

**SOUTH EAST STRATEGIC LEADERS AND  
SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS  
JOINT MEETING**



**Date:** 6 February 2014

**Subject:** **Joint Working with South East Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**

**Report by:** Philippa Mellish, Policy Manager, SESL

**Recommendations:** Members are asked to:

- i) Support joint working with LEPs to raise the profile of shared interests and consider the most relevant topic areas where SESL and SEEC should look to work with LEPs.
- ii) Consider whether SESL and / or SEEC wish to co-commission research with LEPs to make the case for a more balanced approach to the distribution of funding and powers and to address how government can nurture weaker economies whilst facilitating growth in stronger economies such as the South East.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. LEPs and local authorities are important players in supporting economic growth and share many priorities, such as infrastructure, skills and housing. By working together, local authorities and LEPs can maximise what they can achieve for residents and the South East economy. Joint working would also help to raise Ministers’ awareness of South East policy and investment needs as well as the South East’s ability to offer high economic returns.
- 1.2. On 9 January, representatives from SESL and SEEC met with Warren Ralls, Partnerships Manager at Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP, to learn about emerging LEP networking arrangements, identify common themes and agree a means of achieving closer working between South East local authorities and LEPs.

**2. Shared Agendas**

2.1. The table below outlines SESL and SEEC projects where there are likely to be common themes and objectives with LEPs which would benefit from a joint approach. Members agreed to share information and reports relating to these projects with Warren with a view discussing the involvement of / support from groups of LEPs.

| <b>Topic Area</b> | <b>Project</b>  | <b>Description</b>   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Transport         | Mind the Gap  | Mind the Gap is a draft report that makes the case for investment in economically beneficial transport schemes that are not national priorities yet are too large for local areas to finance. There would be benefit in joint lobbying for investment in the schemes identified.   |
|                   | Future Aviation Capacity  | The Airports Commission Interim Report on airport capacity and connectivity in the UK recommended options for aviation growth in the South East. Whatever final option is chosen, success is contingent on early investment in existing infrastructure deficits and in new infrastructure needs resulting from aviation growth.  |
| Housing           | Response to the GLA’s London Plan Further Alternations Consultation | Potential increases in South East house building to accommodate London’s unmet need is an emerging issue. In responding to London, it would be helpful to discuss the positive as well as negative effects of housing growth in specific areas on the South East economy; for example, would it support dynamic local economies or damage economic growth and prosperity by increasing commuting and reducing employment land? It would also be helpful to discuss with LEPs the implications of additional housing growth for wider service provision, e.g. pressure on local infrastructure and school places etc. |

|                          |                                      |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Employability and Skills | Starting with the end in Mind (SESL) | SESL is exploring the potential for joint work with LEPs to improve young people's employability skills through facilitating better coordinated, more effective business-school engagement. LEPs and local authorities also share a desire for greater devolution of skills funding and provision.                          |
| EU Funding               | On-going SEEC work                   | SEEC is keen to work with LEPs to maximise economic benefits of EU funding, ensuring projects are well targeted and sharing good practice.  |
| Economic Growth          | South East Manifesto                 | SESL and SEEC are undertaking work to develop a South East Manifesto comprising a set of policy proposals and key messages on the themes of most importance to South East authorities. It would be helpful to explore common issues with LEPs and where LEP endorsement would help to strengthen lobbying on key proposals. |
|                          | Clearing the Hurdles (SEEC)          | SEEC's report <i>Clearing the Hurdles</i> makes the case for greater investment in / devolved powers for South East organisations to allow them to support economic growth better.  |
| Broadband                | On-going lobbying                    | SESL and SEEC continue to make the case for Government to fund 100% coverage of superfast broadband.  |

### 3. Potential LEP Project

- 3.1. Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP is seeking LEP and local authority support for commissioning an evidence-led review of the current local growth architecture. This would explore whether funding and powers are balanced geographically and between different types of area, e.g. cities and counties. The review would highlight the benefits of a more balanced approach and potentially explore the notion of a 'county buy-out'. This is the idea that a county-based LEP could establish a business case for an autonomous local area and strike a deal with HM Treasury to buy-out of the central finance system and central control. The potential for a joint project will be explored further with the LEPs, particularly the detail of the county buy-out idea, before a commitment is made.
- 3.2. **SEEC and SESL members are invited to comment on whether, in principle, they would support co-commissioning such a review. Areas for clarification include:**
- Whether the report will have a South East focus or cover all England's non-city areas, such as Cheshire, South West and Yorkshire LEPs.
  - Clarification that a LEP-commissioned report would build on SEEC's *Clearing the Hurdles* report, not simply duplicate some of this work.
  - The financial contribution required from SESL and / or SEEC and how a final report would be branded.
  - How do LEPs view the role of local authorities as partners in driving local economic growth and how do they see local authorities as being part of a new solution?

### 4. Emerging LEP Networks

- 4.1. Although a [national LEP network](#) does exist, some LEPs feel that there remains a gap in engagement with Government. As a result, ahead of the 2013 Spending Round, Alex Pratt, Chair of Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP, engaged all 39 LEPs in a collective response to Government. Alex has subsequently led on collective representations to Whitehall and a number of informal LEP networks have started to form to influence Government. Across the South East, for example, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Coast to Capital and Enterprise M3 LEPs have come together to form the Greater Thames Valley Six (GTV6) (extended through the involvement of Solent LEP). The group has been engaging with the Highways Agency on cross-LEP transport projects.
- 4.2. There is an offer to invite a SESL and / or SEEC representative to a future meeting of GTV6 and to welcome a LEP representative to future SESL and SEEC meetings. SESL and SEEC will look to work with loose, supportive networks of LEPs on an issue by issue basis.