

Minutes of the South East LEP Annual General Meeting:

13th October 2023

Attendees:

Sarah Dance	Chair
Simon Cook	Deputy Chair
Helen Russell	CEO
Carol Ford	Kent and Medway Economic Partnership
Cllr Christine Bayliss	District/Borough/City Councils representative
Liz Gibney	Kent and Medway Economic Partnership
Cllr Keith Glazier	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
Cllr John Lamb	Southend City Council
Cllr Lauren Edwards	Medway Council
Cllr Clair Bell	Kent County Council
Gregory Wilkinson	DLUHC
David Sheppard	Team East Sussex
Clive Soper	Team East Sussex
Prof. Karen Cox	Higher Education Representative
Lara Fox	Success Essex
Penny Shimmin	Social Enterprise Representative
Perry Glading	Opportunity South Essex
Mark Curle	Opportunity South Essex
Vince Lucas	Kent and Medway Economic Partnership
Ana Christie	Team East Sussex
Andrew Metcalf	Kent and Medway Economic Partnership
Jeremy Kerswell	Further Education Representative

Other Attendees:

Michael Neumann	Essex County Council (s151)	Jo Simmons	SELEP Secretariat
Zoe Gordon	SELEP Secretariat	Keri Lawrence	SELEP Secretariat
Vivien Prigg	SELEP Secretariat	Lorna Norris	Essex County Council
Dave Evans	East Sussex County Council	Louise Aitken	SELEP Secretariat
Helen Dyer	SELEP Secretariat	David Powell	Kent County Council
Brian Horton	SELEP Secretariat	Sharon Spicer	SELEP Secretariat
Howard Davies	SELEP Secretariat	Richard Dawson	East Sussex County Council
Ian Lewis	OSE	Alex Riley	SELEP Secretariat
Steve Samson	Kent County Council	Steve Smith	

This AGM was held a virtual meeting and a recording can be found by clicking [here](#); the timestamp of the start of the discussion for each item is indicated in brackets.



1. Welcome and Introductions - Sarah Dance, Chair, South East LEP

- Sarah Dance opened the meeting and welcomed all those attending and their interest in the partnership.
- This meeting is an opportunity to bring all South East LEP Ltd members, our partners and businesses together; to consider the performance of the partnership over the year; and to consider some of the important issues at hand as we look to the future.
- As we reflect on the year 2022-23 it was a time of challenges for all our partners with rising costs, limiting profitability and margins for our business community, and impacting on deliverability for key projects across our area. The energy crisis, and other economic fluctuations continue to challenge but our economy performed better than some expected.
- For the South East LEP as an organisation we have had to deal with volatile context to our work. In February 2023 Government announced its decision, that they were 'no longer minded' to fund LEPs in future years and instead for the Local Authorities in our area to be responsible for strategic economic planning, ensuring a strong business voice and delivering local growth schemes. This represents a paradigm shift around the local growth agenda and means that by March 2024 we will need to fully integrate our activity into the work of the Upper Tier local Authorities across our area – and during 2022-23 we were starting to consider how these future arrangements may look.
- As this was my first year to take up the role as Chair, it has been quite a ship to steer, but I have welcomed the support, expertise, knowledge and guidance from Simon as Deputy Chair, our federated Board Chairs and other Board members during this time. Wish to pay tribute to Christian Brodie as the previous Chair from whom I learnt a great deal and has steered the ship so well for so many years.
- Despite these fluctuating conditions, the fundamentals still apply, we still need to support our businesses and ensure good quality advice and guidance; around sector growth, development, housing and planning in a collaborative way; and we need to ensure we have the skills to support future industry. We have continued as a partnership to deliver on what we set out and as you will see from the Annual Report, there was a lot of delivery happening.
- We have seen growth in some important sectors such as supply chain logistics, life sciences, net zero, digital creative industries, advanced manufacturing, food tech, modular construction, and agritech. Undoubtedly the impact of energy costs, inflation, access to supply and skills represent some of the biggest challenges we face as a region. But with this change comes opportunity: we have some internationally significant planned major projects in the future, we have some significant projects in our own capital programme that have started or will be opening in the near future and our natural position as a gateway to the UK means our airports and ports and those that are now evolving into freeports continue to influence our local and national economic recovery.
- We have a continued responsibility to support all our business and public sector leaders to invest in our local area and ensure we can do so in a sustainable and conscious way. By leveraging the expertise and knowledge we have developed over the years and the unique partnership that we as a LEP have built, fostering a culture of collaboration we know there is much to be positive about for our future South East Economy.
- We recently welcomed Helen Russell as our new Chief Executive, which is a great appointment due to her past experience and knowledge and bringing consistency from the SELEP senior leadership team. The LEP has always been an agile organisation and was well guided and managed by our previous CEO Adam



Bryan, I must extend my thanks to him for his commitment and his work to the partnership over the 6 years in that role.

