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

Date: Thursday, 28th September, 2023

Time: 9.30 am

Place: Thurrock Borough Council

Contact: Robert Harris

Email: committeesection@southend.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. **Leaders Only Session - 9.30am to 10am**
2. **Apologies for Absence**
3. **Declarations of Interest**
4. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 3 - 4)

To agree the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 27 July 2023.

5. **ASELA - The Next Chapter including workstream updates** (Pages 5 - 28)
 - Good Homes (Jonathan Stephenson)
 - Environment and Climate Change (Angela Hutchings)
 - Sustainable Transport (Tom Walker)
 - Economy, Skills and Jobs (Scott Logan)
6. **Future South Essex Business Engagement Arrangements** (Pages 29 - 36)
7. **ASELA Rebrand and Communications Strategy** (Pages 37 - 40)
8. **Finance Update Report** (Pages 41 - 44)

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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

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

Date: Thursday, 27th July, 2023
Place: Basildon Council Offices

4

Present: Councillor Andrew Jefferies – Thurrock
Councillor Barry Aspinall – Brentwood
Councillor Dave Blackwell – Castle Point
Councillor Meg Davidson – Southend
Councillor James Newport – Rochford

In Attendance: Scott Logan – Basildon
Robert Harris – Southend
Elizabeth Helm – Southend
Ian Butt - Castlepoint

Start/End Time: 09.30am – 09.37am

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cox (substitute: Cllr Davidson), Mason (substitute: Cllr Newport), Baggott and Bentley.

2 Appointment of the ASELA Chair and Vice Chair

Resolved:

That Councillor Andrew Jefferies be appointed Chair for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

3 Appointment of ASELA Vice Chair

Resolved:

That Councillor Andrew Baggott be appointed Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Thursday, 23rd March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 Review of Governing Documents

The Joint Committee considered a report presenting the Governing documents for review.

The Joint Committee suggested that the ASELA logo/brand should be changed to the Association of South Essex Council's (ASEC). S Logan confirmed that this would be looked at as part of the review of the Constitution and reported back to the Joint Committee in September.

The Joint Committee noted that the secretariat will write to all Leaders to seek named deputies/substitutes.

Resolved:

That the ASELA Joint Committee Governing documents, be approved and that no changes be required at this time.

6 Accountable Body - to confirm that Southend Council shall act as accountable body for the Joint Committee for the 2023/24 year

Resolved:

That it be confirmed that Southend-on-Sea City Council shall act as the accountable body for the Joint Committee for the 2023/24 year.

7 Secretariat - to confirm that Southend Council shall act as Secretariat for the Joint Committee for the 2023/24 year

Resolved:

That it be confirmed that Southend-on-Sea City Council shall act as Secretariat for the Joint Committee for the 2023/24 year.

8 Agreement of 2023/24 Joint Committee Dates

The Joint Committee noted that the dates for the remainder of the 2023/24 year will be advised in due course.

The Joint Committee suggested that future meetings alternate between the constituent authorities.

Chair: _____

DATE: 28th September 2023	ITEM:
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: ASELA: The Next Chapter	
Report of: Tom Walker, Essex County Council	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Borough Council	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

Greater Essex and South Essex in particular, are engines of economic growth. South Essex is entrepreneurial, pro-business and open for sustainable growth. Our strong partnership working and unified local leadership have enabled ASELA to achieve a significant amount so far. The economic and political circumstances are evolving, with Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) powers returning to local government from April 2024 regardless of whether devolution happens, and local government facing a tough financial outlook. Now is the right time to review our approach and deepen our collective work to effectively tackle the challenges and maximise the opportunities.

That means working with key businesses and public sector partners including Thames Freeport and Thames Estuary Growth Board to invigorate our strategy, define a robust place narrative for South Essex and develop ambitious delivery plans for a ‘South Essex Growth Zone.’ There is potential to drive economic growth and generate new high-skilled jobs, with major housing growth catered for at Dunton Hills Garden Community and West Horndon, sustainable transport connections linking current and future residents with key employment sites such as Thames Freeport, Ford Dunton and our existing business/enterprise parks completing the proposition. The key window to influence is the next Spending Review (post-General Election) when new money for regeneration, growth and economic development will be available as well as working with private sector to leverage investment to ease the constraints on public finances. Defining a pipeline of investable propositions alongside immediate quick wins, a place narrative and articulating the benefits of growth will be essential to ensuring South Essex is well-positioned to securing available investment.

To achieve this, we should also explore greater pooling of our resources, as investment in our collective capacity is 'no regrets' activity. If and when a Devolution Deal is completed, this work would plug in as part of the South Essex delivery plan.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1. The Joint Committee are asked to agree a refreshed approach to the next phase of ASELA's development, including:

- a) refreshing our 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 paper for today's meeting.
- 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 an accompanying paper for today's meeting.
- i) building on existing work within South Essex Councils to achieve the agenda set out in this paper

2. Background

2.1. We came together as seven local authorities to drive growth and prosperity in South Essex and much has been achieved in recent years, including.

- the innovative SEATS programme that will equip residents with the skills local employers need (first enrolments due to start shortly),
- laying more than 200km of full fibre connecting some 190 public and community sites to the internet.
- formalisation of the partnership with Homes England and working with Housing Associations to create new partnerships to unlock a pipeline of 5,255 homes in South Essex
- overseeing work on progressing a Joint Strategic Framework and completion of a design led toolkit to guide planning, delivery, and stewardship of major new developments.
- Deepening collaboration on matters of transport, economic growth and infrastructure, including supporting benefit realisation at Thames Freeport.

With some new Leaders following the May elections, it's clear there is a renewed high ambition for collaborative working across the functional economic area of South Essex to support a thriving economy.

