

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
EXECUTIVE MEETING**



Date: 1 December 2016

Subject: **SEEC activity report and updates**

Report of: Heather Bolton, Nick Woolfenden, Emma Sutton, Ian Mackie & South East Strategic Migration Partnership Manager Roy Millard

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.

1. Introduction

1.1 Current and recent work to represent SEEC member interests addresses barriers to housing delivery, transport, homelessness, schools, work with the GLA and migration.

a) Housing barriers:

- a.1 SEEC is preparing a report to Government on tackling South East barriers to housing delivery. Many councils are concerned that approved housing permissions are often slow to be built, which can undermine progress on local growth plans. There are also challenges to securing sufficient affordable homes and necessary infrastructure. SEEC's report will highlight actions that could help address these issues. The report is planned for launch in early 2017, in time for the 27 January SEEC-LGA housing workshop.
- a.2 The report will include short South East examples of the issues that need tackling. We already have some helpful information from members, but welcome further suggestions.

b) Meeting with Louise Ellman MP, Chair of Transport Select Committee

- b.1 A group of five SEEC members met Louise Ellman MP on 1 November in her role as Chair of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee. Members highlighted the [Missing Links](#) infrastructure gaps and the risk to UK economic success of not investing, given the South East's role as a national gateway to major ports and airports.
- b.2 Members suggested the select committee should launch an inquiry into the Economic Value of Transport Gateways. A priority should be to review road and rail improvements needed to deliver better access to Heathrow – both now and with a proposed third runway. Members will submit a formal proposal to the committee after Autumn Statement.

c) Wider South East/London Political Steering Group on 12 October

- c.1 On 12 October SEEC representatives met Jules Pipe, London's new Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills. Discussions included:
 - How the Mayor plans to bridge London's gap between housing demand and supply. The Mayor is looking at higher densities but remains committed to protecting London's Green Belt. This will be discussed further at the Wider South East Summit on 9 December.
 - Progress following the joint letter to Government on tackling barriers to housing delivery, with a ministerial meeting now scheduled for January 2017.
 - Agreeing mutually-beneficial strategic transport investments. These will form the basis of an initial programme of action to make the case for investment to Government - including some of those identified in SEEC's [Missing Links](#) report.

d) Homelessness and out of area placements

- d.1 Council Leaders in Kent have raised concerns about London boroughs placing homeless families in the county. The placements are increasing demand and costs for district and county services and distorting local housing markets. SEEC has offered to help reinforce these concerns. Member input is requested on the extent to which similar placements are also affecting their areas and what SEEC can do to support Kent authorities.
- d.2 Key points raised by Kent authorities include:
 - The need to reduce London borough placements of homeless people in Kent. This could include stricter criteria for placements or payment of a premium to cover local costs.

- Potential for the Homelessness Reduction Bill to include measures making large-scale relocation of homeless people unattractive.
- Concerns about welfare for relocated people and increasing long terms costs for Kent authorities in providing services for vulnerable people moved away from their roots.
- Large-scale purchase of property is reducing the housing stock and pushing up rents. It is reducing temporary and move-on accommodation for local people, and there is concern about loss of commercial capacity as offices are converted to flats at risk of being sold/let to London Boroughs.

e) SEEC response to Schools that work for everyone

e.1 Following a request from September's Executive, SEEC officers are drafting a response to the schools green paper. Deadline for responses is 12 December. Member input is invited. Emerging points include:

- There is a need for more high quality school places in the South East to meet growing pupil numbers. South East leaders have mixed views on grammar schools & selection.
- All pupils need access to high quality school places, so any expansion of grammars must not be at the expense of high quality places in alternative educational settings.
- The green paper needs to be stronger on alternatives to grammars, e.g. University Technical Colleges and raising standards in non selective schools. Cross fertilisation between schools, universities & businesses is welcome.
- There should be options at different ages to switch between selective or non selective education or between academic and technical schools.
- Local authorities should have a funded strategic role in education, e.g. around the number and mix of pupil places in the right locations and holding free schools and academies to account.
- All tiers of council should have a role in ensuring that schools are delivering the skills that businesses need to succeed.

f) National Infrastructure Commission: SEEC proposal for NIC study

f.1 SEEC has called for a National Infrastructure Commission study to address the major transport needs of the South East for the economic benefit of the whole UK. Our [submission](#) argues that the South East's twin roles of national economic gateway and net funder of national public spending are both at risk from an infrastructure funding gap provisionally estimated at £15.4bn over the next 15 years. It emphasised:

- A balanced infrastructure investment portfolio is needed to support both regeneration projects and higher-return South East projects.
- South East international transport gateways - used by companies UK-wide - are increasingly congested, harming businesses, commuters, residents and the environment. Problems could be exacerbated if proposals for a third Heathrow runway proceed.

