

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ALL-MEMBER MEETING**



Date: 21 June 2012

Subject: **South East England Councils' Business Plan**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director

Recommendation:

Members are asked to contribute views on priority topics/ additional work areas for inclusion in SEEC's business plan 2012-13.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 An initial draft SEEC business plan has been prepared to prompt discussion and input from members on priorities for 2012-13.
- 1.2 Today's discussion is members' opportunity to review the proposed plan and put forward alternative or additional work areas that SEEC's small secretariat will help take forward in the coming year.
- 1.3 The business plan is based on SEEC in its current formation but, depending on decisions about closer working with SESL, the business plan can be developed to reflect any joint working agreed. A final draft of the business plan will be submitted to SEEC Executive in September 2012.

2. SEEC principles and objectives

- 2.1 It is suggested that SEEC maintains a focus on the 4 principles and 4 objectives agreed by members in 2010.

Principles:

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

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.

3. Proposed work areas for 2012-13

- 3.1 Suggestions for the draft business plan for 2012-13 include:

i) Local Government finance

- Push for changes to local government finance to redress unfair funding and build on SEEC's finance report from June 2012.
- Ensure SEEC member views are heard on funding issues affecting South East councils, including the Local Government Finance Bill in the House of Lords, health funding allocations and any other emerging financial changes.

ii) European funding

- Help shape development of EU funding streams – including post 2014 structural funds – to secure continuing access for the South East.
- Member input into ERDF local management committee and updates on funding opportunities for members.

iii) Economy, transport & infrastructure

- Input to Government on the case for greater infrastructure investment in the South East, including transport, broadband and affordable housing.
- Workshop to help authorities develop CIL & other infrastructure funding opportunities and share good practice on cross tier working to deliver growth.

iv) Skills

- Highlight councils' role in employability & how lessons from Connexions, local economic development and LEP involvement can help influence training and skills development.

v) Collective voice on legislation & policy

- Workshop for members on the South East's demographic time bomb and the impact on services.
- Respond to developing policies on benefit changes and help assess the impact of housing benefit/ universal benefit changes for all tiers of councils and residents.
- Update members on developments in the public health agenda – focus on opportunities for local government and benefits of integrated service delivery.
- Policing – report to members the results of research into the impact of migration on policing.
- Devolution – make the case for opening up greater devolution of powers to local government in the South East.
- Monitor forthcoming legislation, policy developments and ensure South East views are heard by Government.

vi) Monitor the pulse of the South East

- Publish SEEC dashboard twice a year, reporting trends in economy & employment; housing & infrastructure; public finance and grants; demography; migration; environment.
- Use this data as an evidence base to inform SEEC input and responses to Government and help members understand the impact of changes in the South East.

vi) Member involvement, partnerships and resources

- Ensure members lead work via a regular programme of meetings and communicate South East views externally via member appointments to outside bodies.
- Provide regular member updates via SEEC newsletter and website and target media coverage where appropriate.
- Review potential for efficiency savings due to closer working between SEEC and SESL.
- Ensure migration updates for SEEC members via hosting of the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration.
- Build working relationships with other English local authority groupings on relevant cross boundary issues.

- 3.2 Members are invited to put forward any additional areas that they wish to see included in the SEEC business plan for 2012-13 for agreement by the SEEC Executive in September. Subject to resources and members' priorities, additional areas to consider could include:
- A good practice session at a SEEC All-member meeting on community involvement in services (eg mutuals, children as inspectors)
 - Potential for joint working with LEPs and/ or Local Transport Bodies on key infrastructure and growth issues.
 - Potential to review the impact of elected police commissioners in the South East.