

SOUTH EAST FIRST

The newsletter of South East England Councils

August 2010



SEEC welcomes new member-led agenda

Key decisions on the future of a single voice for South East local government were made at the SEEC Annual Meeting on 14 July.

Members elected office holders for 2010-2011 who will be influential in driving forward SEEC as a member-led organisation over a year that will see major change affecting all tiers of councils.

Members welcomed abolition of regional planning, Leaders' Boards and closure of SEEDA and GOSE. Freed from the requirement to contribute to central planning and housing targets, SEEC will concentrate on making the case for South East policy and investment priorities to maintain our strong economic performance.

A draft SEEC business plan was approved. It will now be further developed with members to focus on priority outcomes. Decisions on the need for new committees alongside the Executive will be based on business plan priorities.

SEEC Subscriptions

After a detailed debate on the future of SEEC, members agreed to increase subscriptions for 2010-11. This will enable SEEC to recruit a small team to deliver communications and gain consensus on policy priorities, ensuring a single voice to Government representing all tiers of councils across the South East.

Member subscriptions will raise £250,000 for 2010-11 – half the expected operational costs. Additional costs will be subsidised by reserves transferred to SEEC from SEERA Ltd, the previous local-authority owned regional organisation that is now going into liquidation.

SEERA Ltd employed a CLG-funded regional planning team but also held reserves funded by council subscriptions. SEERA Ltd staff were made redundant in July and a liquidator will be appointed in September to wind up the company. It is expected reserves of around £500,000 will be available to SEEC late in 2010. SEEC will also gain assets such as IT and intellectual property.

SEEC Elections

The following have been elected for 2010-11:

Chairman: Cllr Paul Carter, Con, Kent CC.

Deputy Chairman: Cllr Gordon Keymer, Con, Tandridge DC.

Secretary & Treasurer : Cllr Paul Watkins, Con, Dover DC.

Vice Chairmen: Cllr Louise Bloom, Lib-Dem, Eastleigh DC. Labour Vice Chairman to be confirmed.

This group will act as trustees following changes to the SEEC constitution. They will advise SEEC staff on the organisation's day to day operations.

Executive Committee

County: Cllr Paul Carter, Con, Kent CC (Chairman); Cllr Mike Appleyard, Con, Buckinghamshire CC; Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Con, Oxfordshire CC; Cllr Andrew Povey, Con, Surrey CC; Cllr Ken Thornber, Con, Hampshire CC.

District: Cllr Myles Cullen, Con, Chichester DC; Cllr Barry Norton, Con, West Oxfordshire DC; Cllr Andrew Bowles, Con, Swale BC; Cllr Elizabeth Cartwright, Con, East Hampshire DC; Cllr Lynne Hack, Con, Reigate & Banstead BC; Cllr Louise Bloom, Lib-Dem, Eastleigh BC; Cllr Tony de Vere, Lib-Dem, Vale of White Horse DC; Cllr Kelsie Learney, Lib-Dem, Winchester City Council; Labour district representative to be confirmed.

Unitary: Cllr Mary Ballin, Con, Bracknell Forest DC; Cllr Andrew Cumpsty, Con, Reading BC; Cllr Cec Tallack, Lib-Dem, Milton Keynes Council; Labour unitary representative to be confirmed.

Spokespeople: Three spokespeople will join the Executive Committee, representing key topics: Cllr Mike Appleyard, Con, Buckinghamshire CC on economy & skills.

Cllr Moira Gibson, Con, Surrey Heath BC on planning, housing and sustainability.

Cllr David Robertson, Con, Oxfordshire CC on transport & infrastructure.

Speaking for the South East

SEEC has been active in making the case for the South East to Government Ministers since May's General Election.

Members have welcomed decentralisation and devolution of powers to local government but recognise there are areas where the South East needs to make its voice heard. We need to ensure that policy and investment decisions do not damage the South East's global competitiveness and its position as most profitable UK economy.

SEEC is making its presence felt with Ministers, making the case for continued support for the South East in its contribution to the Government's autumn Spending Review.

Spending Review 2010

The Spending Review submission argues against disproportionate cuts to the South East. As the engine room of the UK economy, the South East contributes £18bn more to the Treasury each year than it receives in Government funding. Our money supports public spending in other areas of the country, so if the South East economy falters due to lack of investment everyone will suffer.

Unfair cuts would also have an adverse impact on the 500,000 South East residents living in areas that rank within the 20% most deprived in the country. These areas often rely heavily on public sector jobs and would be hit hard by disproportionate cuts in the South East.

Another concern raised with Business Secretary Vince Cable is the fact that the South East has been refused access to national insurance reductions available to start up companies in other areas of the country.

Recent Government decisions have taken on board SEEC views – for example it is now confirmed that SEEDA will close by 2012 and a final announcement on GOSE is due in October.

