



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

Date: Thursday, 28th October, 2021

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

Present: Councillor C Hossack (Chair) (Leader - Brentwood Borough Council) Councillors S Wootton (Vice-Chair) (Leader - Rochford District Council), A Baggott (Leader - Basildon Borough Council), G Butland (Cabinet Member - Essex County Council), M Coxshall (Cabinet Member - Thurrock Borough Council), I Gilbert (Leader - Southend-on-Sea Borough Council) and A Sheldon (Leader - Castle Point Borough Council)

In Attendance: P Glading (Chairman - Opportunity South Essex) (Co-Opted Member), L Carpenter (ASELA Lead Chief Executive - Thurrock Borough Council), A Horgan (Head of Governance - Castle Point Borough Council), A Hutchings (Strategic Director - Rochford District Council), A Lewis (Interim Chief Executive - Southend-on-Sea Borough Council), C Mills (ASELA Lead Chief Financial Officer - Castle Point Borough Council), S Logan (Chief Executive - Basildon Borough Council), S Summers (Chief Operating Officer - Brentwood Borough Council), S Tautz (ASELA Secretariat), A Wardle (ASELA Communications Lead) and M Whiteley (Programme Director)

Start/End Time: 10.00 am - 11.40 am

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

On the nomination of Councillor S Wootton, seconded by Councillor A Sheldon, and with the unanimous support of the Joint Committee:

Resolved:

- (1) That Councillor C Hossack be elected as Chair of the Joint Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

On the nomination of Councillor A Sheldon, seconded by Councillor A Baggott, and with the unanimous support of the Joint Committee:

Resolved:

- (2) That Councillor S Wootton be elected as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Bentley (Leader - Essex County Council) (Substitute: Councillor G Butland), A Grant (Interim Chief Executive – Castle Point Borough Council), G Jones (Chief Executive - Essex County Council) and J Stephenson (Joint Chief Executive - Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council).

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair paid tribute to the valuable contribution made to the success of the work of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) by David Marchant, the former Chief Executive of Castle Point Borough Council who had sadly passed away earlier in the year.

The Chair welcomed Leaders, councillors and officers to the first public meeting of the Joint Committee, which was also being live streamed to the internet. The Chair outlined the purpose of ASELA as a partnership of local authorities that had first come together in 2016 to collaborate on the delivery of growth and prosperity in the South Essex region.

The Chair reported that the ASELA authorities had been working together across existing local government boundaries to help deliver improved infrastructure and economic growth, through arrangements agreed as part of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 that had culminated in the submission of a Growth and Recovery Prospectus to the Government in July 2020, that set out a vision and proposition for South Essex. The Chair indicated that as the activities of ASELA had matured and moved forward, it had been necessary to establish the Joint Committee as a formal, accountable, and transparent governance arrangement for the delivery of relevant priorities.

The Chair emphasised that as part of the ASELA governance arrangements, there would be no transfer of powers currently held by any constituent local authority to the Joint Committee, in order to maintain the sovereignty of partners. Members were reminded that no decision could be taken by the Joint Committee which related to any matter in the preserve of a specific constituent authority unless that authority indicated its agreement to the proposal.

5 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH ESSEX LOCAL AUTHORITIES (ASELA) - PRIORITIES & PROGRAMMES

The Joint Committee considered a report and received a presentation from the lead Chief Executive for ASELA, with regard to the current interrelated key 'anchor' programmes that had arisen from the development of the Growth and Recovery Prospectus for South Essex in July 2020, the delivery of each of which were intended to have a positive impact for residents and business.

The Committee received an overview of the progress that had so far been achieved against each key programme and it was reported that a fuller update on current progress against each of the programmes would be made later in the meeting.

The Joint Committee was advised that South Essex was one of only two areas in the country where partnership arrangements with Homes England had been agreed to facilitate the 'unlocking' of stalled housing developments and that a report would be made to the next meeting with regard to the agreement of a Memorandum of Understanding with Homes England. The lead Chief Executive emphasised that, notwithstanding the partnership with Homes England, the planning process remained a sovereign issue for each local authority through the existing local plan processes, but that the partnership arrangement would generate resources to progress schemes where planning permission had already been agreed, but where significant infrastructure requirements had been identified.

