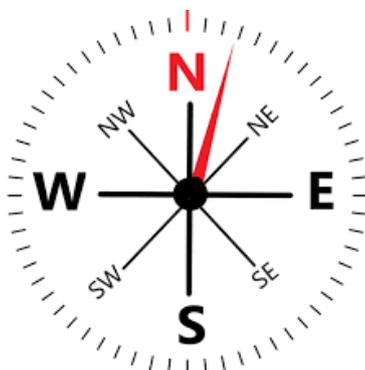


SOUTH EAST FIRST

The Newsletter of South East England Councils



January 2020



Will levelling-up damage the South East?

South East England Councils supports investment in every part of the UK, but the Government's focus is pointing away from the South East. We must challenge complacency, bust a few myths, make a powerful case for investment and for greater freedom for local councils, and highlight the damage that will be done to the UK economy if the South East is neglected. South East England Councils' all-member meeting considered how to make our messages heard in Westminster and in the national media.

South East England Councils' 2020-21 [Business Plan and Communications Strategy](#) includes Key Messages (see below) covering Funding, Housing & Planning, Economy & Infrastructure, and Environment & Places. We hope that Council Members, MPs and our partners will use these messages at every opportunity.



Securing sustainable growth

Housing, clean growth and wider development issues were key discussions at South East England Councils' January all-member meeting.

Leaders and senior councillors met with expert panellists from Homes England, think-tank Localis, Green Alliance, London Councils and the Greater London Authority.

Chair of Homes England Simon Dudley [explained](#) how the Government is committed to significantly increase the number of homes delivered in England. Homes England aims to help unlock sites and investment and improve/diversify the range of housing delivery options. The South East faces particular housing pressures and high levels of need but also constraints in many areas. Councils play a vital role setting out sustainable growth, housing and infrastructure plans for their areas. Simon encouraged councils to explore how Homes England could help them tackle barriers and improve delivery within their areas.

Localis Chief Executive Jonathan Werran and Green Alliance Head of Policy Roz Bulleid set out [highlights](#) of their recent work on supporting clean growth into the 2020s. With over 50 councils in the South East having declared a climate emergency, councillors are showing leadership in their local areas. Members agreed it will now be vital that Government helps them and partners work together to tackle the challenges and seize opportunities - including necessary funding, powers and freedoms - as a matter of urgency.

The South East's relationship with London was explored with London Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe CBE and Cllr Darren Rodwell from London Councils (pictured). The Mayor is shortly to submit the London Plan to the Government following independent examination. Members and speakers discussed the importance of securing the ongoing economic success of the South East and London, including the need for infrastructure investment. Members also highlighted whilst there are other vital shared issues, such as tackling housing delivery barriers, it was important to recognise the differences in the areas too. Ongoing dialogue would be important to progress those issues where there is mutual benefit.

Media:

MJ on-line 30 January 2020. "South-East authorities raise fears of grinding to a halt". Coverage of South East England Councils' all-member meeting

More information

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

Contacts

David Covill - Director - DavidCovill@secouncils.gov.uk

Nick Woolfenden - Head of Policy Co-ordination - NickWoolfenden@secouncils.gov.uk

Shaughna Bloomfield - Administration Officer - admin@secouncils.gov.uk

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South East England Councils

Key Messages January 2020



1 FUNDING

The South East receives the **lowest public expenditure in the country** with revenue funding **30% below the national average**. It makes a **net contribution of £20bn** to Central Government which funds investment in other parts of the UK. **It is a myth** that the South East is treated better than other areas.

The number of people aged **75+ is the highest in the country and set to double**.

Local areas in the South East are facing a **funding crisis** that risks damaging the very fabric of our communities.

In 2020/21

- Government needs to reintroduce multi-year funding settlements with fewer funding streams, less ‘ring-fencing’ and full recognition of **higher costs in the South East**.
- Government must consult on concrete policy proposals regarding the long-term provision and funding of **services to adults and children**
- **Funding and freedoms** should be devolved to individual councils and not just elected Mayors, regional bodies or centrally prescribed partnerships.

2 HOUSING & PLANNING

The South East has delivered more than **100,000 new homes** over the last three years – the highest in the country. Many more could be built if there was investment in infrastructure and councils had additional powers.

Planning permission has been granted to developers for another 100,000 homes which **remain unbuilt** which means councils are forced to instead identify even more sites.

House prices are **12 times average earnings** and **40% above the UK average** so delivery of affordable housing must be a priority for central as well as local government.

In 2020/21:

- Government must give councils more **powers to ensure planning consents are acted upon** – specifically to amend compulsory purchase orders legislation, allow charges for unimplemented permissions, and to insist that substantial progress on construction works has been undertaken for permission to be renewed.
- Increased funding for **affordable housing** should be available to all providers. Councils should be able to keep 100% of Right to Buy without restrictions and have flexibility about the level of reduction offered.
- Government must instigate an **immediate review of Permitted Development Rights** to improve standards, deliver affordable housing and protect jobs.

3 ECONOMY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The South East is a major generator of income for the UK and taxation for the Government but **underinvestment by the private and public sectors jeopardises international competitiveness and exports**, holds back those parts of the South East which perform less strongly, and fails to help people reach their potential.

The South East is the largest exporter of goods and a gateway to international markets but **public expenditure on transport is 15% below** the national average.

There are almost **900,000 people with low skills or no formal qualifications**. **Productivity has not increased** over the last decade.

In 2020/21

- Government should appoint a **Minister for the South East** to champion the region, improve understanding in Whitehall regarding the area's strengths and weaknesses, and to work with councils and partners so that all communities prosper.
- Government should support the region's sub-national transport bodies and commit to raise public **expenditure on transport** per head of population in the South East to **at least the national average** within five years.
- A **National Infrastructure Strategy** should be accompanied by legislation to ensure that infrastructure is in place before new housing development takes place.

4 ENVIRONMENT & PLACES

The South East environment is a **precious resource** which we want to protect and enhance for the benefit of future generations. This means balancing distinct factors and recognising the competing pressures which are faced.

More than **40% of the region is covered by Green Belt, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Sites of Special Scientific Interest** but the planning system does not take sufficient account of this which **creates huge pressure** on other areas.

In 2020/21

- Councils should have freedom to set higher than minimum building standards in order to achieve higher levels of **sustainability, including carbon neutral homes**. Government should further incentivise owners and occupiers of residential, business and other properties to retrofit premises to achieve higher environmental standards.
- Government should use its powers and resources to provide sufficient private and public sector funding for major infrastructure investment to **prevent and address the consequences of climate change** including flooding.
- Measures should be taken to encourage or require manufacturers to **reduce packaging and ensure clear labelling** to maximise recycling rates.
- Government should assess in the round the impact of national policies which have the greatest impact on **High Streets** rather than relying on a piecemeal series of one-off or temporary initiatives.