

Minutes of the SEEC Plenary Meeting

Thursday 25 March 2010

**Church House Conference Centre,
Dean's Yard,
Westminster,
London, SW1P 3NZ**



Present:

See attached attendance list

Minutes of the meeting

1a. Apologies and Declarations of substitutes

These were recorded on the attendance list

1b. Declarations of Interest

No personal or prejudicial interests were notified to the Chairman

2. Chairman's Update

Paul Carter mentioned the discussion later on the agenda with David Shakespeare and David Parsons which could see a more formal relationship developing with the LGA. Paul also mentioned that Heather Bolton would shortly be taking up the full time post of SEEC Communications Manager.

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings

- a) SEEC Plenary – 4th December 2009. The minutes were agreed
- b) Draft Minutes of the Leaders Board/SEEC Executive – 22 January 2010. The minutes were noted including the submission of evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into housing in the south east by the Chairman of the Regional Housing and Regeneration Board.
- c) Minutes of the SEEC European Meeting – 22 January 2010. Paul Watkins explained that the meeting had been convened as it was clear that there was not full uptake of available funding streams across the South East and the overall approach appears uncoordinated, thus not maximizing the full potential of European funding opportunities. The meeting received detailed presentations from GOSE and SEEDA and the outcomes were detailed in the minutes. The Transport Board has already been looking at the potential of integrating European funding. A follow up meeting of

the group is scheduled to take place in advance of the next SEEC Executive on 16th June. Paul Carter said it was critical that there was full take up of funding across the SE and that better coordination of effort would help to ensure this.

Action 1 – to arrange a further meeting of the SEEC European Grouping and to provide an update report to the next SEEC Executive

4. Consultation Response to the Conservative Party’s Proposals for Planning and Economic Development

Paul Carter reminded Members of the debate at the last Plenary which focused on the future proofing of SEEC and the relationship with London. He said he had recently met with Sir Simon Milton who was keen to ensure the relationship is improved.

Chris Williams introduced the paper. He said that in the event of a Labour victory or a hung Parliament after the general election the expectation was that the current arrangements would continue but within the context of less funding overall. The Conservative proposals were more focused around localism and subsidiarity with local authorities having a much greater say. Conservative proposals are to sweep away much of the formal regional architecture with voluntary arrangements likely to be encouraged.

Under Conservative proposals, there were four key areas where local authorities would benefit from acting collectively, detailed in para 2.2 of the paper. Para 3.2 outlined a series of suggested guiding principles but the key question to address is whether any new planning system can deliver the appropriate levels of development needed. Chris Williams reiterated that any new region-wide body should be designed according to the ‘form follows function’ principle. In considering the reform of RDA’s, natural economic areas must be agreed with business leaders and local authorities. The paper suggested a small cross party working group should meet with SEEDA to explore these issues further.

Paul Carter said Rob Douglas was keen to enter into a dialogue with SEEC about future arrangements. Myles Cullen raised the issue that sub-regions were not developed in the paper. It was noted that the reference to 30 groupings in the paper was for the whole country not specifically the South East. George Beckett said that an open approach was needed and that ground rules for economic areas must be established. He suggested that an over-arching body for Seeda was not necessary and that areas should be driven by economic development.

Tony Page suggested that elements of housing provision should be top-down otherwise local authorities may well ‘pull up the drawbridge’ to future housing development. He added that the current arrangements may well exist for a further 2/3 years even if there is a change of Government after the election. Paul Carter said that changes are likely to be included as part of the Queen’s speech but that RDAs could exist for longer until legislation is enacted.

Paul Clokie raised a concern about who decides on the allocation of Seeda's funding if Seeda were to cease to exist. Andrew Povey said that there is likely to be less funding for infrastructure in two-tier areas and that any response should include reference to incentives for upper tiers to provide infrastructure.

Louise Bloom endorsed the view to take forward a conversation but remained concerned about future development need being met and who will choose who sits on the new bodies from the business sector. Gerry Paterson suggested that a new SERPLAN type arrangement might be needed to enhance the south east working with London and its hinterland. Gillian Brown suggested that local authorities can effectively identify housing needs and would 'step up to the mark' under potential new arrangements. David Kirk believed the potential from Seeda funding was relatively small and that SEEC should push for improved infrastructure funding. John Gilbey said that housing numbers are difficult to defend locally when imposed by others.

