



South Essex Councils Joint Committee

Date: Tuesday, 3rd December, 2024

Time: 10.00 – 12.00

Place: Brentwood Town Hall, Ingrave Rd, Brentwood, CM15 8AY

Contact: Rob Harris

Email: committeesection@southend.gov.uk

A G E N D A

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
- 2 Declarations of Interest**
- 3 Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair (Pages 3 - 4)**
- 4 Resourcing South Essex Councils (SEC) (Pages 5 - 14)**
To consider the attached report of the Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Councils.
- 5 South Essex Councils Finance Report (Pages 15 - 18)**
To consider the attached report of the lead Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer).
- 6 Date and time of future meetings**
Dates to be advised for January/February and March/April 2025.

Chair & Members:

Cllr Aspinall, Cllr Newport, Cllr Callaghan, Cllr McKinlay, Cllr Kent, Cllr Aspinell, Cllr D Blackwell, Cllr K Bentley and Cllr D Cowan

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South Essex Councils Joint Committee

Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair Procedure

A Chief Executive will chair the meeting for appointment of a chair and vice-chair.

Invite nominees to be proposed and seconded.

If there is only nominee, they would automatically be appointed.

If two nominees, then the person with the majority of votes cast would be appointed.

If there are more than two people nominated and there is not a clear majority of votes in favour of one person, then the name of the person with the least number of votes will be taken off the list and a new vote taken. The process will continue until there is a majority of votes for one person.

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South Essex Councils (SEC) Joint Committee

Report Title: Resourcing South Essex Councils

Report of: Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive, Brentwood and Rochford Councils

Programme Implementation Director: N/A

Accountable Programme SRO: N/A

This report is public

1. Executive Summary

South Essex Councils Joint Committee relies on support and resources from officers of constituent authorities dedicating their time and efforts as part of their existing roles within their own local authorities and collaborating to progress the desired outputs. Whilst this will remain a key resourcing approach of the Joint Committee, it does not provide a dedicated resource to support and represent the Joint Committee and progress its ambitions and programmes.

This paper sets out a proposal for the provision of dedicated resource for the Joint Committee.

The paper also presents the work undertaken by Inner Circle and Metro Dynamics who were commissioned in Spring 2024 to partner with South Essex Councils (SEC) to understand the issues, assess what could unlock growth and develop a Growth Action Plan, with recommendations for systems change and practical activities to tap into South Essex’s latent growth potential which can be used to guide and inform future activity but which would benefit from additional capacity to take forward.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Joint Committee are asked to agree the proposed approach in the next phase of SECs development, including:

- a) Note the findings of the South Essex Growth Action Plan and its benefits in guiding and informing the Joint Committee’s future activity (appendix 1)**
- b) Approve the recruitment to a Programme Director to provide dedicated resource and support for the SEC Joint Committee in accordance with the principles and approach set out in the report, and**
- c) Recruit an interim resource to provide immediate capacity whilst recruitment of a new Programme Director takes place.**

3. Background

South Essex is a powerful economic region with a firm growth ambition, home to nearly one million people and close to 33,000 businesses. The region has major development and growth projects larger in scale than areas that are currently the focus of national investment, for example in the North of England. With its proximity to London, extensive international transport links, and thriving sectors with high-growth potential, the region could be primed for a game-changing leap forward, to unlock good growth and innovation. As such, South Essex can and should stand out as one of the country’s focal areas of future growth.

Despite these advantages, the region is underperforming relative to its potential. Evidence points to growth rates and productivity levels well below national and regional averages, more akin to regions in the UK North and Midlands. Some residents face challenges in accessing quality employment, with traffic congestion and local services posing further barriers to economic opportunity. A positive attribute is the connectivity to jobs in the capital, yet this has given rise to a two-tier economy shown by a significant gap between resident and workplace earnings. Furthermore, major development and growth opportunities have struggled to move into delivery and impact.

Inner Circle and Metro Dynamics were commissioned in Spring 2024 to partner with South Essex Councils (SEC) to understand the issues, assess what could unlock growth and develop a Growth Action Plan, with recommendations for systems change and practical activities to tap into South Essex’s latent growth potential. The research process included desk analysis, building on SEC data and filling selective gaps in understanding. This was followed by meetings with Leaders, workshops with economic development directors, workshop with new Leaders following local and national elections, plus 1-1 meetings, business engagement and project analysis. This enabled us to develop the economic rationale and the project analysis on which the report is based.

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.

The Joint Committee is asked to note the findings of the South Essex Growth Action Plan and its benefits in guiding and informing the Joint Committee’s future activity.

4. Resourcing

At present, there is no specific dedicated resource to support the work of the SEC Joint Committee. Support for the work of SEC relies on officers from constituent authorities dedicating their time and efforts as part of their existing roles within their own local authorities and collaborating to progress the desired outputs. This will remain a key resourcing approach to ensure collaborative working.

