



Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) - Joint Committee

Date: Thursday, 23rd March, 2023

Time: 11.30 am

Place: Brentwood Borough Council

Contact: Robert Harris

Email: committeesection@southend.gov.uk

A G E N D A

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
- 3 Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 3 - 6)**
To agree the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 15th December 2022.
- 4 ASELA Programme Review and Reset (Pages 7 - 20)**
- 5 Existing Programme Progress Reports (Pages 21 - 34)**
 - (a) South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEAT) – Report attached
 - (b) Housing and Infrastructure – to follow
 - (c) Superfast Digital – report attached
- 6 Financial Update Report (Pages 35 - 38)**
- 7 Communications Update and Future Working Arrangements (Pages 39 - 42)**
- 8 Future Business Engagement Arrangements (Pages 43 - 50)**

Members:

Cllr A Baggott (Leader - Basildon Borough Council), Cllr D Blackwell (Leader - Castle Point Borough Council), Cllr K Bentley (Leader - Essex County Council), Cllr M Coxshall (Deputy Leader - Thurrock Borough Council), Cllr S George (Leader - Southend-on-Sea City Council), Cllr C Hossack (Leader - Brentwood Borough Council), Cllr S Wootton (Leader - Rochford District Council and P Glading (Opportunity South Essex (Co-opted Member))

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Meeting of Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) – Joint Committee

Date: Thursday, 15 December 2022

**Place: Council Chamber, Castle Point Borough Council, Kiln Road,
Thundersley, Benfleet, SS7 1TF**

Present: Councillor C Hossack (Chair) (Brentwood Borough Council)
Councillors S Wootton (Vice Chair) (Rochford District Council), A
Baggott (Basildon Borough Council), D Blackwell (Castle Point
Borough Council), M Coxshall (Thurrock Borough Council) S
George (Southend-On-Sea City Council)

In attendance: I Butt (Castle Point Borough Council), J Cuthbertson (Essex
County Council), E Helm (Southend-On-Sea City Council), A
Hutching (Castle Point Borough Council), S Logan (Basildon
Borough Council), R Polkinghorne (Southend-On-Sea City
Council), J Stephenson (Brentwood Borough Council and
Rochford District Council), K Wheeler (Thurrock Borough
Council)

Start/End Time
9.30am-10.16am

13. Apologies

No apologies were received.

14. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

15. Minutes

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 20 October
2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

16. Chairman's Report - Verbal Update

The Chair confirmed that the away day in November was a success with great attendance from members and officers. The purpose of the away day was to check the shared understanding of the opportunities and benefits ASELA can bring and to strengthen commitment to collaboration. The next steps are now in the process of being agreed.

17. ASELA Joint Committee Secretariat Arrangements

R Polkinghorne introduced the report. He confirmed the report was straightforward and outlined that approval from the Joint Committee was being sought to transfer the secretariat from Thurrock Borough Council to Southend-On-Sea City Council as Thurrock Borough Council were currently experiencing a challenging time.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Southend-on-Sea City Council act as the Secretariat in relation to the ASELA Joint Committee with effect from the date of this meeting.**

18. ASELA Joint Committee Finance Report

E Helm introduced the report. She confirmed that following feedback from the last Committee meeting she had gone through each scheme with the programme leads. She confirmed that as she finalised this report further changes have taken place and more funding has been received. There is therefore a revised deficit of £79,000 down from £95,000.

The Committee discussed the funding of SEE PARK and the £750k funding received from Highways England. A Hutchings is currently in the process of confirming that the commitment of funding is enough for Highways England's accounting purposes.

Councillor George joined the meeting at 9.47am.

Councillor Baggott queried what the back-up plan is if Highways England do not accept this is enough for their accounting purposes. A Hutchings responded that it will be a stale mate as assurance is needed that the money will be received.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 The Joint Committee noted the contents of the report.**

19. ASELA Joint Committee Communications Report

K Wheeler presented the Communications report. She confirmed that the website had been updated to better reflect the key themes of ASELA. Social media interest has continued to increase across all channels.

S Logan updated the Committee that it has been agreed that a communications lead from each organisation will support each of the programmes to help embed ASELA communications across all 7 Councils. S Logan suggested that he can bring a report to the next Joint Committee meeting regarding this and he will also set up a meeting in January with the communications leads.

R Polkinghorne suggested each programme lead could complete a short monthly update on each of the programmes.

Councillor Wootton highlighted that many members in Rochford are still not aware of what ASELA is and therefore more needs to be done to improve the branding of ASELA.

K Wheeler confirmed there will be a Newsletter issued before Christmas. The Chair suggested a tour is completed in the New Year and he could attend the Town Halls of each organisation to raise the profile of ASELA.

Councillor Baggott stated that the way they were communicating was archaic and highlighted that video content is popular and that the general population don't want to read long boring reports.

The Chair agreed that he could do a video update on ASELA and send the link out via You Tube video rather than a physical tour of each Council Town Hall.

R Polkinghorne suggested a digital round table meeting.

K Wheeler agreed that two-way engagement like a virtual webinar is good as people will have the opportunity to ask questions.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Joint Committee noted the update provided in the Communications report.**

20. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

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DATE: 16 March 2023	ITEM: 4
ASELA Joint Committee Meeting	
Report Title: ASELA Programme Review and Reset	
Report of: Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Borough Council	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: N/A	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The Leaders and Chief Executives of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) have, over the last few months, been reflecting on the achievements of ASELA and preparing a revised programme of work for the ASELA Programme going forward. This report provides an overview of the outcome of those deliberations and proposes 5 new ASELA workstreams as set out below to incorporate relevant existing activity and provide a framework for future activity:

- Skills, Economy and Jobs
- Good Homes
- Infrastructure
- Environment and Climate Change
- Sustainable Transport

In parallel to this it has been considered necessary and appropriate to reflect on the resourcing of the ASELA Programme to enable the next phase of delivery and ASELA’s evolution and asks the Joint Committee to consider and approve the revised structure for resourcing to support the delivery of the ASELA Programme.

It is also proposed that an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge of ASELA be undertaken to build on the above and aid understanding of issues the association should consider and develop further.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the ASELA Joint Committee recognises the achievements delivered by the ASELA Programme to date.

- 1.2 That the ASELA Joint Committee endorses the proposed new workstreams, the Leader and Chief Executive sponsors and emerging strategic visions, and tasks the Chief Executives with defining these further in consultation with the Leader sponsors for consideration at the first meeting of the Joint Committee in the new municipal year.
- 1.3 That the ASELA Joint Committee approves the revised structure of resourcing to support delivery of the revised ASELA Programme as set out in this paper and asks the Chief Executives Group to progress its implementation
- 1.4 That the ASELA Joint Committee endorses the undertaking of a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge of ASELA with the scope of the review being agreed by the Chairman of the Joint Committee.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The ASELA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in January 2018 and consisted of the 6 Local Authorities spanning the South Essex Region including Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend and Thurrock, plus Essex County Council. The MoU aimed for these authorities to achieve more together across the region, than individually.
- 2.2 The ASELA Growth and Recovery Prospectus was subsequently submitted to Central Government in July 2020 followed by the establishment of the ASELA Joint Committee in July 2021. The ASELA Joint Committee comprises of the 6 South Essex Council's, Essex County Council and the OSE as a co-opted Member.
- 2.3 Since 2018, ASELA has amongst other things –
 - Developed engagement with Government
 - Built support and backing from businesses and major employers
 - Developed a shared ambition for place-based future growth that will:
 - **Maximise** the full potential for prosperity and quality of life for all communities
 - **Capitalise** on the natural assets of an active coast and the Thames Estuary
 - **Strengthen** our position as an economic partner to London and a gateway for the rest of the UK and the world
 - Identified deliverable programmes of change to have greatest impact across the area
- 2.4 At present ASELA's primary activity is driven across 5 delivery programmes of change in order to have the greatest impact across the area. Detailed below is a brief summary of the existing programmes of work and the achievements to date:

Digital

- Rolled out more than 200km of full fibre across South Essex since August 2020 – funded by Government grants totally £6.9m

- New digital infrastructure links around 190 public sector sites including libraries, sheltered accommodation, schools, fire stations and community and village halls
- £100m of private sector digital infrastructure investment committed to South Essex by Openreach, Virgin and City Fibre collectively
- Secured £890k funding from National Highways to support project management, Brentwood connectivity and launch of the 'Internet of Things' (IOT) initiative
- Secured £500k funding from SELEP to enable further infrastructure to be laid in Southend

South Essex Estuary (SEE) Park

- Developed the SEE Park Vision approved by ASELA in 2021 Rolled out more than 200km of full fibre across South Essex since August 2020 – funded by Government grants totally £6.9m
- Secured £750k funding from National Highways to support Phase 1a of the Central Thames Marshland (CTM) project and design work for phase 2
- Green and Blue Infrastructure Study that gave rise to SEEPARK plan has won a prestigious World Architecture Festival (WAFX) award.

