

Southend and Thurrock head new body for economic growth

Better together! Two councils unite to create extra clout

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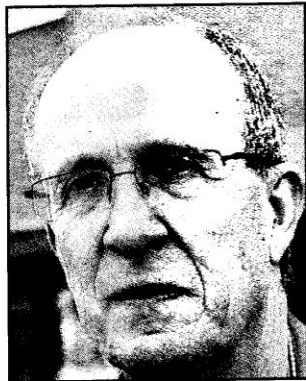
SOUTHEND and Thurrock Councils are to join forces to create a body aimed at attracting Government funding and bringing extra powers to south Essex.

The new body could have greater control on how Whitehall cash is spent on Thurrock and Southend's economies and roads, in a scheme which would bring more devolved powers for the authorities.

The Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, a body of all the councils in the south of the county, helped bring cash to projects such as Southend Airport and London Gateway, in Thurrock.

Essex County Council withdrew from leading the group, so Thurrock and Southend Councils have stepped in to spearhead a new body, with council leaders claiming they are "leading the way for the county's future prosperity".

The move could see both authorities put in joint bids for additional delegated powers from Government to drive economic growth.



■ Leading the way – Ron Woodley

It is understood the other councils in south Essex will also be asked to team up, and if they do, a model where the whole south of the county has control over its transport, instead of Essex County Council, could become feasible.

Independent Ron Woodley, leader of Southend Council, said: "Following the disappointing news that the county council is withdrawing from the Partnership, this seems to be the natural next step for a revised



■ Working together – John Kent

Partnership. We have seen in the north of England how combined authorities can act as a real driver for jobs and improved transport links, acting as a stronger voice for more investment and powers to deliver change locally.

"Our ambition would be to deliver transport and economic policy more effectively over a wider area and build on the work already done by the Partnership."

Both authorities will need full council approval, as well as the



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Government's thumbs-up. The body would be chaired by Kate Willard, from the Stobart Group, which owns Southend Airport.

Labour's John Kent, leader of Thurrock Council, said: "I want Thurrock leading the way and I want Thurrock working with all our south Essex partners to get the best possible deal for delivering the infrastructure and growth needed to benefit all our communities."

"As with our shared services with Barking and Dagenham, our initiative is supported by Government – this time specifically by Communities and Local Government Minister Penny Mordaunt when she visited Thurrock last week."

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Northern authorities get devolved powers

TEN Lancashire councils joined forces in 2011 to create a combined authority, which will pave the way to the area getting a mayor akin to London's Boris Johnson.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has successfully bid for devolved powers from Government.

Last November, Whitehall gave the group the green light

to have an elected Mayor, as London has. A year after inception, the Government announced a City Deal for the group. That involved the formation of an investment board to

build homes for the area, and a 'revolving infrastructure fund', allowing the group to earn back up to £30million per year against spending on big projects.