

## Cover Note

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Committee for submission: Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee, 2 November 2023

### 1. Summary

The Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee has received the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA, now rebranded as South Essex Councils (SEC)) held on 28th September 2023.

This cover note seeks to highlight any implications, benefits or considerations for Southend and its interests arising from the ASELA / SEC Joint Committee, its work programme, and its operations.

### 2. Background

The Leader of the Council, at the meeting of the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee that took place on 8 June 2023, undertook to provide a brief summary of the discussions at future meetings of the ASELA / SEC Joint Committee and highlight the benefits for Southend.

### 3. Implications for Southend

#### 3.1.1. Governance and resourcing

- Re-establishment of the Good Homes Board was approved, with senior representatives from all ASELA (SEC) Authorities and Homes England to participate – this will continue the resource requirement from Southend.
- The release of 1 day FTE per calendar month per authority towards the operational work to be undertaken by the Environment and Climate Change Workstream was agreed.
- The Government has confirmed that the functions of SELEP will transfer to upper tier local authorities from April 2024. This links with the current negotiation activity around a potential devolution deal that, if accepted, would create a Combined Authority for the “Greater Essex” area, i.e., the areas of Essex County, Southend, and Thurrock councils. ASELA / SEC intends to work with officers from across the three councils over the rest of the year to form a view on the right spatial level for each of SELEP’s current functions.

#### 3.2. Finance

3.2.1. The final outturn for the 2022/23 financial year was a £206,000 surplus. The current 2023/24 forecast is a surplus of £263,000.

3.2.2. The Joint Committee approved the engagement of consultants to provide the necessary capability and capacity to refresh and consolidate ASELA / SEC's strategy by March 2024. This is to be funded by reallocating resources for the ASELA / SEC Programme Director and Programme Officer positions, which will no longer be recruited to, providing up to £100,000 to fund the consultancy work. No additional financial contributions are requested from ASELA / SEC authorities at this time.

3.2.3. The proposal to wind up Opportunity South Essex (OSE) and develop new business engagement arrangements from April 2024 is likely to require Southend to contribute financially to support such a new functional arrangement in future. A report is planned to be brought to the December 2023 meeting of the Joint Committee where the full details of a new proposal will be considered.

3.2.4. Southend will be liable, along with the other ASELA / SEC authorities, for the costs of the redundancy of the OSE Director post in the proportions in which we currently subscribe to OSE – currently 17% of the overall costs. An approach will be made to OSE to secure OSE unspent funds to mitigate those costs.

3.2.5. Any OSE funds which remain unspent at the point at which OSE ceases to exist would be returned to the us in the proportion in which we contributed (17%).

3.2.6. The majority of the costs for the rebranding and communications strategy development work will come from within existing resources.

### **3.3. Governance**

3.3.1. Southend must recommend through our own governance procedures that we will cease our financial subscription to OSE at the end of this financial year by 30 December 2023.

3.3.2. Southend is also asked to recommend through our own governance procedures that we indemnify Castle Point Borough Council against all costs and liabilities arising from the OSE-related redundancy, in the same proportion as our current OSE subscription (currently 17%).

### **3.4. Communications and Engagement**

3.4.1. A proposal to rename ASELA to "South Essex Councils" (SEC) was endorsed and agreement that the change be made with immediate effect was reached.

### **3.5. Other**

The next meeting of the Joint Committee will take place in December 2023, at which time the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee can expect further briefing and analysis of the Joint Committee's work programme and its implications and benefits for Southend.

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**NS 19/10/2023**