South Essex Technical University (SETU)

- Business case developed and approved by both ASELA Joint Committee and the South Essex Technical University Partnership board in July 2022
- Secured £155k funding to support phase 2 project delivery
- Formally established *South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) Ltd.* via companies' house in February 2023
- Secured £240k pump prime funding from the Thames Freeport Governing Board and an additional £570k pending approval of the Thames Freeport Full Business Case being approved by Government

Housing and Infrastructure

- Ground-breaking Strategic Place based partnership with Homes England that is just one of two strategic place-based programmes in the country, signed by January 2022
- Developed a pipeline of stalled sites where an intervention is required
- Launched the new joint venture between ASELA and a range of Housing Associations in December 2022
- Commenced recruitment to the Programme Director funded by Homes England

Thames Freeport

- Successfully secured government approval for three tax sites and a customs site, offering financial incentives to businesses locating in the area – including one at London Gateway and one at the Port of Tilbury
- Has already secured six new companies into the Freeport, generating over 500 new additional jobs
- Is investing in local skills programmes such as SEATS and Advanced Logistics

3. Programme Review

- 3.1 Recognising the ever-changing landscape, Leaders and Chief Executives have completed two away days (24 November 2022 and 08 February 2023) to check shared understanding of the opportunities and benefits of ASELA, strengthen commitment of future collaboration opportunities and agree the next stages for practical delivery. In addition, workshops were held with lead Chief Executives and key officers across each workstream to identify what was working well and where improvements could be made.
- 3.2 Key issues to arise from this work were –
1. That ASELA is having a positive impact in many ways and there is growing recognition of this but also scope to enhance and accelerate this
 2. The activity of ASELA has arguably become too focused on specific programmes/activity and would benefit from adopting more strategic workstreams and increased activity outside of specific workstreams
 3. As previously reported to the Joint Committee, ASELA’s activities would benefit from more consistent governance and assurance arrangements across its workstreams and activities
 4. A main barrier in addressing 1-3 above going forward is the lack of dedicated centralised ASELA resource to oversee and co-ordinate activity and delivery of desired outcomes. This would also reduce the reliance on external consultants and enable the embedding of the workstreams within the individual authorities.
 5. Recognises that outcomes outside of the ASELA programme will be coordinated and delivered through other existing partnerships for example Health and Wellbeing Partnerships and the Integrated Care Partnerships (ICP)
- 3.3 Firstly, whilst it is considered that the workstreams are useful in co-ordinating programmes of work, they would benefit from review to address points 1 and 2 above. There is also an opportunity for each of the local authorities within ASELA to achieve more through the pooling of existing activity into a more centralised approach in order to achieve more together.
- 3.4 As a result, 5 new workstreams are proposed with a Leader and Chief Executive sponsor assigned to each. These are set out below.
- 3.5 An ‘officer relaunch session’ was hosted by the Chief Executives on 09 February 2023 and attended by c55 representatives across each of the 7 local authorities. Following this, each Chief Executive has hosted a workstream scoping session supported by a selection of the key officers to develop emerging strategic visions. Subject to the endorsement of these by the Joint Committee, the workstreams will be

developed further for consideration and approval at the first meeting of the Joint Committee in the new municipal year:

Skills, Economy and Jobs

Leader Sponsor: Cllr Kevin Bentley, ECC

Chief Executive Sponsor: Scott Logan, Basildon

The ASELA region has significant economic strengths – a population of nearly 1 million, a rich culture of entrepreneurs, home to global businesses such as Ford, Amazon and DP World with industry sector clusters including advanced manufacturing, logistics, creative industries and health. It is home to Thames Freeport which will generate 21,000 net additional jobs and over £4.5 billion in private sector investment. There exists a significant economic opportunity across South Essex. For example, jobs and investment from Thames Freeport, the potential from any devolution or growth deal with Government, direct Government funding (e.g. UKSPF) and capitalising on the work of partners such as the Thames Estuary Growth Board. The question for us is how to maximise the benefit from the economic opportunity for residents and businesses so that the overall impact is greater than the sum of the individual parts and we achieve longer-term sustainable and inclusive growth across ASELA.

We have common growth ambitions and we do a lot of the same things and deliver similar actions and economic development interventions. We will continue to focus on important local issues. We will continue to implement actions in a way that ensures greater contribution to the wider growth ambitions and we will focus on those themes articulated in a single strategic plan that are best considered on a wider economic geography, beyond individual Council boundaries:

- Supporting businesses to scale up and be more outward looking - trade and investment – exports and inward investment;
- Boosting productivity, fostering innovation and R&D;
- Future skills needs – what employers require and aligned to growth and related sectors;
- Maximising the benefit and impact of major areas of opportunity – interventions that have regional significance e.g. Freeport, economic growth corridors (similar to that set out in the Investment Zones process), individual elements of any devolution deal; and
- Prosperity shared by all – giving people and businesses the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from increased economic growth.

We are committed to deeper and closer joint working to support the economy, create jobs and improve skills to achieve greater economic benefits across the ASELA region. Joint working extends beyond the local authorities and the important role of our partners including the private sector, our knowledge institutions, community and voluntary sector and central government.

The ASELA business base has over 32,000 businesses. Strengthening our engagement with businesses is critical to achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the region. We want to harness the collective power of our

businesses, adding an injection of new insight, new ideas, and different perspectives in shaping our plans and actions to deliver our economic growth ambitions.

Good Homes

Leader Sponsor: Cllr Stephen George, Southend

Chief Executive Sponsor: Jonathan Stephenson, Brentwood and Rochford

The vision for the Good Homes programme is:

- To deliver high quality places to live, work, visit and invest that reflect and enhance the best of what our towns, countryside and coast have to offer.
- To provide an increased supply of high-quality housing to meet the full range of housing needs in sustainable locations across South Essex.

The three Strategic Outcomes of the programme will be:

- A collective view of housing delivery opportunities across ASELA and what is required to unlock them
- Targeted place-based engagement and resource alignment around priorities with key partners, both local and national
- Accelerated new homes delivery to support the housing needs of South Essex

This will be delivered through a number of workstreams including:

- Accelerating the delivery of housing through a collectively agreed ASELA pipeline
- A delivery plan for productivity, MMC and low carbon
- Exploring opportunities for sharing delivery capacity across Councils
- Exploring a partnership approach between local authorities and housing associations
- Engaging the Private Sector (Inc. SMEs)
- Improving the quality of existing homes
- An interface with other programmes (e.g. Freeport and TEGB)
- A vision and Digital Twin to support new settlements
- A Joint Strategic Framework for ASELA

Digital and Energy

Leader Sponsor: Cllr David Blackwell, Castle Point

Chief Executive Sponsor: Rob Polkinghorne, Southend

A scoping workshop was held 10th February 2023. It was attended by 23 officers representing all local authorities within ASELA. The purpose of the workshop was to scope the strategic objectives and their supporting projects within the Digital and Energy delivery group.

The outcome of the workshop identified two strategic objectives each with 4 supporting projects (8 projects in total). The strategic objectives and projects proposed are as follows:

Strategic objective 1 - Digital Connectivity: All residents and businesses in South Essex are digitally included.

1. Full Fibre Coverage by 2025: Delivering beyond the Government's target through continued market stimulation and investment, leveraging the deployed full fibre network wherever possible.
2. Expanding Mobile Coverage: Engage with mobile operators to make South Essex attractive for investment, improve 4G coverage and capacity and expand 5G coverage, leveraging the investment in the full fibre network wherever possible.
3. Improving Public Service: Utilise our 200km of full fibre network for the benefit of the public sector across South Essex to drive down costs, improve connectivity and open up innovation through shared infrastructure including IOT and shared digital services.
4. Opening up Access for All: Ensure digital inclusion across South Essex making 'decent' broadband not just available to all but affordable for all and ensuring everyone has the basic digital skills to make use of this connectivity.

Strategic objective 2 - Sustainable Power: Energy capacity across South Essex is increasingly green resilient and enables growth.

1. Energy resilience is continually improved through strong 'lean, clean and green' messaging, through leveraged investment, battery storage, innovation, regional generation projects and strategic partnerships alongside projects to manage power usage and demand.
2. Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs): All power-related NSIPs are planned and delivered to enhance capacity and resilience, to secure the widest pool of benefits for South Essex residents and businesses and are used to leverage private investment wherever possible.
3. Local Plans are aligned to enable housing and economic growth and to ensure that all current and future infrastructure demands are planned for and contributions are optimised, including heavy users such as data centres and Electric Vehicle Charging.
4. Green Energy Generation: Opportunities to unlock green energy generation including hydrogen, solar, wind, micro-generation and retro-fit are brought forward to ensure maximum benefit to South Essex's power resilience and sustainability and opportunities to capture the value of green jobs, skills and innovation are captured for the benefit of South Essex residents and businesses whilst also supporting bio diversity.

