

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

BOARD MEETING ON 18 JUNE 2009

ITEM 4

DEVELOPING THE NEW REGIONAL STRATEGY

Recommendation

The Board is invited to **DISCUSS** this report and **CONSIDER** what additional support, briefing and training Board members wish to receive to enable them to perform their roles in the new regional partnership arrangements.

Background

1. SEEDA is now entering into a new Partnership arrangement with Local Authorities in the region to jointly produce and implement the Regional Strategy. This removes the previous separation between economic development strategy and spatial planning. Both SEEDA and the Local Authorities have entered enthusiastically into the partnership, and it creates a great opportunity, for the region, for SEEDA as a whole and for individual Board members. It will also create a range of challenges and potentially a need for Board members to develop new skills and knowledge.
2. Previous reports to the Board have focussed on the new Governance arrangements and the purpose behind the changes. This report, while providing an update on the governance arrangements, majors on the skills and behaviours Board members will need to develop, and how they can be supported to obtain these.

Introduction

3. The partnership arrangements have set up a Partnership Board, Strategy Board and three Delivery Boards, which cover Transport, Housing and Regeneration, and Economic Development. The first two of these Boards already exist and have SEEDA Board representation. The majority of SEEDA Board members have been nominated to sit on one or more of the Boards. The overall purpose of the Boards is to enable SEEDA to develop a successful high-level partnership with local authorities, working together with other key partners, to:
 - Implement the existing Regional Strategies (RES and SE Plan)
 - Produce a new Regional Strategy to take the region forward, integrating economic development and spatial planning.
4. Terms of reference for the Partnership Board and the Strategy Board have been developed, and work is currently being concluded on terms of

reference for the Delivery Boards. Alex Pratt and Pamela Charlwood have represented the SEEDA Board in this work.

5. The first meeting of the Partnership Board is to be held on July 24th. In advance of this a private workshop session is to be held on July 9th for all SEEDA Board and Local Authority Leaders Board members to start to develop ideas about how best to work with each other and with partners, and the key challenges facing the region. This report puts some flesh on the bones of these issues to prior to the 9th July workshop.

Latest position on terms of reference for Delivery Boards

6. The ToRs for the Transport Board and the Housing and Regeneration Board will remain similar to the existing ToRs. In general terms the purpose of the Delivery Boards is to:
 - Advise the South East England Regional Partnership Board (and by implication the Strategy Board) on implementation and delivery related issues associated with the preparation of the Regional Strategy;
 - Advise on the preparation of the Regional Delivery Plan (the implementation plan that supports the Regional Strategy), monitor its progress and review its content on a regular basis;
 - Identify investment priorities within the context of the policy framework set out in the Regional Strategy and advise on the allocation of funds
7. The creation of the Economic Development and Skills Board will provide the opportunity to rationalise the number of existing SEEDA Committees and Steering groups. The intention is that the RES Steering Group would be dissolved. The Group heard about this at its June meeting, and made some helpful suggestions as to how the new Board could best reflect the work the RES Steering Group has done. It is also proposed that the future roles of South East Business Support Advisory Board and Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance will be considered alongside the development of the Economic Development and Skills Board.
8. As well as the Delivery boards it is proposed that there will be a Planning Panel. This will be an advisory group on spatial planning issues. Membership will be mostly from local authorities, but with one SEEDA Board member

Roles of SEEDA Board members

9. The involvement of SEEDA Board members in the new partnership arrangements is a very significant opportunity. SEEDA has enjoyed generally very strong and positive relationships with local authorities throughout its life, and this new role will provide the opportunity to build on this. It will also bring a series of challenges and new ways of working. Some of these are described below.

Advocacy of sustainable regional economic development

10. The key role of SEEDA Board members on all the Boards will be to provide strong and effective advocacy and leadership in the field of sustainable economic development. This will require Board members to have a deep understanding of the strategic issues and to be able to engage with partners who may start from a significantly different position. This will require sound briefing before each meeting and possibly some additional focussed workshops on key issues.
11. The Board will also be the key advocates for taking a genuinely strategic regional, and in some cases national view in developing and implementing strategy. This will complement the essentially local and County-level perspective brought by the Local Authority Leaders Board.

Operating within a political environment

12. Decisions at the Boards will be by consensus. This means that to make progress both SEEDA and the Local Authority Leaders Board members must agree with the proposed way forward. However it is reasonable to expect that, particularly on contentious issues, Local Authority Leaders will still expect to exercise a strong element of political judgement.
13. For those Board members relatively unfamiliar with this environment it will take time to learn how to operate effectively, and we anticipate that Board members may welcome training in this area. Board members from a Local Authority background can also be a great help to other Board members. Learning will be a two way process here. The meetings will also be a different kind of experience for the Local Authority members, who will also need to learn new skills to make them an effective partnership. This makes joint private workshops, of which the first is on 9th July, so important in developing joint understanding and effective joint working.
14. SEEDA will be represented on all the Boards by fewer members than the local authorities. This reflects the geography of the region. There are 74 local authorities (and a national park authority) but only 15 SEEDA Board members. However the terms of reference of the Boards give SEEDA an equal say in decisions.

Dealing with the Press and Public

15. One key difference from SEEDA Board meetings is that all meetings will be held in public, and can potentially be reported in the press. Local Authority Leaders are well-versed in this, and can be expected on occasions to use the meetings to get points across which they expect to see reported favourably in the local press. This is part of the cut and thrust of politics, but for SEEDA Board members it will be less familiar, and again some training will be made available if required.

Towards a new Regional Strategy

16. The agreed Change Management Plan for the new partnership sees 2009/10 as a transition year, in which some of the unfinished business of the former regional assembly must be completed, and delivery maintained, while making a start on the new Regional Strategy. This transition year provides the opportunity for SEEDA Board members and the Local Authority Leaders to develop strong relationships and a clear shared vision for the future of the region. This shared vision will be key to reaching agreement on a range of challenging issues at later meetings. The vision will need to address key strategic challenges such as:

- Economic Scenarios to take the region into an economic upturn
- Moving to a low carbon society
- An ageing population
- Likely reductions in availability of public finance.

17. The new Regional Strategy will build on the strong base set out in the SE Plan and RES. There will be many aspects where the current strategy remains appropriate. Developing a shared vision around strategic challenges will help to identify where this is the case and also where a changed approach is needed. The workshop on July 9th and the first meetings of the Partnership and Strategy Boards will provide the opportunity to make a strong start on relationship building and on developing the vision which will be needed to agree an effective Regional Strategy.

Communications Implications

18. The branding for the new partnership arrangements is set out in the Appendix. This will be used for all meetings of the Boards and for letters and press releases. SEEDA's communications team is in discussions on developing an agreed framework for Partnership Board announcements and press releases, working on this with SEEC's communications adviser and staff in the strategy unit supporting the Partnership Board. The aim is that press releases will be signed off jointly by SEEDA and South East England Councils.

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Appendix – Branding for SE Partnership Board

