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South Essex Councils (SEC) - Joint Committee Meeting

Date: 06 December 2023

Time:

09.45am – 1.30pm

Venue: Brentwood Council Chamber, Brentwood Council, Ingrave Road,
Brentwood, CM15 8AY

AGENDA

Agenda Item		Lead
1.	Arrival and Refreshments – 9:30am to 10am	Leaders
2.	Apologies for Absence	Cllr Jefferies
3.	Declarations of Interest	Cllr Jefferies
4.	Minutes of Previous Meeting (28/09/2023)	Cllr Jefferies
5.	South Essex Councils: The Next Chapter Specification and Next Steps <i>Report attached</i>	Tom Walker
6.	South Essex Councils: Partnership Narrative <i>Report attached</i>	Liz Aelberry
7.	Shared Services Verbal Update	Jonathan Stephenson
8.	Finance Update Report <i>Report attached</i>	Elizabeth Helm
9.	Meeting Closure	Cllr Jefferies

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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

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

Date: Thursday, 28th September, 2023

Place: Thurrock Borough Council

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Present: Councillor A Jefferies (Chair – Thurrock BC)
Councillor A Baggott (Vice-Chair – Basildon BC)
Councillor B Aspinall – Brentwood BC
*Councillor J Newport – Rochford DC
*Councillor B Palmer – Castle Point BC
Councillor T Cox – Southend CC
Councillor L McKinlay – Essex CC

*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

In Attendance: S Logan, J Stephenson, K Sawyer, L Aelberry, R Gilbert, R Harris, A Hutchings, T Walker, D Smith and L Helm.

Start/End Time: 10.00am – 10.50am

9 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Blackwell (substitute: Cllr B Palmer), J Mason (substitute: Cllr J Newport) and K Bentley.

10 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

11 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Thursday, 27th July 2023, subject to Councillor B Aspinall to be deleted from the list of those present and added to apologies for absence and Councillor K Bentley be added to the list of those present, be confirmed as a correct record.

12 ASELA - The Next Chapter including workstream updates

(a) ASELA – The Next Chapter

The Joint Committee considered a report setting out the next phase of ASELA's development.

Resolved:

That the refreshed approach to the next phase of ASELA's development, be approved, including:

- a) Refreshing the strategy, consolidating the evidence base and revising our implementation plans, including developing investable propositions for future funding.
- b) Exploring the potential for a South Essex Growth Zone as the centrepiece of this future approach, demonstrating ambition and maximising the opportunities for funding from government and private sector.
- c) Reviewing the impact on existing workstreams, potentially integrating key elements of the Economy, Housing and Transport workstreams into a single Growth Zone programme to achieve maximum impact with constrained resources, and retaining other projects that are affordable and impactful.
- d) Identifying quick wins such as publishing principles for good growth.
- e) Exploring further sharing of resources at officer level.
- f) Engaging consultants to provide the necessary capability and capacity to achieve the above by March 2024; reallocating resources allocated to the ASELA Programme Director and Programme Officer positions which will no longer be recruited to, providing up to £100,000 to fund the commission.
- g) Putting businesses at the heart of our approach by developing new business engagement arrangements from April 2024 as set out in the accompanying report (Minute 13 below).
- h) Ensuring that the work of ASELA is effectively communicated and understood by business and public through a rebranding exercise and development of an accompanying communications strategy from April 2024 as set out in the accompanying paper below.
- i) Building on existing work within South Essex Councils to achieve the agenda set in this report.

(b) Good Homes Workstream

- The Joint Committee considered a report presenting an update on the ASELA Good Homes workstream.

Resolved:

That the report, be noted.

(c) Environment and Climate Change

- The Joint Committee considered a report presenting an update on the work of the Environment and Climate Change workstream.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.

2. That the release of 1 day FTE per calendar month per authority towards the operational work to be undertaken by the Workstream, be approved.

(d) Sustainable Transport

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The Joint Committee received a verbal update on the work of the sustainable transport workstream.

Resolved:

That the verbal update, be noted.

