Executive Summary

To update Cabinet on matters relating to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership (TGSEP) and to seek agreement to a way forward that supports Thurrock’s priorities.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cabinet note recent developments with SELEP and TGSEP.

1.2 That Cabinet agree to a new South Essex partnership being established with Southend-on-Sea Council and other partners to support the achievement of Thurrock’s priorities.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Thames Gateway is a key driver for regeneration and economic growth. Under successive Governments there has been a Minister assigned to the overall area of which the South Essex forms a significant part. It is a high priority area for Government and SELEP identified Thames Gateway as its top priority in the Strategic Economic Plan submitted earlier this year.

2.2 Future funding for infrastructure and economic growth from Government is now intrinsically linked to the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Thurrock Council has played a central role, alongside Southend Council and south Essex businesses, to position TGSEP as one of the four federated areas of SELEP. The partnership also includes Castle Point, Rochford and Basildon Councils and Essex County Council plus business representatives from across South Essex.
2.3 The TGSEP federated area secured over 40% (£155m) of the funding allocated to SELEP by Government in Round 1 of the Local Growth Fund earlier this year. Of that Thurrock was able to secure £92m, principally for A13 widening.

2.4 In November an unexpected communication was received from Essex County Council (ECC) saying it is withdrawing from TGSEP. The reasoning given was to reduce bureaucracy and streamline decision making to the Greater Essex level. Recent correspondence indicates that ECC has taken the view, without discussion or consultation with Thurrock or Southend Council or businesses in South Essex, that TGSEP no longer exists and that a three federated area structure is now operating within SELEP. This view is not shared by the other South Essex partners, nor by SELEP which recently received and submitted the TGSEP round 2 Local Growth Fund submission. It is also inconsistent with the TGSEP Partnership Agreement.

2.5 Due to ECC’s withdrawal, TGSEP will end on 31 March 2015. Given the strength of business activity and investment across South Essex, the national profile of Thames Gateway and the commitment to partnership working from the unitaries, districts and business, that work begin immediately on options for a new partnership across South Essex. The new partnership would begin on or before 1 April 2015. The work to establish the new partnership will be driven by Thurrock and Southend Councils working in close collaboration to establish a business led partnership that will help drive forward growth and regeneration and realise benefits and opportunities for communities across South Essex.

2.6 The new partnership will then form the fourth federated area for SELEP purposes and will be used as a partnership mechanism to bid for funding.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The alternative to establishing a new South Essex Partnership from April 1st 2015 is for Thurrock to become part of a Greater Essex Partnership. This option is not recommended as it would greatly diminish the profile and achievement of Thurrock’s strategic objectives and priorities; would reduce the impact of Thames Gateway South Essex as a Government and SELEP priority; and reduce the likelihood of Thurrock projects securing the profile and financial support they warrant.

3.2 The boundaries of the new partnership area will be similar to those which applied to the TGSEP, but can be more permeable allowing other districts such as Brentwood the opportunity to opt in for specific purposes and enabling the three existing district partners to participate in specific functions and activities as well as participating in the wider Essex partnerships.
4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 The retention of a partnership working across the south Essex area will ensure a higher profile for Thurrock projects on the national and SELEP agenda and is an effective mechanism for cooperation with neighbouring local authorities and for supporting the needs of business.

5. **Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 The issues contained in this report were discussed and supported at the Thurrock Business Board in November.

6. **Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

6.1 Growth and regeneration of the Borough is a key priority for Thurrock. Working with partners across South Essex, as part of SELEP, is instrumental to the successful achievement of this priority.

7. **Implications**

7.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**

Head of Corporate Finance

SELEP is an important mechanism for the Council in securing funding necessary to achieve growth and regeneration priorities. Funding secured for individual projects through TGSEP and SELEP may have implications but there are none arising directly from this report.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Evonne Obasuyi**

Senior Lawyer

7.2.1 The report seeks Cabinet approval of proposals to establish a new South Essex partnership with Southend-on-sea Council & other partners to support the achievement of Council priorities in relation to regeneration and economic growth.

7.2.2 The Council will have power to enter into the proposed arrangement. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides local authorities with general power of competence enabling them to do anything individual’s generally may do. It enables the Council to undertake a wide range of activities including (but not limited to) incurring expenditure, providing financial assistance to any person, entering into arrangements or agreements with any person and providing staff, goods or services, provided the proposed activity is not already limited or restricted by statute. Legal Services should be consulted to advice and assist on the partnership agreement(s).
and formation process.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: Rebecca Price
Community Development Officer

There are no diversity implications arising directly from this report. However, the achievement of growth and regeneration across Thurrock will help address the needs of local communities. This is more likely to be successful if Thurrock is part of a South Essex partnership than a greater Essex partnership.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council’s website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- N/A

9. Appendices to the report

- N/A

Report Author:

Steve Cox
Assistant Chief Executive