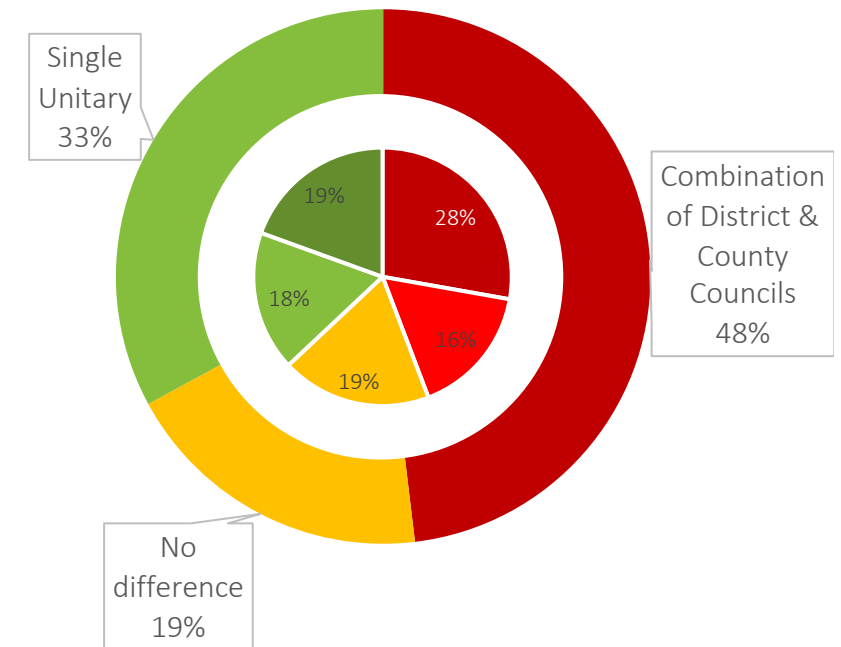
# Recent Unitarisation Polling during local government reorganisation

**Peopletoo**
it works better with you

An inspection of other unitarisation surveys shows higher support for more local focused unitaries.

## Somerset

- Ipsos survey commissioned by Somerset's district councils in January 2021:
  - **29%** supported creating two new unitary councils for Eastern and Western Somerset.
  - **27%** favoured more collaboration between district councils.
  - **15%** preferred a single unitary council for all of Somerset.
  - **23%** preferred no change & maintaining the county and district structure

## Worcestershire

- Shape Worcestershire survey:
  - **48%** backed creating two unitary councils.
  - **29%** supported one unitary council for the county.
  - **19%** didn't support any reorganisation.

## Hertfordshire

- A telephone survey by Survation in October 2020 revealed:
  - **59%** of residents strongly opposed the creation of a single county-wide unitary council. (only **12%** saying it was something they could support)
  - **80%** believed their area would be better served by a local council than a single county-wide unitary.
  - **76%** were concerned that their voice may not be heard by a county-wide unitary.

## Oxfordshire

- A face-to-face survey of 500 residents conducted by Opinion Research Services published by the county council in March2017 suggested:
  - In the survey **70%** were in Favor of abolishing the existing councils and creating a new unitary for the whole of Oxfordshire.
  - However, in the engagement questionnaire two-thirds (66%) said they opposed the proposal for a single unitary, while 30% supported the idea.
    - *Despite this ORS pointed out that "engagement questionnaires are not representative of overall public opinion, and can be influenced by local campaign groups"*

# Semantic Analysis
## *Areas where more clarity was requested*

LGR related Questions:
- *Many raised concerns and wanted clarity over how existing debts would be handled following LGR.*
- *Residents wanted to know LGR would improve the services in their area.*


Devolution:
- *Some asked what the powers of the new mayor and their interactions with the new unitary authorities would look like?*
- *Responsibilities between Mayor and Unitary Authorities*


Implications for services/council areas:
- *Charity Grants*
- *Current local plans*
- *Housing*
- *School Catchments*
- *Hospital Catchments + GPs*
- *Situation of Council offices / local hubs along historical lines*
- *How will the new Unitary Authorities be named?*


Communications around what changes could mean in these areas could provide greater clarity to all stakeholders.

# Appendix A

- Additional Analysis on the Level of Support
- Theme Glossary

# Understanding Levels of Support
## *Support by Age Group*

There was a noticeable trend with the level of support by age. The **level of support was strongest within younger respondents,** with the highest level of support with respondents aged under 18 and between 18 and 24. However, there was a very low response rate with under 18s.

Levels of **non-support were more concentrated in the older population.**

However, there is a slight increase in support for those aged 75 and over, which bucks this trend.

Those who did not return an answer the demographic question on their age grouping were much more likely to not be in support of the proposal than those who did provide their age.

