



South East England Councils
Room 215 County Hall
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Kingston
Surrey
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5 August 2019

020 541 7553

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Mr Jenrick

I am writing on behalf of South East England Councils to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State. We trust that the positive relationships we have had with Ministers and officials within your Department will continue.

South East England Councils is a cross-tier and cross-party membership body which represents the majority of local authorities across the South East. These include authorities within the Midlands and I also wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Ministerial champion for that area. We hope that your Department will demonstrate the same commitment to the whole of the South East.

I have also written to the Prime Minister as it is important that the success of the South East is regarded by Government as an important policy objective. The South East generates over £100bn of tax revenues each year, exports over £85bn of goods and services and is home to over 8,800 foreign owned businesses. With productivity the same as it was a decade ago and almost 900,000 people of working age with low skills or no formal qualification, it is in the interests of all for the South East to reach its full potential and seize opportunities for international trade that will otherwise be lost to the United Kingdom.

We look to your Department to help the Government take a rounded view of matters that affect local communities including economic policy, health, the environment, transport & infrastructure, skills and funding. We support the investment that the Government is making to advance economies in other regions and the recent pledges to increase this funding and hope that you will champion similar investment across the South East. There can be little doubt that transport infrastructure is holding us back as well as impacting on quality of life and the environment, so we hope you lend your support to the work of Transport for the South East as well as the Midlands Engine. I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport to emphasise the importance of this matter.

To aid understanding of what is required to achieve growth we hope that Ministers and officials will avoid grouping London and the South East together as there are important differences between the areas including trends in economic performance and the standard of infrastructure.

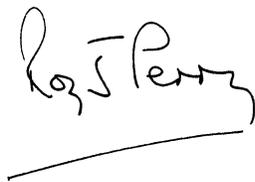
We believe that renewed momentum should be given to the Government's ambition to devolve powers and budgets to boost local growth. South East England Councils believes strongly in locally led decision making and therefore urge Ministers to be bold and allow decisions to be taken at an appropriate local level rather than just at regional or national level.

As well as strategic policy, we are keen to work with Ministers and others to overcome practical barriers to delivery. The decision last year to remove the borrowing cap for local authorities' Housing Revenue Accounts very welcome, and there are other ways in which the proportion and mix of affordable housing in the area can be increased. Quality of housing is equally important, and we look to your Department to promote housing in sustainable locations such as revitalised town centres, and to prevent the type of sub-standard living conditions that has been delivered in some places under Permitted Development Regulations.

Funding for local authorities is of course hugely important. We welcome the Government's commitment to tackle the crisis of social care for the elderly. The South East not only has the largest number of people aged 75+ in the Country but is also facing an exponential increase over the next two decades. This will have a major impact not only on those older people who look to us for support, but also our ability to fund other services including those within the direct remit of your Department.

Once again, please accept our congratulations on your appointment. We would welcome the opportunity to meet you or one of your team. Please do not hesitate to contact me or our Director, David Covill (davidcovill@secouncils.gov.uk). We look forward to making constructive contributions to the development of Government policy as details are announced.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roy Perry', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Councillor Roy Perry
Chair, South East England Councils