

**Minutes of the South East England Councils Extraordinary
Plenary Meeting**

Wednesday 16 June 2010

**Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
27 Sussex Place
Regent's Park
London, NW1 4RG**



Present:

See attached attendance list

Minutes of the meeting

1. Apologies, Declarations of substitutes and Declarations of Interest

These were recorded on the attendance list. Jeremy Birch and Andrew Finney declared an interest in Item 4 as SEEDA Board Members.

2. Minutes of Meeting on 25 March 2010 and matters arising not elsewhere on the Agenda

The minutes of the previous Plenary were agreed.

3. Future Capability at a South East-wide Level

Paul Carter explained the current position with SEERA Ltd and the decision taken to wind up the Partnership Board on 31 July. He said it had clearly been a difficult time for the staff involved, particularly because of the speed of the change. He proposed a vote of thanks by the Plenary members which was acknowledged with a round of applause.

Paul Carter gave a short presentation covering the delivery of 'control shift' He said there should be a great focus on coming together as one across the South East for the benefit of both residents and businesses. Other regions will be ahead of the South East and there was a great risk associated with doing nothing. He added that there was no appetite for structural or regional boundary changes so in was a case of living with what we have in place currently.

Paul mentioned that the GLA was growing and would be continually fighting for the benefit of London. The South East must be able to make its case to avoid being penalised. He noted that SEEDA had already received a disproportionate cut in funding compared to other regions. He posed the question – 'Can the region deal direct with the Government without being joined up on Transport, housing and economic development

issues?' Paul also added that it would be important to protect the intellectual property of the South East to avoid duplication and extra costs for individual councils.

Paul Carter summarised by saying that this was not about protecting the status quo. It was about starting with a blank sheet of paper to design the most effective but minimalist region-wide arrangements. He added that a new collective local government body should also inherit some reserves after the winding up of SEERA Ltd.

Paul Carter also said that two new revised recommendations replacing the report's original recommendations had been proposed, the wording of which was as follows:

Revised recommendations

- 1. Establish a cross party working group of members to consider**
 - a) the functions that SEEC would wish to undertake**
 - b) the minimum staffing level necessary to carry out these functions**
 - c) the appropriate level of subscription for each authority**

- 2. Accept that the prepared option 1 should be regarded as the maximum level.**

Chris Williams added that it would be important to consider three critical functions for the future working of SEEC:

- being able to effectively make the case for investment,
- have the ability to influence the development of the new National Planning framework and,
- to have a single resource available to all SEEC Member councils

The following points were made during discussion:

- a) Gerald Vernon-Jackson (Portsmouth) said the Liberal Democrats could support the amended recommendation but was it worth debating further until the working group had met?
- b) Jonathon Glen (Hampshire). Supported looking at SEEC working alongside the LGA.
- c) James Swindlehurst (Slough). Supported the revised recommendation but would be skeptical about the LGA which is predominantly a national lobbying organisation.
- d) David Shakespeare (Buckinghamshire). There must be a mechanism to argue for resources etc on behalf of the South East as there is unlikely to be any other organisation who could fulfill that role in the future. The LGA offer to the South East remains as presented to the SEEC Plenary meeting on 25 March.

- e) Peter Jones (East Sussex). Supported the concept of SEEC becoming a recognised branch of the LGA but at a minimalist level. The work of SEEC must be driven by Leaders not the Secretariat.
- f) Stephen Parker (Hart). Concerned that a zero option was not one of the options presented where resources are used entirely in Town Halls. This option should be considered by the Working Group
- g) Jeremy Kite (Dartford). Supported the minimalist option but also consider options for working smarter such as using an expert in Government to lobby/play an ambassadorial role for the South East.
- h) Ed Turner (Oxford City). The Working Group should also consider how to maximise lobbying opportunities as part of its discussions.
- i) Jeremy Birch (Hastings). May be faced with the fact that SEEC could be the only region-wide body in the South East. Therefore anything less than option 1 funding would mean effective support could not be achieved.
- j) Gerald Vernon-Jackson. Bidding for funding must be coordinated as the voice of 74 individual councils will not be heard effectively. Transport schemes for example can affect the whole region. Also supported the concept of a SE seat on the LGA Executive to give SEEC another voice at a national level. David Shakespeare said this was a genuine offer that was still on the table from the LGA.

Action - The revised Recommendations proposed at the meeting and detailed above were agreed

Paul Watkins said that the working group would comprise 12 members with officer support. Geographic coverage, tier and political balance would determine final membership of the group. Substitutes would be allowed.

4. Future Arrangements for Economic Development in the South East

Chris Williams introduced the paper and added that SEEDA had already received a disproportional cut in its funding compared to other RDAs. There was concern that future Government funding would be directed to more northern areas with residual RDA functions potentially being centralised within Government departments. Chris Williams said that those critical residual functions such as inward investment and innovation activity should come down to Local Authorities working in partnership with businesses at a more local level. It was also proposed that Recommendation 4 – “Consider what minimalistic, strategic oversight functions are best handled at a region wide level under the auspices of SEEC, determine the appropriate capabilities and make a case for Government to fund the relatively small cost of these” should be deleted at this stage

Ed Turner (Oxford City) suggested that SEEC consider the retention of SEEDA. Paul Carter said the Conservatives believed there was a more efficient way. Gerald Vernon-Jackson also proposed a new Recommendation 6 – that SEEC “Approach Government as soon as possible to press for the majority of current SEEDA funding and all their assets to be transferred to South East local authorities”

Action: The report recommendations and proposed changes detailed below were put to the vote and carried.

- 1. Reach a decision on SEEC’s advice to Government about the future of an RDA in the South East. (All but two SEEC members voted to abolish SEEDA).**
- 2. Work with key business leaders to make its views known to the new coalition Government about the need to continue to 'invest in success' by supporting businesses in the South East and by providing the necessary infrastructure.**
- 3. Press for a devolution of economic development functions down to local authorities and local enterprise partnerships together with adequate central Government funding.**
- 4. Press to be consulted on the future options for the Government Office of the South East (GOSE).**
- 5. Approach Government as soon as possible to press for the majority of current SEEDA funding and all their assets to be transferred to South East local authorities.**

John Packman (Spelthorne) said that the resolution should be publicised including sending to all South East MPs

5. Confirmed Forward Meeting Dates

The following future plenary dates were noted

14 July 2010 Plenary and AGM
19 November 2010 Plenary
17 March 2011 Plenary

8. Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business

Close of Extraordinary Plenary Meeting

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www.secouncils.gov.uk