

South East First



The Newsletter of South East England Councils

June 2017

SEEC 2017 Leadership

Nicolas Heslop, Conservative Leader of Tonbridge & Malling BC, was re-elected SEEC Chairman at the SEEC AGM on 23 June. Cllr Roy Perry, Conservative Leader of Hampshire CC, was re-elected as Deputy Chairman, and Cllr David Monk, Conservative Leader of Shepway DC, was re-elected as SEEC Secretary/Treasurer.

Cllr Heslop said: "I am delighted to be re-elected as Chairman of South East England Councils, it is a great honour and a role I take enormously seriously. Cllr Perry and I work very well together and with involvement from all-tiers of councils and parties across the South East, SEEC has been very effective in terms of what we have achieved over the past year and we look forward to another strong year to come."

Cllr Perry said: "It is crucial that Government and MPs are aware of the pressures that all councils face. For example, our growing and ageing population means the cost of providing many services is going to increase significantly and we need to find solutions. Those solutions are going to come from cross-tier, cross-party and cross-sector cooperation. If we continue to approach this together in a positive way and come to Government offering solutions then we have every reason to expect to be listened to when making the case for the South East."

Cllr Tony Page, Reading (Lab) and Cllr Keith House, Eastleigh BC (Lib Dem) are SEEC Vice Chairmen for the coming year and will serve on the SEEC Executive. A number of new members join the Executive this year, representing particular areas or in ex-officio roles. These include John Furey, Deputy Leader Surrey CC (Con), Eileen Lintel, Deputy Leader, Chichester DC (Con), James Mills, Leader, West Oxfordshire DC (Con), Tony Rooth, Guildford BC (Con), Linda Smith, Oxford City Council (Lab) and Jeanette Clifford, West Berkshire (Con). The Chairman, Deputy, Secretary, two vice chairmen and new representatives above will join the following returning members:

- Ralph Bagge, Leader South Bucks DC (Con)
- Paul Bettison, Leader Bracknell Forest Council (Con)
- Andrew Bowles, Leader Swale BC (Con)
- Paul Carter CBE, Leader Kent CC (Con)
- Moira Gibson, Leader Surrey Heath BC (Con)
- Dr Lynne Hack, Reigate and Banstead BC (Con)
- David Neighbour, Leader Hart DC (Lib-Dem)
- Stephen Parker, Hart DC (Con)
- Carole Paternoster, Aylesbury Vale DC (Con)
- Bob Standley, Leader Wealden DC (Con)

The Independent and Residents' Association groups have proposed that two seats representing smaller parties should be filled by Chris Townsend, Surrey CC (Ind) and Clive Woodbridge, Epsom & Ewell BC (Residents' Association). SEEC secretariat has been asked to contact UKIP and Green councillors to make them aware of this proposal before the Executive ratifies allocation of these two seats.

John Furey will also fill a vacant SEEC place on the Wider South East Political Steering Group. Jeanette Clifford will take up a vacant seat as one of SEEC's nominees to the South central Ambulance Service Foundation Trust.

Queen's Speech 2017

The 2017 Queen's Speech outlined 27 Bills for Parliament to consider in the next 2 years. While proposals such as the Space Industry Bill may help the South East economy, many in local government were disappointed by the absence of a firm way forward on council funding or social care. The lack of a Business Rates Bill will mean uncertainty for councils, especially those who have agreed 4-year funding deals based on the expectation of 100% business rate retention.

SEEC's [on the day briefing](#) covers all 27 Bills and the key non-legislative measures announced. This year's speech set out the new Government's legislative agenda for an extended Parliamentary session of 2 years – as the 2018 Queen's Speech has been cancelled to 'give MPs enough time to fully consider the laws required to make Britain ready for Brexit'. Key Bills announced include:

- A Repeal Bill, Immigration Bill, Trade Bill and Agriculture Bill will pave the way for Brexit ensuring stability as Britain leaves the EU and putting in place the framework for the UK to control its own trade, immigration and agricultural policy
- A Space Industry Bill will support this growing economic sector
- The Draft Tenants' Fees Bill will ban unfair tenant fees and aim to increase competition in the housing market Other aspects of the housing white paper will be taken forward without legislation to help increase the supply of homes, including affordable housing.
- A Draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill will improve protection for victims
- A Data Protection Bill will strengthen people's rights over personal data and update the rules on how data is managed – which could mean changes in the way local authorities handle residents' data
- A National Insurance Contributions Bill will introduce previously announced changes.