- 2.2. In parallel, the Government has confirmed that the functions of Local Enterprise Partnerships (in our case, the South East LEP or SELEP) will transfer to upper tier local authorities from April 2024. These functions are primarily to develop economic and skills strategy, facilitate the voice of local business, enable various local partnerships, and potentially allocate future capital funding.
- 2.3. Government has a clear expectation that upper tier authorities covering a single functional economic area should work together in discharging these functions. Essex CC, Southend, and Thurrock councils are keen to explore what is the right spatial level for each function, and officers will be doing this with ASELA colleagues in the autumn. The resulting arrangements will need to be clearly defined and communicated to businesses in particular.
- 2.4. Moreover, while the ASELA workstreams demonstrate clear ambition and are making progress, resources are constrained which is inhibiting our ability to deliver across such a broad range of activity. The financial outlook for all our authorities means it is unlikely that significant additional resources can be made available in the short-term. We therefore need to prioritise our focus on the most impactful interventions that can be delivered within the existing resource envelope and develop propositions that have the maximum chance of securing investment from the private sector and/or central government.
- 2.5. As such it is proposed that the current workstreams focus activity and resourcing on the following activities over the coming months;
 - **Economy, Jobs and Skills:** In line with the update to be provided later in the meeting focus on delivering tactical interventions focused on four areas, namely Freeport (led by Thurrock Council), Business Support and Engagement (led by Southend City Council), Skills, including SEATS (led by Essex County Council) and Sector Development and Innovation (jointly led by Basildon Council and Essex County Council)
 - **Good Homes:** Following workshop sessions between ASELA Authorities work with Inner Circle to develop a business case for focus of the programme and how resourced once current round of Homes England funding comes to an end in the Autumn to be put to .
 - **Sustainable Transport:** Developing stronger links and a shared vision between ASELA authorities, Transport East and Rail Partners to influence key strategies including Transport East Connectivity Study, South Essex ITP's and Thameside Rail Taskforce to support sustainable connectivity and growth in South Essex.
 - **Environment and Climate Change:** Create a South Essex team of experts providing capacity and de-risking local delivery to increase uptake of local interventions, assist in bidding for / accessing funding and develop outcomes for measuring impacts. Using this expertise we will enable

creation of a South Essex 'climate action story' and vision, embedding climate action into BAU in South Essex Councils and businesses.

- 2.6. We also need to maximise use of our collective officer resource further improve effectiveness and efficiency so we can be ready to face the challenges and secure the opportunities of the coming years.
- 2.7. The refreshed approach set out in this paper provides us with the best opportunity to boost growth across South Essex through an evidence-based, integrated approach that maximises our impact and value for money.

3. Resourcing

- 3.1. Refreshing and consolidating our strategy as outlined above will require sustained focus for a period of around six months, and an approach that combines strategy and analysis with an understanding of South Essex and our work so far. This goes beyond the capability and available capacity that we have within ASELA. We therefore need to consider alternative resourcing options for the short-term while also exploring how to develop our collective capacity for the next phase.
- 3.2. In the short-term, while there is significant enthusiasm and commitment from the existing officer team, they have neither the capacity nor the capability needed. There are therefore two main options: appoint an interim individual or engage consultants. Given the challenges of recruiting to a six-month post in the current labour market, we propose seeking consultancy support. Based on similar activities the cost to deliver this work is likely to range between £50,000 and £100,000 and should be commissioned to report in six months, with a set of clear deliverables as outlined in the section below. It is proposed the selection panel for the consultancy firm comprises of representatives from Thames Freeport alongside representatives of ASELA in recognition of the role of the Freeport as a key partner of ASELA.
- 3.3. We also need to invest in our collective capacity to ensure we can deliver on our ambitions and for ASELA to play a key role as local government assumes LEP functions (and within a Devolution settlement for Greater Essex if we achieve one). We propose two actions to do this:
 - to explore how we could better share our scarce resources in future to maximise our collective impact and provide VFM at a time of financial pressure, while also providing variety and development opportunities for staff. This should build on the shared team already being formed on Economy, Jobs and Skills;
 - we have not proceeded with the proposed recruitment of an ASELA Programme Director and ASELA Programme Officers at this time in light of the evolving circumstances and the challenges of interim recruitment at the moment, but in the medium-term this role should be explored to provide senior leadership below the chief executives to shape the work programme and drive forward delivery.

3.4. Both of these need to be considered as more detail emerges of LEP transition, devolution and emerging proposals in North Essex Councils.

4. Deliverables

4.1. If Leaders agree this refreshed approach, the following outputs would be delivered:

- Consultants would be appointed to produce a place-based growth strategy and detailed implementation plan for South Essex. This work would include a clearly defined pipeline of investable propositions covering the short and long-term, an assessment of the economic benefits / impacts and a resourcing proposal to achieve these goals. The commission would be presented to the Joint Committee in around six months;
- Officers to bring forward reports to the December Joint Committee:
 - 4.1.1 identifying quick wins consistent with the emerging strategy/implementation plan;
 - 4.1.2 setting out the impact of the refreshed approach on existing workstreams;to the Joint Committee in early 2024:
 - 4.1.3 updating on options for greater sharing of resources between our authorities.

5. Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

5.1. Impact on policies, priorities, performance and community impact (if applicable) – the refreshed strategy, consolidated evidence base and revised implementation plans will be presented to the Joint Committee in due course.

6. Implications

8.1 **Financial** – Budget for commissioning consultants to develop the refreshed approach will be identified from within existing ASELA resources and/or with further support from ASELA authorities. Ongoing resource implications will be identified as part of the proposals for the next phase. Authorities have previously committed to the employment of an ASELA Programme Director and Programme Officer and in principle committed funding to support the resourcing of these posts. On the basis that these posts will no longer be recruited to it proposed ASELA authorities committed funding for these posts is redirected and no additional financial contributions are requested from ASELA Authorities at this time.

8.2 **Legal** – None at this stage.

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

9. Appendices to the report

None.

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DATE: 28th September 2023	ITEM: 5
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: Update on the ASELA Good Homes Workstream	
Report of: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Council	
Programme Implementation Director: Colin Boxall, Interim Programme Director	
Accountable Programme SRO: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Council	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The delivery of new homes is critical to support ASELA’s wider growth and prosperity ambitions. The Good Homes programme was established to both deliver ASELA’s aspirations for new homes and the joint working required to deliver the Strategic Place Partnership (SPP) with Homes England.

This briefing provides, following a period of engagement with officers and Homes England, an update on the emerging priorities and proposed arrangements for the next phase of the Good Homes Programme.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 ASELA Chief Executives are asked to note the progress.

2. Progress Update

2.1 Through the collective effort of ASELA and investment by Homes England, progress has been made across key strategic workstreams and unlocking early sites for delivery. However with council funding and capacity constraints - coupled with the funding from Homes England not being sufficient, long-term or programme specific - has meant that the step change in the pace and scale of delivery within the original proposition has not been realised.

