

SOUTH EAST FIRST



The Newsletter of South East England Councils

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News Roundup

£224m for South East infrastructure projects to support housing

Ministers Sajid Javid and Philip Hammond [announced £866 million investment](#) nationally from the Housing Infrastructure Fund this month. Just over a quarter of the total (26%) goes to South East local authorities, with £224.5m funding for 32 schemes in the South East. The funding is designed to support investment in infrastructure to make housing developments viable and get homes built quicker. London authorities receive £110m in this funding round. This means some 38% of the total has been allocated to the highest pressure housing areas of London and the South East. SEEC has welcomed the South East's allocation as a step towards making sure infrastructure is in place to support new homes.

2 March: Last chance to respond to London Plan consultation

GLA [Consultation on the new draft London Plan](#) runs until 2 March 2018. The draft covers housing and economic growth, transport and other infrastructure and addresses London's relationship with the South East. SEEC has produced a [high level 1-page summary](#) highlighting some of the key issues relevant to SEEC member councils. SEEC will submit a formal response to consultation and individual member councils are also encouraged to respond.

SEEC Dates

[23 Mar – SEEC Executive](#)

[28 Jun – SEEC All-Member and AGM](#)

[28 Sep – SEEC Executive](#)

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Expert panel informs SEEC housing and infrastructure workshop



SEEC's 1 February housing and infrastructure workshop gave members the opportunity to discuss South East opportunities and challenges with a high profile panel of public and private sector experts.

The workshop also considered what still needs to change one year on from Government's Housing White Paper.

Keynote speakers included Homes England Chairman Sir Edward Lister (pictured), LGA Chairman Lord Porter, National Infrastructure Commission Chief Executive Phil Graham, Berkeley Homes Group Chairman Tony Pidgley CBE and MHCLG Director of Planning Simon Gallagher.

Members also heard good practice case studies on delivering affordable housing – from Reading BC's Cllr John Ennis – and on scoping infrastructure needs – from Surrey CC's Cllr Colin Kemp.

Opening the workshop, SEEC Chairman Cllr Nicolas Heslop said that housing and infrastructure are vital to underpin sustainable communities and set out 5 member concerns to address during the day:

- How extra council powers could help tackle unimplemented planning permissions
- Ways to meet the growing infrastructure funding gap in the South East – estimated at £15.4bn by 2030
- Help for councils to build more homes themselves
- Concerns about Government's new housing need calculations
- The need for clarity on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) review.

Closing the workshop SEEC Deputy Chairman Cllr Roy Perry stressed the importance of all tiers of councils working together to deliver the homes and infrastructure that residents need. Transport investment is important but is not the only issue. There is a pressing need for all types of infrastructure and the Government should weigh the relatively modest investment needed against the large amounts that South East GVA contributes to the national economy. SEEC would work with member councils to engage with the Letwin Review.

A full account of the workshop is [available on the SEEC website](#).

SEEC members debate London Plan and partnerships with Mayor



At January's Wider South East (WSE) Summit, London Mayor Sadiq Khan outlined plans for delivering his draft London Plan – including more homes in the capital – and his desire to continue partnership working with SEEC to address shared challenges across London and the South East.

Over 100 councillors, officers and LEP representatives attended the Summit on 26 January. The Mayor thanked SEEC and East of England partners for their work on the WSE Political Steering Group and stressed the importance of continuing to build trust and explore how working together can help tackle shared growth challenges and influence Government.

A question time debate (pictured) with the Mayor, SEEC Chairman Cllr Nicolas Heslop and East of England LGA's Cllr David Finch gave members the chance to ask questions about how the London Plan could affect the South East. Responding to questions the Mayor stressed that he aims to deliver 65,000 homes a year for 10 years – a rise of 50% on current building rates and he wants half the new homes to be affordable. He pledged

continued joint working to attract infrastructure investment that offers mutual benefits for London and the South East. As a long term contingency, he also wants to see if there are 'willing partner' councils in South East or East of England who may want to help accommodate some London growth where local areas can see the benefit of additional homes or jobs.

SEEC members are pleased that the Mayor recognises South East concerns and now aims to accommodate the vast majority of London's housing need within the capital's boundaries. The Mayor said this challenge, along with making space for businesses and delivering infrastructure, could not be achieved by London working in isolation. Much of what London has achieved has been enabled by its connections with the Wider South East, whose communities, economies and housing markets are intrinsically linked.

On joint working priorities for 2018, the Summit agreed work to address the large numbers of unimplemented planning permissions and to press for infrastructure investment.

A fuller description of the event is available in [SEEC's Wider South East Update](#).

Housing pressures: SEEC proposals to new Minister

SEEC Chairman [Cllr Nicolas Heslop has written](#) to new Housing Minister Dominic Raab MP, calling for changes in three key areas that would enable councils to deliver more homes sustainably.

The letter outlined the significant challenges that South East local authorities face in overcoming barriers to housing delivery and the importance of balancing the demands of housing and economic growth with environmental protection.

Cllr Heslop has called for an opportunity for a small group of SEEC leaders to meet the Minister to discuss three concerns:

- **A sense check for proposed housing allocations**

Proposed housing need calculations set out for consultation in 'Right Homes in the Right Places' need review to address South East anomalies. These should be adjusted to take account of cases where some councils already have higher local needs figures and situations where other councils are constrained by large amounts of protected land such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, floodplains or Green Belt.

- **Unimplemented planning permissions**

Councils need new discretionary powers to charge developers who fail to use planning permissions, as data shows a backlog of over 60,000 unbuilt homes across the South East. New powers would allow councils to incentivise building of approved homes, which would reduce the pressure to release more greenfield sites for development.

- **Infrastructure for new homes**

Despite Government investment, South East infrastructure funding is not keeping pace with housing growth. SEEC research shows a South East infrastructure funding gap of £15.4bn by 2030. Giving councils access to a small portion of national taxes raised in their areas could help councils directly invest in local infrastructure.

UASC funding needs review to cover South East costs

[SEEC and the South East Migration Partnership have written](#) to new Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes

MP to highlight funding shortfalls for South East local authorities that accept Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

The letter sets out proposals to include in a current Home Office review of UASC funding. The letter welcomes additional funding for UASC in the local government settlement and via the Controlling Migration Fund, but expresses concerns that this will not bridge councils' deficits. This means some councils are reluctant to take their place in a rota system that would deliver an equitable spread of UASC allocations across the South East. SEEC and the Migration Partnership have called for redesign of the UASC system to mirror the successful voluntary – and better funded – system in place for councils who resettle Syrian refugees.

Funding shortfalls mean that councils may need to reduce other local services to be able to subsidise the costs of accepting UASC. Examples of shortfalls in the South East include:

- **Accommodation**

Many South East councils must pay more for accommodation than they receive in UASC funding due to local shortages of cost effective in-house foster carers.

- **Local authority capacity**

Some South East county and unitary councils have had limited exposure to supporting vulnerable young people, so there is a need for capacity building funding to help them recruit, train and retain social workers to support UASC.

- **Care leavers**

Low levels of funding for UASC who become care leavers at age 18 – and large numbers of young people who are exempt from care leaver funding – are barriers to councils accepting UASC, particularly in the high cost South East. As many UASC arrive aged 16-17, councils may only receive UASC funding for a short period, then lose funding once UASC become care leavers.

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