

# SEEC HIGHLIGHTS

## 2017-18



### Influencing decision-makers

SEEC's work programme delivers effective influencing opportunities for member authorities in unitary, county and district councils across the South East.

SEEC brings together leaders and senior councillors to ensure South East views are heard by national policy and decision makers.

In 2017-18 SEEC gave members the chance to talk directly to senior influencers; the opportunity to put forward constructive written proposals in key policy areas; and to share good practice in service delivery.

Work this year covered a wide range of important issues affecting the South East. Examples included economic growth, health & social care, Brexit, infrastructure investment needs, housing & planning and the impact of London's growth.

During the year, SEEC delivered an extensive programme for members, including:

- **5 events, free for all SEEC members**, to influence senior opinion formers and share good practice. Topics included an [expert panel on housing & infrastructure](#), [Brexit](#), [commercialisation](#), [making the most of LEP relationships](#) and a [Summit with London's Mayor](#).
- **Influential speakers** at SEEC events included Mayor of London Sadiq Khan; LGA Chairman Lord Porter; Homes England Chairman Sir Edward Lister; senior civil servants leading on infrastructure and planning; KPMG's head of local government; Chairman of Berkeley Homes Tony Pidgely CBE; and Localis Chief Executive Liam Booth-Smith.
- **Meeting political leaders**. Several meetings gave small groups of SEEC members the chance to discuss priorities with leading politicians. Members met Housing Minister Dominic Raab, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and London's Deputy Mayor for Planning Jules Pipe.
- **Making the South East voice heard**. SEEC delivered 23 proposals and consultation inputs on key policies. These successfully helped influence Government actions in areas including infrastructure funding, unused planning permissions, planning

fees, HRA borrow for housebuilding and a review of social care funding. Media attention included coverage of SEEC member views on homelessness, skills and preparing South East borders for Brexit.

- **Regular updates**. In addition to monthly e-newsletters, SEEC delivered 6 member/MP briefings and 2 data dashboards to update members and MPs on South East issues and priorities. SEEC also published a good practice guide this year to help councils maximise the value of working with LEPs to deliver local economic growth.

### Housing & planning

Housing and planning continued to be important topics for SEEC this year. Ministers consulted on updated planning rules and SEEC members called for powers to help unlock over 60,000 unused planning permissions for homes in the South East.

In February 2018, a year on from the Housing White paper, SEEC convened an [Expert Panel on Housing and Infrastructure](#). This gave SEEC members the opportunity to talk directly to decision makers including LGA Chairman Lord Porter, Homes England Chairman Sir Edward Lister, National Infrastructure Commission Chief Executive Phil Graham, MHCLG Director of Planning Simon Gallagher and Chairman of Berkeley Homes Tony Pidgely CBE.

The event also shared good practice, showcasing examples of how South East authorities are planning for [infrastructure](#) needs and [delivering affordable homes](#).



*SEEC members met Housing Minister Dominic Raab MP in March 2018*

SEEC worked effectively to influence Government thinking on housing and planning. After a [letter to the Housing Minister](#), SEEC members met Dominic Raab in March 2018, [setting out proposals](#) on greater powers for councils to drive housing delivery, reviewing housing need methodology and funding essential infrastructure.

### About SEEC and the South East

SEEC's work focuses on making the case for strategic policy and funding priorities for the South East and its 9.1 million residents. Our [website](#) gives more detail on SEEC and its work.

The South East is the UK's economic powerhouse. Latest data shows that between 2000-16 the South East paid £154bn more in taxes than it received in public spending. This 'net profit' for the Treasury is the UK's highest, and funds public spending UK-wide.

The South East also has the UK's largest population, leading to growing demand for council services. For example, we have the UK's largest and fastest growing older population, with over 75s expected to rise 89% to 1.5m in the next 20 years. We also have 909,000 people in income deprivation. However, traditionally low levels of South East funding mean average council spending per resident, at just £628 in 2016-17, remains among the lowest in the country – £233 lower per person than in London.

SEEC's 2017-18 Chairman was Cllr Nicolas Heslop (Conservative, Tonbridge & Malling BC). Cllr Roy Perry (Conservative, Hampshire CC) was Deputy Chairman. SEEC's work is steered by a cross-party, cross-tier Executive of 19 senior councillors.



Building on the points discussed with Dominic Raab, major inputs were made on [draft NPPF](#) and [Developer Contribution](#) proposals (May 2018). SEEC also responded to [Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places](#) (November 2017). Addressing barriers to housing delivery was also one of three key areas covered in SEEC's [September 2017 input in advance of the Autumn Budget](#).

