

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
SOUTH EAST ENGLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
JOINT EUROPE COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22 JULY 2005

Present: Cec Tallack, Regional Assembly (Committee Chair)
Gillian Ferguson, Regional Assembly
Liz Brighthouse, SEEDA
Rob Douglas CBE, SEEDA
Francis Robinson OBE, Thames Valley Partners
Roy Perry, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and
West Sussex Partnership
Gordon Keymer CBE, Committee of the Regions

In Attendance: Paul Bevan, Regional Assembly
Anke Seidler, Regional Assembly/SEEDA
Irene Cripps, Regional Assembly
Paul Lovejoy, SEEDA
Stella Bellem, SEEDA
John Pinnell, GOSE
Barry Deller, ACTVaR
Rachel Gapp, West Sussex County Council
Hilary Lawson, Surrey County Council
Frances Martin, Kent Partnership

1. Apologies for Absence

Michael Chater, Regional Assembly
Roger House, Regional Assembly
Pam Palmer, Regional Assembly
Keith House, SEEDA
Peter Jones, SEEDA
Sue John, South East Partners
Alex King, Kent Partnership
Brad Watson OBE, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and West Sussex Partnership
(Roy Perry attended as substitute)
Susie Kemp, Committee of the Regions
Sharon Bowles, MEP
Caroline Lucas, MEP
Peter Skinner, MEP

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. Minutes of the Meeting on 18 February 2005

It was **noted** that Professor Tony Moore's apologies had not been recorded at the meeting. Otherwise the Minutes were **agreed** as a true record of the meeting.

4. Matters Arising

- a) Item 4c - Item 14: GOSE Report on Structural Funds:
 - a) European Social Fund Programme Progress Report

Francis Robinson explained that ACTVaR believe that it would be worth publishing an updated version of the booklet produced by GOSE which had shown a comprehensive picture of EU funding in the region, as it had been enormously helpful to the decision makers.

Paul Bevan believed the recent restructuring within GOSE had interrupted dialogue. John Pinnell advised the Committee that Mark Bilsborough now headed up the European team within GOSE. JP would suggest that the updated information should be in the same format as before.

It was **agreed** that Paul Bevan would continue to pursue this matter outside the meeting with GOSE.

- b) Item 7 - Regional Policy Update
 - a) Update on EU Regional Policy Developments

It was **noted** that a letter had been sent from the Committee Chair conveying the region's position in respect of future structural fund allocations.

5. Joint Europe Committee Future Ways of Working

Paul Bevan introduced the paper, advising the Committee that there had been a debate in respect of the terminology used in relation to the JEC's oversight of South East England House (SEEH). He further advised the Committee that the event on 30 September 2005, referred to in point 2.6, now had to be rescheduled to 6 September 2005.

During the following discussion some concern was expressed over the use of the term 'political' oversight, used in recommendation I. It was proposed the word 'political' should be deleted.

Paul Bevan responded that the distinction is between the JEC as a member group and the officer group, chaired by Barry Deller, that manages SEEH. It was **agreed** to substitute 'political' with 'strategic'.

The Chair advised the Committee of his concern at the lack of notice people would have of the September event but that he believed it was the best solution to bring the date forward, even if this meant a potentially smaller attendance. He cautioned that the success of the event should therefore not

be analysed on the basis of this year's attendance level. The Committee **agreed** this approach.

Agreed

1. That the Committee continues to meet three or four times a year as necessary to discuss and provide a steer on policy issues, to receive and debate information briefings, and to provide collective strategic oversight for the management of South East England House.
2. That one JEC meeting each year is used to agree strategic priorities on Europe and an annual work programme to address them.
3. That an annual forum is planned each year in order to engage with a wider group of stakeholders in the region.

6. Update on the Dynamo Regions Network

During the discussion concern was expressed that while generally in favour of a network of Dynamo Regions, there is the possibility that the success of the South East region will be underplayed unless all regions in the network are also strong performers.

There was support for the proposal that the region should focus on networking in niche areas of policy. At the same time, some concern was expressed that there is potential for duplication of effort. For example, well-established political and technical committees already exist for transport (POLIS) and the region should be looking to join these rather than setting up its own.

It was suggested that wording should be used to indicate that the idea of regional networking is "to improve on existing rather than set up new". It was therefore suggested that the phrase 'participation in' could be added.

