

WIDER SOUTH EAST PRESS RELEASE

COUNCIL LEADERS JOIN FORCES TO ADDRESS HOUSING CRISIS

Council leaders across the East, South East and London and the Greater London Authority are set to “harness their collective strength” to address barriers to housing, and are calling on Government to build on its Autumn Statement announcements to make a real difference to housing delivery.

The Wider South East (WSE) Political Steering Group, made up of politicians representing the East, South East, London and the Greater London Authority, represents 159 councils and 24 million people - 43% of England’s population – and is calling for further action from central government to support their mission after working together to pinpoint issues to tackle slow delivery of housing.

Whilst the group welcomes announcements in the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement for infrastructure funding to help provide 100,000 new homes in high demand areas and to deliver 40,000 extra affordable homes nationally, these alone will not solve all the problems. Council leaders have highlighted the ongoing and pressing need for measures that will also allow councils and their partners the flexibility and freedom to address the challenge of slow build out rates locally, as well as facilitate and deliver much needed housing.

Representatives from the Wider South East will be meeting in early 2017 with Gavin Barwell MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government to discuss their concerns and possible solutions.

Cllr David Finch, Leader of Essex County Council and a member of the WSE Political Steering Group, said: “We have been working closely with council leaders across the area to explore barriers to housing delivery and have set out the key hurdles and ways to overcome them.”

“The crux of the matter is that, without urgent action, delays to building will continue to hinder local and national growth ambitions and stifle the supply of housing – including affordable homes.”

Matters to be discussed with the minister include looking at ways to prevent developers land-banking plots; holding on to sites for speculative purposes and delaying building after planning permission has been granted.

Cllr Nicolas Heslop, Chairman of South East England Councils and Leader of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and member of the WSE Political Steering Group said: “We are working together to harness our collective strength. However with the support of central government we hope to unlock the hundreds of thousands of planning permissions for new homes granted by our councils that are not yet built – some 266,000 homes in London and at the very least 107,000 homes across the East and South East .”

“Our councils are granting enough approvals to meet our identified housing needs but completions are failing to keep up.”

Cllr Darren Rodwell, London Councils' Executive member for city development and Leader of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, said "Investing in affordable housebuilding, high quality regeneration schemes and infrastructure across London and the wider south east is vitally important, given our region's status, population size and leading role in driving the national economy."

"Local authorities must be given the tools we need to ensure the government's housing and planning policies have a positive impact on our communities. London Councils pledges to continue to work with our partners to make this case to government."

Council leaders across the WSE look forward to working with central government to explore:

- how new local discretionary powers can enable councils to work with the housing market to encourage quicker building.
- how councils might play a more effective role in tackling the lack of skilled construction industry workers.
- the progress that can be made by freeing up finances to build affordable homes at scale.
- how to help ensure delivery of critical infrastructure to support new homes, and free up the ability of councils and other infrastructure providers to invest.

The East of England LGA, London Councils, South East England Councils and the Greater London Authority are all working together to foster stronger partnership working across the Wider South East, and look forward to extending this partnership to central government.

ENDS

2 December 2016