

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS MINUTES OF THE ALL-MEMBER MEETING

Thursday 5 February 2015

Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining

1 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5DB



- 1. Welcome, apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest**
 - 1.1 Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE welcomed members. Apologies and substitutes are on the attached attendance list. There were no declarations of interest.

- 2. Minutes of 3 July 2014 and matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda**
 - 2.1 The minutes of the last all-member meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.
 - 2.2 Future of SEEC and SESL task group: Cllr David Hodge is awaiting feedback from the group before drafting a paper on options for SEEC Executive on 19 March.

- 3. Financial devolution: What could it mean for South East councils?**
 - 3.1 Heather Bolton presented new [SEEC/SESL research by Local Government Futures](#), showing the value of council tax, business rates, stamp duty and annual tax on enveloped dwellings in the South East. It compared council control of these property taxes to grants received from central government.
 - 3.2 11% of the SEEC area's total tax take is property tax, equal to £9bn last year. By 2015-16, the SEEC area forecasts property tax revenues of £5.8bn (excluding council tax), compared to grants of £2.7bn, leaving a funding surplus of £3.1bn. South East unitary and county councils (except Isle of Wight) would gain under this system but 40% of districts would be worse off, raising questions about how to rebalance funding.
ACTION 1: Circulate Local Government Futures research to all SEEC members.

- 4. Devolution for English local government**
 - 4.1 Bob Neill MP, member of the Political & Constitutional Reform Select Committee (PCRC), said that there is a window of opportunity for political debate and policy development. Following the Scottish referendum, the more that is devolved to Scotland, the more English grants and funding will also be affected, so now is the time to push for change. For example, lobbying to allow local government to retain more income from business rates. Property taxes are an obvious starting point, as they are easily identifiable and collected by locality. The issue of equalisation will still exist, but can be solved. Local government must start making their case for a new government, with a joint approach and voice for two tier areas. The next stage for PCRC is to look at how devolution works in practical terms. They hope to report in early March.
 - 4.2 In discussion, members agreed that local votes will become more important as financial responsibilities are devolved. The key word is simplicity, which is why property taxes are a good starting point. All the main parties are discussing devolution, but local government must provide a solution. Local authorities must work out what their offer is to the Treasury, showing increased efficiency and the ability to return more money through devolution. To persuade civil servants, a strong political case must be made. Bob Neill suggested a gradualist approach is better, in order to achieve some goals, rather than pushing for too much too quickly and failing. SEEC must make sure local MPs are aware of the issues, including briefing new MPs on SEEC's work, and liaising with CLG Select Committee & PCRC to influence their work and provide evidence.
ACTION 2: Send letter and briefing to South East MPs & relevant Select Committees making the case for more devolution for local government.

- 5. How to maximise the value and potential of non-metropolitan councils**
 - 5.1 Sir John Peace, Chairman of the Independent Commission on Economic Growth and the Future of Public Services in Non-Metropolitan England, said he is approaching the topic in a non-political way; trying to find the best way forward. The commission is

concerned by the government focus on cities, and began with work to show government how important non-mets are to the UK economy, creating more jobs than London and three times more than met areas.

5.2 The Commission report in March will focus on seven areas: **skills** (local responsibility for managing skills), **foreign investment** (how non-met areas can raise their profile to attract funding), **infrastructure** (planning & transport decisions to be taken within economic areas), **housing, digital connectivity** (vital for Small & Medium Enterprises), **investment in infrastructure** (mechanisms must be in place to deliver strategies with local funding) & **public sector governance** (strengthen cross-boundary arrangements to reduce bureaucracy, duplication and delays in decision-making).

5.3 In discussion, Sir John said he had found no opposition to these ideas, but implementation will depend on political will. In skills, a formal structure for employers and schools to work together is missing. It is very important for the South East to provide a vision and bring all stakeholders together to detail what will make the South East economy more prosperous than it is today. Everyone is beginning to acknowledge that things must change, but the challenge is how to make it happen.
ACTION 3: When final non-met report published, SEEC to consider action to support calls for devolution.

6. **South Central Ambulance Trust: nominations for two local authority governors**

6.1 The CVs of four candidates were presented to members, who agreed to nominate Cllr Keith House (Lib Dem, Eastleigh BC & Hampshire CC) and Cllr Jan Warwick (Con, Winchester City Council). The other candidates were Cllr Allan Glass (Con, New Forest DC) and Cllr David Carroll (Con, Bucks CC & Wycombe DC).

ACTION 4: Nominations to be reported to the Ambulance Trust.

7. **Housing, Planning & Infrastructure – South East opportunities**

7.1 Cllr Keith House updated members on the recent publication of the Housing Supply Review he co-chaired. It found four main reasons for the gap in local housing supply: **land** (large amounts held by central government must be easier to release), **finance** (some areas have unspent housing revenue account funding; lack of awareness that all councils can borrow through their general fund for housing), **building & methods of delivery** (political leadership and innovation can deliver more homes) and **skills** (a new institute should help councils access skills to take forward housing initiatives).

7.2 Discussions with London: SEEC's Task and Finish group has published [notes](#) of its meeting. SEEC aims to establish stronger political engagement with the GLA and London Councils. Members should have received an invitation to a political 'summit' with the GLA and East of England LGA on future plans on 19 March and are encouraged to attend. The task group will meet London Councils separately.