2.3 A review of the programme has been undertaken with ASELA Authorities and Homes England over the last few months to inform the next phase of the programme. There remains strong commitment to make progress, but given

wider constraints and likely ending of the revenue support for the programme from Homes England, the emerging approach is to;

2.4 Focus on a smaller number of achievable and deliverable priorities;

- **Accelerated Pipeline:** A focused pipeline of priority sites that can realistically be accelerated – facilitating structured engagement with Homes England for portfolio funding from their existing programmes to unlock delivery and to define strategic engagement with partners (i.e. Registers Providers and developers).
- **Catalyst Sites:** Focused list of longer-term Catalyst Sites which can unlock growth. Work will focus on a coordinated partnership with Homes England to put in place the conditions to unlock delivery and leverage the funding required. This could include Dunton as part of the Growth Zone proposal.
- **Six Streets:** Roll out of the Six Streets Initiative pilot, which will through working on a 'street/place' in each borough, district and city, create scalable models for partnership and leveraging institutional investment to unlock good quality homes and thriving places. The learning from the pilot is then intended to be repeated and scaled up across South Essex and the UK.

2.5 **Create a Fit for Purpose Governance** through re-establishing the Good Homes Board, with senior representatives from all ASELA Authorities and Homes England to;

- Act as a 'Centre of Excellence' for housing delivery across South Essex to ensure it keeps pace and supports wider economic growth.
- Elevate the partnership with Homes England and leverage better outcomes.
- Identify, respond and maximise future opportunities.
- Elevate commissioning and coordination around key catalyst sites and drive immediate delivery.

3. Next Steps

- Finalisation of the draft Business Plan in September.
- Re-establish the new Good Homes Programme Board and approval of the Business Plan.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Focusing the next phase of the Good Homes Programme on a smaller number of key deliverable priorities with a fit for purpose governance, offers a strong route forward to maintain delivery of good homes that support growth,

maximise the benefit and leverage of the partnership with Homes England and capture future opportunities.

4.2 ASELA Chief Executives are therefore asked to note the progress.

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 financial implications will be set out in the business plan and in any individual programmes and projects. Any financial implications that fall on individual local councils will need to be agreed by those councils.

7.2. **Legal** – Legal implications of any projects will be set out in the project plans, and funding agreements will need the legal approval of the relevant accountable body.

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

8. Appendices to the report – N/A

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DATE: 28 September 2023	ITEM: 5
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: Update on the work of the Environment and Climate Change Workstream	
Report of: Angela Hutchings, Chief Executive, Castle Point Borough Council	
Programme Implementation Director: n/a	
Accountable Programme SRO: Angela Hutchings, Chief Executive, Castle Point Borough Council	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The Workstream is in its infancy but with aspirations to work across all activities undertaken by ASELA. There are identified quick wins and also legacy projects which have now come to fruition and need to be moved on to their next stage of development.

1. Recommendation(s)

- (1) To note the contents of this report.
- (2) To commit to the release of 1 day FTE per calendar month per authority towards the operational work to be undertaken by the Workstream.

2. Background

2.1 The strategic purpose of this Workstream is set out in Appendix One. Progress made is set out below:

Skills analysis and existing resource definition	Within 4 weeks	Partially complete – to be finalised as part of MOU
MOU creation – to create preconditions for collaboration	Within 8 weeks	To be finalised pending agreement of terms
Creation of operating model and shared repository (governance and technology)	Within 8 weeks	To be finalised as part of MOU

Identification of quick wins (low/no cost projects and agreed data sets)	Within 12 weeks	Partially complete
Creation of vision and longer term ambition	Within 12 weeks	Outstanding
Creation of pipeline of strategic projects	TBA	Outstanding

- 2.2 The Workstream group met on 7 June 2023 and representatives from ECC, Basildon BC, Rochford and Brentwood, Southend, Thurrock and Castle Point were all present. The group workshopped the MOU creation using a simple SWOT based analysis (set out in Appendix Two) and identified a number of characteristics to be captured in a vision for the Workstream and an MOU for how it would work.
- 2.3 There are two legacy projects which were inherited by this Workstream and they are:
- a) South Essex Estuary Park (SEEPARK); and
 - b) South Essex Culture & Creative Industries Strategy which was commissioned as part of the SEEPARK project.
- An update to each of these is set out in this report.

3. Resourcing

Resourcing for the Workstream

- 3.1 As per the strategic purpose set out in Appendix One, the group workshopped this theme and settled on the following which should be comprised within an MOU between all constituent authorities which would reflect the following:
- a) The Workstream should be the focal point for climate leadership and co-ordination across ASELA. It should showcase innovation, create pilots and share the learning across the patch.
 - b) But whilst the Workstream should be a catalyst for ideas/projects, these should be fed into the other Workstreams and owned by those Workstreams, with this group providing subject matter expertise.
 - c) However where there were quick wins, then these should be something the Workstream just gets on with and the constituent authorities should agree to sacrifice any intellectual property rights and share across ASELA.
 - d) The Workstream should use its collective reach across ASELA to influence internal and external stakeholders to achieve consistency of approach and take advantage of the economics of scale especially when it comes to applying for funding.
 - e) The strength of the Workstream lies in its inherent expertise and we should take time to build on this strength to create a community of best practice by each

member of the group committing one day a month to work on the development and betterment of this Workstream and its reach/impact.

- 3.2 It is important that the authorities commit to making a time commitment by releasing officers to work together on cross boundary strategic issues through a mixture of virtual and face-to-face sessions.

Resourcing for Legacy Projects

- 3.3 There are no plans for additional resourcing of the two legacy projects for the reasons set out in the body of this report.

4. Deliverables

- 4.1 The following early win projects have been identified for the Workstream:
- a) Share policies, action plans and strategies between constituent authorities, not just to share knowledge but also to achieve consistency across ASELA;
 - b) Collaborate on BNG and create an ASELA approach to its implementation – especially useful for determining the future of SEEPARK;
 - c) Collaborate on development of EV strategies through local transport plans;
 - d) Create a common resource channel e.g. through TEAMS;
 - e) Develop an ASELA wide approach to carbon literacy – so we are literally all speaking the same language about decarbonisation;
 - f) Host sessions for sharing learning and best practice which are open to other officers and councillors e.g. Passivhaus and retrofit “show homes”;
 - g) Create an ASELA template climate risk register regarding adaptations, mitigations and risk management of extreme weather; and
 - h) Build on the success of Brentwood Environmental Business Alliance (BEBA) and Rochford Environmental Business Alliance (REBA) to embed business networking/leadership across ASELA – e.g. offering carbon calculation to Small/Medium Enterprises.
- 4.2 The two legacy projects have reached their identified deliverables as per their original scope.

