

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 21 OCTOBER 2005

Present: Keith Mitchell (Chairman)
Mary Ballin
Louise Bloom
Sheila Campbell
Michael Chater
Ian Chisnall
Barry Clout
Alison Cook
Chris Corrigan
Christine Davis
Christine Field
Tim Hall
Andrew Hodges
Alan Hopkins
Douglas Horner
Roger House
Christina Howell
Pam Palmer
Jerry Patterson
David Shakespeare, OBE
Nick Skellett
Mick Stevens
Cec Tallack
Don Turner

In Attendance: Paul Bevan, Chief Executive
Diana Pogson, secretariat
Philip Craig, secretariat
Irene Cripps, secretariat
Alistair Moses, secretariat
Mark Bilsborough, GOSE
Sheila Hopson, GOSE
Paul Lovejoy, SEEDA
Rolfe Showell, Assembly Partners Support Unit

1. Apologies for absence and declarations of substitutes

Paul Carter
Paul Harvey
Gordon Keymer, CBE (Andrew Hodges attended as substitute)
Tony Reid (Christine Field attended as substitute, as well as in her role of
Chairman of the Regional Planning Committee)
The Chairman advised the Committee that he had nominated, pro tem, Paul
Carter, the new Leader of Kent County Council, as the replacement

Committee member for Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart; the Conservative Group would confirm this or an alternative nomination at the plenary in November.

2. Minutes of the Meeting on 16 September 2005

The Minutes were **agreed and signed** as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

a) Item 5 - SEEDA Report

a) ii) Agency Activity Report, 19 July 2005

It did not appear that the engagement on the Manufacturing Advisory Service with organisations representing smaller businesses that SEEDA had promised at the last meeting had yet happened. Paul Lovejoy apologised and explained that it is SEEDA's intention to cover that dialogue at the next meeting of Business South East.

b) Item 5 - SEEDA Report

b) SEEDA's Full Year Performance in Context

Paul Lovejoy was asked if the administrative burden on Enterprise Hub Directors had yet been removed, as recommended by the Assembly's Select Committee. He responded that the issue was recognised and action is in hand.

4. GOSE Report

Mark Bilsborough said that interviews for the new Regional Director had taken place and it was hoped that an announcement would be made in the next week or two. The appointment would be a level transfer from Whitehall.

Kent and Brighton & Hove had participated in the first round of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and these would have a mid-year review. There were nine areas in the South East taking part in the second round. The guidance had been clearer this time and submissions had drawn on the experience of the pilot phase. More precision is needed on targets, however. The success last time had been due to the process being open and transparent, which is again being encouraged. Stakeholder participation is regarded as important to securing wider buy-in to LAAs.

Concern was expressed to GOSE over the balance of local government funding between the South East and other parts of the country. If the region was not granted a fair share of the central government support, crucial services will be cut dramatically, since council tax rises were likely to be capped at 5%. This would also put the region's economy at risk.

5. SEEDA Report

The Agency activity report to SEEDA Board, 29 September 2005 was received and **noted**.

Responding to the comment that entrepreneurship needed to be taught at an earlier age, Paul Lovejoy confirmed that FE colleges would be very much involved in education for enterprise measures. These skills issues will be captured in the enterprise strand of the new Regional Economic Strategy.

In response to questions about the Folkstone Living Landmarks project, Paul Lovejoy accepted that there may be a need for more dialogue with the Big Lottery Fund but he believed that SEEDA was lending support to a local initiative in this case.

SEEDA was praised for supporting the development of services from Manston Airport. They should not be deterred from taking risks; the outlook was promising thanks to their support.

Paul Lovejoy reported a new strand of collaboration between the South East, London and the East of England to exploit the Greater South East's capacity for innovation and world science, and to address common issues such as transport and the Olympics. He apologised that the Committee had not been advised of this new collaboration at the last meeting although it was then in hand ahead of the party conferences.

Paul Lovejoy said that the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Review events had been well attended. There is a need to focus on the real drivers of economic prosperity, to firm up convincing and effective policies, and to spell out what they mean for sustainable development. SEEDA also consulted with Government Departments on 20 October; the Treasury had not however been present. The consultation document will be available from SEEDA's website from the first week of November and will be widely circulated in print. The consultation period will be for 13 weeks.

Following the Olympics announcement, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has invited RDAs and Sport England regionally to ensure there is full engagement and coordination. SEEDA Board member Mary McAnally, who is also regional chair of Sport England, will be representing the South East nationally. There will be a small coordination group involving key players. SEEDA has commissioned research to scope the region's 'offer'.

Paul Lovejoy concluded by saying that SEEDA is keen to minimise its administrative overheads. There is to be a simplification of the work of key 'out-facing' colleagues and a setting of stretching targets to focus that work.

Concern was expressed that the Olympics would exacerbate the skills shortages already being experienced in the region. Paul Lovejoy said that it was recognised that construction skills training needs to be stepped up.

The Assembly's Chief Executive advised the Committee that the RES will be an agenda item for the next plenary on 16 November. He hoped that the publication of the document will provide for a full debate there.

