

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
MINUTES OF THE ALL-MEMBER PLENARY MEETING
Friday 19 November 2010
Church House Conference Centre
Dean's Yard, Westminster
London, SW1P 3NZ



Present:

See attached attendance list

SEEC Chairman, Paul Carter tendered his apologies, so Deputy Chairman, Gordon Keymer chaired the meeting. It was proposed and agreed that where agenda items allow, this and future Plenary meetings should aim to finish by 1.00pm

1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

These were recorded on the attendance list for the meeting and attached to these minutes for information. No declarations of interest were made.

2. Minutes of SEEC AGM held on 14 July 2010 and matters arising not elsewhere on the Agenda

The minutes of the AGM were agreed as a true and accurate record and there were no matters arising.

3. Chairman's Report

Gordon Keymer outlined the current changes facing local government and the challenge of delivering local services with less money. He stressed the importance of working through SEEC to help ensure a fair funding deal for the South East and in maintaining the area's global competitiveness. He added that there was now, through SEEC, a central point of contact for any LEP councils who want to offer secondment opportunities to SEEDA staff. In addition, an approach has been made to Bob Neill to address the planned SEEC housing conference due to take place in the New Year.

Gordon Keymer also reported that Hayley Austin had been appointed on a six month fixed term contract to provide admin support to SEEC.

SEEC also welcomed an LGA update from David Parsons, the LGA's nominated representative for the South East. David Parsons said the LGA was engaged in a number of campaigns including lobbying for specific grants to come within the Formula grant calculations, the need to help councils particularly as the cuts were being front-end loaded and pressing for the need to prevent large swings in funding. Within the Area Based Grant, he warned of the potential impact of the changes to the Working Neighbourhoods Fund worth around £450m. Jeremy Birch said that the poorest authorities would end up taking the biggest impact, for example, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund is worth approximately £2m to Hastings.

David Parsons said that the top-slice funding would be reduced to £28m by 2015, demonstrating that the LGA would be taking the same pain as local councils. He added that in addition to the 16 pilots for Community Budgets, a further 20 are in the pipeline.

In terms of improvement activity, post Audit Commission and other inspection reductions, the LGA could offer help and support, although essentially it was a decision for local councils about how they would wish to go forward.

SEEC members made a number of comments regarding what was seen as the excessive salary and pension packages for the LGA Chief Executive and other senior officers. Some SEEC members said that senior LGA Officers should consider some level of voluntary reduction of benefits. David Parsons confirmed that LGA allowances for members are being frozen.

David Parsons said he noted the views of SEEC and would feedback to the LGA. He said he would write to the SEEC Chairman to outline the salary and pension issues

Action 1 – David Parsons to write to the SEEC Chairman to respond to the comments made regarding salary and pension levels of senior LGA staff. (In the light of this response, SEEC should consider whether it writes directly to the LGA Chairman).

Chris Williams said that senior government officials were saying that the areas most affected by public service job losses would be cushioned from the cuts as far as possible, which would leave the South East hardest hit. Cec Tallack was concerned as Milton Keynes has the second lowest proportion of public sector jobs in the country. Ed Turner also felt the South East could lose out significantly as its diverse nature masked areas where there were high concentrations of public service jobs. SEEC reminded David Parsons of the importance of the South East economy to the rest of the country and to caution against the BIS view that money is better directed to other parts of the country.

Action 2 – SEEC to produce a briefing note for David Parsons covering the effect of public service job losses across the region.

Paul Watkins also raised the importance of the LGA being active in promoting views for the future redistribution of ERDF European funding. David Parsons said he would ensure views are fed into the LGA's European Team.

4. The Way Forward – the future SEEC Work Programme.

Gordon Keymer gave a short presentation to introduce the draft Work Programme. It was noted that around £700k would be coming to SEEC following the final wind-up of the Partnership Board. Gordon Keymer explained that the Work Programme was focused on four key principles:

- Fair Funding for the South East
- Promote the South East as a global economy

- A single democratic voice for the South East
- To monitor the pulse of the South East economy through a dashboard of indicators

It was proposed to establish two 'Task and Finish' Working Groups to look in detail at European issues and funding distribution and a range of dashboard indicators. These groups would report their findings to the SEEC AGM in July 2011.

Linked to the principles are six priority topics – Finance, Economy, Europe, Housing, Migration and Transport – which will form the basis of the monitoring dashboard and provide focus for future topical events or conferences. In addition to the proposed housing conference, a further conference covering the effect of London on the South East was also suggested as a future topic.

David Lee said it was important that SEEC does not duplicate the work of other organisations, for example through the collection of data for the dashboard. He also suggested a potential future conference on strengthening the South East economy. Andrew Cumpsty supported the focus on migration particularly with the lag in the grant formula calculations. James Swindlehurst added that migration issues must be relevant to local councils eg Education or multi-occupancy properties. Cec Tallack said consideration must be given to people migrating from other parts of the country.