(e) ASELA Economy, Jobs and Skills Workstream

The Joint Committee considered a report presenting an update on the work of the Economy, Jobs and Skills workstream.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That it be confirmed that the Joint Committee is content with the key opportunities Identified in the report.
3. That the Joint Committee commit to prioritising this work for the existing officer cadre to enable individuals to effectively drive forward this work within organisations.

13 Future South Essex Business Engagement Arrangements

The Joint Committee considered a report presenting the future business engagement arrangements.

The Joint Committee emphasised the significant role of businesses and they must be at the forefront of this work.

Resolved:

1. That the Joint Committees extends its expression of thanks to the Chair and business members of OSE for their commitment to South Essex and everything that has been achieved.
2. That a further report be brought to the December 2023 meeting of the Joint Committee with proposals for future business engagement arrangements for South Essex, building on and learning from OSE, in the context of LEP transition and a potential Devolution Deal.
3. That each ASELA constituent council shall, no later than 30 December 2023, recommend through their own governance procedures that their Council ceases its financial subscription to OSE at the end of this Financial Year in line with the transfer of SELEP functions to local government.

4. That each ASELA constituent Council shall, no later than 30 December 2023, recommend through their own governance procedures that their Council indemnifies Castle Point Borough Council against all costs and liabilities arising from any redundancy arising as a consequence of resolution 3 above, in the same proportion that each constituent Council pays current OSE subscriptions (as set out in Appendix 1) provided that reasonable attempts are made to secure any outstanding OSE balances or reserves be used to offset the costs.

14 ASELA Rebrand and Communications Strategy

The Joint Committee considered a report outlining the proposal to rename ASELA to South Essex Councils (SEC) and setting out initial activity that will lead to the creation of a new communications strategy for the partnership.

The Joint Committee discussed the resources for the rebranding and new communications strategy emphasising that the costs/resources should be kept to a minimum. It was confirmed that the majority of the costs would come from within existing resources.

Resolved:

1. That the update set out in the report be noted and that the renaming of ASELA to South Essex Councils (SEC) with the tagline 'Working Together', be endorsed and the change be made with immediate effect.
2. That the development of a high-level narrative for SEC be endorsed.
3. That the plan to develop a robust communications strategy once work to consolidate the partnership's workstreams is agreed, with a view to present a draft for approval at the next Joint Committee, be noted.

15 Finance Update Report

The Joint Committee considered a report summarising the 2022/23 outturn position and the latest forecast financial position for the various programmes within SEC / ASELA.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

At the end of the meeting the Joint Committee discussed a number of aspects relating to devolution and stressed the significant importance of the role ASELA/SEC within the devolution agenda.

Chair: _____

DATE: 23rd November 2023	ITEM:
SEC Joint Committee	
Report Title: How should we <i>collectively</i> unlock greater growth and improve productivity across the region?	
Report of: Tom Walker Scott Logan	
Programme Implementation Director: Ruth Gilbert	
Accountable Programme SRO: Tom Walker	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The Next Chapter: March 2025+

We share a common ambition to unleash the full potential of South Essex , to add dynamism to our economies, cohesiveness to communities and improvement to the environment, **making South Essex Councils a sustainable, high-impact action-based partnership.**

Our commitment to this ambition drives our intent to create a Combined Authority (CA) for operation from mid 2024 (subject to a devolution deal being agreed and subsequent statutory processes). The CA will provide a vehicle to harness our expertise collectively, to increase the pace, scale and scope of our public services, for the benefit our residents and businesses- **sharing resources (including staff) to achieve more, faster, together.** The Local Enterprise Partnership functions will also pass to local government in April 2024.

Purpose of this paper

To update on the proposals for the ‘next chapter work’ following the agreement at the September meeting of South Essex Councils and request the Joint Committee’s endorsement of the draft Specification of Requirements for commissioning expert support to build and implement a mid-term (2025+) **South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan.**

To this end, on the 28th September 2023, the Joint Committee approved prudent expenditure of up to £100,000 to commission this expert practical support, to ensure that we maximise opportunities for economic growth and set up for ongoing success throughout the medium and long term.