### Level of Support by Age Group

| Age Group | Strongly do not support | Do not support | Neutral | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Under 18 years | 2 | | | 4 | 4 |
| 18-24 | 29 | 22 | 27 | 36 | 47 |
| 25-34 | 155 | 90 | 111 | 130 | 122 |
| 35-44 | 256 | 136 | 166 | 154 | 187 |
| 45-54 | 288 | 147 | 194 | 203 | 233 |
| 55-64 | 314 | 193 | 241 | 210 | 247 |
| 65-74 | 242 | 181 | 195 | 190 | 169 |
| 75+ years | 177 | 114 | 159 | 134 | 134 |
| No Response | 586 | 329 | 292 | 232 | 292 |

Legend: ■ Strongly do not support  ■ Do not support  ■ Neutral  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
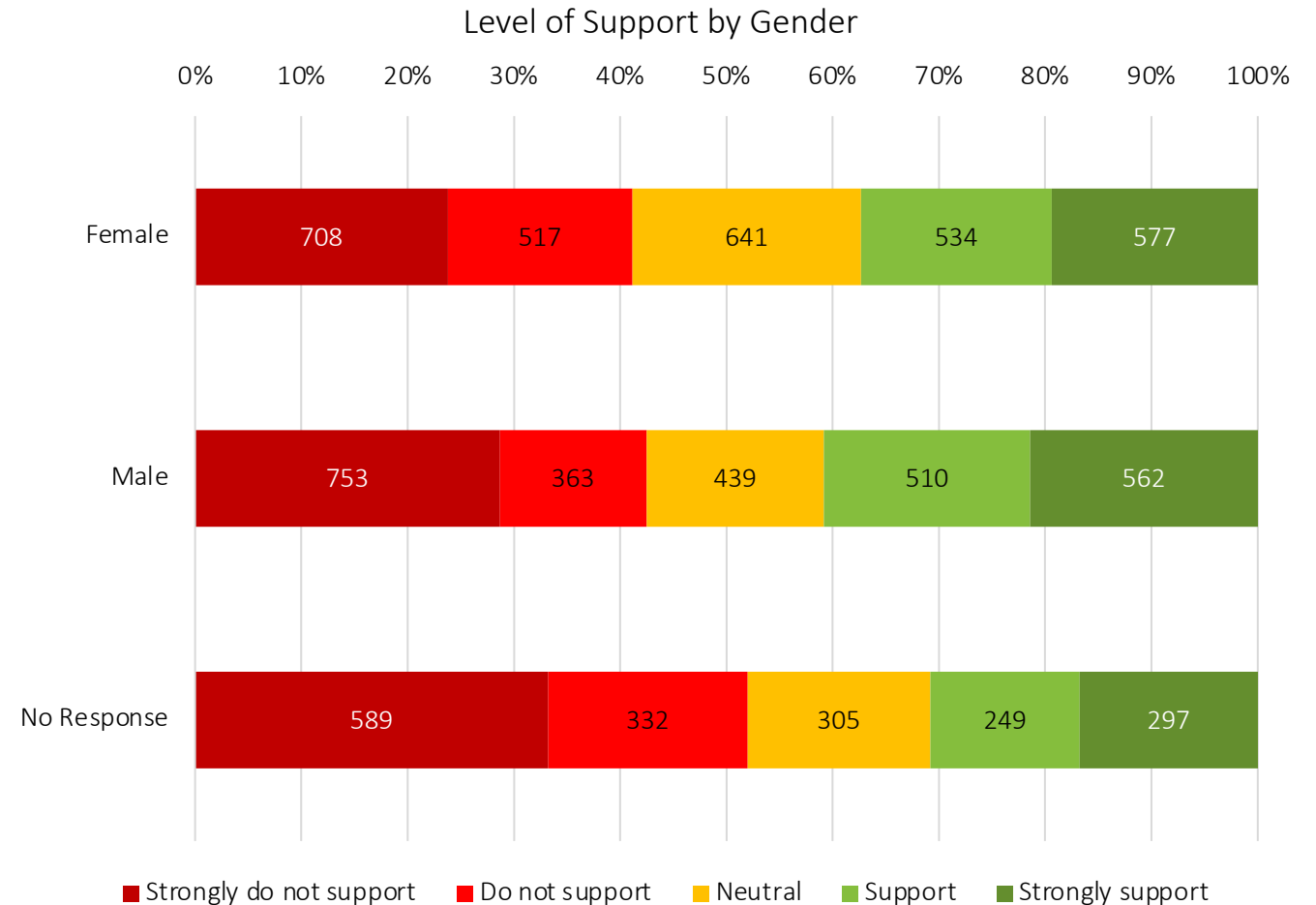*Support by Gender*

Overall, the level of enthusiasm was low across both men and women, with **men more likely to state they *strongly* did not support the proposal**.

**Women were less likely to either support or oppose the proposal** with 24% responding with a neutral position.

Conversely, the **net support, while overall opposing, was marginally higher with men than women by 2%**, as the numbers of non-support were consistent at 41%, but men were more likely to be in support of the proposal (40% compared to 37%).

The survey also heard from those who identified with a non-binary gender, who overall supported the proposal, as well as those who self-described their gender identity who overall did not support the proposal. These are missing from the reporting due to weighting relying on ONS mid-year population projections, but were split according to projected demographics in the same way as those who did not respond to the question.