Additional workshop sessions will be undertaken, following feedback from ASELA Leaders, to further develop the scope of each of the proposed projects.

Environment and Climate Change

Leader Sponsor: Cllr Andrew Baggott, Basildon



Chief Executive Sponsor: Angela Hutchings, Castle Point

In Essex, the Essex Climate Action Commission (ECAC) was developed a roadmap to get Essex to net zero by 2050. Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral (ctfassets.net) and the work of the Commission is reported here [Essex Climate Action Commission - Essex County Council](#)

ECAC focusses on the following:

- Land use, green (and blue) infrastructure, resilience
- Transport
- Built environment
- Energy
- Waste
- Community Engagement
- Business Support

The ambitions of the ECAC can only be achieved by everyone doing their bit. Across the patch, action on climate change is inconsistent across local authorities and is dependent on there being senior leaders and councillors in place who wish to drive the agenda. We are not all starting from the same place.

At this stage, therefore, it is proposed that this workstream will:

- Create a South Essex team of experts – a pan ASELA climate change workforce focussed on sharing expertise and best practice at a local level – underpinned by an MOU - providing capacity and de-risking delivery to increase uptake of local interventions e.g. engagement and education; rationalisation of public estate and retrofitting; bidding team for HMG and other funding pots; themes, outcomes and measures including behaviour change, social value ROI, metrics and data; risk management, business continuity, EP and resilience. An immediate skills/resources audit will inform this work.
- Create a South Essex climate action story - work collaboratively to create a pan ASELA narrative which will embed climate action into business as usual and enable constituent authorities to take a South Essex level approach to engagement with residents and businesses. This is intended to get everyone to the same level and “sets the bar” for the collective ambition; allowing constituent authorities to measure themselves against one another and implementing quick wins locally (essentially taking initiatives which are already live in some authorities and replicating them across the patch). That way we build a comprehensive and cohesive approach to climate adaptation and mitigation across South Essex
- Create a South Essex Vision – define the ambition for our longer term aspirations – how we will work together across South Essex to meet the challenges of ECAC.

- Deliver large scale strategic climate action interventions, mitigations and adaptations– this means delivering some but also focussing on cross border strategic collaboration to achieve wider benefits at scale across South Essex – pipeline of potential projects TBC (need to ensure no duplication with other workstreams) but e.g. distributed energy networks and public sector PVs; SEEPark and BNG; waste collection/disposal alignment; hydrogen.

There are overlaps with other ASELA workstreams which we will need to bear in mind. The green agenda touches everything. The environmental “lens” also will apply to the following ASELA workstreams:

- Economy, Jobs and Skills (e.g. retrofitting, green skills and business support)
- Infrastructure (e.g. energy and green/blue infrastructure/biodiversity net gain)
- Good Homes (e.g. net neutral development, retrofitting, waste and energy)
- Sustainable Transport (e.g. energy, and active travel)

This means that this workstream must operate across all of the thematic workstreams in ASELA but not duplicate them.

There is a wealth of talent across the ASELA region and a skills audit will be necessary to collate that information. There is no obvious workstream lead and even co-ordination will require some external input as otherwise individuals’ time is taken up with their own authority’s projects. Either staff must be released from the “day job” or external workstream support is required.

The previous SEEPark project has a PM in place and their role will be dependent on where that project ends up.

- Skills analysis and existing resource definition – within 4 weeks
- MOU creation – to create preconditions for collaboration – within 8 weeks
- Creation of operating model and shared repository (governance and technology) – within 8 weeks
- Identification of quick wins (low/no cost projects and agreed data sets) – within 12 weeks
- Creation of vision and longer term ambition – within 12 weeks
- Creation of pipeline of strategic projects - TBA

Sustainable Transport

Leader Sponsor: Cllr Mark Coxshall, Thurrock

Chief Executive Sponsor: Tom Walker, ECC

The transport eco-system in South Essex is complex with three Transport and Highway Authorities each developing their own Local Transport Plans (LTP) as well as multiple public and private transport operators delivering services. At the same time, the transport network, especially highways, operates over capacity and this has significant impact on productivity and Economic Development.

An initial workshop has recognised the significant interrelationships within the South Essex economy with effective connectivity being essential for securing a thriving

economy and growth. A Sustainable Transport system with an inclusive approach, recognising the continued importance of the private motor vehicle and road freight in the immediate term whilst seeking to develop pathways to decarbonise the transport system and deliver modal shift, is critical to ensuring that we balance growth with environmental considerations. We recognise the way people, goods and information move is changing, and growth must be supported by flexible, affordable, and adaptable transport systems that embrace technology.

Therefore the Sustainable Transport workstream identified significant areas of common ground to be further developed as well as opportunities for immediate collaboration. This includes:

- Development of a single South Essex Transport Plan; building on existing LTP4 collaboration to provide a single narrative for South Essex.
- Sharing data between ASELA authorities & developing an engagement protocol to align and streamline the creation of Local, ASELA and regional transport and Local Plans
- Enhancing external communications & lobbying at a national and regional scale, through development of a common ASELA position to secure connectivity improvements.

Targeting these opportunities and challenges will be the focus for this workstream. One potential approach would be to enhanced work commenced in developing the Investment Zone proposition, identifying key growth locations, and considering the transport and connectivity required to maximise the opportunity.

The workstream will develop principles and objectives for adoption by Leaders and Chief Executives in South Essex to guide ASELA's approach. A series of propositions will also be produced exploring both immediate opportunities and 'quick wins', short-term infrastructure projects as well as a series of long-term strategic initiative.

4. ASELA Resources

- 4.1 Whilst much of the work of ASELA relies on officers from constituent authorities collaborating to progress the desired outputs and will continue to do so, ASELA has for some time funded specific resources and also commissioned the support of consultants across individual programmes. These have reported to respective Chief Executive programme leads
- 4.2 ASELA has until very recently been funding a role of Programme Director for SEE Park and Digital who reports to the Chief Executive sponsor of the programme and a Communications Officer, at a combined cost of circa £200k per annum.
- 4.3 These arrangements are not felt to provide best value for ASELA and use of its relatively limited resources to address points 3 and 4 above.

4.4 It is considered that whilst ASELA will continue to require specific resources, this could and should be more effectively and efficiently utilised through dedicated central resources across the ASELA programme to ensure -

- effective oversight, co-ordination, delivery, and utilisation of resources across the overall ASELA programme to achieve the desired outcomes
- enhanced and consistent governance and assurance in delivery of programmes
- enhanced capacity and capability in programme management and delivery and progressing matters outside of the specific defined workstreams
- direct and clear reporting of progress through the Joint Committee
- a central point of focus and support for ASELA

4.5 It is therefore proposed that the future structure of specific ASELA resources comprises:

ASELA Director

The post shall work closely with ASELA Leaders and Chief Executives and formally report to the Joint Committee.

- Overall responsibility for management and programme implementation and delivery of workstream outputs as defined by the Joint Committee, working closely with Member and Chief Executive programme sponsors.
- Responsible for effective leadership and management of ASELA's physical and financial resources
- Development and implementation of a governance and assurance framework for consistent application across all ASELA's activities
- Regular reporting of progress against the programmes and deliverables to the Joint Committee and ASELA Scrutiny Committee.
- Liaison with external bodies and government departments to promote South Essex Vision and support delivery of the programmes and key deliverables.
- Lead the identification of potential investment opportunities
- Lead advisor to the Joint Committee
- Manage and co-ordinate the secretariat and accountable body services provided through agreed constituent authorities.
- Working closely with the communications network to promote South Essex and the work of ASELA including working with Thames Estuary Growth board, Thames Freeport Governing board, Essex County Council and other strategic interventions/partnerships across the South Essex Region.
- Work closely with the Leaders and Chief Executives to ensure South Essex is represented in any potential devolution deals.

ASELA Programme Officer

This post shall report directly to the ASELA Director and be responsible for

- supporting the development of, and management and monitoring the ASELA programme.

- Working directly with all Chief Executive's, workstream leads and project managers to support delivery of their workstream activities and ensure compliance with the defined governance and assurance framework
- Presenting an objective view of progress against the five key workstreams and providing a level of challenge to responsible officers to allow for the effective reporting to the ASELA Joint Committee.

It is proposed that the above are permanent appointments but that the options of a fixed term post or secondment from one of the constituent authorities be considered as necessary and that Chief Executives progress the appropriate arrangements, in consultation with the Joint Committee Chairman.

