

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE AGM & ALL-MEMBER MEETING

27 June 2019



1 Welcome, apologies, declarations of substitutes and declarations of interest

- 1.1 Roy Perry welcomed Members and guests.
- 1.2 Roy Perry declared an interest on any matters relating to immigration as his daughter has Ministerial responsibility.

2 Political Balance following May 2019 elections

- 2.1 Members noted the outcome of the May 2019 local elections and the implications for the allocation of 19 seats on the Executive. In accordance with the formula set out in South East England Councils' constitution, the seat allocation is: Conservative 11, Labour 3, Liberal Democrat 3 and Independent 1. The final seat is unallocated as no other group or party reached the required threshold of 5% of the vote but may be filled by consensus between the other groups and parties. The Local Government Association is assisting in securing a nomination.

ACTION: To delegate the completion of the appointments to the Director in consultation with the Local Government Association and the Chair.

3 Election of Chair

- 3.1 Roy Perry (Hampshire CC) was elected Chair.

4 Election of office holders and nominations to external bodies

- 4.1 Ralph Bagge (South Bucks DC) was elected Deputy Chair. James Mills (West Oxfordshire DC) was elected as Secretary/Treasurer. Keith House (Eastleigh BC) and Tony Page (Reading BC) were elected as Vice-Chairs

- 4.2 In addition to the names above, Executive Committee appointments were:

Conservatives: Paul Bettison OBE (Bracknell Forest Council), Angela Glass (East Hampshire DC), Nicolas Heslop (Tonbridge & Malling BC), Colin Kemp (Surrey CC), Eileen Lintill (Chichester DC), Carole Paternoster (Aylesbury Vale DC), Bob Standley (Wealden DC) and Mike Whiting (Kent CC).

Labour: Jason Brock (Reading BC) and Peter Chowney (Hastings BC).

Liberal Democrats: David Neighbour (Hart DC) and Caroline Reeves (Guilford BC).

Ex Officio: Lynne Doherty (West Berkshire Council)

- 4.3 Nicholas Heslop and James Mills were elected as Chair and Vice-Chair of the District Leaders' Group.
- 4.4 Roy Perry was nominated as representative on the Local Government Association Executive with Ralph Bagge as substitute.

- 4.5 Roger Gough (Kent CC) was elected as Chair of the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration.
- 4.6 Barry Wood (Cherwell DC) was elected as a Governor of the South Central Ambulance Foundation Trust.
- 4.7 Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC), Isabel Darby (Chiltern DC) and Daniel Humphreys (Worthing BC) were elected to serve as Conservative representatives on the District Councils' Network with Barry Wood (Cherwell DC) and James Mills (West Oxfordshire DC) as substitutes.

5. A Strong South East Economy to Drive Growth for the UK

- 5.1 The Chair introduced the item and explained that the importance of the South East economy is not always appreciated and has been taken for granted by successive Governments. As result, the South East economy is not growing as fast as other parts of the Country.
- 5.2 South East England Councils commissioned research to provide evidence to support the case for increased investment in infrastructure and increased financial support for local authorities. The agenda papers included a summary of the findings together an analysis by Phil Swann at Shared Intelligence in which he called for the South East to have a more unified economic voice with councils empowered by new organisational freedoms to match their increasing financial independence.
- 5.2 The Chair welcomed Rt. Hon. Damian Green MP and Rob Whiteman (Chief Executive of CIPFA) to the meeting to give their views on the South East economy and how best to influence government and other decision makers. Damian Green reinforced the message about the importance of the South East economy and the impact that relatively lower growth will have on the UK. He added that although prosperous in overall terms, the South East includes areas of deprivation which must be addressed. In respect of infrastructure, he highlighted investment in broadband infrastructure as a priority. He challenged people to be clear why a South East approach is required when for many people, what matters is what happens in their immediate local vicinity or local authority. He highlighted that there are a lot of organisations and bodies that work across local authority boundaries.
- 5.3 Rob Whiteman gave context on the global economy and said that the UK needs to focus on skills to improve productivity. There should be parity between vocational and academic training and more funding for business to work with further education colleges. Local authorities have a key role as enablers of productivity, helping businesses thrive. The South East should look at how other parts of the Country have made the case for investment in their area, some have done it well, others less so. Usually this reflects how effective partnership working has been. He agreed that the digital economy is very important and broadband infrastructure can be as important as transport. He believes that there should be far more devolution to communities and local authorities but urged Members to appreciate that local authorities already have considerable freedom in respect of borrowing powers.
- 5.4 In discussion members highlighted:
- Government has encouraged the establishment of regional structures as a condition for devolving powers or funding.
 - the South East does not wish to adopt that approach and the public do not want more or bigger government. This does mean a 'messy' structure given the number of bodies involved including Local Economic Partnerships, sub-national transport bodies and local government membership bodies.
 - the South East must nonetheless become far better at making a coherent case
 - Local authorities should be given greater freedoms, not just regional bodies or Mayors.

