

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ALL-MEMBER MEETING

Date: 25 June 2015

Subject: **South East England Councils' Business Plan**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director



Recommendation:

Members are asked to contribute views on priority topics and work areas for inclusion in SEEC's business plan 2015-16.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 SEEC's annual business plan is normally agreed in the autumn, allowing the opportunity for priorities and suggestions to be discussed by members at the AGM.
- 1.2 Some high-level, outline proposals and questions are set out below to prompt discussion on where SEEC should focus its work over the coming year. Member views on these proposals are invited as well as suggestions for alternative/ additional work areas. Views on priorities are particularly welcome, given SEEC's limited officer resources.
- 1.3 Decisions on future joint working by SEEC and SESL will also help shape the draft business plan to be presented to members in the autumn. Over the past three years SEEC and SESL have worked together extensively to share officer resources and present a single, strong South East voice on issues such as devolution, funding and infrastructure investment.

2. Current business plan priorities

- 2.1 The current SEEC business plan for 2014-15 focuses on three areas:
 - Infrastructure and funding – during the year this work stream evolved to respond to the devolution debate
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Ongoing policy and data work to support South East interests.

3. Proposals for the coming year

- 3.1 With a new Government in place and a devolution Bill now in Parliament, members should consider updating business plan priorities. Headline options for consideration include:

- Devolution
- Infrastructure and economy
- Health and care funding
- South East evidence base.

Ideas for discussion on each of these are set out below. SEEC will also monitor emerging policy developments throughout the year to identify any issues where specific South East input would be relevant.

- 3.2 **Devolution** – support the case for devolution of funding and powers, ensuring opportunities are open to all tiers of councils in the South East. Views are welcome on how best SEEC could support local devolution ambitions, for example through:
 - **Research** – Would work on financial/ practical implications of devolution be useful? Is work needed to build on this year's study about the impact of localising property taxes? How could more local redistribution of business rates work?
 - **Influencing the devolution Bill** – Are there specific points that members would want to brief parliamentarians to amend during the progress of the Bill?
 - **Workshops/conferences for members** – Are there topics where workshop speakers/ discussion would help members deliver local devolution initiatives?
 - **Collating and sharing good practice.**

- 3.3 **Infrastructure & economy** – support the case for more investment in infrastructure to maintain and enhance the South East’s economic strength. Also important over the coming year will be the impact of London’s growth and how this is likely to impact on South East housing and infrastructure needs. Member input is invited on potential SEEC work areas EG:
- **Strategic transport** – Aiming to reach consensus on a submission to DfT calling for national investment in a shortlist of very large, cross boundary projects that offer significant UK-wide and South East economic benefits. How can SEEC help carve a role for councils in influencing infrastructure for aviation expansion?
 - **Local infrastructure** – Are there specific points to press in the devolution debate to support the ability for South East authorities to fund local projects? How could SEEC help make the case for resources to deliver local needs?
 - **Economy & skills** – How best can SEEC support economic local ambitions?
 - **Housing** – Would it be useful to analyse the impact of unimplemented planning permissions in the South East? Is there work that would be useful to help overcome barriers to housing delivery? What could SEEC do to help councils encourage developers to build? Would further work on the planning system and duty to co-operate be useful?
 - **London** – Establishing political dialogue with the GLA, Mayor and London Councils to influence London’s next statutory plan. Are there areas where London and the South East could work together to press for major infrastructure investments? How do members want to engage in the debate about London’s future housing need and the potential that the next London Plan may need to look outside London boundaries to fulfil housing need?
- 3.4 **Health and care funding** – support the case for adequate funding to deliver services for the South East’s large, ageing population. Potential areas of work could include:
- **Care Act** – How can SEEC best help make the case for increased funding to cover the cost of the care cap in the South East and providing publicly-funded support for the UK’s highest elderly population?
 - **Public health** – What support can SEEC provide in arguing for a review of the public health formula to ensure funding reflects the scale of the South East population?
 - **Integration** – What could SEEC do to help authorities access funding to deliver integration? Is there a role for SEEC in sharing good practice on how all tiers can work together to deliver cost effective health and care services?
- 3.5 **South East evidence base** – data and trends on key issues in the South East to underpin all SEEC work, particularly submissions to Government. This is an ongoing area of work, recommended to continue in the coming year, for example through:
- **Data dashboard** – Reviewing & improving bi-annual reporting of South East trends.
 - **Key issues** – Which topics should be covered? Current areas are Economy; Housing & Infrastructure; Public finance; Demography; Migration; and Environment.
 - **Influencing potential** – Are there new options for using the evidence base to influence Government policy?
- 3.6 SEEC currently allocates modest resources to the following areas, which members may also want to review for the coming year.
- **Communications** – there is currently no dedicated communications resource in SEEC. Should this be a higher priority and allocated greater resources?
 - **Europe** – SEEC maintains a watching brief on EU matters, particularly availability of EU funding for the South East. Do members have specific EU priorities to put forward for 2015-16?
 - **Migration** – SEEC hosts the Home Office funded South East Strategic Partnership for Migration. This ensures regular updates for members on migration data and legal/policy changes affecting councils, such as the Modern Slavery Act. Are there particular topics members want to see covered?
- 3.7 The ideas set out above are for discussion and consideration. Member suggestions, amendments or alternatives are welcome to ensure SEEC delivers a work programme that supports member needs.