

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
PLENARY**

Date: 25 March 2010

Subject: **Economic Development and Skills Board Update**

Purpose of the Report

To update members on the work of the Economic Development and Skills Board; the second meeting of the Board took place 2 February 2010.

Summary

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. The Economic Development and Skills Board acts as forum in which to 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. The Board agreed 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 members 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. Members agreed that 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 Board received a briefing on improving the South East's business critical infrastructure and 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 (25 May, 17 September and 1 December). 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

Contact: Ameeta Rowland, Economic Development and Skills Board Manager
Email: ameetarowland@se-partnershipboard.org.uk
Tel: 01483 555 204