

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 28 September 2018
 Subject: **SEEC business plan 2018-19**
 Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director

Recommendation:

Members are asked to consider the draft SEEC business plan below and agree priority topics for future meetings and project spending

i) Introduction

Following an initial discussion at SEEC's AGM and a request for member input, a draft SEEC business plan for 2018-19 is set out below for comment/ approval.

Member views are welcome on selection of topics to lead SEEC's All-Member and Executive meetings and preferred use of SEEC's £17,000 budget in 2018-19 for research/ ad hoc events.

The extent of joint working by SEEC and SESL remains to be determined, pending a response from SESL to SEEC's proposals sent in June 2018.

ii) Draft business plan

Meeting dates 2018-19

Executive: Fri 30 November 2018; Fri 29 March 2019; Fri 20 September 2019; Fri 13 December 2019.

All-Member meetings: Thurs 31 January 2019 and AGM on Thurs 27 June 2019.

Other events: Brexit South East roadshow Tues 18 December 2018. Wider South East Summit Fri 11 January 2019. There is also some scope to consider another ad hoc conference/ event to reflect member interests if required.

Meeting format

After positive feedback on All-Member meetings as themed workshops/ mini conferences, this will continue in 2018-19. Combining All-Member meetings with workshops allows interactive sessions on topical issues and makes good use of members' diaries and SEEC resources. It also opens up attendance to relevant cabinet members and senior officers in addition to Leaders. Short SEEC business sessions, such as AGM elections, will be scheduled on the same days as workshops.

Executive meetings will continue to focus on 1-2 key discussions relevant to topical policy issues. Dates for the Executive have been aligned with SESL meetings to share costs and aid diary management for members who are in both organisations.

Workstream 1: South East People, Places & Economy

A focus on the South East population and economy and the measures needed to maintain sustainable, successful places for residents and business alike. (In many cases there will be close links to workstream 2 on funding and infrastructure).

Potential new topics to address in 2018-19 include:

- 1.1 Sustaining South East economic success** – consider the distinctive factors that make the South East one of the UK's most profitable economies and what is needed to maintain a thriving economy.
- 1.2 Opportunities for local authorities post Brexit** – work with LGA to organise a South East roadshow to inform LGA work in arguing for local authorities to take on additional powers to shape local places and economies.
- 1.3 Future of the high street** – the local authority role in helping manage the changing face of high streets and addressing the challenges and opportunities this presents.
- 1.4 Managing impacts of the South East's ageing population** – responding to the challenges raised by the UK's largest and fastest growing older population. Key issues include a response to expected green paper proposals on funding social care, the changing dynamic of health and housing needs, as well as workforce and skills implications.

Continuing areas within this workstream will include:

1.5 Liaison with London and Wider South East

Continue work with London Mayor, London Councils & East of England to ensure the South East voice is heard in development of the new London Plan and in initiatives to highlight shared infrastructure needs by:

- a) Arranging and promoting an interactive summit to give South East councillors the opportunity to discuss the new London Plan directly with the Mayor and his team.
- b) Making SEEC representations to the London Plan Examination in Public in 2019, with a focus on avoiding overspill housing pressure in the South East.
- c) Delivering focused, relevant political steering group meetings that highlight South East member views and take forward joint work to influence Government policy and investment decisions, particularly on housing & infrastructure. Support the underpinning Officer Working Group.

1.6 Housing & planning

Monitor impacts on South East authorities of the new NPPF, housing needs methodology and Statements of Common Ground and address the challenges of securing housing delivery, including:

- a) Making the case for South East councils' need to ensure a sustainable balance between housing demand and protected land/ valued green space.
- b) Calling for more powers for councils to maximise delivery of homes to meet the housing delivery test and deliver homes for all needs – older people, key workers and social tenants as well as homebuyers.
- c) Monitoring and responding to expected recommendations from Sir Oliver Letwin's review of unused planning permissions.
- d) Considering pros and cons of modular construction as a method of improving delivery of new homes, including for key workers or homeless households.
- e) Working with South East officers to review the SEEC-facilitated housing company officer good practice network following the current chair's decision to step down.

Workstream 2: Local Government Finance & Infrastructure

Funding and infrastructure are essential pre-requisites for a successful South East where local authorities can create places in which local people and businesses thrive.

2.1 Infrastructure investment and needs

Aim to help South East local authorities secure greater investment in infrastructure by:

- a) Continuing to raise awareness among Ministers and MPs of the need for investment in key South East projects and potential solutions.
- b) Co-ordinating influencing work with external bodies – such as Wider South East partners and Sub-national Transport Bodies on emerging transport priorities – to maximise the strength of the South East voice.
- c) Exploring options for funding additional South East infrastructure investment – including the pros and cons of different approaches to land value capture.
- d) Monitoring the progress and impact of decisions on post-Brexit customs and border controls to review any economic impacts caused by increased congestion and delays at South East ports and airports.
- e) Making the case for South East infrastructure investment that will be needed in advance of work starting on any additional runway/ airport expansion.

2.2 Highlight South East returns on investment

Raise awareness of the impacts of under-investment in South East infrastructure by highlighting the importance of the South East contribution to UK economic success and the Treasury's ability to invest nationwide by:

- a) Reviewing new ONS data on South East returns on investment.
- b) Making the case to Ministers/ South East MPs for the national value of investing in South East economic growth, for example by considering input in advance of the Chancellor's Autumn Budget.

2.3 Sustainable local government finance

Make the case for greater devolution of funding to local level and reform of local authority finances to support more sustainable councils by:

- a) Emphasising the importance of removing negative RSG, due to affect large numbers of South East authorities in 2019-20.
- b) Highlighting South East implications of emerging proposals to change the allocation of local government funding.
- c) Assessing how council tax charges impact on household budgets in the high cost South East compared to the rest of the UK. Consider local accountability and choice in setting council tax and local fees and charges.
- d) Assessing the post-Brexit impact of the loss of EU grants to the South East and highlight the need for South East authorities to have access to adequate replacements.

Workstream 3: Cross Cutting Projects

3.1 Monitor emerging policy

Regular monitoring of policy announcements to ensure SEEC's voice is represented in relevant consultations and to provide members with South East-specific briefings on major events such as the Budget and Brexit.

3.2 Data dashboard

SEEC's data dashboard is produced-in house twice yearly as an evidence base for SEEC input to Ministers/ consultation responses. A 2-page summary is widely circulated but councillors and officers from SEEC member authorities also have access to more detailed data in a member-only web area.

3.3 Migration

SEEC continues to host the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM). This link enables updates for members on migration – for example via SEEC and SESPM collaboration on migration data to help assess impacts for South East authorities. Via the Home Office, SESPM is funded to support South East authorities' participation in refugee resettlement, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children placements and discussions to increase the number of areas accepting adult asylum seekers.

3.4 Communications

Communications activities include: Monthly member/ MP/ stakeholder newsletters, occasional Wider South East newsletters, MP briefings, news releases, by-lined articles, case studies and SEEC's website.

3.5 SEEC resources

Officers will present options for member discussion on subscriptions & SEEC resources for 2019-20.

3.6 Discussion on future joint working by SEEC-SESL

Continue debate on options for a potential merger of SEEC and SESL to create a new single organisation representing the views of all tiers of councils in the South East.