SEEC's active approach to putting forward constructive proposals successfully helped influence Ministers' thinking as a number of headline concerns have now been picked up by Government, including:

- A review of unused planning permissions by Sir Oliver Letwin is underway.
- £224.5m HIF funding allocated to the South East.
- Councils can now bid for increases in HRA borrowing to help fund housebuilding.
- Some councils in high cost areas have been seen increased Local Housing Allowance rates to help prevent tenants falling into homelessness.
- Planning fee increases to help fund better services.

SEEC now facilitates a [Housing Network](#), bringing together officers from South East local authority housing companies to network and share good practice.

The SEEC secretariat also draws on a South East Planners' Group to help inform consultation responses on planning and housing issues. The planners help identify practical implications of planning reform proposals and share current thinking and good practice.

## Infrastructure, the economy & preparing for Brexit

Alongside housing – infrastructure, the economy and Brexit were major issues for SEEC in 2017-18.

SEEC has consistently made the case for greater investment in the South East to prevent decline in our economic profitability. The SEEC area is critical to Government spending. It produced the UK's largest net 'profit' for Treasury in 2000-2016, paying £154bn more in taxes than was received in public spending.

New SEEC analysis suggests Ministers are responding to SEEC influencing, as the South East has seen greater percentage spending increases than other areas between 2010-2016. However, more still needs to be done to address past underfunding (see below).

**SEEC review of total public spending increases by area:**

Area	2010-11	2015-16	% increase	£ increase
South East	£86.13bn	£92.47bn	<b>7.36%</b>	£6.34bn
Northern powerhouse (i.e joint NW & NE)	£105.79bn	£109.8bn	3.79%	£4.01bn
West Midlands	£56.64bn	£60.29	6.44%	£3.65bn

SEEC members recognise a vital link between infrastructure investment and economic growth and this has been reflected in numerous pieces of work over the past year.

In September, in advance of the Budget, SEEC [highlighted how Ministers could help local authorities:](#)

- Speed up housing delivery – e.g via greater powers to incentivise quicker building by developers
- Support local infrastructure investment – e.g via greater retention of locally-raised taxes
- Secure sustainable funding for social care
- Reduce skills gaps and port congestion after Brexit – e.g via steps to ensure skilled workers can enter the South East and via updates to border systems.

SEEC reiterated these points in response to the National Infrastructure Commission's [National Infrastructure Assessment](#) in January 2018. This also highlighted the need for better broadband coverage.

South East infrastructure investment needs were also covered in responses to consultations on:

- [Major Roads Network](#) (March 2018). SEEC supported MRN principles but called for adequate funding for both improvements and road maintenance. We also made the case for a greater share of the MRN in the South East to support economic and housing growth.
- [Heathrow Airport's extra runway proposals](#) (March 2018) and [Airports National Policy Statement](#) (May 2017). Both submissions stressed the need for detailed proposals for better South East infrastructure to support a potential extra runway. These should include a step change in road and rail transport and clear environmental protection.

The potential of Local Industrial Strategies was explored at a SEEC workshop in December 2017. Members discussed how councils can work alongside LEPs to shape strategies that boost local economic growth. Following the workshop a [guide and checklist](#) suggested ways for councils to maximise the benefits of working with LEPs.

With Brexit now set for March 2019, SEEC members put forward views on how to ensure the continued success of the South East economy. A SEEC workshop in June 2017 looked at skills and border implications, leading to SEEC influencing activity in two key areas:

- A [letter to Brexit Secretary David Davis](#) in September 2017 calling for urgent action to confirm post-Brexit border arrangements. This will be critical to avoid major traffic, freight and passenger delays at South East ports of entry – such as Dover and the Channel Tunnel – once the UK leaves the EU.
- Input to the [Migration Advisory Committee](#) on skills. Currently the South East has high levels of EU workers employed in sectors such as public services (21%) and distribution/hotels (23%). Steps are needed to ensure that leaving the EU does not create skills gaps that damage the economy.

## Health & social care

Rising demand for social care continued to be a concern for South East local authorities. The South East has the UK's largest and fastest growing older population and this is placing increasing demands on care budgets. The South East already has 805,000 residents aged 75+ and this is due to increase to 1.5m over the next 20 years. SEEC members report that social care is now the largest single cost for county and unitary councils.

