



South Essex Councils (SEC) - Joint Committee Meeting

Date: 24 February 2024

Time: 09.30am – 1.30pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, Southend City Council, Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6ER.

AGENDA

Agenda Item		Lead
1.	Leaders only session – 9:30am to 10am	Leaders
2.	Apologies for Absence	Cllr Jefferies
3.	Declarations of Interest	Cllr Jefferies
4.	Minutes of Previous Meeting (06/12/2023)	Cllr Jefferies
5.	South Essex Councils - The Next Chapter: Appointment	Tom Walker
6.	Economy, Jobs and Skills Workstream	Scott Logan/Ruth Gilbert
7.	Good Homes Workstream	Jonathan Stephenson
8.	Climate and Environment	Angela Hutchings
9.	Digital	Alan Richards
10.	Shared Services Verbal Update	Jonathan Stephenson
11.	Finance Update Report	Elizabeth Helm
12.	Meeting Closure	Cllr Jefferies

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

Date: Wednesday, 6th December, 2023

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

Present: Councillor A Jefferies (Chair – Thurrock BC)
Councillor A Baggott (Vice-Chair – Basildon BC)
Councillor B Aspinall – Brentwood BC
*Councillor T Ball – Essex CC
Councillor D Blackwell – Castle Point BC
Councillors

*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

In Attendance: L Aelberry, R. Gilbert, E Helm, A Hutchings, S Logan, J Stephenson, K Thomas, T Walker, K Waters and S Cox

Start/End Time: 10.00 am - 10.33 am

16 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Bentley (substitute: Councillor T Ball), Councillor T Cox, Councillor J Lamb, Councillor J Mason, Councillor J Newport and Councillor L McKinlay.

Apologies were also received from G Jones and D Smith.

17 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

18 Minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2023

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Thursday 28th September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

19 South Essex Councils: The Next Chapter Specification and Next Steps

The Joint Committee considered a report which provided an update on the proposals for the 'next chapter work' and the the draft Specification of Requirements for commissioning expert support to build and implement a mid-term (2025+) South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan.

Resolved:

1. That the outline Specification of Requirements for commissioning expert support to develop and implement the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan, be approved.
2. That the Vice-Chair of South Essex Councils (SEC) be involved in the consultancy commissioning and selection process.

20 South Essex Councils: Partnership Narrative

The Joint Committee considered a report which set out the communications narrative for the partnership.

Resolved:

1. That the final version of the narrative for use by the partnership, following amends made to the draft after the informal JC meeting, be approved.
2. That it be noted 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.

21 Shared Services Verbal Update

The Joint Committee received an update on shared services and agreed for a report to be referred back in the New Year for consideration and further discussion.

Officers and Leaders were requested to identify which services could potentially be shared or coproduced going forward, ahead of the next meeting scheduled for January 2024, and that previous workshop responses should feed into this.

Resolved:

1. That a report on shared services be referred to the Joint Committee in the New Year.

22 Finance Update Report

The Joint Committee considered a report summarising the 2023/24 forecast financial position for the various programmes within SEC.

The Chair requested an update on the various projects at the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

DATE: 15th February 2023	ITEM: 5	5
SEC Joint Committee		
Report Title: ‘The Next Chapter’- The appointment of consultants to develop and deliver the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan		
Report of: Tom Walker		
Programme Implementation Director: Ruth Gilbert		
Accountable Programme SRO: Tom Walker		
This report is public		

1.0 Recommendations

The SEC Joint Committee is asked to approve the appointment of Metro Dynamics and Inner Circle Consulting to jointly develop and support the delivery of the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan

2.0 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.**

2.1 Collectively unlocking greater growth and improve productivity across the region

- On the 28th September 2023, the Joint Committee approved prudent expenditure of up to £100,000 to commission expert practical support to develop and implement a South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan. This was to ensure that we maximise opportunities for economic growth and set up for ongoing success throughout the medium and long term.
- On the 6th December 2023, the SEC Joint Committee approved the specification of requirements, including:
 - Understanding our context **& gap analysis** of our current evidence base, projects, and strategies.
 - Identifying a **pipeline of projects** and method for selecting them
 - Developing a **detailed implementation plan** with timelines, responsible parties, and performance indicators- to include **project management and expert support to take the action** therein.
 - Providing **support for monitoring, evaluation,** and communication

2.2 Following an open market invitation to tender, procurement evaluation, and interview process, the interview panel unanimously recommend the joint appointment of Metro Dynamics and Inner Circle Consulting. The panel concluded that they presented a balanced ‘think/do’ partnership (in their words), with a wide breadth of specialist expertise, and experience and knowledge of working within Essex. They provided pertinent reflections on the lessons they learned from working in our region.

3.0 Summary of the procurement process

At the time of writing this report, procurement has been undertaken, with a selection process having taken place which involved South Essex officers and observation of the process and selection by Cllr Baggott.

SEC officers prepared and launched tender:	SEC officer review, December 2023
Brief on tender process for SEC Joint Committee:	Cllr Baggott briefed December 2023 (As Joint Committee representative observer)
Open market invitation to tender:	December 2023 to January 2024
Pre-interview panel scoring:	4 officers (ECC, Southend)
7 respondents to tender:	All 7 respondents interviewed 5 th February 2024
Interview panel:	Scott Logan, Tom Walker, Kevin Waters, Ruth Gilbert Observer- Cllr Baggott Procurement representative- Michael Veasey

3.1 The interview and selection process concluded with the decision to recommend that Metro Dynamics and Inner Circle Consulting be jointly appointed to develop the Action Plan. The two organisations have formed a strategic partnership under the strapline of a ‘think/do’ partnership, to provide these capabilities to SEC across the duration of the assignment from March 2024 to March 2025.

4.0 Conclusions & Next Steps

4.1 Subject to ratification by the SEC Joint Committee, and all due diligence completed, Metro Dynamics and Inner Circle Consulting (the Consulting Team) will be informed and are expected to commence work by the 7th March, with a request to meet all South Essex Leaders and Chief Executives at the earliest possible convenient date.

4.2 The key milestones for delivery of the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan (‘Plan for Action’) are:

Award Notification:	Subject to Joint Committee ratification 22/2/24
Contract start:	01/03/24
Plan for Action produced:	30/09/24
Ongoing implementation support:	01/10/24-31/03/25
Contract term End:	31/03/25

4.3 SEC officers will then support the induction and briefing of the Consulting Team in early/mid-March 2024, with ongoing engagement to input, and support for implementation of the Plan for Action, ensuring this is aligned with government guidance (published 19th December 2023) for Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) transfer of powers (from 1st April 2024, referenced further under report for Agenda items 6 & 7).

4.4 SEC officers will provide the SEC Joint Committee with an update from the 'South Essex Economic Growth Plan for Action' consultants' appointment at the next meeting on the 26 March 2024.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendation

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

6.0 Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

8.0 Implications

8.1 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.

