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Skills and Social Care: How to Address South East Challenges

Rising to challenges around skills and social care – these are two of the pressing issues facing South East MPs and local authorities alike this year, as Brexit and the Social Care green paper evolve.

Both are important issues, impacting on different aspects of a successful South East. Better skills are critical for continued economic growth, while solutions to funding and staff shortages in social care are needed to ensure quality support for vulnerable residents.

South East England Councils (SEEC) members would welcome your support in encouraging Parliament to give local authorities greater ability to help address these challenges:

Better skills to continue South East economic success

The South East is the UK's most profitable economy. Between 2000-16 we contributed £154bn more to Treasury than our area received in public spending – but closer analysis shows this tailing off. Better skills are needed to ensure the South East continues to be successful and to support UK plc. Our [new report](#) shows that by 2024 we expect 99% of jobs will be closed to workers with no qualifications. Other findings show that 85% of South East employment is in the service sector. Almost half our service sector is knowledge intensive, creating demand for high-skill employees. Demand for lower skills is also high with 25% of new South East jobs in the distribution, transport, accommodation and food sectors. Care jobs also make up 8.5% of all South East job vacancies.

SEEC would welcome your support for steps to deliver:

- **Greater council influence on skills funding** to ensure it delivers what local employers need.
- **Reversing the decline in adult education** – NVQ level 2 take up has dropped 57% since 2011.
- **Ways to incentivise businesses to offer more degree-level apprenticeships** – in the South East only 8.5% out of 47,000 apprenticeships are NVQ level 4+.
- **More flexible vocational training** to mix classroom learning with more workplace experience.

Finding a fair solution to funding social care

Nationally, local authorities face a £2.2bn social care shortfall. South East pressures are particularly severe. As well as growing care needs from working age adults, the South East has the UK's largest and fastest growing older population. We have 820,000 residents aged 75+, rising to 1.5m by 2041.

SEEC would welcome your support for steps including:

- **A Royal Commission to identify a long term sustainable funding solution for social care.** This should involve national and local politicians, NHS and directors of adult social care.
- **Assessing ways to raise social care funding via national taxes**, as in other countries. Options include a review of National Insurance or automatic enrolment (as with pensions).
- **Recognising that funding social care via council tax is unsustainable.** Council tax income bears no relation to care demands. Also, as South East councils receive less central grant than metropolitan areas, our residents pay a higher proportion of council costs through local taxes.
- **Rebalancing NHS and social care spending.** Shifting more investment to local authorities' preventative work can reduce NHS admissions and delay costly care home placements.

More details on SEEC's proposals are set out in a recent [Ministerial letter](#).

We hope we can call on your support in these issues. Our enclosed [dashboard](#) shows the latest South East data and we would be pleased to provide more information if helpful.

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