

DRAFT SEEC business plan October 2017- October 2018

Meeting dates 2017-18

Executive: Fri 13 October 2017; Fri 1 December 2017; Fri 23 March 2018, Fri 28 September 2018.

All-Member meetings: Thurs 8 February 2018; Thurs 28 June 2018.

Other events: Wider South East Summit Fri 26 January 2018. Consider potential for occasional extra conferences/ events to reflect member interests.

Meeting format

After positive feedback on All-Member meetings as themed workshops/ mini conferences, this will continue in 2017-18. For example, SEEC will explore a potential event for the All-Member meeting in February 2018 to assess progress one year on from the Housing White Paper.

Combining All-Member meetings with workshops allows interactive sessions on topical issues and makes good use of members' diaries and SEEC resources. It also opens up attendance to relevant cabinet members and senior officers in addition to Leaders. Short SEEC business sessions, such as AGM elections, will be scheduled on the same days as workshops. Executive meetings will continue to focus on 1-2 key discussions relevant to topical policy issues.

Proposed business plan work areas

Suggested main theme 1: Infrastructure & housing needs

1.1 Liaison with London and Wider South East

Continue to build on established links to work with London Mayor, London Councils & East of England on shared infrastructure needs and to ensure the SE voice is heard in development of the new London Plan:

- Arrange and promote an interactive summit to give SE councillors the opportunity to discuss the new London Plan directly with the Mayor's team during consultation.
- Ensure SEEC submits formal written comments during consultation on the London Plan and relevant related strategies, such as the Mayor's Transport Strategy.
- Deliver focused, relevant political steering group meetings to discuss London Plan issues and agree joint actions to influence Government on policy and investment decisions affecting the WSE, particularly on housing & infrastructure. Support and develop the underpinning Officer Working Group.

1.2 Housing & planning

Make the case for the powers South East councils need to maximise delivery of homes. Monitor and respond to plans to implement measures from Housing White Paper with particular focus on:

- Impact of new housing need assessment figures for SE authorities and proposed changes to councils' planning operations, including fees, developer contributions & statements of common ground.
- Assess progress of proposals from the Housing White Paper, progress on affordable homes and lessons to learn from the Grenfell Tower fire.
- Powers needed to help councils overcome slow take up of approved but unimplemented planning permissions to encourage quicker delivery of homes. Consider update on SE unused permission data.
- Facilitate a SE housing companies' officer networking group to help share good practice on how local authorities can deliver affordable and market homes directly or through joint ventures.

1.3 Infrastructure investment

Aim to help SE local authorities secure greater investment in infrastructure:

- Raise awareness among Ministers/ MPs/ National Infrastructure Commission of the need for investment in key South East projects - eg transport and broadband - and potential solutions.
- Co-ordinate influencing work with external bodies – such as Wider South East partners and Transport for the South East – to maximise the strength of the South East voice.
- Make the case for infrastructure investment that will be needed following any Government decision on a new runway in the SE.

Suggested main theme 2: Industrial strategy and the South East economy

2.1 Implementing the industrial strategy in SE key sectors

Support members in developing a place-based narrative to underpin industrial strategy implementation.

- Facilitate debate on how leaders can drive growth, collaborate across borders and give Government the confidence to invest in an area.
- Consider a workshop to develop a guide on how best all tiers of council can engage with partners, such as LEPs, to take forward the Industrial Strategy.
- Consider research on scale and scope of SE high potential economic sectors and exports post Brexit.

2.2 South East economy and returns on investment

Raise awareness of the impacts of under-investment in SE infrastructure by highlighting the importance of the SE contribution to UK economic success and the Treasury's ability to invest nationwide:

- Utilise SEEC's new bespoke data on SE economic performance to demonstrate the negative impacts of underinvestment in SE infrastructure.
- Make the case to Ministers/ SE MPs for the national value of investing in SE economic growth, including input in advance of the Chancellor's autumn Budget.

2.3 Brexit impacts

Argue for investment and policy changes to ensure the SE economy does not falter as a result of Brexit:

- Outline how local authorities can help address potential skills gaps post Brexit – via greater control of skills funding and input into a new system of shortage occupation lists.
- Set out the importance of early decisions on customs and border controls to avoid negative economic impacts caused by increased congestion and delays at SE ports and airports.

Suggested main theme 3: South East funding, services and devolution

3.1 Funding, financial flexibility, devolution and service sustainability

Make the case for greater devolution of funding and powers and reform of SE local authority funding to support more sustainable councils:

- Support changes to allow councils more control over fees and locally generated taxes – such as stamp duty and charges for services – to help fund service and infrastructure demands. Potential to include comparisons with other public sector systems and/or commercialisation case studies.
- Influence and inform Ministers, MPs and LGA on priority SE issues as the new Government revisits business rate and funding reform. Key areas include fair needs assessments and retention of sufficient local income to incentivise economic growth.
- Argue for SE authorities to have greater devolved funding and powers in line with those already granted to English cities, Wales and Scotland.
- Monitor expected Government consultation on the future of social care to ensure proposals meet the needs of the South East, which is home to the UK's largest and fastest growing population aged 75+.
- Assess the need for SE-specific work to support LGA influencing on more devolution of powers and funding to local authorities post-Brexit to ensure exiting the EU does not lead to further centralisation. This could include the case for replacing EU grants with a UK-only funding stream.

Suggested main theme 4: Cross cutting projects

4.1 Monitor emerging policy

- Regular monitoring of policy announcements to ensure SEEC voice is represented in relevant consultations and to provide members with SE-specific briefings on major events such as the Budget.

4.2 Potential South East All Party Parliamentary Group

- Consider potential for an All Party Parliamentary Group for the South East. Explore the remit and possible MP membership of a potential group and whether a group should be jointly established with SESL.

4.3 Data dashboard

- Data dashboard. Produced-in house twice yearly as evidence base for SEEC input to Ministers/ consultation responses & similar work.

4.4 Migration

- Continue to host the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration
- Updates for members on migration – including South East participation in placement of refugees, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and Home Office discussions to widen the number of areas accepting adult asylum seekers.
- Potential for joint policy influencing by SEEC and SESPM, eg on funding councils for the costs of accepting refugees and UASC.

4.5 Communications

- Communications. Monthly member/ MP/ stakeholder newsletter, occasional Wider South East newsletter, news releases, by-lined articles, case studies, website.

4.6 Discussion on future joint working by SEEC-SESL

- Consider options for a potential merger of SEEC and SESL to create a new single organisation representing the views of all tiers of councils in the South East.