

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE MEETING**



Date: 10 September 2010

Subject: **SEEC priorities and action plan**

Report by: Cllr Paul Carter, Chairman; Cllr Gordon Keymer, Deputy Chairman; Cllr Paul Watkins, Secretary & Treasurer; Heather Bolton, SEEC Head of Communications & Public Affairs

Recommendations:

SEEC Executive is asked to:

- i) Agree the priorities and action plan proposed for SEEC's work programme for 2010-11
- ii) Consider resource implications of decisions on priorities and action plan and any possible additional work areas.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the SEEC AGM on 14 July members approved the SEEC business plan in principle and requested a more detailed action plan to support the principles already set out.
- 1.2 The proposed action plan has been developed for discussion by the SEEC Executive, with input from SEEC's Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Secretary/ Treasurer. The action plan is attached as appendix A below.

2. Context

- 2.1 Two key factors need to be considered in discussions on the SEEC work programme – staffing levels and changes in the relationship with central Government following closure of SEEDA & GOSE.
- 2.2 **Staffing** – The SEEC staff resource is very limited. Current staff is one full time post and one part-time (paid) secondment from Buckinghamshire CC. A post focused on migration, funded by UK Borders Agency, is also hosted under the SEEC banner – this post is dedicated to delivering the UKBA agenda but the hosting arrangement ensures regular reports back to SEEC members. There is currently no admin support for SEEC, meaning that specialist staff devote time to administrative tasks rather than delivering policy and communications priorities.
- 2.3 In the short-medium term it is proposed that SEEC should target two additional posts (1 admin officer and 1 policy post) on a secondment basis to help deliver the action plan and support SEEC member meetings. This would bring SEEC staffing to 3.5 posts. SEEC should explore potential for subsidised (or free) secondments from member

councils or other South East organisations to support its work programme until the political and structural landscape becomes clearer.

- 2.4 **Relationship with central Government** – SEEC has welcomed closure of SEEDA & GOSE and devolution of responsibilities to local government. However, members should consider whether there is a role for SEEC in presenting a single voice for the South East in a small number of areas where abolition of SEEDA & GOSE may leave a gap. Options around this are set out in agenda item 6b. There would also be a need to consider the resource implications of any decisions on a future expanded role for SEEC.

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Business plan principles

The SEEC business plan sets out four principles for the organisation:

- Representing South East local government interests on external bodies
- Scrutiny of centrally-funded services delivered in the South East
- Dialogue with neighbouring areas such as London and East of England
- A single voice for South East interests, representing cross-boundary views to Government.

Business plan objectives

Three of the four business plan objectives remain valid for the coming year:

- Being the democratic voice for South East local government
- Providing a framework for co-ordinated action on issues of common concern
- Maintaining a flow of member and external communications

A fourth objective on 'monitoring the state of the region' should be re-cast to focus on a small number of specific areas that will enable SEEC to present an independent, authoritative view of key trends across the South East to support bids for investment or demonstrate how the South East is working collectively to deliver growth.

Priorities

The following priorities are proposed for 2010-11:

- Making the case for the South East and protecting its interests – for example influencing funding (including European funding), investment and policy decisions.
- Building relationships with ministers to raise awareness of South East needs.
- Building relationships with external organisations to create a strong joint voice for joint concerns.
- Developing an intelligent working relationship with SESL.
- Maintaining a strong evidence base to support the South East case.
- Monitoring reorganisation of public services, including the extent and effectiveness of devolution of powers to local government.

Action Plan

A proposed 10-point action plan through to July 2011 is set out below. Delivery and timing is subject to available resources:

1. Agree a list of priority topics to focus efforts when preparing proactive and reactive approaches to Government and responses to consultations. Proposals are:
 - A fair funding deal for the South East, eg through the review of local government finance and opportunities to bid for investment
 - Making the case for South East infrastructure investment to support economic recovery
 - Making the case for increasing delegation of responsibilities to local government.
2. Ask SEEC's three topic spokespersons to create special interest groups to gather member views and feedback to the Executive on specific work areas to develop in:
 - Economy and skills (Mike Appleyard, Bucks CC)
 - Transport and infrastructure (David Robertson, Oxfordshire CC)
 - Planning, housing & sustainability (Moirra Gibson, Surrey Heath BC).
3. Deliver an annual programme of six Executive meetings and three all-member meetings to ensure SEEC is a member-led organisation.

4. Build a network of officers from SEEC councils to inform South-East-wide input to Government on finance and policy issues. This will help SEEC staff provide members with bottom up evidence to argue for a fair deal for the South East for example on:

- Regional Growth Fund
- Review of local government finance
- National infrastructure prioritisation.

5. Develop two scrutiny events to allow members to examine:

- Impact of NHS reorganisation on local services and opportunities for councils
- Extent and effectiveness of devolution of powers to local government.

6. Develop two high-level SEEC conferences, targeting ministerial attendance, on:

- Delivering housing in the South East
- An infrastructure summit.

7. Develop a programme for SEEC's leadership to build effective, influential relationships via:

- Meetings with Ministers and South East MPs
- Meetings with South East business representatives – for example with representatives from all South East LEPs
- Creating a regular forum to meet elected members from the GLA, London Councils and East of England LGA
- Membership of the LGA Executive Committee.

8. Collate and publish data from member councils on housing completions, employment land, economic trends and impact of migration to provide a strong South East-wide evidence base to inform discussions with Government on investment needs.

9. Review SEEC's role in providing information and facilitating access to European funding following closure of SEEDA and GOSE.

10. Deliver a programme of member and external communications including six member newsletters per year, a regularly updated website and media relations activity.