



DATE: 3 December 2024	ITEM: XX
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.