

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Friday 29 March 2019

Local Government Association

18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ



Present: Roy Perry (Chair)
Ralph Bagge
Paul Bettison OBE
Andrew Bowles
Jason Brock
Peter Chowney
Jeanette Clifford
Colin Kemp
Eileen Lintill
James Mills
David Monk
Tony Page
Stephen Parker
Carole Paternoster
Bob Standley
Chris Townsend
Mike Whiting

In Attendance: Nigel Duncan, Fareham College
Tracy Sherriff, West Berkshire Council
Georgina Angele, Careers & Enterprise Company
Simon Harris, West Kent Partnership
Heather Bolton, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, SEEC
Emily Duddy, SEEC
Rachael Coker, SEEC
Neil Border, SESL

1. **Apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest**

1.1 Mike Whiting substituted for Paul Carter CBE. Apologies came from Cllrs Matt Furniss, Moira Gibson, Lynne Hack, Nicolas Heslop, Keith House, David Neighbour, Clive Woodbridge and from Tim Wheadon. Roy Perry made a declaration of interest that his daughter is the Minister of State for Immigration. As this would be her last Executive meeting before leaving in May, Heather Bolton was thanked for her highly effective work as Director of South East England Councils.

2. **Shaping skills to fill gaps in the South East economy: a proactive role for local authorities**

2.1 The Chairman introduced four expert speakers to share good practice and help members explore the role of councils in improving skills in their areas.

2.2 Nigel Duncan, Principal of Fareham College, cited examples of how his college and Hampshire County Council are collaborating effectively, such as:

- Supporting council employees' skills development through providing apprenticeships designed to provide key skills required, eg. in areas such as highways work.
- Partnering with the council to identify and develop key skills and employability needs in the area eg. securing £1m funding in a joint application to the Construction Skills Fund.
- Supporting post-16 skills development eg. the council endorsed Fareham College's successful bid to become a centre of excellence for mathematics; and regular sharing of labour market intelligence.
- Collaborating on capital investment projects, for example centres specialising in advanced engineering and manufacturing.
- The council's encouragement and endorsement of vocational education helps to raise the profile of this as an alternative to academic qualifications. The college also offers vocational T-Levels, technical qualifications which are the equivalent of A-Levels.

- Nigel encouraged councils to look at how they can help bring colleges/partners together to share ideas and how they can support careers guidance. He also suggested councillors should visit colleges in their local area to see what they are doing and how they can get involved.

2.3 Tracy Sherriff, Apprenticeship Co-ordinator at West Berkshire Council, shared her experience in tackling challenges around spending the council's apprenticeship levy:

- The Apprenticeship Levy is set by Government at 0.5% of employers' payroll for large organisations. It is commonly underspent and unused funds have to be given to Government after 2 years.
- West Berkshire hired Tracy to help deliver effective spend of the levy and improve knowledge and perceptions on apprenticeships. Her experience is specifically in apprenticeships rather than in local government and this has increased understanding of the opportunities to employ apprentices and utilise the levy.
- At senior management level, this has included raising awareness of how apprenticeships can be used to co-fund the training of new employees. For example, the council is now recruiting people into Adult Social Care with no prior experience and, as apprentice carers, they receive intensive initial training funded via the levy.
- Apprenticeships in Leadership and Management have proved highly effective in strengthening internal capacity, although there have been some difficulties with staff having to re-sit English and Maths at GCSE if unable to locate their original certificates.
- Standard contracts for training providers have been introduced to reduce time and expense for council legal teams checking contracts.
- Changing perceptions around vocational education remains a challenge, as does ensuring suitable standards of training are offered by providers. Councils need to be clear about what they expect/need from providers.
- These changes have helped West Berkshire make good progress on spending the levy, with 118 apprentice enrolments so far.
- Tracy's experience has informed [proposals on how the levy system could be improved](#).

2.4 Georgina Angele, South East Regional Lead, Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), and Simon Harris, Enterprise Co-ordinator for three West Kent local authorities, provided an overview of how councils can help build links between businesses and school career services. The CEC is a DfE initiative to help ensure young people have good information and guidance about pathways through education into employment. The CEC creates Enterprise Adviser Networks (EAN), based in LEPs or councils, helping maximise the exposure of students to work opportunities and the skills required.

- In West Kent, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks District Councils jointly fund Simon's post as an enterprise co-ordinator.
- Building effective relationships between enterprise co-ordinators and council economic development officers can help promote the work of EANs.
- An important outcome is enabling more encounters with employers in the school curriculum as research shows that if a young person has 4 or more meaningful encounters with employers during their education, they are 86% less likely to become NEET.
- EANs can assist schools to navigate DfE budgets to obtain funds to upskill school careers advisers and unlock connections possible through school governors.
- EANs are keen to promote apprenticeships as a means of retaining human capital locally, as opposed to university pathways which often see young people failing to return to their local area with much-needed skills.
- West Kent intends to create Enterprise Hubs specialising in degree level apprenticeships and replicate some of the university experience (eg. social events) to create a competitive alternative to university.

