

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING**Wednesday 12 November 2014**The Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining
1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DB

Present: Gordon Keymer CBE (chair)
Paul Bettison
Paul Carter CBE
Ken Crookes
Van Coulter
Myles Cullen
Roland Dibbs
Nicolas Heslop
David Hodge
Keith House
Ian Hudspeth
Gerry Lewin
Gill Mattock
David Neighbour
Ann Newton
Tony Page
Carole Paternoster
Roy Perry
Martin Tett

In Attendance: David Sparks OBE, LGA Chairman
Mona Sehgal, LGA
Heather Wills, LGA
Chris Williams, Buckinghamshire CC
Richard Schmidt, Buckinghamshire CC
Heather Bolton, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, SEEC
Nathan Roach, SEEC / SESL
Philippa Mellish, SESL

1. Apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest

1.1 Apologies were received from David Burbage and John Burden. Gerry Lewin substituted for Andrew Bowles, Ann Newton substituted for Bob Standley. No declarations of interest were made.

2. SEEC-SESL working relationship: Discussion on next steps

- 2.1 Agenda item 5 was brought forward. David Hodge said SEEC and SESL had worked together well with many successes, but there was a need for a single voice. The South East was the only English area represented by two different organisations. The South East must find the best way to influence government and maximise cost effectiveness. He proposed establishing a task and finish group to report back in March.
- 2.2 In discussion, members agreed the two organisations would be stronger together with a clear, single voice and it made sense to combine officer resources. This would help the South East lobby central government more effectively.
- 2.3 A working group was agreed comprising: Conservatives: Martin Tett (Buckinghamshire CC), David Hodge (Surrey CC), Nicolas Heslop (Tonbridge & Malling BC), Roy Perry (Hampshire CC); Labour: Van Coulter (Oxford City); Liberal Democrat: Keith House (Eastleigh BC). David Neighbour (Hart DC) was nominated as Lib-Dem sub.
ACTION 1: The task and finish group on the working relationship with SESL to meet and report back to the next SEEC Executive on 19 March 2015.

3. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 25 September 2014 and matters arising

3.1 The minutes were agreed. Heather Bolton updated members on a London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) report about construction skills shortages in London and the South East. At September's Executive, members met LCCI, then provided written input. The final report included SEEC comments supporting devolution of skills. LCCI has invited SEEC Treasurer Nicolas Heslop to take part in a skills round table.

4. Independent Commission on Local Government Finance: Consultation

4.1 The Commission, supported by LGA and CIPFA, published an interim report in October inviting views on options for future local government funding. Richard Schmidt, Assistant Director (Strategic Finance) at Bucks CC gave an overview of how options could affect the South East:

- i) By 2018-19 council tax and business rates will exceed central grants, so councils could become self sufficient. This could give councils more control - on condition ministers do not change business rates or require councils to provide more services.
- ii) Equalising payments between councils to ensure a base level of funding in all areas would benefit the South East if done locally rather than nationally.
- iii) Giving councils power to revalue properties and set council tax bands could be complex in two-tier areas, such as the South East.
- iv) There was broad support for giving councils powers to raise new income streams – eg charges for enhanced levels of service or to meet high demand in the South East.
- v) Lifting restrictions on council borrowing to invest in housing could benefit the South East where there is high potential to demonstrate returns on investment.
- vi) Rather than setting council funding for 5-year Parliamentary terms, a rolling 3-4 year settlement would avoid a cliff-edge at the end of a fixed term for any central funding.

4.2 Members welcomed the Commission's work to highlight the importance of funding reform and the need to develop new income streams. However, some felt focusing on self sufficiency meant there was inadequate consideration of current unfair distributions of central grant funding. They also felt that a review of local government finance must consider capital funding for infrastructure investment as well as revenue funding.

ACTION 2: SEEC to respond to consultation, building on its interim response from August and stressing South East interests. SESL to be invited to co-sign the response.

ACTION 3: Members to ask their Treasurers to provide any additional points to the SEEC Secretariat to help shape the response.

