

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS  
PLENARY MEETING**

Date: 25 March 2010

Subject: **Partnership Board: Update**

Report of: Director of Regional Investment/Director of Planning  
Partnership Board

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that the meeting notes the content of the report.

**Purpose of Report:**

To update the meeting on recent activity and to set out the key areas of work for the forthcoming year.

**Key Issues:**

Despite cuts in the grant funding provided by Communities and Local Government it has been possible to maintain the core technical capacity and capability within the Partnership Board secretariat. The work programme ensures that work on the Regional Strategy is progressed in accordance with the agreed Project Plan and that momentum on matters of implementation and delivery is maintained.

Undoubtedly the single biggest challenge facing the South East will be the implication of cuts in public sector budgets. Using the information collected through the work on monitoring, drawing on the work to prepare the Regional Delivery Plan and using the advice provided by the three 'delivery boards' the South East needs to prepare the strongest possible case in support of continued investment.

## 1. Update on Recent Activity

### South East England Strategy

- 1.1 On 9 February the Partnership Board – through which South East England Council members and SEEDA Board members discharge their statutory duty to prepare the Regional Strategy – agreed to move forward with work on the South East England Strategy. The Project Plan has been agreed with the Government Office and is available on the Partnership Board website – [www.se-partnershipboard.org.uk](http://www.se-partnershipboard.org.uk).
- 1.2 A series of six ‘think pieces’ have been published (via the Partnership Board website). These have been prepared to stimulate debate around the key challenges the facing the South East in the years ahead:
  - Economic Growth and Technological Innovation
  - Climate Change and a Low Carbon Economy
  - Funding for Infrastructure and Investment
  - Tackling Housing Affordability
  - Demographic Change and the Ageing Population
  - Dealing with Economic Disadvantage
- 1.3 South East England Council members, together with SEEDA Board members were involved in two workshops with key stakeholders in February. The workshops provided the first opportunity to discuss the issues raised in the ‘think pieces’.
- 1.4 A full report on the workshop debates and the next stages in the development of the South East England Strategy will be considered by the South East England Strategy Board at its meeting on 30 March.

### South East Plan: Partial Review on Gypsies, Travellers & Travelling Show people (GT&TS)

- 1.5 The Examination in Public was held during the first week in February. This considered in detail both the overall approach to GT&TS provision as well as distribution to each local planning authority. The Panel’s recommendations are expected to be published in April. Under the new legislation (Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act), responsibility for considering the Panel’s recommendations and publishing the Proposed Changes will rest with the Partnership Board.

### South East Plan: Partial Review on Aggregates

- 1.6 The Proposed Changes were published for consultation on the 19 March. The Government has accepted the Panel’s recommendations on the overall amount of aggregates the South East has to plan for and the recommended apportionment to each of the Minerals Planning Authorities.

### Regional Monitoring Report

- 1.7 On the 9<sup>th</sup> February the Partnership Board signed off this year’s Regional Monitoring Report which monitors delivery against the framework set out in the South East Plan. The information presented in the report provides a snap shot of progress to date and identifies issues that need to be addressed.
- 1.8 It also provides an important context within which the three ‘delivery boards’ develop their advice on investment priorities for the region. The data will also form part of the evidence base that will underpin the South East’s case to the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 1.9 The report is available to download from the Partnership Board website.

## Delivery Boards

- 1.10 The three delivery boards – the Regional Transport Board, the Regional Housing and Regeneration Board and the Economic Development and Skills Board – have continued to meet on a regular basis.
- 1.11 The reports of the Chairman of the Regional Transport Board and Regional Housing and Regeneration Board (roles that are nominated via the South East England Councils) are set out elsewhere on this agenda. The lead Local Authority member on the Economic Development and Skills Board has provided an update on the work of that Board.
- 1.12 In addition to their role in monitoring progress with the delivery of agreed investment priorities, all three boards are considering the potential implications of cuts in the available budgets. This will inform the papers put to the next meeting of the Partnership Board (2 July) which will focus on how the South East positions itself in advance of the forthcoming spending review.

