

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

BOARD MEETING ON 28 JANUARY 2009

ITEM 9

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY – SUB NATIONAL REVIEW

Recommendation

The Board is invited to **AGREE** with the Chair of the Regional Assembly on the key elements of the implementation of the Government's sub-national review of economic development (SNR) in the South East, with the aim of a transitional structure going 'live' on 1st April 2009.

Background

1. The Government's SNR was published as part of the Comprehensive Spending review in summer 2007. The key proposition was that the Regional Assemblies were to be abolished and the Regional Spatial Strategies and Regional Economic Strategies replaced by new integrated Regional Strategies. RDAs were to be responsible to Ministers for producing strategies which were to be agreed between the RDA and a regional Leaders' Forum of Council Leaders.
2. After 18 months of discussions of varying difficulty across the regions the Government produced revised proposals and legislation towards the end of last year. We are now in detailed discussion with the Regional Assembly and the South East England Leaders' Board with a view to the dissolution of the Regional Assembly on 1st April, following the March plenary meeting, and the creation of a new regional architecture, which will be necessarily transitional pending Royal Assent to the legislation.
3. A meeting of the Board sub-group on the SNR is planned for early February and any major issues can be considered at the strategy awayday in late February. However, fast progress has been made since the end of December and this briefing updates the Board in the expectation that the Chairman of the Regional Assembly will raise this under his item.
4. It focuses on the architecture required to produce the Regional Strategy, including the Regional Delivery Plan, rather than the other aspects of the SNR which have been discussed on other occasions.

Key elements of the proposals

5. The diagram annexed represents the draft structure under discussion with the Chairman of the Regional Assembly on behalf of the Leaders' Board. Under the government's proposals the preparation of the Regional Strategy will be a joint duty on the RDA and Leaders' Board.

6. The key elements of governance proposed are shown:
- **A South East Partnership Board** comprising 4 SEEDA Board Members and 8 South East Leaders' Board members, would commission and sign off the Regional Strategy;
 - **A Strategy Board** comprising another 4 SEEDA Board Members and 8 South East Leaders' Board members would steer the process of creating the Regional Strategy, ensuring alignment of the policy framework and implementation plan. Delivery partners might be invited to join this Board as observers, much as they currently sit on the Regional Funding Advice Steering group;
 - **A series of Delivery Boards** including Regional Transport and Housing and Regeneration Boards and an Economic Development and Skills Board would advise on the investment programmes and priorities and the Regional Delivery Plan, with a much broader membership drawn from SEEDA, the Leaders' Board, stakeholders and delivery partners;
 - **Task and Finish Groups** would be set up to oversee specific aspects of the Regional Strategy such as the Sustainability Appraisal, again with a broad membership.
7. Beneath the governance arrangements set out above there would be a technical support structure that would undertake the work on the Regional Strategy (including Regional Delivery Plan). The key elements here will be:
- **An Executive Steering Group** comprising the Chief Executive of SEEDA and the Chairman of Local Authority Chief Executives, together with the senior officer(s) accountable for the work and budget; would steer the work programme required to produce the Regional Strategy and Regional Delivery Plan;
 - **A Regional Strategy Unit** would draw upon staff from SEEDA and from SEERA Ltd to provide the independent technical support required to produce the Regional Strategy and Regional Delivery Plan, drive their implementation (through the Delivery Boards) and undertake monitoring activities.
8. There are significant details to be sorted out ahead of 1st April, which is a challenging timetable. But the staff of the Assembly have been under considerable uncertainty for 18 months; this provides a way forward for agreeing between ourselves and the Leaders' Board a practical structure that will give confidence for the future and, as important, move the South East from the back of the process to a place in the lead across the regions.
9. The particular concerns include:
- i) The position of **stakeholders**. Stakeholders have an important role to play in the process but Government is not anticipating that the Assembly will be recreated. Nor would local government find this acceptable. Our joint proposal therefore focuses on input through the Delivery Boards. There may be a case for proposing a small financial contribution to be made available to support stakeholders engaged

effectively in the overall process; the principle of such a payment appears to have consensus but requires further discussion. Such an arrangement would help stakeholders participate in the technical engagement and consultations associated with the Regional Strategy. There is no doubt, however, that stakeholders greatly regret the demise of their clear place alongside local government on the Regional Assembly.

- ii) We want to engage **the key delivery agencies** such as the Homes and Communities Agency, Learning and Skills Council, Highways Agency and Environment Agency as part of the preparation of the Regional Strategy; it is essential that they commit to delivering their part of the Regional Strategy as opposed to creating their own parallel topic specific regional strategies, hence their role as observers on the Strategy Board.
- iii) The technical support to the new governance arrangements will involve spatial planning staff from the former Assembly ('SEERA Ltd' is now owned by the local authorities collectively) and economists from SEEDA. All partners want the Regional Strategy to be an integrated strategy that goes wider than simply combining the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies. The governance arrangements as set out will, we believe, provide the framework that enables this to happen.

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Regional Strategy: Proposal for Governance & Technical Support in the South East

Draft for Discussion (18 January 2009)

