

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE MEETING

Friday 30 September 2011

The Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining,
1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DB



Present: Paul Carter (SEEC Chairman)
Paul Watkins (SEEC Secretary/Treasurer)
Gordon Keymer, CBE (Deputy Chairman)
Mary Ballin
Andrew Bowles
Ken Crookes
Myles Cullen
Moira Gibson
Lynne Hack
Keith House
David Neighbour
Tony Page
Robert Standley

In Attendance: Chris Williams, Chairman of the LACE Group
Heather Bolton, Director, SEEC
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy Co-ordination, SEEC
Hayley Austin, Office Manager, SEEC
Roy Millard, SESPM
Gary Porter, LGA/South Holland DC
Kate Jones, SESL

1. Apologies, Declarations of Substitutes and Declarations of Interest

1.1 Apologies were received from Andrew Geary, Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, Andrew Povey, David Robertson, James Swindlehurst, Martin Tett, Ken Thornber and Gerald Vernon-Jackson.

1.2 George Beckett substituted for Barry Norton and Neil Stanley substituted for David Tutt.

1.3 Paul Carter welcomed Tony Page who is back again representing Reading BC and David Neighbour, the new Liberal Democrat member from Hart DC.

2. Minutes of SEEC Executive on 7 June 2011 and Matters Arising Not Elsewhere on the Agenda

2.1 The minutes of the previous Executive were agreed as a true and accurate record.

2.2 Responding to a question regarding Item 10.1 of the previous meeting, the Chairman and Heather Bolton explained there were currently nine local authorities not in SEEC membership.

3. Planning, development and growth

a) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – an overview by Cllr Gary Porter, Leader South Holland DC and Deputy Chairman Local Government Association and b) NPPF – SEEC response

3.1 Gary Porter explained the LGA broadly welcomes the localist emphasis in the draft NPPF but recognises that improvements need to be made if it is to be successfully implemented. For example, local authorities need time to get local plans in place but, once done, they would be the second most important planning documents in the country.

b) National Planning Framework – SEEC response

3.2 During discussion with Gary, SEEC members identified several key points to include in a response to NPPF consultation. These included:

- Timing for implementing the NPPF and transition arrangements for authorities with and without existing adopted Core Strategies. Some districts may need time to get an LDF in place.
- Need for greater emphasis on the localism agenda.
- Concern about the requirement for an extra 20% 'contingency' allocation of housing.
- Need for local Government engagement in developing any methodology regarding housing needs.
- Need for policies or financial incentives to bring brown field sites forward.
- Need for a fundamental review of the role of Planning Inspectorate in light of the more localist approach.
- Need to clarify that all three strands of sustainable development are critical, not simply the economy.
- Renewal of planning permission on schemes with permission but which have not been developed should be restricted to minimise land-banking.

3.3 Gary welcomed SEEC's input, asked for a copy of SEEC's consultation response and promised to feed views into the LGA's consideration of NPPF.

3.4 Members agreed that SEEC's NPPF response should be based on issues proposed in the meeting paper, plus additional points raised at the meeting. They agreed the Chairman should sign this off to meet the Government's deadline.

ACTION 1: SEEC's response to be finalised and submitted to Government by 16 October deadline; copy to be sent to LGA.

c) Enterprise zones, LEPs and Regional Growth Fund update

3.5 Nick Woolfenden explained that all the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) wholly or partly in the South East now have permanent or interim chairs and boards appointed. Nick also updated members that three Enterprise Zones have been approved by the Government in the South East, but further news was awaited on round two Regional Growth Fund bids. Members agreed that SEEC should develop light-touch engagement with the LEPs at officer level, to understand key issues and opportunities for sharing information and research.

ACTION 2: SEEC officers to approach LEPs on an informal basis to discuss priorities and opportunities to share information or research.

3.6 Following advice from Chris Williams that the South East holds the only non-LEP areas in the country, members agreed the Chairman should write to Government to encourage ministers to support any new bids from local partners for LEP status.

ACTION 3: SEEC's Chairman to write to Government to encourage it to support any further South East bids for LEP status.

- 3.7 Nick explained DCLG has put in place Locality Directors. Members agreed that SEEC should ask CLG to nominate one director as the initial point of contact for SEEC on strategic matters. Maps showing CLG localities were distributed.

ACTION 4: SEEC to write to DCLG suggesting it identifies one locality director as a point of contact for SEEC on strategic matters.

4. Local Government Finance Review

a) SEEC response on business rates retention

- 4.1 Heather Bolton reported many members' concerns that there is not enough incentive in business rate proposals due to the large Government top slice. Another factor is that even in a strong economy the only real driver of rates growth was the increase in the national multiplier, not business growth. A fundamental review of local Government finance is required to make the whole system fairer and more transparent.
- 4.2 Heather explained that SEEC has asked Local Government Futures (LGF) to analyse the impact that business rate proposals would have had on South East local authorities if introduced five years ago. The outcome of this will be considered for inclusion in SEEC's consultation response.
- 4.3 Members agreed issues in the meeting paper should form the basis of SEEC's response and the Chairman should sign this off to meet Government's consultation deadline.