This is about...

- Working together to ensure shared ownership and action, in the context of working towards devolution opportunities and building a single economic growth service for south Essex
- Filling gaps and using external expertise to create the right pathway to boost growth and productivity in South Essex

What this is *not*...

- Fusing our plans together or creating more strategies - instead we focus together on common ambitions, for greater impact, capacity and pace
- More data collection - we have a good evidence base
- Pushing for south to do the same as North Essex Councils, who are developing complementary but separate proposals

Context:

At the September Joint Committee meeting, Leaders and CEOs agreed to continue to deepen the south Essex joint working regardless of whether Devolution proceeds. Key referenced points agreed are:

- The 2020 Growth Prospectus holds true and is a good foundation for our future work
- We have strong foundations with the brand, SEATS/EJS/Digital programmes are delivering
- We are committed to sustaining and growing our good relationships with Homes England through the Strategic Place Partnerships
- **We should build on the successes through South Essex Councils workstreams already in place**

If devolution does not proceed, we still need to take action together, to mitigate against budget constraints and limited individual authority capacity for growing economic imperatives. **Businesses won't wait.** Dunton Hills, DP World, Thames Freeport, Ford electrification and hydrogen energy growth require us to take action now, to maximise potential for business growth and local employment opportunities, with a clear SEC service offer and cohesion for greatest impact.

1. Recommendations

1.1 Joint Committee members are asked to approve the outline Specification of Requirements for commissioning expert support to develop and implement the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan.

1.2 Outline Specification of Requirements for Commissioning

Expert guidance, recommendations, and management support, to develop and implement a South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan

A focused, time-limited consultancy commission, with the brief to develop a South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan, through which success is defined (in consultation with key local authority leaders and business community) and measurable, to ensure collectively increased, well-targeted investments in defined projects.

To include a 15+ year horizon, single economic rationale for the south Essex region (accounting for distinctions/opportunities for business and residents in Greater Essex), setting outcomes for place and people, and **answer the question of 'what should we do together to boost growth and productivity and achieve South Essex' full economic**

potential?’ In plain English, this is about creating jobs and creating *better* jobs to increase wealth.

This would build our project portfolio and delivery plan, from 2025, for at least 2 years, to include the resources and be aligned to capacity and skills required for a South Essex Economic Development/Growth Team, to be developed (as agreed previously by the Joint Committee).

Key elements of this Specification of Requirements:

1. Understanding our context

- Assess the current economic, social, and environmental conditions in south Essex.
- Consider trends, challenges, and emerging issues that may impact the region.

2. Conduct a gap analysis of our current evidence base, projects and strategies

- Building on economic intelligence from existing work, held by South Essex Councils, the County (e.g. sector development strategy) the Chamber (e.g. the Local Skills Improvement Plan) individual councils (e.g. the Southend Economic Growth Strategy) or individual assets (e.g. the Thames Freeport ambitions).
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis).

3. Identify a pipeline of projects and method for selecting them

- Consider economic development initiatives, infrastructure projects, community programmes, (appreciating some projects in progress will continue in individual local authorities). These may include projects for job creation, business growth, skilling to access better jobs and income, new housing and improving housing affordability, adoptions of technology and innovation in infrastructure and public service and improving transport/ transport links.
- Evaluate and prioritise potential initiatives based on feasibility, impact, and alignment with regional priorities/ gap analysis outcomes.
- Consider short-term and long-term goals, in particular for the post General Election period and the next Spending Review so we do not lose out on growth/funding opportunities to other parts of the country (e.g., on future Levelling Up investments, Freeports, or their equivalents).

4. Develop a detailed implementation plan with timelines, responsible parties, and performance indicators.

- Map existing resources and capacity in South Essex Councils and the optimum way of organising this resource to drive efficiencies and operate within a reducing funding envelope.
- Recommend practical capacity and structures to make a reality of this plan.
- Consider a phased approach to ensure a smooth and manageable rollout.
- Develop a financial plan outlining the budget required for implementing the initiatives.
- Explore funding sources, including public-private partnerships, government grants, and community contributions.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the South Essex Economic Action Growth Plan.
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of implemented initiatives and make adjustments as needed.

