



Correspondence address:

South East England Councils
Room 215 County Hall
Penrhyn Road
Kingston
KT1 2DN

t: 020 8541 7553

e: heatherbolton@secouncils.gov.uk

David Davis MP
Secretary of State for Exiting the EU
9 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AS

19 September 2017

UPGRADING BORDER CONTROLS IN ADVANCE OF BREXIT

Dear Secretary of State

As UK negotiators work towards achieving the UK's exit from the EU, local authorities across the South East want to urge you to prioritise upgrading of border controls for passengers and freight in advance of Brexit.

Our local authorities are home to many port and airport entry routes into the UK and will be hardest hit by queues, congestion and additional inspection costs if effective, fully-tested border systems are not in place before we leave the EU in 2019. We outline some of the key challenges below and would be keen to meet you to explore how best to avoid delays that will add burdens to local authorities and damage the UK's reputation as a place to visit or do business.

South East England Councils (SEEC) and South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) regularly work together on issues that affect local authorities in our area. SEEC is a voluntary membership body bringing together cross-tier local authority leaders representing the wide-ranging interests of our 9.1 million residents and SESPM focuses on helping councils to control and manage migration. Together, we recently organised a workshop on Brexit, migration and skills where delegates from across the South East highlighted the concerns we set out below.

Port of Dover & Channel Tunnel

Dover and Shepway councils have particular concerns about the future of borders as they are the UK gateways for the Channel Tunnel and Port of Dover, which is the closest port to the European mainland. However, many of their concerns are also shared by other councils who have ports or airports within their boundaries.

Dover and Shepway are keen to see border controls staying in France for vehicles and passengers inbound to the UK. The controls are currently at Coquelles for the Channel Tunnel and at Calais Port for the Port of Dover. The alternative – repatriating the incoming borders to the UK in less than two years' time – would require significant investment in the land and infrastructure required to carry out checks on UK soil. Moving controls to the UK also has potential to increase the number of illegal migrants and asylum seekers arriving if the checks in France are removed or scaled back. This would increase the pressure on local authorities nationally – and the Home Office itself – by raising the demand for asylum dispersal places.

Freight

Border and customs controls for freight from 2019 onwards are a major concern for ports in all parts of the South East.

Managing port health burdens: If not carefully managed, changes in free trade agreements with the EU could impose significant new burdens on local authorities. For example there would be a

substantial increase in port health responsibilities if the inspection of foods from the EU is required post-Brexit. This would increase the need for staff and processing areas and would slow the transit of freight. With over 70% of the UK's annual agri-food imports coming from the EU, increased inspections would be a significant burden on councils and would delay getting products to consumers across the UK and risk damaging the health of the retail, hospitality and farming sectors.

As a matter of urgency, we want the Government to pursue agreement on the future inspections required for food imported from the EU and how any additional burdens on councils will be funded.

Managing incoming freight traffic: We also want the Government to explore options for a freight checking and monitoring system that could be in place by 2019 to allow known and trusted freight companies to pre-register and then enter the UK without additional processing. This will reduce delays for trusted companies and ensure quick, efficient movement of validated freight across borders. This is critical to UK companies' supply chains and to maintaining a productive economy.

Thousands of freight companies cross into the UK from Europe every day so a system similar to that used on the US/ Mexico border should be explored to allow trusted companies to pre-register. By providing detailed information for each load – what is being carried and who is driving it – a company's vehicles could cross the border without further checks, reducing queues, avoiding delays and focusing staff time on non-registered vehicles.

Passengers

It is also important that an upgraded E-border system is expedited and is fully tested and operational before we leave the EU in Spring 2019.

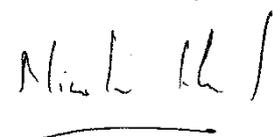
We recognise Government's commitment to developing a replacement system to replace the contract cancelled in 2010. However the need to implement an alternative is now pressing.

Without a viable E-system to help process non-UK passengers, ports and airports across the South East will have to manage lengthy queues, which risk deterring both business travellers and tourists. Systems are also needed to manage security risks and identify potential terrorist suspects trying to enter the UK with intent to harm our communities. Swift decisions are needed in the following areas:

- Whether existing E-gates – which allow for faster processing of passengers – are to be closed to European Economic Area (EEA) nationals. If they are closed, we risk significant delays and overcrowding at our ports and airports, with knock on effects for road congestion for passengers queuing to access ports and airports that are stretched to capacity.
- How the UK will share information with other governments, including future access to EU passenger intelligence, European Arrest Warrants and Europol information systems.
- How best to upgrade the use of Advance Passenger Information (API) to improve the ability to identify high-risk individuals and intercept them before they reach the border. This should include analysis of extended API, greater use of biometric information to verify passengers' identity and more effective checking against early warning watch-lists. Efficient systems to identify potential security risks are vital for national security but will also reduce queues for other passengers by allowing quicker, less staff-intensive border processes for those deemed risk free.

We look forward to hearing how Government plans to approach these challenges and would be happy to meet you to discuss the issues in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Nicolas Heslop
Chairman South East England Councils and
Leader, Tonbridge & Malling BC



Cllr Paul Watkins
Chairman South East Strategic
Partnership for Migration and Leader, Dover DC