There were also a number of measures announced that do not need any primary legislation, which will have a direct impact on local authorities. These included:

- Consultation on the future of the social care system to ensure it is able to meet the challenges of the growing ageing population
- Increasing the National Living Wage to 60% of median earnings by 2020, with further increases to maintain this level
- Progressing Fairer Funding for schools and increased support for technical education
- Government will consider reform of mental health legislation and will ensure that mental health is prioritised in the NHS in England.

'Step change' needed in infrastructure investment

[SEEC's response](#) to DfT consultation on the draft Airports National Policy Statement (NPS) argues it is critical that any expansion in South East runway capacity is supported by significant national investment in better infrastructure.

SEEC emphasised the importance of looking more widely at transport investment needs beyond the immediate vicinity of an airport. A fully integrated, wider strategic transport network is needed to ensure that non-airport traffic has access to viable alternative routes to avoid adding to congestion around airports. This should include investment in better transport links to other South East global economic gateways, such as Dover, Portsmouth and Southampton. SEEC's 2016 ['Missing Links'](#) report set out a package of strategic road and rail proposals with national economic benefits that

would give better access to the South East's global gateways and relieve congestion on existing overcrowded roads.

SEEC stressed that timing of the final decision on an extra runway should not be used as an excuse to delay investment in public transport improvements to Heathrow that are ready and needed immediately. For example, investment in both Western and Southern rail access to Heathrow has been endorsed by the Airports Commission and should be categorised in the Airports NPS as essential immediate needs, rather than desirable future requirements.

SEEC's submission also called for the Airports NPS to include a much more comprehensive view of the non-transport infrastructure that will be needed to support local communities – for example funding for the schools, health, waste and other public services required by new residents moving into the South East to work at an expanded airport.

SEEC argued that Government should be much more ambitious in acting to mitigate the environmental impacts on communities living close to an expanded airport. Our response called for unambiguous performance targets for noise, air pollution and public transport access and for Government to clearly set out how these will be measured and the penalties for exceeding targets.

Migration update

Recently published Government figures show that as of 31 March 2017, 593 people had been resettled across 40 South East authorities under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS).

Nationally, the SVPRS had seen 7,055 arrivals – approximately 35% of the Government commitment to resettle 20,000 people by 2020. The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) continues to support local authorities here through its dedicated coordination role.

SESPM also organises a range of free practitioner workshops to share good practice on resettlement. Past events have covered topics such as refugee health and future workshops will look at English language provision and integration. For more details contact SESPM@secouncils.gov.uk

SESPM also continues to support South East local authorities in responding to vulnerable children's programmes. So far around 40% of children moved under the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children have been transferred to participating South East authorities. SESPM-organised practitioner workshops on children's programmes have covered topics such as health and age assessment.

News Roundup

Successful year for SEEC

SEEC's [2016-17 Annual Review](#) outlines an extensive programme of events and influencing initiatives delivered by SEEC over the past year. Among other highlights, the year saw 5 free events for SEEC members to influence Government Ministers and senior opinion formers and a programme of 25 South East-focussed policy proposals and consultation inputs. SEEC work helped influence Government policy in areas such as business rates, housing, infrastructure and local growth funding.

South East MPs prominent in new Cabinet

The return of Michael Gove to the Conservative front bench saw the number of South East MPs in the Cabinet rise to 11 including the Prime Minister. This equates to around 40% of the Cabinet. In terms of political control, the Conservatives are still dominant in the South East with 72 of the area's 84 seats. Labour gained 4 MPs taking their total to 8, Lib Dems gained 2 MPs (none in 2015) and the Greens retained their single seat. John Bercow retained his seat as an independent and was re-elected as Speaker of the House of Commons – by tradition a non-partisan role.

Commercialisation workshop to be held on 8 September

As funding pressures continue, many councils are looking beyond service efficiencies and actively seeking new revenue streams – for example reviewing charging policies, generating investment income or setting up profit-making companies. SEEC and SESL are holding a free joint workshop on Commercialisation aimed at leaders, portfolio holders and senior officers in member local authorities. The workshop will look at the strategy and options underpinning commercialisation and share good practice from councils with successful commercial ventures. Email admin@secouncils.gov.uk to register your interest.