The above resources would be supplemented by the accountable body (finance) and secretariat functions for the joint committee currently provided by Southend Council and for which, in connection with the joint committee, would work with the ASELA Director.

In addition, a Programme Director is to be recruited to support the Good Homes workstream, utilising funding from Homes England Partnership. Under the current arrangements this role would report to the Chief Executive sponsor of the programme but as part of the proposals set out in this report would instead, whilst focusing on the Good Homes workstream, form part of the above central resource pool and also report to the ASELA Director to enhance capacity, collaboration and expertise across workstreams.

- 4.6 As well as providing a more effective and efficient use of resources and enhancing oversight, co-ordination and delivery across the overall ASELA programme as set out above, it would also demonstrate a further progression of ASELA in delivering the shared ambitions for South Essex and provide a basis and enhanced approach to take forward the revised programmes detailed in this report.

5 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

- 5.1 The above sets out the next evolution of ASELA and to support and underpin this, it is felt that it would be beneficial to ask the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge of ASELA in order to build on the direction set out in this report and aid understanding of areas the association should focus on to aid its development.
- 5.2 The scope of any proposed review would be subject to input from all Leaders but it is proposed that final agreement of the scope of the review be agreed by the Joint Committee Chairman.

6 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 6.1 The programme review does provide each local authority with the opportunity to realigned resources and priority activity to achieve a greater impact in delivery.
- 6.2 The recruitment to the proposed ASELA resources may be filled from existing resources within the 7 Local Authorities through a secondment opportunity.

7 Reasons for Recommendation

- 7.1** This report asks the Joint Committee to approve the revised ASELA programme of work, the vision for each of the workstreams and resources required in order for the full impact of each to be realised throughout delivery.

8 Consultation (if applicable)

- 8.1** Consultation on the content of this report has been undertaken with the Chief Executives for each of the constituent ASELA local authorities.

6. Impact on policies, priorities, performance and community impact (if applicable)

- 6.1** N/A

7. Implications

- 7.1 Financial** – There is not expected to be any additional financial requirement to the ASELA Programme as a result of the revised workstream visions nor the revised ASELA support structure as this will be covered by the resourcing budget currently allocated.

- 7.2 Legal** – The proposals set out in this report accord with the governing documents of the Joint Committee. The arrangements for recruitment to the positions outlined in this report will likely be via one of the constituent authorities.

7.3 Other implications (where significant)

There are no direct inclusion, diversity and community cohesion implications arising from consideration of this matter. The report primarily deals with programme scope of the Joint Committee as opposed to impacting on any individual or group. Necessary arrangements will be made to ensure that all members, and any future co-opted members, can effectively participate in the proceedings of the Joint Committee.

8. Appendices to the report

N/A

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DATE: 16 March 2023	ITEM: 5A
ASELA Joint Committee Meeting	
Report Title: SEATS Progress Report	
Report of: Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Borough Council	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: N/A	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

Significant progress continues to be made on delivering a ‘technical university’ for South Essex. The development of the private sector led technical university – South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) was one of the ASELA pioneer projects. SEATS has been established to transform the current higher education offer in the region, strengthen employer-led work-based learning delivery and increase the skills of local people to better meet the existing and emerging needs of business.

At the last meeting of the Joint Committee members were updated on the work underway to establish a private sector led operating company to take ownership and implement SEATS; work to identify a High Education (HE) provider; and steps to secure additional funding over the medium term to operationalise the programme. Since the last progress update to the Joint Committee:

- The SEATS operating company has been established and the first meeting of the new board has taken place. The three founding Directors are Ford Motor Company, DP World and Southend Airport with Leonardo and TEVVA Motors supporting employers at the Board.
- Completion of a soft market testing exercise of potential higher education providers.
- Procurement for the higher education provider is currently underway, with completion in April 2023.
- Secured £240k pump prime funding from the Thames Freeport Governing Board and an additional £570k pending approval of the Thames Freeport Full Business Case being approved by Government.
- Plan agreed and actions underway o establish a Business Supporters Group.

SEATS will form a core element of the proposed Skills, Economy, and Jobs workstream with the first in-take of new students expected in September 2023.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the ASELA Joint Committee notes the progress and achievements delivered to date.**
- 1.2 That the ASELA Joint Committee endorses the key next steps set out in Section 4.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The creation of a ‘technical university’ is a pioneer project and key deliverable of the ASELA Growth and Recovery Prospectus. The development of the private sector led technical university – South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) has been established to transform the current higher education offer in the region, strengthen employer-led work-based learning delivery and increase the skills of local people to better meet the existing and emerging needs of business.
- 2.2 At the last meeting of the Joint Committee members were updated on the work underway to establish a private sector led operating company to take ownership and implement SEATS; work to identify a High Education provider; and steps to secure additional funding over the medium term to operationalise the programme.
- 2.3 Significant progress continues to be made on delivering a ‘technical university’ for South Essex.

3. SEATS Progress and Update

SEATS Operating Company

- 3.1 South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) Limited operating company (OpCo) was established on the 15th February 2023. The OpCo has been established as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. The three founding directors of the company are Ford Motor Company, DP World and Southend Airport with Leonardo and TEVVA Motors supporting employers. Officers will attend Board meeting in an observer capacity. The inaugural board meeting of the SEATS OpCo took place on 27th February.
- 3.2 The core aims of the OpCo are to:
 - enhance the delivery of higher-level technical skills in South Essex;
 - provide opportunities for local people to secure high-skill jobs, including providing bursaries to support south Essex residents access to employment and better career opportunities;
 - enable local firms to secure the skills they need to grow; and

- support the retention / attraction of high-quality firms into the area.

The OpCo will act as a one-stop-shop through which training solutions can be collectively procured on behalf of a consortium of employers, bringing employers together to identify common workforce and training needs and provide easy access to information for employers relating to available training solutions and specific apprenticeships. The OpCo will be responsible for the following core activities:

1. Scoping the training needs of employers in South Essex- starting with Board members and founding partners;
2. Procuring, contracting and managing the established HE provider(s) to deliver high quality education and training provision including honours degrees and degree apprenticeships, which are linked to employer demands within South Essex; and
3. Working with other stakeholders (businesses, learners and the public sector) to grow the overall size of the market for higher-level technical, vocational education in South Essex.

3.3 To date the partners engaged developing the SEATS proposition have been supported by officers from Basildon, Essex and Thurrock Councils alongside additional capacity support in the form of specialist HE and legal advisers. This support will continue to be provided during the procurement process and in the short-term with funding resource secured from Thames Freeport (see below). A core part of this will be to work with the SEATS Board to develop the specification and process for the recruitment and appointment of the SEATS Executive Team comprised of the following roles:

- Chief Operating Officer;
- Stakeholder Engagement Manager;
- Widening Participation Manager; and
- Administrative Support Officer.

It is anticipated that members of the SEATS Executive Team will be in place by September 2023.

Securing a Higher Education Provider Partner

- 3.4 The procurement process to secure a higher education provider partner for SEATS is currently underway. The process was launched on 1st March and is expected to conclude at the end of April with the appointment of a preferred provider.
- 3.5 Prior to commencing the procurement process a soft market testing exercise was undertaken of HE providers across the UK. 18 universities were approached as part of the exercise. The soft market testing was successful in generating interest and awareness of SEATS, attracting the interest of 12 HE institutions and two other training / private sector providers.

3.6 The key milestone dates in the procurement process are:

- 1st March Procurement process commenced
- 8th / 9th March – Webinar for HE providers to meet SETAS / ASELA representatives
- 24th March – Closing date for receipt of tenders from HE providers
- 21st April – Successful HE provider appointed

3.7 The Joint Committee will be kept updated and notified of the preferred HE provider. A separate communications plan will be put in place to support announcements around the appointment of the HE provider, the launch of courses and the first in-take of students.

Thames Freeport Funding Support

3.8 To meet an increasing demand for higher skilled labour and to provide a pipeline of skilled labour to facilitate business growth and new inward investment Thames Freeport will deliver a bespoke skills investment programme. Amongst other initiatives being developed by Thames Freeport, SEATS has been identified as a key programme to help develop and grow the future workforce, unlocking freeport economic benefits for residents and businesses across South Essex. Thames Freeport has been actively involved in the development of the SEATS proposition.

3.9 The interim Thames Freeport Governing Board met on Friday 27th January, and discussed SEATS and considered a request for investment funding. There is full support for this initiative from all freeport partners and they agreed the following:

- To approve the investment of £240,000 from the Thames Freeport Skills Fund up to 31st July 2024, as a grant to SEATs Ltd., to maintain the operational establishment of the company up to this date.
- To seek approval of support to invest an additional £570,000 of retained business rates (subject to the Thames Freeport FBC being approved by government) when the full Freeport Board is constituted.

