

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING
Held on Friday, 10 September 2010



Present: Paul Carter (Chairman)
 Paul Watkins (Secretary/Treasurer)
 Mike Dobson
 Mark Worrall
 Louise Bloom
 Myles Cullen
 Kirsten Bayes
 Tony de Vere
 Moira Gibson
 Lynne Hack
 Kelsie Learney
 Barry Norton
 David Robertson
 Tony Page
 Cec Tallack

In Attendance: Howard Ewing, GOSE
 Pam Alexander, SEEDA
 Jay Hunt, SEEDA
 Heather Bolton, Head of Comms & Public Affairs, SEEC
 Aidan Shutter, p/t Policy Officer, SEEC
 Roy Millard, SE Strategic Partnership for Migration
 Chris M Williams, Chairman of LACE Group

Observers: Jason Luger, SEEDA

Ex1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

Ex1.1 Recorded apologies were received from Elizabeth Cartwright, Ian Hudspeth, Dr Andrew Povey and Ken Thornber CBE.

Ex1.2 Substitutes attending were: Mike Dobson for Mike Appleyard; Kirsten Bayes for Andrew Cumpsty; Mark Worrall for Andrew Bowles; and Tony Page for James Swindlehurst.

Ex1.3 Due to their involvement with LGID (formally the IDeA), declarations of interest in respect of item EX7c were made by Cec Tallack, Louise Bloom and Paul Carter.

Ex2. Minutes of SEEC Executive Meeting on 16 June 2010 and Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

Ex2.1 The minutes were **agreed and signed** as a true record of the meeting.

Ex3. GOSE Update

- Ex3.1 Howard Ewing explained that following the Government's 'in principle' decision to abolish the Government Offices, Colin Byrne had written to all South East Councils. At present, Government departments are looking at what work may need to continue. Howard explained that as some work had already ended, it might be possible to arrange to second GOSE staff to authorities to provide work experience/attachments for specific projects. Howard added that, subject to decisions in the Spending Review, GOSE was expected to close at the end of the financial year, although there was no current closure timetable.
- Ex3.2 Howard said that up to 16 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) bids had been submitted from the South East, more than any other region and that announcements on these were expected to be made alongside the Spending Review. Bids covered all areas across the South East and there was currently no 'white space'. More information on possible overlaps would be available in the forthcoming White Paper.
- Ex 3.3 Paul Watkins asked if a possible secondment could be made available to help improve local authority access to European funding opportunities. Howard Ewing said Government departments are acutely aware of European funding issues and Pam Alexander said this presented an opportunity to work together.
- Ex 3.4 It was **agreed** to write a letter to appropriate ministers to outline the issues in relation to EU funding, making the distinction between match-funded and competitive funding streams. Once finalised the letter should be copied to all South East MEPs.

Ex4. SEEDA Update

a) Transition from RDA to LEPs

- Ex4.1 Pam Alexander reported that SEEDA still retained a programme of £120m for 2010/11 but the following year would be very different as all RDAs have been asked what commitments can be stopped and/or renegotiated. Pam also explained that most current SEEDA property assets are located in the Kent and Medway and Solent areas. Like GOSE, SEEDA are also interested in potential secondments to local authorities or the emerging LEPs so staff can gain wider work experience. SEEDA will also continue to produce their monthly economic bulletins and offer support to SEEC such as data and statistical input into detailed consultation responses.

b) Consultation on draft South East Skills Priorities Statement

Ex4.2 Jay Hunt from SEEDA introduced the draft statement prepared for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. He explained the key findings of the statement:

- i) The rate of achievement of higher qualifications (A-levels or higher) across the South East was now beginning to lag behind other regions.
- ii) There are now 500,000 South East residents seeking work with particular increases in youth and longer-term unemployment.

Ex4.3 Following a question from Lynne Hack, Jay clarified that Level 2 equated to 5 GCSEs (any subject) and Level 3, 2 A Levels.

Ex 4.4 It was **noted** that any further comments should be submitted to SEEDA as soon as possible before the extended deadline of 17 September 2010.