## Level of Support by Gender

| | Strongly do not support | Do not support | Neutral | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 708 | 517 | 641 | 534 | 577 |
| Male | 753 | 363 | 439 | 510 | 562 |
| No Response | 589 | 332 | 305 | 249 | 297 |

# Understanding Levels of Support
## *Support by Ethnicity*
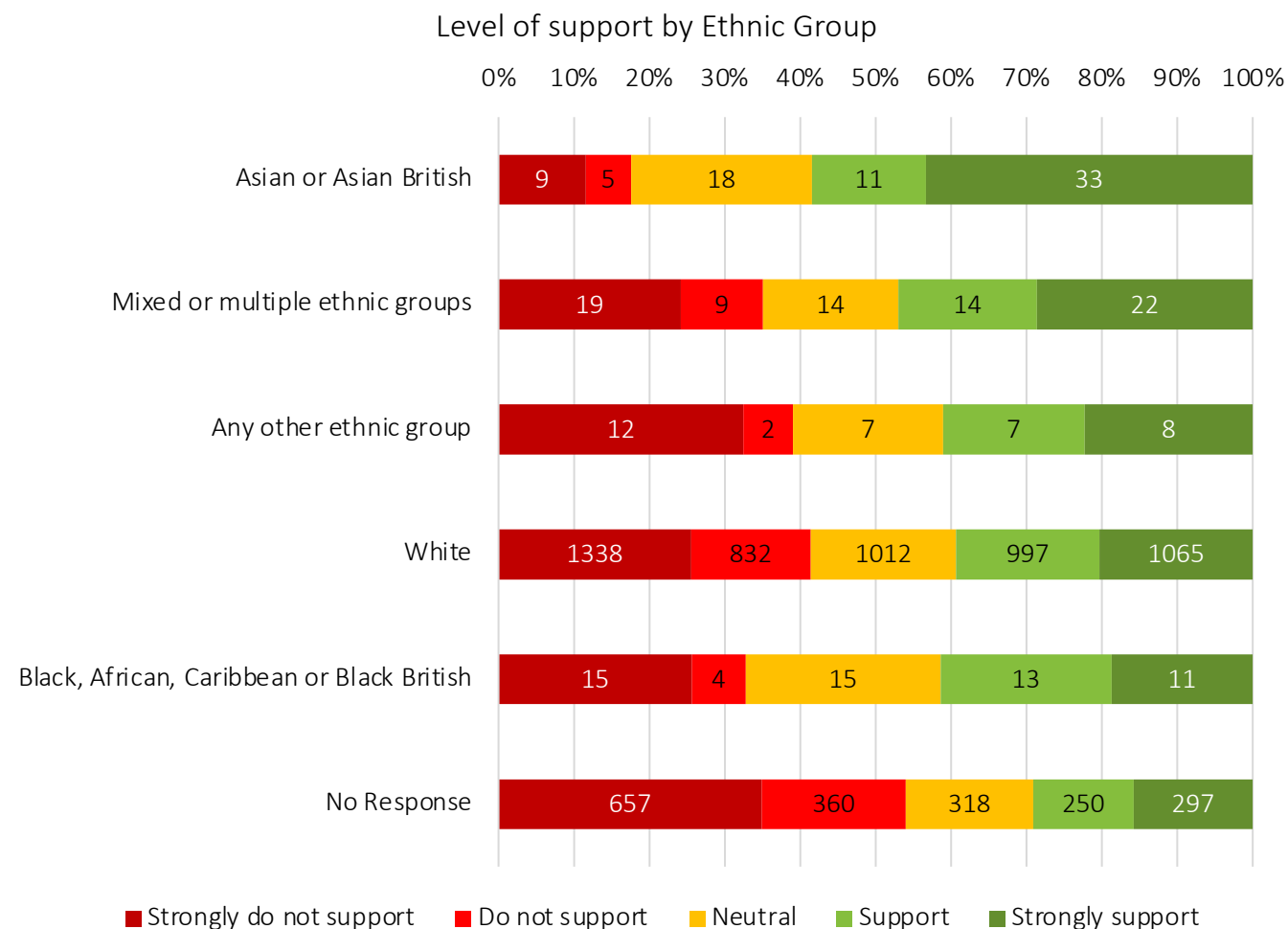
**Peopletoo**
it works better with you

There was noticeable variation in the level of support for the 5 Unitary Authorities proposal across different ethnicities.

The **groups most in support of the proposal were Asian/Asian British** (58%), and **respondents from mixed or multiple ethic groups** (47%).

**Respondents identifying as 'White' were less in support of the proposal** with 26% strongly and 16% not in support of the proposal.

The number of responses were somewhat over-representative of respondents from a White background with 96% of responses that answered with the ethnic group they belong to, compared to 89% of the population of 'Greater Essex'

Those who did not provide demographic information on their ethnicity were more likely to not support the proposal than any other group

### Level of support by Ethnic Group

| Ethnic Group | Strongly do not support | Do not support | Neutral | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asian or Asian British | 9 | 5 | 18 | 11 | 33 |
| Mixed or multiple ethnic groups | 19 | 9 | 14 | 14 | 22 |
| Any other ethnic group | 12 | 2 | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| White | 1338 | 832 | 1012 | 997 | 1065 |
| Black, African, Caribbean or Black British | 15 | 4 | 15 | 13 | 11 |
| No Response | 657 | 360 | 318 | 250 | 297 |

