

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 30 September 2011

Subject: **SEEC business plan 2011-12**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director

Recommendation:

Members discuss and agree the attached detailed business plan and actions for 2011-12.

1. Introduction: SEEC principles and objectives

- 1.1 SEEC's business plan period runs from October to October, allowing issues raised at the AGM to be developed and presented to the autumn Executive Committee.
- 1.2 In 2011-12 SEEC will continue to work to the four principles and four objectives agreed by members in 2010. The business plan is organised to show work according to the four principles, plus an additional area that reflects the importance to SEEC of member input, partnerships and effective use of resources.

Principles:

- A Strive for a fair funding deal for the South East
- B Promote the South East's position as a leading global economy
- C Act as single democratic voice for South East interests
- D Monitor the pulse of the South East

Plus:

- E Effective member involvement, partnership working and use of resources.

Objectives:

- Provide a framework for member-led co-ordinated action on issues of common concern such as the economy, investment and funding.
- Maintain an overview of key data and trends across the 74 South East councils to inform strategic needs.
- Be the democratic voice for all tiers of South East local government.
- Maintain a flow of member and external communications on SEEC's work.

2. Ways of working

- 2.1 In delivering its work programme SEEC will focus on effective use of the following tools for raising the profile of members' views and concerns.
- Ensuring strong member input to SEEC's work via member meetings and a range of working groups on key topics to gather both member views and expert officer advice.
 - Influencing decision makers to raise awareness of members' views and make the case for recognition of the South East's needs in Whitehall, Westminster, Brussels and to other national and regional bodies such as the LGA.
 - Ensuring member views are heard by decision makers through well-argued responses to consultation on relevant policy issues and legislation.
 - Monitoring key trends across the South East to help provide a strong evidence base to inform influencing work and, where appropriate, commissioning bespoke research.
 - Sharing information and briefings on issues affecting SEEC member councils.
 - Building relationships with partner organisations to create a strong joint voice for joint concerns and maximise effective use of resources.

3. Work areas for 2011-12

The programme below sets out activities for SEEC for the year from October 2011. The main areas of work are expected to run through the year and we will also monitor wider policy and legislative issues that emerge and shape our work accordingly. This will be particularly important in the second half of the year, when the implications of proposals on localism, planning and local government finance become clearer.

A Strive for a fair funding deal for the South East

A1. Local government finance	
Aim: Raise the profile of South East needs with ministers and opinion formers, creating an effective evidence base that will support our work in continuing to argue for a fair funding deal for South East Councils.	Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Commission, publish and disseminate independent research report on levels of funding in the South East by autumn 2011.ii) Develop SEEC recommendations on future of local government finance for ministers by late 2011 and engage opinion formers on the need for reform and options available.iii) Propose a simplified grant system for local authorities, drawing on member views and input from a finance officer working group.iv) Gather SEEC member views for a consultation response on business rate retention by October 2011.v) Monitor consultations on funding and policy issues affecting South East local authorities and ensure ministers are aware of South East views and needs.vi) Maintain a watching brief on operation of the developing incentivisation systems such as NHB, CIL and TIF to review their complexity and whether they offer councils genuine incentives.
A2. European funding	
Aim: Raise awareness of EU funding opportunities for South East councils and feed member views into Government and EU to influence and maximise future funding opportunities.	Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Highlight funding opportunities to SEEC members via meetings and newsletters and help ensure members are aware of information available through the LGA.ii) Secure SEEC councillor involvement in the new ERDF Local Management Committee and ensure regular reporting back to keep members informed of its work.iii) Engage with MEPs, Committee of the Regions, national and EU opinion formers to raise the profile of the South East's need for continuing EU funding, including periodic invitations to SEEC meetings.iv) Ensure South East views are represented through responses to consultations and discussions on relevant EU funding and policy matters – for example consultation on the future of EU structural funds is expected in late 2011. This work will engage SEEC's member task and finish group on Europe to inform responses.v) Help members understand benefits of European funding in the South East, with support from an informal network of European officers from member councils and other organisations such as LGA.

