

SOUTH EAST FIRST



The Newsletter of South East England Councils

June/July 2019

The South East economy - don't bite the hand that feeds

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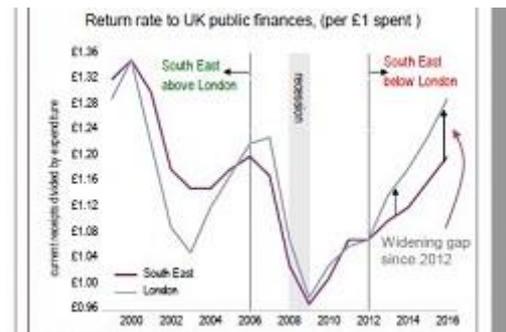
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Powerful new data on the South East economy

A study commissioned by South East England Councils from the Economic Business Intelligence Service includes some powerful messages about the importance of the South East economy but concerns that it is stagnating through under-investment.

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A more unified approach?

'What if the South East had a more unified and compelling vision?' is the question posed by Phil Swann from public policy consultants Shared Intelligence in their response to the new economic data.

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Deputy Chair speaks at the LSE

South East England Councils' Deputy Chairman, Cllr Ralph Bagge, told a well-attended event at the London School of Economics (LSE) about the Wider South East political partnership's work with the Mayor of London on key issues of common interest.

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News Roundup

Stay informed...and spread the word

South East England Councils is an open and transparent body led by its membership to champion the economy and quality of life in the South East. We want more people to know about our work. As a start we are aiming for a substantial increase in the number of subscribers to our newsletter. Over the coming months we will also be looking at new ways both to encourage wider engagement in our work and communicate even more effectively.

Please forward this newsletter to a fellow Councillor, a work colleague, a partner organisation or anyone with an interest in the South East. They can then subscribe to the service [here](#).

AGM elections

The South East England Councils AGM elected new political office holders. Roy Perry (Hampshire CC) and Ralph Bagge (South Bucks DC) continue as Chair and Deputy Chair respectively, whilst James Mills (West Oxfordshire DC) takes over as Secretary and Treasurer. Tony Page (Reading BC) and Keith House (Eastleigh BC) continue as Vice-Chairs.

South East England Councils' cross-party and cross-tier approach is integral to its ethos and structure. The new Executive will comprise 11 Conservatives, 3 Labour, 3 Liberal Democrats, 1 Independent plus an ex-officio member. An additional appointment will be made in the near future.

Full details of the new Executive are available [here](#).

More information

For more information about South East England Councils see our [website](#) or contact the Director, David Covill, email address below.

Dates

20 September - South East England Councils' Executive
13 December - South East England Councils' Executive

Contacts

[David Covill – Director](#)
[Nick Woolfenden – Policy Co-ordination](#)

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The South East economy - don't bite the hand that feeds

'Don't bite the hand that feeds' was the clear message to the Government from South East England Councils' AGM in June.

Recently released [research](#) commissioned by South East England Councils (see below for more details) shows that the huge contribution the South East makes to the national economy is being jeopardised by under-investment, with lower than average economic growth and productivity which has not increased for a decade.

For example, public investment in transport per head is far below the national average, even though the South East is the largest exporter of goods and a gateway to global markets.

Cllr Roy Perry, Chair of South East England Councils, supported the importance of investment that has gone

into other parts of the country including London, but argued that the South East needs at least the same level of investment to remain competitive. He warned that Governments make the mistake of being complacent about the South East and this harms international competitiveness at the very time when it is more important than ever that the South East thrives.

Rt.Hon. Damian Green MP for Ashford (and former Secretary of State and Minister at the Cabinet Office) laid down a challenge to demonstrate why better joint working across the South East would make a difference when many people wish to focus on what happens in their local town or Council area. Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive of CIPFA (and a former senior civil servant and local authority chief executive), advised that there may be many within Government who agree that investment in the South East has the greatest payback, but other parts of the country are nonetheless given priority.

South East England Councils' members called for the Government to give local authorities greater autonomy without trying to impose any new top-down structures. There was consensus that South East England Councils must use its democratic accountability to galvanise the private and public sectors to make the case for increased investment in the South East and for greater autonomy.

Powerful new data on the South East economy

A [study](#) commissioned by South East England Councils from the Economic Business Intelligence Service includes some powerful messages about the importance of the South East economy but concerns that it is stagnating through under-investment. The South East England Councils AGM used this analysis to debate the issues and think about what action should be taken to address them. The figures show:

- the South East is becoming relatively less productive and less competitive. This may have profound implications for the UK economy and other parts of the country as the South East makes a net contribution of £19.4bn, which may not be sustained
- economic growth in the South East has been below average during the current decade and productivity has not increased at all. Investment in Research & Development has also not kept pace with the national average
- the Gross Value Added of the area's economy would have been £8bn larger if it had increased at the same rate as the national average and £31bn if it increased at the same rate as London
- investment in critical infrastructure is crucial to securing the South East's and the UK's competitiveness and prosperity but Government investment per head of population here is the lowest in the country (alongside the East of England)
- an ageing population is a major challenge. The South East has the largest number of people aged 75+ and this is projected to rise by a 77% by 2041. The strain on public finances is not sustainable.

The summary report and more-detailed annexes are available [here](#).

A more unified approach?

'What if the South East had a more unified and compelling vision?' [is the question posed by Phil Swann from public policy consultants Shared Intelligence. Shared Intelligence was commissioned](#) by South East England Councils to reflect on the latest economic analysis (see above) and provide thoughts to help members consider what part the organisation might play in enabling the region to regain its economic momentum. The work highlighted three key questions for their debate:

- should local government in the South East use its increasing financial independence to make the case for greater autonomy from government?
- should the councils in the region work with the LEPs, sub national transport bodies, higher and further education institutions and other anchor institutions to create a stronger economic voice for the South East?

- should partners across the South East promote a programme of collaboration with government to mobilise the five foundations of productivity (ideas, people, business environment, infrastructure and place)?

Shared Intelligence concluded that South East would benefit from a stronger, more unified and more consistent voice on economic issues. South East England Councils' members will consider these and other aspects as they develop the business plan and priorities for the coming year.

Deputy Chair speaks at the LSE

South East England Councils' Deputy Chairman, Cllr Ralph Bagge, told a well-attended event at the London School of Economics (LSE) about the Wider South East political partnership's work with the Mayor of London on key issues of common interest.

As well as focusing on a few key issues to influence Government on policy changes to help everyone, political discussions have also focused on understanding and seeking to shape the implications of the Mayor's new London Plan, for mutually-beneficial outcomes. Cllr Bagge was invited to speak by the LSE's Professor Ian Gordon following his contributions to the London Plan Examination in Public earlier this year. (See earlier editions of the [newsletter](#) and the [submissions](#) for details).

Cllr Bagge outlined how the relationships between London and the [Wider South East](#) have significant impact, but the issues are not the same across the board, which underpinned his argument for localism and locally-led planning. He communicated members' shared priority issues in the Wider South East – including transport infrastructure, planning, house-building and the economy. He also highlighted how the [political partnership between South East England Councils](#) and the GLA/Mayor of London, London Councils and East of England LGA provides a forum for making positive progress on the challenges within limited resources available.

He stressed one of members' key messages - that both London and South East economies are important to national prosperity, pointing out that the South East is not simply a dormitory for London's workers, but is a strong economy sitting alongside that of London, which is why equitable investment is vital.

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