9.0 Appendices to the report – N/A

DATE: 15th February 2023	ITEM: 6
SEC Joint Committee	
Report Title: Economy, Jobs, and Skills workstream – progress update, including the interim report on business engagement arrangements	
Report of: Scott Logan & Tom Walker	
Programme Implementation Director: Ruth Gilbert	
Accountable Programme SRO: Tom Walker	
This report is public	

1.0 Recommendations

The SEC Joint Committee is asked to note the progress being made in strengthening business engagement arrangements in South Essex and endorse the overall approach to development of the SEC Economy Jobs and Skills Workstream (EJSW). (Agenda Items 6 and 7)

2.0 Executive Summary

2.1 South Essex Councils (SEC) are committed to ensuring effective strategic and operational engagement with local businesses, to support the achievement of a range of shared goals, including (but not limited to):

- Supporting business to generate wealth, grow and create inclusive good quality employment
- Stimulating greater investment into the area
- Strengthening our key growth sectors and growing ‘future economy’ jobs
- Encouraging collaborative working on joint projects, addressing shared challenges/ market failures

2.2 Other key drivers for our collaboration include central government guidance to increase local government working across larger functional economic areas, including the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) responsibilities to Greater Essex, requiring us to now review our business growth support and engagement arrangements in the region.

2.3 Improving the join up of our economic development services will help us to successfully engage with ambitious businesses and support growth in our region- with a collective approach to support businesses and avoid duplicating or multiple approaches. The transfer of LEP functions, and a focus on growth and productivity from all main political parties nationally, also provide strong drivers to join up business board structures and business engagement activities across Greater Essex and South Essex, to create more coherent systems for working with the business community and shaping these arrangements to fit with our collective economic ambitions.

2.4 This report provides an update on key actions supporting the imperatives and commitments above, through our SEC Economy, Job, and Skills Workstream (EJSW), including:

What are we doing?	Why?	In order to...
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<p>1. Mapping current business engagement activities in Greater Essex, South Essex and individual SEC partner geographies, to inform the future model of business engagement and representation.</p> <p>2. Commissioning a study into options for future Growth Board (SME/ start up support) arrangements in South Essex, in the context of likely new arrangements for Greater Essex.</p>	<p>Better understanding the current business engagement activities, market gaps and opportunities for future engagement and collaboration by building on what already exists.</p> <p>Establishing suitable governance arrangements for engaging with business to develop the South Essex economy (with the cessation of SEC funding for Opportunity South Essex, March 2024).</p>	<p>Recommend to the SEC Joint Committee future business engagement arrangements for south Essex (26th March 2024).</p>
<p>3. Developing a ‘South Essex Economic Growth Plan for Action’</p>	<p>To ensure that we maximise opportunities for economic growth and set up for ongoing success throughout the medium and long term.</p>	<p><i>(Covered in Agenda Item 5)</i> Commission expert support to develop and implement A South Essex Economic Growth Plan (March 2024 to March 2025)</p>
<p>4. Reviewing the current SEC EJSW Action Plan to update for 2024/25</p>	<p>Ensure our existing and collective priorities for economic impact in 2024/5 are updated, aligned with the development of the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan (above)- for integration together in due course.</p>	<p>Ensure our current (2024/5) EJSW activity reflects the latest government guidance and South Essex priorities.</p> <p>Workshop planned 19th March to finalise.</p>

3.0 Progress to date

3.1 Over the last year, the SEC Economy, Job, and Skills Workstream (EJSW) has delivered a number of significant achievements, including (but not limited to):

- Establishing South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS) as a joint venture company with members comprising Ford, DP World and London Southend Airport, to broker advanced technical (STEM) training for South Essex businesses and increase job accessibility for residents.
- Securing grant funding of £810,000 of investment (over 3 years) from Thames Freeport to support the establishment of South Essex Advanced Technical Skills.
- Collaborating on the organisation of South Essex Business Expo (14th March 2024)- the first jointly delivered business event by South Essex Councils, with over 180 businesses engaged so far.

Further detail on EJSW Action Plan and progress may be found in Appendix 1

3.2 Reported to the SEC Joint Committee on the 6th December, 2023, SEC partners committed to work together to:

- **Map current business engagement activities** in Greater Essex and individual SEC authority geographies.
- **Commission a short study into options for future Business Board arrangements in South Essex** (to be funded by Opportunity South Essex residual funds) in the context of the likely arrangements for Greater Essex.
- **Review the SEC EJSW Action Plan to develop a revised Action Plan for 2024/25**, with a particular focus on developing a ‘unified growth service’- as we work towards our longer-term South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan (Agenda Item 5).

This report provides the SEC Joint Committee with an update on each of these 3 activities as follows:

3.2.1 Mapping current business engagement activities

SEC has mapped the business engagement landscape in Greater Essex, South Essex and individual SEC authority geographies, UTLAs, District, Borough and City Councils, sub-regional local authority partnerships, and private sector networks. The purpose of this mapping exercise is to produce an easily understandable 'market-map' of business engagement activities across Greater Essex, to enable this to be discussed and understood at a range of levels within partner organisations. This mapping builds on existing capabilities and structures and be used to help to inform the design of the proposed future business engagement arrangements and support the process to identify where capabilities are best sitting in the 'system' covering an analysis of existing business boards and groups, support local programmes (e.g. Business Improvement District schemes), facilities, and resources, such as business publications, social media, networks and event providers. Critically, this is shaping a 'network of networks' to ensure we capitalise on intermediaries, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses and avoid duplication.

3.2.2 Commissioning a short study into future South Essex Business Board options

Government guidance to local authorities on future business representation and local economic planning arrangements emphasises how private sector employer perspectives can enhance local economic strategies and interventions, including shaping business, trade and investment support around local business and economic needs; provide challenge and insight on business impacts of public sector initiatives; provide delivery expertise; provide market credibility; provide a strong vehicle for leveraging match funding; and help develop effective partnership projects to support growth.

In this context, the South Essex Councils are supporting the commission of a short piece of consultancy support to help develop proposals for a successor to Opportunity South Essex. Opportunity South Essex have agreed to fund this study from their reserves. It will complement the SEC Economic Growth Action Plan commission, by providing a timely insight on the Voice of Business.

3.2.3 Developing a revised 2024/25 SEC EJSW Action Plan - developing a 'unified growth service'

In line with the above requirements and recognising that the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan (for the mid/longer-term- Agenda Item 5) will be development for the next 6 months, the 2024/25 SEC EJSW Action Plan is being reviewed and updated, to ensure that we are strengthening our work on business engagement and delivering 'strategic projects' in tandem with local businesses that will draw businesses closer to us.

SEC officers have been asked to consider the current Economy, Jobs, and Skills Workstream Plan, to assess what we might do to create a more unified service offer for business. The EJSW officers will meet on the 19th March 2024 to evaluate progress and update the EJSW Action plan for March 2024 to March 2025. With respect to the updates above, this will include integrating consideration of mapping of existing business engagement, support and board arrangements in the region (completed by SEC officers, February 2024).

