

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 30 September 2011

Subject: **Update on Localism Bill**

Report of: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination

### Recommendations:

- i) Members note progress of the Localism Bill through the House of Lords.
- ii) SEEC briefs Lords and MPs on the need to ensure all local authorities are given equal opportunities for devolved powers without unnecessary bureaucracy, not just cities as being promoted in a recent Lords' amendment.

## 1. Latest Progress

1.1 Following the summer recess, the Localism Bill is continuing its progress through the House of Lords. Currently at Report stage, further amendments are being tabled and debated by the Lords. The next sitting is on 10 October following the Party Conferences. Although there is nothing firm on dates, Royal Assent is still possible around the end of the calendar year as previously anticipated.

1.2 SEEC has provided members of the Lords and MPs with briefing on key issues following discussions at Executive committee in June, available on our website<sup>1</sup>. In summary the briefing emphasised that SEEC members:

- Strongly support the principle of localism and devolving responsibility and delivery of services.
- Believe that communities are best served when elected and accountable local government is entrusted with powers, freedoms and flexibilities to respond to their needs effectively and efficiently.
- Support Localism Bill proposals such as a general power of competence for local authorities, the ability to grant business rate discounts and the abolition of regional planning.
- Have concerns about three areas that could hinder effective and accountable localism, and where changes are needed in the Bill:
  - remove unnecessary local referendums
  - simplify neighbourhood planning
  - reduce bureaucracy and central control for local government.

1.3 It is too early to conclude whether SEEC's issues of concern, echoed by many others in local government, will be addressed. However members are encouraged to continue to press these important points to decision makers when opportunities arise.

## 2. Related Issues

2.1 Members may be interested in two specific amendments recently made in the Lords. The first would effectively give major cities greater opportunities for devolved powers from central government. Whilst devolution to local government is welcome, it is of concern that this may exclude opportunities for

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/4/view/19/localism-bill>

non-metropolitan areas. We recommend SEEC briefs Lords and MPs on the need to ensure all local authorities are given equal opportunities for devolved powers without unnecessary bureaucracy.

- 2.2 The second amendment, which seems to have been accepted by the Government, addresses local government's concerns that the Bill would allow EU fines to be passed from central to local government.
- 2.3 SEEC officers will continue to monitor progress of the Bill, identifying any further issues where SEEC should consider briefing decision makers.