

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Thursday 19 March 2015

Greater London Authority, City Hall
The Queen's Walk, London, SE1 2AA



Present: Gordon Keymer CBE (chair)
Paul Bettison
Andrew Bowles
David Burbage MBE
John Burden
Myles Cullen
Neil Dallen
Roland Dibbs
David Hodge
Keith House
David Neighbour
Ann Newton
Tony Page
Carole Paternoster
Chris Townsend

In Attendance: Russell Reefer, LGA
Kate Herbert, LGA
Chris Williams, Buckinghamshire CC
Heather Bolton, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, SEEC
Sarah Momber, SEEC / SESL

- 1. Apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest**
 - 1.1 Apologies were received from Martin Tett, Roy Perry and Nicolas Heslop. Ann Newton substituted for Bob Standley. No declarations of interest were made.
- 2. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 12 November 2014 and matters arising elsewhere**
 - 2.1 The minutes were agreed. Heather Bolton updated members on a Government review on the future of business rates, suggesting SEEC could submit a high level response. Members agreed to respond by the 12 June deadline.
ACTION 1: SEEC to respond to Government review on business rates.
 - 2.2 Gypsies and Travellers: the Government is giving councils more powers to deal with long-term illegal encampments, but not to address short-term illegal camps.
- 3. EU legislation and funding: impact on South East councils**
 - 3.1 Cllr Keymer welcomed LGA Adviser Russell Reefer. Following Government's allocation of EU Structural and Investment Funds to LEPs, the first call for local project bids is expected imminently. However, the LGA and local partners are concerned that the Government is centralising project funding decision-making powers and reducing local government/LEPs to advisory roles.
 - 3.2 Members supported LGA concerns that this loss of local control will reduce the effectiveness of funds. Members offered SEEC's support if it would strengthen the LGA's case to Government to reverse the decision and increase local powers.
 - 3.3 Cllr Keymer also updated members on his work to influence EU legislation and reduce burdens on local government through Europe's Committee of the Regions. He was concerned about moves to reduce local government's ability to scrutinise European decision-making. He will continue to fight such moves and make the case for South East concerns.

ACTION 2: Circulate Russell's slides to the Executive Committee.

ACTION 3: LGA to advise SEEC how it can best support its calls to Government for local decision-making on EU Structural and Investment project funding.

4. Financial devolution prospects for South East authorities

4.1 Heather Bolton summarised two recent reports by the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance and the Independent Commission on Economic Growth and the Future of Public Services in Non-Metropolitan England. Both reflected SEEC input and recommended financial devolution to local authorities.

4.2 Supporting SEEC arguments, the reports called for councils to receive more revenue from business rates, not just a percentage of growth, and to devolve powers and budgets for skills and infrastructure. In discussion members welcomed the reports but highlighted:

- the need for cross boundary governance to support devolution may be challenging for the South East as a mainly two-tier area
- opposition to making social care an NHS responsibility as local government is more cost effective and efficient
- Government's desire to make business rates reform fiscally neutral.

Members asked for a short update of SEEC devolution proposals for Ministers & MPs.

ACTION 4: SEEC to set out brief, clear points on South East devolution benefits for meetings with and letters to Ministers and MPs after the election.

5. Care Act 2014: Cap on care costs & appeals: Draft SE consultation response

5.1 Heather Bolton asked member views on main issues to include in a joint SEEC, SESL and SECASC response to Care Act consultation. In discussion members raised concerns on funding, IT systems and a new appeals process, including:

- Resource implications of new appeals in parallel to existing complaint systems
- Cost increases as the market raises prices for councils when self-funders decline. This will reduce the number of people councils can support. Surrey CC faces extra costs of £100m-£150m a year.

ACTION 5: Circulate draft consultation response to Executive members for comment in time to meet the response deadline of 30 March.

6. SEEC-SESL working relationship: Next step options

6.1 Cllr Hodge emphasised how well a joined-up approach had worked so far between SEEC and SESL. He said there are still ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency, whilst ensuring the South East has a clearer single voice. Task and Finish group options are: 1. Maintain status quo on current SEEC-SESL joint working; 2. Create a new single organisation combining the best of SEEC and SESL and a value for money review; 3. Review and enhance SEEC as the single cross tier voice for the South East.

6.2 In discussion, Cllr Hodge and most members agreed strongly with option 2 that the South East needs to create one message, using one voice. Cllr Burbage stated that SESL have not had a chance to discuss this yet. Members agreed that a debate at the June AGM, taking into account SESL's position, is the best way forward.

ACTION 6: SEEC-SESL working relationship to be debated at June AGM.

7. SEEC budget update 2014-15 and 2015-16

7.1 Members confirmed the planned budget and subscription freeze for 2015-16. Cllr Hodge suggested reviewing the budget after a decision on SEEC-SESL joint working.

ACTION 7: Recommend to the AGM a SEEC subscription freeze for 2015-16.

8. London Summit on future housing & infrastructure needs: Key issues

8.1 Nick Woolfenden updated members on the Summit. Sir Edward Lister has said London can meet its housing need within its boundaries. However, this was challenged by a

Planning Inspector, who encouraged London to begin dialogue with surrounding areas. The Summit will provide the opportunity for councillors to take this forward.

8.2 Members agreed the importance of establishing influential dialogue with London. Councillors must be involved in discussions, not just officers, and there must be clear, published outcomes. Cllr Keymer encouraged members to ensure London recognises the South East's own housing and infrastructure needs, protected land and economy.
ACTION 8: Members to attend London Summit and raise South East concerns.

9. **Update – Modern Slavery Bill: Duties for councils and South East training film**
9.1 Heather Bolton outlined a new duty in the Modern Slavery Bill for councils to report suspected victims of slavery. SESPM is creating a short film to raise awareness and support council staff with the changes. Chris Williams added that the Bill also gives councils responsibility for housing any victims who are discovered.

ACTION 9: SEEC to send briefing on new duties once Bill receives Royal Assent.

ACTION 10: SEEC to circulate SESPM training film when available.

10. **Confirmed forward meeting dates:**

- 25 June 2015 – SEEC AGM (shared date with SESL)
- 24 September 2015 – SEEC Executive (shared date with SESL)
- 26 November 2015 – SEEC Executive

11. **Any other business**

There was no further business and the meeting closed at 2.45pm.

Signed:

Nicolas Heslop, SEEC Chairman

Date: 24 September 2015