

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING



Date: 13 October 2017

Subject: **SEEC Executive membership; business plan 2017-18; and potential for a new single body to represent South East councillors**

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director

### Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i) Note representation by smaller political parties on SEEC Executive for 2017-18
- ii) Consider the draft SEEC business plan and agree priority topics for project spending
- iii) Discuss SEEC views and next steps following a motion at SESL's AGM recommending merger of SEEC and SESL to create a new single voice for South East councillors

### 1. SEEC Executive membership

- 1.1 SEEC's constitution restricts Executive seats to political parties which have at least 5% of councillors in the South East. In the May 2017 elections, four smaller political parties (Independents, Residents, UKIP and Greens) together claimed 9.4% of seats. If this was a single party, rounding of the political template would allocate two seats on SEEC Executive.
- 1.2 SEEC's AGM agreed to consult the four smaller parties on a proposal that an Independent/ Residents' Association coalition should fill two SEEC Executive seats on behalf of the combined smaller parties. The proposal was to continue as last year, with smaller party representation via Cllr Clive Woodbridge (Residents' Association, Epsom & Ewell) and Cllr Chris Townsend (Independent, Surrey CC).
- 1.3 Following the AGM, SEEC secretariat wrote to leading councillors in all four smaller parties setting out the proposal from the Independents/ Residents' Association, asking for any objections by 8 September. No objections were received, so Cllr Woodbridge and Cllr Townsend have been invited to join the SEEC Executive for 2017-18.

### 2. SEEC business plan 2017-18

- 2.1 Following an initial discussion at SEEC's AGM and a request for member input, a draft SEEC business plan for 2017-18 is attached for comment – see annex A for full draft.
- 2.2 Two All-Member meetings and three Executives are scheduled for the next 12 months. The All-Member meetings will be designed as interactive workshops on topical issues – for example a suggested workshop in February 2018 to review progress one year on from the Housing White Paper. SEEC will also, once again, be a partner with the London Mayor's office and East of England to organise a Wider South East summit – this year's event in January 2018 will take place during formal consultation on the London Plan.
- 2.3 Member views are invited on suggestions grouped into four main themes:
  - a) **Infrastructure and housing needs.**  
This includes ongoing work with the GLA/ Mayor to influence the London Plan through a political steering group; making the case for more powers for local authorities to deliver homes; and continuing to argue for greater infrastructure investment to support growth.
  - b) **Industrial strategy and the South East economy.**  
This includes a suggestion to develop a guide for councils to help engagement with the Industrial strategy and local LEPs, potentially backed up by research on key economic sectors across the South East.  
Other work proposed includes: continuing to use SEEC's bespoke economic data to raise awareness of investment needs and the risk of underfunding the South East; and working to influence decisions on Brexit to ensure it does not damage South East economic potential.
  - c) **South East funding, services and devolution.**  
This includes making the case for greater funding devolution for South East authorities, potentially including international comparisons. Work to influence business rate reform proposals and ensure adequate service funding, including for social care demands.

#### **d) Cross cutting projects**

This includes continuing work to respond to emerging policy proposals; regularly updating SEEC's data dashboard evidence base; hosting the South East migration partnership; and a regular communication programme for members and stakeholders.

2.4 Budget allocations have already been made for scheduled meetings. Views are requested on priorities for allocating and scheduling project funding priorities from circa £13,000 - £15,000 remaining for this financial year. As SEEC's financial year and business plan year have different periods, some of this year's business plan projects could be scheduled for payment from the 2018-19 budget. Options are:

- Industrial strategy: facilitated debate to inform a 'how to engage' guide for councils, potentially developed with LEP involvement
- Industrial strategy: commission external research on key business sectors in the South East to gain a cross-boundary picture of South East economic potential
- Funding: commission a review of local authority funding and charging in other countries to inform member thinking on proposals for greater funding devolution in the South East
- APPG: An inaugural meeting/ launch event for a possible South East All Party Parliamentary Group.
- Unimplemented planning permissions: commission an update of data on unused permissions in the South East if not available from existing sources.

2.5 The extent of joint working by SEEC and SESL remains to be determined and may depend on the outcome of discussions outlined in section 3 below.

### **3. Potential for a new, single body to represent South East councillors**

3.1 On 30 June councillors at the SESL AGM voted to support the following motion from Surrey CC Leader Cllr David Hodge:

*"I'm aware of the survey of SESL and want to propose that we consider a joint future with SEEC as a single organisation. This would save money, reduce meetings and strengthen a single voice for the South East."*

3.2 In response, SESL's Chairman Cllr Martin Tett has set up a SESL working group to consider the future, which is due to meet for the first time on 13 October. SEEC Executive members have been sent copies of correspondence to SEEC's Chairman and Deputy Chairman, where Cllr Hodge suggests a joint working group, drawn from both SEEC and SESL.

3.3 Executive members are asked to consider their views on a potential merger and any steps that SEEC should take to become involved in a debate on this.