Agreed

That the South East should explore participation in and the initiation of regional networks on:

- i) entrepreneurship and education
- ii) transport and high growth regions

7. Update on PURPLE (Peri-Urban Platform Europe)

Hilary Lowson introduced the paper, advising the Committee that invitations to the conference would be sent out very soon, and that the website should be in place by the end of next week.

The report was **noted**.

8. Lisbon Agenda

a) National Reform Programme

Paul Lovejoy introduced the report, advising the Committee that Rob Douglas and he had met with the Treasury team who will prepare the National Reform Programme, and with those in the DTI who would be playing a key role. The UK Presidency is a make or break period for the Lisbon Agenda, but there is some resistance from other Member States. It was clear that in that context UK Government is very interested in the role we can collectively play in conveying the lessons learnt. This is of significance for the UK Presidency and a useful platform for the region. A 30 - 40 page document will be published, and the key chapter headings will be micro-environment, macro-environment and employment. That chapter structure captures RDA targets and SEEDA has already been able to feed in some useful examples from the South East.

Stella Bellem added that community strategic guidelines are very much on the agenda and link in with the work that has been done. The Government is happy with the way the strategic guidelines are being formed. John Pinnell advised the Committee that the strategic guidelines had been issued on 6 July and are still in draft form.

The report was **noted**.

b) English Regions Research and Event

Paul Bevan explained that a firm date had yet to be confirmed for the event in Brussels mentioned in point 3.2 of the report, but it is likely to be 30 November or 1 December.

The report was **noted**.

Post-meeting note: the date has now been confirmed as 30 November 2005.

9. UK Presidency of the EU

Anke Seidler reported that opportunities may come up around issues like transport, which the South East can use to promote what the region is doing. Roy Perry suggested the children's event, to be held in SEEH in November. Rachel Gapp advised the Committee that the event is mentioned in the CoR report under agenda item 11d (ii) and it would be held on 9 and 10 November 2005.

The report was **noted**. It was **agreed** that a report would be presented to the next meeting to update the Committee.

10. Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 European Territorial Co-operation (Objective 3)

Frances Martin introduced the paper on behalf of Ron Moys, who had been unable to attend the meeting.

The ensuing discussion covered the scope of transnational and cross-border co-operation. It was noted that the wider the eligibility for the cross-border co-operation programme, the thinner resources would be spread. There was support for the inclusion of West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, but not for areas further west. It was noted that hinterland areas adjacent to the coastal authorities were eligible for involvement as project partners.

Concern was expressed that the South East is the only UK region only eligible for transnational funding under one programme area; we should also have access to the North Sea programme.

The report and issues raised were **noted**.

11. Committee of the Regions

a) CoR UK Delegation Top 12 Priorities for 2005

The list was **noted**.

b) New Mandate

Gordon Keymer reported his concern about long-term planning. He has suggested that a long-term planning committee be set up to overcome the problems caused by the difference in the length of appointment cycles, i.e. two year cycle for the Presidency and four year cycle for the CoR.

The report was **noted**.

c) Report

Gordon Keymer reported that his own-initiative opinion on state aids for regional airports had been adopted at the plenary meeting on 7 July. He also reported that the Conservative members of the Assembly had proposed that he should be appointed as their regional nominee for the next mandate.

Paul Bevan explained that the question of this appointment had not been brought before the JEC as it is really an Assembly matter. The Assembly is asked to nominate a member and substitute, one a man and the other a woman, normally from the two main parties. Nominations have been received but are yet to be endorsed by the Assembly.

The Chair thanked Cllr Keymer for his consistent reports back from the CoR, which the JEC finds of great interest.

The report was **noted**.

d) Meeting Note

i) Commission for Territorial Cohesion (COTER), 24 June 2005

The report was **noted**.

ii) Commission on Economic and Social Policy (ECOS), 29 June 2005

The report was **noted**.

iii) Commission on Culture and Education (EDUC), 11 July 2005

The report was **noted**.

12. South East England House Report (SEEH)

Barry Deller reported that the major issue discussed at the special meeting of the SEEH Partnership Group (SPG) on 4 July had been the ongoing review of arrangements at SEEH, which SEEDA had requested ahead of the next break in the lease.