Engaging South Essex Businesses

3.10 To support SEATS over the medium and longer terms a Business Supporter Group is to be established. The purpose of the business group is to work with the OpCo Board and executive team to identify the training and development needs of their employees and new degree apprentice opportunities, work with and advocate for SEATS in furtherance of its wider objectives of identifying training needs and solutions and who will be particularly instrumental in helping

to grow the provision locally by supporting the development of a pipeline of learners and to shape the future growth of the curriculum offered through SEATS.

3.11 In the short-term until the SEATS team is in place, Opportunity South Essex (OSE) supported by economic development officers in the ASELA local authorities will provide the project management oversight of the Business Supporters Group.

3.12 During January 2023 – June 2023 a targeted programme of marketing SEATS to medium / larger sized South Essex employer businesses will be developed and implemented, particularly those in advanced manufacturing, logistics and IT sectors. Following the marketing exercise, the first meeting of the Business Support Group is planned to take place in June 2023, post appointment of the HE provider partner.

3.13 The target is to recruit 50 business supporters by June 2023.

4. Next Steps

4.1 The key next steps in the delivery of SEATS are:

- Conclude the procurement process for the HE provider partner.
- Confirm the interim arrangements to support the OpCo Board until the SEATS Executive Team is in place.
- Work with Thames Freeport to put in place the mechanism and funding agreement to drawdown freeport funding from April 2023.
- Work with the SEATS OpCo Board to develop the Executive Team specification and commence the recruitment of key posts.
- Initiate the marketing of SEATS to South Essex businesses and establish the Business Supporters' Group.

5 Reasons for Recommendation

5.1 This report asks the Joint Committee to note the progress to date and endorse the next steps in the successful delivery of the SEATS provision.

6 Consultation (if applicable)

6.1 N/A

6. Impact on policies, priorities, performance and community impact (if applicable)

6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 **Financial** – There is not expected to be any additional financial requirement to the ASELA Programme as a result of the revised workstream visions nor the recruitment to the new positions as this will be covered by the resourcing budget currently allocated.

7.2 **Legal** – N/A

7.3 **Other implications (where significant)** – N/A

8. Appendices to the report

N/A

DATE: 16 March 2023		ITEM: 5C
Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) Update		
Joint Committee Briefing Meeting		
Programme Name	DIGITAL	
ASELA Chief SRO	Rob Polkinghorne	
Programme Implementation Director	Michael Snaith	
Lead Officer/PM	Graham Brace	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ambition for South Essex is that every household, business and community facility, has access to affordable full fibre digital connectivity by 2025.

The digital programme is focused on four key themes.

1) Full Fibre Coverage for All by 2025:

Through: Continued market stimulation, investment and leveraging the deployed full fibre Infrastructure).

2) Improved Mobile Coverage for All by 2025:

Through: Engagement with mobile operators, making ASELA region an attractive place to invest and leveraging the deployed full fibre Infrastructure.

3) Supporting a Digital Agenda for Public Services:

Through: Delivery by 2024 of a LoRaWAN IOT network and by enabling public buildings with Gigabit connectivity, reducing cost of connectivity, supporting creation of community digital hubs, supporting shared infrastructure and shared digital services.

4) Digital Inclusion for All:

Through: A decent broadband connection that is: Available to All, Affordable by All, Suitable Digital Skills for All

This paper updates the committee on the emerging phases of the Digital Programme, its ambitions and progress to date.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Joint Committee:

1.1 Notes the progress of the Digital Programme and endorses continued support to deliver the programme.

2. ASELA region – full fibre coverage:

2.1 Full fibre coverage across the region has increased significantly over the past 12 months, as shown in the table below, but more still needs to be done:

Area	Full Fibre coverage (%)		
	July 2021	August 2022	February 2023
England	21.9	37.7	47.19
Essex	19.5	36.5	44.89
Basildon	27.6	44	53.36
Brentwood	37.2	55	60.67
Castle Point	2.3	4.5	9.08
Rochford	8.1	33.4	49.16
Southend-on-Sea	23.7	51.5	77.26
Thurrock	13.6	48.1	59.54

Source: [Think Broadband](#)

- 2.2 Most areas have seen coverage move from below national average to above national average (c47%). Factors in achieving this has been increased market activity thanks to a raised profile for the area due to the ASELA Digital Programme. The full fibre network has directly stimulated investment in the likes of Ingatestone and is in the process of attracting investment to improve connectivity in Business Parks in Basildon. South Essex has generally outperformed comparable areas, which have not seen anywhere near the level of uplift over this period. From market engagement the view is that a further significant uplift will occur over the next two years.
- 2.3 The ASELA Digital Programme has a target to achieve 100% full fibre coverage across the region by 2025 (Government target is 85% access to gigabit capable networks). The biggest issue to achieving this is likely to be in addressing ‘not spots,’ where businesses and residents can’t get a ‘decent broadband connection’, defined by Ofcom as 10 Mbit/s download speed 1 Mbit/s upload speed.

3. ASELA digital infrastructure

- 3.1 The ASELA Digital Programme has rolled out more than 200km of full fibre across South Essex since August 2020. This has been funded by grants from DCMS and MHCLG totalling £6.9m, which were successfully secured by the Digital Programme. This new digital infrastructure links around 190 public sector sites including libraries, sheltered accommodations, schools, fire stations as well as community and village halls. In addition to this, we have joined up what were previously isolated areas across the region with fibre backhaul links. The full fibre infrastructure is available for use at no cost to the public sector irrespective of the bandwidths delivered for a period of 15 years. This is a significant achievement that differentiates us from similar grant funded projects across other regions.
- 3.2 The work has progressed to time and budget and significantly raised the profile of ASELA as a result of close working with DCMS, and ASELA has received very positive feedback on the project rollout.
- 3.3 The ASELA Digital Programme has recently secured further grant funding from Highways England's Lower Thames Crossing project (£900K) with part of this funding being used to connect the Brentwood area to the rest of the region via Basildon.
- 3.4 The ASELA Digital Programme has also recently secured further grant funding from SELEP (£500K) to both connect Southend to the rest of the region as well as deliver fibre connections to public buildings within Southend.

4. Taking service from the the fibre

- 4.1 While the fibre has been laid, it remains 'dark' until it is 'lit', that is to say a service is taken from it. This is a key requirement of the grant funding and when real benefit will begin to be delivered to the public sector and hence has been a main drive of the Digital Programme.
 - The ASELA Digital Programme supported Thurrock Council's wide area network (WAN) re-procurement to make use of the deployed ASELA fibre infrastructure to enable significantly increased bandwidths and significant cost savings. Thurrock Council WAN sites (80% of the total) are now running over the ASELA digital infrastructure.
 - Following a procurement we are now in the process of awarding a contract to provide a very cost effective and innovative solution to facilitate the delivery of an overlay internet service of 1 gigabit per second (Gbit/s) for both download and upload (ie symmetric) across the remainder of the connected public sector sites. It is anticipated that this solution should now be in place by September 2023.

- Following the award of this contract we are now closely working with the other authorities to progress a procurement activity to deliver a highly cost effective 1Gbit/s internet service to public sector sites across Brentwood, Rochford, Basildon, Castle Point areas. It is anticipated that this procurement will be completed by the Summer 2023 enabling each local authority to migrate their current connectivity services to the new service by December 2023 and provide cost savings and improvements to service delivery.

5. Leveraging the improved public sector connectivity

5.1 The following activities are being progressed by the Digital Programme to ensure that having access to fibre is only the first stage in delivering a successful digital programme. The focus is now shifting to delivering outcomes that constitute real and tangible benefits to the public sector as a result of the ASELA Digital Infrastructure rollout:

- **Sheltered housing – wellbeing and digital skills**

The ASELA Digital Programme secured funding from Thurrock Council working with the Thurrock Sheltered Housing manager to leverage the full fibre now rolled out to all 29 Thurrock sheltered sites to address wellbeing and digital skills. A trial of the technology and its uses has been completed and Thurrock Council are now in the process of completing the deployment to all 29 sites by the end of March 2023.

Considerable interest has already been expressed in this project from Essex County Council and National Government.

- **Village halls and community centres – community hubs**

The ASELA digital infrastructure rollout will provide full fibre gigabit connectivity to around 20 village halls and community centres across the region. The digital programme plans to work with these community facilities with a view to strengthening their role within their communities and potentially enable them as community digital hubs. With impending procurements as described above ASELA are now in a position to progress during 2023.

- **Creating a public sector network across ASELA**

The ASELA Digital Infrastructure will connect around 190 public sector sites across the region. The ASELA Digital Programme plans to explore how to offer public sector partners the opportunity to consider collectively how connectivity for the wider public sector can be delivered in the future and at reduced cost. An example of this is evident through the additional funding secured from SELEP whereby additional public buildings are being enabled in Basildon, Rochford and for the first time in Southend.