4.1 Next steps

SEC officers will provide the SEC Joint Committee with the following, at the next meeting on the 26 March 2024:

- 1. Recommendations (options) for the future Business Board arrangements in South Essex.**
These will factor in a collaborative approach with districts and boroughs so that business support functions (e.g. Growth Hubs and wider business engagement) are exercised at the right spatial level e.g. Greater Essex and/or North Essex/South Essex.
- 2. Updated SEC Economy, Jobs, and Skills Workstream Action Plan, 2024/5** to be brought to the Joint Committee on the 26th March for review,

5.0 Reasons for Recommendation

5.1 To fulfil agreed actions from the Joint Committee meeting on 6th December 2023

6.0 Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

8.0 Implications

9.0 Appendices to the report – Attached

Appendix 1: The SEC Economy, Job, and Skills Workstream (EJSW)

Current EJS Workstream Plan and potential Future Developments

The current (2023/24) EJS Workstream Plan contains a number of activities including:

No	Topic	Overview
1	Business Engagement	To inform future SEC business board/ engagement arrangements- built on what's already in place- recommendations to Joint Committee, March 2024
2	Thames Freeport	Ongoing work to ensure opportunities for South Essex residents' training and employment, and support business growth
3	South Essex Business Expo	14 th March, 10am to 3pm, Brentwood Centre- through collaboration with our business community and all SEC members. Over 180 businesses involved to date.
4	Growing Technical Vocational Skills (inc. Green Skills)	Capitalising on existing UKSPF and ECC funding- pooling resource and activity to maximise reach/impact to our residents and businesses (see action plan below)
5	Skills and South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATs)	<p>Following SEC investment in the setup of this training/employer brokerage with Ford, DP World, London Southend Airport, Tevva and Leonardo, we secured a new university presence in south Essex (June 2023) for STEM advanced training- Coventry University. Thames Freeport has grant funded operations in year 1, with proposals in development to support years 2 and 3. The first Apprentices through SEATS commenced on programme, at Ford, November 2023,* and a permanent Managing Director and Business Development Director have been appointed to SEATS from February 2024. The permanent team will support a community engagement programme, with residents and educators, to support local employment brokerage.</p> <p>* 39 apprentices commenced their upskilling programmes in September to October 2023, 26 Level 7 Senior Leaders and 13 Level 6 Chartered Manager staff;</p>
6	Inward Investment	Proposals in development for a collective regional 'shop front' online presence and investment promotion, with a focus in the SEC Economic Growth Action Plan to support alignment/ collective activity in 2024/5.

8	Digital (ASELA)- now South Essex Councils	Please see action plan below, referencing regional broadband infrastructure development.
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In order to review this work programme, we have consulted with the South Essex Economic Development Managers & Officers and held a workshop with partners to explore how these projects might be developed further, how we might create a more 'unified south Essex growth service' and how we might strengthen our business engagement arrangements to stimulate increased sustainable growth to support our plans to establish a south Essex Business Board. The high-level output of this EDM/EDO work to date is shown below, setting out potential future developments.

No	Priority	Case for collaboration	Resources Required
1	Strengthening Account Management of key strategic businesses	Developing relationships with those businesses most likely to help us transform the sub-regional economy. (ECC are developing their business Account Management focus) and doing this all together- sharing intelligence and joining up- will enable us to better support our key strategic businesses.	Will require investment from SEC funds. Funds distributed across partners, with standard model and aggregated data to tell a regional story
2	Strengthening our relationship with SEATS, the IoT, Colleges, GECH and Apprenticeship Levy Transfer Services to grow the SME apprenticeship market, particularly technical	We have a consistent and functional sub-regional skills provider market. Functional skills delivery is a clear sub-regional market gap, apprenticeship numbers are falling, and NEETS are on the rise. We and the Thames Freeport have invested considerable amounts of time, effort and money in establishing SEATS. For the operation to be successful in growing apprenticeship numbers, we need to maximise levy investment in South Essex, reach into the SME market and drive-up demand for apprenticeships.	SEATS to lead. Improve linkages to Apprenticeship Levy across the region. Driving up levy investment and channelling it through SEATS would allow them to make a commission on throughput, to resource leadership.
3	Deliver Regional Business Events	We have proven we can work together on delivering a few larger scale sub-regional events. We should review the effectiveness of South Essex Business Expo and explore the potential to deliver a handful of sub-regional events which bring together businesses across the region	Pooling of small amount of funding for one or two events. Partnership with business groups and networks.
4	UKSPF Green Skills collaboration	Essex, Thurrock, Castlepoint and Basildon to explore the potential of co-commissioning Green Skills provision.	UKSPF pilot investment +ECC funding/expertise
5	Strengthening our Inward investment offer and approach (including links to Thames Freeport)	We do not have a consistent inward investment offer and process for working, noting some work underway with DBT and ECC. Deal flow numbers are low. To improve the effectiveness of our work in this area, we need to review work in progress at ECC, their research base and	EJS core staff improving collaborative working, involving DBT and Thames Freeport personnel.

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		proposals for the future. We also need to consider expertise across SEC EJS officers, and how we strengthen our collaboration with Thames Freeport to explore the potential to develop a stronger regional offer on inward investment. This feeds into the 'Next Chapter' work, to establish a standard set of agreed propositions etc.	
6	Stimulating demand for the (ASELA) SEC Digital network	We have invested significant funding in establishing a regional broadband network. We stand to reap further financial benefits and reinvest in the network if we grow business use of the regional network. Develop a standard approach to working with ITS Technology Group and the Digital SEC programme, to rollout this infrastructure.	ITS & MS to lead. Growing SEC investment results in additional investment into the regional infrastructure

The EJS Workstream Plan for 2024/5 is subject to further review, culminating in a workshop with the Workstream Chair (Scott Logan) on the 19 March 2024.

↳ The conclusions from this work will influence the development of the final proposals for the EJS Workstream Plan for 2024/5 and be fed into the gap analysis and development of the South Essex Economic Growth Action Plan, to commence work with appointed consultants, from March 2024.

Appendix 2: Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions and government guidance for economic growth functions

Under the [latest national government guidance](#) (published 19th December 2023) for Local Authorities taking on LEP responsibilities from the 1 April 2024, the government has stated that it expects Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLAs) to work together to put in place suitable arrangements to deliver business representation functions, including structuring future Growth Board arrangements, putting in place suitable arrangements for delivering government programmes, overseeing local Growth Hub delivery and establishing a Board Secretariat.

This government guidance states:

*“from April 2024, government expects functions to be delivered over current or potential devolution deal geographies so far as possible.... Where multiple upper tier local authorities operate across a whole county or functional economic area, no upper tier local authority should be left out – there must be no gap in service provision across the area. **Additionally, government will not provide funding to areas that intend to deliver these functions at a lower-level geography (i.e., below whole county or functional economic area).***

*Government expects the delivery of government programmes – such as Growth Hubs and Careers Hubs – to be coterminous with the delivery of business representation and economic planning functions. This geography should be sustainable and maximise efficiency and effective service delivery as well as enhance democratic engagement. **We will not support plans that lead to a fragmentation of approach or proliferation of unsustainable support services to business”.***

The UTLAs in Greater Essex will be able to (together) bid for up to £240,000 of funding in 2024/25 to absorb LEP functions, establish arrangements for strategic business engagement and prepare a local economic plan.

Upper Tier Local Authorities are also working jointly on a LEP integration Plan to ensure that functions transfer effectively on 1 April 2024. Both SEC and Essex County Council are reviewing current business engagement activity to ensure that effective and complementary arrangements are developed for future economic growth activity.