Action 2

- Recommendation 1 – agreed

- Recommendation 2 - agreed to submit a cross-party response on behalf of the SEEC Executive. Chris Williams to formulate draft with Catriona Riddell and Martin Tugwell.

- Recommendation 3 – agreed that a small cross party SEEC working group should meeting with Rob Douglas and Pam Alexander. Options to be developed and reported back to the SEEC Executive.

5. Partnership Board Update Report

The report was noted

6. Boards, Delivery Boards and Planning Panel

- a) **RHRB** – The Board will be focusing on affordable housing and the Value for Money of Gypsy & Traveller pitch provision.
- b) **Planning Panel** – noted that the London Mayor had just cut Gypsy and Traveller provision by half. Proper dialogue would be needed with London on transport, economic development, waste and affordable housing
- c) **RTB** – Some schemes will not be going forward for the time being such as A40 Abbey Way, High Wycombe. Also noted that a new Urban Challenge Fund is set to replace TIF and that the SE needs to be careful that it does not lose out.
- d) **EDSB** – current work is focusing on the development of the regional skills strategy and business critical infrastructure such as Broadband. Miles Cullen said this was a real issue. Martin Tugwell said Seeda had announced a grant process and details would be sent to all SEEC members

Action 3 – Seeda Press release attached for information

7. SE Rural Board and Council

Cllr Andrew Bowles from Kent CC explained the working of the Rural Board, chaired by Paul Bettison and the Rural Council. Both will be subject to funding difficulties this year, particularly as Seeda's rural teams have ceased. He said there is a real danger that both the Rural Forum and Rural Board may be dissolved. There is potential for rural issues to form part of the SE regional architecture, possibly as a SEEC Board in its own right.

Action 4 – Rural matters to be included for discussion at the next Leaders' Board on 16th June with Paul Bettison present

8. SEEC Budget

Chris Williams presented the report. The key issue was the expected underspend outlined in paragraphs 3 & 4. SEEC Members discussed whether a rebate should be paid back to member Councils. There were views expressed on both sides. The issue was then put to the vote and it was agreed to carry forward surplus to 2010/11. The budget position would be reviewed post-election at the SEEC AGM in July.

Action 5

- a) **2009/10 surplus to be carried forward to 2010/11.**
- b) **Subscription rates to remain at 2009/10 rates**
- c) **Agreed that it would not be appropriate for the two SE National Park Authorities to be invited to join SEEC.**
- d) **The administration of the budget to be transferred from Buckinghamshire County Council to SEERA Ltd**
- e) **Budget position to be reviewed at the SEEC AGM on 14th July.**

9. Leaders' Board Consultation

SEEC Members noted the report and the actions taken

10. Future LGA/SEEC Relationship

David Shakespeare and David Parsons attended for the discussion. David Shakespeare outlined the current LGA position saying that whilst other regions have assumed the LGA name, they were not official LGA regions. He said that a SE proposal could be that SEEC becomes part of the 'LGA family tree' with a seat for each region then being offered on an LGA member board.

David Parsons introduced his role as lead LGA member for the SE Region. He offered to attend SEEC meetings to ensure views of SEEC members could be fed back to the centre of the LGA.

David Kirk also said representation on other LGA Boards/Panel was important. David Shakespeare said the LGA makes about 70 board appointments but receives 600-700 nominations so representation is sometimes compromised. Richard Gates said he welcomed closer liaison but not necessarily to become part of the LGA family. David Parsons said this could affect SE nominations if required. John Gilby said a good association with the LGA was needed however Richard Gates said that no decisions about closer LGA working should be taken at today's meeting. Hilary Barr was concerned that any future relationship could perpetuate regionalism. David Shakespeare said it was up to SEEC to decide what relationship it wanted with the LGA in the future.

Paul Carter thanked David Shakespeare and David Parsons for attending.

Action 6 – SEEC to consider the future relationship with the LGA at the next available Plenary meeting

11. Health and Well-being in the South East

Candy Morris and Professor Yvonne Doyle attended from the South East Coast SHA to give a presentation on the health and wellbeing of people across the South East. (presentation attached for information). In overall terms, the health of people living in the South Central area is marginally better than in the South East Coast area. The SE Coast area also has higher levels of deprivation and the funding is adjusted accordingly. Both SHA areas have visions based on eight pathways of care. Both SHA's, in common with other public sector organisations, have financial challenges which are unlikely to improve in the short term.

