



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

Date: Thursday, 14th July, 2022

Place: Council Chamber, Castle Point Borough Council, Kiln Road, Thundersley, Benfleet, SS7 1TF

Present: Councillor C Hossack (Chair) (Brentwood Borough Council)
Councillors S Wootton (Vice-Chair) (Rochford District Council), A Baggott (Basildon Borough Council), D Blackwell (Castle Point Borough Council), M Coxshall (Thurrock Borough Council) and S George (Southend-on-Sea City Council)

In Attendance: I Butt (Castle Point Borough Council), L Carpenter (Thurrock Borough Council), A Horgan, A Hutchings (Castle Point Borough Council), A Lewis (Southend-on-Sea City Council), S Logan (Basildon Borough Council), J Stephenson (Brentwood Borough Council and Rochford District Council), A Wardle (ASELA Communications Lead), S Tautz (Southend-on-Sea City Council), R Whiteley (Thurrock Borough Council) and L Wosko (Castle Point Borough Council)

Start/End Time: 10.00 am - 12.05 pm

1 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

On the nomination of Councillor S Wootton and with the unanimous support of the Joint Committee:

Resolved:

- (1) That Councillor C Hossack be elected as Chair of the Joint Committee for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

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

Resolved:

- (2) That Councillor S Wootton be elected as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Bentley (Leader - Essex County Council), P Glading (Chairman - Opportunity South Essex (Co-Opted Member)), G Jones (Chief Executive - Essex County Council), M Doran (Essex County Council) and P Bates, E Helm (Southend-on-Sea City Council).

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 ASELA Joint Committee - Review of Governance Arrangements

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Monitoring Officer for Basildon Borough Council, regarding the annual review of the governance documents for the Joint Committee recently undertaken by the Monitoring Officers, Chief Financial (Section 151) Officers and Chief Executives of the ASELA local authorities, to ensure that the governance arrangements for the Committee remained fit for purpose to support the developing ambitions of ASELA.

It was reported that the review of the governance arrangements had identified that it would be beneficial to clarify that the proceedings of the Joint Committee were bound by the provisions of Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972, but that constituent local authorities had agreed to operate in accordance with the arrangements set out in the governing documents. The Joint Committee was advised that this approach primarily related to the provision that there be no arrangement for a casting vote and for decisions that affected an individual local authority to require the specific support of that authority rather than simple agreement by a majority vote. Members noted that it was proposed that such clarification be made through the inclusion of an additional relevant provision within the governance documents for the Joint Committee.

The Joint Committee was advised that, arising from the recent review of the governing documents, Monitoring Officers were developing an Assurance Framework to provide clarity and understanding of operating arrangements and processes across the key programmes of ASELA, to ensure that these were consistent and fit for purpose as the programmes progressed.

Members considered that it was also important to ensure that the activities of the Joint Committee were subject to robust overview and scrutiny arrangements, notwithstanding that the governance documents already made provision for the work of ASELA to be subject to scrutiny through each of the constituent local authorities' own overview and scrutiny processes.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report of the annual review of the governing documents for the Joint Committee, be noted.
- (2) The following additional provision be added to the governing documents as new Paragraph 1.8:

‘The Joint Committee and its proceedings are bound by Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972; however constituent authorities have agreed and shall be expected to operate in accordance with the local arrangements set out in the Governing Documents.’
- (3) That the Joint Committee note that no other changes are considered to be required to the governing documents at this time.
- (4) That the ongoing development of an Assurance Framework to provide clarity and understanding of operating arrangements and processes across the ASELA key programmes, for consideration at a future meeting of the Joint Committee, be noted.

- (5) That Monitoring Officers be requested to consider the effectiveness of current arrangements for the activities of the Joint Committee to be subject to overview and scrutiny by each of the constituent local authorities' and report on any changes required to achieve a robust scrutiny process for the Joint Committee, to the next meeting.

6 ASELA Joint Committee - Accountable Body & Secretariat Arrangements

The Joint Committee considered a report of the Interim Director of Financial Services for Southend-on-Sea City Council, with regard to the proposed transfer of the role of Accountable Body for ASELA from Castle Point Borough Council to Southend-on-Sea City Council and for the transfer of the future provision of secretariat support for the Joint Committee, from Southend-on-Sea City Council to Thurrock Borough Council.

Members were reminded that the governing documents for the Joint Committee required that the designation of an 'Accountable Body' should be agreed by the Committee in relation to the functions and resources of ASELA. A Lewis indicated that, as a result of the likely growth in the future scope and responsibilities of the partnership, it was recommended that this responsibility should be transferred to Southend-on-Sea City Council who were in a position to provide adequate capacity and resources to enable the Accountable Body to implement appropriate control around the finances of ASELA and to support the proposed Assurance Framework.

The Joint Committee was advised that the governing documents also required that a local authority be designated to provide secretariat services to the Committee and were informed that, in order to facilitate the sharing of support responsibilities across the constituent local authorities', it was proposed that ongoing provision of such secretariat services should transfer to Thurrock Borough Council pursuant to the assumption of the Accountable Body role by Southend-on-Sea City Council.

