



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

Date: Thursday, 23rd March, 2023

Place: Council Chamber, Brentwood Borough Council

Present: Councillor C Hossack (Brentwood Borough Council) (Chair)
Councillors A Baggott (Basildon Borough Council), M Coxshall (Thurrock Borough Council) and S George (Southend-on-Sea City Council)

In Attendance: A Hutchings (Castle Point Borough Council), S Logan (Basildon Borough Council), J Stephenson Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council), A Richards, E Helm and S Tautz (Southend-on-Sea City Council), T Walker (Essex County Council), K Wheeler (Thurrock Borough Council)
A Bryan (South East Local Enterprise Partnership)

Start/End Time: 11.30 am - 1.50 pm

21 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Bentley (Leader - Essex County Council), Councillor D Blackwell (Leader - Castle Point Borough Council Council) Councillor S Wootton (Leader - Rochford District Council), P Glading (Opportunity South Essex (Co-opted Member)) and R Polkinghorne (Chief Executive - Southend-on-Sea City Council).

The Joint Committee was advised that A Bryan (South East Local Enterprise Partnership) was in attendance at the meeting on behalf of P Glading.

22 Declarations of Interest

The following interest was declared at the meeting:

(a) Councillor M Coxshall - Agenda Item 8 (Future Business Engagement Arrangements) - Member of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership.

23 Appointment of Vice-Chair

On the nomination of Councillor C Hossack and with the unanimous support of the Joint Committee:

Resolved:

That Councillor A Baggott be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee for the duration of the meeting.

24 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee held on 5 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

25 ASELA Programme Review and Reset

The Joint Committee considered a report of S Logan proposing the adoption of five new ASELA workstreams to incorporate relevant existing work into a framework for future activity, following the development of a revised work programme by the Leaders and Chief Executives of the ASELA local authorities.

S Logan reported that Leaders and Chief Executives had also identified that it was necessary to review the resourcing of the work programme to enable the next phase of its delivery and the evolution of ASELA and had therefore also developed a revised resourcing structure to support the delivery of the programme, which could be implemented on a cost neutral basis.

The Joint Committee was advised that it was also proposed that a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge be undertaken to build on the revised programme and resourcing framework of work and support understanding of the issues that ASELA should consider and develop further.

Resolved:

1. That the achievements delivered by the ASELA Programme to date, be recognised.
2. That the proposed new workstreams, Leader and Chief Executive sponsors and emerging strategic visions be endorsed, and that the relevant Chief Executives define these further in consultation with the respective Leader sponsors for consideration at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.
3. That the proposed resourcing structure to support the delivery of the revised ASELA Programme as set out in the report be agreed and that Chief Executives progress its implementation.
4. That the proposed undertaking of a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge of ASELA be endorsed and that the scope of the review be agreed by the Chair of the Joint Committee.

26 Existing Programme Progress Reports

(a) South Essex Advanced Technical Skills (SEATS)

The Joint Committee considered a report of S Logan with regard to the delivery of the private sector led technical university for South Essex, setting out the progress made since the last meeting of the Joint Committee and the key next steps in the delivery of SEATS.

S Logan confirmed that the results of the procurement process for the appointment of a higher education provider for SEATS, would be reported to all members of the Joint Committee by June 2023. The Joint Committee was also advised that a media release on the progress of SEATS was to be released imminently.

Resolved:

1. That the progress and achievements to date in respect of the delivery of a private sector led technical university for South Essex, be noted.
2. That the key next steps for the delivery of the technical university, be noted.

(b) Good Homes Programme

The Joint Committee received a presentation from J Stephenson with regard to the reset of the former Housing and Infrastructure programme and the progress currently made to deliver new homes and communities and the increased supply of high-quality housing, alongside arrangements for future programme delivery by local authorities and housing associations and details of the funding for the programme received from Homes England.

The Joint Committee suggested that efforts should be made to ensure close working with registered social landlords as part of the delivery of the Good Homes programme.