5. SEEPARK

- 5.1 The vision for the SEEPARK project is the assembly and creation of 24,000 ha of 5 large scale major landscapes across South Essex linked together so that there is a high quality green space within 500m of every front door or workplace by 2050. More information can be found on the ASELA website [SEEPARK | ASELA \(southessex.org.uk\)](https://www.southessex.org.uk/SEEPARK)
- 5.2 SEEPARK is, therefore, an ambitious plan to tackle climate change, ecological collapse and to level-up the region through the creative use of natural assets such as parks, woods, rivers and wetlands. The plan is the result of the South

Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure Study commissioned by ASELA and prepared by Alexandra Steed URBAN and associated partners. SEEPARK was chosen as one of 20 exemplary projects by the World Architecture Festival and was one of three shortlisted projects for the Best plan award in the East of England by the Royal Town Planning institute (RTPI).

5.2 The project is not about land assembly per se because it is not about creating a traditional park. The Business Case for the project envisages partnerships with public, private and third sector partners to deliver the vision of SEEPARK, using local plans and strategic alliances with landowners to embed that vision. It contemplates various funding alternatives for implementation, from traditional grant funding and s106/CIL contributions as well as harnessing opportunities for stewardship models which will pay, not only for the initial assembly and build but also the ongoing revenue cost of maintenance e.g.

- Health and wellbeing/ leisure and recreation;
- Ecology and environmental protection; and
- Place making i.e. to attract high value jobs, infrastructure and housing.

5.3 Further opportunity exists in the creation of SEEPARK as an investable proposition, attract funding and repay investment in the longer term e.g.

- Carbon off-setting and bio-diversity net gain (BNG);
- Green bonds;
- Eco tourism;
- Green tech employment; and
- Active travel.

5.4 The Workstream continues to explore those opportunities, most recently with Thames Estuary Growth Board (TEGB). TEGB's ambition is to enable good green growth in the Estuary by bridging gaps, working with both the private and public sector and in general to find investable propositions and bring investments to the region. In relation to BNG TEGB is aiming to understand gaps on project delivery (whether these are lack of funding, credit market readiness, access to the required skills, etc) to make sure that the projects are implemented. TEGB is also looking into this from a replicability perspective as well.

6. South Essex Culture & Creative Industries Strategy

6.1 The Strategy is designed to provide a strategic framework which will act as a catalyst to connect culture and the creative industries into the future vision for South Essex. Consultations with the cultural sector and partners have guided the focus and set out the conditions required for culture and the creative

industries to drive sustainable growth and thriving communities. The strategy has been informed by the potential for the creative cultural sector to drive the vision for South Essex fitting within the wider strategic context of the Thames Estuary Commission and Thames Estuary Production Corridor all working towards 2050 timescale and beyond.

- 6.2 The Strategy sets out how an interconnected approach to culture and the creative industries can achieve wider ambitions for growth and thriving communities. The strategy sets out clear actions under a set of core themes to positively influence everyone working in South Essex. It sets out clear and achievable goals relating to economic inclusion, environment and green spaces, health and wellbeing, housing, transport and community engagement through culture and the creative industries.
- 6.3 This piece of work having been completed it now provides a springboard opportunity for ASELA's ambitions for economic growth and skills development and will inform and shape the wider work of the Joint Committee.

7. Implications

- 7.1 **Financial** – there is an operational resourcing cost to each authority in releasing officer time to this Workstream. The cost will differ as between authorities but the amount of FTE effort should be a matter for each authority, although a commitment to at least 1FTE effort pcm will be sought as part of the MOU.
- 7.2 **Legal** – None.
- 7.3 **Other implications (where significant)** – N/A

8. Appendices to the report

Attached

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APPENDIX ONE

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSTREAM

CEO: Angela Hutchings, Castle Point BC

LEADER SPONSOR: Cllr Andy Baggott, Basildon BC

Purpose and Scope of the Workstream

1. 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](#)
2. ECAC focusses on the following:
 - * Land use, green (and blue) infrastructure, resilience
 - * Transport
 - * Built environment
 - * Energy
 - * Waste
 - * Community Engagement
 - * Business Support
3. 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.
3. At this stage, therefore, it is proposed that this workstream will:
 - a. **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.
 - b. **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

- c. **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.
- d. **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.

Interdependencies and what is out of scope

- 4. 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:
 - a. Economy, Jobs and Skills (e.g. retrofitting, green skills and business support)
 - b. Infrastructure (e.g. energy and green/blue infrastructure/biodiversity net gain)
 - c. Good Homes (e.g. net neutral development, retrofitting, waste and energy)
 - d. 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.

Resources

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.

Timetable

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

APPENDIX TWO

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject Matter Expertise • Already sharing best practice and building an informal community of experts • Can support all workstreams in ASELA because each of them has a “green” thread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience – expertise lies in the collective not necessarily in individuals • Difficult to focus on the hard to reach stuff compared to the easier wins • Not all authorities are starting from the same place
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working at scale and beyond administrative boundaries • Continuing professional education and upskilling as a collective – not just about having more people – might be about investing in more skills • Sharing best practice in a community of experts e.g. policies, action plans and strategies – only write these documents once • Expand our reach – increase our circle of experts and find the right people to have the right conversations e.g. supermarkets or flooding; set up learning opportunities for members to attend e.g. virtual learning • BEBA/REBA – business networking/leadership – replicable/scalable across ASELA – could be a quick win carbon calculation esp SMEs • EV strategies through local transport plans which will attract funding • Devolution offers greater opportunity to replicate across Greater Essex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being subsumed into the BAU; getting bogged down in delivery and missing the opportunities • Culture, education and promotion – requires comms and marketing to support the work of the Essex Commission – make sure we are all saying the same things to get the message home ONE VOICE • Political support - Understand the politics - can we be non-political in how we approach the wicked issues? Very difficult! Can we get political support to focus on the bigger impact e.g. emissions rather than single use plastics

DATE: 28th September 2023	ITEM:
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: Briefing on the ASELA Economy, Jobs and Skills Workstream	
Report of: Johnathan Cuthbertson, Essex County Council	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Borough Council	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

A stronger, more resilient economy where people have the skills to access high quality jobs is essential if South Essex Councils (SEC) is to improve prosperity across South Essex.

