

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 13 JUNE 2008

Present: Keith Mitchell, CBE (Chairman)
Mary Ballin
Louise Bloom
Paul Carter
Elizabeth Cartwright
Ian Chisnall
Chris Corrigan
Myles Cullen
Ian Fowler
Moira Gibson
Roger House
Roy Illott
Gordon Keymer, CBE
Tim Lockwood
Keith Mann
David Neighbour
Derek Overfield
Tony Page
Jerry Patterson
Tony Reid
Nick Rose
Karen Stalbow
Cec Tallack
Ian Ward
Paul Watkins

In Attendance: Paul Bevan, Chief Executive
Heather Bolton, Communications Director
Diana Pogson, Finance and Administration Director
Catriona Riddell, Director of Planning
Nick Woolfenden, Head of Policy
Irene Cripps, PA to Chief Executive
Emma Broad, Assembly Partner Support Team PA
Claire Hamilton, Policy Advisor
Alistair Moses, PR Executive
Jo Shockley, Assembly Partner Support Manager
Colin Byrne, GOSE
Sheila Hopson, GOSE
Paul Lovejoy, SEEDA
Martin Tugwell, SEEDA

1. Apologies for Absence, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Michael Chater, Alison Cook, Peter Dean, Patricia Harris, Douglas Horner, Jeremy Kite, David Shakespeare OBE, Nick Skellett CBE and Matthew Tyler-Jones.
- 1.2 The following substitutions were declared: Tim Lockwood for Douglas Horner, Nick Rose for David Shakespeare, Derek Overfield for Matthew Tyler-Jones and Paul Watkins for Jeremy Kite.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 11 April 2008

- 2.1 The minutes, subject to the following amendment, **were agreed and signed** as a true record of the meeting:

Page 9, additional point between paras. 7.6 and 7.7

Ian Chisnall requested that the Chairman's statement following the vote on his proposal should be included at this point. It was **agreed** to include that "the Chairman stated that if the vote had gone the other way he would not have felt able to work in that way to find a solution".

3. Matters Arising

- 3.1 Item 11 - Reports of Committees, point 11.2 - David Neighbour's request that the list of attendees at the Regional Health Summit on 22 January 2008 be electronically circulated.

It was **noted** this had yet to be done.

4. GOSE Report

- 4.1 Colin Byrne was welcomed to his first meeting of the Assembly's Executive Committee in his new role of Regional Director.

a) Local Area Agreements

- 4.2 Colin Byrne informed the Committee that LAA indicators had been agreed across the region's 19 county and unitary councils.

- 4.3 The comment was made that, from a sustainability perspective, the targets were not well defined. Responding, Colin Byrne said that the LAAs were at the beginning of the process and the real test is the outcomes.

b) Sub-National Review

- 4.4 He advised the Committee that, following the consultation events, the strength of the region's feelings had been fed back to Ministers John Healey and Jonathan Shaw and that the same issues were emerging in other regions. He did not expect Government to respond this side of the

summer recess but he believed that it is worthwhile to continue discussions.

4.5 The Deputy Chair said that the stakeholders felt let down and asked what they should do. Responding Colin Byrne said that the Regional Minister is acutely aware of their feelings and that, collectively, they need to make their feelings known to the three Government departments involved.

4.6 The Chairman suggested that it might be a good idea to have a standing invitation to Jonathan Shaw to attend the Executive Committee meetings.

c) SEEDA Board Appointment

4.7 He advised the Committee that the recruitment process was in its final stages and it was hoped the new chairman would be announced before the summer recess. Four new board members were also to be appointed and the closing date for those is 26 June 2008.

d) Eco-Towns

4.8 The Committee was advised that the Challenge Panel had met to consider the merits of the proposals so far developed and the local authorities and scheme proposers would be informed of the Panel's views before they were made more widely available. CLG will be publishing a further pack of documents in July and it was expected that decisions would be made in October 2008.

e) Climate Change Bill

4.9 Colin Byrne advised the Committee that the Bill is now with the House of Lords and that the aim is to gain Royal Assent by July 2008. The aim is for 60% of targets to be met by 2050.

f) Regional Funding Allocations

4.10 Colin Byrne said it was hoped that these would be announced before the summer recess but there was still a number of issues in respect of the guidance.

g) South East Plan

4.11 The Committee was advised that the aim is to publish changes before the summer recess and that some technical work was still being carried out, particularly around the sustainability appraisal.

h) Draft Legislative Programme 2008/09

4.12 Colin Byrne tabled the leaflet 'Your Voice' which gives details of the draft programme and consultation process.

i) Regional Minister

4.13 Colin Byrne confirmed that the Minister's forward programme, which had been circulated to the Committee, would be put on the website.