SEEC members welcomed the proposed green paper review of social care. In advance of the green paper, SEEC has worked to make the case for changes that would help South East authorities deliver effective, person-centred and cost effective services for residents.

SEEC's Executive in March gave members the opportunity to discuss the [role of all tiers of councils](#) in managing social care demands. The meeting also heard from a South East provider of older people's housing who highlighted how specialist accommodation could [delay care needs and free up family homes](#) to help tackle the national housing shortage.

Following the Executive meeting SEEC's leadership wrote to [Health & Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt](#) with proposals for the forthcoming social care green paper. SEEC proposed a Royal Commission or similar formal review should address:

- A long term, sustainable funding solution for social care. Funding should be raised nationally rather than through council tax.
- A review of boundaries between NHS and care, with greater investment in local authority-led preventative work to reduce NHS admissions and minimise expensive residential care placements.
- Social care needs for all ages, not just the elderly.

In March 2018, SEEC provided input to two social care reviews – the House of Commons [Select Committee Inquiry on Health and Social Care](#) and the [Independent IPPR/ Lord Darzi review](#). Both submissions reinforced SEEC calls for a sustainable funding solution. They also proposed a strategic review to assess whether it is fair that social care is means tested while NHS care is free.

Also relevant to social care was SEEC work with SESPM on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). [A letter to Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes](#) called for full cost recovery for South East councils who accept caring responsibilities for UASC (see also Migration section below).

## Working with London

SEEC leads the South East's working relationship with the London Mayor, London Councils and East of England LGA. This Wider South East (WSE) work had a high profile in the year as the Mayor published drafts of his Transport Strategy and new London Plan.

The draft London Plan was the key topic for discussion at a [WSE Summit](#) in January 2018, when London Mayor Sadiq Khan met over 100 local authority representatives. He outlined his vision for London and then took part in an open Q&A session alongside SEEC Chairman Cllr Nicolas Heslop and Cllr David Finch from East of England LGA.

SEEC members raised questions about London's ability to meet its own housing need and London's request for 'willing partners' on growth. SEEC reinforced member views in its [formal response to the London Plan consultation](#) in February 2018. Key points included:

- Welcoming the aim to meet all London's housing need in the capital for 10 years. SEEC also called for more detail on the next 10 years and how the Mayor will double housing delivery to meet his aim.



*Above: London Mayor Sadiq Khan took part in Q&A at January's Wider South East SE Summit, alongside SEEC Chairman Cllr Nicolas Heslop & Cllr David Finch from East of England. SEEC Director Heather Bolton chaired the session*

- A call for more information on the Mayor's interest in 'willing partners' outside London who might accept some of London's housing or jobs growth. If partners are needed, more detail is required on how this could work and the Mayor's offer to partners.
- Welcoming joint work on infrastructure funding. But more detail is needed on how the Mayor could help attract investment outside London. It must also be recognised that many South East funding priorities will simply meet existing demands and should not be seen as a way to increase commuting.
- A call for the Mayor to review his Green Belt to help meet London's housing needs – as this is already happening in many South East authorities.

SEEC's response also welcomed changes made to the draft Plan as a result of discussions at the WSE Political Steering Group. The group comprises 5 representatives each from SEEC, London and East of England LGA.

Two steering group meetings this year gave SEEC members the opportunity to influence drafting of the consultation version of the London Plan. London Deputy Mayor for Planning Jules Pipe represents the GLA on the steering group and SEEC [wrote to him in August 2017](#) about three areas the draft London Plan should clarify:

- Details of any expected gap between London's housing need and its capacity. (The Plan now aims to meet all London needs for 10 years).
- Whether 'willing partners' for growth outside London are needed and how this would work. (The Plan now specifies this is a long term contingency).
- The importance of ongoing collaboration between London and the South East.

In October 2017 SEEC [responded to the Mayor's draft Transport Strategy](#), highlighting the need for investment to offer mutual benefits to both London and South East.

WSE partners also worked together to raise the profile of shared concerns.

[Joint input in advance of the Autumn 2017 Budget](#) stressed the economic benefits of WSE transport investments. A [joint letter](#) led to a meeting with Transport Secretary Chris Grayling in October attended by SEEC Chairman Nicolas Heslop. The next step in joint working will be to co-ordinate WSE work on transport with emerging sub national transport bodies. The WSE also agreed to continue to work together on overcoming barriers to housing delivery.

## Migration

SEEC hosts the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and appoints SESPM's Chairman.