In response to these issues, the UTLAs and SEC have made the decision to review their own future business engagement and board arrangements. Essex County Council, Southend and Thurrock Councils (as UTLAs receiving SELEP functions) have proposed a collaborative approach with districts and boroughs so that functions are exercised at the right spatial level e.g. Greater Essex and/or North Essex/South Essex.

DATE: 22nd February 2024	ITEM: 7
SEC Joint Committee (Informal Meeting)	
Report Title: Update on the ASELA Good Homes Workstream	
Report of: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Council	
Accountable Programme SRO: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Council	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

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.

There has been significant momentum in developing the Programme over recent months (supported by a refocused Business Plan and fit for purpose governance, as outlined in the 28th September update report to Joint Committee). However, the programme funding from Homes England finished at the end of last year.

This paper provides, following discussions at the Joint CEO meeting, an overview of the Good Homes Programme progress, recent discussions with Homes England around future partnership opportunities and a proposal for funding from SEC for interim programme support the next 6 months to maintain programme momentum.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 SEC Members are asked to;
 - Note the progress of the Good Homes Programme and current position;
 - Note the discussions with Homes England around future partnership opportunities;
 - Approve a funding request of £54,000 over the next 6 months to provide ongoing programme support.

2. Good Homes Programme Progress

- 2.1 SEC has been actively collaborating with Homes England since 2019, and in recognition of South Essex’s ambition, potential and the scale of the delivery

challenges faced, formed a Strategic Place Partnership (SPP) with Homes England to unlock and accelerate housing delivery across the area which will enable our growth ambitions.

- 2.2 While progress has been achieved, there have been significant challenges in putting in place the right focus, shared purpose, fit for purpose & bespoke funding commitments and effective governance around the partnership to make the step change and pace originally envisaged.
- 2.3 However last year, through close working with the SEC and Homes England, we have reviewed the approach and helped shape the next phase of the Good Homes programme – captured it a refreshed Business Plan.
- 2.4 This includes the establishment of a new officer Programme Board to act as a ‘Centre of Excellence’ for housing delivery across SEC to ensure housing delivery keeps pace and supports wider economic growth. All board members are responsible for the development of a number of programme workstreams.
- 2.5 Programme delivery is refocused on a pipeline of deliverable priority sites (which could deliver 2,400 homes in the next few years) and a targeted number of catalyst sites - which are strategic sites that could unlock significant growth but which require a infrastructure led approach, greater certainty of funding and coordination. An action plan for the 7 catalyst sites identified has been developed to demonstrate their potential impact on the region and begin to define a route for Homes England’s involvement. High level work suggests that on their own, these catalyst sites could deliver 20,000+ homes of all tenures, as well as significant social-economic benefit (including £1.1bn in local additionality, £36m in additional council tax and 35,000 construction jobs).
- 2.6 We have also been careful to maintain relationships with our Registered Providers and development partners – who remain keen to work with us on the next steps. We have also kicked off the Six Streets Pilot with all SEC council, which through working on a ‘street/place’ in each borough, will create scalable models for partnership and leveraging institutional investment to unlock good quality homes and thriving places. There is also work underway around ensuring policy alignment around housing need, infrastructure delivery, innovation, sharing knowledge/best practice and shared services.
- 2.7 There is real momentum and support to continue to deliver this programme and realise the long-term benefits. However, the Homes England funding for programme support ended in December. While the Business Plan set out a more focused programme and a framework for it to be facilitated through existing resources where possible, there remains a significant risk that the progress made will be stalled without wider programme support. Stalling of the programme will also risk make it harder to capture future support from Homes England in the future.

3. Homes England Engagement

- 3.1 The SRO and Homes England Director for the South have recently met to discuss the future of the partnership and how SEC can support them in delivering their objectives and renewed focus on place making and creating thriving places through working ever more closely with local leaders, local residents and other partners to build communities as well as housing.
- 3.2 Home England remain committed to South Essex and to finding a way of reigniting and strengthening the partnership going forward – with the aim to fully realise the original shared vision to transform housing and regeneration in the region through a programme of strategic and tactical interventions to significantly increase housing delivery rates and embed outstanding place making principles in every project.
- 3.3 A proposed key next stage to putting the partnership back on track is for SEC to political reconfirm their collective commitment to working with Homes England and supporting growth and housing delivery.
- 3.4 As such, a letter to the Chair and CEO of Homes England from the Joint Committee has been sent that reconfirms SEC commitment to the partnership and its objectives. SEC officers putting in place the framework to work with Homes England to further define the future form of our partnership, joint progress of the Business Plan going forward and secure further programme funding support.

4. Ongoing Programme Support

- 4.1 While Homes England remain committed to working with SEC, they have indicated that there will not be further revenue funding in the short term.
- 4.2 To ensure the momentum and progress behind the Good Homes Programme is maintained and to ensure we are in the best position to respond to future partnership opportunities with Homes England and the 'Next Chapter' work, it is proposed that SEC provide interim programme funding over the next 6 months (with a budget of £9k per month).
- 4.3 This would enable us to maintain:
- **Strategic Support** – continue to support work to elevate the partnership with Homes England to leverage better outcomes, feed into the 'Next Chapter' work and ensure the programme aligns with the wider SEC governance structures.
 - **Programme Governance** – continue to maintain, service and develop the Programme Board and Working Group over the period and ensure appropriate reporting.
 - **Workstream Development** – support the identified workstream leads in developing and embedding their activities over the period. This would include

a focus on the Catalyst sites and definition of their requirements to facilitate engagement with Homes England.

- **Partner Engagement** – maintain the relationship with key delivery partners, specifically the RP's and developer forum.

5. Next Steps

- Reset and elevate the strategic relationship with Homes England, putting in the framework to define future priorities, programme support and delivery framework.
- Continue to implement and deliver the Good Homes Programme Business Plan – building on recent momentum.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 Developing a renewed partnership with Homes England will be a key opportunity for future delivery of growth across South Essex.
- 6.2 Maintaining delivery of the Good Homes Programme, with its focus on a number of key deliverable and priority workstreams, overseen by a fit for purpose governance, offers a strong route forward to maintain momentum and ensure we are able to capture future opportunities.
- 6.3 ASELA Joint Committee are therefore asked to.
- Note the progress of the Good Homes Programme and current position.
 - Note the discussions and approach with Homes England around developing future partnership opportunities;
 - Approve a funding request of £54,000 over the next 6 months to provide ongoing programme support.

7. Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

9. Implications

- 9.1. **Financial** – The financial implications are set out in the report.
- 9.2. **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.
- 9.3. **Other implications (where significant) – N/A**

10. Appendices to the report

- None

DATE: 22nd February 2024	ITEM: 8
SEC Joint Committee	
Report Title: Climate & Environment Workstream Update	
Report of: Angela Hutchings	
Programme Implementation Director: n/a	
Accountable Programme SRO: Angela Hutchings	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the work of the Climate & Environment Workstream and the SEEPark project.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 To note the contents of the report; and
- 1.2 To include the monetisation of SEEPark within the scope of the Economic Growth Plan

2. Progress Update

- 2.1 This report follows on from the update report produced to the Joint Committee on 28 September 2023. Detailed background can be gleaned from that report.
- 2.2 At the meeting of 28 September 2023, the Joint Committee agreed to commit to the release of 1 day FTE per calendar month per authority towards the operational work to be undertaken by the Climate & Environment Workstream (the “Workstream”).
- 2.3 The following have been agreed as projects for the Workstream:
 - a. “Green” waste fleet options:
Reason for exploring:
 - i. Breadth of application/relevance as a statutory service waste collection is common to all SEC authorities, accepting that Essex, SCC and Thurrock have disposal duties also and that SCC is currently out to procurement and so its ability to participate may be limited
 - ii. Reducing carbon in the fleet will go a significant way to hitting net zero targets

- iii. Acknowledging that this is emerging technology and learning/funding/procurement opportunities should be shared and explored collectively

Current status:

Data on the current level of diesel use for all authorities is being collated to understand the level of consumption from each authority's vehicles. Rochford DC has now agreed to move to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), which significantly reduces carbon emissions without the need to change the engine. Data will be available soon on the carbon reduction that is being achieved and the cost implications for change. We are also gathering data on fuel storage for each authority to understand the capacity across SEC. This should be completed by the end of February. Once data is collated, we will be soft market testing the possibility of a joint procurement, driving a more competitive rate given that the HVO is a higher cost per litre. A longer term view for consideration is the modernised depots that will be needed as HVO is a medium term fix. Diesel engines will eventually be obsolete and the infrastructure for electric or hydrogen will be an issue that we would want to work on jointly.

- b. Retrofit and green skills:

Reason for exploring:

- i. Application to social housing stock as well as private sector and public buildings
- ii. Links to business and growth aspirations of SEC

Current status:

The retrofit project team has had a number of discussions around the retrofit market and what we can do to facilitate momentum/continue to build skills in the system at south Essex level. There has already been a significant piece of work between Essex County Council and the Retrofit Academy, working with the district authorities to promote free training to support PAS 2035 rollout (training Levels 2-5). There is no additional funding to support this, and discussions with DLO/contractors indicates that the need for a supply of staff resource with appropriate retrofit skills is recognised and being managed. Whilst this issue is not fully resolved, this element of green skills does appear to be building some momentum through partnership working. The "able to pay" market is potentially more challenging in terms of the ability of homeowners to make informed choices about the need for retrofit, the benefits it brings and navigating through a market which is confusing to

say the least. A number of SEC authorities are undertaking local retrofit projects, either as part of social housing decarbonisation funded projects or Passivhaus (or similar) pilots, potentially providing a physical resource to showcase the benefits of retrofit/build to green standards and dispel some of the myths. It is proposed that the retrofit workstream look to:

- Explore the opportunities available from current projects to engage with ‘able to pay’ residents as well as those who may benefit from grant funded works
- Create synergies across South Essex through a shared view of planning policy in relation to home improvements particularly, incorporating retrofit as the norm
- Learn from other schemes, e.g. Ecofurb/Parity to understand whether there is an opportunity to replicate a similar scheme within SEC

c. SEEPark and BNG:

Reason for exploring:

- i. To ensure the work undertaken by SEC in the SEEPark concept thus far is not lost or wasted
- ii. To develop thinking and gather intelligence around the application of BNG which will be relevant not just to SEEPark but to all SEC authorities

Current status: see below

2.4 The Workstream is an example of sharing specialist resource to build a community of experts who can share best practice and working together achieve more than the sum of their parts. Going forward is it intended that the Workstream will support the outcomes of the New Chapter work and the Economic Growth Plan.

3. SEEPark

Background

- 3.1 The concept of the South Essex Estuary Park (SEEPark) was conceived from a multi award-winning South Essex Green Blue Infrastructure Study, commissioned by ASELA in 2019.
- 3.2 SEEPark is not an actual “park” within the usual understanding of that word. it is a green/ blue vision which places nature at the centre of a South Essex place-based transformation journey to ensure that our unique natural environment offers place-making benefits that deliver for the region socially, environmentally and economically.

- **Socially**, by providing better access to green space, positively supporting health and wellbeing and encouraging connected active travel networks.
 - **Environmentally**, by mitigating climate change and flooding by creating adaptive landscapes, delivering 24,000 hectares of connected and protected landscapes and enhancing biodiversity.
 - **Economically**, by enabling sustainable development, increasing eco-tourism, encouraging and promoting green-tech jobs and providing private sector the opportunity to carbon-offset at scale.
- 3.3 If fully realised, SEEPark will protect, link and nurture 5 varied landscapes¹ covering 24,000 hectares across South Essex. Those areas already contain existing initiatives that are starting to deliver large scale landscape and habitat improvements but the vision is that SEEPark will connect them, thus creating:
- a) A high-quality green space within 500m of every front door or workplace, starting with new developments and re-developments
 - b) 175 km of connected walk and cycle routes, including a continuous 70km coastal path from Tilbury Fort to Shoeburyness
 - c) 2,500 hectares of enhanced park and recreational areas
 - d) 4,500 hectares of woodlands and grasslands
 - e) 7,500 hectares of marshland and wetlands
 - f) 8,500 hectares of improved agriculture and semi-natural green space
 - g) 1,000 hectares of golf courses with potential for habitat enhancement
- 3.4 A Business Case has been developed that sets out how SEEPark could be planned, co-ordinated and delivered over a large number of phases with a wide range of partners. Phases are aligned to 2030 delivery and 2050 delivery. It is no understatement to say that significant capital and revenue funding would be required. The table below provides a sample of priority grant funding sources identified by the Business Case as being available.

¹ Central Thames Marshland Pathfinder, Mardyke Valley, Brentwood Parklands, Island Wetlands, Central Arc

A Sample of Priority Grant Funding Sources Available - 2030

Costs to 2030 (£000)			
Five Major Landscapes	Landscape Enhancement Costs	Maintenance Costs	Funding Sources*
Brentwood Parklands	5,112	239	National Highways DfA Environment Trees for Climate National Lottery Communities/Heritage Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme
Mardyke Valley	1,530	30	National Highways DfA Environment Sport England Lottery Funding Trees for Climate Programme South Essex Catchment Partnership
Central Thames Marshland	8,174	426	National Highways DfA Communities Natural Environment Impact Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme EA Flood and Coastal Erosion RMS
Woodland Arc	4,335	239	National Highways Community Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme Essex Forestry Initiative National Lottery Communities Fund
Island Wetlands	7,864	511	Natural Capital for Climate Natural Environment Impact Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme EA Flood and Coastal Resilience IP
TOTAL	27,015	1,445	

A Sample of Proposed 2030 - 2050 Grant Funding Sources

Costs 2030 to 2050 (£000)			
Five Major Landscapes	Landscape Enhancement Costs	Maintenance Costs	Funding Sources*
Brentwood Parklands	15,709	1,347	Sport England Lottery, Trees for Climate, Woodland Creation Planning Grant National Lottery Communities/Heritage Grant
Mardyke Valley	27,189	1,963	National Highways DfA Environment Sport England Lottery Funding Trees for Climate Programme South Essex Catchment Partnership
Central Thames Marshland	2,725	1,543	SELEP Sector Support Fund BIFFA Award (Recreation) Essex Forestry Initiative National Lottery Communities Initiative
Woodland Arc	14,601	4,778	National Highways Community Fund Natural Environment Impact Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme Woodland Creation Planning Grant
Island Wetlands	83,086	3,866	Natural Capital for Climate Natural Environment Impact Fund DEFRA Nature Recovery Scheme EA Flood and Coastal Resilience IP
TOTAL	143,310	13,497	

*Costs are shown as overall totals for the entire period

This list is not exhaustive and only provides a sample of funding routes, they will also be subject to further approval processes.