g) SEEC's Brexit input to LGA

g.1 Following discussion at September Executive, SEEC submitted [evidence](#) to the LGA's call for information on local authorities' Brexit priorities and concerns. This will help inform LGA national negotiations with Government. SEEC stressed that the South East offers the highest return on public investment and is the biggest net contributor to Treasury, so its continued success post-Brexit is vital for the whole UK. SEEC highlighted the need to:

- **Enhance South East economic growth as a way to support UK PLC.** Investment in South East infrastructure can deliver twofold benefits: high returns on investment to support further investments UK-wide; and improved national access to overseas markets via South East ports and airports. Minimal tariffs are also vital.
- **Maintain access to project funding but with greater focus on high return projects to maximise public profitability.** Replace EU funding with a UK scheme to continue support for community, economic, regeneration and research projects. A commitment to include a proportion of high-return projects – such as those in the South East – will produce funds for further public spending UK-wide.
- **Give councils the ability to take on former EU responsibilities.** Councils could deliver some functions – e.g. waste – to better standards and with less bureaucracy.
- **Ensure South East skills and labour shortages are not exacerbated.** Work is needed to up-/re-skill UK workers to fill the gaps in some sectors currently filled by EU workers.

h) Migration update

h.1 From the SEEC-hosted South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM):

- **Refugees:** Latest official figures show 2,682 Syrian refugees resettled in the UK by 30 June 2016, with 425 in the South East. There are over 3,000 offers of places from the South East towards the Government's 20,000 target. The Government is also asking councils to help place 3,000 vulnerable refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.
- **Children:** Funded by the Home Office, SESPM has seconded in a specialist social worker to provide expert support for South East authorities on placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Sarah Spain is on secondment from East Sussex CC. South East councils were among the first to accept transfers from overburdened councils, such as Kent. There are also now phased arrivals from French reception centres (following closure of the Calais Jungle); under the Dublin III regulations (reunited with families); and Dubs amendment (unaccompanied without family).
- **Controlling Migration Fund (CMF):** SESPM facilitated a number of DCLG officer visits to South East authorities to deepen understanding of how this new fund could be used. Launched in November, CMF will provide £25m a year for four years to English authorities where migration has had a significant impact. SESPM can offer support to any South East authorities considering applying.
- **Asylum Dispersal:** SESPM is leading a South East response to consultation on sourcing accommodation for asylum seekers. This will inform new Home Office contracts.

i) SEEC budget & subscriptions 2017-18

- i.1 SEEC's constitution sets out that member subscriptions and budget for the coming year should be discussed by the Executive at least three months before the financial year-end.
- i.2 **Subscriptions:** In June 2016 the AGM agreed to freeze SEEC subscriptions for 2017-18. Subscriptions have been frozen since 2011 at:
- £1,705 per district
 - Unitary councils pay £1,705 for each 50,000 population
 - County councils multiply £1,705 by the number of districts in their county.
- i.3 **An outline budget** below sets out spending of £293,300 for 2017-18, a 1% increase over 2016-17 in anticipation of rising staff costs. SEEC actively shares services, staff, meetings, research and events with South East Strategic Leaders and other partners to generate income that helps offset SEEC costs. This income in 2016-17 was £20,000 higher than budget and SEEC will continue to look for opportunities to increase income to offset cost rises and avoid increasing the draw on reserves. As previously agreed by members, the budget draws on reserves to maintain subscriptions at an affordable level. In 2017-18, as this year, the draw on reserves is estimated at around £94,000.

SEEC outline budget 2017-18

Forecast income

Subscriptions	168,800
Shared services	24,500
Event/ project contributions	3,000
Interest	2,950
Estimated income	£199,250

Estimated expenditure

Staffing (<i>inc NI & pension</i>)	233,350
Projects/ research/events	18,250
Regular meeting costs	14,000
Rent	7,877
Travel	2,500
Insurance	1,400
Professional fees	2,900
IT/website	8,800
Admin/office costs	4,200
Estimated expenditure	£293,277

Estimated draw on reserves: £94,027

SEEC estimated out-turn 2016-17

(*very early estimate: 17 November 2016*)

Income

Subscriptions	168,800
Shared services	35,000
Event/project contributions	8,500
Interest	3,000
Total	215,300 (+£20,500)

Expenditure

Staffing (<i>inc NI & pension</i>)	231,000
Projects/ research/ events	15,000
Regular meeting costs	12,000
Rent	7,877
Travel	2,500
Insurance	1,400
Professional fees	2,800
IT/website	13,000
Admin/office costs	4,500
Total	£290,077 (+£77)

Original budget 2016-17 £290,000

Original draw from reserves £95,200

Current expected draw on reserves: £74,777