4.14 The Chairman said he had been very impressed by the way the Regional Minister had been talking in support of the region and that he had found this very helpful.

j) Skills Summit 8 July 2008

4.15 The Committee was advised that this would be co-hosted by SEEDA and that the Regional Minister, Jonathan Shaw, would attend.

4.16 The Chairman thanked Colin Byrne for his helpful advice.

5. SEEDA Report

5.1 Paul Lovejoy **reported** that SEEDA's Corporate Plan 2008-11 has been approved by Government and tabled the leaflet style summary of the Plan, saying that full copies could be made available should the Committee wish.

5.2 Referring to recent press coverage in respect of the travelling expenses of SEEDA's Chairman, he advised the Committee that it is believed that using a chauffeur driven car is the most cost effective way for the Chairman to travel to achieve the high number of meetings he attends in any one day.

5.3 Responding to the question of how much of the Chairman's work is conducted by teleconferencing, Paul Lovejoy informed the Committee that he did not have the figures to hand but could say that although a great deal of the work is done electronically much of the Chairman's work does benefit from face to face meetings; the Chairman's average working day is 18 hours.

5.4 He informed the Committee that the recent economic trends will be taken forward in the ongoing review of the Regional Economic Strategy and form the context for the RES conference in July.

5.5 He welcomed the fact that Martin Tugwell had been seconded to SEEDA from June 2008 to March 2009; this would help SEEDA to respond to the planning and delivery challenges raised by the SNR proposals. His focus would remain on implementation, leading the work of both the Assembly and SEEDA in taking forward the Single Delivery Plan and co-ordinating the South East's response to the Regional Funding Allocations and the 2009 Comprehensive Spending Review. He would also continue to manage the Regional Transport Board and Regional Housing Board on behalf of the Assembly.

5.6 Responding to the comment that administrative costs had not been included in the information on the European Development Programme for England (page 11 of the Agency's Activity Report), Paul Lovejoy advised that some developments will require an increase in administration costs but

there are constraints on the programme. He would take back comments and report back to the Committee at the next meeting.

5.7 Paul Lovejoy **agreed** to provide details of how the national funding of RDAs is distributed and would report back to the Committee at its next meeting.

5.8 The Chairman thanked Paul Lovejoy for his contribution.

6. **Assembly Response to ‘Prosperous Places’, the Sub-National Review Consultation - Report of the Chief Executive**

6.1 The Chief Executive introduced the paper and advised the Committee that the text of the Ipsos MORI report would be finalised the following Monday and would then be circulated. Points raised during the following discussion were:

- Para. 2.18 states that there is no consensus in respect of stakeholder involvement, but the wording of the paragraph does not reflect that there are different, strongly held, views. The Committee **agreed** to amend the wording accordingly.
- Referring to para. 2.19, Ian Chisnall said the wording should reflect the need for a stronger connection between the voluntary sector RDA Board member and the sector in the region. The Committee **agreed** to amend the wording accordingly.
- In response to the request that para. 2.4 be revised, the Chairman suggested an addition that stakeholders came to the group through election by their representative bodies. The Chief Executive suggested that that would be better included in para. 2.8 rather than 2.4.
- It was **agreed** that reference be made in para. 2.9 to the need to balance social, environmental and economic wellbeing.

Consultation Question 1

- It is essential that capacity is built up where it is lacking. The suggestion was made to remove the reference to performance assessment and add words to the effect that “if RDAs feel there is insufficient capacity this should be addressed”.

Consultation Question 2

- An additional reference to scrutiny was requested as there was concern that loss of value to scrutiny if stakeholders not included should be acknowledged. It was **agreed** to add this to para. 3.4.

Consultation Question 4

- It was felt that protecting the environment was not emphasised enough in para. 3.8; it was **agreed** to add in a reference.

Consultation Question 5

- It was **agreed** to add into para. 3.12 wording to stress the importance of stakeholder engagement.

6.2 Subject to the **agreed amendments**, the Committee **agreed** the proposed response to the SNR consultation as set out in the report.

