

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

### MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Tuesday 11 September 2012

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



**Present:** Gordon Keymer CBE (Chairman)  
David Hodge (Deputy Chairman)  
Paul Watkins (SEEC Secretary/Treasurer)  
Paul Carter  
Ken Crookes  
Myles Cullen  
Roland Dibbs  
Peter Hardy  
David Holmes  
Keith House  
Gerry Lewin  
Gill Mattock  
David Neighbour  
Barry Norton  
Tony Page  
Bob Standley  
Martin Tett

**In Attendance:** Chris Williams, Chairman of the LACE Group  
Heather Bolton, Director, SEEC  
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Co-ordination, SEEC  
Hayley Austin, Office Manager, SEEC  
Kate Jones, SESL  
Michael Coughlin, LGA  
Sarah Bull, LGA  
Marianne Abley, LGA  
Mona Sehgal, LGA

- 1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest**
  - 1.1 Apologies were received from Mary Ballin, David Burbage, John Burden, Moira Gibson, Ian Hudspeth, Arif Hussain and Ken Thornber CBE.
  - 1.2 Gerry Lewin substituted for Andrew Bowles.
- 2. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 11 July 2012 and Matters Arising**
  - 2.1 The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.
  - 2.2 Nick Woolfenden said that, following consultation on devolving some funding, DfT had invited proposals by 28 September from transport authorities and LEPs to set up Local Transport Bodies (LTBs). Funding allocations by LTB are expected later this year.
  - 2.3 Heather Bolton said SEEC had been liaising with South East Directors of Environment, Planning & Transport (SEDEPT) on the case for greater transport investment in the South East. It had been proposed that SEDEPT worked with SEEC and SESL on a high level summary report followed by a workshop to refine a list of critical schemes. Members emphasised this work should focus on very large schemes only (eg £50m+) and not duplicate work by LEPs or others bodies.

**ACTION 1: SEEC to work with SESL and SEDEPT to produce a short summary report identifying key transport schemes. A workshop for all tiers of councils and LEPs will review the report to inform briefings for Government.**

- 3. City deals – emerging themes and potential for deals in the South East**  
**Speakers: Michael Coughlin, LGA Executive Director and Sarah Bull, LGA**
- 3.1 Michael Coughlin and Sarah Bull updated members on city deals, which aim to maximise economic potential in city regions. Eight 'core city' deals had been agreed, with more expected later in 2012. Deals offer additional/devolved resources and powers in return for significant economic improvements, leveraging in private finance. Areas must be larger than a single local authority and strong governance across all partners was a pre-requisite.
- 3.2 The South East had no city deals so far due to the lack of 'core' cities but there may be potential for future deals in South East urban areas. In discussion members emphasised the importance of all areas having the opportunity to access city deal type agreements, and for governance to be kept simple using existing partnerships where possible. Members supported the LGA's view that devolved powers which proved successful in city deals should be mainstreamed and made available to all councils.
- 3.3 Members agreed to monitor future city deal announcements to inform any SEEC activity that could support the case for infrastructure to support South East growth.

**ACTION 2: SEEC to monitor City Deals and consider further work to help make the South East's case for resources and powers to deliver economic growth.**

**4. Local Government Finance**

**a) Local Government Finance Bill update – verbal update**

- 4.1 Nick Woolfenden explained that the Lords had held lengthy discussions about possible amendments to the Bill, many reflecting SEEC's briefings. However significant changes had not been made, reflecting Government's view that the Bill as drafted provided a framework for the reforms and detail would be confirmed in regulations later. Further Lords debate was scheduled for October, prior to final discussion by both Houses. Royal Assent was expected by the end of the year.

**b) Briefing for MPs**

- 4.2 Heather Bolton introduced a draft briefing for comment. It had been produced at the request of July's Executive to explain SEEC's concerns about local government finance and opportunities to improve it through the Bill. Members agreed it was important to continue to influence MPs and Lords, given ongoing concerns on the Bill.

