

Minutes of SEEC European Meeting

Held on: Friday 22 January 2010 – 1.30pm to 3.30pm

**At: 'The Library', Institute Of Materials, Minerals & Mining,
1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DB**

Present:

Alex King	Kent County Council (In the chair)
Paul Watkins	Dover District Council & SEEC Secretary
Alan Marsh	Kent County Council
John Pinnell	GOSE
Paul Lovejoy	SEEDA
Martin Tugwell	SEEDA/Partnership Board
Ameeta Rowland	SEEDA/Partnership Board
Irina Von Wiese	SEEDA
Tiziana Boyland	SEEDA
Helyn Clack	Surrey County Council
Vincent O Connell	Surrey County Council
Jasbir Jhas	LGA
Roy Perry	Hampshire County Council
Helen Richardson	Hampshire County Council
Cec Tallack	Milton Keynes Council
Paula Baker	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Laura Hoskins	West Sussex County Council
Robert Bliss	Shepway District Council
Ron Moys	Kent County Council
Aidan Shutter	SEEC



A. Welcome and purpose of the Meeting

1. Paul Watkins gave a brief introduction of SEEC and its developing role across the South East region. He stressed that there was no appetite to re-create the previous Joint European Committee or to 'tread on the toes' of current activity. He also welcomed SEEDA and GOSE representatives to the meeting.
2. Alex King said the meeting was to discuss two key issues for the future.
 - As SEEC now exists, what do we all want to sign up to achieving?
 - How does SEEC, working together, ensure that South East England gets the maximum benefit possible from existing and future European funding streams?

B. GOSE/SEEDA Presentation

3. John Pinnell gave a presentation of the main funding streams for which GOSE has responsibility (presentation attached for information). He highlighted that a challenge for the South East is the perception that it is seen as a prosperous region; with European funds targeted towards regions of greatest need it is important for the South East to develop an effective 'pitch'. In addition he emphasised the importance of putting time and effort into developing a pipeline of proposals for consideration by future programmes.
4. Paul Lovejoy explained that from a SEEDA perspective, the two management authority blocks were ERDF and ESF. In addition to administering funding streams/programmes, there are other areas where SEEDA has also successfully applied for funding (along with local authority partners) – principally in the INTERREG programme.
5. Paul drew attention to the key areas of focus for SEEDA as being: supporting SME, supporting innovation/research and development activity, supporting growth in environmental technology industries and securing investment in critical infrastructure. He noted that through the Partnership Board structures SEEC had the opportunity to use forum such as the Economic Development and Skills Board and the Regional Transport Board to develop its pitch for European funding. In particular he highlighted the opportunity that these forums offered to co-ordinate the investment available more effectively; thereby maximising the benefit to the South East.

C. Group Discussion

6. Helyn Clack and Roy Perry suggested that a definitive table of the funding streams available and the South East's current performance would be helpful. John Pinnell cautioned that the transnational dimension of some projects meant that it was not always possible to break the information down in this way.
7. Alan Marsh said that funding was on a per capita basis. He suggested that the UK, and in particular the South East, should do better at securing European funds particularly if proposals are targeted at the criteria that favour the region. He looked to GOSE & SEEDA to support the work of local authorities in this regard.
8. Robert Bliss asked what percentage the UK gets and might we be missing out as a region? John Pinnell said that overall the UK is a net contributor not a net beneficiary of funding.
9. Paul Lovejoy reminded the meeting that the former JEC used to receive summary reports on funding programmes. He suggested that it should be possible to put together an overview for the region of the programmes currently in operation; in broad terms the overall scale of these programmes (across Europe) amounted to something in the order of €1bn of funding. Cec Tallack suggested that information on funding programmes could be made available through the SEEC network (via Paul Watkins).

10. Alex King summarised the key points identified so far as being:

- Agreement that recreating the Joint European Committee was not appropriate;
- Agreement that there was benefit from ensuring that all SEEC members had access to the information they need to make sure that they take full advantage of the opportunities available;
- Agreement that the creation of SEEC represented an opportunity to develop a stronger working relationship across local authorities in the region, with strategic leadership provided through the SEEC Executive (Leaders' Board);

The question that needed further consideration was how best to build upon this foundation; in particular how to translate the Political will to achieve more for the South East into success, and how might SEEC use existing forum to realise its ambition.

11. Martin Tugwell set out the opportunities afforded through the 'delivery boards'; in particular the Regional Transport Board and the Economic Development and Skills Board. He suggested that these were forum provided opportunities to develop a strong pitch for the South East and in particular to improve the co-ordination of funding streams to a common purpose. In that way it may be possible to lever in additional funding to the South East.

12. Roy Perry stressed the importance of local authorities having a presence in Brussels to support activity within the South East. He noted that SELP (South East Local Partners) provides a European presence for 27 councils and other organisations across the South East. Funding for this work comes by way of subscriptions.

13. Helyn Clack stressed the need to make greater use of existing working arrangements – such as SELP - although the question of how such arrangements were funded needed to be considered. It would not be acceptable for some authorities to benefit from a service that was funded by subscriptions from other authorities.

14. Alan Marsh said that in the past good working arrangements in Brussels had been important and that this should act as a catalyst for developing arrangements into the future. He agreed as to the importance of having a presence in Brussels. He noted that the Commission's preferred modus operandi was to engage with 'regions'.

15. Paul Watkins suggested that there was a need for a South-East wide grouping to develop knowledge for all South East England Councils so that collectively they could 'punch above their weight'. He stressed that SEEC has identified as a priority action the need to 'establish an appropriate mechanism to monitor and influence European policies and funding'. While this meeting was a starting point for taking that action forward there was a need to make real progress sooner rather than later if the South East is to secure more funding from European sources.

16. Alex King reminded the meeting that nominations for the Committee of the Regions (CoR) had been made through SEEC.

17. Paula Baker stressed the fact that the South East representatives on the CoR offered SEEC members a conduit to feed in strong South East input into the development of policy at European level. However, it requires there to be a clear message to convey; if SEEC can provide the messages she and her colleagues would be happy to fight the South East corner.

D. Future Actions

18. The future actions agreed from the discussion were:

- i) To ensure that European linkages are made explicitly with the activities of:
 - The Regional Transport Board – next meeting 12 March **[Martin Tugwell]**
 - The Economic Development and Skills Board – next meeting 25 May **[Ameeta Rowland/Martin Tugwell]**
- ii) To produce a table to show main funding streams and to develop this overtime to meet SEEC's requirements **[Paul Lovejoy/John Pinnell]**
- iii) SELP to write to Paul Watkins & Alex King to scope ideas for closer collaboration opportunities with SEEC **[Roy Perry]**
- iv) To convene a further meeting of this working group – possibly March but subject to progress - to develop more detailed proposals for consideration by SEEC Executive **[Aidan Shutter]**
- v) Using information from the above actions, to prepare a report for the SEEC Executive (expected in June post-elections) **[Paul Watkins/Vincent O'Connell/Aidan Shutter]**

19. Alex King thanked everyone for attending this inaugural meeting and for their ideas and suggestions for developing this area on behalf of SEEC.

For further details about South East England Councils (SEEC) please visit
www.secouncils.gov.uk