

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**



Date: 24 September 2015

Subject: **SEEC activity report: Information updates**

Report of: SEEC Secretariat – Heather Bolton, Nick Woolfenden, Sarah Momber

Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- i) Note the updates on SEEC work.
- ii) Consider any follow up actions required or suggestions for future SEEC work.

1. Introduction

1.1 Over the summer much of SEEC's work has focused on devolution, strategic transport/housing pressures and the need for changes in public health funding. Headlines from work on these and other areas topical during summer 2015 are set out below.

a) Roundtables with London on housing & infrastructure

a.1 [Roundtables](#) arranged by SEEC and GLA in July/September gave all SEEC members the chance to shape future political influence with London on housing, economy and infrastructure issues. Whilst the Mayor is currently committed to meeting London's housing needs in the capital itself, London may need to look at options to meet needs beyond its boundaries in the longer term. SEEC is concerned about this given the South East's own high levels of housing need, overstretched infrastructure and large amount of protected land (including Green Belt, National Parks and AONB).

- The Roundtables indicate there is support to set up robust political engagement to influence London's growth plans and make a joint case on shared priorities – eg major transport infrastructure and ensuring locally approved development is built.
- There is a proposal to set up an accountable small political steering group (also including East of England), plus a wider forum for all Leaders and LEPs.
- All SEEC members will be invited to a Wider South East Summit at GLA on 11 December to agree the way forward, in time to help shape the new London Plan and engage with the new Mayor following 2016 elections.

b) SEEC input to Spending Review 2015

b.1 SEEC provided detailed [input to the Spending Review](#) in September. The submission centred on devolution in two-tier areas, highlighting economic and service benefits of extending devolution to the South East, including the need for:

- Significant devolution with alternatives to elected mayors.
- Devolving business rates & stamp duty to allow investment in local infrastructure for growth.
- Empowering councillors to lead delivery of streamlined, cost effective services across health and wider public services.
- Local determination of planning, including power to incentivise house-building.

c) Devolution: CLG Select Committee and Rt Hon Theresa May MP

c.1 To help secure South East devolution opportunities, SEEC has been briefing Ministers and MPs. A recent meeting with the Home Secretary and written evidence for the CLG Select Committee provided opportunities to highlight SEEC key points. These built on the four calls set out in b.1 above but also highlighted requests for:

- Devolution to be significantly extended outside city areas.
- Genuine devolution for high population two-tier areas.
- Commitment on future phases of devolution deals.
- Clarity on the scope for devolution and assessment criteria.

d) Strategic Transport: Missing Links

d.1 *Missing Links* highlights five strategic transport priorities in need of national level investment to support the South East's role as a national economic powerhouse and international trade gateway. After an initial discussion at SEEC's AGM, councillors and officers provided comments over the summer to refine the report. Work is now underway on the final report, with publication targeted for October. [Missing Links](#) will update last year's *Mind the Gap* report on South East strategic transport needs.

e) Consultation response on public health spending cuts

e.1 In response to the Department of Health (DH) consultation on how to implement £200 million public health savings from current year budgets, [SEEC proposed](#) a new formula to reclaim more from those authorities receiving allocations much higher than their accepted target. This would speed up progression towards fairer funding as well as reducing the burden of cuts on underfunded local authorities in the South East. In addition, SEEC called for DH to ensure that councils with unspent reserves are not penalised and local authorities are fully involved in the impact assessment of the savings. SEEC continues to call for DH to publish long-term plans to give councils certainty over their public health budgets and ensure in-year cuts are not repeated in the future.

f) Consultation response on Sunday trading

f.1 [Responding](#) to the Government's recent consultation, SEEC welcomed the principle of offering devolved decision-making powers to all councils on Sunday trading hours as part of the wider devolution agenda. Powers should not be limited only to 'metro mayors'. Ensuring high streets are able to compete with the growing online retail sector and flourish with a suitable mix of retailers – small/big and independents/larger chains – is a key concern for local areas. SEEC's response emphasised that devolving powers to councils could provide more flexibility than the current national system to meet the needs of different places but could need co-operation across boundaries to avoid significant local discrepancies. It would enable effective joined-up decisions given existing council licensing/planning powers and allow councils to take account of varied business and community perspectives on Sunday trading changes.

g) Modern Slavery training package for member councils

g.1 To help local authorities respond to their new legal duty to report suspected cases of modern slavery, the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and SEEC have produced a 2-minute training film for councils. Accredited by the Independent Anti Slavery Commissioner, the film is designed to raise awareness among council staff, stimulating their professional curiosity and encouraging them to look out for and report potential signs of slavery encountered in their day-to-day work. It is available to all South East councils free of charge and accompanied by [guidance notes](#) to support in house training. Members can find out more by looking at our [Modern Slavery web page](#) or by contacting SESPM Manager Roy Millard on roymillard@secouncils.gov.uk.

h) SEEC and SESL joint working

h.1 SESL held a meeting on 30 July to discuss future joint working with SEEC. Following this, SESL Chairman David Burbage met SEEC Chairman Nicolas Heslop in mid September. They will provide a verbal update on the discussions for today's Executive Committee.