Key challenges outlined where:

- a) the need to address long-term conditions
- b) treatment closer to home
- c) more freedom to innovate
- d) culture change in the NHS
- e) achieving greater value for money
- f) developing stronger partnerships

Mike Appleyard said that delivery in rural areas was a key issue which includes ambulance services to hospital. Yvonne Doyle said it was critical to get the right skills mix to patients to limit problems at the point of contact. For example, 'Super Care' paramedics increasing use digital technology.

Paul Carter said a future Conservative Government may get the Audit Commission to do an analysis of the totality of expenditure to challenge the fairness of current national funding. Candy Morris said she was involved in a group looking at NHS allocations and how much is shared out to look at reducing inequalities. Overall agreement that future Health/SEEC relationship should be built around information sharing, future consultations, joining forces where it makes sense and sharing best practice. It was expected that this would develop over time.

Paul Carter thanked Candy Morris and Yvonne Doyle for attending.

12. Any Other Business

Paul Carter advised SEEC that Diana Pogson was retiring at the end of March and he expressed his thanks for all her hard work over what has been a difficult and challenging time for the Partnership Board and its staff.

Close of Plenary Meeting

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

24th March 2010

SEEDA TO PROVIDE £375K FUNDING FOR RURAL COMMUNITY BROADBAND PROJECTS

Rural communities throughout the South East can now apply for capital grants to increase their access to broadband.

The funding programme is expected to improve local services, stimulate economic development and increase social inclusion.

Through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), £375,000 has been made available until the end of 2010. The grants are provided through the European Economic Recovery Programme and managed by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

Robert Crawford, Operations Director at SEEDA, says: "SEEDA has worked in partnership with local authorities and telecommunication companies to bring broadband to rural communities across the South East. This grant funding will help rural communities compete with areas that already have sufficient broadband access and promote growth throughout the local economy."

The funding will provide access to broadband infrastructure or upgrade the existing network to ensure a minimum speed of 2Mb/s is reached. Expressions of interest must be received by 31 May 2010 and fall within areas which have already been identified as 'white' or 'grey'*.

Robert adds: "SEEDA's broadband investment to date is estimated to have provided a broadband service to over 1,500 premises, 10% of which have been rural based businesses. It is essential that the South East builds on this to provide every community, regardless of its location, with the same opportunities."

More information about the RDPE fund for Rural Community Broadband is available by visiting the SEEDA website at www.seeda.co.uk

For further information, please contact David Cooper at SEEDA on 01483 501304

For media enquiries please contact: Stuart Pearson, PR & media manager on 01483 501362 or stuartpearson@seeda.co.uk.

Notes to Editors

*White areas are where broadband networks do not at present exist and private investment is unlikely to build a network within three years. "Grey" areas are where only one network is in place or planned for deployment within three years, and there are no plans by any operator to deploy a second network within three years.

- **SEEDA, the South East England Development Agency**, is the Government-funded agency responsible for the sustainable economic development of the South East of England – the driving force of the UK's economy. Through supporting businesses, encouraging innovation, developing skills and engaging with public and private partners, we aim to create a successful, sustainable future for the region.

- **SEEDA's support helped deliver the following** over the period 2005-2008:
 - 17,500 jobs created or safeguarded
 - 32,500 people helped to get work
 - 10,000 businesses created or attracted to region
 - 137,500 businesses assisted
 - £638m investment, 45% levered from private sector
 - 200ha Brownfield land remediated
 - 148,500 people assisted in skills development

The Rural Development Programme for England

1. The Rural Development Programme for England is jointly funded by the EU, through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the UK Government.

2. The RDPE provides a wide range of support for capital and revenue projects and training for farmers, growers, foresters, rural businesses, food businesses and rural communities.
3. The RDPE runs from 2007 – 2013 and during this time SEEDA will administer a budget of £65m for use across the South East and London.

European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP)

The European Council has approved a European Economic Recovery Plan to help mitigate the impacts of the current downturn across member states. This includes funding for the support of Rural Community Broadband to be delivered through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).