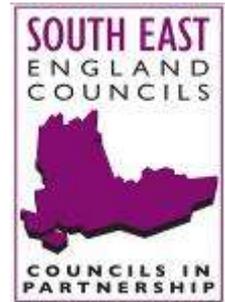


**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING**



Date: 8 March 2012

Subject: South East data: Draft response to Government consultation on ending publication of South East-level statistics

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

Recommendations:

SEEC Executive members are asked to:

- i) Note CLG's proposals to change arrangements for collecting and publishing its data and statistics, both at local and former regional levels.
- ii) Agree SEEC should respond to highlight the importance of CLG publishing local area data and continuing to make data available at former-region level for purposes of local and national comparison, as used in SEEC's Data Dashboard.
- iii) Agree that SEEC's Chairman approves the final response to meet CLG's 2 April deadline.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has published a consultation¹ on proposals to change the way it collects and publishes data and statistics, closing on 2 April. These include land-use change statistics, collection of local authority housing statistics and publication of regional statistics.
- 1.2 Individual authorities may wish to comment on the Department's proposals for improving efficiency in collection of local area land-use and housing statistics. We propose that SEEC should consider responding specifically on proposals to end publication of its statistics at regional level in light of the closure of the Government Offices.

2. Key issues for SEEC's proposed consultation response

- 2.1 SEEC strongly supports the removal of regional bureaucracy, including Government Offices, and welcomes the localism agenda.
- 2.2 It is of course vital that CLG continues to provide data and statistics, such as housing numbers, deprivation and local government financing, at district, unitary and county council levels. It will also be helpful if data is made available at Local Enterprise Partnership area level.
- 2.3 CLG's proposal to stop providing information at former regional level is however of concern. It is still very helpful to have ready access to data summarised at this level for comparison purposes, both locally and nationally, and to see high-level trends over time. Alongside robust local

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/consultchangesstats>

information, this can help identify strategic challenges and opportunities for local government and other partners.

- 2.4 Such data and analysis are key parts of the SEEC Data Dashboard² which SEEC members, MPs and other decision makers have welcomed since its introduction last year and which is helping inform local and cross-boundary actions. The Dashboard includes local, South East/regional and national comparisons for several key CLG data-sets including:
- Housing completions
 - New Homes Bonus
 - Growing Places Fund
 - Local government finance
 - Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 2.5 Detailed analysis of CLG's data has also underpinned important policy research and analysis undertaken by SEEC highlighting South East-wide issues. This included raising ministers' awareness of the increasing number of people living in deprivation in South East England, now some 565,000. CLG data has also been important in Local Government Futures' analysis for SEEC, identifying changes needed to improve the Local Government finance system.
- 2.6 We therefore recommend that CLG should continue to make all its data and statistics available at former Government Office region level, and should continue to code/group local authority-level data with former regions. This makes presentation and analysis of local level data much easier, for example in our Data Dashboard, as well as readily allowing local authorities to assess their own situation against wider comparators.
- 2.7 Although loss of CLG regional data would itself be significant, we are also concerned that it may set a precedent for other departments, for example BIS, Defra and ONS, whose information SEEC and local authorities use regularly to inform policy and actions.
- 2.8 We believe it is straightforward for government departments to continue to make data/statistics available on-line at local, regional and national levels, since much of this is done automatically via coding in their databases/spreadsheets. It would however add considerable administrative burden to SEEC and local authorities to manually recalculate or amalgamate unsorted data; this transfer of burden from national to more local level would, for example, possibly put the viability of SEEC's Data Dashboard into doubt.
- 2.9 We therefore recommend SEEC sends a short response to CLG emphasising these points. We invite members' views on these issues and ask that members agree that SEEC's Chairman approves the final response to meet CLG's 2 April deadline.

² <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/4/view/26/seec-data-dashboard>