

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

**MINUTES OF THE SEEC EXECUTIVE MEMBER WORKSHOP
(Closed Meeting)**

Held on Friday, 15 October 2010

Royal Horticultural Halls, Greycoat Street, London



Present: Paul Carter (SEEC Chairman)
 Gordon Keymer (SEEC Deputy Chairman)
 Paul Watkins (SEEC Secretary/Treasurer)
 Moira Gibson
 Andrew Bowles
 Elizabeth Cartwright
 Gillian Brown
 Lynne Hack
 Barry Norton
 David Robertson
 Ian Hudspeth
 Dr Andrew Povey
 Louise Bloom
 Mike Appleyard
 Kelsie Learney

In Attendance: Heather Bolton, Head of Comms & Public Affairs, SEEC
 Aidan Shutter, p/t Policy Officer, SEEC
 Roy Millard, SE Strategic Partnership for Migration
 Susie Kemp, ACE, Surrey CC representing Chris Williams

Ex1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

Ex1.1 Recorded apologies were received from Myles Cullen, Cec Tallack, Tony de Vere, James Swindlehurst, Andrew Cumpsty and Ken Thornber CBE.

Ex1.2 Substitutes attending were Gillian Brown for Myles Cullen.

Ex1.3 Gordon Keymer chaired the meeting as Paul Carter notified the Executive he would be late attending.

Ex2. Minutes of SEEC Executive Meeting on 16 June 2010 and Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

Ex2.1 The minutes were **agreed** as a true record of the meeting with one change recording Gordon Keymer's apologies.

Ex3. "The Way Forward"

Ex3.1 The Executive meeting took the form of a 'working group' with Members dividing into three discussion tables. Heather Bolton explained that the purpose of the session was to discuss the main SEEC priorities for the next 12 months. Three papers were included in the agenda to aid discussion and a paper covering the

latest speech by Mark Prisk, Minister of State for Business and Enterprise made on 12 October was also circulated by Aidan Shutter.

- Ex3.2 Heather Bolton explained that the LACE Chief Executives had suggested a number of priority areas which included Europe, Housing, Transport and Infrastructure, LEPs and Health. LACE also expressed caution about planning as the approach has radically changed under the Coalition Government and it could be seen as re-inventing the old regime. In addition, it was felt that the future SEEC work programme should have minimal overlap with the work of South East Strategic Leaders (SESL).
- Ex3.3 Paul Watkins asked if a possible secondment could be made available to help improve local authority access to European funding opportunities. At the previous SEEC Executive meeting Howard Ewing had said Government departments are acutely aware of European funding issues and Pam Alexander had said this presented an opportunity to work together.
- Ex3.4 **Summary of table discussions**

(Group A: feedback via Gordon Keymer, Group B: feedback via Susie Kemp And Group C: feedback via Heather Bolton)

Q1. Do SEEC's principles & objectives need updating?

Group A:

- Change scrutiny role to monitoring role.
- Add promotion of SE as a leading global economic 'region'.
- Add maximising EU funding.
- Include monitoring of migration.

Group B:

- Review scrutiny role. Consider subject by subject but resources a problem.
- Link dialogue with neighbours to SEEC's role as single voice for the SE.
- Replace word 'region' with 'Greater South East'.

Group C:

- Need to keep principles under review as the new local government landscape develops.
- Not yet clear what needed on scrutiny.
- Single voice needs to represent consensus views.

Q2. What are the priority topics for SEEC to address in 2010-11?

Group A:

- Current priorities plus:
 - Migration.
 - Fighting to maintain economic position of the SE.

Group B:

- Transport.
- LEPs.
- Europe (check no duplication with LGA).

- Housing/ localism.
- Planning policy.

Group C:

Focus on areas that need joint 'muscle' – eg:

- Transport.
- Housing.
- Migration.
- Broadband.
- Finance – a fair deal for the SE.

Q3: What should be SEEC's role in relation to European matters?

Group A:

- Create SE-wide network of existing council European officers to support work.
- Better information on SE needs to Committee of the Regions members.
- Access to EU funding that is comparable with other areas of the UK.
- Explore web link to LGA tracker on EU funds.

Group B:

- Build relationships with MEPs.
- Co-ordinating role on nominations to EU and information on availability/take up of funds (check no duplication with LGA).

Group C:

- Information on funds available and how to access them – aim is more money for the SE. Also focus on post-2013 funding arrangements
- Influence Committee of the Regions to lobby for SE needs.
- SEEC to establish links with local authorities' European officers.

Q4: How will SEEC engage with LEPs and business organisations?

