



SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING
Wednesday, 16 June 2010

Present: Paul Carter (Chairman)
Paul Watkins (Secretary)
Mike Appleyard
Mary Ballin
Louise Bloom
Elizabeth Cartwright
Moirra Gibson
Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Ian Hudspeth
Gordon Keymer, CBE
Brian Oxley
Tony Page
Jerry Patterson
Andrew Povey
Tony Reid
David Robertson
Cec Tallack
Ed Turner
David Tutt

In Attendance: Colin Byrne, Regional Director, GOSE
Chris Williams, Chairman of the LACE Group
Heather Bolton, Head of Communications & Public Affairs, SEEC
Aidan Shutter, Policy Officer, SEEC
Catriona Riddell, Director of Planning, Partnership Board
Martin Tugwell, Director of Regional Investment, Partnership Board/SEEDA
Irene Cripps, Partnership Board

Ex1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

Ex1.1 Apologies were received from Tony de Vere and Mary Mears.

Ex1.2 Jerry Patterson substituted for Tony de Vere and Brian Oxley substituted for Mary Mears.

Ex1.3 As George Beckett is no longer Leader of Winchester City Council Hilary Hibbert-Biles of West Oxfordshire DC took his place on the Committee, for this meeting only.

Ex1.4 There were no declarations of interest.

Ex2. Update from Colin Byrne, Regional Director, GOSE

Ex2.1 Colin Byrne **advised** the Executive that in addition to the changes the Government had recently announced, work is in progress on open source planning, introducing incentives for housing, elected mayors for the 12 big cities (none are expected in the South East); additionally an announcement was expected shortly on the process for reviewing the function of RDAs. The Government is concentrating on the fiscal environment and what spending cuts to introduce. It is likely that the South East and East of England RDAs would be the subject of heavier cuts than others. There will be consultation on these choices and GOSE will be organising events in the South East.

Ex2.2 He **also advised** that it is expected that a minister will be appointed for Manchester, but there will not be a South East Regional Minister.

Ex2.3 He **further advised** that it is dangerous to assume that the case made in the past, that the South East is the engine of the UK economy, is accepted and understood in Whitehall. The South East therefore needs to present a well evidenced and articulated case for investment in the region.

Ex2.4 Responding to a question on the future of GOSE, he **advised** the Executive that an announcement is likely to be made around October 2010, although the likely outcome may be known in September.

Ex3. Minutes of SEEC Executive Meeting on 22 January 2010 and Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

Ex3.1 The minutes were **agreed and signed** as a true record of the meeting.

Ex3.2 It was **noted** that CLG had agreed to some additional funding to cover the wind up costs of SEERA Ltd.

Ex4. Political Balance on SEEC Executive following May 2010 Local Elections

Ex4.1 Members **noted** the results of the May 2010 local elections and the implications for allocation of seats by political party on the SEEC Executive.

Ex5. Future Capability at a South East-wide Level

Ex5.1 Paul Carter **advised** the Executive that it was the Conservative Group's view that SEEC should be retained as the voice of the South East. He suggested that a sub-group of SEEC members should be convened as a working group to produce a proposal on functionality and work programme for the next 12 months, keeping the proposed secretariat as small as practicable; it would then be possible to

calculate the level of annual subscription for the member councils. The working group's report would be submitted to the AGM on 14 July for endorsement.

Ex5.2 Points raised during the following discussion were:

- A subscription unit of £500 would provide an income of £77,500 and this should be considered as an additional option.
- It is important that all tiers of local government are united so that central Government sees that SEEC meets its requirement for local governance.
- It was more important that today's debate should agree the principle of the organisation, subscription levels could then be agreed at a later meeting.
- Responding to the question had there been any initial indications as to which authority/ies would provide IT functions and office space, the Executive was **advised** that it is dependent on how much funding is available and the amount of space required; although a small contingency had been allowed for, it is premature to discuss accommodation in detail until a decision had been taken as to the organisation's remit and staffing levels.

Ex5.3 It was **agreed** that a small working group of no more than 12 members, representing proportionality and geography, be convened. A written report would be submitted to the extraordinary meeting of the Executive to be held on the morning of 14 July; the Executive's recommendation would then be considered at the AGM that afternoon.

Ex5.4 It was **also agreed** that the recommendations in the paper be revised to the following, and put to the plenary meeting that afternoon:

- i) Establish a cross-party working group of members to consider:
 - a) the functions that SEEC would wish to undertake;
 - b) the minimum staffing level necessary to carry out these functions;
 - c) the appropriate level of subscription for each authority.
- ii) Accept that the prepared option 1 should be regarded as the maximum level.

Ex6. Future Arrangements for Economic Development in the South East

Ex6.1 Points raised during the discussion on the paper were:

- Should SEEDA cease to exist, an area of its work that would not be covered is inward investment from Europe and beyond. SEEC would need to attract inward investment to the South East rather than individual local authorities.
- At the moment it is unclear what central Government wishes to retain. However there is a role for collective action across the South East to provide a support mechanism for companies investing in the region.
- Another issue to be borne in mind is the growing importance of city regions, and the steps being taken by the London Mayor to increase London's powers.
- The emphasis should be on Recommendation 3: press for a devolution of economic development functions down to local authorities and local enterprise partnerships together with adequate central Government funding.
- The following proposed recommendation was rejected: consider what minimalistic, strategic oversight functions are best handled at a region wide level under the auspices of SEEC, determine the appropriate capabilities and make a case for Government to fund the relatively small cost of these, to be considered by the working group on future capability.

Ex6.2 The other recommendations, which would be considered at the plenary meeting that afternoon, were **agreed**:

- i) Reach a decision on SEEC's advice to Government about the future of an RDA in the South East.
- ii) Work with key business leaders to make its views known to the new coalition Government about the need to continue to 'invest in success' by supporting businesses in the South East and by providing the necessary infrastructure.
- iii) Press for a devolution of economic development functions down to local authorities and local enterprise partnerships together with adequate central Government funding.
- iv) Press to be consulted on the future options for the Government Office of the South East (GOSE).

Ex7. Update on the Work of the SEEC European Group

Ex7.1 The Executive **received** the report and **noted** the progress of the work being undertaken by the SEEC European Group to develop arrangements to ensure that SEEC member councils have the opportunity to improve their access to European funding.

Ex8. Confirmed Forward Meeting Dates:

Ex8.1 It was **agreed** that an additional meeting of the Executive would be held on the morning of 14 July 2010, before the start of the AGM.

Ex8.2 Members **noted** the following dates:

Wednesday, 15 September 2010

Friday, 15 October 2010

Tuesday, 7 December 2010

Thursday, 27 January 2011

Friday, 18 February 2011

All meetings will be held at a central London venue.

Ex9. Any Other Business

a) Future Relationship with the LGA

Ex9.1 It was **agreed** that the working group on future capability would also consider the relationship with the LGA going forward and include recommendations in their paper to the AGM for consideration and agreement.

b) Future Inter-Regional Working Relationships

Ex9.2 Paul Carter **advised** the Executive that he had met with senior politicians from London and the East of England to discuss the potential for future joint working relationships. It was **agreed** that the working group on future capability would also consider the relationship with London and the East of England going forward and include recommendations in their paper to the AGM for consideration and agreement.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 11.05.