

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
ALL-MEMBER PLENARY MEETING**



Date: 17 March 2011

Subject: **SEEC Europe Task & Finish Group:
Report of second meeting**

Report by: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination

Recommendation:

SEEC members are asked to note the actions from the second meeting of SEEC's Europe Task & Finish Group

Present: Robert Bliss, Andrew Bowles, John Gilbey, Lynne Hack, Nicholas Heslop, Ian Hudspeth, Gordon Keymer CBE (Chairman), Kathy Newbound, Cec Tallack

In Attendance: Helen Andrews Tipper, European Policy Adviser, SEEDA
Heather Bolton, Head of Communications & Public Affairs, SEEC
Ron Moys, Head of European Policy, Kent County Council
Vincent O'Connell, Strategy and Economy Manager (Europe), Surrey County Council
Nick Porter, European Policy Officer, LGA
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Coordination, SEEC

1. Introductions, apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest

1.1 Apologies were received from Paula Baker, Mary Ballin, Alex King (substitute Andrew Bowles), James Swindlehurst and Mark Worrall (substitute Nicholas Heslop).

1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

1.3 The Chairman welcomed the officers who had been invited to share expertise and advice with members.

2. Action note of first meeting on 21 January 2011 – approval and actions arising.

2.1 The note of the first meeting and revised terms of reference were approved.

2.2 In discussing issues raised, Nick Porter from the LGA highlighted two web-based 'tracker' services LGA members could access relating to European funding and associated policy. These can be accessed by LGA members at

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=11061870> .

- 2.3 It was noted that work was underway taking forward actions from the first meeting on 21 January. In relation to specific actions:
- Gordon had received information on key European contacts through Richard Kitt at the LGA.
 - Nick W was inviting officers at the meeting, along with those from other local authorities, to form up a virtual 'officer sounding board' for the Task & Finish Group.
 - Heather explained there may be longer-term opportunities to explore working with East of England LGA to 'buy into' its European expertise, which is employed by Essex County Council.
 - SEEDA and BIS have been invited to the March SEEC all-member meeting for an item on European funding.
 - Heather has included a call for evidence on 'cutting red tape' in the SEEC newsletter due to go out late February.

3. Accessing funding under current European programmes:

a) SEEDA transition planning and knowledge sharing – presentation from Helen Andrews Tipper (SEEDA) and discussion.

- 3.1 SEEDA has recently produced two 'legacy' documents to share knowledge on European partnerships and funding, available at <http://www.seeda.co.uk/what-we-do/european-investment>.
- 3.2 Round 4 of the ERDF Competitiveness Programme, with funding of £4-5m, is expected to be launched by SEEDA in late March 2011. The Programme Monitoring Committee, which Cec Tallack is a member of, has recommended that this round should include emphasis on transport and renewable energy projects.
- 3.3 The importance of raising local authorities' awareness about other European funds opportunities, such as Interreg - with funds of some Euro350m available across Europe - was also discussed.
- 3.4 Concern was raised about intelligence that the Government was viewing local government match funding as 'high risk' when assessing ERDF bids, which could lead to bids being rejected. It was agreed SEEC should write to Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) on this issue emphasising that local government match funding, where available, was not 'high risk'.

Action:

- Gordon Keymer to write to Sir Bob Kerslake on this issue.

b) Future ERDF management arrangements.

- 3.5 Following consultation the Government has confirmed from July 2011 ERDF management will move from RDAs to be administered by CLG. Local Management Committees will be established, chaired by CLG directors.
- 3.6 In discussion concerns were shared about the possible centralisation of decision making for ERDF: it will be important to ensure programme

emphasis and spend is flexible enough to respond to local needs; local government must be involved in the management committees; and maintaining stability and momentum on programme delivery is also critical.

4. Influencing future funding programmes and policy – round-table discussion.

4.1 The group discussed a short 'key topics' paper on influencing post-2013 funding and agreed two key areas that SEEC should consider are:

- European policy that will influence future funding
- Developing SEEC's 'key principles' on future European funding

4.2 The European Commission is expected to publish proposals for the post-2013 structural funds during summer 2011. The group agreed SEEC should consider and respond as appropriate to consultations on these programmes.

4.3 SEEC will need to consider its key principles to lobby on/respond with in relation to future European funding. Members agreed the following key principles and that SEEC's wider membership should be engaged in discussion on these at the March all-member meeting:

- Local government must be involved in setting priorities and on programme committees.
- Funds must be allowed to respond to varied and complex local needs.
- Funds must be available to all parts of the UK including South East England.
- Funds must be available to address urban and rural needs.
- There is a need to look innovatively at addressing the challenge of limited public match-funding.
- Counter any proposals for loans ('financial instruments) to replace, rather than complement, structural funds in the UK.
- Bureaucracy and red-tape must be reduced wherever possible.

4.4 On the last point, Gordon explained he was continuing to pursue this through the Committee of the Regions. He would welcome input from SEEC colleagues on any proposed/developing European legislation that would increase burdens/red-tape in order that he could raise concerns through the CoR.

4.5 The group also briefly discussed European networks that SEEC might engage with to influence future funding decisions. Lynne Hack represents South East England on the PURPLE pan-European network. This is a network representing parts of Europe that contain significant urban and rural areas. It lobbies and enables partnership/project development. SEEDA has funded the South East's membership of until March 2012. It will be important for SEEC to consider how best to engage with Lynne as the South East's representative in the future.

5. **Forward work programme, including:**
- a) **European item at SEEC all-member meeting on 17 March**
 - b) **Next T&F group meeting – confirmed as 17 March, 13.30 (following SEEC all member meeting)**
 - c) **Topics for discussion at future meetings**
 - d) **Any papers, presentations or guest speakers required to provide expert advice for members at future meetings**
- 5.1 Members asked that a simple overview paper be produced for the SEEC all-member meeting to inform members about key issues being discussed. This should be drafted in time to allow members of the Task & Finish Group to comment before wider circulation.
- Action:**
- *Nick to draft paper, to circulate to T&F group for comments, to include reference to key funding programmes, LGA's Tracker service, SEEDA's legacy documents, proposed SEEC key European funding principles, and to invite members to raise experience/opportunities/concerns about European funding at the meeting to further inform the T&F group's work.*
- 5.2 Members also asked for a simple acronyms sheet to be produced for the Task & Finish group's reference.
- Action:**
- *Nick to produce acronyms sheet.*
6. **Any other business**
- 6.1 There was no other business.

NEXT MEETINGS

Members and officers who are available will meet for a brief half-hour round-up meeting at 13.30 on 17 March at Church House, London (following the SEEC All-member meeting)..

The next full meeting will be arranged in mid-late May in preparation for reporting to the SEEC AGM in July.