- Our AGM provides an opportunity to reflect, and I am always heartened by the drive, enthusiasm and collaboration across our area. Whether that's in skills, infrastructure, town centre regeneration, business support, driving through our Delivery Plans and many engagements with local partners, and key stakeholders. I am always impressed by the quality and impact of our work, that by working together to find collaborative solutions and to strengthen delivery we are changing our future economy for the better.

2. SELEP Progress and Achievements 2022-23 - Helen Russell, Chief Executive, South East LEP (06'04" timestamp on video)

2.1 Sarah Dance introduced the segment, and advised the attendees that the SELEP Annual Report has been published and available on the SELEP website [here](#).

2.2 The Annual Report covers SELEP activities in 2022/23. The Report also includes financial information for last year.

2.3 Sarah Dance outlined that the Annual Report provides some good examples of the work that has been completed, and introduced Helen Russell to present some of the SELEP Achievements and highlights from 2022/23.

2.4 Helen Russell's presentation:

There have been many examples where South East LEP and our partnership has made a huge local impact in this past year. We have featured some here and there are more which you can read about in the annual report:

Slide 5: One of the most significant this year was the award of £1.275m Create Growth funding to provide bespoke business support services to the Creative and Digital sector in the South East.

This is a first-of-its-kind opportunity and one of only 6 awards nationwide targeted at creative businesses with the potential to grow.

This free programme will provide the South East's creative businesses with the support, the networks and the investment they need to turn their innovative creative ideas into the leading creative businesses of the future.

Slide 6: We have seen the confirmation of new Freeports for Thames Freeport and Freeport East.

The final business cases for both Thames Freeport and Freeport East have been given approval by Government which means they can start operating and constitute a board to oversee their operations.

These two projects cement the role of the South East as the Gateway to the UK economy.

Thames Freeport is partnership between Ford, Forth Ports Limited and DP World. Thames Freeport will see over £4.6 billion in new public and private investment, and the creation of over 21,000 new jobs and many more across supply chains. Significant investment in training and skills will contribute to the 'levelling-up' of the communities and businesses in East London and South Essex.

Freeport East is centred around the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich, which is sits in our region. The Freeport positions itself as a world-leading centre for clean energy production, and sets out a unique set of opportunities and

support which will benefit traders, manufacturers and clean energy suppliers. It will create 13,500 new jobs and generate a GVA of £5.5 billion over 10 years.

Slide 7: The strength of our Major Projects Group continues with work on skills, supply chain engagement and low carbon/ sustainability

Following a report in 2021 undertaken looking at the collective skills needs of our major we held a Webinar which provided an opportunity to hear from the key projects on their progress in creating skills and employment opportunities. We heard some great insights from key speakers and the video is available online [here](#).

In addition the Major Projects group has also been looking at opportunities to collaborate on supply chains and looking at technologies to support that.

As well as tutor shortages impacting skills provision, and social value, ensuring the South East derives most benefits from these future projects and investment in our region.

Slide 8: The Building Garden Communities Conference was another highlight

This was the first in-person Building Garden Communities Conference although this has been a successful conference, we have supported for 3 years running.

This started with a desire to bring this policy to the forefront and demonstrate the role that the South East is playing in this agenda and to share best practice. It has now expanded into a national conference, well attended by representatives from all industries, and is great session for learning, debate and growing our networks.

Our Housing and Development Group (HDG) continues to be at the forefront of national policy on housing and engaged with government and partners on key matters, including responses to the Levelling Up White Paper and other policies to highlight the impact on housing in the South East.

Slide 9: SELEP developed and published a **Levelling Up Index in September 2022**

With respect to data and intelligence, real strides were made this last year, using our huge data repository to understand key challenges and trends which affect the area. The Levelling Up Index focused on assessing good access to high quality jobs, and highlighted the need to level up across our coastal and Thames estuary communities.

The report showed that as an economic region SELEP has 31% of its local authority areas in need of levelling up, as defined by the Government's papers, which is similar to the standard statistical regions of the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber.

With 9.4% of local authorities in extreme need for levelling up, only the North East region, Wales and Scotland have more need. The analysis in this report has been shared with partners and working groups such as the Coastal Communities group, as well as to inform policy discussions such as the APPG for the South East's Levelling Up Inquiry.

To support SELEP's and our partners' understanding of the response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic, [SELEP published the Town Centre Footfall Report in May 2022](#). This provided analysis of footfall levels across all 32 local authorities within the SELEP area for Retail and Recreation locations using google community mobility reports, compared with a pre-pandemic baseline index.

