



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Frances Oram and Sophie
Langdale Directors, Local
Government Reform & Strategy,
MHCLG

MHCLG Thurrock Commissioners
Cc Julian Ellerby, Nicole Wood, Theresa Grant

By email

28 July 2026

Dear Gavin, Dave and Denise,

Thank you again for your hard work so far supporting Thurrock in their reorganisation work as well as the role you have played to date in the wider Essex system. As we expect the intervention to continue through to vesting day in 2028, I wanted to provide some further clarity on our expectations of Commissioners during the transition period. For the avoidance of doubt, the Thurrock Directions and your legal powers remain unchanged throughout this period unless varied by the Secretary of State.

Thurrock Council, as the current unitary within the new South West Essex unitary, has a fundamental role in establishing the new authority. Our expectation is that, throughout the transition period, you will continue to support Thurrock's improvement journey by providing robust advice, oversight and challenge, and assuring progress ahead of vesting day. You will also continue to be responsible for supporting Thurrock's financial recovery. You should prioritise work to reflect the transitional state of Thurrock, with a particular focus on managing risks to be inherited by South West Essex. You should ensure there is a shared understanding of the expected outcomes to be achieved by vesting day and the remaining improvement activity and risks that may be passed on to the new authority.

We expect you as Commissioners to engage actively with the South West Essex Implementation Team and, when it is established, the Joint Committee, contributing your expertise to support effective transition planning and delivery, and helping to build strong managerial and political leadership links across the South West Essex footprint.

Once the shadow council is elected in 2027, we will also expect you to provide support using your Best Value expertise ahead of vesting day. While you will not have formal decision-making powers in regard to the shadow council, Ministers have been clear that they welcome your insight into the success of the wider reorganisation process, and we will pay regard to these observations in our engagement with the wider Essex system during this period.

In summary, we expect you to use your expertise on Best Value to support both Thurrock and South West Essex, as per the Thurrock Directions, by:

- contributing your expert knowledge to Joint Committee and shadow council discussions as appropriate;
- supporting the council's development of robust handover plans for South West Essex;
- providing regular updates to South West Essex on commercial decisions including those captured by anticipated Section 24 exemptions;
- maintaining your working relationships with key local stakeholders including the Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock LGR Implementation team lead and Chief Executive Officers of the component authorities of South West Essex, as well as the Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock LGR sector advisor.

More widely, in the context of the Government's initial tranche of debt support, it remains essential that Thurrock continues to take into account value for money for the local and national taxpayer and demonstrates a continued commitment to reduce debt as far as possible within its local capacity. We also expect to issue a Section 24 Direction and for Thurrock to be exempt, meaning that the council will not need to seek consent from the shadow authority for specific material matters including commercial decisions above set thresholds. We encourage you to share information about spend that could in theory be captured by such a direction, as set out in our guidance note. We will share a draft direction and explanatory note for you to consider and to provide representations upon later in the year.

We welcome your reflections on working arrangements as well as any Best Value concerns as the implementation progresses. We will keep your role under review throughout this period.

We are also mindful of Secretary of State's recent decision to issue a Best Value Notice to Basildon Borough Council and will keep this under review as the External Assurance Review progresses over the summer. Where there are opportunities for you to facilitate joint working across Basildon and Thurrock in the coming period to the benefit of both and in support of successful delivery of reorganisation, we encourage you to do so.

We would be happy to meet and discuss any of this if you would find this helpful.

We are copying this letter to Nicole Wood, as the LGR implementation team lead, Julian Ellerby as the Chief Executive Officer of Basildon Borough Council and Theresa Grant as your sector advisor.

Yours sincerely,

Frances Oram and Sophie Langdale
Directors, Local Government Reform & Strategy, MHCLG