

Agenda item **Ex5** Appendix 1



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The Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles, MP
Secretary of State
Communities and Local Government
Eland House
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A Strategic Voice for the Engine Room of the UK Economy

Dear Mr Pickles

I write on behalf of the 74 local authorities in the South East, known as South East England Councils (SEEC). As you know the leaders of South East local authorities have been working closely with business in developing proposals for Local Enterprise Partnerships.

SEEC members strongly support decentralisation of power to local government and the abolition of costly regional bureaucracies such as SEEDA. At the same time, business organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses and Institute of Directors have approached SEEC, keen to be able to engage with South East LEPs collectively to ensure there is a strategic voice bringing together the key players across an economy of the size and importance of the South East's.

Subject to our SEEC Executive Committee, which meets on Friday 10 September, we would like to register an interest in such a strategic approach as part of the LEP process. Subject to Executive agreement, we could facilitate a forum to bring together the key players from the different tiers of local government, the main political parties, business leaders and their various business organisations. We will provide formal feedback on this after our Executive meeting but any proposals would be low cost and minimalistic. We

have no desire to recreate a regional bureaucracy – rather to facilitate joint working on a voluntary basis.

Given the South East's importance to the UK economy – over 15% of national GDP and an £18 billion net contribution to Treasury each year – there is a strong case for joined-up engagement between Government, the main business representative organisations and all South East LEPs.

We would also value the opportunity to talk to Government about priority investments that are needed to support our continued success. We support economic growth in other areas of the UK, but this must not be at the expense of declining investment and performance in the South East economy.

Yours sincerely

Chris M Williams
Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire County Council
and lead Chief Executive supporting South East England Councils