

Cllr Kevin Bentley (Conservative / Leader of the Council)

[cllr.kevin.bentley@essex.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.kevin.bentley@essex.gov.uk)

9<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Dear Cllr Kevin Bentley,

I wrote to you and the Leaders of Southend and Thurrock in September last year to express the Essex Chambers of Commerce's support for the initial response the authorities made to the Deputy Prime Minister's letter about devolution in England. Since that time we have seen the publication of a White Paper on English devolution giving more detail on how the government wishes to take forward this issue, alongside a reform of local government structures. I am writing again to restate and confirm our position as the representative body for some 700 key businesses in Essex.

Without rehearsing the arguments we put forward last time, we still believe that devolution, particularly coupled with a reform of local government involving unitarisation across the county, could over the longer term deliver significant benefits to businesses and residents alike, as we are beginning to see in other parts of the country. We would like ultimately to see an Established Mayoral Authority in Essex but we understand the necessary first step is for the county to be included in the government's Devolution Priority Programme. That will put us on the right path. We therefore urge the Council to support the recommendation to request that Essex be included in the programme.

We applaud the ambition to work towards a mayoral election in May 2026 and to submit outline proposals for local government restructuring by March 2025, with a full proposal to follow in the Autumn. Much of the rest of the country has already adopted single tier local government and we welcome the new impetus towards this. From a purely business perspective a simplified structure within Essex will we believe be much easier to engage with than 15 different councils.

Taking these twin processes forward will likely be very challenging, quite possibly local government reform in particular. However, we do believe that if done well they hold out the promise of a much closer partnership and understanding between business, local

authorities and communities, better, more efficient delivery of a range of services and a clearer and more coherent set of growth priorities and the means to achieve them.

We have been pleased to be part of the new Greater Essex Business Board and will support in any way we can the wider ambitions for the county as they are developed on the back of the White Paper. For now we hope we can depend on your support for the recommendations being put before Council.

Best wishes.



Denise Rossiter  
Chief Executive  
Essex Chambers of Commerce & Industry Ltd

**cc Group Leaders Essex County Council**