

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



Date: 13 July 2011

Subject: **SEEC European Priorities: Report and Recommendations from member task group**

Report by: Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE, Task & Finish Group Chairman

**Recommendations:**

Members are asked to endorse the findings of the SEEC Europe Task and Finish Group and agree that:

- i) SEEC should put arrangements in place to keep members informed of opportunities to access European funding.
- ii) SEEC should continue to press the case to government and the EU on the importance of maintaining access to European funding in South East England under future EU programmes.
- iii) To help achieve these actions SEEC should continue, initially for one year, its member Task Group to provide leadership and steer on European funding issues.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 SEEC agreed in November 2010 to establish a member Task & Finish Group looking at how it might engage on European issues, in particular funding opportunities. Chaired by SEEC's Deputy Chairman Cllr Gordon Keymer, the group made good progress, meeting twice as well as conducting business via email.
- 1.2 In making its recommendations, the group is conscious that some local authorities have significant member and officer expertise on European issues; some are already involved individually, or through local groupings, in European policy and funding, in two instances having offices based in Brussels<sup>1</sup>. The Local Government Association also provides European policy and funding advice and has a Brussels office.
- 1.3 However there are also some member authorities who have very limited working knowledge of these issues. Given SEEC's own resource constraints, the group's focus was on what SEEC could do to add-value for all member authorities and make the South East case for European funding at a strategic level, complementing and, where appropriate, drawing on existing resources.
- 1.4 Although primarily focused on what SEEC could do from July 2011 onwards, the group's work has already helped identify policy issues of concern that SEEC has taken action on. It has:
  - Recommended the inclusion of important European funding issues at the March SEEC All-member meeting. This provided the opportunity for members to emphasise key principles that SEEC believes important in future funding to senior government officials, which was followed up with a letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

<sup>1</sup> Kent County Council with Kent European Partners, and Southern England Local Partners (a consortium of organisations led by Hampshire County Council to provide a presence in Brussels)

- Alerted members to funding opportunities in the latest rounds of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Interreg programme.
- The Chairman of the group also wrote at members' request to the Government to address concerns that it may not be treating local authority match funding for European funds fairly.

1.5 We are grateful for the input of members, as well as the advice received from officers within member authorities, LGA and SEEDA. This report is deliberately kept brief for easy digest, but fuller notes of the meetings, working papers and papers discussed at the SEEC All-member meeting in March 2011 are available on the SEEC website<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Key Findings from the Group

2.1 Having assessed issues and resources available, the group recommends two main areas for SEEC to take forward:

i. **Ensuring SEEC members make the most of European funding opportunities**, within the current EU financial framework for 2007-2013. The group agreed SEEC does not have the capacity to provide technical support for funding bids, but should provide information or 'signpost' member authorities to funding opportunities.

*The Government is moving management of the European programmes managed by SEEDA and GOSE (including European Regional Development Fund and Rural Development Programme) to central departments during 2011. It is important SEEC members are kept aware of implications of changes and the remaining opportunities to access these and other funds, such as Interreg.*

ii. **Influencing future European funding from 2014 onwards** – there is a broad indication from the European Union that key funding programmes will continue in some form after the current funding period (2007-13), but fuller details are awaited. Although the key principles for future European funding will be set at pan-European level, the UK Government will have considerable flexibility in how it manages and makes this available at sub-national level. SEEC should therefore look to influence the Government on this, as well as taking up issues with European institutions such as the Committee of the Regions.

*In November 2010, the European Commission published a report setting out its proposed principles for the post-2013 funding period<sup>3</sup>. Key aspects include continuation of structural funds for all parts of the EU, including wealthier member states; but a tighter focus on the EU's growth strategy for the next 10 years ('EU 2020'<sup>4</sup>), with priorities for "Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive" growth, with richer regions addressing fewer priorities of particular local significance. More specific funding proposals for the EU Budget review (2014-2020), including the structural and cohesion funds, are expected during summer 2011. It will therefore be important that SEEC is ready to influence this as necessary. Key principles were agreed by SEEC members at the*

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/5/detail/25/year/2011/>

<sup>3</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion

[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion5/index\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion5/index_en.cfm)

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)

*March 2011 All-member meeting and sent to BIS's Secretary of State, attached for reference as Annex 1.*

*A practical example of influencing the future was the attendance of the Chairman of this group at a meeting in June with members of the House of Lords and MEPs to discuss the future of cohesion policy, at which he was the sole UK councillor present.*

### **3. Taking the Group's Findings Forward**

#### **3.1 The Group recommends three main actions:**

- i. **Sharing information updates** and signposting potential sources of European funding and deadlines via SEEC's quarterly newsletter and reports to members. Information is already available through sources such as the LGA<sup>5</sup> and SEEC should ensure members are aware of this. Email updates or reminders would be sent for time-critical opportunities that do not fall within SEEC's main newsletter or meeting cycles.

As an example of the sort of information SEEC could share, briefing information is set out in Annex 2 on two forthcoming funding opportunities relating to lifelong learning and supporting families in need that SEEC has recently been informed about.

