

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	
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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.

		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.