It was reported that, alongside the key programmes, the development of interconnected strategies and delivery proposals for other aspects of the Growth and Recovery Prospectus would be considered by the Committee going forward, including future transport and mobility requirements, a joined-up active travel network and sustainable energy systems, all of which would underpin the achievement of the key programmes whilst also complementing similar work undertaken across Essex. The Committee was also advised that a Joint Strategic Plan was also to be developed to give oversight of the delivery of the ASELA key programmes.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report and presentation be noted.
- (2) That the appreciation of the Joint Committee for the work of Thurrock Borough Council on the delivery of the Thames Freeport Programme so far, be noted.

6 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH ESSEX LOCAL AUTHORITIES (ASELA) - JOINT COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Joint Committee considered a report of the lead Monitoring Officer for ASELA, with regard to matters set out within the governing documents for the Committee. Members noted that the governing documents provided for them to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the governance arrangements remained fit to support the ambitions of ASELA, and that the first review would be undertaken in February/March 2022.

It was reported that confirmation had been received from Essex County Council of its membership of the Joint Committee going forward.

Following the appointment of Opportunity South Essex as a non-voting co-opted member of the Joint Committee, the Chair formally welcomed the Chairman of Opportunity South Essex to the meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the arrangements contained in the Governing Documents for the Joint Committee as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

- (2) That Southend-on-Sea Borough Council provide secretariat to the Joint Committee until further notice.
- (3) That Castle Point Borough Council act as the Accountable Body in relation to the functions and resources of ASELA until further notice.
- (4) That Opportunity South Essex be appointed to the Joint Committee as a co-opted Member (without voting rights).
- (5) That the Joint Committee consider the possible co-option of additional member(s) (without voting rights) to membership of the Committee, to bring appropriate expertise around the Climate Change/Carbon Zero agenda.

7 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH ESSEX LOCAL AUTHORITIES - FINANCE REPORT (OCTOBER 2021)

The lead Chief Financial Officer for ASELA presented the Finance Report for October 2021, which set out the current financial position for ASELA and the key work programmes, including the budgeted income and expenditure, and provided assurance in relation to the arrangements for financial management and reporting in respect of the budget.

Members were advised that the Finance Report would be presented to each meeting of the Joint Committee, and, at the present time, there were no financial issues or concerns to be brought to the attention of the Committee.

It was reported that a reserve was maintained to manage fluctuations in spending plans between years and that, at the end of the current financial year, the balance on the reserve was forecast to be a surplus of £202,000.

The Joint Committee was advised that the current financial position of ASELA did not yet reflect its ambition that going forward, work programmes would become fully self-funded, although it was noted that programme and finance leads would seek to identify and pursue appropriate opportunities to achieve this.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That further information be circulated to the Joint Committee to provide detail of the additional funding provided by the ASELA authorities and the income received from other partners in 2021/22, as set out within the Income and Expenditure Summary of the Finance Report.
- (3) That a report be made to the next meeting of the Joint Committee with regard to the current level of impact arising from the 'South Essex No Use Empty Scheme.'

8 THAMES FREEPORT PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Joint Committee received a report setting out the progress of the Thames Freeport programme.

It was reported that, as part of the budget announcement on 27 October 2021, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had confirmed that the Thames Freeport, with tax sites at London Gateway, the Port of Tilbury and Ford in Dagenham, would be amongst the first designated freeport areas in the country, alongside Humber and Teesside, and would be able to commence initial operations from 19 November 2021.

The Joint Committee was advised that it was anticipated that an appointment as chair of the private sector board for Thames Freeport would be announced on 1 November 2021. It was also reported that the final Business Case for Thames Freeport was required to be submitted to the Government by 3 February 2022 and that it was anticipated that the completion of the business case within this timescale would be achievable with the support and resources currently provided by ASELA.

