

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 22 March 2016

Subject: **SEEC activity report and updates**

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

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 covers transport, infrastructure investment, devolution, housing and planning.

a) Update from the Wider South East/ London political steering group

a.1 This new group – established to ensure political dialogue on strategic housing and infrastructure – met for the first time on 10 March. The 15-strong group includes five councillors each from SEEC and East of England LGA, plus five London representatives drawn from the GLA, London Councils and London Enterprise Panel.

a.2 The group set parameters for future work through its terms of reference and agreed its next meeting will be July to meet the new London Mayor, who will be elected this May. Agreed priorities for July discussions are:

- Influencing development of the new Mayor's London Plan – particularly housing and infrastructure implications for the South East.
- A national influencing programme to press for strategic transport investment and joint work on actions to overcome barriers to housing delivery.

b) CLG Select Committee report on devolution: support for SEEC member views

b.1 SEEC member views shaped recommendations in February's [devolution report from the CLG Select Committee](#). The [SEEC evidence](#) is highlighted in several places in the report and recommendations to Ministers directly echo SEEC requests, for example:

- Government should set clear objectives for devolution & criteria to measure success.
- Devolution should become 'a right' and powers devolved in one area should be available to all.
- Devolution should include significant spending and tax raising powers.
- Different areas should be allowed to progress at different speeds, especially in two-tier areas with complex local relationships to navigate. Speed should not adversely affect Government's decision on devolution.
- A non-met devolution deal is needed to show Government is not biased towards cities.
- Elected mayors are most suited to urban areas. Non-met areas should be able to put forward alternative forms of governance.

c) SEEC input to CLG consultation on national planning policy/New Homes Bonus

c.1 [SEEC responded to CLG's national planning policy consultation](#), highlighting that while the South East already builds the most homes in England, further action is needed to ensure the effective delivery of councils' locally approved housing plans and infrastructure. SEEC's response highlighted:

- The importance of a mix of affordable homes to buy *and* rent, and ensuring councils can enable delivery of truly affordable homes (including sub-market rent).
- Ensuring funding for infrastructure, including affordable homes – a problem which will be exacerbated if starter homes and small sites are exempted from contributing.
- A call for discretionary incentives/ tools to help local authorities ensure that locally approved permissions turn into development.
- The importance of councils' accountability and decision making in planning.

- c.2 [Responding to CLG's New Homes Bonus technical consultation](#), SEEC emphasised the importance of maintaining the incentive for home building and the need to fund social care and other needs for the South East's growing and ageing population:
- NHB payments should be for as long as possible - ideally continuing for 6 years of delivery, but failing that, for no less than 4 years. This is important to sustain the original intention to incentivise housing growth and contribute to supporting the longer-term infrastructure, social care and other service needs of the growing population.
 - NHB should continue to be paid in full for all homes delivered, whether by appeal or not, and whatever the Local Plan stage. This is important to reflect NHB's purpose - direct, full recognition of housing delivery - and to keep NHB simple and transparent.
- d) SEEC evidence to LGA Housing Commission**
- d.1 Responding to the LGA commission, [SEEC called for](#) councils to have increased powers and options in three key areas:
- Supporting and investing in housebuilding – SEEC called for removal of the HRA Cap and 100% local retention of Right to Buy receipts, discretionary powers to incentivise timely build-out by developers, more infrastructure funding options & local control of skills budgets.
 - Place shaping – SEEC argued that councils are best placed to decide the most appropriate mix of affordable housing and infrastructure for their area and to set developer contributions accordingly.
 - Managing health and an ageing population – SEEC proposed council control of a single budget for health and social care and called for increased ability to borrow to invest in specialist accommodation for the elderly.
- e) Transport – SEEC perspective on suburban rail services and Crossrail 2**
- e.1 SEEC responded to proposals that Transport for London (TfL) could take over management of some suburban rail services in the South East, emphasising the need to ensure South East benefits from any changes, including:
- The need for South East political representation on the TfL board, ensuring regular dialogue with South East councils on rail proposals and changes affecting our area.
 - Input from South East councils on the boundaries for TfL influence over services. It is important to ensure equal benefits for passengers inside and outside London.
 - A review of Oyster card areas and expansion beyond zone 6 to enable South East passengers to benefit from lower ticket prices.
 - The importance of effective transport in maintaining the South East as an economic powerhouse.
- e.2 SEEC calls for investment in Crossrail 2 have been supported by Lord Adonis, Chair of the Treasury's National Infrastructure Commission. In a joint letter [to Lord Adonis](#) with East of England LGA and London Councils, council leaders pressed the case for:
- Government commitment to Crossrail 2 and adequate Parliamentary time to ensure construction commences in 2020. SEEC's calls have been reflected in the Chancellor's March Budget announcement of £80m development funding from Government.
 - Commitment from central government and TfL to continue working with SEEC members to ensure maximum benefits from Crossrail 2 for the South East as well as London.
 - Government commitment to contribute towards funding Crossrail 2 and to examine use of local stamp duty receipts or other financial freedoms to help councils also contribute.
- f) Member briefing on Budget 2016 and SEEC spring newsletter**
- f.1 SEEC produced a [member briefing on Budget day](#) to highlight key issues that will affect local authorities in the South East.
- f.2 SEEC's [Spring newsletter](#) is now available online. It highlights key discussions with Ministers and national speakers from recent SEEC meetings and summarises SEEC input to opinion formers such as the APPG for Reform, Decentralisation & Devolution and CLG's Local Plans Expert Group. It also covers SEEC's work to raise members' issues with Government, including the South East's 'Missing Links' transport report and writing to CLG Ministers Greg Clark and Baroness Williams.