2.5 In discussion, with the 4 speakers, members raised points including:

- Some of the restrictions on apprenticeships can make it hard for councils to spend the levy. Could SEEC help make the case for flexibilities, such as allowing the levy to pay towards apprenticeship coordinators' salaries.
- The requirement for apprentices to spend 20% of their time on 'off the job' training can deter some managers from recruiting apprentices into their teams. However, effective scoping of the 'off the job' training could provide knowledge and skills to improve apprentices' productivity.
- Is there a case for a portion of retained business rates to be allocated towards local skills development?

- There are benefits of councils working together in local areas to share good practice and expertise re apprenticeships. For example, West Berkshire works with other councils in the Thames Valley on aspects such as sharing expertise on procurement or sample contracts.
- In discussion about T-Levels, it was explained that Education Secretary Damien Hinds has now ensured that they have the same UCAS weighting, and entry requirements, as A-Levels. T-Levels have the reverse study/work ratio to apprenticeships, with one day being spent in work and 4 days in college as opposed to apprenticeships where most time will be spent in work.

ACTION 1: SEEC to write to Government to make the case for councils to have increased flexibility on spending the apprenticeship levy to help meet local needs.

ACTION 2: SEEC to circulate information to members including slides from [Nigel](#), [Tracy](#) and [Georgina/Simon](#), Tracy's [summary of how to respond to apprenticeship levy challenges](#) and a link to the Careers and Enterprise Company's ['Give an Hour'](#) campaign.

ACTION 3: SEEC to prepare written case studies on member authority skills initiatives for online publication and circulation to members.

3. Wider South East Liaison: Political Steering Group & London Plan EiP

- 3.1 SEEC has continued to give evidence at the London Plan Examination in Public (EiP), where a panel of three inspectors is hearing views from groups including councils, developers and the voluntary sector. SEEC and SESL are collaborating to make written submissions and appear at EiP hearings to ensure South East concerns are heard. The hearings end in May and the inspectors will report over the summer.
- 3.2 SEEC Deputy Chairman Cllr Ralph Bagge has represented the South East at a number of hearings. He updated members on his recent input regarding London's Green Belt. Green Belt review in his local authority area had identified land that was not fulfilling Green Belt purposes, and subsequently the review freed up land for homes and served to strengthen existing good Green Belt land. In his opinion, a similar review for London is needed but as yet the Mayor is reluctant to do so. The point was also made that, outside London, Green Belt reviews are taking place to help meet housing targets, and the Mayor's refusal to do likewise may make councils more resistant to his call for willing partners to help absorb any London housing shortfall.
- 3.3 More widely, the EiP has highlighted uncertainty about the scale of a possible gap between London's planned housing supply and demand. The Mayor's office estimates an unmet need of 1,065 homes per year, yet others at the EiP felt London is underestimating its need, or overstating availability of sites. Some London Boroughs have said they feel the Mayor's targets are undeliverable, although some feel Green Belt review in London could help towards improving delivery.
- 3.4 London's growth and relationship with the South East was also a key focus for discussion at March's Wider South East Political Steering Group (PSG) with London Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe. SEEC members remain concerned about the risks of unmet housing need in London putting additional pressure on the South East. Some East of England members indicated potential interest in engaging with London on how their Garden City proposals could help with Wider South East growth and in joint lobbying for associated funding. There appears to be strong commitment for continued Wider South East engagement to make the case for infrastructure funding. It was agreed the next PSG meeting would be a workshop to discuss scenarios for London's growth levels/delivery.

ACTION 4: SEEC to continue make representation to London Plan EiP and report on progress to members at next meeting.

ACTION 5: Officers to work with Wider South East partners to arrange a date for a Political Steering Group workshop this summer.

4. Latest SEEC activity report and updates

- 4.1 Members noted updates in the report and discussed a number of key issues below.
- 4.2 A group of SEEC members met Housing Minister Kit Malthouse MP in February. They highlighted concerns about Permitted Development Rights (PDR). They also recommended Government should give new interim protection for submitted draft local plans that meet local housing needs.

- 4.3 SEEC has made written submissions to Government on a number of housing and planning matters including: Sir Oliver Letwin's review to tackle [slow delivery of approved housing](#); proposals [for land value capture](#) to fund infrastructure; and a response to Defra's [biodiversity net-gain consultation](#).
- 4.4 The Chairman invited members to comment on key points to include in SEEC's forthcoming submission to the national Affordable Housing Commission. In discussion, members raised points including:
- The Land Compensation Act should be reformed to allow compulsory purchase of land at current use value rather than inflated 'hope' value.
 - The role of councils working with other land-holders to look for opportunities to build affordable homes.
 - Members discussed how to address the impact on affordable housing stock of Right to Buy. It was agreed the response should emphasise the importance of Government enabling councils to retain funding for 1:1 replacement of stock.

ACTION 6: SEEC leadership team to sign off submission to the Affordable Housing Commission to meet the 4 April deadline, reflecting points agreed in discussion.

5. Minutes and matters arising

- 5.1 The minutes of November's Executive were agreed as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

6. Future meeting dates:

27 June 2019 – SEEC AGM and All-Member Meeting
20 September 2019 – SEEC Executive (shared date with SESL)
13 December 2019 – SEEC Executive (shared date with SESL)

7. Any other business

- 7.1 The Chairman is in discussion with the Chairmen of SESL and South East 7 to see how the three organisations might better work together. This is envisioned to be a loose confederation which cooperates closely on high-level strategic matters relating to the South East. The Chairman would keep members informed about progress.