In addition, SEC has historically commissioned the support of consultants across individual programmes who have reported to respective Chief Executive programme leads

Whilst it is acknowledged that the Government's Devolution White Paper and emergent proposals are likely to impact the role of SEC and there is therefore a degree of ambiguity at present, it is nevertheless recommended that it would be beneficial for SEC to recruit its own Programme Director

North Essex Councils (NEC) have recruited a Programme Director to support their work which it is considered has had a positive impact in progressing their Growth Plan and shared services proposals in an arguably more coherent way and this report proposes the recruitment by SEC to a very similar role which will -

- Provide enhanced capacity and capability to support SEC
- Ensure effective oversight, co-ordination, delivery, and utilisation of resources across the overall South Essex Growth Action Plan to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Enable SEC to effectively respond to, and take forward matters emerging from the Government's Devolution White Paper together with the Industrial Strategy and other emergent policies e.g. environmental, employment support, skills
- Ensure SEC is effectively represented in any Combined Authority.
- Provide capacity to develop shared service proposals across South Essex.
- Work productively and collaboratively with Essex County Council which holds many of the strategic levers
- Ensure effective governance and assurance in delivery of programmes
- A central point of focus for SEC to ensure it is effectively represented and promoted across the region and with Government

As well as providing a more effective and efficient use of resources and enhancing oversight, co-ordination and delivery, the recruitment of a Programme Director would also demonstrate a further progression of SEC in delivering the shared ambitions for South Essex and provide an enhanced approach.

A proposed outline job description for a new South Essex Councils Programme Director is set out in Appendix 2.

It is proposed that the post will be appointed to on a 2 year fixed term contract. Brentwood Brough Council have offered to lead and support the recruitment process through a recruitment agency and be the accountable body and employing body for the post.

It is proposed that the final interview panel shall comprise the following who shall make a recommendation for appointment to the Joint Committee –

- Chair and Vice-Chair of SEC
- Lead Chief Executive
- A representative of Essex County Council

In recognition of the recruitment process taking a few months and the benefits of SEC having immediate additional dedicated capacity, particularly having regard to the imminent Devolution White Paper, it is recommended that an interim resource be secured by the Lead Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of SEC, and representative of Essex County Council.

5. Consultation (if applicable)

Consultation on the content of this report has been undertaken with the Chief Executives for each of the constituent SEC local authorities.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial – The agenda for this same meeting of the Joint Committee includes an update on the financial position of SEC and identifies that there is sufficient resource in the Joint Committee’s current and future budget. Each constituent authority contributes £60k per annum to support the work of the Joint Committee.

The use of a recruitment agency to be procured by Brentwood Council on behalf of SEC will incur costs of circa £10k and an interim resource, depending on the time they were secured for, circa £70k.

The proposed fixed term Programme Director, with on-costs, would have a financial implication of circa £150k per annum over a 2 year period.

6.2 **Legal** – The proposals set out in this report accord with the governing documents of the Joint Committee.

6.3 **Other implications** (where significant)

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

7. **Options**

The Joint Committee have the option of not approving the recruitment of a specific dedicated resource to lead its work, or seeking alternative support as considered appropriate. However, the commissioning and management of such support will still rely on the limited capacity of Chief Executive's and officers in constituent authorities to implement.

8. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A - South Essex Growth Action Plan – findings from the Inner Circle and Metro Dynamics Commission
- Appendix B - SEC Programme Director – Proposed Job Profile.

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Job profile

Job title	South Essex Councils Programme Director
Directorate	Chief Executives Office
Responsible to	South Essex Councils Joint Committee
Accountable Local Authority	Brentwood Borough Council
Grade/Salary	Circa £115k
Key Liaison with	SEC Joint Committee, Leader and Chief Executives, Thames Estuary Growth Board, Government Departments and Agencies
Job purpose	To lead and manage delivery of the South Essex Vision 2050 and specifically delivery of the South Essex Growth Plan and key deliverables as defined by the SEC Joint Committee.
Job profile drafted	November 2024

Overview

The councils of Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock and Essex County have formed the South Essex Councils (SEC).

Through SEC they are working to deliver improved prosperity and wellbeing in the region by:

- tackling problems that members councils can't solve individually
- creating collective scale and impact
- providing the place leadership to promote South Essex.

Each partner council contributes resources to the SEC programmes and together they work to win new investment for the region from central government, the private sector and public partners.

The partnership began in June 2016 and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in January 2018. In October 2021 the seven councils agreed to form a Joint Committee.