- 3.5 The Business Case outlines a funding strategy which is broadly based on a blend of partners' core funding, grants and other external funding options including through s106/CIL contributions. The Joint Committee has long been concerned about the feasibility of funding SEEPark given the cost and the fact that in any event, the SEC authorities own less than 10% of the land holdings within the redline of SEEPark so we could never deliver this alone. Put simply, even the resource required to pursue the proposed funding strategy would be considerable.
- 3.6 The Business Case does recognise that green finance will become more and more mainstream as the market develops and therefore, the possibility that SEEPark could be developed as a source of investment income. Recent developments in Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) and opportunities arising from other green financing puts a new spin on potential funding routes for SEEPARK and elevates it from a traditional grant funded, land assembly project into something potentially game changing. See table below.

Produced at: February 2022	Valuation metric	Value to Businesses (£m)	Value to the rest of society (£m)	Total (£m)
Asset values (monetised)				
Food provision	Gross margin of arable food production	90		290
	Gross margin of livestock production	13		13
Renewable energy	Resource rent value of onshore wind energy generation	5		5
Carbon sequestration	Value of CO ₂ e sequestered by habitats		330	330
	Value of CO ₂ e emitted by livestock		(41)	(41)
Air quality regulation	Value of PM2.5 removed by woodland		379	379
Recreation	Welfare value of recreational visits		3,080	3,080
Physical health	Avoided medical treatment costs		1,670	1,670
Tourism	Expenditure by domestic overnight stays attributed to nature	1,321		1,321
Water quality	Welfare value of avoiding deterioration in lakes, transitional waters, and coastal waters		48	48
	Welfare value of avoiding deterioration in rivers		123	123
Total gross asset value	Mix of values	1,629	5,589	7,219
Asset values (non-monetised)				
Biodiversity	Total area of SSSIs: 15,968 ha			
	Total area of Local Wildlife Sites: 4,830 ha			
	Total area of Local Nature Reserves: 1,384 ha			
	Total area of The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Reserve: 1,820 ha			
	Total area of Special Protection Area: 14,222 ha			
	Total area of Special Areas of Conservation: 11,470 ha			
	Total area of RAMSAR sites: 14,222 ha			

Where we are now

3.7 The SRO for the Climate & Environment workstream has been working with Essex County Council and Thames Estuary Growth Board (TEGB), who in turn are working with a private equity investor to explore the potential for SEEPARK as an investible proposition. The market is very new and so providing assurance and clarity to potential investors is fundamental to establishing the “pitch”. To be clear, this is not about SEC authorities assembling the funds to do this ourselves, but more about us as convenors of place, creating brokerage and partnerships which will achieve the outcomes; in the same way as SEC facilitated SEATS, for example.

- 3.8 The challenge is framing SEEPARK as an investible proposition which is attractive to investors and has replicability to create a sustainable pipeline of investment and return in order to realise the ambition of SEEPARK in the long term creation, definition and stewardship of the 5 landscapes. Capitalising on carbon capture is an existing business model, but doing that for biodiversity units as well at the scale of SEEPark projects is unique. That provides huge opportunity, but is also challenging as there isn't a straightforward existing playbook to do it.
- 3.9 There is some learning to be had from the Defra Landscape Recovery Scheme² process and the work of the Essex Climate Action Commission. Equally there is learning to be derived from Essex Net Zero Innovation Futures³ which aimed to unlock public and private investment in natural capital.
- 3.10 TEGB and its private sector investor are keen to explore this further but the immaturity of the market and the lack of clarity from Government around BNG means that we are pushing at new boundaries. TEGB confirms that getting the right structure in place is vital and that there are investors looking to explore this emerging market but that we need to be influencing government to get the clarity that is needed. TEGB is working with other private organisations in the BNG space and is now positioning itself to take an estuary wide approach to the issue.
- 3.11 Put simply if SEC wants to see the promise of SEEPark realised, it is necessary to invest in the work to create SEEPARK as an investment proposition. If we cannot find a way to unlock the potential of SEEPARK, it will not happen. We can embed principles in local plan making (provided of course, that SEC authorities agree) but we cannot be dynamically proactive in bringing it to life.
- 3.12 Submitting an application to Defra's next round of LRS in 2024 is an option, but that needs seed funding itself and with no guarantee of success and will only relate to one of the 5 landscapes. Similarly, a bid for the Forest for the Nation⁴ might be possible. As part of the "Next Chapter" work for SEC, we will be working with external consultants to produce a report detailing expert guidance, recommendations, and management support, to develop and implement a South Essex Economic Growth Plan for Action and support the commencement of its implementation. The monetisation of SEEPARK should be included as part of that Economic Growth Plan to partner alongside TEGB

² [Landscape Recovery: round two - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landscape-recovery-round-two)

³

<https://admin.essexruralpartnership.org.uk/public/uploads/all/zfQZJ934YWwf4Pt9Q3Etic1iltUwQ1RoTO3tXlg0.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forest-for-the-nation-competition>

and government to develop the investment proposition and build market confidence.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The Workstream continues to self-organise and work on projects from which all SEC authorities will benefit. The Workstream remains available to undertake work commissioned by other workstreams and contact should be made via the SRO.
- 4.2 TEGB has indicated that is committed to developing the 'Green Finance Platform' which will be able to support projects like SEEPark by bringing private money to these projects in a way that creates benefits for both public and private sector. TEGB views SEEPark as potentially the first project within that 'Green Finance Platform' and we would like to partner together and find the right solution for the project to bring it into the investable position. We don't have the answer yet, but we are keen to work on this together and investigate the different options:
- a) *Government funding* – there isn't clarity currently when that funding opens up again in the election year. However, it isn't expected (currently) that the biodiversity units being created would be required for the statutory 'pot'. The project/land owners can decide how they use it.
 - b) *Private investment* – according to investors active in this space there is an appetite for these type of good project by the private sector, but it has to be at the stage of being investable. There could be ways to bring forward a seed-investment from the private sector, but it will require selecting the long term partners/investors for the scheme and creating the structure for this at this stage.
 - c) *Thames Freeport*– can the Freeport provide some private sector leadership in this space? This needs to be investigated further.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The opportunity exists to partner with TEGB to develop further certainty/ information/ clarity around green finance projects and how those can be made more mainstream such that they would create an attractive pipeline of investment opportunities. If SEC creates an investment proposition around the vision and concept of SEEPark and that forms part of its Economic Growth Plan for the sub-region, not only is there greater certainty around delivery but also around the stewardship. If we do not pursue this opportunity, SEEPark is not capable of delivery in its totality by traditional means.

6. Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

At this stage all the work of the Workstream has potential impact on policies of individual SEC authorities. If the recommendation for SEEPark is accepted, then that work will go to the heart of the Economic Growth Plan.

