

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

### MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Friday 18 February 2011

LGA, Local Government House,  
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ



**Present:** Paul Carter (SEEC Chairman)  
Paul Watkins (SEEC Secretary/Treasurer)  
Mike Appleyard  
Mary Ballin  
Louise Bloom  
Andrew Bowles  
Myles Cullen  
Andrew Cumpsty  
Tony de Vere  
Moirra Gibson  
Lynne Hack  
Ian Hudspeth  
Gordon Keymer, CBE  
Kelsie Learney  
Barry Norton  
Andrew Povey  
Cec Tallack

**In Attendance:** Chris Williams, Chairman of the LACE Group  
Heather Bolton, Head of Communications & Public Affairs, SEEC  
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Co-ordination, SEEC  
Hayley Austin, Office Co-ordinator, SEEC  
Gary Porter, Local Government Association  
Martin Wheatley, Local Government Association  
Pam Alexander, SEEDA

- 1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest**
  - 1.1 Apologies were received from Elizabeth Cartwright, David Robertson, James Swindlehurst and Ken Thornber.
  - 1.2 Paul Carter welcomed Nick Woolfenden who is on secondment from SEEDA as Head of Policy Co-ordination for SEEC.
- 2. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 7 December 2010 and Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda**
  - 2.1 Pam Alexander noted that the email address for Jenny Lester in paragraph 3.2 was incorrect and should be [jennylester@seeda.co.uk](mailto:jennylester@seeda.co.uk)
  - 2.2 Paul Carter noted that the word East should be included after the word 'North' in paragraph 3.4.

- 2.3 Heather Bolton reported in relation to paragraph 3.8 that Roy Millard had checked and confirmed once a national insurance number (NINO) is allocated it is never deregistered, even if the person leaves the country. Roy is therefore investigating better measures for non-EU workers in the UK and will update at the next meeting.
- 2.4 Paul Watkins advised that Roy Millard has been invited to a meeting of the all-party Parliamentary Group on migration, as a result of helpful information provided from South East local authorities and other stakeholders via Roy.
- 2.5 Regarding paragraph 3.5, Heather confirmed that SEEDA had provided SEEC with a list of key Regional Growth Fund contact names which she had circulated to all the SEEC members in January.
- 2.6 With these matters addressed, the minutes were approved.

### **3. Local Enterprise Partnerships and Regional Growth Fund**

- 3.1 Nick Woolfenden advised that there are now seven Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) wholly or partly in the South East. Most of the LEPs are now in their development stages with chairs being sought and boards being set up. A number of them have met in shadow form.
- 3.2 Nick suggested that SEEC might want to explore ways of working with LEPs to maximise collective impact, for example on issues such as lobbying, intelligence sharing and interpretation of data.
- 3.3 Nick also circulated latest information from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills about the number of bids made to the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). Nationally 464 bids totalling some £2.78 billion have been made, far greater than the £250 million available in the first round. Only 33 bids (7%) were made from the South East.
- 3.4 It was agreed SEEC should continue to press the need for fair access to RGF for South East bids. For example suggesting improvements to the data for assessing bids for round 2.
- 3.5 Paul Carter commented that he felt SEEC is making progress on raising the profile of the needs of the South East not just because it is the engine room of the South East economy but that it also contains significant deprivation. In recent conversations he has been having over the Pfizer issue in Kent with both Vince Cable and David Willets, they now accept that it would be totally inappropriate to exclude the South East from RGF bids. It is important to ensure the RGF panel also understand this.
- 3.6 Members also discussed plans for new 'BIS local' offices across the country. Their role is not yet clear but they are likely to be staffed lightly, with a focus on briefing ministers on local issues. It was agreed to write to Vince Cable to find out more about BIS Local and how this will relate to local authorities and LEPs.

**ACTION 1: SEEC's Chairman to write to Vince Cable on RGF assessment criteria and to request more information about BIS Local.**

- 3.7 It was also agreed that, at present, rather than set up a meeting with LEPs it would be better to send some information on SEEC's priorities to LEP Chairs (as they are appointed) and to keep a watching brief for when opportunities arise to work together. It will also be important to remember not all areas are in LEPs.

**ACTION 2: Heather to send SEEC information sheet and deprivation briefing to LEP Chairs as they are appointed.**

- 3.8 It was agreed updates on LEPs and RGF should be brought to future SEEC Executive meetings.