7. Eco-Towns - Report of the Director of Development

7.1 It was **noted** that representations against the proposed development at Ford in West Sussex had been received by the Chairman and Executive Committee.

7.2 The Director of Development then introduced the report. Points raised during the following discussion were:

- There are three proposed eco-towns in the South East, only one of which has strong local support (Bordon-Whitehill, East Hampshire).
- The proposal which causes most concern in respect of nature conservation is Bordon-Whitehill and reference should be made to this in the response.
- An additional 5,000 homes at Bordon-Whitehill would make the regeneration of the town much more viable.
- Paras. 7b and 7c of the recommendations (re Ford) should be amended by deleting the words “likely to be” and “probably” from each.
- The proposed development at Marston in Bedfordshire would increase the number of vehicular movements as it would be a dormitory town whereas developments on the edges of Milton Keynes would be more sustainable.

7.3 The Committee **agreed** the recommendations subject to the proposed changes to 7 (b) and (c):

It is recommended that the Regional Assembly respond to the consultation on potential eco-towns as follows:

- I. The Regional Assembly supports environmentally sensitive and sustainable development principles. However the eco-town concept does little to add value to existing requirements of the statutory planning framework which increasingly require such measures to be incorporated into all developments.

2. Contrary to the assurances given by Ministers, it is clear that the principle of eco-towns is being taken forward outside of the planning system. The Regional Assembly is particularly concerned that the eco-towns Planning Policy Statement could effectively supersede and override local and regional plan-making to date.
3. The principle of specific eco-town proposals should be the subject of independent testing as part of the statutory planning system.
4. The approach to Sustainability Appraisal appears flawed and unlikely to provide a truly independent assessment of the merits of the eco-towns policy or specific proposals.
5. There is an urgent need for Government to clarify whether the growth associated with an eco-town proposal will be included in, or additional to, the overall housing provision figures in the South East Plan.
6. The deliverability of some of the infrastructure associated with specific eco-town proposals is highly questionable, both in terms of timescale and affordability. We believe that there is a very real danger that resources will be diverted from existing priorities (including Growth Areas) rather than added to. In addition, the failure to develop the commendable reference to requiring biodiversity and landscape enhancement as part of the key criteria puts at risk existing environmental assets at the proposed eco-town sites.
7. In terms of the specific proposals identified in the region:
 - a) Bordon-Whitehill has the potential to offer a good fit with the spatial strategy, reflecting the South East Plan EiP Panel recommendation that there should not be an impediment to an increase in housing at this location (above the 2,500 dwellings they recommend) as long as this is shown to be sustainable.
 - b) Ford is inconsistent with the spatial strategy and would undermine the ability to deliver agreed spatial and economic priorities in the sub-regional area.
 - c) Weston Otmoor is inconsistent with the spatial strategy and would undermine the ability to deliver agreed spatial and economic priorities in the sub regional area.

8. Regional Delivery Plan - Report of the Director of Development

- 8.1 The Director of Development introduced the report. The Committee **endorsed** the approach being followed to produce the Regional Delivery Plan.

9. **Regional Infrastructure Fund - Report of the Director of Development**

9.1 The Director of Development introduced the report. Questions and points raised during the following discussion were:

- The question was asked whether the total cost of infrastructure to support planned growth had been quantified. In response the Director of Development said that this had been calculated before but that it needed updating, alongside a review of the investment committed from Government so that the funding gap could be assessed.
- Concern was expressed that the RIF will syphon funding away from affordable housing. The Director of Development said that decisions will be based on the strength of each business case but that the money is recycled.
- In respect to the membership and structure of the Investment Panel (Annex 1, para. 2) it was **agreed** that point 2.2.1 (b) should be amended to read "Representatives from the South East Leaders Forum" as an alternative to the Regional Assembly.

9.2 The Committee **agreed**, subject to the above amendment, to submit the governance and accountability framework to Government.

10. **Joint Europe Committee - Report of the Chief Executive**

10.1 The Committee **agreed** with the Leadership Group's recommendation that the Assembly's participation in and administration of the Joint Europe Committee should cease with effect from the annual meeting on 16 July 2008.