Resolved:

- (1) That Southend-on-Sea City Council act as the Accountable Body in relation to the functions and resources of ASELA with immediate effect, until further notice.
- (2) That Thurrock Borough Council provide secretariat services to the Joint Committee with immediate effect, until further notice.
- (3) That the appreciation of the Joint Committee for the support of Castle Point Borough Council in undertaking the role of Accountable Body for the functions and resources of ASELA to date, be noted.
- (4) That the appreciation of the Joint Committee for the support of Southend-on-Sea City Council in the provision of secretariat services for ASELA and the Committee to date, be noted.

7 Association of South Essex Local Authorities - Finance Report

The Joint Committee received the ASELA finance report for June 2022, which set out the current financial position for the partnership and provide assurance in relation to the arrangements for financial management and reporting in respect of the ASELA budget.

Members were advised that the provisional outturn for 2021/22 currently showed an in-year deficit of £251,000, which was predominately related to funding of £240,000 expected from Homes England not being received during the year, although the surplus brought forward from previous years had the effect of reducing the actual deficit for the year to £174,000.

The Joint Committee was informed that significant effort had been made to secure the outstanding funding from Homes England, but that it had not proved possible to find a solution that would allow Homes England to fund the work that had been completed in anticipation of the promised funding being received. It was reported however that, since the preparation of the report and as a result of new powers given to Homes England by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Homes England had formally confirmed in writing that it would be able to make the funding of £250,000 to ASELA, although the mechanism for the settlement of the funding arrangement had not yet been confirmed by Homes England.

The Joint Committee was advised that the provisional outturn for 2022/23 currently showed an in-year deficit of £74,000 in addition to the deficit for 2021/22 of £174,000 but that, once the outstanding funding had been secured from Homes England, it was expected that this would eradicate the current budget deficit.

Resolved:

- (1) That the ASELA Finance Report for June 2022, be noted.
- (2) That should the outstanding funding of £240,000 due from Homes England to fund work already completed by ASELA not be received, proposals for the eradication of the forecast budget deficit for 2022/23 be considered at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.
- (3) That the Chair write to Homes England and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (as appropriate) on behalf of the Joint Committee, expressing concern at the implications of the apparent delay in the receipt of the outstanding funding on the delivery of the key programmes of ASELA and seeking the settlement of the funding arrangement as soon as possible.
- (4) That appropriate updates on the progress of the settlement of the funding arrangement with Homes England be provided to all members of the Joint Committee in advance of the next meeting.

8 Thames Freeport Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of current progress with regard to the Thames Freeport programme.

L Carpenter reported that the final Business Case developed by the Thames Freeport partners had been submitted to the Government during April 2022, the decision on which was still awaited.

The Chair suggested that going forward, the Thames Freeport programme should be regarded as a key element of the delivery of an overall economic growth ambition for South Essex by ASELA rather than as a standalone programme and that it would also be helpful for the ASELA region to be formally defined as a Functional Economic Area. L Carpenter indicated that discussions around the review of the current key programmes in terms of the broader economic corridor of South Essex, had already been initiated by Chief Executives and that appropriate proposals for the refresh of the key programmes as overarching themes, would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

The Joint Committee considered that, as part of the review of the Thames Freeport programme, the opportunity should also be taken to ensure that the other key programmes of ASELA were appropriately focussed on economic growth and the provision of housing, transport, skills, infrastructure and the environment, with existing and future activity being delivered as part of the proposed overarching programme

themes. L Carpenter reported that the possible identification of Lead Members/Project Sponsors for the ASELA programmes to support the delivery of activity and outcomes alongside the lead officers for each programme, had also recently been discussed by Chief Executives.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress of the Thames Freeport programme be noted and that the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.
- (2) That a report on the review and refresh of the current ASELA key programmes as overarching themes to support economic growth and the provision of housing, transport, skills, infrastructure and the environment for South Essex, be made to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.
- (3) That proposals for the identification of Lead Members/Project Sponsors for the overarching key programmes, to support the delivery of activity and outcomes alongside Chief Executives going forward, be made to the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

9 South Essex Estuary Park Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of current progress with regard to the South Essex Estuary Park (SEE Park) programme.

L Carpenter reported that the full business case for each of the landscape spaces within the SEE Park was currently being developed, alongside an indicative programme delivery plan and the identification of an appropriate governance framework for the SEE PARK to ensure its future self-funding independence, which was to be brought to the next meeting of the Joint Committee for consideration.

The Joint Committee indicated that it was important to maintain focus on the benefits of the SEE Park for the whole of the South Essex area and to protect the programme from the challenges presented by other landscape regeneration issues in the ASELA area, particularly those arising from the delivery of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing.

Members were pleased to be advised of the national recognition being generated by the delivery of the SEE Park programme, including the recent nomination of the programme for the global World Architecture Festival Awards for 2022.

Resolved:

That the progress of the South Essex Estuary Park (SEE Park) programme be noted and that the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.