## Local Development Framework Workshop

- 1.13 A (free) LDF workshop is being hosted by the Partnership Board on 25 March. This will provide an opportunity for local authority officers to learn about best practice and hear from key people (including the Planning Inspectorate) on the issues being faced by local authorities. It will also provide an opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other. The Partnership Board will also be introducing its new LDF guide on Affordable Housing at the event and providing advice on its other guides (on Transport, Economic Land and Development, Climate Change).

## **2. The Year Ahead: Work Priorities for 2010/11**

- 2.1 The work of the Partnership Board is funded by grant from Communities and Local Government (CLG). From 2010/11 this funding is directly channelled through the Leaders' Board and has to be used to deliver the work on strategic planning and the delivery/implementation agendas.
- 2.2 Reflecting pressures elsewhere in the public sector, funding for 2010/11 has been reduced. As a result staffing levels have been reduced by 25% compared with 12 months ago. Priority has been given to retaining the core technical expertise, with reductions made in the management communications and administrative support areas.
- 2.3 This has enabled us to ensure that the secretariat continues to provide the South East with capacity and capability in matters of strategic planning; an expertise that enables the South East to continue to be influential at a national level. It also provides local authorities in the South East with access to expertise and advice that supports them in their day-to-day roles.
- 2.4 At the end of March Diana Pogson will step down from her role as Interim Managing Director for the Partnership Board secretariat. Given the longer-term uncertainties that currently exist an interim arrangement has been put in place. With effect from the beginning of April, accountability for the team will be the joint responsibility of Catriona Riddell and Martin Tugwell.
- 2.5 The business plan for 2010/11 has been prepared on the basis of the funding available. Key areas of work for the next 12 months are:

**South East England Strategy** – work on the new Strategy (which will build upon both the South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy, but will also look beyond traditional approaches to planning) is now underway. During the first half of the year the focus will be on looking at the strategic choices facing the South East. Drawing upon the evidence available at local and sub-regional levels, the Partnership Board will identify the key issues and develop potential options for the new Strategy. This will then shape an initial public consultation at the end of the calendar year.

**Regional Delivery Plan** – improving the co-ordination of investment is a key ambition for the South East. This was reflected in the Partnership Board's decision to invite key national agencies – the Homes and Communities Agency, the Highways Agency, the Environment Agency, and the Learning and Skills Council (and its successors) – to be involved in the work of the Strategy Board. An initial framework for the Delivery Plan will be considered by the Strategy Board on 30 March. The Partnership Board will then work with local authorities and other agencies to develop the Delivery Plan in time for discussion in early July. As the framework for setting out the investment needs of the South East, the Regional Delivery Plan will underpin the South East's case to Government as part of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

**Monitoring** – the monitoring information collected is an important part of the evidence base that underpins the work of the Partnership Board. Bringing together the work previously undertaken separately as part of the South East Plan and Regional Economic Strategy will enable the Partnership Board to develop a high level 'state of the region' report. More importantly it will provide the Partnership Board (and its associated delivery boards) with an update on progress with delivery; information that is important to ensuring the limited funding available is effectively targeted.

**Local Development Framework** – a key role for the Partnership Board secretariat is the work it does with local authorities across the region to provide advice on their Local Development Frameworks. The pioneering work undertaken in producing practical guidance for local authorities on key areas of policy is increasingly influential at the national level. The Partnership Board will continue to support local authorities in this work throughout the year. A key area will be providing assistance and support on the new duty to prepare Local Economic Assessments.

**Delivery Boards** – the three 'delivery boards' reflect the three key areas of funding where the Government looks to the South East to advise on investment priorities. The Partnership Board will continue to work with local authorities and other delivery agencies in the South East to ensure that existing priorities are delivered. In addition all three boards will continue to work closely together to ensure the realities of delivery inform policy making at national, regional and local levels.

**Comprehensive Spending Review** – arguably the single biggest challenge from the South East is that dealing with cuts in public sector budgets following the next election. The importance of the South East to the national economy is a key message that must flow through any discussion on future levels of funding. However the reality is that the South East will face stiff competition for investment from other parts of the country. A pro-active and positive approach to engaging in the fight for resources will be essential to ensuring that the impact of future cuts in funding are minimised wherever possible.

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