

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Thursday 24 September 2015

Engineering Employers' Federation
Broadway House, Tothill St, London, SW1H 9NQ



Present: Nicolas Heslop (chair)
Andrew Bowles
David Burbage MBE
Paul Carter CBE
Peter Chowney
Van Coulter
Myles Cullen
Neil Dallen
Roland Dibbs
Lynne Hack
David Hodge
David Monk
Tony Page
Stephen Parker
Carole Paternoster
Roy Perry
Rodney Rose
Bob Standley
Martin Tett

In Attendance: Lewis Rose OBE, Derbyshire Dales DC
Piali Das Gupta, LGA
Heather Wills, LGA
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 Keith House, Chris Townsend, David Neighbour, Moira Gibson and Chris Williams. Rodney Rose substituted for Ian Hudspeth. No declarations of interest were made.

2. Partnerships, powers & leadership: making South East devolution work

2.1 The Chairman welcomed Cllr Lewis Rose OBE, Leader of Derbyshire Dales District Council, to discuss lessons learnt for devolution in two-tier areas like the South East from his involvement in the [D2N2 devolution bid](#). This includes 15 districts, 2 unitaries and 2 counties and aims to be the first deal agreed in a two-tier area. Cllr Rose gave an overview of the experience in Derbyshire:

- Consensus on the importance of cross-tier partnership working has helped underpin progress so far.
- Government seems to have a firm structure for city devolution, whilst it is still evolving for two tier areas. Clarity on outcomes will be important to securing ongoing support from all partners.
- It is important that devolution bids offer something worthwhile to every tier to secure full buy-in.

2.2 Piali Das Gupta provided an update from the LGA on devolution progress nationally ([summary](#) available on the LGA website). Government has received 34 bids in England, including 5 from the South East. Most have at least one other partner beyond local government e.g. LEPs, CCGs. While many propose governance reviews, fewer than 10 have proposed mayors; some have agreed to commit to a mayor only if they receive

powers they do not already have e.g. skills or health. Piali emphasised a few points for local authorities to be aware of:

- Councils should evidence the importance of any key public estate assets to their future plans, to prevent Government arguing for their disposal eg. to offset other costs.
- Business support is crucial.
- Councils should look at opportunities to propose uses for Government departments' underspend, and argue for further cuts to focus on these budgets rather than on local government.
- The LGA can provide a support package to help councils' bids.

2.3 In discussion, members raised the following points:

- SEEC should respond to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on devolution's call for evidence, highlighting concerns members have about the current barriers to devolution, in particular for two tier areas (see action 2).
- Uncertainty over outcomes and funding that would accompany devolution is deterring some councils and their partners from full commitment to devolution bids.
- Some councils are concerned about Government indications that they may lose Local Growth Funds and Regional Growth Funds if they don't submit devolution proposals; LGA advises this should not be the case and councils can contact them directly with any examples.
- Councils incur huge costs through various bidding processes for different funding pots; more comprehensive devolution of these budgets would save resource.

ACTION 1: Circulate Piali's slides and the LGA devolution summary to the Executive.

ACTION 2: SEEC to respond to APPG for Reform, Decentralisation & Devolution by deadline of 4 October.

ACTION 3: Individual councils to alert LGA to any discussions linking devolution to LGF and RGF payments.

3. SEEC business plan & resource options 2015-16

3.1 Members agreed the draft business plan, subject to adding the forthcoming Housing & Planning Bill as a potential area of work and clarifying options on any possible member workshops. Members also agreed that SEEC should put resource into a new communications post and were happy with the estimated costs proposed. SESL expressed potential interest in sharing this resource.

3.2 Reflecting widespread interest in planning issues, members requested that SEEC write to Greg Clark asking Government to reconsider its appeal against the Reading-West Berkshire High Court ruling. The court allowed continuing use of s106 on small sites, in line with SEEC members' view that s106 contributions should be permitted on all sites (see action 5).

3.3 Members also suggested topics for discussion with Greg Clark at the next SEEC Executive in November including: devolution, Housing & Planning Bill, Gypsy & Traveller legislation and refugees. There were mixed views on opening the meeting to all members.

ACTION 4: SEEC to take forward recruitment for a Communications post and report back on progress in November.

ACTION 5: SEEC to write to Greg Clark asking Government not to appeal against a recent High Court ruling re s106 on small sites.

ACTION 6: Chairman to consider whether to extend attendance at the next Executive meeting with Greg Clark.

4. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 19 March 2015 and matters arising elsewhere

4.1 The minutes were agreed. A letter from SEEC Secretary David Monk to smaller political parties (less than 5% of South East seats) identified no objections to a Residents'/Independent coalition filling two seats on the SEEC Executive. Neil Dallen and Chris Townsend will take these seats.

5. Information updates: Latest SEEC activity report

5.1 Roundtables with London on housing & infrastructure - Nick Woolfenden explained recent political roundtables were well attended by members from South East and East of England. All members will be invited to a Wider South East Summit on 11 December to agree a political structure and actions to progress formal dialogue with the Mayor and East. Members are keen to agree tangible actions for joint work with London as soon as possible. The Chairman agreed to discuss with Cllr Burbage a collective South East position to present at the Summit. Members agreed to discuss Wider South East engagement further at the 26 November Executive, and asked to consider opportunities to engage with 2016's mayoral candidates.

ACTION 7: All members to receive invitations to 11 December Wider South East political Summit.

ACTION 8: SEEC & SESL Chairmen to discuss South East position before Summit

ACTION 9: SEEC to invite mayoral candidates to speak with members

ACTION 10: Wider South East dialogue to be included on 26 November agenda.

6. Confirmed forward meeting dates:

- 26 November 2015 – SEEC Executive
- 11 December 2015 – Wider South East Summit
- 29 January 2016 – SEEC All-Member Meeting

7. Any other business

7.1 Syrian refugees: Heather Bolton updated the group on the current situation and a SEEC and SESPM [briefing](#) was handed out in advance of circulation to all members. The Home Office are expecting counties and districts to work together locally before proposing an offer for their area, but members raised concerns that different areas/councils are receiving different communication from the Home Office.

ACTION 11: SEEC/SESPM to circulate the refugee briefing to all members

ACTION 12: LGA and SESPM to feed back to the Home Office re importance of consistency re their communications to all councils re the refugee crisis.

7.2 There was no further business and the meeting closed at 2.50pm.