10 Digital Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of current progress with regard to the Digital programme.

J Stephenson reported that the installation of over 200km of full fibre infrastructure across the ASELA region had recently been completed, to connect public sector sites including libraries, sheltered accommodation, schools, fire stations and community and village halls. The Joint Committee was advised that the next element of the programme was It was reported that the taking of service from the fibre installation, which was a key requirement of the grant funding for the programme and the point at which real benefit would be delivered. J Stephenson reported that a procurement process was currently underway for the taking of service, which was to be concluded by the end of August 2022.

The Joint Committee requested that a presentation on the successful outcomes arising from the programme to date be made to the next meeting of the Joint Committee and that appropriate fibre carriers and infrastructure providers be invited to attend the meeting to outline their experiences of the delivery of the programme and the opportunities that it can bring to stimulate investment for South Essex, particularly in 'not spot' areas.

Members requested that details of the specific outcomes achieved from the Digital programme so far and the current level of return on investment achieved from the delivery of the programme, be included in future highlight reports made to the Joint Committee.

Resolved:

That the progress of the Digital programme be noted and that the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.

11 Housing Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of current progress with regard to the Housing programme.

The Chair sought clarification of the implications for the delivery of the programme, arising from the current delay in the settlement of the funding arrangement with Homes England previously raised as part of the consideration of the ASELA finance report for June 2022. J Stephenson highlighted that, despite the delay in the settlement of the funding arrangement, a significant amount of work with partners including Homes England had been achieved on the delivery of aspects of the programme.

The Joint Committee was advised that there was a need to allocate additional resources to the delivery of the programme and that provision had been made within the current ASELA budget for recruitment to a Programme Director position to lead the programme. Members noted that the programme was currently being delivered on the basis of the 'in kind' officer capacity allocated by the ASELA local authorities, but that this arrangement would not be sustainable for the full delivery of the programme going forward.

J Stephenson reported that Homes England were currently working with partners on technical assessments for seven 'pipeline' sites across the ASELA area to deliver approximately 1,000 new homes, many of which already had planning permission, but each of which also had complex needs in terms of the unlocking of development potential. I Butt reassured the Joint Committee that this aspect of the programme did not cut across the local plans of the constituent local authorities and that it sought to identify and utilise collective resources in a coordinated approach to facilitating the delivery of new housing development on stalled sites.

Members requested that, subject to the consideration of any commercial sensitivities, details of the 'long list' of sites included in the programme be incorporated in future programme highlight reports made to the Joint Committee and that the specific individual requirements of each of the pipeline sites that were needed to be resolved to facilitate the unlocking of previously approved development schemes, also be included in future reports, in tabular form.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress of the Housing programme be noted and that the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.

- (2) That the RAG status for the programme be reviewed at the next meeting of the Joint Committee, in the event that the outstanding funding arrangement has not been settled by Homes England at that time.

12 South Essex Technical University Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of current progress with regard to the South Essex Technical University programme.

S Logan reported that, following the approval of the full business case for the Technical University by the Partnership Board in March 2022, letters of commitment had been received from the main business supporters to confirm their continued commitment to the programme and the provision of an agreed number of learners from September 2023 onwards. Members were advised that two further businesses had also now confirmed support for the establishment of the University.

The Joint Committee considered the Business Case and Financial Model for the Technical University and the establishment of a Business Advisory Forum to support wider business interest around the University. S Logan reported that the proposed Financial Model was considered to be commercially viable, but that pump-priming funding would be required from ASELA. The Joint Committee was informed that resources had been made available by Essex County Council to support the provision of professional support for the procurement of the higher education provider for the Technical University by October 2022.

The Joint Committee received video presentations prepared by senior management representatives of key business supporting the establishment of the South Essex Technical University.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress of the South Essex Technical University programme be noted and that the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.
- (2) That the South Essex Technical University Business Case and Financial Model be endorsed.
- (3) That the commitment of ASELA funding of £60,000 in 2022/23 to enable the appointment of advisers to continue to move the project forward, be agreed.
- (4) That appropriate updates on the progress of the procurement of the higher education provider for the South Essex Technical University, be provided to all members of the Joint Committee in advance of the next meeting.

13 Association of South Essex Local Authorities - Communications Report

The Joint Committee received an update on recent communications activity to support ASELA and its key programmes, following the agreement of a broad communications and engagement strategy to support the key programmes at the previous meeting of the Committee.

A Wardle reported that ASELA had continued to benefit from a high profile since the previous meeting through external recognition and had increased its social media following. Members were advised however, that proactive communications opportunities had been limited during the recent pre-election period but that, as the key programmes moved increasingly into delivery mode, opportunities for positive promotion and engagement would increase.

The Joint Committee considered proposed key messages and proof points for future communications activity, arising from the endorsement of the ASELA communications and engagement strategy.

Resolved:

- (1) That the ASELA Communications Report be noted.
- (2) That the proposed key messages for future communications activity contained in Section 3 of the report, be agreed.

14 Other Business

The Chair raised the following additional item of business:

(a) Integrated Care Partnership

The Chair suggested that Jo Cripps, the Executive Director (Strategy and Partnerships) of the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care System, should be invited to attend a future meeting of the Joint Committee to discuss how ASELA could support the Integrated Care Partnership around its priority to achieve health equity through good education, opportunities for employment, decent housing and a vibrant local economy.