6. Regional Transport Board

Nick Skellett, Chairman of the RTB, introduced the paper. He explained that, because the A3 Hindhead improvement would take up much of the regional funding allocation in the first five years, the Board had agreed to explore a private finance initiative approach, which could also bring forward the commencement date. If this option failed the project would proceed as programmed but other schemes would have to begin later. The Chief Executive added that alternative means of funding were being explored for several schemes in the draft transport investment programme.

The Chief Executive explained that members would have the opportunity to debate the alignment of transport housing and economic development priorities at the 16 December workshop that was to follow the Executive meeting. In addition the Chairmen of the Assembly and SEEDA would meet with their Chief Executives and the Regional Director of GOSE early in the New Year to iron out any issues, before the Executive Committee and the SEEDA Board sign off the advice to Ministers later in January.

Nick Skellett asked the Executive how it wished to be informed of and to have influence on the work of the RTB. It was suggested that the Chairmen of the RTB, the Housing Board (RHB) and the Planning Committee (RPC) should be on the circulation lists for papers for each body so that they are aware of the issues. Occasional meetings between the Chairmen of the RPC, RTB and RHB might also be useful.

The Chief Executive said that it would be misleading to refer to schemes as 'falling out'. Clearly demand for investment exceeds the regional allocation by a long way, so it is necessary to schedule priorities over time. The RTB has yet to look forward to 2011-16. Even so, not all projects will fit in the second period for the same reason. Local transport authorities would need to realise that if a scheme is not pressing the regional buttons sufficiently other solutions may have to be considered.

The Chairman said that the Chairman of the RPC is already an ex officio member of the Executive Committee and suggested that consideration could be given to the Chairmen of the RTB and RHB also being ex officio members.

The Chief Executive warned that this would require a constitutional amendment, but could be included in the changes that would need to be made with the transfer to the Assembly of the RHB in due course.

In the meantime it was **agreed** that email alerts would be sent to Executive Committee members when the minutes of board meetings became available on the Assembly's website.

The Executive Committee **agreed** to note the report.

7. Regional Housing Board

The Committee received the Chief Executive's update report on the work of the RHB. Mark Bilsborough advised the Committee that he was working on the assumption that the Chairmanship of the RHB will be transferred to the Regional Assembly within the next few months. He added that the Board would have a review day the following week to discuss implementation issues.

It was observed that there is an increasing occurrence of large scale buy-up of smaller new homes for rent by companies and private individuals, thereby reducing the opportunities for first time buyers to get on the property ladder. Responding, Mark Bilsborough agreed that the RHB might commission research on this.

Responding to a concern about the definition of sub-regional housing market areas, Mark Bilsborough accepted that fuzzy boundaries and lack of coterminosity with South East Plan areas might create complications, but the areas were the result of research and aimed to reflect the real economic geography of housing.

The Executive Committee **agreed** to note the report.

8. Subscriptions 2006-07

Receiving the Chief Executive's report, the Committee **agreed** to recommend to the Assembly that local authority subscriptions should be held at their current level with no increase for inflation for the year 2006-07.

9. Regional Planning Committee, 14 October 2005

Christine Field, Chairman of the RPC, introduced her report. There had been a theme throughout the meeting of acknowledging the importance of relationships with other regions.

She said that the greatest concern had been around the export of waste from London. It was felt that the volumes cited should be regarded as maximums and not targets to export to other regions.

Local authorities are engaging with the private sector to improve performance on recycling. There had been a discussion on sustainable construction and it was felt that attention should also be given to more sustainable production of aggregates as these materials could be locally sourced.

The Committee had been concerned to stress the potential of regional airports such as Southampton.

The Executive Committee **agreed** to receive the report.

10. **SEEDA Board Committee:
Social Dialogue Forum, 17 October 2005**

The report was received and **noted**.

11. **Any Other Business**

Local Government Finance Settlement (taken after agenda item 5)

The Chairman introduced the paper that he had tabled, suggesting joint action by the Assembly and the South East County Leaders (SECL) on the forthcoming settlement.

Concern was raised that in order to give a complete picture the impact of service pressures on districts and unitaries, such as in respect of licensing, needed to be included. There would also be benefits from achieving a cross-party alliance on these issues.

It was further noted that the public seemed to be switching off from the message, making it difficult to make an impact on Government. We need to be specific and avoid the impression of a general whinge. The support of the CBI may be forthcoming if the economic impact could be demonstrated; there should be liaison with the CBI regional office.

The Chairman said that a presentation could be given at the plenary on 16 November; followed by a SECL briefing for SE MPs with media attendance is already scheduled for 17 November; subject to the Committee's support, the Assembly Leadership Group would be discussing tactics that afternoon.

The Executive Committee **agreed** to ask the Leadership Group to:

- a) work with the South East County Leaders Group to complete a comprehensive survey of funding pressures facing local authorities in the South East;
- b) establish whether sufficient consensus can be established between authorities and, if so, to pursue a high-profile media and lobbying campaign, jointly with the South East County Leaders Group, drawing attention to the funding crisis facing local government and other public services in the South East.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.35.