

Date: 6 February 2014

Subject: **Influencing Future Government –
Towards a South East Manifesto**

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Recommendation: Members are invited to:

- i) Note work underway to develop a shared SESL-SEEC document to influence party political General Election manifestos;
- ii) consider views on headline themes to underpin presentation of the proposals;
- iii) provide input on specific proposals and key asks of prospective Government. You can do this by contacting either Philippa Mellish (Philippa.mellish@hants.gov.uk, 07841 492507) or Heather Bolton (heatherbolton@secouncils.gov.uk, 07966 865525).

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Ahead of the 2015 General Election there is a short window of opportunity for South East councils to influence Party Manifestos and inform the policies of the next Government. A Member-led steering group has been created to oversee and take forward the development of manifesto proposals. These will be applicable to the whole of England but pertinent to the South East and supported by evidence of the benefits that the South East would offer Government in return for greater devolution of powers, funding and responsibility. Benefits include, for example, increased national growth, more efficient public services and the transfer of risk from the centre to localities.
- 1.2. In order to have greater traction with Government and impact, the manifesto will be a shared document that builds on SESL and SEEC's existing work programmes and current influencing. The final output is likely to comprise two parts, a short and accessible outline of the main proposals and supporting evidence to give gravitas. Members' views will be sought on this as the work develops.
- 1.3. The steering group met for the first time on 24 January.

2. Identifying cross-cutting themes

- 2.1. The steering group considered potential proposals by service area. During discussion, however, it emerged that there are a number of 'golden threads' that run across all / several service areas. As a result, it was agreed that the next iteration of the work would present proposals by several cross-cutting themes. These themes, or headlines, will help to make the document accessible and highlight how the outcomes that local authorities can deliver will help future Government meet their manifesto aims. The themes have yet to be determined and members' views on suitable headings are encouraged. While no headline themes are likely to remove all overlaps, potential options to consider include:
 - Successful Businesses, Successful Communities, Successful Localism
 - Prosperous Places, Empowered People / Strengthened Democracy, Genuine Localism,
 - Prosperity, People, Places
 - Better Economy, Better Services, Better Decisions.

3. South East Context

- 3.1. English local government is the last bastion of Ministerial control. If devolution is acceptable for Wales and Scotland, why not English local government? England cannot be taken for granted, especially not the South East. The UK's engine room of economic growth and prosperity should not be strangled through under investment and restrictive powers and freedoms. We need a truly independent local government through which power is put back in the hands of local people to help deliver better services and greater economic growth.
- 3.2. The city-driven agenda for economic growth is bypassing the potential of non-metropolitan, two-tier areas including the South East, which makes the UK's largest net contribution to the Treasury. Indeed, the South East economic contribution exceeded that of all 8 core cities combined during 2007-11. Rather than risk killing the goose that lays the golden egg, it makes sound economic sense to invest in already successful areas and sectors alongside riskier regenerating economies. Local government also offers the quickest avenue for translating capital investment into returns for the national economy.
- 3.3. South East local authorities are some of the most efficient parts of the public sector with a strong track record of delivery. This, combined with their democratic mandate and place shaping role, should give

Government the confidence to entrust councils with responsibility for a greater number of service areas. Government should utilise councils to hold other non-democratic public bodies to account and bring greater efficiency to the delivery of public services, such as the NHS.

- 3.4. Supporting councils to deliver integrated care recognises that citizens are assets with a positive contribution to make to society, not just a cost. Integrated care offers residents better quality of life and relieves pressure on public finances, which can then be directed elsewhere. The South East has England's largest and most rapidly ageing population. Already at 8.7m, total population is expected to grow by 3/4m to 9.5m in the next 10 years, with over 75s growing by a third – much higher than nationally. Meeting the health, care and other needs of our residents is a major challenge – if not resourced and managed effectively, not only will our residents' needs go unmet, but pressure on local public finances could jeopardise investment in economic growth.

4. Examples of emerging proposals

- 4.1. Initial discussions with the member steering group presented policy proposals service-by-service. Although this identified overlaps and duplication in key principles, emerging points are summarised by service area below while members consider the most suitable headline themes for the next iteration.

- **Economic growth and LEPs**

Investment in: strategic transport projects, mobile phone coverage and superfast broadband, specific sectors, infrastructure to support aviation growth; make LEPs more democratic; give councils and LEPs freedom to agree LEP boundary changes without Whitehall permission.

- **Local government finance and devolved powers**

Depoliticise funding allocations; retention of a greater proportion of business rates and other locally raised taxes; freedom to set single person discounts for council tax; responsibility to integrate blue light services; responsibility for some public utilities and regulatory services.

- **Education and skills**

Control over skills provision and budgets to boost growth; promoting volunteering to improve employability skills; power to direct capital funding for schools; strengthen the accountability of Governing Bodies; supporting councils to fulfil their democratic mandate with regard to education.

- **Health and social care integration**

Responsibility for local health provision; extension of commissioning responsibilities for public health, shift to community care, support to deliver integrated care.

- **Welfare reform**

Responsibility for commissioning / contract management for welfare to work programmes; openness and transparency through data sharing between Departments and government agencies.

- **Children's services and troubled families**

Extension of and investment in the Troubled Families programme.

- **Immigration**

Address accuracy of migration data; a national levy on immigration fees to fund local costs.

- **Planning housing and greenbelt**

Simplifying the planning system; discretion over local development.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. The steering group agreed the majority of work **in developing the manifesto document should be carried out in-house**, with some support from member authorities. It was, however, recognised that for some specific areas, there may be value in commissioning supporting research or seeking an independent viewpoint.
- 5.2. It was agreed that the next iteration of the work would be made available to the steering group for comment by early March with a view to launching the final manifesto by the summer. This would mark the start a period of campaigning to get political support and buy-in to the manifesto proposals.