

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE MEETING**

Date: 10 September 2010

Subject: **Future roles for SEEC following the closure of GOSE and SEEDA**

Report by: Cllr Paul Watkins, SEEC Secretary & Treasurer
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Recommendations:

SEEC Executive is asked to:

- i) Consider whether there are any functions or policy areas where SEEC should become involved to ensure South East councils present a strategic, collective view to Government following the demise of SEEDA and GOSE.
- ii) Consider the resource implications of decisions to become involved in any such functions or policy areas.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Over the last couple of months it has been confirmed that the Regional Development Agencies will be abolished as part of the savings announced by the Coalition Government. Ministers have also announced the intention to abolish Government Offices, with final details to be confirmed in October's Spending Review.
- 1.2 As we currently understand, these organisations will officially be disbanded by March 2012, however it is looking increasingly likely that their work will be much reduced from March 2011. Appendix A gives an overview of functions currently carried out by both organisations.
- 1.3 The Executive is asked to consider the implications for SEEC and how any gaps in information and assistance to South East Councils can be overcome.

2. Context

- 2.1 To support the drive for greater localism and more direct responsibility for local councils, the SEEC Executive has supported the abolition of both the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). Closure of SEEDA has now been confirmed by the coalition Government and Ministers have stated their intention to abolish GOSE. SEEC's direction is now to build a stronger and more direct relationship on areas of common interest between local authorities, through SEEC, and central Government.

- 2.2 Clearly, many of the functions of both organisations will disappear as planning and other powers return to local government. However, there are likely to be some areas which will remain important to local councils both individually and collectively. With the current financial pressures, SEEC will need to be realistic about what functions it sees as critical, and how each of these are carried out in future, for example:
- i) centralised at national level and carried out by central Government
 - ii) carried out purely locally by local authorities working individually
 - iii) whether there are some areas that would benefit from a collective, South East-wide position and how they would be resourced.

3. Functions – what are the potential gaps?

- 3.1 In terms of functions currently carried out by SEEDA and/or GOSE which are important for the future of South East England Councils, the following are presented for initial discussion. There may be additional areas/gaps that the Executive believe should also be considered.

Europe

- 3.2 Currently both SEEDA & GOSE are involved in the administration of European funding streams. (As is the LGA on areas like the Council of Europe). European funding is worth millions to the South East and it is believed that collectively we are under-subscribing meaning potentially more could be identified for the South East.

Liaison with Department for Transport

- 3.3 Investment in transport infrastructure remains critical for the South East to support our economic success.
- 3.4 The Department for Transport has expressed interest in continuing to engage with local authorities collectively to help prioritise transport investments and identify the most important strategic projects. This is particularly relevant in a climate of limited public spending.
- 3.5 The DfT and Highways Agency valued the previous prioritisation process carried out by the South East Transport Board and there may be scope for finding a new way to work with these organisations to direct transport investment to the projects that will deliver the widest economic benefits.

Dialogue with Government Ministers/Departments

- 3.6 One of the key routes for communication with central Government has been through the GOSE Regional Director and his staff. SEEC will be keen to maintain and develop this relationship as mentioned in paragraph 2.1 under the new localism agenda in order to make its case direct to central Government. There are also particular key areas of work that GOSE co-ordinate such as requests for ministerial

visits/briefings relating to the South East and in acting as a conduit for policy briefings/information from central government to local authorities. SEEC has already suggested in its response on the future of GOSE, dated 5th July that a combination of a small financial allocation and possible civil service secondments could help both ministers and local authorities to better deliver the new agenda.

Economic Development and information

- 3.7 With the demise of SEEDA, it is expected that most functions will transfer to Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs), business led partnerships with local councils which match natural economic areas. Areas have been asked to submit outline proposals for LEPs by 6th September. Elsewhere on the Executive agenda is a paper covering a possible underpinning arrangement for LEPs by SEEC if there is sufficient funding. However, there is a more general issue about SEEC's future relationship with newly emerging LEPs and what if any economic development data needs to be available at the South East-wide level.

Rural investment

- 3.8 The South East remains predominantly rural and therefore the economy of and specific services to the rural economy is an important issue for many local councils. Are there areas of rural support that SEEC would wish to continue?

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Primary functions of GOSE

Before the announcement on 22nd July confirming the intention to abolish GOSE, the organisation's agenda covered virtually the whole of government domestic policy, from improving children's services to delivering housing and transport infrastructure.

GOSE acted on behalf of the Secretary of State regarding land use planning in the South East region. It advised and acted for Government Ministers on significant planning applications which came before the Secretary of State and worked on the final stages of production of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) following Examination in Public and consultation on Proposed Changes.

GOSE worked closely with local authorities to monitor progress and delivery of their Local Transport Plans and worked with local and regional organisations to promote an efficient and integrated transport system, promoting green travel including cycling and walking, dealing with freight, rail, aviation, ports, rail and bus issues.

GOSE supported local authorities' delivery of local development frameworks and worked to ensure the development and delivery of sound, strategic, all tenure approaches to tackling housing and homelessness problems were in line with Government policy objectives.

GOSE led for the Government in negotiating Local Area Agreements with local authorities. GOSE's other work with local councils and partners included: reducing crime and disorder, promoting policies for children and young people, delivering the Government's five year education strategy, promoting the importance of culture and sport, and regional resilience with regard to large-scale incidents either within or bordering the region.

Primary functions of SEEDA

SEEDA was wholly focused on supporting economic development in the South East. Economic growth brings regeneration and enables people and places to grow and ultimately to build their futures. To achieve growth SEEDA worked through partnerships in the public and private sectors and managed practical programmes to support businesses, champion innovation and drive global competitiveness.

These specifically included:

- helping business growth and development
- Skills - supporting people and business
- inward investment and trade – securing new opportunities
- policy and strategy – setting the framework for sustainable prosperity
- economic intelligence and research
- the green economy
- infrastructure and development – critical for business growth
- European investment – investment for the South East
- rural investment – investing in the rural economy.