8. Implications

- 8.1. **Financial** – .none at this time. All work undertaken in the Workstream is in kind.
- 8.2. **Legal** – none.
- 8.3. **Other implications (where significant)** – N/A

9. Appendices to the report – Slides

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DATE: 22nd February 2024	ITEM: 9
SEC Joint Committee	
Report Title: Digital Workstream	
Report of: Carol Thomas, Digital Lead	
Programme Implementation Director:	
Accountable Programme SRO: Alan Richards, Executive Director (Environment and Place)	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 To note the progress in respect to the delivery of the South Essex Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure.
- 1.2 To note the outcomes being realised by the Local Authorities in respect to utilising the SEC Digital Infrastructure.
- 1.3 To note the progress and impending delivery of the South Essex IOT LoRaWAN Network
- 1.4 To note the current direct and indirect benefits being realised through the South Essex Digital Programme
- 1.5 To note the improvements in FTTP coverage being realised across South Essex through private sector investment.

2. Progress Update

2.1 Fibre Network Delivery

2.1.1 The ASELA Digital Programme has rolled out more than 280km of full fibre Digital Infrastructure across South Essex since August 2020. This has been funded by grants from DCMS and MHCLG totalling £7.5m, which were successfully secured by the Digital Programme. This new Digital Infrastructure links around 230 public sector sites including libraries, sheltered accomodations, schools, fire stations as well as community and village halls.

In addition to this, we have joined up what were previously isolated areas across the region with fibre backhaul links. The full fibre Digital Infrastructure is available for use at no cost to the public sector irrespective of the bandwidths delivered for a period of 15 years.

- 2.1.2 The work has progressed to time and budget and significantly raised the profile of South Essex as a result of close working with DSIT and South Essex has received very positive feedback on the project rollout.
- 2.1.3 The South Essex Digital Programme secured further grant funding from Highways England's Lower Thames Crossing project (£900K) in September 2022 with part of this funding being used to connect the Brentwood area to the rest of the region via Basildon.
- 2.1.4 The ASELA Digital Programme has secured further grant funding from SELEP (£500K) to both connect Southend to the rest of the region as well as deliver fibre connections to public buildings predominantly within Southend, which is now nearing completion with a further circa 50 sites in being enabled.

2.2. Delivery of Services on the Dark Fibre Infrastructure

- 2.2.1 South Essex Digital Programme supported Thurrock Council's wide area network (WAN) re-procurement to make use of the deployed SEC Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure to enable significantly increased bandwidths and significant cost savings. Thurrock Council WAN sites (80% of the total) are now running over the South Essex digital infrastructure.
- 2.2.2 Following a procurement and subsequent delivery which has now completed we have deployed a very cost effective and innovative solution (named the middle layer) to facilitate the delivery of an overlay internet service of 1 gigabit per second (Gbit/s) for both download and upload (ie symmetric) across the remainder of the connected public sector sites.
- 2.2.3 Following a further procurement and the award of a contract to hSO we are now in the process of delivering a 1Gbit/s internet service to public sector sites across Brentwood, Rochford, Basildon, Castle Point, Thurrock and Essex CC Libraries. It is anticipated that sites will be able to migrate over to the new service by March '24, providing tangible cost savings and service improvement.

Based on information shared by respective local authorities the following benefits should be realised:

- Savings of 50-75% in respect to current connectivity costs.
- Uplift in the connectivity currently available from in some cases below 50Mbit/s to 1Gbit/s being available to each site.
- Enhanced capability of each site to improve the delivery of public services.
- Inclusion of Essex Libraries and Essex Fire & Rescue.

We are currently working closely with all our local authority stakeholders and would wish to place on record our thanks for their contribution and support in respect to this procurement process.

2.3 South Essex IOT LoRaWAN Network

2.3.1 The South Essex Digital Programme secured funding from Highways England to deliver a South Essex Council owned IOT Long Range Wide Area Network (LoRaWAN) which will be leveraging the South Essex Digital Fibre Infrastructure and its connectivity into public sector buildings.

2.3.2 procurement has been completed and a delivery partner namely Abzorh has now been contracted to design and deliver this network.

2.3.3 Delivery of the LoRaWAN Network will commence in early February 2024 with an anticipated completion in early September 2024

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

- Support the delivery of public services through the deployment of council owned and managed sensors which will be a key component in collecting data across South Essex (environmental, transport, independent care). Workshops are being arranged with local public sector stakeholders across South Essex to identify potential needs and user cases.
- Enable South Essex to share data with other public bodies and academia which will inform future policies and strategies – environmental, transport, health.
- Enable South Essex to share data with centres of education – support local coding initiatives and promote digital skills amongst young people.
- Stimulate digital innovation and economic growth, providing local businesses with a test bed to pilot innovative ideas and solutions that can benefit communities.
- Develop opportunities to collaborate with other public sector bodies who own and operate LoRaWAN Networks including Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils in the East of England.
- Leverage opportunities to work with the likes of Highways England and the Thames Freeport
- The delivery of this network by South Essex Councils will continue to enable and support Essex CC's efforts in securing funding for future IOT/5G initiatives across the County of Essex. For South Essex this will be important as this will have a direct impact and benefit on local businesses, future 5G investment and through collaboration strengthen our strategic engagement with key stakeholders such as Highways England and the Thames Freeport.

If considered appropriate we would welcome the opportunity to undertake a presentation to elected members which would outline this project in more detail.

2.4 Direct and Indirect Benefits

2.4.1 Sheltered Housing – Wellbeing and Digital skills

The South Essex (ASELA) Digital Programme secured funding to leverage the full fibre now rolled out to all 29 Thurrock sheltered sites to address wellbeing and digital skills. A trial of the technology and its uses has been completed and all 29 sites have now been enabled. Trials involving representatives of the NHS, local Colleges and internal departments are still ongoing including utilisation of the connectivity to deliver on line interactive courses for residents, and NHS virtual messaging and communication to residents. The service is expected to be launched in the spring 2024.

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

2.4.2 Creating a Public Sector Network across South Essex

As part of the Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure project we have been able to fund the provision of fibre point to point connections between Council main offices across the SEC region allowing each council to use for their own purposes and at no cost for the next 15 years.

Outcomes to this provision could include enabling shared services and aggregation and examples of this collaboration are already starting to emerge around the delivery of Public Realm CCTV), however further work is required to make all stakeholders aware of this capability which has the potential to create one public sector network across South Essex with significant savings for SEC authorities..

2.4.3 Village Halls and Community Centres

The SEC Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure rollout has provided full fibre gigabit Connectivity to circa 20 Village Halls and Community Centres the South Essex region.

As a result of a revenue share model negotiated by the SEC Digital Programme as part of our MOU with ITS we are now funding free connectivity to all these sites for the first year. This funding will enable us working with our local council partners and Digital Essex to develop these sites as community digital hubs and focus on digital inclusion, digital skills and develop a sustainable model around creating these sites as local public service hubs.

