

South East England Partnership Board Economic Development and Skills Board

Purpose

This paper provides an update on the work of the Economic Development and Skills Board; the second meeting of the Board took place 2 February 2010.

Recommendation

The Board is invited to **NOTE** the summary of the Economic Development and Skills Board's meeting on 2 February:

1. The second meeting of the Economic Development Skills Board focused on: developing the Regional Skills Strategy, progress in producing Local Economic Assessments across the region, and developing a regional approach to innovation and business critical infrastructure. This focus reflects the three advisory groups which relate to the Board's agenda these are:
 - Business Development Advisory Group – the group has a strategic oversight of publicly funded business support and acts as an advisory mechanism to regional and local authorities/agencies providing business support. It also provides advice on the range of business critical infrastructure needs in the South East.
 - South East Science Engineering and Technology Advisory Council – the purpose of this group is to advise the SEEDA Board on the development and implementation of a strategy and investment plan for supporting innovation in the region.
 - Skills Working Group – this group is being established and will play a key role in the development of the Regional Skills Strategy.
2. We have a forum in which we can build on and integrate the work of these sub-groups and add value by making connections to the housing and transport priorities at the strategic level.
3. A substantial portion of the meeting focused on an outline project plan for developing the Regional Skills Strategy – a draft of which will be completed by the end of year. The Board has already acknowledged the need to ensure a wide range of informed views and experience shapes the development of this strategy; and we discussed the membership of the new Skills Working Group that will support the Board in all its skills related work.
4. The Regional Priorities Statement, which outlines where skills in the South East can be improved to their greatest effect in 2010-11 has been submitted to Government. The Statement puts an important marker in the ground about the changes needed and forms a basis for the skills strategy.
5. Given the importance of skills to the South East's economy, the Board stressed the urgency of this work and agreed that the skills strategy should be closely related to the work underway to develop the new Regional Strategy. As we develop the skills strategy it will be important to ensure a strong link with work on skills being done at a

local level; particularly with local authorities' responsibilities for 14-19 and the duty to produce Local Economic Assessments.

6. A presentation by Oxfordshire County Council outlined their early experience in producing their Local Economic Assessment; and served to highlight the valuable bottom up evidence feed that these assessments will provide. To promote consistency in key aspects of these assessments, the Board agreed to act as a forum through which advice, guidance, and good practice is shared.
7. With a new Innovation Strategy due to be published by SEEDA later this year, the Board discussed some of the key issues that the document should consider. Other regions in the world are becoming increasingly adept at exploiting new ideas; in order to keep pace with our comparators we must ensure access to quality business infrastructure, such as super-fast broadband, to attract and develop globally competitive firms.
8. The briefing on improving the South East's business critical infrastructure brought into focus the importance of developing of a clear regional aspiration for super-fast broadband access. The Board agreed that investment in improved broadband will be crucial if the region is to capitalise on technological innovation. Work is underway on a regional approach to broadband and will be brought for discussion at our next meeting.
9. The Board discussed its response to London's draft economic development strategy, which formed part of the regional response to the Mayor's 'Shaping London' Strategy. Collectively the Board agreed that cross-regional working and collaboration on infrastructure will be important for the long-term competitiveness of the Greater South East.
10. Looking ahead the Board approved its forward programme and future meetings have been identified for the rest of the year. A 12-month business plan is being developed for the Board and will be brought to our next meeting. The business plan will focus on the Board's three areas of activity:
 - Business Critical Infrastructure
 - Learning and Skills
 - Business Support and Innovation
11. The Economic Development and Skills Board is one of three 'delivery boards' that form part of the regional governance arrangements; along with the Regional Housing Regeneration Board and the Regional Transport Board. The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and the South East Plan stress the importance of timely investment in infrastructure as being a critical success factor in achieving sustainable economic growth. This serves to emphasis the importance of three delivery board chairmen developing a strong working relationship.

Co-ordinating the delivery agenda

12. In order to ensure co-ordination of investment priorities the three delivery board chairmen meet as a group on an informal basis. The most recent meeting took place on 9 March and involved Cllr David Robertson (Regional Transport Board), Cllr

Elizabeth Cartwright (Regional Housing and Regeneration Board) and Alex Pratt (Economic Development and Skills Board). The discussion focused on the work on the Regional Delivery Plan – the single document that brings together the implementation plans developed for the South East Plan and the RES.

13. With pressures on public sector investment a key feature of the next Parliament it is essential that we use the Regional Delivery Plan to co-ordinate investment and to influence the decision making of others (such as regulated utilities) in order to deliver the Regional Economic Strategy and South East Plan. The framework for the Regional Delivery Plan will be considered at the South East England Strategy Board on 30 March.

14. Meetings will be held between the delivery board chairmen on a quarterly basis; to ensure that we continue to make the strategic connections and address cross-cutting issues of competitiveness that bridge across the delivery boards.

Social Dialogue Forum

15. A key principle underpinning the changes in regional governance over the last 12 months has been the desire to streamline the number of groups and committees, many of which have had common membership. The Economic Development and Skills Board, together with its associated support groups (such as the Skills Working Group and the Business Development Advisory Group), provides the appropriate mechanism for ensuring that workplace productivity and skills issues are taken forward. This work has hitherto been carried out in the separate Social Dialogue Forum (SDF) which SEEDA has funded (some £50K pa). Key membership of the SDF has been included in the EDSB and Skills Working Group; in this way it will be possible to ensure that workforce productivity issues are taken into account in the development of the new Regional Strategy and the Regional Skills Strategy, including identification of the necessary evidence and data. It will also ensure that there is a mechanism for maintaining an oversight on implementation.

Reputational implications

16. It has taken longer than we had anticipated to establish the Skills Working Group. A small team is being seconded to SEEDA from the Learning and Skills Council to lead on the Regional Skills Strategy and manage the work of the Group. During this transition the team have been focused on skills priorities for 2010-11. However we have provided resources to ensure that the Group is established as quickly as possible. By the time the SEEDA Board meets on 25 March members and a date for the first meeting of the Skills Working Group will be identified. Jill Goddard, Skills Strategy Manager and Ameeta Rowland, Economic Development and Skills Board manager will continue to work with partners to ensure that they give priority to the Regional Skills Strategy as SEEDA as an agency is giving.

17. The Social Dialogue Forum has been advised that SEEDA is not in a position to support the SDF financially beyond the end of the current financial year. Funding has previously been extended to the end of the financial year to allow the SDF to decide how to proceed in future.

Financial and resource implications

SEEDA provides the executive and administrative support for the Economic Development and Skills Board.

Timescale

The Economic Development and Skills Board meets on a quarterly basis; future meetings of the Board have been identified for 25 May, 17 September and 1 December.

Author

Redacted, 16 March 2010

Signed off-by

Paul Lovejoy, Executive Director (Strategy), 16 March 2010