- **ASELA ‘Internet of Things’ (IOT) Network**

The ASELA Digital Programme has recently secured funding from Highways England to deliver an ASELA-wide IOT long range wide area network (LoRaWAN), that fully leverages the ASELA Digital Infrastructure and its connectivity into public sector buildings across the region, making it in ASELA’s view both attractive and innovative. Work has commenced on this project and it is anticipated that following a procurement process Spring 2023 that a delivery partner will be contracted to start deploying the LoRaWAN from July 2023.

Delivery of an ASELA IOT LoRaWAN is likely to attract significant investment into the region. It will provide a digital platform to:

- Support delivery of public services through the deployment of sensors and collection of data across ASELA
- Enable ASELA to share data with local businesses.
- Stimulate digital innovation and economic growth, providing local businesses with a test bed to pilot innovative ideas and solutions that can benefit communities.

6. Market stimulation from ASELA digital infrastructure rollout

6.1 The other key requirement from the digital infrastructure grant funding was for it to stimulate private sector investment and market activity through both leveraging spare fibre capacity and through a resulting raised profile of ASELA. As the infrastructure rollout concludes the Digital Programme has been ramping up market engagement with a view to stimulate investment particularly in ‘not spot’ areas. This work has included:

- **Delivery Partner MoU**

The Digital Programme has been working closely with our fibre delivery partner Next Generation Access (NGA) on an MoU. This MoU has now been agreed and will be signed in early March 2023. The MOU will see 25% of commercial revenues generated from selling access to spare capacity on the digital infrastructure being re-invested into digital-related initiatives and projects for the direct benefit of the public sector across the region and the local community. The MOU is important statement for the Region and highlights the benefits being realised from the £8M of investment into the LFFN fibre infrastructure.

- **‘Not spot’ identification**

The Digital Programme has been working to identify ‘not spot’ areas across the region, where coverage remains poor, and mapping these onto a Google maps overlay alongside the deployed fibre infrastructure and the third party interconnection points to the fibre. This model has now been produced and is now being kept up to date as data changes.

Through this work BDUK have invited ASELA to be part of a National Urban Not Spot Working Group which is looking at urban areas poorly served by connectivity.

- **Third party private investment**

The Digital Programme has been talking with a number of prospective fibre connectivity providers about leveraging the fibre roll-out to support commercial business cases to invest in areas of poor fibre coverage. This has involved:

- Sharing not spot data and data on fibre infrastructure roll-out
- Promoting ASELA as a good place for fibre investment
- Exploring ways of stimulating investment in business parks and new developments.

As a result of this engagement a number of fibre providers are now actively investing within the region, this includes the following:

ITS – extending the LFFN fibre network into Business Parks in Basildon
Openreach – Grays and Purfleet, Wickford
Digital Infrastructure (Be Fibre) – Brentwood and Ingatestone
Netomnia – Grays/Stanford Le Hope & Purfleet
Lit Fibre – Basildon
City Fibre – Great Wakering, Rochford and Wickford

Through these engagements we are anticipating further announcements regarding further investment during 2023.

- **Business engagement:**

Access to high speed and reliable broadband is increasingly essential to do business, and the Digital Programme continues to engage with the business community to:

- Understand and promote issues and challenges around digital connectivity (fixed and mobile)
- Identify 'not spot' areas for business across ASELA.
- Leverage investment into business parks from the deployed digital infrastructure.

7. Digital inclusion

7.1 This is one of the key workstreams for the Digital Programme and needs to be addressed so the region can fully realise the benefits that could be achieved through a 100% full fibre coverage. This covers tackling:

- Not spots – Inability to obtain a 'decent broadband connection through un-availability.

Inability to afford a decent broadband connection – working with public and private sectors to deliver cheaper packages an issue which is now receiving higher profile due to the current cost of living situation. ASELA's Digital Programme Team are actively working with Digital Essex in engaging with the market to identify ways in which social broadband tariffs can be delivered either through social value or ASELA playing a proactive role in wider national initiatives

- Inability to make full use of a broadband connection through lack of digital skills.

8. Mobile Coverage

8.1 Recognising the importance of mobile coverage the Digital Programme continues to engage with the mobile operators (MNO's) with a view to:

- Attracting investment re enhancing 4G Coverage and accelerating 5G coverage across ASELA.
- Understanding their current and future investment plans
- Exploring solutions to address capacity issues in urban areas – Small Cell and Public Footpath masts.
- Understand the MNO's strategic and commercial approach to addressing 'not spots' in rural areas and where possible highlight current coverage issues.

9. ASELA new developments and regeneration schemes

9.1 The Digital Programme continues to advise and work closely with the ASELA Planning Board and have contributed to the ASELA Housing Strategy report and working to ensure that in new developments the provision of telecom ducting, full fibre provision and accommodation for 4G/5G technology, through early engagement with the market.

10. Engagement with BDUK and Digital Essex

9.1 The ASELA Digital Programme continues to engage with both BDUK and Digital Essex and will play a key enabling role in the Government funded Gigabit Project, which is looking to address the final 20% of properties who will not benefit from commercial investment but will require government intervention to meet broadband availability targets.

ASELA welcome the opportunity to work more closely with Digital Essex and this is already realising some significant outcomes in respect to data collaboration and driving investment.

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DATE: 16 March 2023	ITEM: 6
ASELA Joint Committee Meeting	6
ASELA Financial Report	
Report of: Elizabeth Helm, Senior Finance Business Partner, Southend-on-Sea City Council	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: N/A	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This report summarises the latest forecast financial position for the various programmes within ASELA.

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Joint Committee note the content of the report

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The budget for ASELA is set at the start of the financial year and adjusted throughout the year as plans are changed and updated. Provisional budgets for future years are also compiled to aid longer term financial planning.
- 2.2 Southend-on-Sea City Council maintain a separate accounting structure for ASELA and produce financial monitoring reports which are shared with Programme Implementation Directors, ASELA Chief Executives and Finance leads.
- 2.3 Financial and operational monitoring is enabled through the routine highlight reporting mechanism undertaken by each Programme Implementation Director, supported by a Finance lead, and which are also reported on this agenda.
- 2.4 Financial implications detailed in highlight reports are monitored against the budget set at the start of the financial year. Changes to a programme budget may occur when additional external funding is confirmed which enables increased programme spend or when unavoidable costs have been incurred.

3. 2022/23 Current Forecast

3.1 The 2022/23 forecast income and expenditure for ASELA is summarised in Table 1 below:

Income and Expenditure Summary	2021/22 £000's	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's
Income			
Partnership Investment (ASELA authorities)	(420)	(420)	(420)
Other partners			
Homes England	180	(192)	(178)
SEE Park - Highways England	(65)	0	0
Digital - National Highways	0	(506)	(394)
SEATS - private sector investment	(30)	0	0
SEATs - Opportunity South Essex	(20)		
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(1,869)	(1,131)	
SEATS - Thames Freeport Skills Fund			(240)
Additional funding ASELA authorities			
SEE Park - Thurrock	(200)	0	0
SEATS - Essex CC	(60)	(75)	0
Cost Reimbursement (Thurrock/Freeport)	(30)	0	0
Total Income	(2,514)	(2,324)	(1,232)
Programme Expenditure			
SEE Park	387	96	0
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	161	155	240
Full Fibre Digital	1,918	1,693	394
Thames Freeport	60	0	0
Infrastructure and Housing	118	192	178
Operating and Other Costs	121	39	55
Total Expenditure	2,765	2,175	867
In year (surplus) / deficit	251	(149)	(365)

ASELA Reserve	2021/22 £000's	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's
Balance brought forward	(77)	174	24
Non-ringfenced in year (surplus) / deficit	271	(169)	(365)
Ringfenced income: SE Tech Uni	(20)	20	0
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	251	(149)	(365)
Balance carried forward	174	24	(341)

3.2 Based on the latest forecast position, a £149,000 surplus is anticipated in 2022/23, which primarily relates to alternative funding being secured to fund a Programme Manager. As a result, this bring the reserve deficit down to £24,000, which will be carried forward to 2023/24

3.3 **SEE Park**

Phase 1a delivery and Phase 2 design work have been transferred back to Thurrock Council as it is felt this element of work better sits under the Council direct as opposed to ASELA.

Costs incurred to date are programme support and £40,000 for creative industry resource, of which £30,000 has been incurred to date. Clarity is being sought on whether the remaining £10,000 has been spent but not invoiced for.