2. Progress Update- related activity

Through our current Economic, Jobs and Skills workstream we are making more immediate moves to strengthen and deepen our collaboration, to shared aims:

2.1. How do we best serve business and support business growth? Consulting business work in progress

Through the South Essex Growth Programme, South Essex Councils Economic Development Officers are working together to propose how we collectively engage and support our business community (notably with the impending transfer of SELEP powers/ Business Growth Hub in April 2024). Work is underway to commission impartial business consultation, to result in recommendations for a regional SEC service offer for business. Officers will finalise the brief shortly, to commission the business consultation December and report back on recommendations to the February 2024 Joint Committee, for implementation from April 2024+.

2.2. Working towards a collective, shared approach in 2024- sharing expertise and capacity now

With scarce resources and pressure on council budgets, there is a growing imperative to pool economic development resources and work together. We have previously discussed aspirations to create a consolidated South Essex Economic Development/Growth Team. As a potential step towards this, building and piloting arrangements, it is now proposed that each South Essex Councils member assigns a lead person to co-work.

3. Next Steps

06 th December 2023	Specification of Requirements (SoR) commission (this paper)-to Joint Committee for approval
12 th December 2023	SEC officers complete refinement of SoR (from any Joint Committee feedback) and commence market search/ invitation to tender
08 February 2024	Selection process undertaken by SEC officers, with recommendation for appointment to this consultancy commission via SEC Chiefs
22 February 2024	Joint Committee receive recommendation for appointment of party to conduct this consultancy commission- for approval

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Rationale for this commission was approved on the 28 September by the Joint Committee.

5. Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

6. Impact on policies, priorities, performance and community impact (if applicable) - N/A

7. Implications

7.1. **Financial** – The Joint Committee approved expenditure up to £100,000 to commission this expert practical support, to ensure that we maximise opportunities for economic growth and set up for ongoing success throughout the medium and long term.

7.2. **Other implications (where significant)** – N/A

8. Appendices to the report – N/A

6 December 2023	ITEM:
SEC Joint Committee	
Communications Narrative and Strategy update	
Report of: Liz Aelberry	
Programme Implementation Director: Liz Aelberry	
Accountable Programme SRO: Scott Logan	
This report is draft	

Executive Summary

At the JC meeting in September, SEC members approved the development of a communications narrative for the partnership.

A clear narrative will help us tell SECs story – setting the tone for a robust communications strategy which aligns with the partnership’s streamlined objectives.

Following a period of draft and review with comms working group members, and the informal joint committee, the final draft of the narrative is submitted for approval.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Joint Committee:

- 1.1 Approves the final version of the narrative for use by the partnership, following amends made to the draft after the informal JC meeting.
- 1.2 Notes the plan to develop a communications strategy once work to consolidate the partnership’s workstreams is agreed, with a view to present a draft for approval at the next Joint Committee in February.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 Following the renaming of the partnership to South Essex Councils (SEC) it was agreed that this presents an ideal opportunity to reset the approach to communications and engagement for the partnership – ensuring there is a robust strategy to inform and engage with relevant stakeholders.

- 2.2 This is prefaced by the development of a short communications narrative for the partnership – a clear overview of the partnership’s story which separates its identity from that of any individual member authority.
- 2.3 A communications narrative is considered best practice by the Local Government Association (LGA) in order to review and refresh communications activity. It should be simple, clear and offer clear takeaways of what the partnership is all about.
- 2.4 The communications working group were tasked with developing this narrative. The draft was reviewed at a meeting of the working group on Friday 3 November before being submitted to the Joint Committee. The final draft is included as Appendix I.
- 2.5 If approved, the narrative will set the tone for development of a communications strategy – an activity led piece which will focus on how and when the partnership will communicate with its audiences going forward.
- 2.6 It is acknowledged that the development of a communications strategy also relies on a separate proposal, presented to the Joint Committee in item ‘South Essex Councils: *The Next Chapter*’, which decommissions the partnership’s existing five workstreams and consolidates them into a singular programme for growth. This is vital to determining the partnership’s communication objectives – the foundation for a communication strategy.