It was agreed by all that the relationship with LEPs was important but that this will be work in progress for some time as the size, shape, area and functions of LEPs are still to be clarified.

Group A:

- Invite LEP/ business representatives to some SEEC Executive meetings to build ongoing relationships.

Group B:

- Dialogue via Executive committee.

Group C:

- Approach will depend on how LEPs develop.

Q5: What member structures/ meetings will best deliver active member involvement in the work programme?

Group A:

- Focus mainly on Executive Committee involvement plus task and finish groups.
- A format based on 2 plenary and 4 executive meetings each year.

Group B:

- Focus on task and finish groups and workshops in addition to Executive committee.
- A format based on 3 plenary meetings (2 business plenaries and 1 annual conference).

Group C:

- Issue based meetings rather than regular standing committees.
- Review district representation to ensure members represent consensus views from the 55 district councils.
- Officer networks can help support members to minimise need for SEEC resources.

Q6: Do the SEEC spokesperson roles need to change to reflect changing priorities?

Group A:

- Review after a year.

Group B:

- Spokespeople topics should be chosen to cover wider local government issues than previously.
- Ask spokespersons to facilitate task and finish groups.
- Relevant spokesperson should go with chairman to meet ministers.

Group C:

- Difficult to carry out spokesperson roles without specialist officer back up.
- Changing spokespersons would lead to review of Executive Committee, as current spokespersons are also Executive members.
- Review portfolios later when policy agenda is clearer.

Q7: What are the respective roles of SEEC and SESL?

Detailed discussion deferred on this topic.

Q8: On liaison with MPs and MEPs – what should be done locally and what should be done via SEEC?

Group A:

- Send SEEC newsletter to all MPs and MPs in the SE.

Group B:

- Build relationships with MEPs via SEEC Executive.
- Use SEEC to co-ordinate contact with Cabinet MPs to make best use of contacts.
- Make contact with EU officials based in London (xref SEEC role on EU matters).

Group C:

- Liaise with MEPs on specific issues– eg via invite to SEEC Plenary to talk on EU funding.
- MP contact will be primarily locally-led not via SEEC.
- Build database of SEEC members' ministerial contacts.
- Important to choose knowledgeable SEEC representatives to meet ministers with relevant briefing and specialist officer support.

Q9: How do members want to take forward relationships with LGA, Mayor, London Councils and groups of councils in other areas?

Group A:

- Build relationship with councils in East of England. Compare notes on how they handle liaison with London.
- As joint work with SESL, meet London 2-3 times a year on major issues such as transport, waste.

Group B:

- Maximise use of SEEC members who have an LGA role to influence the LGA agenda.
- Meet London regularly to establish relationships, especially with the Mayor's office.

Group C:

- Relationship with London should be based on bargaining to balance what London & SE need from each other.
- Regular meetings important to build relationships but focus on key issues (eg transport & waste) and consider a framework on who meets who, as Mayor won't attend all meetings.
- SEEC should aim to influence LGA agenda

Q10: What are the key data that SEEC needs to collect from councils to track issues?

Group A:

- Ask councils what they can provide.
- A data dashboard is important but should focus on key data not create an industry around it.
- How can we make use of 2011 Census data?

Group B:

- GVA and returns to the Exchequer important but how do we collect this?
- Identify gaps – ie what is not collected centrally.

Group C:

- Data important for negotiations.
- Pull together what already available in councils.

Ex3.4 Paul Watkins gave a brief update on discussions at the LGA Executive which now includes representatives from each region. The last meeting was dominated by a discussion around the forthcoming Localism Bill.

Ex3.5 It was **agreed** to circulate the LGA Executive Meeting agendas to SEEC Executive Members by e-mail.

Ex4. Items for Information

a) SEEC Subscriptions Update

Ex4.1 Aidan Shutter said that since the report had been written, three more authorities had paid their SEEC subscriptions making just seven outstanding payers. These authorities were being followed up.

b) Consultation responses submitted

Ex4.2 The Executive noted the responses submitted by SEEC to the Revenue Support Grant Top Slice for Improvement Services and the Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution Consultations, both of which closed on 6th October.

c) Confirmed Forward Meeting Dates

Ex4.3 The remaining dates for 2010 SEEC meetings were noted

- SEEC All-member meeting – 19th November 2010 at Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London
- SEEC Executive Committee – 7th December at RIBA, Portland Place, London

Ex5 Any Other Business

Ex5.1 There being no AOB items, the meeting closed at 14.30.

Signed: _____

Paul Carter
Chairman

Date: 7 December 2010