It was requested that an update on the current status of the proposed Freeport East, covering Harwich and Felixstowe, be provided to all members of the Joint Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Thames Freeport programme highlight report be noted.
- (2) That the appreciation of the Joint Committee for the work of the private sector partners leading the delivery of the Thames Freeport programme, and Thurrock Borough Council (as the lead Accountable Authority), the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and the London Borough of Havering, be noted.

9 INFRASTRUCTURE & HOUSING PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

With the agreement of the Joint Committee, consideration of this report was deferred until the meeting to be held in February 2022, to enable full consideration to be given to the implications of relevant announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as part of the budget presentation for 2022/23 and the opportunities that these presented.

10 SOUTH ESSEX ESTUARY PARK PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Joint Committee received a report setting out the progress of the South Essex Estuary Park (SEE Park) programme.

It was reported that work was progressing well on Phase 1 of the programme around the delivery of the Central Thames Marshland path in view of its relationship to the proposed Thames Freeport, which would be part of the focus of the formal launch of the SEE Park in March 2022.

The Joint Committee was advised that all partners were working collaboratively to deliver the ambitions for the SEE Park and that specific local government and private sector expertise would be called upon by the Project Team when considered necessary to support and challenge the delivery of the programme. It was reported that the SEE Park programme also had regard to the priorities of the Climate Commission to tackle the climate challenge across Essex and the 'Green

Bonds' initiative to raise funding for projects that would deliver environmental benefits.

Members were advised that branding and marketing opportunities for the SEE Park were being developed alongside a communications plan, which would be brought to the Joint Committee for consideration and requested that details of relevant actions to progress the delivery of elements of the SEE Park be reported to the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the SEE Park programme highlight report be noted.

11 FULL FIBRE DIGITAL PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Joint Committee received a report setting out the progress of the Full Fibre Digital programme.

It was reported that the rollout of a local full fibre network to public service premises (including GP Surgeries and fire stations) using Government grant funding was nearing completion and would be delivered on-time and within budget. The Joint Committee was advised that the rollout of full fibre to village halls and community centres had also commenced and was anticipated to be completed by the end of 2021/22

The Joint Committee was informed that significant investment interest had been expressed in the programme by private sector fibre operators/carriers and infrastructure providers, as a result of the success of the rollout of the local full fibre network. Members were advised that work was also being undertaken to identify coverage "Not Spots" across the South Essex region and to identify sources of funding to ensure that services could be delivered from the new fibre infrastructure.

It was requested that information around some of the local impacts arising from the delivery of the Full Fibre Digital programme, be provided to all members of the Joint Committee to demonstrate the success of the programme so far.

Resolved:

That the Full Fibre Digital programme highlight report be noted.

12 SOUTH ESSEX TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHT REPORT

The Joint Committee received a report setting out the progress of the South Essex Technical University programme.

It was reported that the Technical University was intended to go-live on a virtual basis for the first cohort of students from September 2023, although the development of a relevant curriculum was likely to present a challenge in the meantime, given that the programme was business lead, and that degree opportunities and apprenticeships would need to meet the business requirements

of the key private sector partners that were leading the programme and local employers, whilst also providing a future pipeline of relevant skills.

The Joint Committee was advised that the financial business case and procurement arrangements for the University were being developed by the Partnership Board for consideration at the next meeting. It was reported that challenges had also been identified around ensuring that schools and education providers in the most deprived wards in South Essex and the wider area, both supported and were fully engaged with the development of the Technical University and the opportunities that it presented for apprenticeship programmes for local young people and the future skills pipeline for local businesses.

Resolved:

That the South Essex Technical University programme highlight report be noted.

13 LOWER THAMES CROSSING

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair requested that a presentation be made to a future meeting with regard to the current proposals for the Lower Thames Crossing, to ensure that this was complemented by the work of ASELA and could help to support its key programmes, particularly around the Thames Freeport.