■ Strongly do not support  ■ Do not support  ■ Neutral  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
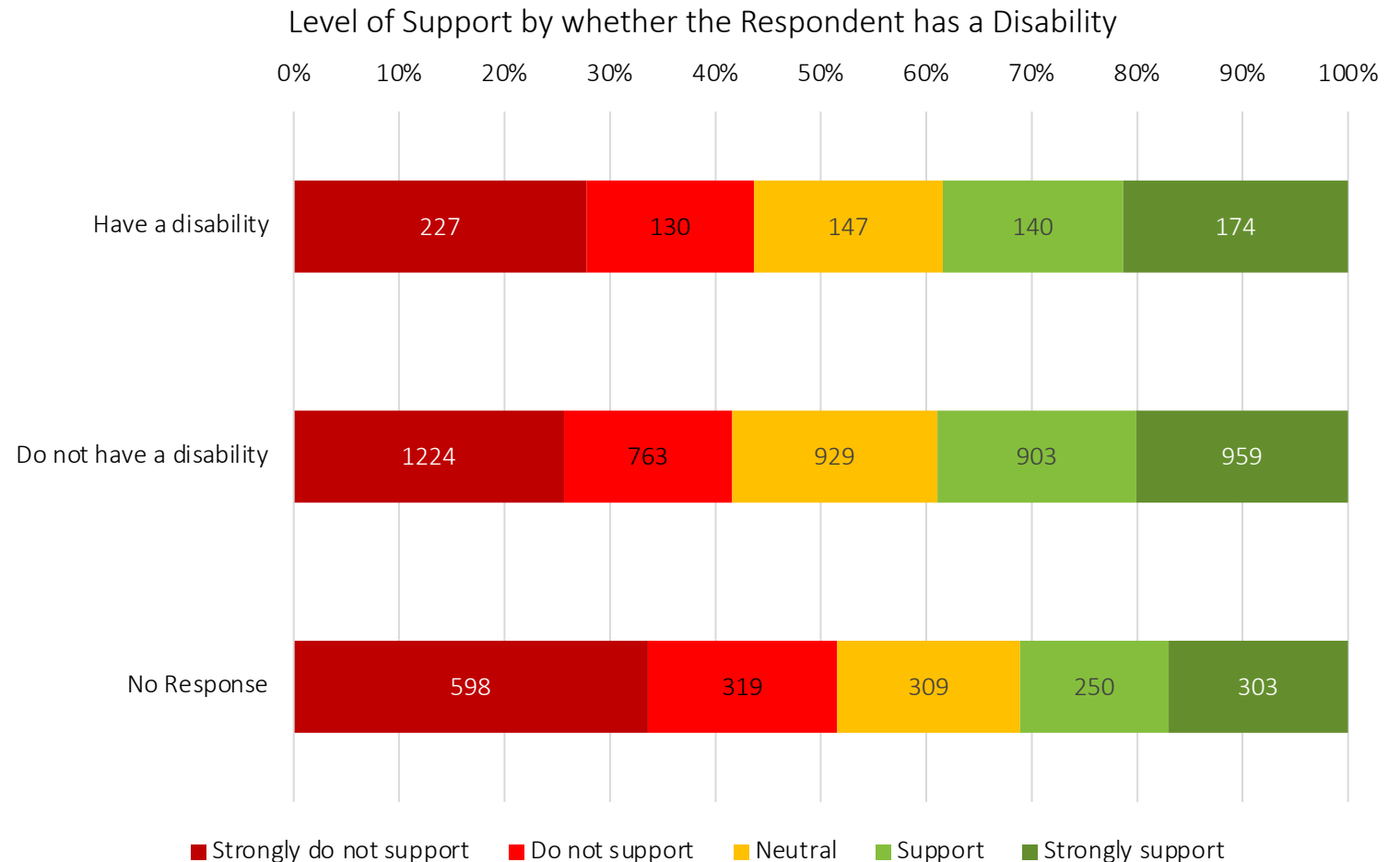## *Support by Disability Status*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

The **levels of support from those who recorded having a disability and those who did not was similar**.

17% of respondents with a disability and 19% of those who do not have a disability strongly supported the proposal.

20% of those with a disability compared to 21% of those without supported the proposal. Overall, those without a disability were 2% more supportive than those with.

Opposition to the proposal was slightly higher among respondents with a disability, with 28% strongly opposed and 16% opposed. This compares to 26% strongly opposed and 16% opposed among those without a disability

### Level of Support by whether the Respondent has a Disability

| | 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Have a disability:** 227 | 130 | 147 | 140 | 174