ACTION 5: SEEC to re-circulate summit invitations to all members.

7.3 Mind the Gap transport report: A number of schemes will now receive funding (M25, A27 & M3) but others will not. SEEC now aims to publish an update to present to the new government after May.

ACTION 6: Members are asked to commit a small amount of resource to prepare an updated Mind the Gap report.

7.4 Member updates on recent SEEC work included:

- [SEEC response to the Airports Commission](#). This focuses on the common need for infrastructure, wherever expansion occurs. It also notes concerns about a simplistic approach to housing, ignoring constraints faced by the South East e.g. Green Belt.
- [Report from SEEC's Duty to Co-operate \(DtC\) workshop](#). DtC is part of the strategic planning role councils lobbied for, so political leadership is needed to make it work.

8. Updates and links

8.1 Cllr Keymer drew members' attention to recent SEEC submissions on [local government finance](#), [helping councils respond to an ageing population](#) and [planning for Gypsies and Travellers](#).

9. Confirmed forward meeting dates:

- **19 March 2015** – SEEC Executive 1pm (shared date with SESL + London Summit)
- **25 June 2015** – SEEC AGM & All-Member meeting (shared date with SESL)
- **24 September 2015** – SEEC Executive.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 Cllr Peter Fleming asked members to respond to the LGA consultation on the future of sector led improvement before 13 March 2015.

10.2 Cllr David Hodge asked members to support forthcoming LGA work on devolution. This aims to pull together key points from the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance and Independent Commission on Non-Metropolitan England.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 15:00.

Signed:

Gordon Keymer CBE, Chairman

SEEC ALL-MEMBER MEETING 5 FEBRUARY 2015: ATTENDANCE LIST

Name	Organisation	Signature / Apologies / Substitute
Gillian Brown	Arun District Council	Yes
Gerry Clarkson	Ashford Borough Council	Apologies
Carole Paternoster	Aylesbury Vale District Council	Yes
Clive Sanders	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	Yes
Paul Bettison	Bracknell Forest Council	Yes
Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire County Council	Apologies
John Gilbey	Canterbury City Council	Yes
Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council	Apologies
Myles Cullen	Chichester District Council	Yes
Isobel Darby	Chiltern District Council	Yes
Jeremy Kite	Dartford Borough Council	Apologies
Paul Watkins	Dover District Council	Sub – Susan Chandler
Ferris Cowper	East Hampshire District Council	Apologies
Gill Mattock	Eastbourne Borough Council	Apologies
Keith House	Eastleigh Borough Council	Yes
John O'Reilly	Elmbridge Borough Council	Apologies
Neil Dallen	Epsom & Ewell Borough Council	Yes
John Burden	Gravesham Borough Council	Yes
Stephen Mansbridge	Guildford Borough Council	Sub – Jenny Wicks
Roy Perry	Hampshire County Council	Yes
Stephen Parker	Hart District Council	Apologies
Jeremy Birch	Hastings Borough Council	Apologies
Michael Cheshire, MBE	Havant Borough Council	Yes
Ray Dawe	Horsham District Council	Apologies
Paul Carter, CBE	Kent County Council	Yes
Ron Maskell	Lewes District Council	Apologies
Garry Wall	Mid Sussex District Council	Apologies
Chris Townsend	Mole Valley District Council	Yes
Barry Rickman	New Forest District Council	Apologies
Van Coulter	Oxford City Council	Apologies
Ian Hudspeth	Oxfordshire County Council	Apologies
Tony Page	Reading Borough Council	Yes
Dr Lynne Hack	Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	Yes
David Burbage, MBE	RB of Windsor & Maidenhead	Yes
Patrick Roberts	Runnymede Borough Council	Apologies

Roland Dibbs	Rushmoor Borough Council	Yes
Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks District Council	Yes
David Monk	Shepway District Council	Sub – Russell Tillson
Adrian Busby	South Bucks District Council	Apologies
John Cotton	South Oxfordshire District Council	Apologies
Robert Watts	Spelthorne Borough Council	Apologies
David Hodge	Surrey County Council	Yes
Moira Gibson	Surrey Heath Borough Council	Apologies
Andrew Bowles	Swale Borough Council	Yes
Gordon Keymer, CBE	Tandridge District Council	Yes
Ian Carr	Test Valley Borough Council	Apologies
Iris Johnston	Thanet District Council	Apologies
Nicolas Heslop	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council	Yes
David Jukes	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	Apologies
Robert Knowles	Waverley Borough Council	Apologies
Bob Standley	Wealden District Council	Apologies
Gordon Lundie	West Berkshire Council	Apologies
Barry Norton	West Oxfordshire District Council	Apologies
Robert Humby	Winchester City Council	Yes
John Kingsbury	Woking Borough Council	Apologies
Keith Baker	Wokingham Borough Council	Apologies
Tony Green	Wycombe District Council	Yes

Speakers

Bob Neill MP	Political & Constitutional Reform Select Committee	Yes
Sir John Peace	Independent Commission on Economic Growth and the Future of Public Services in Non-Metropolitan England	Yes

Other Attendees

Chris Williams	Buckinghamshire County Council	Apologies
Heather Bolton	SEEC	Yes
Nick Woolfenden	SEEC	Yes
Philippa Mellish	SESL	Yes
Kate Herbert	Local Government Association	Yes