

SOUTH EAST FIRST

The newsletter of South East England Councils

September 2011



SEEC outlines priorities for year ahead

SEEC has built momentum substantially in its first full year, Chairman Paul Carter reported to SEEC's AGM in July. Read our [Annual Review 2010-11](#) for details.

Draft business plan priorities for 2011-12 include:

- Local authority finance – continuing to argue for a fair funding deal
- Data dashboard – publishing 3 updates a year to inform SEEC influencing work on South East needs
- Europe – arguing for continued access to EU funds and highlighting opportunities to bid for funds
- Transport – working with SEEC's Transport Convenor to influence strategic transport issues
- Migration – updating members on trends & issues via South East Strategic Partnership for Migration.

Member views are welcome on extra work such as:

- Infrastructure – joint work on a South East summit
- Economy – exploring joint working with LEPs
- Economic growth – research into helping under-performing areas
- NHS changes – how local authorities can ensure health services match needs
- New Homes Bonus – the impact one year on
- Localism Bill – monitoring progress of legislation.

Members agreed to freeze SEEC subscriptions for two years, reflecting the commitment to a minimalist organisation. Outline budget for 2011-12 is £360,000.

First data dashboard launched

The first edition of SEEC's Data Dashboard has been published to support members in making the case for the South East.

SEEC's AGM endorsed the work of a member Task & Finish Group, which led development of the dashboard to help SEEC and member authorities:

- Understand strategic issues and trends affecting their areas
- Influence government policy and investment decisions on these key issues, taking account of how South East councils are faring compared to other areas of the country.

The Dashboard will be updated three times a year, covering six key topics:

- Economy and employment
- Housing and infrastructure
- Public finance and grants
- Demography
- Migration
- Environment.

Each section includes a summary sheet, supported by more detailed information by local authority area where this is available. See the [full dashboard online](#).

SEEC Elections 2011-12

At the SEEC AGM in July 2011 the following were elected:

Key office holders

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 Keith House, Lib-Dem, Eastleigh BC and Cllr Tony Page, Lab, Reading BC.

Executive Committee members

County: Cllr Paul Carter, Con, Kent CC (Chairman); Cllr Martin Tett, Con, Buckinghamshire CC; Cllr Ken Thornber, Con, Hampshire CC; Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, Con, Oxfordshire CC; Cllr Andrew Povey, Con, Surrey CC.

District: Cllr Gordon Keymer, Con, Tandridge DC (Deputy Chairman); Cllr Paul Watkins, Con, Dover DC (Secretary); Cllr Myles Cullen, Con, Chichester DC; Cllr Ken Crookes, Con, Hart DC; Cllr Lynne Hack, Con, Reigate & Banstead BC; Cllr Andrew Bowles, Con, Swale BC; Cllr Bob Standley, Con, Wealden DC; Cllr Barry Norton, Con, West Oxfordshire DC; Cllr Keith House, Lib-Dem, Eastleigh BC; Cllr David Tutt, Lib-Dem, Eastbourne BC.

Unitary: Cllr Mary Ballin, Con, Bracknell Forest Council; Cllr Andrew Geary, Con, Milton Keynes Council; Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Lib-Dem, Portsmouth City Council; Cllr James Swindlehurst, Lab, Slough BC; Cllr Tony Page, Lab, Reading BC.

Specialist roles: Cllr David Robertson, Con, Oxfordshire CC, will sit on the Executive as SEEC's Transport Convenor and Cllr Moira Gibson, Con, Surrey Heath BC, will join the Executive covering planning & housing. Cllr Martin Tett, Con, Buckinghamshire CC, (already a county member of the Executive) will cover economy & skills.

Nomination of one extra Lib-Dem is to be confirmed.

SEEC meetings: future dates

- 30 September 2011 – Executive Committee
- 8 November 2011 – All-member meeting
- 9 December 2011 – Executive Committee
- 7 February 2012 – All-member meeting

SEEC considers fairer funding options for councils

SEEC's work with finance experts Local Government Futures is moving to its next stage, looking at positive proposals for a fairer funding system for councils.

