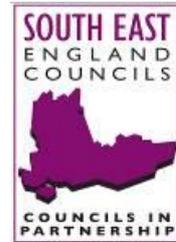


SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS ALL-MEMBER MEETING



Date: 31 January 2019

Subject: **Latest SEEC activity report and updates**

Report of: SEEC Secretariat – Heather Bolton, Nick Woolfenden and Emily Duddy

Recommendations:

- i) Provide comments on the draft Data Dashboard (section a & annex) by 11 February to nickwoolfenden@secouncils.gov.uk so it can be shared with members, Ministers & MPs
- ii) Note updates on SEEC's new and ongoing work to represent members' interests.

a) **Draft SEEC Data Dashboard: Spring 2019**

a.1 **For member comment**, the draft 2-side summary of SEEC's Spring 2019 Data Dashboard is attached (see Annex A). It provides evidence on key South East opportunities and challenges for members to raise with Government/ Ministers and local MPs, to help influence funding and policy decisions. It sets out:

- **The scale of issues facing the South East's public services.** The South East has the UK's largest population. The South East total is now 9.2m, with 847,000 over 75s and 258,000 over 85s. This raises major challenges for councils, not least in care funding.
- **South East potential for economic growth, but challenges to overcome.** The South East made the largest net contribution to Treasury (£154bn between 2000/01-2015/16) and 2nd highest economic output (GVA £263bn in 2017, more than all 8 core cities combined). It also saw the largest net growth in homes (39,263 in 2017/18, and over 110,000 in the last 3 years).

However the South East also faces an infrastructure funding gap (£15.4bn by 2030) and growing unemployment (80,585 claimants in October 2018, up 23% from October 2017). With greater local funding powers and freedoms, councils could invest more to support economic growth and housing delivery, and steer funding to meet skills gaps/needs now and post-Brexit.

- a.2 To give greater emphasis to the South East skills challenge, we propose including a chart on the number of South East residents with no skills – some 287,800 people, which is more than East, East Midlands, North East and South West. This would replace the previous chart on deprivation, for which official data has not been updated for several years.
- a.3 **We welcome comments on the draft dashboard – and inclusion of the skills chart – prior to finalising it for circulation to members, Ministers and MPs. Please send comments by 11 February to nickwoolfenden@secouncils.gov.uk.**

b) **Meeting with Skills Minister Rt Hon Anne Milton MP**

- b.1 Councils have an important role in helping colleges tailor their training to meet local labour shortages, Skills Minister Rt Hon Anne Milton MP has told SEEC. Meeting a small SEEC group on 22 January, the Minister said councillors shouldn't wait to be asked but should be proactive in approaching colleges and schools. Local authority work to identify local skills gaps can be crucial to help colleges understand the opportunity for take up of new courses.
- b.2 The Minister is also a strong advocate of local authority involvement in new Skills Advisory Panels that LEPs are being asked to establish. SEEC will aim to collate existing good practice on skills from member councils to help encourage more authorities to become involved in skills work.

c) **Wider South East work: Summit and London Plan Examination in Public**

- c.1 Earlier this month SEEC members attended a Summit with London Mayor Sadiq Khan and Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe to discuss key South East and London growth issues. Over 100 councillors and senior officers from the South East, London and East took part in the event on 11 January. SEEC Deputy Chairman Cllr Ralph Bagge took part in a panel debate with the Mayor, chaired by SEEC Director Heather Bolton. SEEC Executive Member and Transport for the South East Deputy Chairman Cllr Tony Page took part in a panel discussion with Jules Pipe.

- c.2 With the draft London Plan Examination in Public (EiP) starting this month, discussions focused on joint actions rather than the detail of the Mayor's policies, which instead will be debated at the EiP. In plenary discussion and round-table interactive sessions, members highlighted the importance of speaking with one voice to try to influence Government on key issues, including infrastructure funding and housing delivery. Other key themes included looking at how to make best use of collective resources. Members also discussed exploring engagement on strategic growth challenges and issues where there are mutual benefits for the South East and London – for example securing enhanced infrastructure funding, jobs or affordable homes, and how these relate to the Mayor's 'willing partners for growth' proposals. SEEC and other members on the Wider South East Political Steering Group will discuss actions and next steps at a meeting on 8 March.
- c.3 The Summit came just 4 days before the start of the London Plan EiP. SEEC, jointly with SESL, is making representations at 9 EiP sessions, represented at most by SEEC's Deputy Chairman Cllr Ralph Bagge. SEEC will reiterate to the inspectors member concerns about possible implications for the South East, and that clarification is needed on key issues such as the Mayor's 'willing partners for growth' policy. Early EiP sessions cover London's housing growth and implications for the Wider South East. This is of particular concern given existing high levels of South East housing growth, protected land and other constraints such as our infrastructure deficit, which all reduce capacity to accept any further growth from London. Later sessions cover economy, Green Belt and transport. SEEC's Deputy Chairman will give a verbal update on the first sessions at today's meeting.
- d) SEEC input to Government, including consultation responses on Permitted Development Rights and NPPG**
- d.1 This month SEEC responded to [MHCLG consultation on planning reform including permitted development rights \(PDR\)](#). SEEC challenged Government's proposals to extend PDR and reduce councils' control over development, highlighting members' concerns that this would risk:
- Undermining councils' ability to ensure a suitable mix of uses that will help ensure vibrant South East town centres. Lack of council input could lead to use of unsustainable locations for housing.
 - Inappropriate home extensions that encroach on neighbours' quality of life and lead to increased complaints.
 - Worsening the South East's existing infrastructure deficit through lack of financial contributions from PDR sites.
- SEEC members believe that local councils are best placed to make decisions through their current planning processes.
- d.2 SEEC also responded to [MHCLG consultation focusing on local housing need assessment methodology](#) in December 2018. The response expressed members' concerns that Government's standardised methodology is too blunt an instrument to reflect local circumstances. It also creates unexpected results, for example increases for many parts of the South East with high growth levels but limited further capacity, and reductions in other areas that could undermine local growth plans. SEEC recommended action to ensure the methodology outputs are deliverable and support local sustainable growth plans, including:
- Reviewing the affordability criteria
 - Ensuring that any reduced needs figures do not take precedence over locally-led higher growth plans
 - Using PPG to provide clear information for councils on factors to include when their local evidence base supports lower housing figures.
- e) SEEC November and December newsletters**
- e.1 SEEC's [November](#) and [December](#) newsletters updated members on recent work, including discussions at November's Executive meeting on potential to capture land value to help fund infrastructure. An additional [Wider South East newsletter](#) reported on work with the London Mayor's office in the lead up to this month's Summit and the London Plan Examination in Public.