5.5 In summary the Chair reiterated that South East England Councils has a very important role as a voice of the South East and should work with others in the area to provide a more unified message to Government. The economic study must inform work going forward including a submission to a Spending Review.

6 Introduction to South East England Councils

6.1 Tim Wheadon (Chief Executive, Bracknell Forest Council) and David Covill (Director, South East England Councils) gave a presentation which explained that South East England Council is an all-party and cross tier group which focuses on shared policy issues to ensure the specific interests and concerns of the South East are heard by Government and other decision makers.

6.2 There are four principles which are to strive for a fair funding deal, promote the South East's position as a leading global economy, act as a single democratic voice, and monitor the pulse of the South East.

6.3 The presentation included examples of work undertaken in 2018/19 as set out in the Annual Review (item 7 on this agenda).

6.4 The role, priorities and funding of South East England Councils will be reviewed prior to 2020/21. An immediate priority is to increase awareness of South East England Councils and its work, particularly within member authorities.

7 Review of the year and 2018/19 annual accounts

7.1 Members considered the highlight report which gives more detailed information on work undertaken in 2018/19 under the headings:

- influencing decision makers
- local government funding
- infrastructure, the economy & preparing for Brexit
- health & social care
- housing & planning
- working with London
- data briefings and media.
- South East Strategic Migration Partnership.

7.2 Members noted that the annual are approved by the Secretary/ Treasurer. Expenditure in 2018/19 was £249,445 with use of reserves of £47,521. Reserves at 31 March 2019 totalled £479,130.

7.3 Thanks were recorded to Surrey County Council for hosting South East England Councils.

8. Minutes of All-Member meeting 31 January 2019

8.1 The minutes of the last all-member meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

9. Any Other Business

None

In attendance:

Councillors

Carole Paternoster (Aylesbury Vale), Paul Bettison OBE (Bracknell Forest), Barry Wood (Cherwell DC), Eileen Lintell (Chichester DC), Angela Glass (East Hampshire DC), Roy Perry (Hampshire CC), David Neighbour (Hart DC), Mike Whiting (Kent CC), Judy Llewellyn-Burke (Mid-Sussex DC), Tony Page (Reading BC), Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC), Ralph Bagge (South Bucks DC), Colin Kemp (Surrey CC), Chris Townsend (Surrey CC), Ann Newton (Wealden DC), James Mills (West Oxfordshire DC) and David Watson (Wycombe DC).

Others

Sophie Poole (Local Government Association, Tim Wheadon (Bracknell Forest Council), David Covill, Nick Woolfenden, Emily Duddy, Rachael Coker and Renate MacLennan (South East England Councils).

Apologies

Councillors James Walsh (Arun DC), Gerry Clarkson (Ashford BC), Ken Rhatigan (Basingstoke & Dean), Keith Morris (Dover DC), Keith House (Eastleigh BC), Clive Smitheram (Epsom & Ewell), Caroline Reeves (Guilford BC), Michael Wilson (Havant BC), Ron Maskell (Lewes DC), Stephen Cooksey (Mole Valley DC), Michael Harris (New Forest DC), Linda Smith (Oxford City Council), Nick Prescott (Runnymede BC), Roger Truelove (Swale DC), Tony Elias (Tandridge DC), Jason Savage (Thanet DC), Nicholas Heslop (Tonbridge & Malling), Lynne Doherty (West Berkshire Council), Lucille Thompson (Winchester City Council), John Halsall (Wokingham BC).