3. Actions

- 3.1 Following agreement by the Joint Committee, Basildon Council’s communications team will begin work to:
 - Finalise and publish the new narrative for SEC on appropriate channels.
 - Develop a draft communications strategy for the partnership, in line with the consolidated workstream and in consultation with member authorities.

(Appendix I below)

Appendix I – SEC Narrative

South Essex Councils is an ambitious partnership of local authorities dedicated to creating opportunity and prosperity across South Essex.



We believe that South Essex is the place to live, to visit, to work and do business – and we are eager to show off our region’s possibilities.

As a region, we punch above our weight, setting our sights much higher than any one local authority can achieve alone.

We are unlocking the potential of our region, and collaboration is the key to our success.

We celebrate the unique qualities of each local area but look beyond our boundaries to the opportunities we can unlock for the region.

We present ourselves as a strong, single voice for South Essex, and that strength comes from acknowledging our diversity. From England’s city-by-the-sea, Southend on Sea, to the boutiques of Brentwood, the manufacturing strength of Basildon, the countryside of Rochford, the coastal front of Castle Point, the two ports of Thurrock and all being part of the historic county of Essex, we have it all and we want to shout about it.

We understand what is important in order for South Essex to continue to flourish. Together we are working towards improved digital infrastructure, investment in green and blue infrastructure, improved access to skills and jobs, commercial development, improved public transport, and quality housing for all. We understand that in order for us to grow as a region we need to tackle regional issues together.

Our region is a natural economic corridor – the largest in the UK outside of London – with global brands and innovative enterprises all calling South Essex home. We are home to one of only eight freeports in the country, have an international airport and are investing in improving the skills of our workforce. By committing to delivering economic growth we will deliver mutual benefits the whole region.

South Essex is a special place, alive with opportunity and a proven record for success. At South Essex Councils we firmly believe in the potential of the region, and we are harnessing our skills, energy and diversity to deliver a brighter future for the people, businesses and partners who call South Essex home.

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DATE: 6 December 2023	ITEM:
SEC Joint Committee Meeting	7
SEC 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 SEC.

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Joint Committee note the content of the report

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The budget for SEC 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. 2023/24 Current Forecast

- 3.1 The current 2023/24 forecast is a surplus of £279,000, which will bring the reserve balance to £311,000 at year end. The income and spend to date can be seen in the table below along with the corresponding forecast position for the financial year.

Income and Expenditure Summary	2023/24 Actuals £000's	2023/24 Forecast £000's
Income		
Partnership Investment (SEC authorities)	(420)	(420)
Other partners		
Homes England	(117)	(172)
Digital - National Highways	(155)	(852)
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(742)	(742)
Total Income	(1,434)	(2,186)
Programme Expenditure		
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	27	36
Full Fibre Digital	860	1,594
Infrastructure and Housing	117	172
Operating and Other Costs	0	105
Total Expenditure	1,005	1,907
In year (surplus) / deficit	(430)	(279)

SEC Reserve	2023/24 £000's
Balance brought forward	(32)
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	(279)
Balance carried forward	(311)

3.2 South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)

The legal work to establish the operating company has incurred £27,000 to date, with one final invoice anticipated to cover the final costs.

3.3 Full Fire Digital

£1.5m of work is anticipated to be completed this year on the Local Full Fibre Network, with funding from the SELEP GBF and National Highways. To date payments totalling £860,000 have been made for the works completed.

3.4 Infrastructure and Housing

Homes England agreed a variation to their grant agreement, whereby an extension to the 31st December 2023 was agreed. Spend to the end of September was £117,000, leaving £55,000 available for the October to December period.

3.5 Operating and other costs

The forecast includes £100,000 for consultancy as agreed at the last Joint Committee, along with a small allocation for ad hoc costs.

Report Author:

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

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