



# South East England Councils

## DRAFT Business Plan 2010-11

7 July 2010

## **1. The Role of South East England Councils**

- 1.1 South East England Councils (SEEC) was established in 2009 to create a strong democratically-elected voice for the South East's district, county and unitary councils on issues of common concern. Its role is to represent and promote the views and interests of local government across the South East.
- 1.2. In addition to acting as a single voice for all councils in the South East to influence policy and funding decisions by central Government, SEEC provides:
- effective representation of local authority interests on regional, national and international bodies;
  - scrutiny of the activities of centrally-funded agencies operating in the South East;
  - representation of South East views in dealings with bodies such as the Greater London Authority and Local Government Association;
  - a forum for consideration and determination of regional and cross-boundary local authority issues, including strategic policies and investment priorities that affect the economic, social and environmental well-being of the South East.
- 1.3 Changes since the General Election in May 2010 make the role of SEEC as the representative voice of South East local authorities even more important, as many of the previous regional structures are dismantled and more powers devolved to councils. Devolution is welcome and brings with it the need for a more direct relationship with central Government, some of which will need to be handled jointly to avoid Government departments having the same dialogue with 74 individual councils.
- 1.4 Over the past decade much of the central government relationship with the South East has been channelled through organisations such as SEEDA, GOSE, the former Regional Assembly and Leaders' Board - for example structured bids for funding via the Regional Funding Allocations. Already statutory regional strategies have been swept away along with the requirement to have a regional Leaders' Board. SEEDA will close by March 2012 and SEEC has also called for the closure of GOSE.
- 1.5 In this new environment it is for councils to make their case direct to Government for policy, spending and investment priorities. Without the capacity to organise this collectively, the South East is likely to lose out to other areas of the country in the competition for influence and investment. At the SEEC Extraordinary Plenary on 16 June 2010 members agreed in principle to fund a small SEEC team and this business plan reflects the subsequent recommendations from a member working group to establish a team costing up to £500,000 a year. It is that small team that will take forward the objectives and actions set out in this business plan.

## **2. Status of this Business Plan**

- 2.1 This draft Business Plan will be considered by an Extraordinary SEEC Executive meeting in July 2010 before submission to the SEEC AGM for approval, also in July 2010.
- 2.2 The Business Plan has been drafted to take account of devolution plans outlined to date by the coalition Government following the May 2010 General Election. As more detail of new Government policies emerges over the coming months there will be a need to keep the business plan under review.
- 2.3 Delivery of some elements of the plan will be dependent on success in recruiting the additional staff needed to take forward actions outlined below.

## **3. SEEC Objectives**

### **Objective 1:**

**To be the democratically representative voice of South East England.**

- a) To arrange meetings of all Member Councils in the South East, the Executive Committee and any sub-committees or working groups to agree the SEEC position on key issues.
- b) To nominate members to serve on relevant external organisations such as national, international and regional boards, committees and working groups.
- c) To influence national and European policies and resource allocation.
- d) To scrutinise the operation and priorities of Government-funded agencies working in the South East.

### **Objective 2:**

**To provide a framework for co-ordinated action by South East England Councils, or groups of councils, on issues of common concern within the South East or with neighbouring areas.**

- a) To make the case for investment in South East services and infrastructure - for example by agreeing a prioritised programme of investments and the benefits they will deliver.
- b) To influence Government policy to ensure the needs of the South East are taken into account - for example in development and operation of an effective new planning system, Local Enterprise Partnerships and reviews of local government finance.
- c) To argue for greater devolution of powers and their funding streams to South East local government - for example in economic development.
- d) To input to the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and other relevant groups.

- e) To maintain relationships with external bodies to ensure representation of South East views - for example with the Greater London Authority, East of England and Local Government Association.

**Objective 3:**

**To monitor the 'state of the region' and formulate an appropriate strategic response by councils.**

- a) To maintain a shared evidence base on strategic trends in the South East to support local decisions and SEEC's case to Government - for example how housing and infrastructure investment impact on economic success.
- b) To receive regular reports on trends in the South East affecting local authorities and their residents - for example health provision and crime and policing.
- c) To co-ordinate 'bottom up' input from member councils to maintain collective oversight of how well the South East is meeting its strategic needs and priorities - for example on affordable housing and sustainable development.
- d) To collate and share best practice to support member councils in implementing new and emerging policies - for example on infrastructure strategies and new-style local plans.

**Objective 4:**

**To keep members and partner organisations informed about the work of SEEC and to ensure members are able to provide input to SEEC's direction.**

- a) To communicate the work of SEEC, its Executive committee and any additional sub-committees or working groups to all member councils, enabling councils to provide input to issues under consideration and to be kept informed of decisions taken.
- b) To communicate the work of SEEC - and its priorities - to appropriate outside bodies (including Ministers, MPs, civil servants, partner organisations and the public).