SESPM supports South East councils' work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrant children who arrive either unaccompanied or with their families. March 2018 saw the South East pass the milestone of 1,000 Syrian refugees resettled and SESPM continues to work with councils to reach the 3,000+ refugee places originally offered. SESPM also met all local authorities to discuss their capacity to receive asylum seekers.

SEEC this year appointed Cllr Roger Gough of Kent CC as the new Chairman of SESPM, following retirement of Cllr Paul Watkins (formerly Leader of Dover DC). After a call for nominations, SEEC's October Executive appointed Cllr Gough, who is Kent CC's Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education.

With migration high on the political agenda this year, SEEC and SESPM worked together to raise the profile of local authority opportunities and challenges.

Funding for South East local authorities who accept Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) continued to be a concern. SEEC and SESPM's Chairmen [wrote to Immigration Minister](#) Caroline Nokes in January 2018 calling for councils to be fully refunded for UASC costs. A funding review is due later in 2018.

SEEC and SESPM organised a [joint workshop](#) for councillors and senior officers in June 2017 to consider the South East impacts of Brexit. Following the workshop, SEEC and SESPM Chairmen [wrote to Brexit Minister David Davis](#) with proposals to ensure South East borders can continue to operate efficiently after Brexit. The letter set out ways to reduce the potential for delays and congestion at ports of entry and ways to smooth the flow of freight.

The two Chairmen joined forces again to provide [input on post Brexit skills to the national Migration Advisory Committee](#) in October 2017. They called for changes to the UK's Shortage Occupations List to avoid skills gaps in key South East economic sectors that currently rely on large numbers of EU workers.

SEEC and SESPM also [responded to consultation on Government's Integrated Communities Strategy](#) green paper. The response highlighted positive roles councils can play in integrating migrants into local communities – but stressed the need for funding to do this.

## Sharing good practice

As budget pressures on local authorities continued to grow, SEEC delivered a number of projects to help share good practice.

In September 2017 a free workshop for SEEC member authorities was dedicated to sharing good practice on local authority commercialisation. This gave the opportunity to learn from public and private sector experts. Keynote speakers included:

- Localis Chief Executive Liam Booth-Smith on the political acceptability of charging for local services.
- KPMG Head of Local Government Joanna Killian on [success factors and avoiding pitfalls](#).

- CIPFA C.Co Managing Director Richard Harrison on [legal and practical aspects of commercialisation](#).

Examples of live good practice included:

- Aylesbury Vale DC [on trading and service redesign](#).
- Eastleigh BC on [property investments](#).
- Surrey CC on [commercialising shared services](#).
- Worcester CC on care services.
- Sevenoaks DC on [bringing services back in house](#).

Sharing good practice was also a part of other SEEC policy-led activities during the year. These included:

- Examples of all-tier cooperation to reduce social care costs at SEEC Executive (March 2018).
- Workshop and checklist on maximising council-LEP relationships and Local Industrial Strategies to boost economic growth (December 2017).
- Examples of good practice in infrastructure planning and affordable housing delivery at SEEC's Expert Panel (February 2018).
- Good practice in resettling Syrian refugees as part of SEEC's Brexit & Migration event (June 2017).
- Housing Network for officers involved in local authority housing companies.
- A South East planners' group to discuss and share approaches to changing planning rules.

## Data, briefings & media

SEEC published 2 editions of its South East [data dashboard](#) in the year. The dashboard provides an essential evidence base for members and underpins all SEEC's policy influencing work. It shows how trends in the South East compare to other parts of England, covering: economy and employment; housing and infrastructure; public finance; demography; and migration.



*SEEC's twice yearly data dashboard shows key South East trends*

Members receive regular updates on SEEC activity via monthly [e-newsletters](#). There have also been 4 Wider South East Updates since May 2017.

SEEC sent 2 briefings to South East MPs this year, highlighting key opportunities and challenges. The first set out [South East infrastructure](#) needs and options for raising the investment required. The second covered [housing](#) and outlined ways to unlock new homes.

SEEC produced on-the-day briefings for members covering the [Autumn Budget](#) and [Chancellor's Spring Statement](#) and [Queen's Speech](#). Members also received SEEC's bespoke 1-page summary of the new [South East political balance following May's local elections](#).

National and local media reported on SEEC member views, including positive coverage in LGC, MJ, LGA magazine, transport & housing trade press and local newspapers & websites. Coverage included articles on SEEC views about homelessness, calls for greater South East infrastructure investment and the need to ensure South East borders are ready for Brexit.