Stella Bellem advised the Committee that SEEDA, as leaseholder of the property, has the lead on management and facilities functions. The lease had been taken in September 2001 and under Belgian law the next break point for vacating the premises is 2007. As SEEH is run as a partnership SEEDA felt it incumbent on them to notify the partners of this to give them plenty of notice in case any wanted to pull out. The SPG had looked at what had been achieved and how in the current premises. Partners want to stay in these premises but need to cut costs. The partners are committed to continuing to work together. One option is to see if they can negotiate a reduced rent and/or see if the space could be reconfigured to provide space to sub-let. Open plan working is being considered with some closed areas for private and distinct area identity. Another option is to move to a less expensive property, although the current location is ideal. A brief will be drawn up for engaging a property agent by the beginning of September; there will be another meeting of the SPG to discuss progress in October. SEEH is an officer led group and proposals will have to be taken back to the partners.

Responding to the question about looking more widely and at cheaper areas of Brussels, Barry Deller advised the Committee that the general feeling was that the current premises are in the right part of Brussels. The meeting space is under-utilised but if the office moves the meeting space will be even more difficult to market externally.

Other points raised during the discussion were:

- There is no reason to believe that Brussels rents will go down.
- The location of SEEH is excellent.

- There is a strong demand for meeting rooms as not everyone has access to such facilities. We should maximise revenue rather than simply cutting costs.
- Other RDAs had built up their Brussels offices around obtaining structural funds and as these are now running down they may see less need. However, as the South East region is looking to achieve Lisbon agenda targets its requirement for representation in Brussels is stronger. Rob Douglas said that in his experience if an organisation is located in the right place, then people will attend meetings; if not the organisation's invitations will not be accepted. He also thought that the present position is excellent and endorsed the suggestion that the meeting room be marketed externally.
- SEEH is a known site and there is a danger that in moving to other premises useful contacts will be lost and it will take some time to rebuild the familiarity of SEEH.
- Another consideration is the stability of the current personnel in SEEH and the excellent co-operation they have built up; there is a danger this synergy may be lost due to staff turnover as a result of relocation. The goodwill of staff is key to its success and this is very good.
- The current premises provide an incredibly versatile set up for small or large numbers of people. However, the unknown element is what it will cost in the future. It is hoped that something along the current lines can continue.

Stella Bellem advised the Committee that the staff in SEEH are completely involved in the ongoing process and the decision will be made inclusively. She explained that attempts had been made in the past to let out the meeting room, a process that takes up a lot of staff resource. The meeting room was not a very good room to let out anyway due to its poor ventilation and it would need a large additional investment to bring it up to the standards available at hotels in the area.

The suggestion was made that perhaps South East companies could be persuaded to contribute to the cost of the necessary equipment for the meeting room as a one-off and use it as a showpiece. Alternatively the cost of renting other people's meeting rooms could be investigated with a view to converting the one in SEEH into office space to be sub-let.

The verbal report and points raised during the discussion were **noted**.

13. GOSE Report on Structural Funds

a) ESF Objective 3 Programme Progress Report Update

As Jan Stephenson had been unable to attend the meeting John Pinnell introduced the paper. He reported that the programme period is coming to an end and funds will be largely committed by the end of

the year. Government Office East is organising an event in September on the cross-border programme; this will involve the South East and South West regions; GOSE is dealing with invitations to regional stakeholders.

The question was asked why not all the columns on page 8 of the report had been totalled. JP undertook to make enquiries and report back.

The report was **noted**.

b) ERDF Update

The report was **noted**.

14. Future Meeting Dates

It was **noted** that the next meeting of the JEC would be on Friday, 11 November 2005 at the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, 12 Great George Street, London SW1. The meeting will be from 11.00 to 13.00; pre-meets for the three groups will be held from 10.30.

It was **further noted** that details on the events in September and November discussed earlier in the meeting will be circulated shortly.

Responding to the question are there any plans to hold a meeting of the Committee in Brussels in the foreseeable future, Paul Bevan commented that it is worthwhile if MEPs can be persuaded to attend but recent attempts had been significantly unsuccessful. Barry Deller commented that it would be worthwhile if a suitable event with which to combine the meeting could be identified.

It was **agreed** that the coincidence of dates should be explored and a decision taken on locating a meeting in Brussels.

15. Any Other Business

There was none.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.30.