Key accountabilities and deliverables

1. Overall responsibility for management of SEC's programme and the implementation and delivery of workstream outputs as defined by the Joint Committee, working closely with Member and Chief Executive programme sponsors.
2. Support SEC to effectively respond to, and take forward matters emerging from the Government's Devolution Agenda together with the Industrial Strategy and other emergent policies e.g. environmental, employment support, skills.
3. Ensure SEC is effectively represented in any Combined Authority.
4. Co-ordinate and develop shared service proposals across South Essex.
5. Work productively and collaboratively with Essex County Council to ensure SEC can utilise the strategic levers in delivering its ambitions i.e. employment support, skills, highways)
6. Represent and promote SEC with partners locally, across the region and with Government
7. Responsible for effective leadership and management of SEC's physical and financial resources
8. Development and implementation of a governance and assurance framework for consistent application across all SEC's activities
9. Regular reporting of progress against the programmes and deliverables to the Joint Committee and SEC Scrutiny Committee.
10. Liaison with external bodies and government departments to promote South Essex Vision and support delivery of the programmes and key deliverables.
11. Lead the identification of potential investment opportunities
12. Lead advisor to the Joint Committee
13. Manage and co-ordinate the secretariat to the Joint Committee and accountable body services provided through agreed constituent authorities.
14. Working closely with the communications network to promote South Essex and the work of SEC including working with Thames Estuary Growth board, Thames Freeport Governing board, Essex County Council and other strategic interventions/partnerships across the South Essex Region.

Person specification

Job title	South Essex Councils Programme Director
Directorate	Chief Executives Office

Information for applicants

The person specification provides an outline of the experience, skills and abilities we expect the successful applicant to possess. You should match your own skills, experience, and abilities to those listed below. Tell us in what way you have carried out the criteria asked for.

Disabled people will be offered an interview where they meet the essential criteria alone

Method of testing:

- 1 = Application form**
- 2 = Interview**
- 3 = Assessment tests**

Weighting:

- 1 = Low importance**
- 2 = Medium importance**
- 3 = High importance**

Key competencies and behaviours	Method of testing	Weighting
1a. Skills and abilities – essential		
Ability to inspire with well-developed and established leadership skills	1/2	3
Ability to motivate and to lead a team to ensure high level work outputs and adherence to deadlines	1/2	3
A track record of hands-on initiating and successfully completing complex programmes, working both independently and part of a team.	1/2	3
Effective communication skills with the ability to communicate with staff and stakeholders at all levels both verbally and in written format	1/2	3
High level of attention to detail	1/2	3
Ability to work well under pressure and to tight deadlines	1/2	3
A clear, visible leader with the personal authority and influencing skills, able to champion and to represent the ambitions of SEC with the credibility to work across the public and private sectors and wider stakeholders	1/2	3

Key competencies and behaviours	Method of testing	Weighting
2a. Special knowledge – essential		
Appreciation of the wider growth agendas across South Essex and the Thames Estuary, including the Thames Freeport and Government's future plans for the green and blue infrastructure and the potential to support plans for net zero and post covid 19 recovery.	1/2	2
3a. Experience – essential		
An understanding and experience of the Local government landscape, governance and leadership across South Essex and the Thames Estuary.	1/2	3
Demonstrable experience of working in a political environment at a senior level.	1/2	3
Demonstrable experience of establishing effective networks and maintaining positive and productive relationships and partnership across multiples stakeholders, including chief office and political leaders.	1/2	3
Proven ability for problem solving and pre-empting issues escalating.	1/2	2
Excellent communication, project management, business case development, planning, report writing and presentation skills.	1/2	3
4a. Other requirements – essential		
Flexibility in working hours / attending meetings as required	1/2	3
5a. Equalities – essential		
Demonstrable knowledge and understanding of diversity and equality issues and legislation.	1/2	3

DATE: 3 December 2024	ITEM:
SEC Joint Committee Meeting	5
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 SEC and produce financial monitoring reports which are shared with Programme Implementation Directors, SEC 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 outturn for or 2023/24 was a £375,000 surplus, which included funding for the Middle Layer project. This brought the reserve balance to £407,000.
- 3.2 Spend forecast for 2024/25 has been populated in the table below and shows that with no further commitments impacting this financial year, there will be a £247,000 surplus, bringing the reserve to a £654,000 surplus

Income and Expenditure Summary	2023/24 Actuals £000's	2024/25 Actuals £000's	2024/25 Forecast £000's
Income			
Partnership Investment (SEC authorities)	(420)	0	(420)
Other partners			
Homes England	(166)	0	0
Digital - National Highways	(605)	(51)	(247)
Digital - SELEP Getting Building Fund	(742)	0	0
Digital - ECC	0	(2)	(32)
Total Income	(1,933)	(51)	(667)
Programme Expenditure			
South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)	33	0	0
Full Fibre Digital	1,358	79	321
Infrastructure and Housing	166	0	0
Operating and Other Costs	0	100	100
Total Expenditure	1,558	179	421
In year (surplus) / deficit	(375)	128	(247)

SEC Reserve	2024/25 £000's
Balance brought forward	(407)
Net in year (surplus) / deficit	(247)
Balance carried forward	(654)

3.3 Full Fire Digital

The Internet of Things (IOT) works continue to progress, with completion anticipated in the new calendar year. Once final invoices are received, the final claim will be submitted to National Highways. Due to the extended timelines, the grant funding from National Highways is not sufficient to cover

all of the programme management costs, and £30,000 of funding has been agreed from ECC to support the ongoing implementation across the county.

Report Author:

NAME Elizabeth Helm

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

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