



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

Date: Thursday, 20 October 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), K Bentley (Essex County
Council), S George (Southend-On-Sea City Council), S Cole
(Castle Point Borough Council)

In attendance: I Butt (Castle Point Borough Council), E Helm (Southend-On-
Sea City Council), A Hutching (Castle Point Borough Council), A
Lewis (Southend-On-Sea City Council), S Logan (Basildon
Borough Council), M Snaith, J Stephenson (Brentwood Borough
Council and Rochford District Council), A Wardle (ASELA
Communications Lead), T Walker (Essex County Council), K
Wheeler (Thurrock Borough Council)

Start/End Time 10.00am – 11.35am

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Coxshall (Leader-
Thurrock Borough Council), Councillor D Blackwell (Castle Point Borough
Council) and Sharon Bayliss.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 14 July 2022 be
confirmed as a correct record.

4. Chairman's Report - Verbal Update

The Chair noted that nationally we are facing difficult times however he stated that ASELA knows its purpose and the things it is focussed on and continues to pursue them. The Chair also noted the issues Thurrock Council were experiencing and stressed that Thurrock remains a partner of ASELA and confirmed that all the Local Authorities that make up ASELA are supporting Thurrock.

The Chair highlighted that the time is right to re-group and for ASELA to look at its strategic priorities. The Chair proposed that within the next 3 weeks a date is agreed for a workshop to be arranged to look at the pressures Local Governments are under and to consider how to take this level of collaboration to the next level.

Councillor Bentley updated the Committee that Essex County Council has completed their submission to Government for Investment Zones in 4 areas, the North of Essex - Clacton, in the south of Essex - the A127 corridor, the A120 corridor and over to the west of Essex - North Weald. Councillor Bentley praised staff for their hard work on the submission which was put together in just two weeks. The outcome of the submission should be received before Christmas. Councillor George confirmed that Southend-On-Sea City Council's submission related to the city centre and linking it up with the area around Southend Airport. The Chair confirmed he had received communications from Environment groups referring to investment zones as an attack on nature. The Chair clarified that all the submissions from Essex were part of Local Development Plans already or brownfield sites and are not an attack on nature.

The Joint Committee members present agreed to attend a workshop in November to look at ASELA's priorities in the context of devolution and current financial pressures.

Councillor Baggott joined the meeting.

5. ASELA Joint Committee - Finance Report

The Joint Committee received the ASELA finance report. Members were advised that since the last meeting Homes England have confirmed the grant to ASELA of £250k of funding and Southend-On-Sea Borough Council are just waiting for this to be received into their account. The forecast is for ASELA to end 2022/23 with a surplus of £2k. There have been some other grants received since the report was written and they will be contained within the next finance report.

Resolved:

That the Joint Committee note the content of the ASELA Finance report for September 2022

6. South Essex Estuary Park Programme - Highlight Report

The Joint Committee received an overview of the current progress regarding the South Essex Estuary Park (SEE PARK) programme.

S Logan confirmed that the Pathfinder Demonstrator Project is being developed. A business case for each of the 5 landscape spaces has been completed and the focus is now on how in the current climate to resource SEE Park.

The Vice Chair raised that it would be helpful to see in future highlight reports where the income stream may be coming from and where the expenditure is for the programme.

Members were advised that the SEE Park vision contained within the South Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure study has won a World Architecture Festival award. The World Architectural Festival takes place at the end of November and will be an opportunity to showcase the work going on in South Essex on a global stage.

Councillor Baggot raised the need for further detail on what the financial costs to each Council will be once SEE Park is created and what the plan will be for ongoing maintenance and security.

Resolved:

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

7. South Essex Technical University Programme - Highlight Report

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

S Logan reported that the key workstreams they are focussing on are setting up the Operating company, procuring the HE Provider to deliver the planned courses and procuring a HE Advisor.

Councillor Baggott queried what the process is for assessing and finding the Provider.

S Logan confirmed they are starting work on a soft marketing exercise and will then invite interest. It will be the businesses who make the decision as to who the Provider is.

S Logan reassured the Committee that they have got a number of experts involved with the programme now who have experience of this process.

Resolved:

That the progress of the South Essex Technical University programme to be noted and the continued provision of support to deliver the programme, be endorsed.

8. Digital Programme - Highlight Report

J Stephenson introduced the Digital Programme Highlight Report and requested that Item 8 and Item 9 of the agenda are heard together as item 8 provides details of the work completed in the last quarter and item 9 summarises the work undertaken over the last 2 years. J Stephenson highlighted the four key themes of the Digital programme and confirmed that the 200km of full fibre network has been delivered and is due to be lit very soon. He stated that the Project Manager M Snaith will provide a more detailed summary to the Joint Committee.

9. Digital Programme Briefing Report

M Snaith thanked all colleagues that have supported this programme and stated that they wouldn't be where they are today without this level of collaboration. M Snaith explained that they had been fortunate in securing 7.5 million pounds of funding to deliver 200km of full fibre network which has now linked over 200 public sector buildings.

M Snaith highlighted that in July 2021 the level of full fibre coverage in Rochford was 8%, it is now 33%. In Thurrock coverage was at 13.6% and is now at 48%. M Snaith acknowledged that Castle Point is still at 4.5% and commented that this is not good enough.

M Snaith confirmed that Thurrock have now lit the network and have derived over a million pounds worth of savings over the next 4 years. All other sites will be enabled with a lit service over the next 12 months. There is connectivity for all the sheltered housing in Thurrock and they are working with colleagues in adult social care who support those sites to use that fibre to provide virtual opportunities for residents to engage in such as to provide yoga sessions across 29 sites or a digital skills course. This can then be extended to other sites in the ASELA area. Community sites and village halls can also be used as digital hubs and this may provide somewhere to work for residents who work from home. M Snaith highlighted that the network can also collect anonymous data to inform policy.

The Joint Committee discussed the issue of inclusion. M Snaith confirmed in the current climate take up of full fibre connectivity is quite low and the issue of affordability needs to be looked at. The Chair requested if data could be provided to confirm the amount of people taking it up. M Snaith responded that it is likely to be commercially sensitive information to the companies and internet providers.

S Logan highlighted the need to communicate the wider benefits of the Digital programme and other ASELA programmes to residents and businesses.

Resolved:

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

10. ASELA Communications Update Report

A Wardle reported that there has been a delay in the communication of the success around the digital programme as they are waiting to get a few key milestones over the finish line first. They have also joined up with Highways England to help promote this through some video work. A Wardle also advised the Committee that there are a number of opportunities for communications coming up with SEE park and the World Architecture Festival and also SETU.

The Joint Committee discussed how to maximise communication opportunities around each of the programmes and using the ambassadors of the programmes to do this. It was also raised that ASELA communications should be linked up with all 7 of the ASELA Local Authority Communications teams to maximise reach as it was noted that the majority of the Council's staff are also Essex residents.

Resolved:

That the Communications Report be noted.

11. Any Other Business

J Stephenson provided a short update on the Housing programme. He noted that the finance report had covered the grant of funding from Homes England earlier on in the meeting. He confirmed they can now appoint a programme director to support delivery of the programme but whilst this goes out to market, Inner Circle Consulting will be working on this in the interim as there is a need to use the funding gained otherwise they will lose it.

J Stephenson confirmed he hoped to be able to provide a full update at the next Joint Committee meeting or the one after where a representative from Homes England and the programme director can also be present.