**ACTION 3: SEEC to incorporate comments in the briefing and send to MPs & Lords.**

**5. Public health: transition to local government and funding allocations**

- 5.1 Heather Bolton explained that Executive members had been asked to comment by email on a draft response to Department of Health (DH) to meet a 14 August deadline.
- 5.2 The Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation (ACRA) had recommended that public health funding for councils from April 2013 should be based on the number of deaths under 75 in each area. SEEC had supported this as a first step but called for fairer funding allocations that also took account of population size, deprivation, costs of service provision and the need to redress historic underfunding.

**ACTION 4: SEEC to write to Health Secretary and South East MP Jeremy Hunt to make the case for fairer local authority public health funding from April 2013.**

**6. Consultation on renegotiation of Section 106 planning obligations**

- 6.1 Nick Woolfenden introduced a draft response to CLG's consultation on S106 but added that Government had since announced additional changes to planning. These included possible legislation to allow the planning inspectorate to determine

applications; relaxing planning rules to allow larger extensions; and allowing appeals from developers to reduce affordable homes where they made sites unviable.

- 6.2 Members agreed it was important to progress stalled development and stimulate the economy. However they were concerned that Government was placing too much emphasis on planning reforms to achieve this, when they should instead target the underlying financial challenges. Members agreed to respond to the consultation emphasising this. They also agreed to write to new CLG Ministers reflecting these points. Both should be submitted jointly with SESL if possible.

**ACTION 5: SEEC should work with SESL to respond to s106 consultation and write to new CLG Ministers regarding planning concerns in the South East.**

**7. SEEC business plan update**

- 7.1 The final business plan will be presented to the All-Member meeting on 8 November.

**8. Closer working between SEEC & SESL – verbal update**

- 8.1 A member working group would meet on 14 September to discuss closer working.

**9. Future SEEC meeting dates for 2013**

- 9.1 Three Executive Committees and two All-Member meetings were agreed for 2013. Two workshops were also now scheduled: Ageing Population on 18 December 2012; and Infrastructure on 27 March 2013 (half day event after SEEC Executive).
- 9.2 Chris Williams suggested the Government's new industrial strategy as a focus for a future meeting.

**ACTION 6: SEEC to discuss the Government's industrial strategy at a future meeting.**

**10. An independent local government: SEEC views**

- 10.1 Following Graham Allen's presentation on proposals for independent local government at the July Executive, members agreed to respond. A letter based on today's paper will be sent to the Commons Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform.

**ACTION 7: SEEC secretariat to submit response to Graham Allen.**

**11. Items for information**

- EU funding opportunities
- 11.1 The Chairman reminded members about LGA's regular funding update. He was due to meet MEPs as leader of the UK Delegation to the Committee of the Regions to discuss future funding programmes and invited members to suggest issues to raise.
- 11.2 Heather Bolton informed members about £20m remaining in the European Integration Fund (EIF). Match funding was required but the fund was open to large scale projects from groups of authorities and partners who could share the cost of this. Funding applications must be made before the end of 2012 for projects to be delivered in 2013.
- Public service mutuals – Cabinet Office Roadshow
- 11.3 SEEC is liaising with the Cabinet Office on a free South East event about transferring public services to mutual employee-owned organisations. Invitations would be sent to all SEEC member authorities once details were confirmed.

**ACTION 8: SEEC to send roadshow invitations once details have been finalised.**

**12. Confirmed forward meeting dates**

- SEEC All-Member meeting (shared date with SESL) – 8 November 2012 at Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London SW1P 3NZ.
- SEEC All-Member meeting (shared date with SESL) – 7 February 2013, central London venue to be confirmed.
- SEEC Executive Committee – 27 March 2013, central London venue to be confirmed.

**13. Any other business**

13.1 UK Power Networks, who operate the distribution infrastructure for electricity in parts of the South East, had invited SEEC to sit on their stakeholder 'critical friends' panel. Three sessions were scheduled at Gatwick in October, November and January to discuss regulation, business plan and investment. Members should contact Heather to express interest in taking part.

**ACTION 9: SEEC to invite member nominations for the UK Power Networks panel.**

13.2 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.20pm.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gordon Keymer CBE, Chairman**

**Date:** 27 March 2013