10.2 In response to the concern that there could be a lack of information on European programmes and the need for SEEDA to have more definitive mechanisms to publicise what the region is receiving from these programmes, Paul Lovejoy advised the Committee that the SEEDA members of the JEC have expressed a similar concern and that they want to continue working with local authorities on the European agenda; in the short-term liaison would be ad hoc until new arrangements are agreed.

10.3 Gordon Keymer said that he had found the work of the JEC, both as a former Assembly member of the committee and subsequently as a member of the Commission's Committee of the Regions, very useful and requested that he be kept informed with whatever arrangements are put in place for the future.

11. **Committee Templates 2008/09 - Report of the Chief Executive**

11.1 The Committee **noted** the implications of the May 2008 local election results for the political share of places on the Assembly's Executive and Planning Committees.

12. Full Year Financial Report 2007/08 - Report of the Finance and Administration Director

12.1 The Finance and Administration Director **reported** that the Auditors' report had now been received and that their figures were very close to those before the Committee. She advised the Committee that the requested carry-over of CLG funding for public consultation on the South East Plan partial review would be ring fenced.

12.2 The Committee **noted** the financial report.

13. Reports of Committees and Boards

a) Regional Housing Board, 15 May 2008

13.1 The Chairman of the RHB introduced the report. Questions and points raised during the following discussion were:

- Reference was made to the housing and planning grant and GOSE's Regional Director's comment that it is important for local authorities to work closely with developers to remove any barriers to completions. There is concern that grants to local authorities will be hit by the market slow-down and their capacity will be constrained.
- The Director of Planning informed the Committee that the Assembly is contributing to this debate via the Planning Officers Society.
- It was **agreed** that, in addition to the Regional Director raising with CLG the Committee's concern, the Chairman would write to the Minister directly requesting that Government reconsiders these grant proposals.
- It was **agreed** that the Director of Planning would look at reporting on housing completions on a more frequent, e.g. quarterly, basis.
- Concern was expressed that should there be an increase in the number of repossessions in the buy to let sector of the housing market a large number of tenants would be made homeless as these tenants have no security of tenure, which would put further pressure on social housing. The Regional Director advised that Treasury Secretary, Yvette Cooper, was in close discussion with banks and building societies on these issues.

13.2 It was also **agreed** that a report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

13.3 The Committee **noted** the report.

b) Regional Transport Board, 12 March and 16 May 2008

13.4 The Committee Chairman presented the report on behalf of the Chairman of the RTB. It was asked as to what the extent of the delay referred to in para.

1.2 was likely to be and what schemes would be affected. In response the Director of Development advised that the full implications on the programme of the reported cost increases would be examined by the RTB as part of its work to update the regional priorities. This work is currently underway and will be considered by the RTB in the autumn.

13.5 The Committee **noted** the content of the report.

c) Regional Planning Committee, 21 May 2008

13.6 The Chairman of the RPC introduced the report.

13.7 The Committee:

i) **Noted** the contents of the report.

ii) **Endorsed** the response to the Government's proposals for a Single Regional Strategy (as contained in Agenda Item 6) with proposed amendments (paragraph 2.1 of this report).

iii) **Endorsed** the response to the Government's Eco-Town proposals (please see Agenda Item 7) and proposed amendments (paragraph 3.3 of this report).

d) Joint Europe Committee, 4 June 2008

13.8 This item had already been covered under Agenda Item 10.

14. Any Other Business

14.1 The Chairman informed the Committee that the 15 member Task and Finish Group which had been set up following the March plenary to formulate a way forward to meet the requirements of the SNR would be meeting again soon. He explained that the Conservative group has a three year limit for holding office and his tenure as Assembly Chairman would come to an end at the annual meeting on 16 July. However it is becoming increasingly clear that the Assembly in its present form will not continue until 2010 and there is a need to get a Local Government Forum in place. It had been put to him by a number of people from different interest groups that standing down now, during the period of transition, would not be in the region's best interests. He had discussed the proposal that he remain in office with his group and they had agreed, subject to the whole Conservative group agreeing, to waive the three year rule at the plenary pre-meet on 16 July. If this is endorsed he would expect to continue as Chairman until March or, at the latest, July 2009. His aim in staying in office would be to progress the South East Plan, get the best out of the SNR, sustain the constructive relationship with SEEDA and protect the Assembly's assets, notably the staff team and evidence base.

14.2 There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.40.

14.3 The date of the next meeting is Friday, 12 September 2008 at 10.30 at the Institute of Materials, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1.