

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 26 November 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 as part of SEEC's work programme.

### 1. Introduction

1.1 Major issues for SEEC members this autumn have included input to debates on devolution and planning as well as the ongoing discussion about Syrian refugees. Key headlines from work on these and other areas are set out below.

#### a) SEEC input to All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Reform, Decentralisation & Devolution

a.1 Following discussion at SEEC Executive in September, [SEEC input to the APPG](#) focused on five principles that should underpin devolution:

- i) An open, accountable approach to negotiating devolution deals.
- ii) Clarity on the criteria used to judge successful and unsuccessful bids.
- iii) Consistent devolution offers across all parts of the UK.
- iv) Link powers with control of funding.
- v) Long term sustainability.

SEEC called for devolution to be available without the need for elected mayors and set out three areas where significant powers should be made to be available to all councils:

- Greater local control of funding to support devolution – e.g. full control of council tax, access to local property taxes and the ability to borrow, alongside greater control of skills and transport budgets.
- Powers to encourage development and support affordable housing.
- Powers for democratically-elected council leaders to streamline health services.

#### b) SEEC response to CLG Local Plan Expert Group

b.1 SEEC [wrote](#) to CLG's new [Local Plan Expert Group](#) highlighting that although the South East already builds the most homes in England, further action is needed to help ensure effective delivery of councils' locally approved housing plans and the vital infrastructure communities and businesses need. SEEC's recommendations for Government included:

- Allowing councils to drive forward the localist planning system without unnecessary interference that can cause delays.
- Allowing councils local discretionary powers to incentivise building of locally-approved housing, such as 'use it, lose it or pay for it' conditions.
- Rethinking Government's centrally-imposed thresholds for, and exclusions from, s106 affordable housing contributions or other developer contributions for infrastructure.
- Support for locally-led approaches to fund large scale strategic infrastructure schemes, such as those set out in SEEC's Mind the Gap/Missing Links reports.
- Devolution of skills commissioning to councils to better meet construction industry needs.

#### c) Joint SEEC-SESL letter to CLG on section 106

c.1 Following member agreement at the September Executive meeting, [SEEC wrote to Greg Clark](#) asking Government to reconsider its appeal against the Reading-West Berkshire High Court ruling. The court allowed continuing use of s106 on small sites, in line with SEEC members' view that s106 contributions should be permitted on all sites. SEEC

called for local decision-making on s106 rather than national determination. However, a response from Brandon Lewis MP has confirmed Government will pursue an appeal that will be heard in March 2016. A copy of his response was circulated to Executive members with the papers for this meeting.

**d) SEEC and SESPM briefing on refugees**

- d.1 The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) is liaising between South East local authorities, the LGA and Home Office to co-ordinate councils' pledges to accept Syrian refugees. By 10 November South East councils had made provisional pledges to accept a total of 2,550 refugees over the lifetime of this Parliament, subject to the detail of the funding package. This would be around 13% of the UK total. Pledges include 14 authorities offering places for a total of 150 refugees before Christmas.
- d.2 The latest [SESPM/SEEC briefing note](#) provides an update on discussions about extending Government funding from 12 months to five years, and the potential for top up funding in areas with high housing rents. SESPM and SEEC have been offered funding to run officer workshops over the next 2-3 months to help South East authorities share good practice in responding to the refugee crisis. SESPM is hosted by SEEC and fully funded by the Home Office.

**e) SEEC meeting dates for 2016**

- e.1 SEEC has confirmed two All-Member Meetings and three Executive Meetings (for Executive Members only) for next year on the following dates:
- Friday 29 January 2016 – SEEC All-Member Meeting
  - Tuesday 22 March 2016 – SEEC Executive Meeting (shared date with SESL)
  - Thursday 30 June 2016 – SEEC AGM & All-Member Meeting (shared date with SESL)
  - Friday 30 September 2016 – SEEC Executive Meeting (shared date with SESL)
  - Thursday 1 December 2016 – SEEC Executive Meeting (shared date with SESL)

**f) Index of Multiple Deprivation: Initial South East headlines**

- f.1 [New official data](#) showing the scale of deprivation in local areas across the South East and England was released in September 2015. Updated by CLG every 4-5 years, initial SEEC analysis indicates the South East has 665,000 people living in the 20% most deprived parts of England – an increase from 565,000 people in the previous 2010 data. There are also over 900,000 people in the South East living in income deprivation (470,000 of which are children & older people) – more than the East, East Midlands, North East, South West or Yorkshire & Humber. Further analysis will be provided for SEEC members in the next Data Dashboard (expected January 2016).

**g) SEEC newsletter autumn 2015**

- g.1 SEEC's latest [newsletter](#) is now available online. It gives an overview of recent work, including feedback from meetings with Home Secretary Theresa May and Treasury Minister Damian Hinds. It also covers headlines from SEEC input to consultations and inquiries on devolution, business rates, public health funding and Sunday trading.

**h) Member briefing on Spending Review 25 November 2015**

- h.1 SEEC and SESL will produce a same-day briefing for members setting out headlines from the 2015 Spending Review and likely impacts for South East authorities. The briefing will be emailed after the Spending Review on the evening of 25 November. Hard copies will be also available for members at the Executive meeting.