The report highlighted trends such as the significant drops in footfall, the varying impacts across coastal towns, and those areas that struggled to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Slide 10: We also completed the COVID-19 Recovery Fund programme

At the beginning of the year we launched six programmes to help with economic recovery from the Covid19 pandemic. Three were for skills development, and three to support small businesses.

We developed a new procurement framework, which can be used by other organisations in the future, to bring appropriately experienced suppliers on board to deliver the programmes.

They ran for 12 months each and supported nearly 1500 people and over 600 businesses in various ways – providing grants, upskilling individuals for re-employment, enabling digital inclusion for those further from the labour market, helping pre-start and starts up to survive, and building resilience within hard-hit businesses.

Place-based campaigns were also designed and launched across our federated areas, to help re-boot the visitor economy. The campaigns had input from over 100 organisations and businesses, with the overall aim of increasing consumer confidence, footfall and spend during the pandemic.

Slide 11: We continued to deliver Growth Hub services across the SELEP region and to evolve the Growth Hub delivery model

The Government funds us to deliver the Growth hub service, which is a one-stop-shop for business looking for support.

This year we saw a 50% reduction to this funding and so we had to quickly review our delivery model. We did this in a way that made sure there was no break in service for the business users, making sure that the service was consistent across the region.

Businesses received signposting, guidance, and referrals to the right support schemes for them. As the cost of living crisis grew, the Growth hub responded by providing bespoke support for their areas, including specialist advisors, an alternative start up programme, 1-2-1 growth support and wider outreach and engagement activities.

Slide 12: There are a number of case studies of impact of our capital programme we have featured in the Annual report but some highlights from our capital programme include:

- **No use empty Southend**

This is the extension of a project which has seen great success across Kent and has expanded across our region into Southend-on-Sea. The City Council is aiming to encourage the development and use of empty commercial buildings across the City and south Essex, by leading a project to provide zero interest loans to owners and developers.

The goal of 'No Use Empty South Essex' is to turn between 10 and 15 empty buildings back into occupation across the area.

- **North Kent College**

We were joined by the Levelling Up Minister Deehena Davison who attended the “Grand Opening Ceremony” at North Kent College for state-of-the-art Performing Arts and Digital Creative Centre.

This represented our highest value project in the Getting Building Fund programme and will provide 2,836 sq m of educational floorspace, including a performance venue, dance studios, music performance spaces, digital design classrooms and multi-use workshops. It is aimed at create a pipeline of talent to serve our growing and thriving Creative and digital sector in the South East.

- **Start on site at Beaulieu Station**

We welcomed the development and building of the first railway station on the Great Eastern mainline in more than 100 years which started at Beaulieu in Chelmsford in January this year.

This station will provide much needed additional rail capacity for Chelmsford and reduce traffic congestion in the area. The new station will serve the new Garden Community at Beaulieu and the wider catchment of rural areas across Mid Essex. It is expected the work will be completed and the station open by the end of 2025.

- **Sunspot Jaywick**

There were other activities such as construction started on the Sunspot commercial space project in Jaywick, which will provide a new business centre, six seafront shopfronts, a covered market and event hall. A great new asset for the community and directly addressing the Levelling Up agenda.

Among other projects A new £2.5 million bus interchange opened in Gravesend designed to improve transport connections between rail, bus and bike.

The Leigh flood storage area expansion scheme was given approval to start which will build a flood embankment and pumping station in Hildenborough to better protect homes and business from flooding in future.

That was just a snapshot of what has been achieved. In delivering all of this, it is the work of partners across the region who never cease to impress with their commitment to growth agenda, to supporting business, those sectors with the potential to grow and putting their communities first. Our work is built on partnership, and we see this everyday in the delivery of our work.

More details can be found in the Annual Report on our activities, and our website is a great source of information for any project updates and news stories across the area.

3. Open Questions for Board Directors (21'56" timestamp on video)

3.1 Sarah Dance thanked Helen Russell and all the team at SELEP for all that has been achieved. Sarah emphasised that the newsletter a really good source for keeping up with activity throughout the year, and encouraged those who have not yet done so to sign up

3.2 Sarah Dance thanked all the partners for the support in delivering these achievements this year.

3.3 No questions received.

4. Session Close

4.1 Sarah Dance thanked the Directors of the Board for SELEP and the federated Boards for their time, dedication, and effort to the collective cause. She stated that we are immensely proud of the work we have achieved as a

partnership, and the plans we have for the South East already in play. Our many achievements, which we have fulfilled with our dedicated network of partners, have already created a legacy that will remain for years to come.

4.2 We will work closely with our partners over the coming months to ensure a smooth transition which maintains our networks and expertise. Whilst this year ahead will bring change and new challenges, together we can build on the fantastic track record of delivery and partnership to propel our region forward.

4.3 Sarah Dance closed the meeting.