This paper provides an update on the short term priorities of the Economy, Jobs & Skills workstream. Following direction of the Joint Committee in March 2023 officers have investigated opportunities that exist to collaborate to help grow the South Essex economy. This is alongside work looking at the future direction of SEC.

1. Recommendation(s)

The Joint Committee are asked to note progress of the workstream and:

- (a) confirm if they are content with the key opportunities identified and provide a steer on them;
- (b) commit to prioritising this work for the existing officer cadre to enable individuals to effectively drive forward this work within organisations.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Leaders and Chief Executives recognise that the Economy, Jobs and Skills agenda in South Essex stretch beyond our respective administrative boundaries and we should seek to respond to the strategic needs of our key businesses by collaboration across the functional economic area.
- 2.2 Officers from across South Essex have been scoping a work programme, exploring the potential for collaborative working, identifying and develop propositions for the first projects to be delivered.

- 2.3 The four areas of work that the economy group has focussed on as shared in the last paper are **Freeport** (led by Thurrock Council), **Business Support and Engagement** (led by Southend City Council), **Skills, including SEATS** (led by Essex County Council) and **Sector Development and Innovation** (jointly led by Basildon Council and Essex County Council)

3 Progress and Update

- 3.1 Since inception of this work, developments in the strategic and economic landscape in both Greater Essex and nationally, including resource pressures across local government, LEP transition proposals and progress on a Greater Essex Devolution Deal have led us to refine the proposed work programme. It consists of two elements;
1. **Key interventions-** delivering shorter-term benefits to the economy. Full details of the outputs of these updates are in Appendix 1 and a summary provided below.
 2. **Building a new relationship with businesses** – a separate paper on business engagement arrangements summarises the current position. Learning from the SEATS model, a closer, more aligned relationship with business will be imperative if South Essex is to harness the growth potential.

Key interventions

- 3.2 During the remainder of 2023/24 there are opportunities to deliver a series of tactical interventions capitalising on and seeking to consolidate existing growth opportunities, these include:

3.2.1 Skills:

- Implementing and marketing of the South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) project, including ensuring the first learners commence courses shortly, with SEC having played a pivotal role in driving its establishment and continuing to play a key role as an observer of the SEATS Board, working alongside private sector partners to develop the SEATS Skills Plan;
- Ensuring a strong South Essex element to the Essex bid for the recently launched Local Skills Improvement Fund with £165m available nationally over the next two years;
- Developing a South Essex Green Skills Plan, building on an existing ECC Plan and ensuring it is tailored to the needs of South Essex businesses now and into the future.

- 3.2.2 **Thames Freeport:** Has potential to deliver growth during 2023/4. A key activity will be to gear-up residents for the creation of the first 500 jobs from new investment at London Gateway, including working with the Freeport, SEATS and the Institute of Technology to develop a 'Work Skills' programme and web portal as the first step towards a more holistic job brokerage service.

3.2.3 Business Support: As the three upper tier authorities take on responsibility for commissioning the BEST Growth Hub when LEP functions transfer from April 2024, Government's expectation is that this will continue to be commissioned at Greater Essex level. However, this change also offers the opportunity to reform the business support offer across the area. Many local authorities across Greater Essex commission their own business support services alongside the Growth Hub. We want to review the current patchwork which leads to potential duplication in some areas and gaps in others, and explore whether a single tender could provide better value for money. This could, for example, commission a standard offer across the area and also allow for a menu of options from which individual councils d/or South Essex Councils could procure additional services bespoke to the needs of their local businesses. In addition, a 'South Essex Business Expo' is earmarked for March 2024 as a key step in the new programme of engagement. A single business survey, commissioned jointly by South Essex Councils also has potential to save time and resources.

3.2.4 Sector development: There is an opportunity to grow the key sectors that will provide high-productivity, high-pay jobs into the future. We will build on the comprehensive analysis undertaken by Cambridge Econometrics that identified advanced manufacturing, digital and creative industries, med tech and green construction as critical to the future of South Essex, as set out in ECC's Sector Development Strategy. Boosting innovation and supporting SMEs to grow are also crucial. In all this, we will work to complement the strengths of the Freeport, creating the conditions to support businesses to innovate through development of collaborative R&D partnerships with an intention to stimulate more high-value start-ups.

3.2.5 Inward investment and place promotion: attracting more businesses to locate in South Essex is a priority as they bring jobs both directly and in the wider supply chain, as well as catalysing wider innovation. We will explore the potential for promoting South Essex as a location, given our proximity to London and excellent transport connections more widely, within the partnership already being built across Greater Essex under the Extraordinary Essex banner.

4 Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 We have scoped the opportunities to deliver an immediate joint programme of work in the remit of Economy, Jobs and Skills to benefit South Essex. To take this work forward it is recommended that the Joint Committee:

- (c) confirm if they are content with the key interventions listed above and provide a steer on key issues;
- (d) commit to prioritising this work for the existing officer cadre to enable individuals to effectively drive forward this work within organisations.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 There is a recognition that delivery needs to be at pace with a focus on beginning implementation this year.
- 5.2 Project Initiation Documents will be developed by each of the workstream leads following confirmation of the priority projects.

6 Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

7 Implications

- 8.1 **Financial** – Resource implications will be clearly set out in the PID for each workstream
- 8.2 **Legal** – Legal implications will be clearly set out in the PID for each workstream
- 8.3 **Other implications (where significant)** – N/A

9. Appendices to the report

None.

DATE: 28 September 2023	ITEM:
ASELA Joint Committee	
Report Title: ASELA/SEC future business engagement arrangements	
Report of: Scott Logan, Chief Executive, Basildon Borough Council and lead Chief Executive for ASELA	
Programme Implementation Director: N/A	
Accountable Programme SRO: N/A	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

A strong relationship between businesses and the public sector is critical to delivering growth and prosperity in South Essex.

Current strategic business engagement arrangements are determined by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), with Opportunity South Essex (OSE) as the federated board for South Essex. ASELA/ South Essex Councils (SEC) together provide funding which amounts to a total of £104,250 per annum to OSE. Details of the breakdown are provided in Appendix 1.