- ii. Pursuing opportunities to **influence policy that impacts on funding programmes** that affect South East England, for example through engagement and communication with the UK government and European institutions (such as the Committee of the Regions and European Parliament) and effective liaison with the LGA and other local government partners with a presence in Brussels. This could include establishing a mechanism to feed South East views into the EU via Committee of Regions members with regular briefings and report backs.

We also recommend periodically inviting UK Government representatives to SEEC meetings to discuss latest developments. SEEC will make representations as appropriate on consultations regarding future funding opportunities. We also suggest SEEC/local authority representatives on the ERDF Local Management Committee (formerly the Programme Management Committee) are periodically invited to report programme progress to SEEC.

- iii. The member Task and Finish Group was an effective mechanism to bring members together to discuss priorities for action, drawing on advice from local authority technical officers as appropriate. We therefore **propose continuing the task group, initially for one year**, to help maintain member leadership, focus and momentum on these issues. It would report periodically to SEEC members, allied to a light-touch officer advisory network.

#### **3.2 Subject to approval of the group's findings and recommendations, the SEEC secretariat will arrange to progress these issues with members and specialist officers in member local authorities.**

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<sup>5</sup> Local Government Association members can access regular funding tracker updates at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=11061870>

## **Annex 1 - SEEC's 'key principles' on future European funding – agreed following discussion at SEEC All-member Meeting in March 2011**

Although South East England receives a relatively small allocation of Structural Funds such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), this funding is very important to helping our communities and businesses take forward key projects. It supports growth in our many underperforming areas and helps maintain global competitiveness in others, for example by stimulating growth in the 'green' economy.

SEEC is clear that South East England must have fair access to European funds in the future. We therefore urge the UK Government to ensure European programme funding, including the ERDF, continues to be available to South East England in the next funding period. We ask the Government to adopt the following principles when engaging in deliberations about the future of European Structural Funds in the UK:

- Local government must be involved in setting priorities for European Union funds nationally and in their local area, and sit on management committees
- Funds must be flexible enough to respond to varied and complex local needs
- Funds must be available to all parts of the UK including the South East
- The role of more prosperous areas in the UK in bringing about economic and social improvement and cohesion must be recognised
- Funds must be available to address both urban and rural needs, as well as those of 'peri-urban' areas with a mixture of rural and urban characteristics
- There is a need to look innovatively at addressing the challenge of match-funding at a time when public funding may be more limited
- Main European funding programmes must continue to be available in South East England - any proposals for loans ('financial instruments) to replace, rather than complement, main funding programmes in the UK should be challenged
- Maximise the opportunities for partners to access funding by placing a greater proportion of funding into programmes that do not require cross-border partnership
- Proportionate administration is essential, and bureaucracy and red-tape must be reduced wherever possible
- Funding decisions must be taken in a timely and transparent way

In addition, we understand and are concerned that key decisions about need for funding are made at pan-European level on the basis of Gross Value Added (GVA). This is a very limited basis to assess real levels of need and opportunity. We ask that the UK Government press the EU to use wider measures which take a fuller range of socio-economic factors into account, not only in relative/percentage terms but also reflecting the absolute numbers of people affected.

## Annex 2:

# SEEC Update – European Funding Opportunities

We have been made aware of the following funding opportunities which may interest local authorities:

- **LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME**

The EU-funded Lifelong Learning Programme offers individuals at all stages of their lives the chance to pursue opportunities for learning across Europe. There are a range of possible activities that can be funded under five strands of programme. More information at <http://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/> We understand the deadlines are annual, so where they have now passed for 2011 there will be further opportunities in 2012.

Crucially one 2011 deadline has not passed which is for week-long Study Visits, through the 'Transversal' fund. The application deadline is 14 October 2011 for visits between March-June 2012. These offer specialists and decision makers involved in the design or delivery of education or vocational training the opportunity to spend a week in another European country finding out about other education systems and practices. Grants of up to 1,500 Euro are available to support each participant's week-long visit.

For further information please see <http://www.transversal.org.uk/>

- **DWP EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH MULTIPLE PROBLEMS**

Around £200m of the European Social Fund (ESF) will be spent by DWP across England on helping families with multiple problems during 2011-13. This funding will be let to organisations who will work with Local Authorities to help identify families who should benefit. In many cases local authorities will already be interacting with these families.

To be eligible for ESF provision, families with multiple problems must have at least one member on out of work benefits, and a history of worklessness. ESF support will focus on moving family members closer to the labour market, so they can enter employment or take advantage of employment-focused support, such as the Work Programme. Providers will be paid for delivering progress and job outcomes.

ESF family provision is expected to complement and align with what is already available locally, and providers will need to work with local authorities to explore opportunities and ensure their proposals are appropriate to the area.

An invitation to tender will be issued for providers in early Summer 2011, with provision going live around the end of the year. Providers are being asked to give close attention to local authority engagement when compiling bids. DWP is working to ensure local authorities are aware of the opportunities - more information will be available at the SEEC AGM on 13 July from Baroness Stedman-Scott, Chief Executive of the organisation Tomorrow's People, an organisation that is likely to bid to help deliver the programme within South East England.