**Do not have a disability:** 1224 | 763 | 929 | 903 | 959

**No Response:** 598 | 319 | 309 | 250 | 303

■ Strongly do not support  ■ Do not support  ■ Neutral  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support
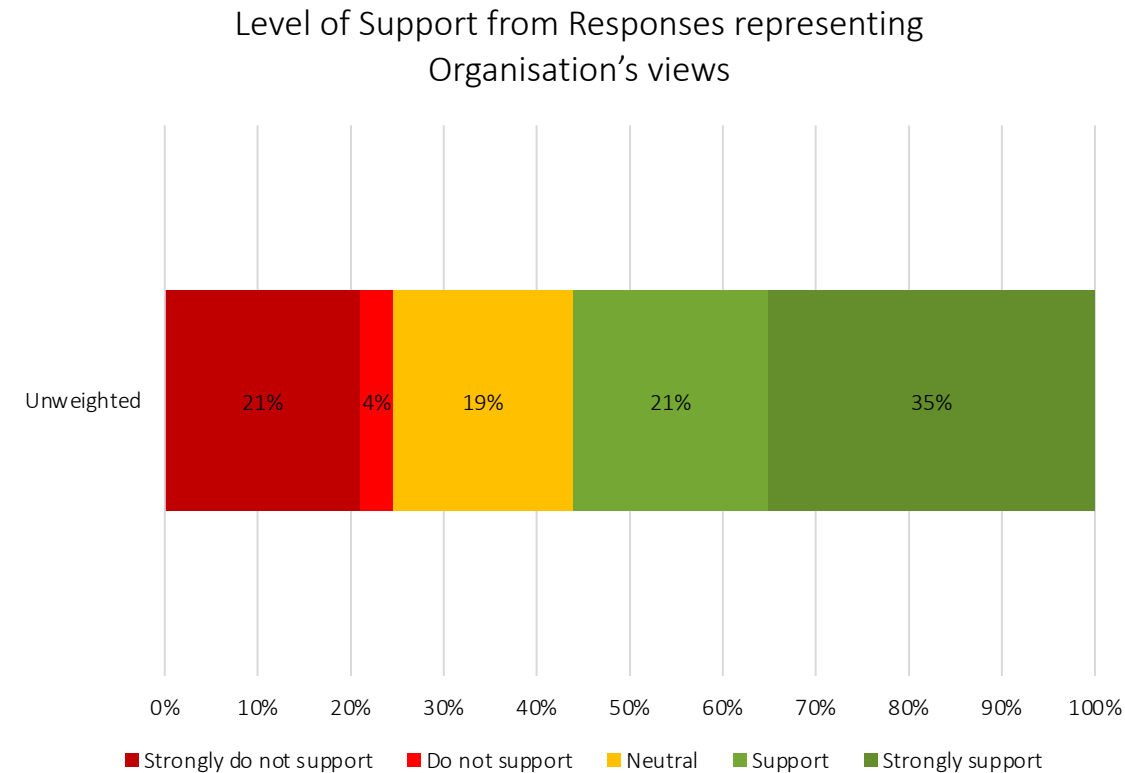
# Understanding Levels of support
*Organisation's responses*

There were 57 of 7391 responses that included the voice of organisations.

Responses from organisations included the voices of:
- Small businesses
- Residents Associations
- Community Organisations
- Community Groups
- Community Campaign groups
- District/Unitary Councils
- Parish Councils
- Local Political Party Branches

Overall, **organisations showed a higher degree of support** (35% strongly supportive and 21% supportive) **than other responses.**

Level of Support from Responses representing Organisation's views

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unweighted | 21% | 4% | 19% | 21% | 35% |

0%  10%  20%  30%  40%  50%  60%  70%  80%  90%  100%

■ Strongly do not support  ■ Do not support  ■ Neutral  ■ Support  ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
## *By council service used in the last year*

Peopletoo
it works better with you

- This graph presents the level of support for the five Unitary Authorities proposal by whether the corresponding service was used by the respondent, or someone known to them.

- **People who had used council services in the past year were generally more supportive than those who had not.**

- **Economic Development, Public Health, and Social Care users showed the highest levels of support**, indicating these services may be seen as working well or improving under a new model.

- In contrast, **users of Planning & Building, Roads & Transport, and Environmental services were more likely to oppose the proposal**, however those in opposition were still in a minority in these groups of service users.

- The least supportive grouping of what service had been accessed where those who identified as not accessing any council services with 68% not in support.

### Level of Support by Services Accessed

| Service | Strongly oppose | Oppose | Neither support nor oppose | Support | Strongly support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Economic development | 408 | 241 | 261 | 291 | 450 |
| Public health | 306 | 146 | 209 | 222 | 298 |
| Social care and support | 359 | 216 | 231 | 241 | 331 |
| Education | 646 | 293 | 365 | 374 | 494 |
| Regulatory functions | 741 | 469 | 488 | 505 | 589 |
| Community | 1766 | 1042 | 1173 | 1148 | 1306 |
| Road, transport and infrastructure | 1542 | 931 | 1009 | 945 | 1123 |
| Environmental | 1900 | 1132 | 1303 | 1221 | 1326 |
| Planning and building | 667 | 359 | 365 | 313 | 490 |
| None of the above | 25 | 14 | 11 | 6 | 1 |

■ Strongly oppose ■ Oppose ■ Neither support nor oppose ■ Support ■ Strongly support

# Understanding Levels of Support
*Importance of Priorities*

- Question 5 gave a list of 10 priorities for local government, where respondents ranked how important they viewed each criteria.

- The **most important functions were** viewed as: **Efficient use of council tax and public funds** (99.4% viewing it as important), **Clear accountability on decision making** (99.1%), and **staff and councillors knowing and understanding the local area** (97.9%).

Comparing respondents' top priorities with overall support levels helps identify which values aligned most, or least, with a positive view of the proposal. This highlights where public sentiment may be driven by alignment or disconnection between what's important and what's perceived to be delivered.

- The areas ranked very important that corresponded with the highest overall levels of support were:
  - Prioritising services for the vulnerable (41% support – 41% opposed)
  - Improving the quality of council services (37% support – 44% opposed)