In March 2023, the Joint Committee agreed:

- a. That, the Joint Committee note the current arrangements for business engagement in South Essex, the current issues and options as set out in the report;
- b. That the Joint Committee note recent discussions between the ASELA Chair and OSE Chair and agree that further 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;
- c. That detailed proposals be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee along with a transition plan

Since that decision, the Government policy has changed and funding for Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) will cease at the end of this financial year. The policy is that LEP functions should be reviewed and as appropriate integrated into upper tier local authorities from the end of the current financial year.



Essex CC, Southend and Thurrock Councils (which are members of SELEP) are proposing a collaborative approach so that functions are exercised at the right spatial level (i.e. Greater Essex / upper tier / North or South Essex Councils).

This confirms the direction of travel set by the March 2023 Joint Committee. The Joint Committee wanted to review the arrangements to enable businesses and councils to collaborate more closely and deliver better value for money for the taxpayer, given OSE has historically operated separately to ASELA/SEC and so there had not always been clear alignment of either economic strategy or delivery.

As part of the SELEP transition plan, the key remaining task for OSE is to prioritise projects for consideration by the SELEP Board for the available Getting Building Fund monies, which was done at their meeting of 30th August 2023. The time is right, therefore, for OSE to come to an end and new arrangements to be put into place going forwards.

This report therefore proposes that there be new business engagement arrangements in South Essex from April 2024, with a closer alignment between businesses and ASELA/South Essex Councils (SEC). The proposed details of this new arrangement will be placed before the Joint Committee for agreement in December 2023.

Subscriptions paid to OSE by ASELA/SEC comprise the vast majority of the OSE budget, and so withdrawal of financial support by ASELA/SEC will have the effect that OSE ceases to exist. In order to withdraw from the OSE financial arrangements, each constituent council will need to take a decision via its own individual corporate governance but this report invites Leaders to signal their intent that this is the direction they want to pursue.

1. Recommendation(s)

The Joint Committee resolves that:

- (1) ASELA/SEC Leaders communicate an expression of thanks to the Chair and business members of OSE for their commitment to South Essex and everything that has been achieved.
- (2) 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/SEC 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/SEC 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 recommendation 3, in the same proportion that each constituent council pays current OSE subscriptions (and 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.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were set up in 2011 to identify and support local strategic growth priorities, encourage business investment, and promote economic development. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) covers East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend, and Thurrock.

2.2 In South Essex, Opportunity South Essex (OSE) acts as a federated board of the LEP and is a long-standing partnership consisting of twenty business and Local Authority members. OSE has an annual budget of £154,000 pa of which ASELA/SEC together contribute £104,250.

2.3 OSE is responsible for:

- I. **Collaboration;** playing a role in managing intelligence and coordinating actions between public and private sector member organisations to address critical issues.
- II. **Leveraging Investment;** as the federated board of the LEP, OSE prioritises and promotes projects for investment, supporting delivery of major projects in South Essex.
- III. **Influencing / lobbying/ advocacy;** providing a business voice on major issues and play a key role in championing priorities and raising/maintaining the profile of South Essex.

2.4 The upper tier authorities are constituent members of SELEP. Essex CC, Southend and Thurrock Councils are proposing a collaborative approach so that functions are exercised at the right spatial level (i.e. Greater Essex / upper tier / North or South Essex Councils).

2.5 We want business leaders and public sector leaders of Greater Essex as a whole and in South Essex to work more closely to harness our collective power around a shared set of priorities and deliver the growth we all want to see. This means setting strategy and facilitating the voice of business at the right spatial level. Subject to further work as part of LEP transition and a potential devolution deal, the current thinking is to move towards the following structure:

- Greater Essex Business Board: senior executives of major businesses and public sector leaders setting a shared vision for the Greater Essex economy, and to act as the guardians and stewards of that vision, with members becoming visible champions for Greater Essex with potential investors nationally and internationally, and with the Government;

- Sub-regional arrangements, including South Essex Business Board: major and SME business representatives collaborating with SEC on shared priorities for the functional economic area to drive growth and support communities;
- Local business groups: focusing on the local business ecosystem including individual town/city centres and high streets.

2.2 At a sub-regional level, this new structure would evolve business engagement into a new functional arrangement with a purpose that enables business and Local Government to harness collective power and collaborate on economic issues. Our intention is for this work to be undertaken in a managed, meaningful way that enables us to provide clarity on how the private and public sector in South Essex will interface going forward and for both public and private sector organisations to continue to value engagement. To that end, the proposal is likely to require ASELA/SEC councils to contribute financially to support such a new functional arrangement. A report is planned to be brought to the December 2023 meeting of the Joint Committee where the full details of a new proposal will be considered.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 There are several issues which must be considered when taking a decision relating to future business engagement arrangements:
- Providing a simple and clear arrangement which enables businesses to engage and shape the issues that matter to them is imperative.** Developing strong relationships with businesses will take time and investment and any proposed changes must reflect the views of businesses to ensure positive engagement.
 - Right spatial level:** sufficient scale to enable strategic decision-making and reflecting functional economic area(s), while also recognising the importance of local identities and business communities;
 - OSE's existing body of work,** including the allocation of residual LEP funding (e.g. Getting Building Fund) and then supporting a smooth transition. Any change will need to ensure legal commitments are met and that funded committed is not lost across partner organisations
 - Constraints on local authority withdrawal from OSE.** The OSE Terms of Reference, agreed by ASELA/SEC Authorities in 2019, stipulate that parties must *'give 12 months' notice in writing of withdrawal to other parties* and *'indemnify the remaining Parties for any expenses reasonably incurred by them as a consequence of the withdrawal.'* One of those consequences is the redundancy of the OSE Director post (1FTE). The post is hosted by Castle Point Borough Council which acts as the employer. The potential costs arising are set out in Confidential Appendix 2). The ASELA/SEC councils will, therefore, be liable as between them for those costs; it is proposed, in the proportions in which they currently subscribe to OSE. The intention is that an approach will be made to OSE to secure OSE unspent funds to mitigate those

costs. This is not something which ASELA/SEC can mandate as the OSE Board has autonomy for its funding. However any funds which remain unspent at the point at which OSE ceases to exist would be returned to the ASELA/SEC councils in the proportions in which they were contributed.