B Promote the South East's position as a leading global economy

B1. Economy, Transport & infrastructure

Aim: Ensure South East views are heard on the importance of infrastructure investment as the key to realising economic growth potential that can support UK economic recovery.	Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Engage with the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), including inviting IPC to take part in a member debate on their work and how local authority views can feed into the decision making process on major infrastructure.ii) Build engagement with DfT on strategic transport issues, including an invitation to attend a SEEC all-member meeting to outline future plans and the role of collective views on transport.iii) Make the case to ministers for greater infrastructure investment in the South East via input on policy issues and through responses to relevant consultations, co-ordinating member input on strategic issues via SEEC's transport convenor.iv) Participation in a South East Infrastructure summit in October 2011, including speaking opportunities for lead SEEC members and invitations to SEEC member councils.v) Keep members informed on the overall economic picture in the South East and the progress and priorities of South East-based LEPs, including monitoring any potential for joint working on common themes emerging from the LEPs.
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C Act as single democratic voice for South East interests

C1. Collective case on legislation and policy

Aim: Ensure SEEC members present a strong collective case on current or emerging policy or legislative proposals affecting the ability of South East councils to contribute to growth and respond to the needs of their local communities.	Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Develop a SEEC response to consultation on the proposed National Planning Policy Framework by October 2011 and inform members of implications for local development plans once new system is finalised.ii) Seek opportunities to influence the Localism Bill during its progress through Parliament, and report to members on the likely impact of amendments and final proposals on South East councils.iii) Keep members informed on local authorities' developing role in health, for example through monitoring the development of health & wellbeing boards across the South East. Also, look for opportunities to highlight creative use of councils' involvement to influence health outcomes.iv) Ensure members are kept informed of forthcoming legislation and policy developments and submit SEEC responses and briefings to decision makers as appropriate.
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D Monitor the pulse of the South East

D1. Data dashboard

Aim: Influence national and local decision makers through strong understanding of key economic, social and environmental trends and issues in South East England.	Actions: <ol style="list-style-type: none">i) Publish SEEC dashboard three times a year and report to members on trends in economy & employment; housing & infrastructure; public finance and grants; demography; migration; environment.ii) Draw on key findings from the data dashboard to inform SEEC input and responses to government on policy issues affecting South East councils.iii) Work with SEEC's data task and finish group to refine content and presentation of the dashboard over the first three dashboard editions.iv) Publish SEEDA's economic data archive on the SEEC website by March 2012 to maintain access to the data after closure of the RDA.
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E Effective member involvement, partnership working and use of resources

Aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure members are engaged in and informed about the work of SEEC.• Work in conjunction with partner organisations to ensure the views of SEEC members are influential in shaping policies and decisions.• Ensure effective use of staff and financial resources to support member needs.
E1. Member input and communications Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure SEEC is member-led through an annual programme of three all-member meetings, four executives plus workshops and task groups as required to enable member debate and agreement on key issues.• Communicate key issues to members and partners via monthly website updates plus four member newsletters a year.• Media relations work on key projects as appropriate to raise the profile of SEEC views.• Redesign the SEEC website by March 2012 to improve functionality and to enable hosting of the inherited SEEDA economic data archive.
E2. Partnership working Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan three shared meetings with SESL during the 2012 calendar year as a first step towards joint working and more efficient use of shared resources across the two organisations.• Initiate discussions with London and East of England on a forum to address issues of common concern.• Maximise South East influence through appointments to external partner organisations and committees such as LGA, ERDF local management committee and LGA sub groups.

E3. Migration

Actions:

- Raise member awareness of migration policy issues, trends and best practice via SEEC's hosting of the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM).
- Highlight economic roles played by EU and non-EU migrants in the South East economy via an independent research report.
- Monitor trends in migration to contribute to SEEC's data dashboard.
- Ensure South East views are heard on major migration issues and consultations through SEEC/SESPM responses to policy initiatives and consultation.

E4. SEEC resources

Actions:

- Maintain SEEC as a minimalist organisation in line with member wishes.
- Ensure effective management of staff and financial resources to support members' priority projects.
- Develop relationships with and/or establish officer networks where additional support is needed, including work with SEEC's Chief Executive group.

4. Outline SEEC budget for 2011-12

<u>Income/ reserves</u>	<u>£</u>
Estimated subscriptions income	220,000
SESPM support & project contributions	9,408
Reserves	<u>129, 592</u>
Total income	359, 000

<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>£</u>
Staff costs (inc NI & pension)	190,000
Member meetings	25,000
Admin/ Office costs	18,250
IT costs & web upgrade to host SEEDA data	27,000
Committed projects (transport, finance)	66,500
Committed projects with SESPM funding	7,250
Uncommitted project fund	<u>25,000</u>
Total expenditure	359,000