

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS  
ALL MEMBER MEETING**



Date: 29 January 2016

Subject: **SEEC activity report and updates**

Report of: SEEC Secretariat – Heather Bolton, Nick Woolfenden, Emma Sutton

**Recommendations:**

Members are asked to:

- i) Note the updates on SEEC work and provide comments on live projects.
- ii) Consider any follow up actions required for recently completed work.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This paper highlights recent SEEC work to represent members' interests. Current work includes making the case for infrastructure investment; input to CLG housing & planning consultations; Syrian refugees; and relationships with London.

**a) Latest SEEC data dashboard: updated format & content**

a.1 The dashboard provides evidence on key South East opportunities and challenges to raise with Government in influencing funding and policy decisions. It sets out:

- **The scale of issues facing the South East** e.g. The South East has England's largest number of older people (790,000 over-75s, projected to nearly double to 1.5m by 2037), raising major implications for councils' care service funding.
- **South East potential for economic growth** e.g. The South East made the largest net contribution to the Treasury (2002-2012: £80bn) but infrastructure is under pressure; with local retention of property taxes and funding freedoms councils would be able to invest more in economic growth and supporting infrastructure.

The dashboard has recently been reviewed to make it as user-friendly as possible for SEEC members and MPs/Ministers. We welcome member comments on the summary Dashboard (see Annex) prior to finalising it for circulation. Please send comments to [Nickwoolfenden@secouncils.gov.uk](mailto:Nickwoolfenden@secouncils.gov.uk) by 10 February.

**b) Missing Links: the case for strategic transport investment in the South East**

b.1 Launched this week, *Missing Links* sets out the South East's top five strategic, cross-boundary transport investment needs and asks Ministers to commit funding to take the projects forward. The report will also be sent to the new National Infrastructure Commission, chaired by Lord Adonis, and to South East MPs.

b.2 *Missing Links* is a joint report from SEEC, SESL and the South East Directors of Environment, Economy, Transport & Planning (SEEDEPT). It builds on the earlier 2014 joint *Mind the Gap* transport report and responds to a request from DfT Ministers to prioritise South East transport investment needs. The five projects, endorsed in principle at the SEEC AGM in July, will support both South East and national economic growth. They offer improved north-south and east-west routes linking major business centres, international gateway ports and airports, and opening up development sites for housing or employment. They are:

- A34/M3 and rail links to Southampton-Portsmouth
- A2/M2 – links to the Channel Tunnel & Dover
- A27/M27/A259 – from Dover to Southampton-Portsmouth
- A34/M40 link via Oxford to Cambridge
- North Downs Rail – from Oxford, Reading & Gatwick Airport to Ashford in Kent.

**c) Housing & infrastructure: update on South East work with London**

c.1 Over 100 leaders attended a Wider South East Summit in December to agree priorities for political engagement with London. Annual Summits and more frequent small political steering group meetings will give SEEC members opportunities to:

- Influence development of the new London Plan 2016, including the new Mayor's growth/housing plans and any implications for the South East.
  - Work with the Mayor to improve infrastructure & housing delivery e.g. tackling barriers to turning planning permissions into development. As a result of the Summit London Councils has expressed interest in joint lobbying to speed up delivery of Crossrail 2.
- c.2 South East political steering group members, nominated by SEEC Executive and agreed at the Summit, are: Nicolas Heslop (Tonbridge & Malling BC), David Burbage (Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead), Peter Martin (Surrey CC), Carole Paternoster (Aylesbury Vale DC), Tony Page (Reading BC).
- d) SEEC input to current consultations**
- d.1 SEEC is drafting a response to CLG consultation on **national planning policy** (deadline 22 February), which includes Government proposals to:
- Broaden definitions of affordable housing to support delivery of starter homes to buy.
  - Increase development density around commuter hubs.
  - Make it easier to develop brownfield land within the Green Belt.
  - Introduce a 'housing delivery test' comparing delivery against councils' Local Plans.
- d.2 The response will highlight members' ongoing concerns, including:
- The importance of a mix of affordable homes to rent and buy.
  - Ensuring funding for infrastructure if starter homes are exempted from contributing.
  - A call for discretionary incentives/ tools to help local authorities ensure that locally approved permissions turn into development.
  - Emphasising the importance of local accountability and decision making in planning.
- d.3 SEEC is also planning a response to CLG **New Homes Bonus** consultation (deadline 10 March). Proposals include recycling NHB funding for services such as social care. To highlight issues for consideration in either national planning policy or NHB responses, please contact Emma Sutton on [admin@secouncils.gov.uk](mailto:admin@secouncils.gov.uk).
- e) SEEC letter to CLG Minister Baroness Williams**
- e.1 SEEC [wrote](#) to the Minister following 26 November's Executive Committee debate, reinforcing member concerns raised with her:
- Delivering infrastructure to support sustainable growth, and the importance of Government support for innovative council-led approaches.
  - Managing development viability effectively, ensuring councils are able to determine validity of developers' viability claims.
  - Need for affordable homes to buy and rent to support economic needs.
  - Funding effective local services, including allowing councils to set planning fees locally and clarification that criteria for forced sale of high-value public assets will not mean councils have to sell assets that generate income.
- f) Update on Syrian refugees and South East Ministerial workshop**
- f.1 Syrian refugee Minister Richard Harrington attended a [workshop on 21 December](#) for South East council Leaders and officers interested in the refugee resettlement programme. Over 100 delegates attended the event chaired by Cllr Paul Watkins, Leader of Dover DC. It was jointly organised and hosted by SEEC, the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and the LGA.
- f.2 Mr Harrington welcomed support from 8 South East councils who together received 71 refugees in December 2015. He urged more councils to commit places for refugees and to help them into work. He acknowledged high housing costs in the South East and encouraged councils to be innovative with non-ring-fenced resettlement funding to help cover rental costs. He is keen to gather more information on future refugees' skills to help match them to areas with suitable employment. So far, 25 South East councils have provisionally pledged to take refugees. Responding to a Home Office request for a single South East point of contact, SESPM is drafting a proposal to help co-ordinate pledges and match refugees to suitable areas.