- e) **Greater Essex Devolution.** A devolution deal would result in further changes to business engagement across Greater Essex as the LEP functions would transfer to a Combined Authority. While the decisions of a Combined Authority cannot, of course, be prejudged, the outline approach above should provide sufficient clarity and flexibility to accommodate emerging needs.

3.2 Options and Recommendations

Three options are presented for consideration:

1. Each ASELA/SEC constituent council to retain the current OSE arrangements including funding after April 2024 (i.e. no change);
2. Each ASELA/SEC constituent council to withdraw support and financial contributions to OSE with effect from 31 March 2024 with a view to establishing new business engagement arrangements in South Essex from April 2024 in line with the transfer of functions from LEPs to local government - RECOMMENDED
3. Each ASELA/SEC constituent council to withdraw support and financial contributions for OSE with immediate effect.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Option 2 is identified as the recommended approach by officers. This approach will balance the political, financial, structural and operational risks outlined in section 3 above whilst responding to the key objectives set out above. It is in line with Government policy on LEP transition, allowing time for a smooth transition and for any employment implications to be managed fairly.
- 4.2 As part of this plan and recommended option, OSE would cease to exist with effect from 31 March 2024 alongside SELEP (and Success Essex – the “sister” federated board which represents the south of the county) when LEP functions formally transfer to upper tier local government. ASELA/SEC councils’ contributions to OSE would, therefore, come to an end at the end of this financial year. Whatever new arrangements are put in place going forward, will require ASELA/SEC councils to agree via their own internal corporate governance routes following on from the Joint Committee meeting in December.
- 4.3 Option 1 is not recommended. This option would leave ASELA SEC councils funding the federated board of the LEP after the point at which Government has determined that LEP functions should pass to upper tier councils. This would miss the opportunity to refresh the sub-regional arrangements in line with a new

Greater Essex approach (though this does not prevent existing OSE business members participating in the future arrangements).

- 4.4 Option 3 is not recommended. It would be unlikely to deliver ASELA/SEC councils any material advantage as compared to option 2. As the decision to withdraw financial subscriptions from OSE would require each ASELA/SEC council to take a decision in line with their own individual corporate governance arrangements, the cost saving would likely amount to only 1-2 months savings this Financial Year but with the same requirement to bear the costs of winding up.
- 4.5 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 arrangements.

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/SEC councils and with the Chair of OSE.

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

- 6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

ASELA/SEC councils contribute to OSE as set out in Appendix 1. Changes to the employment position of staff create a financial impact as set out in Confidential Appendix 2 .

Section 18 of the Opportunity South Essex Terms of Reference agreed by South Essex Councils (ASELA) in 2019 provides that withdrawal requires a minimum of 12 months' notice, during which time Local Authority and Higher Education partners would remain liable for subscription fees and any expenses incurred because of their withdrawal. OSE has cash reserves available which could be liquidated to pay costs associated with redundancy of the OSE Director Role. Any costs not covered by the reserves would require each authority to pay a share to Castle Point Borough Council in the percentages set out in Appendix 1. OSE is not obliged to utilise cash reserves to cover the cost of redundancy of the Director Post with the money pledged as subscriptions to enable the board to deliver outcomes. By engaging the OSE board as a core part of the transition processes it is likely that a positive relationship can be maintained, supporting the release of reserves.

- 7.2 **Legal** - Engagement and funding of OSE is the discretion of individual ASELA/SEC councils. The Joint Committee cannot mandate withdrawal of each constituent council from OSE and as such any recommendations would be subject execution through respective local authorities' internal governance processes.

Employment law implications arise in relation to the OSE Director role which would be dealt with primarily by Castle Point Borough Council on behalf of ASELA/SEC, subject to the indemnities required by recommendation 3.

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 – Current Financial contributions to OSE
Confidential Appendix 2 – Financial Implications and employment issues.

Appendix 1 – Current and proposed contributions to OSE

Authority	Current Annual Contribution	% Annual Contribution*
Basildon Borough Council	£12,500	12%
Brentwood Borough Council	£6,750	6%
Castle Point Borough Council	£12,500	12%
Essex County Council	£25,000	24%
Rochford District Council	£12,500	12%
Southend-on-Sea City Council	£17,500	17%
Thurrock Council	£17,500	17%
Thames Estuary Growth Board	£50,000	0
Total	£154,250	100%

*TEGB funding to OSE has been reduced to zero for current and future financial years.

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.

28 September 2023	ITEM: 7
ASELA Joint Committee	
Partnership Renaming and Communications Update	
Report of: Liz Aelberry	
Programme Implementation Director: Karen Wheeler / Liz Aelberry	
Accountable Programme SRO: Scott Logan	
This report is	

Executive Summary

This paper outlines a proposal to rename ASELA to South Essex Councils (SEC) and sets out initial activity that will lead to the creation of a new communications strategy for the partnership.

Renaming the partnership presents an opportunity to reset primary objectives and this paper aligns with the proposal to consolidate the workstreams of ASELA into a singular objective for regional growth.

The proposal centres on the launch of a clear narrative to tell ASELA's story – aligning with that streamlined objective.

This will then form the base for development of a robust strategy for communication and stakeholder engagement, which will be presented at a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

1. Recommendation(s)

That the Joint Committee:

- 1.1 Notes the update provided in this report and formally endorses the renaming of ASELA to South Essex Councils (SEC).
- 1.2 Endorses the development of a high-level narrative for SEC.
- 1.3 Notes 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.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 It is proposed to change the name of the joint committee to South Essex councils from Association of South Essex Local Authorities.
- 2.2 The renaming to South Essex Councils (SEC) would simplify the name for engagement purposes and bring it in line with similar partnerships in other regions.
- 2.3 A separate proposal, presented earlier at this Joint Committee in item '*ASELA: The Next Chapter*', decommissions the partnership's existing five workstreams and consolidates them into a singular programme for growth.
- 2.4 It is acknowledged 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. This may also include a rebranding exercise.

3. Brand and identity

- 3.1 With the proposal to rename the partnership it is acknowledged that the visual identity for SEC will need to be updated. A new logo was presented and agreed by members at the Joint Committee in March.



- 3.2 It is proposed that this now replaces all other logos. Basildon Council as the lead organisation for communications will update the website and the other social media channels. As this a replacement cost there will be minimum costs. Further work can be undertaken to evolve this brand.