Stage 1 illustrated flaws in the current system and low levels of funding for South East authorities, where per capita funding is consistently lower than other areas of the country. For example:

- The South East received the lowest per capita formula grant for each of the past 4 years, 33% less than the average for England.
- Capital funding from Government grant in 2009-10 was lowest in the South East at £102 per head. Highest was £196 per head in North West.
- Health funding is below average. South Central SHA receives the lowest per capita funding at 13% below the English average for 2011-12.

Stage 2 will focus on options for a fairer, more transparent local government finance system. A member workshop in early September will consider:

- Greater use of incentivisation and fair principles that could be applied to incentivisation schemes such as New Homes Bonus and localised business rates.
- The need to avoid 'excessive equalisation' across the country, which could act as a disincentive rather than an incentive to councils.
- Ways to operate a simpler funding formula.

Once options have been agreed, SEEC members will be asked to endorse a formal report to Ministers, including a response to business rate consultation.

Finance briefing: Member offer

As part of SEEC's Fair Funding project, Local Government Futures (LGF) are offering member councils their specialist finance briefing service at half price if at least 15 new SEEC councils sign up.

LGF already work with a number of SEEC members, providing up to 50 specialist briefings a year on government funding announcements affecting councils.

SEEC Secretary Paul Watkins says: "At Dover we find LGF briefings very useful, ensuring members and staff respond quickly to the impact of financial changes."

Examples of briefing topics include:

- Business rate reform proposals, including TIF and New Homes Bonus and CLG's 8 technical papers
- Consultation on school funding reform.

Find more detail and [sample briefings online](#). Annual prices for SEEC members will be held until March 2014:

District: £995 +VAT pa (usually £2495 +VAT)

Unitary/County: £1995 +VAT pa (usually £3995 +VAT)

Costs for 2011-12 will be pro rata and provide:

- Bespoke briefings by council where figures are available (eg on funding settlements)
- Online secure catalogue of previous briefings
- Access for an unlimited number of people.

Sign up?

Email hayleyaustin@secouncils.gov.uk by **15 September 2011** if you want to take up the offer.

MIGRATION UPDATE

The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) is hosted by SEEC, ensuring regular updates for members on migration issues. SESPM's work is fully funded by UK Borders Agency. Recent projects include:

• Call for comments on financial thresholds for sponsors – deadline 20 October 2011

SESPM has been invited to respond to consultation by the Migration Advisory Committee on establishing minimum income thresholds for people sponsoring spouses, partners or dependants moving to the UK.

The aim is to ensure sponsors are able to support new immigrants so that they do not become a burden on the state. [Read the letter requesting views](#) then send comments to roymillard@secouncils.gov.uk by 20 October 2011 to inform a South East wide response.

• Legal aid & migration – views submitted to Parliament

In August 2011 SESPM [submitted views on the Legal Aid, Sentencing & Punishment of Offenders Bill](#) to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee.

Based on input from South East local authorities and partners, SESPM's report raised concerns about the impact that legal aid changes will have on immigration cases. An [overview briefing](#) and a [summary of proposals](#) are also available on the SEEC website.

• Further work on skills gaps

Summer 2011 saw SESPM publishing research on skills gaps developing in LEP areas following the cap on non-EU migrant workers. The work will help councils and partners identify where training could help local workers fill the gaps. Copies of the reports on all seven South East LEP areas are on the [SEEC website](#).

SESPM has now been commissioned to provide the same information for one of the non-LEP areas of the South East. Work is also underway to examine the type of jobs in the South East economy that are filled by migrant workers from EU countries. Results will be reported back to SEEC members.

SEEC news round-up

Localism Bill

SEEC has had a positive response to its briefing sent to members of the House of Lords. Several Lords have contacted SEEC for further information or to identify shared concerns around topics such as local referendums, planning changes and increased bureaucracy. The House of Lords is now in recess, returning on 5 September for the Bill's Report Stage.