Resolved:

1. That the progress and achievements to date in respect of the delivery of new homes and communities and the increased supply of high-quality housing, be noted.
2. That the slide pack from the presentation be circulated as part of the minutes of the meeting.

(c) Superfast Digital Programme

The Joint Committee received a report of R Polkinghorne with regard to progress on the delivery of affordable full fibre digital connectivity across South Essex.

Members requested that future reports to the Joint Committee on the delivery of full fibre digital connectivity should contain a map of current progress on full fibre roll-out, those public sector sites where connectivity had already been achieved and he previously identified 'not spots' across the region.

Resolved:

1. That the progress and achievements to date in respect of the delivery of affordable full fibre digital connectivity for South Essex be noted.
2. That continued support or the delivery of the Superfast Digital programme be endorsed.

The Joint Committee received a report providing a summary of the current financial position for the delivery of the ASELA key programmes.

It was reported that, based on the latest forecast position, a £149,000 surplus was anticipated in 2022/23 that primarily related to alternative funding being secured to fund a Programme Manager position for ASELA and that, as a result, this would bring the reserve deficit down to £24,000 which will be carried forward into to 2023/24.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

28 Communications Update and Future Working Arrangements

The Joint Committee considered a report providing an update on the approach to communication activity following the review and re-set of the ASELA vision and priorities, including the proposed sharing of responsibility for communications across each of the ASELA local authorities.

Members were advised that it was intended to develop an overarching communication strategy following the re-set, to cover the key elements set out in the report and to increase awareness and engagement with ASELA and the current work programme. The Joint Committee noted that it was intended that the draft communication strategy would be presented to the next meeting for consideration and indicated that it was important that the strategy should contain appropriate arrangements to ensure that agreed communications adequately reflected the views of individual ASELA local authorities where necessary.

The Joint Committee was advised that, following feedback received from Leaders, a variation of the ASELA logo had been created to remove reference to '2050', as many of the current priorities for South Essex had more ambitious and shorter timescales.

Resolved:

1. That the communications update set out in the report and the proposed direction of travel for future ASELA communications activity, be noted.
2. That the proposed development of an overarching communication strategy for ASELA, including visual content (e.g., maps, infographics and videos as part of communications plans for specific workstreams) and the introduction of new communications channels such as TikTok, be agreed.
3. That, going forward, the Chair of the Joint Committee act as the member-level communications lead for ASELA.
4. That appropriate ASELA communications be prepared in respect of the current position with regard to the proposed Lower Thames Crossing and the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in London, given the impact of these policy matters on South Essex.

29 Any Other Business

The following additional item of business was raised at the meeting.

(a) Greater Essex Devolution Proposal

The Joint Committee was advised that the Expression of Interest for consideration of a devolution 'deal' to be submitted by the three upper-tier local authorities in Essex, was to be considered by Southend-on-Sea City Council on 23 March 2023.

30 Last Meeting of the Municipal Year

The Chair expressed his best wishes for the future success of ASELA, as he was not standing for re-election at the local elections in May 2023.

On behalf of all Leaders and Chief Executives, Councillor A Baggott thanked the Chair for his contribution to the success of ASELA so far and the work of the Joint Committee since its establishment in 2021.

31 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the item of business set out below (Future Business Engagement Arrangements), on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

32 Future Business Engagement Arrangements

The Joint Committee Considered a report with regard to future business engagement arrangements in South Essex.

The Committee received a letter from the co-opted Chair of Opportunity South Essex who was unable to be in attendance at the meeting, with regard to the issues set out the report.

Resolved:

1. That current arrangements for business engagement in South Essex and the associated matters and options set out in the report, be noted.

2. That recent discussions between the Chair of the Joint Committee and the Chair of Opportunity South Essex, be noted.

3. That detailed consideration be given to business engagement arrangements in South Essex, with the preferred option being to evolve the current federated board arrangements to strengthen the engagement of ASELA with Opportunity South Essex businesses and to invite businesses to more closely align with the new workstreams.

4. That detailed proposals for future business engagement arrangements in South Essex be presented to the next meeting of the Joint Committee, along with an appropriate transition plan.