3.4 **South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)**

Pinsent Masons are providing legal expertise and are progressing with the work. To date £40,500 of work has been billed, any balance of work completed by the end of the financial year will be accrued and the balance of funding rolled forward into 2023/24.

£240,000 of pump priming funding has been secured from the Thames Freeport Governing Board, with an additional £570,000 pending approval of the Thames Freeport Full Business Case being approved by Government.

3.5 **Full Fire Digital**

In the January Accountability Board, SELP agreed to release the funding to support the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) Phase 3 project to Southend on Sea City Council, which provides a further £500,000 of funding for the programme.

The balance of funding from MHCLG received through the LEP for the Digital LFFN Phase 2 has now be transferred from Thurrock Council to Southend and is forecast to be spent in full this year.

National Highways are being invoiced for the funding agreed for the Internet of Things and Phase 2a of LFFN. This work will continue into 2023/24.

3.6 **Infrastructure and Housing**

Two agreements are now formally in place with Homes England, totalling £370,000 of funding for the housing pipeline delivery work.

To date, claims totalling £108,000 have been submitted to Home England for work completed, with a total spend of £192,000 forecast by the end of the financial year.

The remaining funding will be utilised in 2023/24, for a housing programme director, in line with the grant agreement.

3.7 Operating and other costs

The £420,000 partnership contribution has been received. This funding is utilised to facilitate a resource to support programmes as necessary to enable funding to be secured and a communications resource.

4 2023/24 Budget

4.1 Work is underway to identify the resources and their financial implications for the new financial year to deliver the future aspirations of ASELA

Report Author:

NAME Elizabeth Helm

TITLE Senior Finance Business Partner, Southend-on-Sea City Council

16 March 2023	ITEM: 8
ASELA Joint Committee	
Communications Update	
Report of: Liz Aelberry	
Programme Implementation Director: Karen Wheeler	
Accountable Programme SRO: Scott Logan	
This report is draft	

Executive Summary

This paper provides an update on the approach to communications following the review and re-set of the ASELA vision and priorities, and shared responsibility for communications across all ASELA councils.

It includes the intention to develop an overarching communication strategy following the re-set to cover a number of key elements set out in the report and increase awareness and engagement with ASELA and its workstreams.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Joint Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the update provided in this report and comments on the direction of travel for communications including the development of an overarching communication strategy.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 The review of priorities and programmes has given ASELA the opportunity to reaffirm its vision. This re-set enables the development of an overall communication strategy to support ASELA to continue to raise its profile and communicate progress in delivering its priorities and key milestones for each of the programmes including the benefits for residents and businesses.

- 2.2 The five new ASELA workstreams are as set out below and will incorporate relevant existing activity and provide a framework for future activity:

- Skills, Economy and Jobs
- Good Homes
- Infrastructure – Digital & Energy
- Environment and Climate Change
- Sustainable Transport

2.3 It is intended that Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth at Thurrock Council, will remain the lead director and will be supported by Communication leads from across the member organisations with Basildon Council leading on support for the core activity such as the website and enewsletter to all Members across South Essex and other stakeholders. This is instead of the previous dedicated resource to ensure that ASELA activity is further embedded across the member councils.

2.4 The communication leads have been identified by their relevant organisations and will work with their Leaders to effectively communicate their individual workstreams as well as support the promotion of ASELA as a whole.

2.5 A communications co-ordination meeting was held on 27 February, chaired by the programme sponsor, to confirm this approach and ensure responsibility for relevant ASELA communications channels. Processes and protocols will also be clearly set out to ensure, for example, consistent and efficient sign off of media releases, effective handling of media enquiries and new approach to programme communication and engagement activity including development of key messages, infographics, stakeholder mapping and larger campaigns as appropriate. Further details on this approach will be updated at the next Joint Committee and set out in an overarching communication strategy.

2.6 The re-set and new ways of working provide an opportunity to create an overarching communication strategy. The development of the strategy will need to consider the following:

- Key messages
- Stakeholder mapping
- Opportunities for thought/policy pieces e.g. ASELA's position on significant issues impacting South Essex such as ULEZ, LTC
- Development of communication plans for each workstream
- Calendar of events e.g. LGA Conference
- Expanding digital channels and content e.g. Instagram
- Engagement with local, regional and trade media

3. Channels update

3.1 The following metrics help understand interest and engagement in our work to date. LinkedIn engagement continues to grow and councils have used their own internal and external channels to promote following the ASELA social

media channels including promotion of the Joint Committee agenda and ability to watch it online.

<i>Channel</i>	<i>Last 3 months</i>	<i>+/-</i>
LinkedIn	29 new followers	
	466 followers	+6%
Twitter	61 followers	+4%
Website	1,200 users	+36%
	1,700 sessions	+39%

4. Forthcoming events

4.1 The following events and project milestones provide proactive communication opportunities in the coming weeks largely based on two existing projects at this stage:

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Event/milestone</i>	<i>Date</i>
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	Soft marketing testing exercise of Higher Education providers completed	January 2023
	Operational Board (OpCo) established and first Board meeting held	February 2023
	Procurement process underway for Higher Education Provider	March 2023
	Marketing SEATS to South Essex businesses	March – June 2023
	HE Provider partners appointed	April 2023
	SEATS Business Supporters Group established	June 2023
Digital Connectivity	Publication of Vodafone’s <i>Building Smart Communities: making a success of government digitalisation in England</i> report, which analyses the state of digitalisation in local government authorities across the country with input from lead Chief Exec for digital on behalf of ASELA. Panel event for their launch in April.	February and April 2023
	MOU to be signed which will see a financial return to ASELA where spare	March 2023

	<p>fibres are leveraged by our fibre infrastructure partner.</p> <p>Solution has been rolled out to two trial sheltered accommodation sites. Rollout to the rest of the sites targeted to be completed.</p> <p>'Taking of service' procurement - out to tender with a view to having a solution in place before the end of 2023</p> <p>£500k Additional Getting Building Funding secured - extending the fibre infrastructure particularly into Southend.</p>	<p>March / April 2023</p> <p>April 2023</p> <p>Late Spring/Summer 2023</p>
ASELA	<p>Promotion of Joint Committee including proactive media release on reset report</p> <p>Post Joint Committee end of year round up – enewsletter to all Members and stakeholders and media release, social media etc.</p> <p>Bid to be part of the Innovation Zone at the LGA Conference - the theme is 'challenge and change'.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>

5. ASELA logo

- 5.1 Following feedback from ASELA Leaders, a variation of the logo has been created to remove 2050 as much of the ambition for South Essex and the priorities have more ambitious and shorter timescales.



DATE: 23 March 2023	ITEM: 8
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: ASELA Business Engagement Arrangements	
Report of: Mark Doran, Director of Sustainable Growth, Essex CC	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: N/A	

Executive Summary

A strong relationship with South Essex businesses will be critical to the success of ASELA’s next phase.

It is understood that the leading role of businesses in a relationship is to help drive the agenda around economic growth and all that is required to support that including skills, available workforce and reliable infrastructure.

However, we also recognise their range of expertise, which could be invaluable in them assisting in the shaping of the five strategic workstreams and support their implementation, and to champion South Essex as a great place to live, work and succeed. We should welcome input from the business community across the spectrum of our strategies, should they wish to, acknowledging that of course, all of our strategy areas, in some way, contribute to the objectives of economic growth. Our changing strategic context, with a challenging economic outlook, ambitions to seek a Devolution Deal for Greater Essex, and a stronger ASELA with a refreshed work programme, means now is the right time to review ASELA’s business engagement arrangements.

