

South East Strategic
Leaders



SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING

Date: 30 September 2011

Subject: **Joint working between SEEC and SESL**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director and Kate Jones, SESL
Head of Policy and Public Affairs

Recommendations:

That SEEC's Executive Committee members and SESL Leaders:

- i) Agree the principle of moving towards closer working between SEEC and SESL and support joint working on the areas set out in section 4.4.
- ii) Agree to trial a combined programme of member meetings in 2012 as set out in section 4.1.
- iii) Ask the SEEC and SESL lead chief executives to explore potential savings in more detail and develop proposals for working towards a combined staff team and shared officer networks in the longer term.

1. Background

- 1.1 Both SEEC and SESL wish to explore closer working in order to strengthen the influence of the South East. There is also a desire to make better use of Leaders' and Chief Executives' time by reducing duplication, for example in the number of meetings held. In the current climate where all councils are seeking to identify ways to achieve more with less – streamlining work programmes and forming stronger partnerships – it makes sense for SEEC and SESL to do the same.
- 1.2 It is hoped that closer working will enable a single, stronger voice to be heard for the South East. There are also areas of overlap in the two organisations' work programmes, such as localism, finance and infrastructure. Closer working could maximize the value of the policy support available from officers and could in the future enable high quality research to be commissioned jointly that can benefit all South East authorities.

2. SEEC- SESL meeting on 31 August 2011

- 2.1 A productive meeting between SEEC and SESL representatives, led by Cllr Paul Carter and Dr Andrew Povey, took place on 31 August to discuss ideas about moving forward with joint working.
- 2.2 A model was discussed whereby SEEC would act as the overall 'voice for the South East'. At the same time, the brand and distinctiveness of SESL would be retained as a separate group which would continue to engage with key stakeholders and lead on issues specific to upper-tier authorities, such as education and social care. It was also felt that a District Group within SEEC

could develop a similar parallel role to lead on issues that particularly affect districts.

- 2.3 Agreement was reached that as a first step, SESL and SEEC would plan for a number of joint meeting dates in 2012, retaining separate meetings for SESL and Districts but on the same day as SEEC. It was felt that SEEC and SESL should retain their existing names to avoid confusion. It was also agreed that both organisations would explore potential budget efficiencies, with a view to moving towards a single joint subscription for upper-tier authorities in the future. Officers were asked to review the two work programmes to identify areas of collective interest for joint working, and identify opportunities for joint approaches to communications to give greater weight to lobbying messages. Finally, SEEC agreed to review its Constitution to see whether a clause might be added to reflect a joint working arrangement with SESL.

3. Potential efficiencies

- 3.1 As outlined above, joint working between SEEC and SESL offers potential for efficiencies in a number of areas. Cost savings could be achieved by removing duplication, sharing administrative functions, combining meeting schedules and aligning work programmes. A combined meeting schedule would also reduce diary commitments for members and officers currently involved in both organisations, who in future would attend one set of meetings rather than two.
- 3.2 Joint working could help create a more effective force for raising the profile of South East views with ministers and government. The current situation risks fragmentation of important messages and can create confusion about the role of the two different organisations.
- 3.3 There is also potential for greater productivity by combining complementary staff skills and experience to create a highly effective officer support team. This would be achieved by avoiding duplication and sharing staff expertise and officer networks in pursuit of an agreed work programme covering the needs of all tiers of local government.
- 3.4 On cost savings, the greatest potential lies in three main areas:
- Administration – reduce costs by combining functions
 - Meeting costs – reduce costs by combining meeting dates
 - Research and communications budgets – reduce costs by removing duplication of effort and focusing on top quality work around a few key projects.
- 3.5 In 2011-12 the two organisations have a combined budget of £550,000. SEEC is budgeting to spend £360,000, including cost of three staff. SESL is budgeting to spend £190,000, including the cost of two staff.
- 3.6 Potential for savings would be greater in the financial year 2012-13 as both SEEC and SESL have existing commitments for the current financial year. In future years, subject to member agreement, it would be possible to establish a single subscription covering membership of a joint organisation.

4. Next steps

4.1 Meeting dates

As a first step to joint working it is proposed that there are three combined meetings in 2012:

- Tuesday 7 February 2012
- Thursday 21 June 2012
- Thursday 8 November

As these dates are scheduled in the SEEC calendar, venues have already been booked and the dates circulated to all SEEC members.

4.2 The proposed format for the day of meetings is as follows:

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|-------|-------------------------|
| 10.00 | SESL meeting |
| 10.00 | District meeting |
| 12.00 | Lunch |
| 12.45 | SEEC all-member meeting |
| 15.15 | Close |

4.3 It is proposed that the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of SEEC, SESL and a District Grouping would jointly agree the format of their respective agendas and which topics are on each group's work programme to reduce duplication and ensure issues are considered in the most appropriate forum.

4.4 Work programmes

Areas where it is suggested that SEEC and SESL could start working together and which feature in both organisations' work programmes include:

- Local government finance (responding to the LG Resource Review and maximising the benefits of the research project commissioned by SEEC)
- Localism and community budgets
- The growth agenda (infrastructure, skills and economic development)
- Strategic Transport Planning
- Influencing decision makers and ensuring the views of SE authorities are effectively heard

Subject to member agreement, joint communications activity could begin around some of the above issues when appropriate opportunities arise.