NB: the Chairman agreed a different agenda order from this point

Ex7 Making the case for the South East

a) SEEC contribution to the Spending Review

Ex7.1 The full SEEC submission to the Spending Review was **noted**

b) SEEC submission: Regional Growth fund

Ex7.2 SEEC noted that the RGF totalled £1billion over two years. The SEEC response included statistical input from SEEDA and was submitted by the closing date of 6th September.

c) SEEC response: Current resource allocations

EX7.3 Aidan Shutter introduced the report which focused on two consultation responses covering the Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution and the Revenue Top-Slice for Improvement Services to Local Authorities. Both consultations close on 6th October

Ex7.4 For the Formula Grant consultation, it was **agreed** to canvass Treasurer views on behalf of SEEC and to include further detail in the final consultation response.

Ex7.5 Regarding the Top-Slice consultation, there were some concerns from Executive Members on however the LGA coordination process would work in practice. Lynne Hack was also concerned that the proposed new structure did not readily match the proposed functional objectives and that more clarity was needed. Kirsten Bayes said it was also unclear whether the proposal was restricted to just local authority involvement or should include wider community projects.

Ex7.6 It was **agreed** that Paul Watkins would seek clarification on these issues when he attends the LGA Executive Meeting on 16th September and write to the LGA Executive

Ex5. Strategic cross-boundary working with business

Ex5.1 Chris Williams introduced the paper explaining that, following discussion with business representatives organisations, a proposal had emerged for a light-touch 'underpinning' Enterprise Network arrangement to link and support the South East LEPs. Chris Williams has registered initial interest with CLG in a letter to Eric Pickles dated 6th September (following member consultation by Heather Bolton), although this was subject to the Executive Committee's formal views.

Ex5.2 Heather Bolton explained that responses to the paper circulated in advance had been mixed with particular concerns about establishing unnecessary layers of regional bureaucracy. Paul Carter said it was critical to 'wind the clock forward' to consider a future scenario without GOSE and SEEDA to help business and provide important intelligence. In financial terms, a small unit would cost in the region of £200 -£300k annually, to be funded from the savings of closing SEEDA.

Ex5.3 Barry Norton said a bid at this stage could be premature although he recognised that business organisations were not consistent in their messages so there may be potential for robust information/evidence provision and agreed to the bid. Mark Worrall said there was no downside to the bid particularly if funding came from Government savings. Cec Tallack expressed reservations suggesting LEPs should come together as LEPs. Both Paul Watkins and David Robertson agreed it provided a good opportunity for a funding bid.

Ex5.4 Overall, the Executive **supported** the concept and **agreed** to submit further details including the views of Executive Members to follow up the original expression of interest letter.

Ex6 SEEC work programme and priorities

Ex6.1 Paul Carter suggested that, due to the importance of the SEEC work programme and the importance of working with SESL, the item should be considered in depth at the next Executive Meeting on 15th October. This would allow final proposals to be taken to the SEEC Plenary meeting on 19th November. This was **agreed**.

Ex6.2 In the meantime, it was agreed to appoint an additional policy officer and admin support officer to SEEC. Heather Bolton will manage the recruitment process.

Ex9 Items for Information

Ex9.1 All items for information were noted. (update: 57 authorities have now paid their SEEC subscriptions)

Ex8 Migration Monitoring Report.

Ex8.1 Roy Millard introduced his report focusing on the key issue of employment and need for a flexible approach to restricting migration. Some firms are expressing concerns about restrictions and could choose to relocate. For example, 20% of the care sector is made up of migrant workers.

Ex8.2 Paul Carter said it was important that SEEC had access to the right statistics to know what jobs migrant workers were taking up, ages etc to correctly plan skills and unemployment strategies etc. Kirsten Bayes said it was important to target the allocation of government funds and the address the issues of social inclusion for the migrant population. Louise Bloom added that with the SHA's disappearing, this could give rise to unequal care issues such as mental health. Barry Norton suggested money should be re-diverted from publication budgets to help migrants learn English. Paul Carter suggested the impact of migration on housing could be the subject of a future SEEC conference and asked for a dashboard of migration statistics for the December Executive Committee. Jay Hunt also offered SEEDA support to provide more information on skills needs.

Ex10. Any Other Business

Ex10.1 There being no AOB items, the meeting closed at 13.20.

Signed: _____

Paul Carter
Chairman

Date: 15 October 2010