This report proposes that Leaders agree to explore the future business engagement arrangements in South Essex and develop options in more detail and a transition plan for any proposed changes.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That, the Joint Committee note the current arrangements for business engagement in South Essex, the associated matters and options as set out in the report;**

- 1.2 That the Joint Committee note recent discussions between the ASELA Chair and OSE Chair and agree that detailed consideration be given to business engagement arrangements in South Essex, with the preferred option being to evolve the current federated board arrangements to strengthen ASELA's engagement with OSE businesses and invite them to more closely align with the new workstreams, and
- 1.3 That detailed proposals be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee along with a transition plan

2. Introduction and Background

SELEP, Opportunity South Essex, and Success Essex Board

- 2.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were set up by Government in 2011 to identify and support local strategic growth priorities, encourage business investment, and promote economic development. SELEP covers East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend, and Thurrock.
- 2.2 SELEP operates a federated model which provides a place for businesses to bring their knowledge and expertise to the fore allowing for decision-making and project prioritisation at a local level. In South Essex the federated board is Opportunity South Essex (OSE), a partnership of 20 business and local authority members. Two of the 14 business members also serve as directors of SELEP Ltd. OSE has an annual budget of £154,000 pa, of which South Essex authorities contribute £100k. This budget principally funds the post of a full-time director. Success Essex Board (SEB) fulfils the role for North Essex with a similar arrangement and two business members also Directors of SELEP Ltd.
- 2.3 In the short-term and pending the future constitution of SELEP being agreed following any devolution deal, it has been recognised that OSE is operating in a crowded strategic landscape with ASELA, Thames Estuary Growth Board and Opportunity South Essex each having their own strategic objectives and fulfilling sometimes similar functions leading to less-than-optimal collaboration.
- 2.4 The role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) is due to change in the context of devolution with the UK Government encouraging the integration of LEPs and their business boards into County Deals. Where a devolution deal does not yet exist, LEPs will continue to play a role in supporting local businesses and the local economy until such times that a devolution deal is in place for the area. SELEP itself has a body of work to continue in 2023/24 and is currently able to support the execution of its Delivery Plan (agreed with Government) with a stable secretariat team to March 2024, but the position thereafter is not yet clear.
- 2.5 Nonetheless, until either at least March 2024 (depending on future funding and potential implementation of a Devo Deal in 2025), SELEP has a key role in allocating certain government funding streams (approx. £15m) across the LEP

area. It is in the interests of South Essex (and North Essex) that there is a business voice championing the area. SELEP's Assurance Framework, required by Government, requires that the federated board formally identifies the priorities of the South Essex area, and it is in our interests to ensure this continues during the interim period. It should be noted that decisions about the Federated Board structure are ultimately for the SELEP Board.

Opportunities for ASELA to take a greater role

- 2.6 Since 2020 ASELA has developed the Economic Strategy / Vision and Growth prospectus, leveraging multi-million-pound investments in key projects and engagement with businesses to deliver the key programmes of work. To deliver this work has required extensive engagement with government, supported by OSE, creating confidence in the ability of ASELA authorities to collaborate and lead on projects. Some key businesses have identified duplication of engagement between ASELA, OSE and other partnerships and it is imperative this is managed to ensure business continue to remain engaged and value engagements with Local Authorities.
- 2.7 ASELA is exploring opportunities for further / deeper collaboration between partners through refreshed themes and workstreams, and Leaders wish business to play a key part in developing the strategy, supporting delivery and championing South Essex.
- 2.8 In any arrangements, discussions and communications with OSE must be managed with sensitivity and care taken to ensure that businesses remain engaged with a role in shaping the future structures and that a smooth transition to future arrangements takes place to protect public money. Depending on the options pursued, there may also be employment implications which will require particularly careful handling and are likely to have financial implications for ASELA authorities and OSE.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 **Medium-term:** the arrangements to engage business across Greater Essex would be determined by a Combined Authority / Mayor etc in the event of a Devolution Deal, in accordance with Government policy. That should clearly include sub-regional and local arrangements, with alignment and differentiation between what is done at Greater Essex level, what is done in South Essex and each city/town. Based on current thinking, any Devolution arrangements could commence from 2025 with a transitional period ahead of that. Therefore, it is recommended that the decision about the right arrangements for South Essex in the medium term are taken later this year once the likelihood of a Devolution Deal is clearer, with businesses and Opportunity South Essex engaged as part of this process

- 3.2 A key objective should be to ensure a smooth transition to any new arrangements, to ensure existing commitments are honoured and public money is protected. This is a priority of DLUHC and SELEP.
- 3.3 **Short-term:** there is a spectrum of potential options for the interim period until the status of a Devo Deal is clearer and then potentially to run until the possible creation of a new Combined Authority in 2025, as set out below.
- ***Maintain the current relationship with OSE until any HMG acceptance of the Greater Essex devolution proposal followed by a short transition period to alternative arrangements.***

It is likely that the Greater Essex devolution proposition will be submitted in March 2023 and could be approved in autumn 2023, following which there would be a transitional period of approximately 18 months. If this was to be the case, the current arrangements could therefore be maintained until devolution is implemented (potentially 2025). ASELA authorities would continue to make their financial contributions. However, it is considered that this would not address the need for greater strategic alignment nor delivering better Value for Money.

- ***Develop a transition plan to evolve the current federated board arrangements to strengthen ASELA's engagement with OSE businesses and invite them to more closely align with the new workstreams***

OSE currently has limited direct engagement with ASELA despite complementary agendas. In areas such as economic strategy and business engagement, it is considered that ASELA might be better-placed to drive joined-up strategic activity, however OSE has an established business base which could continue to drive the primary economic growth agenda but also to add value to the refreshed workstreams where individual expertise of some companies could be a great asset to progress in some of our other strategic areas such as homes or the environment

The work of OSE could be re-directed so the member businesses are more closely involved in the development and delivery of the five new ASELA workstreams, providing the critical business voice. There is also much learning of what has worked well (and less well) as OSE has evolved over the years, which should be harnessed in the design of the long-term arrangements. .

The financial contribution made by each local authority to OSE is set out in Appendix 1. This option could release these contributions to OSE however there may be arising financial implications/liabilities which could offset this as set out in the 'financial section' below, certainly in the short term. The Joint Committee should note that investment and engagement in OSE is at the discretion of individual Local Authorities and any changes to engagement will be subject to approval through each authorities own governance processes following review of any transition plan.

- ***End current arrangements and seek to develop a federated board for Greater Essex and explore arrangements for business & skills engagement at the appropriate spatial level.***

A combined federated board for Greater Essex would offer a pragmatic interim arrangement, enabling South Essex to benefit from residual funding and also develop the Greater Essex devo conversations.

There is no HMG or SELEP assurance framework requirement to maintain two federated boards in Greater Essex, just that there should be a business voice. However, revisions to the SELEP governance documents and transition to a single Federated Board for Greater Essex would require approval of the SELEP strategic board. Development and incorporation would take approximately six months, owing to the Legal, HR, financial and operational implications.

This option risks significant work for a 12-month period, and potential confusion for business with a new single federated board sitting alongside new strategic dialogue with major businesses launched by the ECC Leader.

It should be noted that at present, ASELA does not have any specific human resources to lead and manage any business engagement. However, proposals associated with resourcing of ASELA elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting of the Joint Committee would mitigate this issue and enable the above options.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The recommendations recognises the need to ensure there is effective business engagement and the opportunity to ensure stronger business engagement in the new ASELA workstreams that Leaders are seeking, while also seeking to continue to offer opportunities for OSE members to provide input and a business voice for South Essex, minimising disruption and confusion for business, avoiding creating a new structure that would last only 1-2 years, and supporting a smooth transition.

5. Consultation (if applicable)

- 5.1 Consultation on the content of this report has been undertaken with the Chief Executives for each of the constituent ASELA local authorities, with the Chair and Director of OSE and with the Cities & Local Growth Unit in DLUHC.

6. Impact on policies, priorities, performance and community impact (if applicable)

- 6.1 N/A

7. Implications

- 7.1 **Financial** – all ASELA constituent authorities contribute to OSE as set out in Appendix 1. The preferred option could release these contributions to OSE. However, should there be implications/changes to the employment position of staff supporting OSE there may be a potential financial impact as set out in Appendix 2. Further work will be required to understand the impact and apportionment between ASELA authorities as part of more detailed consideration of the options and prior to Joint Committee making any final decision on future business engagement arrangements.
- 7.2 **Legal** – there may be legal implications arising from the potential employment issues, which would be dealt with primarily by Castle Point Borough Council on behalf of the ASELA authorities.

Engagement and funding of OSE is at the discretion of individual Local Authorities. ASELA Joint Committee can not mandate withdrawal of each Authority from OSE and as such any recommendations would be subject to execution through respective local authorities internal governance processes undertaken upon presentation of a transition plan.

7.3 Other implications (where significant)

There are no direct inclusion, diversity and community cohesion implications arising from consideration of this matter. The report primarily deals with business engagement arrangements as opposed to impacting on any individual or group.

8. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 – ASELA authority contributions to OSE
Appendix 2 – Financial implications of employment issues (exempt)

APPENDIX 1 – Current and proposed contributions to OSE

Authority	Current Annual Contribution	Proposed Contribution 2023/2024 financial year
Basildon Borough Council	£12,500	£6,250
Brentwood Borough Council	£6,750	£3,375
Castle Point Borough Council	£12,500	£6,250
Essex County Council	£25,000	£12,500
Rochford District Council	£12,500	£6,250
Southend-on-Sea City Council	£17,500	£8,750
Thurrock Council	£17,500	£8,750
Thames Estuary Growth Board	£50,000	£0
Total	£154,250	£52,125

*TEGB funding to OSE has been reduced in line with Local Authority Contributions however is subject to discussion and agreement with Thames Estuary Growth Board.

Note: Annual subscriptions vary depending on the size of the authority and level of membership, for example Brentwood Borough Council does not confer full membership rights based on the current annual subscription.

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