

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE MEETING**



Date: 26 November 2015

Subject: **Discussion with Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government**

Report by: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director

Recommendations:

- i) Take the opportunity to discuss CLG current priorities with the Secretary of State.
- ii) Ask the Secretary of State to explain the Spending Review 2015 and discuss the implications for CLG and South East local authorities.

1. Rt Hon Greg Clark

1.1 SEEC is very pleased to welcome Rt Hon Greg Clark to speak to Executive members. Greg has been MP for Tunbridge Wells since 2005 and was appointed Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in May 2015. He became a shadow minister in 2006 and since 2010 has held ministerial roles at CLG, Treasury, BIS and the Cabinet Office. Before entering Parliament, he worked for Boston Consulting Group and the BBC, later becoming Conservative Party Director of Policy. He also served as a councillor on Westminster City Council.

2. Spending Review 2015

2.1 Government's Spending Review 2015 is due to be unveiled on 25 November, the day before the SEEC Executive meets. The review will set out Government's spending framework and priorities for the rest of this Parliament. Members may wish to take the opportunity to ask the Secretary of State for more detail on Spending Review impacts and expected announcements, such as:

- Proposals for operating devolved business rates and any additional responsibilities councils may be pressed to take on in return for business rate income or wider funding reforms.
- The local impact of average 30% budget cuts and closure of 'low value programmes' in Government departments including CLG, transport, environment and Treasury.
- How Department for Transport cuts will impact on infrastructure investment.
- How better co-operation between NHS and councils could deliver more value for money.

3. Current CLG programme: opportunities & challenges for local government

3.1 Members will also have the opportunity to discuss current CLG priorities. At the September Executive members highlighted policy areas where small changes could create greater opportunities for effective local government and some proposals that pose challenges for councils, for example:

Opportunities

- Planning fees – local ability to recharge the full costs of processing planning applications will help free up council funds for other local services.
- How help with overcoming barriers to housing delivery will help councils turn planning permissions into development.
- The potential to open up devolution in two-tier areas of the South East.
- The potential for councils to save money by changing requirements on publication of highway notices.
- How firm commitments on long term funding for Syrian refugees will release pledges from South East councils to support refugees.

Challenges

- Housing & Planning Bill – the focus on starter homes could risk delivery of affordable rented housing in high cost areas such as the South East.