Roy Millard updated SEEC on the outcomes from the recent Barking and Dagenham case. The judgement concerns young asylum seekers who are supported by local authorities as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under the age of 18. On turning 18, those who receive a negative decision on their asylum case and whose appeal rights are exhausted, would continue to be supported by the local authority whilst removal directions are carried out within 3 months. The UK Borders Agency makes payments to local authorities for this 3 month period.

The judgement however effectively ends the assumption that at the end of the 3 month period, if a removal has not taken place that the young person can be transferred to UKBA support. Local authorities in the SE report that most removals do not take place within this 3 month period and that notifications from UKBA of the negative decision range considerably (between 7 and 414 days were given as examples).

The judgement means local authorities have a choice i.e. to make the young person destitute, or continue to support. To inform the decision, a Human Rights Assessment (HRA) may be undertaken. The Local Authority may take the option to make destitute with or without the HRA but runs the risk of having the decision judicially reviewed. It risks both costs of defending the action and to reputation of the authority plus examples of inaccurate decisions being communicated increases the risk.

Local authorities are proposing that discussions are held with UKBA to look at the decision serving process and more removals within the 3 month period. Furthermore they are requesting their full costs of providing support are met.

Action 3 – SEEC Members agreed to establish the two proposed ‘Task and Finish’ Groups covering dashboard indicators and European Funding. Nominations for membership of the Task and Finish groups will be in accordance with the current political balance of SEEC and should be sent to Heather Bolton.

Action 4 – agreed to work with the South East Strategic Leaders (SESL) to commission and fund an independent report based on the Oxford Economics Study into the future economic outlook for the South East.

5. Impact of Government Announcements on South East Councils

a) Spending Review and Infrastructure Plans

Heather Bolton reported that the recent Spending Review announcements had resulted in a mixed outcome for the South East. A number of transport schemes had received funding however the front loading of cuts for Councils would bring difficulties.

Ed Turner said both the Housing Revenue Account Reform and the plans for the Treasury to retain right to buy receipts would significantly affect councils with housing stock. James Swindlehurst added that the proposed benefits caps could also cause significant problems particularly if families then move from higher cost areas like London into the South East. David Lee added that the issue of negative subsidies within HRA's means less money to carry out Housing Stock repairs, which will be a particular issue with rents rising. SEEC should be identifying these as areas of significant concern within its work programme and closely monitoring developments.

Jill Davidson supported the A21 scheme which would significantly benefit the South Coast and Myles Cullen supported the A27 Chichester By-pass, both of which are scheduled for further development work. Ian Hudspeth noted that the Access to Oxford scheme had not been included.

b) Impact of proposed housing benefits cap on the South East

SEEC members noted the report and the impacts of both the proposed caps and the potential movement of tenants from more expensive areas to the South East's cheaper coastal towns adding to deprivation and competition for jobs. Elizabeth Cartwright expressed her concerns about Local Housing Allowance anomalies and the issue of the low paid being in and out of work and the effect on job seeker's allowance.

c) Local Growth White Paper

Aidan Shutter introduced the paper and outlined the three key themes of the White Paper. The White Paper heralded the introduction of the first wave of 24 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the establishment of a £1.4 billion Regional Growth Fund. Bidding for the first round of RGF closes on 21 January 2011. Jeremy Birch added that there was potential for LEPs to take on increasing responsibilities such as transport and European funding – in effect potential reconstituted regional assemblies. It was also noted that SEEC may be able to advise and work closely with the developing LEPs

d) Decentralisation and Localism Bill

SEEC members noted the expected contents of the Localism Bill although the official publication date was at this stage unclear. SEEC also noted the recent Cala Homes judgement which effectively re-establishes Regional Spatial Strategies as part of the development plan process until the Localism Bill becomes law.

James Swindlehurst expressed concern over the funding of referendums and whether this would impact on already cash-strapped councils.

As the Bill would be a varied and complex piece of legislation, David Lee suggested that a third Task and Finish Group be established to examine the contents and potential impacts of the Bill for South East Councils.

Action 5 – It was agreed to establish a further Task and Finish Group to look at the implications of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill on South East Councils. Volunteer members to be notified to Heather Bolton.

Action 6 – It was agreed that SEEC would submit views to Government on HRA and Housing Benefit caps and ask David Robertson to lead on a letter to ministers on transport issues.

6. Local Government Finance: TIF and business rate proposals

Heather Bolton introduced the paper. The New Homes Bonus, Local retention of Business rates and Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) were all seen as incentives but were they adequate given the current financial climate? Clearly the allocation process would be contentious as the New Homes Bonus proposals include as a starting point for negotiation, 80% to the lower tier and 20% to the upper tier. Following a suggestion from Andrew Povey, it was agreed that the SEEC response to the New Homes Bonus should include raising the six year threshold for payback to ten years as an added incentive for local councils. Cec Tallack said all the initiatives should be welcomed in principle and TIF could open up new development opportunities.