**4. SEEDA update on transition to closure. Pam Alexander (verbal)**

- 4.1 Pam Alexander explained a letter had recently been sent to local authorities and other stakeholders setting out which projects and programmes SEEDA will be supporting over the next 15 months before it closes. Some work will close entirely, whilst some (such as Business Link) will transfer to national services.

- 4.3 UKTI will be taking on the foreign direct investment work. Management of the European Regional Development Fund and the Rural Development Programme will be transferred to CLG and Defra respectively from 1 July. Innovation Growth Teams will be funded until August and it is understood that Finance South East will continue as a regional arm of the national funding body Capital for Enterprise Limited.

- 4.4 SEEDA submitted its Assets & Liabilities plan to BIS at the end of January with proposals for taking forward land and property assets, nine special purpose vehicles, financial assets, offices and equipment. A major staff redundancy programme will be launched on 5 April.

- 4.5 SEEDA has been working with SEEC on the Data Dashboard Task & Finish Group and is keen to transfer its research archive to SEEC. Pam offered members a workshop on some of SEEDA's key work areas. Members agreed an invitation to all SEEC members would be welcome to a half-day workshop, possibly at SEEDA's offices in late May after local elections.

**ACTION 3: SEEDA to arrange a workshop, extending the invitation to all SEEC members.**

**5. Localism Bill - Key Issues and Member Working Group**

- 5.1 Chris Williams introduced the Localism Bill. He argued that it contains a great many central controls and is unnecessarily bureaucratic. It is currently going through Parliament so may change before Royal Assent.

- 5.2 Particular areas of concern are around the complexity and the administrative cost burdens to local authorities. Issues where SEEC may want to make representations include:

- Targets and Inspection – Although the Government has abolished the Comprehensive Area Assessment, there is concern they may introduce other targets and measures.
- Issues around housing and the changes to the planning system, including the introduction of neighbourhood plans and the New Homes Bonus.
- In relation to achieving ‘fair funding’ for the South East, the question of localisation of business rates and how that might operate.

5.3 It was agreed it was important to identify the key issues of concern to SEEC members and focus resources on those to feed views into central Government and the LGA. It was agreed that rather than set up a SEEC Task & Finish Group, it would be better to gather views from all SEEC members to inform a special Executive Committee discussion on key issues following the local elections.

5.4 It would also be helpful in terms of resources, if there was a SEEC member authority willing to take on a lead role for this.

5.5 Paul Carter suggested asking SEEC members to identify the big issues from their perspective, to help inform preparation for a half-day meeting.

**ACTION 4: At the March All-member meeting SEEC members to be invited to identify key issues for SEEC to address in the Localism Bill.**

**ACTION 5: Half-day special Executive Committee to be set up to discuss the Localism Bill in late May and identify a possible lead authority to help SEEC progress this work.**

## **6. Presentation on LGA Environment & Housing Board**

6.1 Paul Carter welcomed Cllr Gary Porter and Martin Wheatley from the LGA. Gary Porter explained that his Board recently agreed it should engage more closely with member authorities on its work.

6.2 Gary explained some of his Board’s most recent priorities, for example working closely with Defra on waste review issues and the Treasury on Housing Revenue Account reform. It is also involved in plans for the National Planning Framework.

6.3 He believes the Localism Bill will be a major step forward for Local Government. The LGA is clarifying what amendments it thinks are needed and working with Government to address them, although he acknowledges some issues would be easier to tackle than others.

6.4 SEEC members maintained their view that the Localism Bill was a mixed blessing. They raised queries on the LGA’s work on issues including planning, waste and flooding. Gary agreed to take key issues back to colleagues at the LGA as appropriate. Gary also offered involvement of LGA policy officers at the half-day SEEC Executive Localism Bill meeting when this is arranged.

## 7. Update on SEEC work programme

### a) Housing conference 15 February 2011

- 7.1 Heather Bolton reported on a successful SEEC housing conference. 95 people attended and feedback has been very positive. 80% of delegates who responded rated it excellent or good on feedback forms. There was understandable disappointment however that Bob Neill MP had pulled out at short notice.
- 7.2 A Summary of Key Messages from the conference was circulated to members. This and all the presentations from the conference will be added to the SEEC website.