ACTION 5: SEEC response to be submitted to the Government by deadline of 24 October.

b) Fair funding report stage 2 work

- 4.4 Heather explained that LGF has completed its stage one work for SEEC, focused on identifying concerns about the current local Government finance system. LGF presented at SEEC's AGM in July on its second stage work on options for changing the current system. LGF is now writing up its independent report.
- 4.5 SEEC held a member working group on 1 September to agree next steps on the fair funding work. Executive members agreed the workshop's recommendation that SEEC should produce its own constructive recommendations for change to share with ministers, in addition to LGF's independent report. It is hoped to have an initial draft of the SEEC recommendations before Christmas.
- 4.6 SEEC has also been in contact with a number of local authority Finance Officers to form a working group to identify key factors needed in a new funding system.

ACTION 6: SEEC to hold an officer working group in October to help identify improvements to the Local Government Grant formula.

ACTION 7: SEEC officers to draft recommendations to ministers on a fundamental review of local government finance.

5. SEEC Business Plan

- 5.1 Following discussions at the AGM in July, a more detailed business plan outlining SEEC's four main principles was shared with members. Members agreed this.

ACTION 8: Final Business Plan to be put on SEEC website.

6. Strategic Transport update

6.1 David Robertson was appointed SEEC's Transport Convenor at the AGM in July. Heather updated members on progress as David was unable to attend the meeting. David wrote to Leaders in August asking them to raise strategic transport issues. Common themes from responses so far include the need to develop:

- Better strategic rail links
- Road network improvements
- Alternatives to car travel.

6.2 David will use a debate at the All-Member meeting in November to agree the next steps in influencing strategic transport issues. There is still an opportunity to send contributions to David, either via his email or via SEEC Officers.

6.3 The Department for Transport (DfT) is proposing setting up Local Transport Consortia and SEEC has invited DfT to the All-Member meeting in November to discuss these and related issues.

6.4 Members agreed it was important for SEEC to maintain engagement on strategic transport issues during this period of considerable change.

ACTION 9: Members to feed strategic transport views to David Robertson to inform a discussion at SEEC's November All-Member meeting.

7. SEEC and SESL joint working proposals

7.1 A meeting between SEEC and SESL was held in August to discuss ideas about moving forward on joint working. Andrew Povey has since stood down as Leader of Surrey CC and Chairman of SESL.

7.2 Paul Carter reiterated that closer joint working between SEEC and SESL would reduce duplication and overheads. As a first step to joint working it is proposed that there are three combined meetings in 2012. The first one will be on 7 February. Members agreed that the leadership of SEEC should continue to engage with SESL on this important issue. The Chairman would report back on progress to future meetings.

ACTION 10: SEEC to continue dialogue with SESL regarding closer working.

8. Items for information

a) Invitation to South East infrastructure forum – 28 October

8.1 Members were reminded of the invitation to the South East Infrastructure Forum being arranged by Surrey County Council on 28 October.

b) Update on Localism Bill

8.2 Nick Woolfenden highlighted the amendment to the Localism Bill on devolving powers from central to local Government which has recently been accepted by the House of Lords. Members agreed that SEEC should brief Lords to make sure non-metropolitan areas are not excluded from opportunities for devolved powers.

ACTION 11: SEEC to brief Members of the Lords on the need to ensure all local authorities are given equal opportunities for devolved powers.

c) Migration update – net migration increase and EU workforce research

8.3 Roy Millard explained that based on a stable average of 12% over the last five years, net migration in the South East rose by approximately 5,100 over the last year, mainly due to less people emigrating.

- 8.4 Following discussion at last Executive Committee, SESPM research on non-EU migrant labour has now been expanded to consider the impact of EU migrants on the South East economy. More details will be presented at the All-Member meeting in November.
- 8.5 SESPM is working with ACPO to commission an assessment report on the impact of migration on policing.

d) First meeting of South East ERDF Local Management Committee

- 8.6 Paul Watkins advised that there is a vacant Liberal Democrat Councillor's seat and asked for a nomination.

ACTION 12: Liberal Democrat group to advise SEEC secretariat about its nomination to the ERDF, LMC. Post meeting note: Cllr Cec Tallack, Milton Keynes has been nominated.

9. Confirmed forward meeting dates:

- 9.1 Forward meeting dates for 2011/2012 SEEC meetings were noted.
- SEEC All-Member meeting – 8 November 2011 at The Royal Horticultural Halls & Conference Centre, 80 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PE
 - Executive Committee meeting – 9 December 2011 at The Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5DB
 - SEEC All-Member meeting – 7 February 2012, venue in London to be confirmed
 - Executive Committee meeting – 8 March 2012, venue in London to be confirmed.

10. Any other business

- 10.1 There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.35.

Signed: _____

Paul Carter
Chairman

Date: 9 December 2011