4. Telling the partnership's story

- 4.1 Renaming the partnership and resetting its strategic objectives provides a key opportunity to create a clear narrative that supports what the partnership is about, and acts as an anchor for future communications and engagement activity. This is particularly important in a partnership formed of local authorities with their own identities.

- 4.2 ASELA (now SEC) has enjoyed a good profile since the partnership's inception – increasing its following on social media and delivering good news stories of the collaborative work undertaken. Recent highlights include the formation of South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) and the announcement of new higher education opportunities for local people.
- 4.3 The partnership's story is the story of South Essex – not any one of the authorities involved in the partnership. SECs story should sit above the individual ambitions and objectives of each member authority. It should be simple, clear and offer clear takeaways of what the partnership is all about.
- 4.4 In July 2022, the joint committee endorsed three points which would be those takeaways for stakeholders and prospective partners – supporting their use as a core framework for communications of and from the partnership.
- South Essex is a major economy and destination, similar in size to the West of England, North of Tyne or Tees Valley combined authority areas
 - By making more of our assets, our proximity to London and the Thames through which we are connected to the trading world, we can become one of the most prosperous regions in the UK
 - The seven councils that make up the Association of South Essex Local Authorities are working together to make South Essex the place to live, visit and do business.

These points are the key messages of the SEC story – flexible to the various programme objectives and accessible to new and existing audiences.

- 4.5 It is proposed to cement the SEC story through development of a one-page narrative for the partnership – bringing together the key messages above into a single, accessible and marketable story. This will become the anchor for all future communications.

5. Development of a communications strategy

- 5.1 Following development of a clear narrative and consolidation of the partnership's workstreams, it is proposed that a more detailed communications strategy is developed. This will lean on the new narrative and set out a clear action plan for communicating the work of the partnership and support for improved stakeholder engagement.
- 5.2 This new strategy will be developed by Basildon Council's communications team, who will continue to support communications for core partnership

activity, via the website, LinkedIn and e-newsletter.

- 5.3 The team will engage with all council Leaders through the Chair of SEC, and wider communications leads from each of the constituent authorities.
- 5.4 Relevant Cabinet portfolio holders will be included in communications and engagement activity where necessary. This will be expanded in the development of the strategy.
- 5.5 The team will aim to present a draft to the Joint Committee in November.

6. Actions

- 6.1 Following agreement by the Joint Committee, Basildon Council's communications team will begin work to:
 - Update ASELA branding to reflect the name change to SEC
 - Develop a one-page narrative for the partnership
 - Develop a draft communications strategy for the partnership, in line with the consolidated workstream and in consultation with member authorities.

7. Channels update

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 As part of the development of a new communications strategy for the partnership, the team will review these metrics and suggest appropriate measures/KPIs going forward.

<i>Channel</i>	<i>Last 3 months</i>	<i>+/-</i>
LinkedIn	33 new followers 550 total followers	+23%
Twitter	67 followers	+10%
Website	1,100 users 1,500 sessions	-8% -12%

DATE: 28 September 2023	ITEM:
ASELA Joint Committee Meeting	8
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 2022/23 outturn position and 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 Outturn position

3.1 The 2022/23 income and expenditure position for ASELA is summarised in below:

Income and Expenditure Summary	2022/23 £000's
Income	
Partnership Investment (ASELA authorities)	(420)
Other partners	
Homes England	(198)
Digital - National Highways	(48)
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(55)
Additional funding ASELA authorities	
SEATS - Essex CC	(75)
Total Income	(796)
Programme Expenditure	
SEE Park	96
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	103
Full Fibre Digital	158
Infrastructure and Housing	198
Operating and Other Costs	35
Total Expenditure	590
In year (surplus) / deficit	(206)

ASELA Reserve	2022/23 £000's
Balance brought forward	174
Non-ringfenced in year (surplus) / deficit	(226)
Ringfenced income: SE Tech Uni	20
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	(206)
Balance carried forward	(32)

3.2 The final outturn for the 2022/23 financial year was a £206,000 surplus. Of this, £52,000 relates to the work being undertaken by Pinsent Masons in relation to the South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) programme, with the costs to be incurred in the new financial year.

3.3 As a result, the reserve has moved into a £32,000 surplus position.

4. 2023/24 Current Forecast

- 4.1 The current 2023/24 forecast is a surplus of £263,000 based on the £60,000 contribution from each authority and the commitments as detailed below. As the future of the partnership is developed, a medium term forecast will be worked up.

Income and Expenditure Summary	2023/24 £000's
Income	
Partnership Investment (ASELA authorities)	(420)
Other partners	
Homes England	(172)
Digital - National Highways	(852)
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(742)
Total Income	(2,186)
Programme Expenditure	
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	52
Full Fibre Digital	1,593
Infrastructure and Housing	172
Operating and Other Costs	105
Total Expenditure	1,922
In year (surplus) / deficit	(263)

ASELA Reserve	2023/24 £000's
Balance brought forward	(32)
Non-ringfenced in year (surplus) / deficit	(263)
Ringfenced income: SE Tech Uni	0
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	(263)
Balance carried forward	(295)

4.2 South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)

Pinsent Masons continue to provide the legal expertise required to establish the operating company, with spend of £52,000 anticipated this financial year when the work is completed.

The pump priming fund secured from the Thames Freeport Governing Board will go direct to the operating company.

4.3 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 £378,000 have been made for the works completed, with another milestone having been achieved and the next tranche of payments due to be made shortly.

4.4 Infrastructure and Housing

One agreement with Homes England continues into this financial year, with £172,000 of the grant for the housing pipeline delivery work remaining from the total £250,000 awarded with an end date of 20th September 2023. Spend to the end of August was £108,000, leaving a balance of £64,000.

A request has been made to Homes England to extend the terms of the grant to 31st December 2023, whilst the agreement has been verbally agreed, we are waiting for the legal variation to the grant agreement. Any costs beyond the current agreement are incurred at risk to the partnership until the legal extension is in place.

4.5 Operating and other costs

A forecast of up to £100,000 is included for consultancy subject to the corresponding recommendation in the 'ASELA – the Next Chapter' paper earlier in the agenda. This will be financed through the funding previously ringfenced for the recruitment of the Programme Director and Programme Officer roles which are no longer planned for recruitment.

5. Medium term forecast

- 5.1 Once further detail is worked out on the next chapter of ASELA, a forecast beyond the current financial year will be developed with workstream leads.

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