Action 7: SEEC agreed to the submission of consultation responses to the business rates/TIF proposals and the New Homes Bonus proposals

7. Items for Information

The summary of recent consultations to Government and forward meeting dates items were noted

8. Any other Business

There were no items of any other business

Close of Plenary at 12.45pm

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

SEEC All-Member Plenary Meeting – Attendance List

Friday 19 November 2010

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

Name	Organisation	Attended
Cllr Neil Parkin	Adur District Council	No
Cllr Gillian Brown	Arun District Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Paul Bartlett	Ashford Borough Council	No
Cllr John Cartwright	Aylesbury Vale District Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Andrew Finney	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council	No
Cllr Mrs Mary Ballin	Bracknell Forest Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Mary Mears	Brighton and Hove City Council	Yes – sub Brian Oxley
Cllr David Shakespeare	Buckinghamshire County Council	No
Cllr John Gilbey	Canterbury City Council	Yes
Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council	No
Cllr Myles Cullen	Chichester District Council	Yes
Cllr Nick Rose	Chiltern District Council	Yes
Cllr Bob Lanzer	Crawley Borough Council	No
Cllr Jeremy Kite	Dartford Borough Council	No
Cllr Paul Watkins	Dover District Council	Yes
Cllr David Parkinson	East Hampshire District Council	Yes – sub Elizabeth Cartwright
Cllr Peter Jones	East Sussex County Council	No
Cllr David Tutt	Eastbourne Borough Council	No
Cllr Louise Bloom	Eastleigh Borough Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr John O Reilly	Elmbridge Borough Council	No
Cllr Keith Mann	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council	No
Cllr Sean Woodward	Fareham Borough Council	No
Cllr Mark Hook	Gosport Borough Council	Not SEEC Member
Cllr Michael Snelling	Gravesham Borough Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Tony Rooth	Guildford Borough Council	No
Cllr Ken Thornber, CBE	Hampshire County Council	No

Mr Ken Crookes	Hart District Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Jeremy Birch	Hastings Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Tony Briggs	Havant Borough Council	No
Cllr Robert Nye	Horsham District Council	No
Cllr David Pugh	Isle of Wight Council	No
Cllr Paul Carter	Kent County Council	Yes – sub Roger Gough
Cllr Ann De Vecchi	Lewes District Council	No
Cllr Chris Garland	Maidstone Borough Council	No
Cllr Rodney Chambers	Medway Council	Not SEEC Member
Cllr Garry Wall	Mid Sussex District Council	No
Cllr Cec Tallack	Milton Keynes Council	Yes
Cllr James Friend	Mole Valley District Council	No
Cllr Barry Rickman	New Forest District Council	No
Cllr Ed Turner	Oxford City Council	Yes
Cllr Keith Mitchell CBE	Oxfordshire County Council	Yes – sub Ian Hudspeth
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson	Portsmouth City Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Andrew Cumpsty	Reading Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Lynn Hack	Reigate and Banstead Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Carl Maynard	Rother District Council	No
Cllr David Burbage	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council	No
Cllr John Furey	Runnymede Borough Council	No
Cllr Rowland Dibbs	Rushmoor Borough Council	No
Cllr Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks District Council	Yes – sub Jill Davison
Cllr Robert Bliss	Shepway District Council	Yes
Cllr James Swindlehurst	Slough Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Adrian Busby	South Bucks District Council	No
Cllr Ann Ducker	South Oxfordshire District Council	Yes
Cllr Royston Smith	Southampton City Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr John Packman	Spelthorne Borough Council	No
Cllr Dr Andrew Povey	Surrey County Council	Yes

Cllr Moira Gibson	Surrey Heath Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Andrew Bowles	Swale Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Gordon Keymer, CBE	Tandridge District Council	Yes
Cllr Ian Carr	Test Valley Borough Council	No
Cllr Robert Bayford	Thanet District Council	No
Cllr Mark Worrall, OBE	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Roy Bullock, MBE	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	No
Cllr Tony de Vere	Vale of White Horse District Council	Yes
Cllr Robert Knowles	Waverley Borough Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Robert Standley	Wealden District Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Graham Jones	West Berkshire Council	Yes – sub Pamela Bale
Cllr Barry Norton	West Oxfordshire District Council	Yes
Cllr Louise Goldsmith	West Sussex County Council	No – Apologies received
Cllr Kelsie Learney	Winchester City Council	Yes – Thérèse Evans
Cllr John Kingsbury	Woking Borough Council	No
Cllr David Lee	Wokingham Borough Council	Yes
Cllr Paul Yallop	Worthing Borough Council	No
Cllr Mrs Lesley Clarke	Wycombe District Council	Yes – sub Mike Appleyard
Other attendees		
Chris Williams	LACE Chairman	Yes
David Parsons	Local Government Association	Yes
Heather Bolton	SEEC	Yes
Aidan Shutter	SEEC	Yes
Roy Millard	South East Strategic Partnership for Migration	Yes
Observers		
Becky Whale	South East Strategic Leaders (SESL)	Yes
Ian Hepburn	WTSE/SEFS	Yes

Total attendance by SEEC member authorities – 29 out of 71 (41%)