

Notes of Meeting of South East District Council Leaders

12:30 a.m. Friday 2nd October 2009

Venue: Church House Conference Centre, Westminster

Present: (see attached list)

1. Update on SEEC/SEEDA matters

72/74 authorities have joined South East England Councils (SEEC). The next SEEC meeting is planned for March. A major current concern is the future of the SNR and its future under a Conservative front. Concern was also expressed about the relationship with the Counties over this issue.

The inter-relationships between quangos is very complicated, making the possible task of dismantling them quite challenging. Paul Carter is representing the SE on the LGA Board that is in discussions with the Shadow Cabinet advising on such issues, which raised a question about the effectiveness of any advocacy of South East (SE) District interests in such matters.

Concern was expressed about the Chairman of SEEC and his apparent lack of consultation with South East Leaders. Better communication is required between him and his District colleagues. There was a strong feeling that there should be an earlier meeting of SEEC than the one planned for the spring.

Concern was also expressed that the SE was in danger of losing influence on the LGA, and there was a need for strong action by the Districts to advance their interests. The formation of the District SIG will be important in providing an opportunity for district leadership and a district voice.

The mandate for the South East District Leaders must therefore be to protect two tier working, and produce a proactive approach to this issue and that of the shared services agenda.

2. Next Steps for the South East Districts

Simon Eden and Paul Geehan gave a presentation on the recent history of working together, as well as some thoughts on future joint efforts. This was supplemented by the joint paper prepared by Simon and Michael Willis. It covered the following matters:

- The history of SE District working since 2003.
- Emphasis on getting a joined up input into planning issues and.
- Influencing the post SEERA arrangements.

The end result of these endeavours had produced sound advice and coherent voice for SE Districts.

3. Discussion

The general discussion that followed brought forward the following thoughts and suggestions.

What about post 2010? It may require a totally different advocacy structure to advance and protect District interests, especially in the face of fewer, better resourced County initiatives. It may require two agendas: one leading up to a new government; and another following that.

There was a reluctance to move into formal structures at this point, but a concomitant recognition of the need to maintain and strengthen the current SE District Leaders organisation through the next 6-12 months.

A key question posed was:-

What will the proposition in the circulated paper deliver?

There was recognition of the need to support SEEC at least through the likely transition period with a new government, although (as stated earlier) it will require a closer relationship between the SEEC Leadership and the Districts.

All agreed on the need for Districts to pull together at a time of uncertainty, which would require authoritative research, and proper lobbying. There was a strong need to work together, but not necessarily through new structures.

4. Consensus

The objectives of our current endeavours should be:

1. To influence a new Government's policy on two tier local government.
2. To operate within SEEC and ensure that two tier working is recognised and advanced.

It was also agreed that there needed to be stronger secretariat support of these objectives.

In relation to specific actions, it was agreed that:

- While there is a continuing need for co-ordination and collaboration to protect SE District interest, and to influence the Shadow Cabinet in the lead up to a new government, this falls short of needing to establish a formal body at this point.
- George Beckett (in his capacity as Conservative Deputy Leader) is to arrange a meeting with Paul Carter to discuss the communication concerns mentioned earlier and to ensure that there is a full meeting of SEEC before the planned meeting in the spring..
- An 'Executive' of 7 or so, including Cllr Tutt from Eastbourne BC is to be set up

Next meeting

It was **agreed** that there would be a meeting of the South East District Leaders Steering Group (including Cllr Tutt) to advance these steps on Monday 26 October 2009 at 10.00 a.m. in the Bessemer Room, The Institute of Materials, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5DB