

## Appendix A

### Written evidence from Sevenoaks District Council to the CLG Committee Inquiry on The Impact of Brexit on Local Government

November 2017

#### Executive Summary:

- As a large, financially self-sufficient and award-winning rural District Council in Kent, with a significant City commuter population and close links to Dover/the Continent we are well placed to a) understand the issues, b) meet the challenges and c) exploit the opportunities of Brexit.
- The repatriation of powers from the EU closer to home should bring with it the principle of subsidiarity: decision making at the lowest possible level. Brexit provides a once in a generation opportunity to shape local government for the future, devolving responsibilities and resources to local democracies. We would welcome any discussions on piloting devolved responsibilities.
- This applies particularly to the area of skills devolution, where there is mounting evidence that the unique characteristics of very local labour markets need local skills solutions and funding, not national ones determined by Westminster and large employers. Government should prioritise the devolution of skills funding to a strategic authority and provide the means necessary to devolve further to functional economic areas such as West Kent, which are significantly different to those on the other side of the county.
- The current lack of clarity on any post-Brexit trade deal is making forecasting extremely challenging. Government is moving towards the 100% retention of business rates as the primary means of funding local government and should in this context consider setting aside repatriated funding to make sure the already precarious financial position of some councils is not made worse by any loss of business rates resulting from a “no deal” approach.
- Government should also consider funding temporary and local “Brexit Compliance Officers” within local councils to support SMEs to transition successfully to a new regime. These officers can work alongside all the other regulatory functions housed within councils such as environmental health, licensing, planning, building control, etc., and in the case of Sevenoaks District Council, fall naturally within our “Team Around the Business” approach.

- Government should support the rural economy and diversification by ensuring universal high speed broadband coverage as a matter of urgency, and by pressing the legal and insurance sectors to make sure their advice and products are fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century trading with regard to issues of copyright and trade marks in particular regarding web-based trading.
- Local Government, and districts in particular, are the Brexit nucleus within which the various challenges converge and where many of the solutions lie. It is vital that our voice continues to be heard while we continue to be a strong and stable presence for all our communities in this rapidly changing environment.