

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Policy & Finance Committee – 13 February 2025
SUBJECT:	Review of Arun District Council’s membership of the Greater Brighton Economic Board (GBEB)
LEAD OFFICER:	Karl Roberts, Director of Growth
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Lury – Leader & Chairman of Policy & Finance
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION: Membership of GBEB assists the council in working towards the area fulfilling its economic potential.	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT: Membership of GBEB assists with the overall objective of creating a District that has a vibrant and growing economy.	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY: There are no direct financial implications arising directly from the recommendation in this report. However, if the council decides to leave the Board there would be saving from our membership fee.	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to review the council’s membership of the Greater Brighton Economic Board (GBEB) following a request from members at the Policy & Finance Committee on the 24 October 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee confirms its ongoing support for this council’s membership of the GBEB.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 This report sets out how the GBEB came about, who is involved, how Arun became involved and our involvement since then and how GBEB will inform future decisions regard devolution and local government reorganization.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 The Greater Brighton City Region currently covers seven local authority areas, from Bognor Regis in the west to Seaford in the east, and north to Crawley. It is home to one million residents, 40,000 businesses, the UK’s second largest airport, two universities and an economy worth £21 billion a year.

- 4.2 GBEB is the legally constituted body behind the growth of the City Region and was formed in 2014 following the area's success in securing a City Deal Agreement with Government. It has the overarching aim of protecting and growing the economy, by coordinating economic development activities and investment at City Region level. By joining together places and working collaboratively to build on the area's economic assets and unblock its barriers, in order to be able to fulfill its economic potential to become one of the United Kingdom's top performing urban economies. Initially it included five local authorities but in more recent times both Crawley and Arun have joined. There are a number of business partnerships represented as well as the universities of Sussex and Brighton, Chichester College Group, the South Downs National Park Authority and more recently the NHS Integrated Care Board.
- 4.3 In the early years of the Board a number of physical projects were developed based around what was a smaller geography which attracted significant external funding that was available at that time.
- 4.4 The Board made enormous progress in creating a strong brand that is recognised by Government, investors and key stakeholders. It is a united partnership that has a detailed understanding of its functional economic area (and the barriers and challenges to increased productivity) and has the ability to shape priorities and target interventions across the City Region. Through the Board's activities there has been an increased profile for the City Region. This has helped the region to engage with Government.
- 4.5 In October 2018, following extensive discussions between the (then) council Leader and the (then) Chairman of the Board, the council requested to become a member of the GBEB. The council's application set out the reciprocal benefits to both parties should it be accepted as a member. At that time the inclusion of the council on the GBEB was considered to present the following opportunities:
- Arun would have an active involvement and engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnership (now dissolved) in relation to the production of the Local Industrial Strategy and aligning pipeline project to strategic priorities.
 - Arun exhibits strong economic and functional relationships with Greater Brighton and membership would give scope to explore coordinated investment.
 - Arun's membership of the Board would provide funding opportunities to central government funds or to Local Enterprise Partnership to support local pipeline projects.
 - Arun has had a leading role in the Strategic Planning Board, and there is an immediate opportunity in developing the Local Strategic Statement 3 to support better integration and alignment of strategic spatial and investment priorities.
 - Membership could also pave the way for other local partners to become formally involved in the work of the Board, such as the University of Chichester which has strong links and growth plans in Arun and would complement existing higher education partner members.
 - Build a stronger strategic level influence with central government to push for transport infrastructure improvements.

4.6 The Board accepted the council's request to join in April 2019 and this was formally reciprocated by Arun in July 2019.

4.7 The financial cost to the council if officer time is excluded is a proportional element of the running costs based on population. The current cost is approximately £23,000 which is similar to the original cost on joining.

4.8 As the Committee is aware Covid became an issue just over six months after the council joined and therefore the council's ability to play the role it initially intended on the Board has perhaps not been fulfilled to date.