5. LGA priorities and plans: Guest speaker Cllr David Sparks, LGA Chairman

5.1 Agenda item 7 was brought forward. David Sparks outlined his priorities as LGA Chairman including the 100 days campaign and devolution for English councils. He stressed the LGA represented all areas of England and all tiers of councils. Links with bodies like SEEC played an important role in keeping the LGA in touch with members.

5.2 The 100 days campaign built on earlier work on 'Rewiring Local Government'. It aims to influence manifestos for general election 2015. Political parties had welcomed the fact that 100 days proposals are costed. Devolution to local government was also a top priority and should be based on current local government structures.

5.3 In discussion Cllr Sparks confirmed that the LGA was also working to influence civil servants in favour of devolution and keeping an ever-present eye on EU funding to make sure councils received their fair share. Responding to questions about cities' balance of power in the LGA, Cllr Sparks highlighted important work such as the non-metropolitan commission, which is due to report shortly.

6. SEEC data dashboard: Overview and South East housing delivery

6.1 Nick Woolfenden highlighted key South East successes and challenges shown in the latest dashboard. Members welcomed the dashboard and supported a proposal to highlight housing as a key topic when the dashboard is circulated to MPs and Ministers.

- 6.2 Members' views were sought on a proposal to update data sources for capital and council spending to ensure the dashboard uses current figures. Nick also outlined the Lyons report on housing, which backed SEEC's call for 'use it or lose it' powers on planning applications but included some proposals undermining local control.
ACTION 4: Members to provide views on spending data options to Nick Woolfenden
ACTION 5: SEEC to publish the dashboard online and send it to Ministers, South East MPs and MEPs asking them to support changes to help meet local housing need.
- 7. SEEC draft response to CLG Gypsy & Traveller consultation**
- 7.1 Heather Bolton outlined a draft response that built on input from member councils. In discussion members raised concerns about the lack of detail in CLG's proposals and the problems and potential cost burdens this could create for councils.
- 7.2 Members said the proposals put too much obligation on planning authorities to define, monitor and enforce issues, such as whether people had a nomadic lifestyle and when the rights of a child outweighed environmental concerns. Concerns were also raised about inconsistent rulings from planning inspectors, the fact that transit sites were not a panacea, and that the police should be given a clear role in acting against short term illegal encampments.
ACTION 6: Member comments to be incorporated in SEEC's final consultation response, which will be signed off by SEEC Chairman to meet CLG's deadline.
- 8. SEEC updates**
- 8.1 Nick Woolfenden reminded members they could still register for a final few places at SEEC's Duty to Co-operate workshop on 28 November. Gordon Keymer told members that SEEC's task and finish group on working with London would follow the Executive. In addition, a number of documents are now available on the SEEC website including:
- i) The South East response to London's Infrastructure 2050 consultation document
 - ii) The final SEEC business plan for 2014-15.
- 8.2 Gordon Keymer proposed a freeze in SEEC member subscriptions for 2015-16.
ACTION 7: A recommendation to freeze member subscriptions will be presented to SEEC's AGM in June 2015.
- 9. Confirmed forward meeting dates:**
- 5 February 2015 – SEEC All-member meeting: **1pm**
 - 19 March 2015 – SEEC Executive: **1.00pm** (shared date with SESL)
 - 25 June 2015 – SEEC AGM (shared date with SESL)
- 10. Any other business**
- 10.1 Members agreed to submit a high level response to Airports Commission consultation on its shortlist of three options for a new runway. The focus should be on the need for infrastructure investment, which will be needed regardless of where the runway is built.
ACTION 8: SEEC to draft a response to the Airports Commission highlighting South East infrastructure investment needs.
- 10.2 Members agreed that SEEC and SESL should submit a joint response to the LGA's call for evidence on the local government impacts of an ageing society.
ACTION 9: SEEC and SESL to draft a response for approval by the two Chairmen.
There was no further business and the meeting closed at 12.45pm.

Signed: _____
Gordon Keymer CBE, Chairman

Date: **19 March 2015**