Nominations to outside bodies

SEEC's AGM in July agreed the following appointments to outside bodies:

- SEEC representative on LGA Executive: Cllr Paul Carter. Substitutes are Gordon Keymer and Paul Watkins.
- ERDF Local Management Committee: Cllr Paul Watkins (interim) joins existing members Cllr Helyn Clack and Cllr Alex King.
- LGA Transport Futures Group: Cllr David Robertson.

SEEC agrees principles to underpin European focus

SEEC members have agreed priorities and principles for future work on European issues put forward by the Europe Task & Finish Group.

Top priorities will be:

- **Ensuring SEEC members make the most of European funding opportunities**

This work will focus on providing information to signpost member authorities to opportunities for the current EU funding period that runs until 2013.

SEEC will highlight funding opportunities through its meetings and newsletters and help ensure members are aware of information already available through the LGA. See below for two current EU funding pots.

SEEC will also monitor changes in the management of European funding programmes, such as ERDF, to keep members informed of developments.

- **Influencing European funding from 2014 onwards**

SEEC will focus on making the case for continued access to EU funding for South East councils from 2014 onwards. Influencing work will target UK Government & European bodies such as Committee of the Regions.

The EU has indicated that major funding programmes will continue in some form after the current period ends in 2013. Further details are expected later this year and SEEC will ensure South East views are submitted during consultation.

Although principles for future funding will be set at EU level, the UK Government will have considerable flexibility in how it manages and makes funding available at sub-national level. SEEC is keen to ensure that the South East is not excluded from access to EU funds, working to make this case both directly and through effective liaison with the LGA and other local government partners with a presence in Brussels.

Members agreed a set of SEEC principles for EU work:

- Local government must be involved in setting priorities for EU funds nationally & locally, and sit on management committees
- Funds must be flexible enough to respond to varied and complex local needs
- Funds must be available to all parts of the UK, including the South East
- The role of more prosperous areas in bringing about economic and social improvement and cohesion must be recognised
- Funds must be available for urban & rural needs, as well as areas with both rural & urban characteristics
- There is a need to look innovatively at addressing the challenge of match-funding
- European funding must continue to be available in the South East. Any proposals for loans to replace, rather than complement, main funding programmes should be challenged
- Maximise opportunities for accessing funds by placing more funding in programmes that do not require cross-border partnership
- Bureaucracy and red-tape must be reduced wherever possible
- Funding decisions must be taken in a timely and transparent way.

SEEC Chairman briefs MEP

SEEC Chairman Paul Carter met South East Green MEP Keith Taylor in July to press the case for South East access to EU funding.

He highlighted [SEEC's deprivation report](#) showing large numbers of South East residents in deprived areas and asked for support in helping broaden EU funding criteria that assume the South East is universally wealthy.

Current EU funding opportunities: Education and problem families

South East missing opportunities to bid for Lifelong Learning Programme

The South East is currently under-represented in this programme, which supports learning by sharing expertise across EU boundaries. Annual applications are invited for five strands covering:

- Schools
- Higher education
- Vocational education
- Adult education
- Learning professionals.

Applications are currently open for the 'Transversal' fund, which provides up to €1,500 funding for week-long study visits for professionals who oversee education and training provision. The 2011 deadline for applications is **11am on 14 October** for visits between March - June 2012. More details of how to apply are on the [Transversal website](#).

Details on the five strands of the wider programme and news of any calls for funding bids will be highlighted on the main [Lifelong Learning Programme website](#).

Council input needed to target funds for families with multiple problems

Bids to DWP closed on 30 August [for £200m of European Social Fund \(ESF\) money](#) to help families with multiple problems across England in 2011-13.

Money will not go direct to local authorities, but bid assessment will look for good local authority engagement. Councils have a key role in working with bidders to explore opportunities, ensure proposals meet local needs and help identify families who will benefit.

EU funds should provide additional help rather than duplicate existing services, so council input will be important to ensure this is delivered.

To be eligible for ESF-funded support families must have at least one person on out-of-work benefits and a history of unemployment. Support will help family members enter employment or take advantage of employment-focused support, such as the Work Programme. DWP aims to award contracts in October 2011, which will go live in December 2011. Providers will be paid for delivering progress and job outcomes.