The Social Value sites covered are as follows:

1	Ashingdon & East Hawkwell Memorial Hall	Ashingdon Road, Ashingdon	SS4 3HF
2	Bishop Hall Community Centre	Elizabeth Road, Pilgrims Hatch	CM15 9NP
3	Blackmore Village Hall	Nine Ashes Road, Blackmore	CM4 0QW
4	Hawkwell Village Hall,	Main Road, Hawkwell	SS5 4EH
5	Hockley Parish Hall,	58 Southend Road, Hockley	SS5 4QH
6	Hullbridge Community Centre,	Pooles Lane, Hullbridge, Hockley	SS5 6PA
7	Ingatestone and Fryering Community Association,	7 High Street, Ingatestone	CM4 9ED
8	Laindon Community Centre,	Aston Road, Laindon	SS15 6NX
9	Ashingdon Pavillion,	Ashingdon Road, Ashingdon	SS4 3HF
10	Mountnessing Village Hall,	Roman Road, Mountnessing	CM15 0UG
11	Rawreth Village Hall,	Church Road, Rawreth	SS11 8SH
12	Stambridge Memorial Hall,	Stambridge Road, Stambridge	SS4 2AR
13	Tipps Cross Rememberance Halle,	Blackmore Road, Doddinghurst	CM15 0DT
14	Shotgate Community Hall	7 Bruce Grove, Wickford	SS11 8QZ
15	Hockley Community Centre	Westminster Drive, Hockley	SS5 4XD
16	South Ockendon Village Hall	65, North Road, South Ockendon	RM15 6QH
17	East Tilbury Village Hall	Linford, East Tilbury	RM18 8YP
18	Essex Hackspace	Clements Hall Pavillion, Park Gardens, Hockley.	SS5 4HF

2.4.4 Business Park Investment

The Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure deployed across South Essex is now Leveraging investment from the commercial sector who are looking to extend at their own cost the fibre connectivity into poorly served business parks.

Currently the primary focus is on Basildon but this initiative is likely to be extended to other parts of South Essex in the coming year.

2.5 South Essex Fibre to The Premise (FTTP) Commercial Investment

2.5.1 Current Status of FTTP in South Essex

Area	Full Fibre coverage (%)		
	July 2021	August 2022	January 2024
England	21.9	37.7	61.46
Essex	19.5	36.5	58.81
Basildon	27.6	44	62.41
Brentwood	37.2	55	76.46
Castle Point	2.3	4.5	25.15
Rochford	8.1	33.4	60.86
Southend-on-Sea	23.7	51.5	91.38
Thurrock	13.6	48.1	76.20

Source: [Think Broadband](#)

2.5.2 Analysis

Most areas have seen coverage move from below national average to above national average (c61%). Factors in achieving this has been increased market activity thanks to a raised profile for the area due to the South Essex Digital Programme.

The South Essex Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure delivered through funding secured from DCMS (now DSIT), SELEP and Highways England has directly stimulated investment in the likes of Brentwood and Ingatestone and is now being considered as transit into Rayleigh.

South Essex has generally outperformed comparable areas, which have not seen anywhere near the level of uplift over this period. Due to the current economic uncertainty some investment plans are being deferred which may have a knock on effect in South Essex.

However, in noting the encouraging overall progress particular reference must be made to Castle Point which despite some progress is the one borough which still lags behind. Further to our most recent report in October 2023 it should be noted that Openreach have now announced a major FTTP investment for Canvey Island which is most welcomed. However, timescales for deployment are still to be confirmed. Such an investment will contribute to a significant uplift in FTTP levels for Castle Point.

Despite this Openreach announcement as a Digital Programme we will continue to work closely with Castle Point Borough Council with a view to raising the profile of the Borough and in doing so hope to attract private sector investment. As part of this approach, we are also looking to leverage the South

Essex Network as a means of providing more accessible means of transit for interested parties.

2.5.3 Not Spots

The South Essex Digital Programme has a target to achieve 100% full fibre coverage across the region by 2025 (Government target is 85% access to gigabit capable networks). The biggest issue to achieving this is likely to be in addressing 'not spots,' where businesses and residents can't get a 'decent broadband connection', defined by Ofcom as 10 Mbit/s download speed 1 Mbit/s upload speed (includes Urban as well as Rural). We continue to work with Digital Essex to raise this issue with DSIT and are continuing to explore potential funding options to make a more focused intervention.

2.5.4 Commercial Investment

To note the following FTTP commercial investment which has already been delivered, is being delivered or is planned across South Essex:

- ITS – extending the Full Fibre Digital Infrastructure into Business Parks in Basildon/Southend
- Openreach – Canvey Island, Leigh on Sea, Grays, Purfleet Wickford & Billericay
- Digital Infrastructure (Be Fibre) – Brentwood and Ingatestone
- Netomnia – Grays/Stanford Le Hope & Purfleet potentially Basildon
- Full Fibre - Wickford
- Lit Fibre – Basildon
- City Fibre – Southend, Great Wakering, Rochford and Wickford
- VMo2 – Fibre Upgrade of existing DOCIS Network by 2028

3. Next Steps

- To note the findings of this Report
- To ensure that the One Public Sector Network is promoted across South Essex with a view to supporting the shared service agenda.
- To endorse and actively support the delivery of the South Essex LoRaWAN Network

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Continuing recognition of the importance of digital connectivity and the key enabling role that it has in driving and supporting other important strategies and initiatives within South Essex including Housing, Planning, Transport, Health and the Environment



5. Consultation (if applicable) - N/A

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

7. Implications

7.1. **Financial – .**

7.2. **Legal –**

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

8. Appendices to the report – N/A

DATE: 22 February 2024	ITEM:
SEC Joint Committee Meeting	11
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. Forecast

3.1 The current forecast for 2023/24 is a £360,000 surplus, which will bring the reserve to £392,000 as per the table below.

3.2 Spend forecast for 2024/25 has been populated in the table below and will continue to be updated.

Income and Expenditure Summary	2023/24 Actuals £000's	2023/24 Forecast £000's	2024/25 Forecast £000's
Income			
Partnership Investment (SEC authorities)	(420)	(420)	(420)
Other partners			
Homes England	(166)	(166)	0
Digital - National Highways	(155)	(532)	(320)
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(742)	(742)	0
Total Income	(1,483)	(1,860)	(740)
Programme Expenditure			
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	32	33	0
Full Fibre Digital	908	1,284	320
Infrastructure and Housing	166	178	24
Operating and Other Costs	0	5	100
Total Expenditure	1,107	1,500	444
In year (surplus) / deficit	(376)	(360)	(296)

SEC Reserve	2023/24 £000's	2024/25 £00's
Balance brought forward	(32)	(392)
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	(360)	(296)
Balance carried forward	(392)	(688)

3.3 South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)

Work has been completed on setting up the operating company, with the final bill being processed. No further costs are anticipated.

3.4 Full Fire Digital

The Internet of Things (IOT) works are now anticipated to be completed at the start of 2024/25 and discussions have been had with National Highways to push the funding back into the new financial year. This results in a reduction in the forecast spend this year to £1.284M this year on the Local Full Fibre Network, which has been funded from the SELEP GBF and National Highways.

3.5 Infrastructure and Housing

The grant funding from Homes England has been fully claimed in line with the grant agreement.

Subject to approval to the earlier item, the forecast includes a commitment for £54,000 over 6 months to provide interim programme support over the next 6 months.

3.6 Operating and other costs

The forecast includes a small element of ad hoc costs, including supporting updates to the website (under £1,000) and the previously agreed £100,000 for the consultancy work.

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