- The areas ranked very important that corresponded with the lowest levels of overall support were:
  - Having a physical office in my community (33% support – 53% opposed)
  - Accessible information available on council services and councillors (37% support – 47% opposed)
  - Representation and participation of all communities in decision making (37% support – 46% opposed)
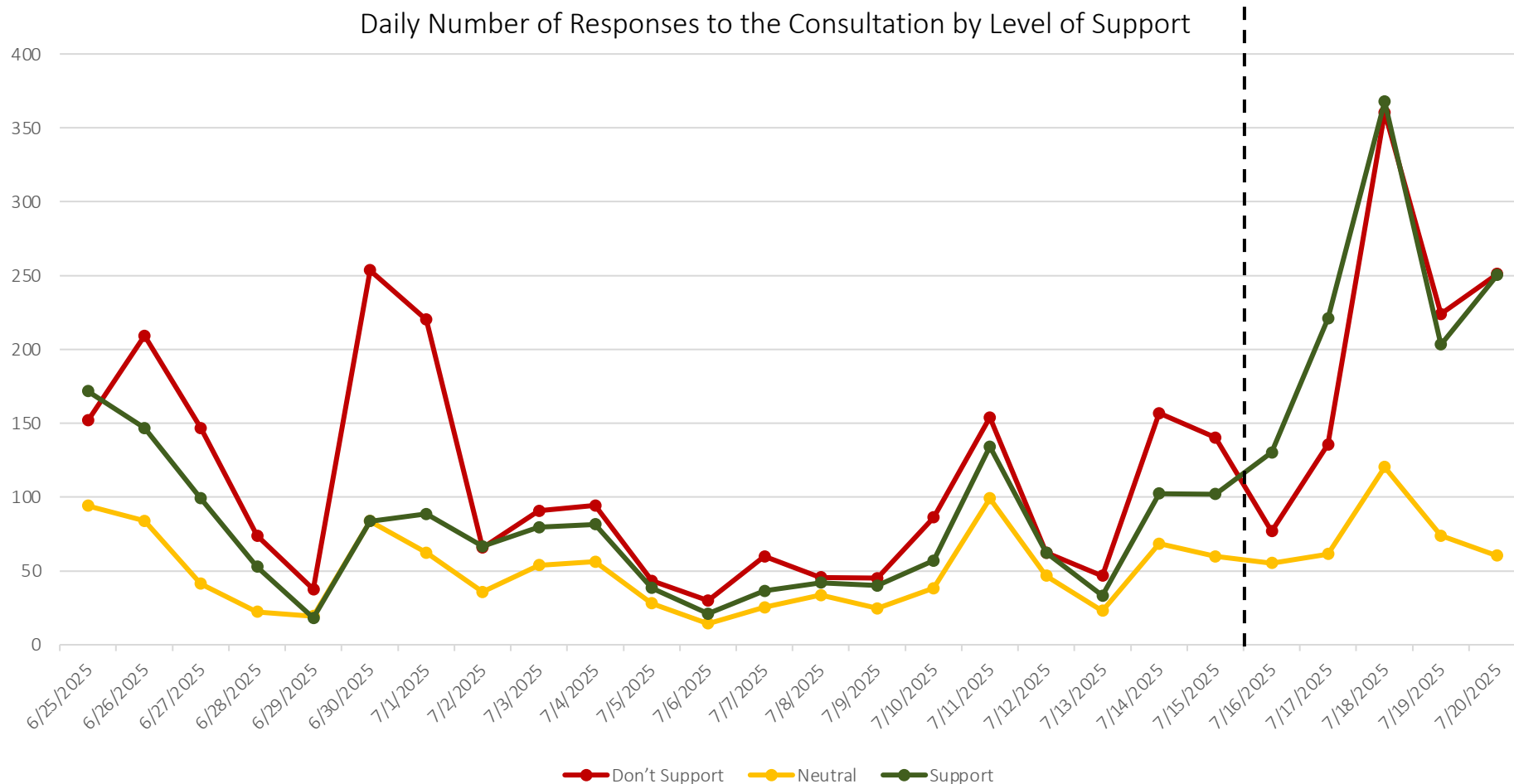
# Daily Number of Responses
*Weighted Figures*

There was a **significant increase** in the number of responses following **communication on social media that confirmed the known options** for Essex re-organisation were the 3 Unitary Authority proposal and the 5 Unitary Authority proposal.

This overall increases in responses following the 17th July (illustrated with the dotted line), saw a **decreasing proportion of responses that were neutral** to the proposal, with greater numbers taking a supportive or view not in support of the proposal. These increased at a similar rate after this date.

Social Media Engagement when both proposals were clear



Daily Number of Responses to the Consultation by Level of Support

Legend: Don't Support, Neutral, Support

# Theme Glossary
## *What does each theme mean? With example responses*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Concern about services worsening/ wants more focus on improvements** | Respondents raised their concerns about the quality of services declining or becoming more expensive. This also included those who wanted the focus to be on improving council delivery in many service areas. |
| | *"Services will decline"*<br>*"I DO NOT WANT SERVICES MAINTAINED, I WANT THEM IMPROVED!!"* |
| **Concern about ease of contacting representatives / services** | Respondents raised the concern that they will not be able to contact relevant representatives or council staff after re-organisation |
| | *"Current council is hopelessly understaffed and staff turnover is too high. There is no accountability and it is impossible to see or speak to anyone. How is a council three times bigger going to improve this"* |
| **Concern over less local representation** | Respondents raised there concerns about their local area having less of a voice following the proposed changes, with decision making more remote and not being focused on the concerns of local residents. |
| | *"Local councils are losing focus on residents needs. By giving them more residents to look after will further remove them from focus"*<br>*"I don't think there will be any local knowledge, much less care"* |
| **Concern with the grouping of the 5 unitaries** | Respondents raised a concern with regards to the combination of some, or just the unitary they would be moved to, of the council combinations going into the 5 Unitary Authorities. |
| | *"Brentwood is an uncomfortable fit with Chelmsford/Maldon"*<br>*"Proposed merger brings together 3 very different socioeconomic areas with differing needs…"* |
| **Concerns of impact of other council's debt** | Respondents raised their worry about the impact of taking on debt from other councils, most frequently Thurrock council's debt. |
| | *"I would be concerned about taking on the debts of neighbouring councils…"*<br>*"Serious concerns about taking on Thurrock councils' debt"* |
| **Concerns of services impact** | Respondents raised their concern that services would be negatively impacted |
| | *"This should only be considered if the services provided can be improved"*<br>*"I don't want to lose services such as my local library"* |

