

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ALL-MEMBER MEETING**



Date: 21 June 2012

Subject: **Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation & Cities**

Report by: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination

Recommendations:

- i) Welcome the Minister's update on current priorities in his portfolio covering decentralisation, cities and planning
- ii) Take the opportunity to raise issues and questions with the Minister on how Government policy can help member authorities maximise the South East's economic potential for local and national benefit.

1. Background

1.1 SEEC is pleased to welcome Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation & Cities, to our AGM. Following his appointment in May 2010 as Minister of State at Communities and Local Government, in July 2011 he was appointed as Minister for Cities in addition to his responsibilities as Minister for Decentralisation, joint appointments at CLG and BIS. The Minister has been invited to update members on key aspects of his portfolio, which includes:

- Decentralisation
- Cities
- Planning policy
- Big Society.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Following the Minister's presentation members will have the opportunity to raise issues and questions. During the discussion members may wish to consider the following issues that SEEC has previously discussed:

- **Fair funding** – how changes to the local government finance system could redress current unfair funding distribution and support greater investment in the South East as the engine room of the UK economy.
- **Local Government Finance Bill** – whether the proposals for 50% business rate retention will achieve their intended aim; the tight implementation timetable and impact of localising council tax benefits with a 10% cut.
- **Infrastructure funding** – the need for long term commitments to allow councils to take forward major projects.
- **European funding** – the need for the South East to continue to receive EU funding in new programmes from 2014.
- **Localism** – the need for Government to minimise centrally imposed burdens.
- **Devolving powers to cities** – the need to open up devolution outside 'core' cities to include areas such as the South East.
- **Planning** – feedback on the operation of the new planning system.