**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS**
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**

Date: 18 February 2011

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

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

**Recommendation:**
SEEC Executive is asked to note the actions from the first meeting of SEEC's Europe Task & Finish Group

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**Present:** Robert Bliss, John Gilbey, Lynne Hack, Gordon Keymer, Alex King, Kathy Newbound, Mark Worrall

**In Attendance:** Heather Bolton, Head of Communications & Public Affairs, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Coordination, SEEC

**1. Appointment of Chairman**

1.1 Gordon Keymer was appointed Chairman by the group. He thanked members and expressed his optimism for good joint working between councils on this important agenda.

**2. Apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interests**

2.1 Apologies were received from Paula Baker, Ian Hudspeth, James Swindlehurst and Cec Tallack.

2.2 There were no substitutes or declarations of interest.

**3. Agreement of Terms of Reference**
**a) Draft terms of reference attached for review and comment**

3.1 Draft terms of reference, circulated prior to the meeting, were discussed. It was agreed that the group's focus should be to identify areas where SEEC can have impact with the limited officer and financial resources available. The two main areas for action should be to:

- Provide information on available European funding to help SEEC members make the most of opportunities, and
- Influence future funding opportunities so they are supportive of the South East's needs.

3.2 It was therefore agreed the first two work areas under the group's proposed remit in the Terms of Reference should be emphasised by showing them in bold ie:

1. Propose methods of raising awareness of EU funding opportunities for South East councils;

2. Review ways of influencing future allocations of EU funds to the South East.

3.3 With this amendment the Terms of Reference were agreed.

***Action:***

- *Nick to amend draft Terms of Reference and circulate to group (attached as Annex 1).*

**b) Initial discussion on how to approach the group's 6 proposed key work areas**

3.4 During discussion the following were identified as key areas for initial activity:

- Engagement with experts from member councils and some partner organisations to tap into existing knowledge networks re European funding/policy, especially where they have an existing presence in Brussels (for example Kent CC, Southern England Local Partners, LGA).

  ***Actions:***

  - *Gordon to speak to LGA Brussels office (Richard Kitt) about mapping contacts/possible intelligence sharing; Nick/Heather to follow up with other partners.*
  - *Nick/Heather to set up virtual European officer working group with Kent CC, Surrey CC and others as appropriate to help inform SEEC's understanding.*
  - *Nick to map relevant existing networks/organisations (eg Committee of the Regions, LGA and local authority Brussels offices) and their key areas of focus/ influence.*

- Explore possible joint working with areas outside the South East, for example East of England LGA.

  ***Action:***

  - *Nick/Heather to identify what other adjoining parts of UK are doing re Europe and identify any opportunities for joint working.*

- Share insight with members re availability of funding, criteria etc. for remaining funding under 2007-13 funding programmes, and opportunities to influence post 2013 funding.

  ***Action:***

  - *Nick/Heather to liaise with Kent CC and SEEDA/other partners to understand current position re funding opportunities and share with SEEC members. Aim for an update to SEEC all-member meeting in March.*

- Influence EU and UK decision makers, including MEPs and MPs, re Structure Funds post 2013 etc.

  ***Actions:***

  - *Heather to coordinate mapping of MEPs and MPs with European policy interests, to enable focused engagement by SEEC members with them.*
  - *Nick/Heather to identify key Commissioners/contacts in their offices and UKRep officials for SEEC to engage with.*

- Engagement with wider SEEC membership on the European agenda.
  ***Action:***
  - *Include European item on SEEC March 2011 Plenary agenda - consider inviting Commission representative from London office and SEEDA/others re funding programmes.*

**4. Priority and phasing of group forward work programme including**
**a) Frequency of future meetings**
**b) Topics for discussion at future meetings**
**c) Any papers, presentations or guest speakers required to provide expert advice for members at future meetings**

4.1 The group agreed to hold future meetings linked to existing SEEC meetings, ie. After Exec on 18 February; after Plenary on 17 March.

4.2 It was agreed a limited number of expert officers from SEEC members and the LGA would be invited to future meetings as appropriate.
***Action:***
- *Heather/Nick to arrange meetings and invite officers [**Update – next Europe Task & Finish Group meetings confirmed as 18 February, 13.30 at LGA offices, and 17 March, 13.30 at Church House, London**].*

**5. Any other business**

5.1 Members considered an LGA briefing on its priorities for EU lobbying, developed by its European and International Programme Board and Nick Porter at the LGA. It was agreed it would be useful to maintain engagement and overview of the LGA's priority actions. However it was important to differentiate LGA's wider policy agenda from SEEC's more specific focus on current and future South East funding opportunities as discussed under Item 3a.

5.2 Linked to the LGA briefing, members agreed it would be useful to canvass SEEC members for good examples of where the UK has introduced legislation which goes further than the European Commission requires. This could be helpful to feed into one of the LGA's European work areas.
***Action:***
- *Heather, through the next SEEC newsletter, to invite members to provide her with examples to share with LGA as appropriate.*

**ANNEX 1**

**SEEC Task & Finish Group: Europe**
**Terms of reference**

The task & finish group will comprise 12 councillors from SEEC member councils. In line with SEEC's political template, membership will be 8 Conservatives, 3 Lib-Dems, 1 Labour.

The first meeting of the task group will be held on 21 January 2011. At the first meeting:

- A Chairman of the task group will be appointed
- Terms of reference will be agreed
- An outline schedule of further meetings (actual and/or virtual meetings) will be agreed with the Chairman and members. Meetings will be organised by the SEEC secretariat at dates/ intervals agreed.

Expert officers from member councils or other organisations may be invited to meetings as required to provide advice to task group members on specific topics.

SEEC secretariat and/or staff from member councils will support the task group in preparing their report.

The task group will present its final report and recommendations on the way forward at the SEEC AGM in July 2011.

The primary remit of the task group is to:

**1. Propose methods of raising awareness of EU funding opportunities for South East councils.**

**2. Review ways of influencing future allocations of EU funds to the South East.**

It will also:

1. Suggest means of providing regular information to South East Committee of the Regions members to enable them to make the case for the South East local authorities in Brussels

2. Recommend new appointments to EU bodies where SEEC is invited to nominate.

3. Provide a regular update to SEEC Executive and SEEC Plenary on Brussels developments.

4. Advise SEEC Executive on lobbying issues with UK Government.

Gordon Keymer
21 December 2010
*Final version, amended following meeting on 21 January 2011*