SEEC's recent work to make the case for the South East is published on the SEEC website www.secouncils.gov.uk

In September the SEEC secretariat moves to offices hosted by Surrey CC in County Hall, Kingston. Email addresses and mobile numbers for contacts will remain the same. New phone and postal details will be added to SEEC's website.

Have your say!

SEEC members are invited to make contributions to the following to help set SEEC's future agenda:

- London Plan Examination – impact of London's housing and waste plans for the South East. Nominations for technical officers to represent SEEC are requested by **31 August**.
- SEEC Executive - agenda items for October by **13 September**.

Email input to: heatherbolton@secouncils.gov.uk.

Working towards LEPs

Business organisations and SEEDA have committed to help SEEC members establish an effective network of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). In August, SEEC Chairman Cllr Paul Carter and Surrey CC Leader Cllr Andrew Povey held a successful meeting with business representatives and SEEDA to help ensure a smooth transition to LEPs.

SEEDA have offered practical help, including a list of SEEDA assets and projects that local authorities may want to include in LEP bids. This is due to be finalised in late August. SEEC will send the list to all council leaders to help inform LEP submissions for the 6 September deadline.

There will also be discussions about whether SEEDA intellectual property could be transferred to SEEC to ensure continuing access to data.

Councillors, businesses and SEEDA all agreed on the need to maintain the South East's economic performance as the powerhouse that funds much of the investment in other areas of the UK.

Representatives from the Institute of Directors, Federation of Small Businesses, Chambers of Commerce and Engineering Employers Federation called for a commitment to joint working by all LEPs. Businesses fear that without this there would be no strong voice to argue for the South East – EG to influence Government's investment decisions and push for priorities such as high speed broadband. All LEP promoters will be asked to include a standard paragraph in their bids on joint working.

Businesses also asked SEEC to consider a South-East network to underpin individual LEPs, creating a forum where businesses and local government could agree strategic priorities and act as a single voice to influence Government.

SEEC member views sought on skills priorities

Local authorities are being asked for views on a draft South East Skills Priorities Statement.

Deadline for comments is 10 September 2010.

Read the full report online at <http://www.seeda.co.uk/what-we-do/Skills/SESPS>. Comments should be sent to martinhannaford@seeda.co.uk.

BIS asked SEEDA for a statement highlighting skills priorities and showing how skills investment could be refocused to support economic recovery and growth. The statement will help inform BIS's national Skills Investment Strategy, and colleges & training organisations will use it to guide delivery.

The South East statement aims to provide an overview of the skills required to support a reviving economy and sets out challenges to be addressed. The statement sets 3 core objectives:

- Develop the skills base to meet and stimulate demands of emerging and growth industries, especially higher level skills.
- Increase skills of those in and entering employment to improve personal progression and support higher productivity.
- Support those areas and groups disadvantaged in the labour market.

These objectives reflect evidence suggesting:

- A shortage of relevant skills at the higher levels 3 & 4.
- The rate of skills increase in the South East is lagging behind other areas.
- 500,000 South East residents seeking work.

Councils are asked for views - including whether any additional priorities are needed and what councils need to support local discussions.

Homes for Gypsies, Travellers & Travelling Showpeople

A draft report on accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople (GTSS) has been published this month, in response to a freedom of information request.

Local authorities with responsibilities for GTSS accommodation may be approached by groups who wish to use information from the draft report in discussions on GTSS accommodation need.

The report from the Planning Inspectorate covers a review of GTSS accommodation carried out

as part of the former South East Plan process in February 2010. When the regional planning system was abolished in July the report was incomplete and unpublished.

Following a freedom of information request from two GTSS groups it has now been released.

The Planning Inspectorate website states that the report no longer forms any formal part of the planning system. It is available at <http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/rss/index.htm>

Ending Detention of Children in Immigration

SEEC has welcomed a review on ending detention of children for immigration purposes. A response to Government consultation was made in July by SEEC affiliated organisation the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration.

Key points in the response included:

- Welfare and safeguarding of children should be given top priority throughout the process of returning to a home country, whether it is a voluntary or enforced return. Every effort should be made to minimise disruption to children during a traumatic time.

Best Practice

- Research to establish best practice in preparing children for return is welcome. Currently schools have to help deal with the distress caused by sudden enforcement action when a child is removed. This can affect teachers and fellow pupils as well as children being removed. Schools' input should be sought to consider ways of mitigating the distress of enforcement action.
- An end-to-end approach is beneficial, working closely with families throughout asylum claims. Early access to legal representation and ongoing independent support enables a more integrated approach and ensures access to realistic, accurate advice.
- For accommodation-based projects there must be robust referral processes to ensure selection of families meets agreed criteria. For example, families who cannot forcibly be removed should not be referred to a 'voluntary return' project as a mechanism to avoid detention. There should also be regular independent review of projects to ensure they are meeting objectives.