4.9 Post Covid the external funding opportunities have become more limited, whilst other issues have evolved such as devolution. As the last published Annual Report (23-24) states:-

'Greater Brighton is a coalition of the willing and crosses local authority boundaries, it is well placed to be involved in discussions about the options for deeper collaboration. We can bring relevant people together and highlight insights about how the strengths and achievements of the different councils can complement one another to make the strongest possible case for investment in the region.'

4.10 A good example of this is the ongoing work on 'Sussex Energy'. The same Annual report states:

'In July 2024 the Board will launch a mission for the City Region and wider Sussex region to achieve net zero energy status by 2040, where the total amount of energy used by our community on an annual basis is equal to the amount of renewable energy created within the community. This will address one of the most pressing aspects of the climate emergency and bring about significant economic and social opportunities and benefits.

By unifying around the Sussex Energy mission and pointing everyone in the same direction, we can help to join up dots to accelerate work and provide momentum. Conversations with a variety of stakeholders have shown that this mission energises and resonates with people and having a single clear voice and a clear ambition will lay the foundations for stronger regional engagement with central government.'

4.11 This is the type of work which as a council we would struggle to resource any meaningful work ourselves, but in being part of GBEB we have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from such collaborative work. The benefits can often be direct but are also often indirect, for example contributing to our evidence base to the Local Plan. The cost of commissioning such work would likely exceed our annual contributions and so we benefit from the collective purchasing power.

4.12 Similar approaches have been taken with creative industries and food production. It is important to recognise that the outputs are not always about local authority delivering the outputs. There is a significant role within the wider partnership for business groups and the education sector to play a key role.

In addition to the above, membership has helped to facilitate access to Government departments which has been beneficial for local businesses. The council recently participated in a GBEB sponsored event with the Department of Business and Trade which involved engagement with a tech firm in Littlehampton.

- 4.13 Looking to the future the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024 is very clear that the Government is looking to develop partnerships such as GBEB across the whole country. The executive summary states:-

'Our goal is simple. Universal coverage in England of Strategic Authorities – which should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in. Many places already have Combined Authorities that serve this role. The government will continue to develop new Strategic Authorities collaboratively and in partnership with places.'

- 4.14 Having strategic partnerships such as GBEB in the lead up to and Combined Authority arrangements will remain clearly valuable there is much value in Arun continuing to be part of such a partnership to ensure it effectively communicates and contributes to what would be the right way forward for the greater Sussex area.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 None.

6. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The council could decide to leave GBEB, but officers would very strongly recommend against such a step because it would limit the opportunity for the council to work collaboratively on 'larger than local' projects and use GBEB to have a more substantial 'voice' in engaging with government and would be counterproductive as discussions regarding devolution and local government reorganisation continue to develop.

7. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 7.1 There are no additional financial implications associated with the proposal in this report. Savings of £23,000 would be achieved if the council ceased its membership of GBEB.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

9. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

- 9.1 In July 2019 approval from Full Council for Arun District Council to become a member of the Greater Brighton Economic Board (GBEB) was given. Upon the council becoming a constituent of the GBEB they joined The Greater Brighton Economic Joint Committee (GBEJC) which is a joint committee established pursuant to section 102(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 and membership is in accordance with the council's constitution Part 3. Article 11.1.
- 9.2 The Council is represented at the Board by the Leader of the Council or the Leader's nominated substitute.
- 9.3 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the council to anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.
- 9.4 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 10.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

11. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

- 11.1 There are no health and safety matters directly arising from this report.

12. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

- 12.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

- 13.1 There are no EIA issues directly arising from this report.

14. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

- 14.1 There are no climate change or environmental impact directly arising from this report.

15. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

- 15.1 There are no crime and disorder matters directly arising from this report.

16. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

- 16.1 There are no human right matters directly arising from this report.

17. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

17.1 There are no FOI/data protection matters directly arising from this report.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/676028c9cfbf84c3b2bcfa57/English_Devolution_White_Paper_Web_Accessible.pdf