# Theme Glossary
## *What does each theme mean? With example responses*

| | |
|---|---|
| Concerns of staff impact | Respondents raised their concerns about increased redundancies and impacts to the working conditions of council staff following re-organisation |
| | *"Worrie[d] about the impact on workers employed by those organisations and our sense of choice about how / where we [work]"* |
| Dissatisfaction with loss of vote in LE2025 | Respondents raised their dissatisfaction with the loss of voting in the May 2025 local elections as a result of re-organisation. |
| | *"When will we have elections as they were cancelled this year"* |
| Hope that these changes can catalyse wider improvements | Respondents raised areas they would like to see improvements in, with this re-organisation seen as a driver of wider changes to these areas. |
| | *"We need more investment opportunities. Planning decision need to be aligned with highways and infrastructure, more recognition as a unitary council"*<br>*"This must be used as an opportunity to make efficiency savings and cut waste"* |
| Opposed to LGR – Cost | Respondents raised the concern that the cost and disruption caused in re-organisation would not be beneficial. |
| | *"Complete waste of time and money"*<br>*"A lot of disruption for several years, no saving of council taxpayers money initially & loss of key long standing officers."* |
| Opposition to LGR – general issue | Respondents raised that they did not want to see changes to the current structure, but without a specific reason (as seen with the other two Opposed to LGR themes). |
| | *"Keep it as it is. We do not want change"*<br>*"None… happy with things as they are. Stop reinventing the 'wheel'"* |
| Opposition to LGR – prefer current districts | Respondents raised that they are happy with the current district structure and so did not want reorganisation. |
| | *"Satisfied with Castle Point Council"*<br>*"This is not needed. Keep the city council as it is, services will get diluted over a large area"* |
| Prefer a different number of Unitary Authorities | Respondents, while in support of the proposal, would prefer a different count of unitary authorities, frequently this was fewer authorities. |
| | *"5 is too many. Still remain complex."* |

# Theme Glossary
## *What does each theme mean? With example responses*

**Peopletoo**
it works better with you

| | |
|---|---|
| Raised a concern with their current district/unitary boundary | Respondents raised that they would want their local town/part of a district to be a part of another, or that they felt their area was closer to an area outside of Essex. |
| | *"Move Billericay away from Basildon council, Basildon never respects our identity."* <br> *"Our natural geographical position is much more Cambridge than anywhere else. I lived 45 years in Uttlesford and have never been shopping anywhere else but Cambridge or Saffron Walden. All decent road links and bus services are linked to Cambridge."* |
| Size of Unitary Authorities looked right | Respondents raised that they believed the structure of the 5 was a good fit in terms of retaining a local focus and being larger than districts and more able to officer efficiencies. |
| | *"I think five areas could still feel local to residents, any less would mean far more people being [severed] by fewer members of council…"* <br> *"Keep services as locally-run as possible"* |
| Uncertain it will deliver | Respondents, while in support, raised their concerns that the proposed changes would not necessarily deliver on the priorities of re-organisation |
| | *"I doubt this plan will provide the cost savings required by the government"* |
| Would prefer Fewer Unitaries | Respondents did not support the changes, as they thought that fewer authorities would be better in terms of structure or delivering efficiencies. |
| | *"In my view the three UC would be a better fit"* <br> *"Five is too many. Three would be ideal: North Essex, Mid-Essex and South Essex"* |
| Would support 5 Unitaries over 3 | Respondents who did not support wider reorganisation but would support the 5 structure against other number of authorities. |
| | *"I would support the change to 5 unitary authorities, provided there is no increase in the number of civil servants, or the cost of the [bureaucracy]"* <br> *"I don't like the proposals at all, however if it is between this and a three authority model, I would prefer the five."* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Asked for Greater Clarity | Respondents asked further questions about the precise process of LGR, devolution, or had a question about the impact on council delivery. |
| Raised a non-LGR specific issue | Respondents raised an issue not-specific to local government reorganisation |

