



Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council
Strategic Partnership
Heads of Terms for a Memorandum of Understanding

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 This document sets out the Heads of Terms which will form the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between both councils detailing the terms of the strategic partnership between them and how that partnership is intended to work.
- 1.2 The councils' joint ambition is to secure a long-term sustainable future for both councils through collaboration in a Preferred Partner relationship (the "Partnership"). The councils recognise the similarity in their socio-demographics and operational scale and both see each other as a natural Preferred Partner.

2. Mutual Objectives and areas of commonality

- 2.1 By working in partnership, both councils believe that they can achieve more together than would be possible by acting alone.
- 2.2 Key areas of common ground for the Partnership are:
 - a. Securing ***greater financial sustainability*** for both councils;
 - b. Building more ***resilience*** into both councils;
 - c. Working together to be more ***entrepreneurial and ambitious***;
 - d. Working collectively to ***overcome challenges, and maximise opportunities***;
 - e. Greater scope to ***retain and develop the talented staff*** we have across our two councils;
 - f. Achieving ***efficiencies, improved purchasing power and economies of scale*** which the partnership offers;
 - g. Acting with a stronger voice to ***exert more influence on a regional and national level*** in order to ensure that the councils thrive in a changing local government sector.

3. Vision for the partnership

3.1 The vision of the councils is that the Partnership will be:

- a. An enduring partnership between two sovereign councils, with a unified officer team that delivers high quality outcomes for our communities, operating a one culture ethos;
- b. A partnership with greater combined capacity to manage change and strive for continuous improvement;
- c. A partnership that retains 'local identity' for our residents and has the scale to make tangible investments and improvements for the wellbeing of our communities;
- d. A well-resourced and fully integrated, council officer team delivering for both councils with built-in resilience, focussed on improving front-line services and effective back-office functions;
- e. A **people first** partnership recognising that its strength comes from the talents our people bring through a depth of skills & experience developed further through collaboration and creativity;
- f. An equitable partnership that brings financial sustainability and organisational resilience to both councils while balancing risk.

4. Partnership Ambitions

4.1 The councils aspire for the Partnership to be one that is recognised as one that applies sector best practice and delivers best value for money services that positively impact on their respective geographies.

4.2 They want to create a reputation that gives other councils and organisations the confidence to do business with the partnership and generate income.

4.3 The councils want to use their collective skills to promote investment in their communities through developing a culture which is proactive, innovative and which focusses on growth and opportunity.

4.4 Consequently, the top five strategic objectives for the Partnership are:

- a. Delivering financially sustainable, high-quality services that are valued by our community;
- b. Leading the way to improve our environment by acting locally, contributing globally;

- c. Providing high quality, sustainable housing to meet the needs of our community;
- d. Improving the quality of life, health and wellbeing of our residents;
- e. Creating opportunities for economic growth and improved connectivity in which businesses can flourish.

5. Principles of partnership and scope of collaboration

- 5.1 The Partnership should support the creation of a new unified organisational teams with one culture through a single senior management team, driving efficiency through organisational development. Accordingly, each council will seek to align its internal operational structures and services wherever possible.
- 5.2 In order to be successful, the councils believe that the Partnership must go beyond shared management and shared services and be strategic in intent. On that basis, each council will seek to harmonise our approach wherever possible (but ultimately each council will be able to set its own policy for which services are to be delivered and how). Each council will continue to be able to set its own corporate plan, using a common template and simple language, seeking wherever possible to harmonise ambition, portfolios, and functions whilst avoiding duplication of resource.
- 5.3 Wherever possible, the councils will seek to harmonise or jointly commission grant aid and other funding bids but that will not inhibit the ability of either council to independently commission grant aid such they wish to.
- 5.4 The councils believe that the whole community in each geography must be at the heart of all decisions and the Partnership must deliver services that feel local to them.
- 5.5 There are some fundamental “red lines” which exist and which will continue to underpin the Partnership going forward. These fundamental principles are as follows:

Corporate governance models remain unchanged	The Partnership is not a merger of the two councils nor is it a take-over by one council of the other. Both councils retain their own political autonomy, accountability, and local identity. There will be no change in the name of either of the councils.
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	<p>Each council will retain its own constitution, setting out how it makes decisions, provide for effective scrutiny and delegate authority.</p> <p>Each council will maintain its own fiscal independence, continuing to set its own budget, council tax and publish its own accounts.</p>
Local democracy remains sovereign	<p>Each council will continue to speak up for its own residents first and foremost, even where there is an apparent conflict of interest between the councils but will always strive to secure an agreed approach wherever possible.</p> <p>Nothing within the Partnership will stop the councils developing local ideas about how to best support their local communities.</p> <p>A power of veto will exist for each council to ensure that neither sovereign council will be forced to adopt a policy, accept a cost risk or change a priority that its political decision makers are not willing to support.</p>
Neither council should be financially disadvantaged by the other	<p>The costs of changes and the benefits achieved from change will be attributed and shared to the satisfaction of both councils.</p> <p>No council will be obliged to break an existing contract.</p>

6. Prioritisation of focus

- 6.1 Immediately following the formal agreement of both councils to proceed to take the Partnership forward, the initial focus of the partnership should be on the following:
- Communication within the two organisations and stabilisation of their respective workforces;
 - Delivery of any obvious improvements in services and outcomes as “quick wins”;

- c. Integration of back office corporate functions so that the enablers for the creation of one officer team and one organisational culture are in place;
 - d. Review and wherever desirable alignment of strategic policy frameworks (subject always to individual council autonomy) together with review of sequencing of decision-making timetables to ensure a collaborative approach to partnership leadership and decision making in the longer term
- 6.2 This work should then be followed by detailed service reviews, prioritised in line with partnership goals and organisational capabilities. Each service review will be fully assessed to ensure maximum value and positive public impact. Implementation will embed the **one team one culture** principle set out in this Heads of Terms.
- 6.3 The Partnership should, at the same time as this work, begin to promote itself as a joined-up voice at regional level on regional issues.

7. Aligned leadership and governance arrangements

- 7.1 As political leaders the Leaders personally commit to:
- a. Lead by example;
 - b. Communicate as openly as possible;
 - c. Maximise opportunities for collaboration;
 - d. Be strategic in our thinking;
 - e. Maintain pace and momentum of change and improvements;
 - f. Develop common policies and frameworks based on an understanding of each councils' priorities and synergies;
 - g. Align our existing decision-making and governance arrangements to support the partnership;
 - h. Focus our attention on what we have in common rather than what divides us and use that strength to drive for results;
 - i. Continuous open dialogue, while being open and honest on our wants and needs from outset;
 - j. Building the internal capacities of our staff to lead the transformation.
- 7.2 The councils will adopt a simple informal governance arrangement that provides both strategic oversight and clear leadership and scrutiny.

Signed by Cllr Simon Wootton Leader, Rochford District Council	Signed by Cllr Chris Hossack Leader, Brentwood Borough Council

Dated

2022