### b) Fair funding

- 7.3 Heather Bolton gave an update on proposals for SEEC to undertake work on 'fair funding' for the South East. South East Strategic Leaders (SESL) is updating its earlier work on return on investment from the South East. The proposal is for SEEC to undertake complementary work to make proposals to radically improve the fairness of the Local Government finance system.
- 7.4 Following a tendering process, SEEC has received two detailed proposals. Paul Carter commented that it is important for SEEC to develop a discussion document and to look at opportunities for a fairer resolution. Nothing official has yet been published by Government about the Local Government finance review. Paul suggested that SEEC needs a flexible approach to this commission and that time is of the essence.
- 7.5 It was agreed by members to progress this work but to undertake it in stages to enable stock-taking along the way. An initial budget of up to £50,000 was agreed, reporting back to the Executive at key stages.

**ACTION 6: SEEC secretariat to progress the commissioning process with SEEC's Chairman, deputy Chairman & Treasurer.**

### c) Europe task & finish group

- 7.6 Gordon Keymer updated members following the first meeting of the Group. Both this and the Data Dashboard Group will formally report their recommendations on the July 2011 SEEC AGM.
- 7.7 The Group has two main areas of focus – how best to provide information on available European funding to help SEEC members make the most of opportunities and how to influence future funding opportunities so they are supportive of the South East's needs.
- 7.8 SEEC will need to consider what it can do within limited resources, so the Group is looking at drawing on existing sources of information, for example local authority Brussels offices and the LGA.
- 7.9 SEEDA and Government representatives are being invited to SEEC's all member meeting in March to provide updates and insight on future issues. Gordon also explained he is particularly interested in how, as a

member of the Committee of the Regions, he can help reduce red-tape and bureaucracy in the European Union and UK.

**d) Data dashboard task & finish group**

7.10 Mike Appleyard updated members on the two areas of business that the Task Group are focussing on. The first is the range of measures that they might wish to look at and the other is recognising that there are a large number of organisations, local authorities and LEPs collecting information. To avoid duplication, they want to look at where there can be co-operation between organisations.

7.11 The group has asked officers to prepare a draft dashboard for discussion by April. The key themes being investigated are:

- Economy and employment
- Housing and infrastructure
- Public finance and grants
- Demography and migration
- Environment

**8. Making the case for the South East: Recent submissions**

**a) Briefing on South East deprivation and need for public funding**

8.1 The final version of the deprivation paper was agreed and will now be sent to all SEEC members, LEPs, MPs, MEPs, David Parsons at the LGA and the RGF panel.

**ACTION 7: SEEC secretariat to circulate the report as agreed.**

**b) SEEC contribution on ERDF funding**

8.2 A letter had been received from CLG confirming management arrangements for ERDF are moving out of SEEDA and into CLG in July.

**c) SEEC submissions on New Homes Bonus and Housing Revenue Account**

8.3 Submissions to Government on Housing Revenue Account and the New Homes Bonus have been submitted following input from SEEC members.

**9. Items for information**

**a) SEEC subscriptions update**

9.1 Just over £800,000 has now been received from the liquidation of SEERA Ltd. It needs to be checked whether SEEC will be liable for Capital Gains Tax. Feedback is pending regarding the VAT status for SEEC.

9.2 A number of authorities have previously given notice that they may pull out of SEEC after the AGM. However during discussion members commented that SEEC's focus and work programme is on the right lines and they are getting value for money.

**b) Confirmed forward meeting dates:**

- 9.3 Forward meeting dates for 2011 SEEC meetings were noted.
- SEEC Executive – 7 June 2011 at Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London
  - All-member & AGM – 13 July 2011 at Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London

**10. Any other business**

- 10.1 Chris Williams gave an update on recent discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT). The issue of lack of direct contact with the DfT was raised at the last executive meeting and it was agreed that an initial approach should be made to them. After a meeting with them it was noted that the DfT would be interested in establishing some form of dialogue with SEEC in relation to major transport schemes and investment strategy.

Following discussion SEEC members agreed that work should be undertaken to develop options for how SEEC might engage to inform DfT and transport providers on major transport scheme issues. It was emphasised that this would not replace the engagement that individual local authorities have with DfT on Local Transport Plan and other issues.

It would also need to engage with LEPs.

**ACTION 8: SEEC secretariat to progress work on options development, to report back to the Executive committee.**

- 10.2 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.45pm

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Paul Carter**  
**Chairman**

**Date:** 27 May 2011