

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Wednesday 11 July 2012

LGA, Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ



Present: Gordon Keymer CBE (Chairman)
David Hodge (Deputy Chairman)
Paul Watkins (SEEC Secretary/Treasurer)
David Burbage
John Burden
Paul Carter
Myles Cullen
Roland Dibbs
Moira Gibson
Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Keith House
Gerry Lewin
David Neighbour
Barry Norton
Tony Page
John Richards
Martin Tett

In Attendance: Heather Bolton, Director, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Co-ordination, SEEC
Hayley Austin, Office Manager, SEEC
Graham Allen MP

1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mary Ballin, Ken Crookes, Andrew Geary, Peter Hardy, Gill Mattock, Bob Standley, Ken Thornber CBE and Chris Williams.
- 1.2 Gerry Lewin substituted for Andrew Bowles, Hilary Hibbert-Biles substituted for Ian Hudspeth and John Richards substituted for Arif Hussain.

2. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 8 March 2012 and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.
- 2.2 Heather Bolton explained that the key transport issues paper that Chris Williams commissioned from South East Directors of Environment Planning and Transport is progressing. An update will be given in due course.

3. SEEC nominations: LGA Executive & LGA Transport Futures Group

- 3.1 It was agreed that the Chairman should represent SEEC on the LGA Executive Committee with David Hodge as substitute. Peter Hardy, SEEC's Transport Convenor, would represent SEEC on the LGA Transport Futures Group.

4. Local Government Finance Bill – House of Lords and SEEC briefing

- 4.1 Nick Woolfenden explained that SEEC had briefed members of the Lords as they began to debate the Local Government Finance Bill. The briefing emphasised SEEC support for the principles of localising business rates and council tax but called for specific changes to ensure the Bill delivers workable improvements.
- 4.2 Following member discussion, Nick explained that a number of amendments proposed by Lords reflected SEEC's points. However the Government maintains

that the 'Framework' Bill should not be significantly modified and operational detail should be dealt with later through regulations..

- 4.3 Members agreed it was important to ensure MPs also understand key aspects of the local government finance system to appreciate SEEC's concerns.

ACTION 1: SEEC to brief MPs on local government finance and improvements that are needed.

5. Campaign for an independent local government: Graham Allen MP

- 5.1 The Chairman welcomed Graham Allen MP, Chairman of the all party Commons Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform. Graham outlined proposals to create local government that is independent of central government. Consultation on the proposals runs until 5 October and he encouraged input from both SEEC and individual councils.

- 5.2 The proposals would give local authorities freedom from central government controls and allow them to become financially self-sufficient. Freedoms would need to be protected to prevent central government revoking them in the future.

- 5.3 In discussion members welcomed the principles that Graham had set out, especially around financial freedoms and other powers that would help provide better services and infrastructure in the South East. However there was also some caution about practicalities and the extent of political will in central government for such radical reform.

ACTION 2: Members to discuss at the next Executive Committee meeting a potential SEEC consultation response.

6. ERDF Local Management Committee 2 July 2012

- 6.1 Paul Watkins explained that the government would soon be launching the final 2007-13 South East ERDF Competitiveness Fund bidding round, with up to £6 million available for growth projects. He highlighted the importance of local authorities in steering the programme's strategic direction.

- 6.2 Paul also emphasised the importance of ensuring local authorities and other partners are kept aware of bidding opportunities following the centralisation of programme administration at CLG. Local authorities must also make sure they take opportunities to inform development of the new post-2013 programmes, which are likely to move away from old regional boundaries to either national or alternative sub-national areas.

7. Closer working between SEEC & SESL – verbal update

- 7.1 A small member working group was needed to make key decisions on future arrangements. Members agreed that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman would represent SEEC on the group. David Burbage said that he and SESL's Deputy Chairman, Ken Thornber, would represent SESL.

8. Business plan: discussion on priorities and outcomes 2012-13

- 8.1 The Chairman explained proposals to structure the business plan under two key headings - Infrastructure and Health & Wellbeing. Following member discussion it was agreed that key issues such as ensuring increased funding for South East local government/infrastructure and broadband delivery would be emphasised within these headline themes. SEEC would liaise with SESL to seek alignment between the two bodies' business plans.

ACTION 3: Revised draft business plan to be presented to SEEC Executive in September, with final sign-off at All-Member meeting in November following discussions with SESL.

9. Future meeting dates and topics for debate

- 9.1 The Chairman invited views on streamlining SEEC's 2013 meeting programme. He proposed reducing each type of meeting by one, ie moving to 2 All-Member meetings and 3 Executive Committees a year. Wherever possible additional member workshops or conferences would be scheduled on existing meeting dates to limit the call on members' time and save costs. The discussion emphasised the importance of ensuring SEEC's members felt engaged in its work through meetings and workshops. It was agreed to trial the reduced programme for 2013 and to cancel the Executive Committee scheduled for 11 December 2012.
- 9.2 Members welcomed proposals for two workshops on Service Implications of Demographic Change, especially the ageing population (winter 2012) and Infrastructure Funding and Planning (spring 2013). Members also agreed to disband the Europe Task and Finish Group and to cover European issues in SEEC's existing meetings. Members were invited to suggest speakers and topics relevant to SEEC priorities for inclusion in future meetings.

ACTION 4: 2013 meeting programme and workshop dates to be agreed and circulated to members; members to let Gordon or Heather have suggestions for key issues for future agendas.

10. Confirmed forward meeting dates for 2012

- SEEC Executive Committee – 11 September 2012 at the LGA, Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ
- 11 December Executive Committee – **cancelled** (see para 9.1)
- SEEC All-Member meeting (shared date with SESL) – 8 November 2012 at Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London SW1P 3NZ.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 The Social Care white paper, published the morning of the meeting, had several implications for local authorities. These include plans to allow care users to defer payment of care costs until after death; an agreement in principle to cap contributions to care costs; and national standards for access to care by 2015. SEEC and SESL will prepare a joint response for the October deadline.
- 11.2 The LGA's sustainable funding campaign offered funding and spending projections for each local authority. LGA asked that members wanting this information should request it through their Chief Executive or Finance Director.
- 11.3 The LGA had launched a portal to share information on flooding and emergency financial assistance. If members had specific issues on flooding, SEEC would be happy to feed these through to the LGA's inland flooding network.
- 11.4 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 4.15pm.

Signed: _____

Gordon Keymer CBE, Chairman

Date: 11 September 2012