#### 4. Action plan: key activities for 2010-11

	Activity	Desired outcome
<b>Objective 1: the democratically representative voice of South East England</b>		
1.1	Plan a 12-month calendar of regular meetings of all SEEC members, the SEEC Executive and any sub-committees.	Establish regular forums for members to agree SEEC views and positions on important topics.
1.2	Support members who are nominated to serve on national and regional boards and to receive timely feedback on issues considered and decided.	The views of SEEC members are influential in shaping policies and decisions.
1.3	Explore options for SEEC to nominate members to additional external bodies at national, international or regional level.	Extend the influence of SEEC members in influencing and shaping policy decisions made by other organisations.
1.4	Establish an appropriate mechanism to monitor and influence European policies and funding.	SEEC is better able to influence emerging European policies and European funding for the South East is maximised.
1.5	Keep the structure and membership of Improvement and Efficiency South East (IESE) under review to ensure it is representative.	The funding available from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership is directed to the issues of highest priority in the South East.
1.6	Scrutinise the work and priorities of Government-funded agencies in the South East such as SEEDA and HCA.	The activities of government agencies are better understood by SEEC members and SEEC's views on priorities and devolution are taken into account in the abolition or downsizing of these bodies.
<b>Objective 2: provide a framework for co-ordinated action</b>		
2.1	Make the case to national Government for South East funding & infrastructure investment priorities to support our continued economic success, which will help drive UK recovery from recession. For example via a response to Government's 2010 Spending Review.	The significance of the South East's net contribution to the treasury is recognised. The wider national benefits of South East investments are understood and SEEC is able to agree a shortlist of top priorities.
2.2	Ensure SEEC views are clear to Government on issues affecting the role, functions and funding of South East Local authorities – for example through regular input to Ministers, MPs, Government departments and via responses to Government consultations.	The views of South East local authorities are heard in Whitehall. National policies take account of South East concerns.
2.3	Make the case to central Government for greater devolution of powers, responsibilities and budgets to local authorities in the South East.	SEEC demonstrates that South East councils work effectively together and can take greater responsibility for 'bottom up' delivery while maintaining strategic oversight of key issues affecting the South East's quality of life and economic success.
2.4	Build on the work of the South East Strategic Migration Partnership to ensure	There is better understanding of the implications of migration and skills, training,

	appropriate mechanisms for handling migration issues in the SEEC area.	workforce planning, housing, social cohesion and child protection. Opportunities for external funding are maximised.
2.5	Explore potential for SEEC input into other South East-wide projects, particularly where external funding is available to support any additional technical or policy work required.	SEEC members better understand the aims of region-wide projects and are influential in shaping their policies and decisions.
2.6	Maintain and build effective relationships with neighbouring areas, including involvement in a joint GLA/ South East/ East of England Forum, and in any national forum created for regional local government membership organisations.	Views of SEEC are better understood by surrounding areas, there is greater co-ordination across the greater South East and the opportunity to share best practice with other local government membership organisations.
2.7	Maintain relationships with the LGA, including effective South East representation within LGA structures.	The LGA is better able to represent the views of South East England Councils.
<b>Objective 3: monitor the state of the region</b>		
3.1	Maintain a shared South East evidence base of data and trends to support local decisions and help SEEC make its policy and investment case to Government.	SEEC members' views, requests and submissions to Government are underpinned by a strong evidence base.
3.2	Consider an annual report on strategic trends in the South East and their impact on the economic and social health of the region.	SEEC members are better informed and have a clear overview of the South East's strategic strengths, weaknesses and needs to inform discussions with central Government.
3.3	Consider annual reports on trends and policies affecting South East residents, including health and crime issues.	SEEC is better informed of current and emerging issues and formulates an appropriate response.
3.4	Co-ordinate local government's collective views to give an oversight of how elements of a new 'bottom up' planning process come together to meet South East strategic needs.	SEEC works together to demonstrate that local government plans will meet the economic and social pressures on the South East.
3.5	Collate and share good practice to assist local authorities in introducing new policies.	SEEC member councils are better informed and able to introduce new and emerging policies effectively.
<b>Objective 4: communicate the work of SEEC</b>		
4.1	Develop and implement a Communications Strategy for approval by SEEC members, including a detailed action plan for communications activity.	SEEC members are better informed and have an opportunity to contribute to the work of SEEC. External organisations, including ministers, central Government and the public are better informed about SEEC's role in making the case for the South East.

## 5. Financial Plan

5.1 This financial plan has been drawn up on the following assumptions:

- i) That funding of up to £500,000 will be available to recruit a small SEEC secretariat and cover the cost of member meetings, essential administration costs and a communications programme.
- ii) That a SEEC member council (or councils) will provide accommodation, IT, HR and financial support free of charge.
- iii) In order to minimise costs and staffing levels, the SEEC secretariat will continue to rely on contributions from officers in member authorities (including via the Local Authority Chief Executives Group) and will work closely with the policy support to South East Strategic Leaders and South East Districts.

5.2 SEEC outline budget 2010-11

Income	Indicative Budget £
Subscriptions (assumes 74 Councils in membership)	499,875
Estimated funds carried forward from 2009-10 (actual amount to be confirmed)	62,000
<b>Estimated total income</b>	<b>£561,875</b>
Expenditure (rounded figures)	Indicative Budget £
Estimated staff costs ( <i>including on-costs for pension/ NI</i> ) 1x Head of Communications and Public Affairs 1x Head of Policy Co-ordination 3x Specialist Policy Co-ordinators 0.5x General Policy Officer 1x Administration Officer	408,000
Additional staff costs (including recruitment, travel, training)	15,000
Administration costs (including stationery, post, printing, phones)	15,000
Meeting costs (including venue hire and refreshments for SEEC Plenaries, Executive Committees and other member meetings)	25,000
Regular communications (including website upgrade and hosting, newsletters, printed material and media relations)	25,000
Optional but recommended expenditure: (including organising high profile SEEC conferences/ summits on topical issues; scrutiny hearings; publishing ad hoc reports; research commissions)	35,000
Contingency	5,000
<b>Estimated total expenditure</b>	<b>£528,000</b>