

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Thursday 26 November 2015

Engineering Employers' Federation

Broadway House, Tothill St, London, SW1H 9NQ



Present: Nicolas Heslop (Chair)
Roy Perry (Deputy Chair)
David Monk (Secretary)
David Burbage MBE
Paul Carter CBE
Peter Chowney
Van Coulter
Myles Cullen
Neil Dallen
Roland Dibbs
Lynne Hack
David Hodge
Keith House
Ian Hudspeth
David Jukes
Stephen Parker
Carole Paternoster
Bob Standley

In Attendance: Baroness Williams of Trafford
Chris Williams, Buckinghamshire CC
Heather Bolton, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, SEEC
Susie Yapp, SESL
Heather Wills, LGA

1. Apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest

1.1 David Jukes substituted for Andrew Bowles. Apologies came from David Neighbour, Tony Page, Martin Tett and Chris Townsend. No declarations of interest were made.

2. Baroness Williams of Trafford, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DCLG

2.1 The Minister welcomed councils' work to support the South East's economic success, but recognised there were challenges to sustaining this, including housing and transport. She encouraged councils to respond to key consultations on Spending Review proposals. She also explained how Spending Review announcements might assist the South East:

- £250m for a permanent lorry park in Kent to support Operation Stack.
- Financial support through Libor fines for military museums in Portsmouth.
- Five new Enterprise Zones in Newhaven, Aylesbury Vale, Didcot, North Kent and the Enterprise M3 LEP area.
- Support for increasing the number of affordable, shared ownership and starter homes, including policy changes through the Housing & Planning Bill.
- Opportunities for councils to make devolution bids, and recognition that different solutions are needed for different areas, especially non-met/two-tier areas.

2.2 In discussion, members raised points including:

- The need for Government to support innovative council-led approaches to infrastructure delivery, such as revolving infrastructure funds.
- 'Gold plating' of legal requirements can undermine financial viability of housing development. Councils should determine validity of developers' viability claims.
- Concerns that office-to-residential developments do not contribute to vital infrastructure needs and reduce the stock of commercial premises.

- The importance of allowing councils to deliver homes for rent and sale to meet varied workforce needs and sustain South East economic success. There are concerns that increasing 'right to buy' and focusing so strongly on starter homes will reduce the South East's already limited supply of affordable homes to rent.
- Government should allow councils to set planning fees locally to cover the reasonable costs of processing applications. Current nationally-set fees mean the public purse is subsidising developers' costs in the South East.
- The need for Government clarification that criteria for forced sale of high value public assets will not mean councils have to sell assets that generate income to fund services.

2.3 The Minister offered to respond to member questions in writing, welcoming the Chairman's proposal for SEEC to write summarising the issues raised.

ACTION 1: SEEC to write to Baroness Williams summarising members' key issues and questions for response.

3. Working with London on housing & infrastructure: a South East voice

3.1 The Chairman updated members on the forthcoming Wider South East (WSE) Summit on 11 December and encouraged attendance. The focus is to ensure South East views are heard in discussions on London's growth. Members supported plans for a political level steering group to oversee WSE joint work.

3.2 Commenting on priorities for joint WSE work, members highlighted:

- Opportunities to shape the Mayor's London Plan review must be a high priority. The South East is already delivering the most homes in England - London must not assume there is scope to accommodate more 'overspill' development here, given the South East's own existing local needs and environmental & infrastructure constraints.
- Tackling barriers to housing delivery is a key shared concern for the South East and London. This will help deliver both locally approved plans in the South East and the Mayor's commitment to meet London's needs in its boundaries, minimising the risk of overspill. London currently has 19 of the 20 worst performing areas of the country when comparing housing delivery against need.
- South East infrastructure is overstretched and more investment is vital to ensure ongoing economic success of the South East economy, as well as London's.
- Shared data/evidence could help demonstrate the existing pressures/growth in the South East, and support the case for increased infrastructure investment. However caution is needed to ensure any work does not undermine existing evidence that underpins South East councils' local plans.
- Engaging London Councils as well as the Mayor will be important.
- In the future, some areas of the South East may wish to consider accepting London housing in exchange for infrastructure investment.

3.3 Members agreed SEEC political steering group nominations as: Nicolas Heslop (Tonbridge & Malling BC), David Burbage (Windsor & Maidenhead), Peter Martin (Surrey CC), Carole Paternoster (Aylesbury Vale DC), Tony Page (Reading BC). Substitutes will be confirmed. London Mayor/London Councils & East of England LGA will also make nominations.

ACTION 2: SEEC to provide a briefing for all South East councillors attending the Summit, setting out the Executive's support for a political steering group and joint work on tackling barriers to housing delivery/improving infrastructure. It should also highlight concerns that any joint work on data must not undermine councils' local plan evidence bases.

ACTION 3: SEEC Chairman to inform the Summit of South East nominations to the Wider South East political steering group.

4. Final SEEC business plan & resource options 2015-16

4.1 Members endorsed the final SEEC business plan for 2015-16. They noted recruitment updates for SEEC's new communications officer and filling the vacant admin/policy post.

David Burbage explained SESL's new Head of Policy would start shortly, helping progress possible areas for joint working.

5. Minutes of SEEC Executive Meeting on 24 September and matters arising

5.1 The minutes were agreed. There were no matters arising.

6. Information updates: Latest SEEC activity report

6.1 Members welcomed the updates on SEEC's recent work set out in the meeting paper. In discussion they raised a number of issues on Syrian refugees:

- Need for clarification on the Government's approach to five year funding arrangements, which are vital to give certainty for receiving councils, including unit costs.
- The importance of SEEC encouraging all tiers to work together to offer further places for refugees in the South East.
- Whilst some refugees will require significant support, others may be well-placed to work.
- A reminder about a recent letter from Government asking county and unitary councils to offer to take over responsibility for some unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), to help relieve extreme pressures in Kent as the arrival point for many UASC.

ACTION 4: SEEC to write to all member councils to raise awareness of Ministers' requests to provide more places for Syrian refugees and highlight the opportunity to attend a free South East conference on the resettlement process.

7. Confirmed forward meeting dates:

- 11 December 2015 – South East, London & East of England Summit on Housing & Infrastructure
- 29 January 2016 – SEEC All-Member Meeting
- 22 March 2016 – SEEC Executive (shared date with SESL)

8. Any other business

8.1 There was no further business and the meeting closed at 11.45am.