# Appendix B

Southend/Castle Point Council Social Media Semantic Analysis
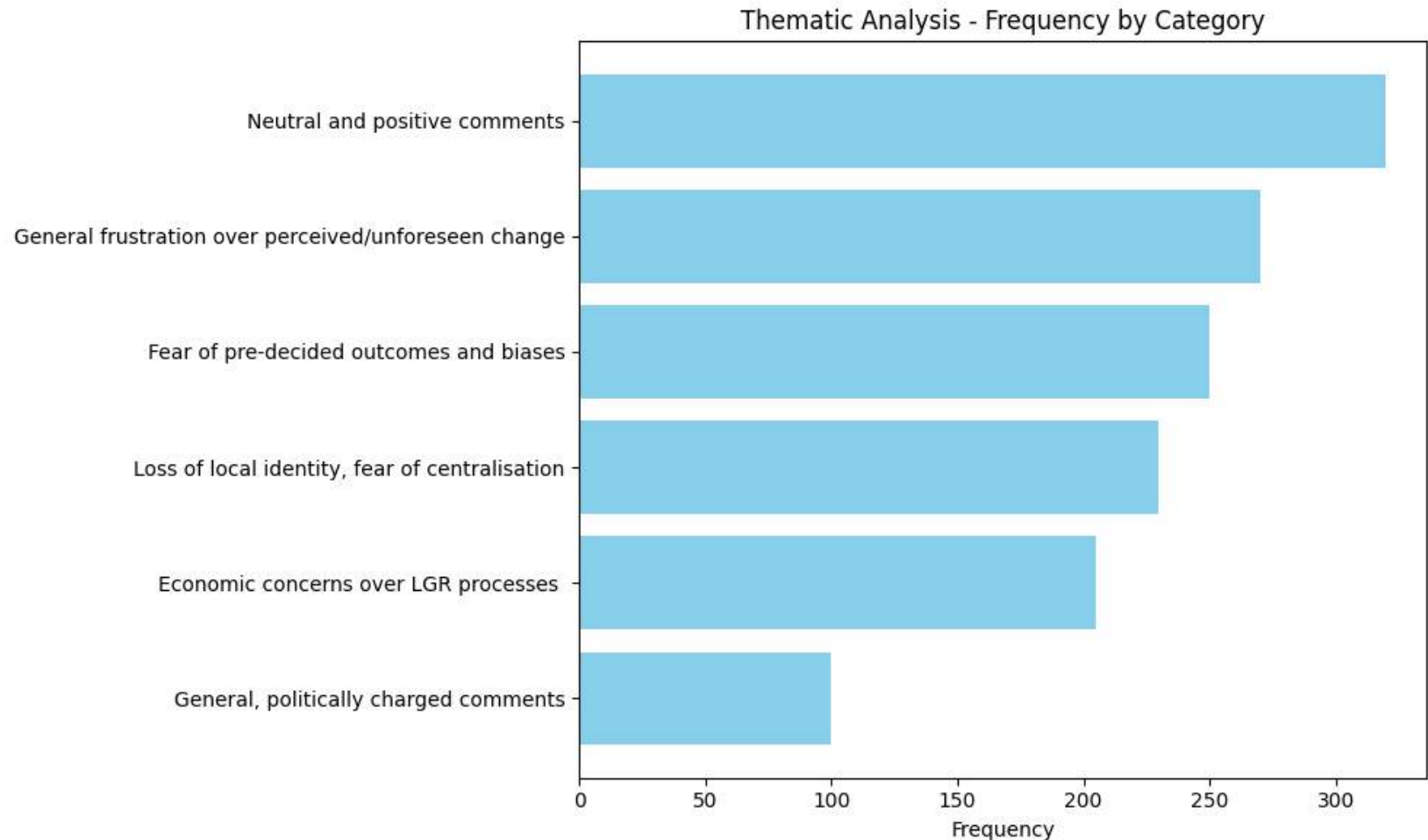
# Social media sentiment analysis:

Chelmsford, Colchester, Castle Point, Harlow, Maldon, and Uttlesford posted on social media – Facebook and Twitter – about the Public Engagement survey between 25 June – 20 July 2025. We analysed the reports captured between 25-29 July 2025. The number of posts varied between 3-7 on one media channel by council, the organic posts representing approximately 80% of the overall posts.

## Qualitative analysis:

Over 1,200 public social media comments were reviewed and categorised by recurring themes. Each theme was coded, quoted, and verified against the source material. No assumptions were made. Sentiment was evaluated based on direct tone and phrasing. Twelve interconnected codes were grouped into six overarching themes.

Notes:
1. An automated sentiment analysis of the full dataset indicated approximately 63% neutral sentiment.
2. A manual coding process, based on qualitative review of tone and meaning indicated 70% negative sentiment.
3. These differences reflect the contrasting methodologies. Manual analysis is considered more reliable in this context, as it accounts for nuance and implicit emotional tone.
4. All quotes were manually selected from the thematically coded responses.



Thematic Analysis - Frequency by Category

# Social media sentiment analysis:

## Quotes: negative sentiment

### LGR process specific

"Council tax will go up, services will go down."
"How much extra will this cost us?"

"It will be faceless, bloated and further from the people."
"Local voice will vanish."
"More overheads / claims for expenses less money will be going to the constituents."

"Rural areas like Maldon will be left out again."
"Pockets of deprivation will be forgotten."
"This plan doesn't serve small towns."

" We'll lose jobs, or be relocated miles away."
"Redundancies are inevitable."
"Won't take long for offices to be converted into houses."

"What happens to refuse collection?"
"Housing policies differ – who decides?"
"Some have sacks, some have wheelie bins – no standard."

## Quotes: positive sentiment

### LGR process specific

"Quietly confident this could work. Tendring, Colchester and Braintree have already been working together on the Garden Communities scheme. Anything that brings more control away from Chelmsford-based Essex Council is only a good thing."

"I certainly prefer the five option… getting rid of Essex County Council, with no overall Essex Mayor. This would be the better saving of money and putting local people front and centre."

"I've just done the survey… Reducing the number of councils may make sense *as long as the resulting areas fit together*."

"Thank you for providing the survey for us to complete."

"Brilliant job to whoever wrote this [council response]. We need more factual information like this on social media because there are way too many people repeating false information."

"I would say there are both risks and potential benefits."