SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ALL-MEMBER MEETING

Date: 13 July 2011

Subject: **SEEC Data Dashboard: Report and Recommendations**
             from member task group

Report by: Cllr Mike Appleyard, Task & Finish Group Chairman

Recommendations:
Members are asked to endorse the findings of the SEEC Data Dashboard Task and Finish Group and agree:

i)   To produce, initially three times a year, a SEEC Data Dashboard to share with member authorities and make available on the SEEC website; Members are invited to comment on draft Data Dashboard sections (Annexes 1-6).

ii)   To use the Dashboard to monitor key data/trends and identify areas where SEEC should be making the case to government or other decision makers about funding/policy needs or opportunities, working with other partners where necessary/beneficial.

iii) To undertake transfer of SEEDA's economic intelligence archive and place on SEEC's website to maintain open access to the archive material after SEEDA's closure.

iv)   To continue the Data Dashboard Task & Finish Group, initially for the next year and primarily in 'virtual'/email correspondence format, to oversee these areas of work.

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1.   Background
1.1   SEEC agreed in November 2010 to establish a member Task & Finish Group looking at how it might gather and share key data to support making the case for the South East, as well as providing a core range of information for individual member authorities. Chaired by Cllr Mike Appleyard, the group made good progress, meeting twice as well as conducting business via email. We are grateful for the input of members, as well as the advice received from officers.

2.   Key Findings from the Group
2.1   The Task and Finish Group agreed the Dashboard should focus on helping SEEC and its member local authorities to:
    •   Understand strategic issues and trends affecting their areas, and consequently
    •   Influence government policy and investment decisions on these key issues, taking account of how South East councils are faring compared to other areas of the country.

2.2   The group explored data under six thematic headings, shown below, to cover SEEC's broad areas of interest. Given SEEC's relatively limited resources, the group agreed the focus should be on a small number of key data/indicators under each theme, primarily drawing on existing sources rather than commissioning new research.

2.3   The group recommends the following structure for the Dashboard:

a. **Six thematic one page summaries of key indicators at South East level,** including short commentary on key issues and policy/lobbying implications, covering:
- Economy and employment
- Housing and infrastructure
- Public finance and grants
- Demography
- Migration
- Environment

b. Each summary to be **supplemented with additional datasets/more detailed local authority information, where possible at County, Unitary and District levels**.

c. Links to be provided to original source/further information on the internet.

2.4   **Draft sections of the Dashboard have now been produced, included as Annexes 1-6**; we have used a variety of charts and tables, given the need to capture both high level and more detailed local level information. **We welcome member comments on these.** We will refine the Dashboard based on member comments at the AGM, as well as adding further detail to some sections for which time did not allow prior to the AGM. If approved, SEEC officers will finalise the first Data Dashboard for release in late summer 2011.

2.5   It is proposed the **Dashboard be produced three times a year**, to allow for reporting to SEEC meetings. We estimate it will take around six officer days of time per update - we expect this is feasible with SEEC's current officer resource, although this will be monitored and frequency/resource implications re-assessed if necessary. We will also maintain flexibility to identify and share any new data that raises particularly significant issues between full Dashboard updates.

2.6   The Group felt most information was usefully presented in chart or table format, for which SEEC will need to consider upgrading to a newer version of Microsoft Office at relatively modest cost to enable charting and formatting to be undertaken more easily. Although mapping some data would be helpful for presentation, SEEC does not have in-house capabilities (software or staff skills) for this at present and it would be costly to set this up for only occasional use. **If any member authorities have mapping (GIS) or other data analysis capabilities which could be made available to assist SEEC's Dashboard work please let the SEEC secretariat know**.

2.7   We propose that the Dashboard is **primarily made available through the SEEC website**, with hard copies only produced in-house if need arises, thus minimising production costs. We will include the Dashboard in papers to update members periodically at SEEC Executive/all member meetings, identifying any key issues where SEEC may wish to influence decision makers either itself or in partnership with others, for example LEPs.

2.8 SEEC officers are also in discussion with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) to discuss possibly assisting with its data analysis, helping alignment with the wider Dashboard. Any additional costs incurred by SEEC in undertaking this would be reimbursed by SESPM.

3. Transfer of SEEDA Economic Intelligence Archive

3.1 SEEDA will close by April 2012. Given staff redundancies this year, its economic intelligence function has now ceased. This work, led by Ivan Perkovic (who also provided advice to this Task & Finish Group), has been used by a wide range of partners over the last 10 years.

3.2 It would not be appropriate or feasible for SEEC to maintain SEEDA's economic intelligence functions. However following approaches from SEEC, SEEDA has agreed to transfer its economic intelligence archive and this will be made available through SEEC's website. This will allow all local authorities and other partners to access the archive of information once SEEDA closes.

3.3 In broad terms SEEDA's economic intelligence archive is made up of:
   • SEEDA's periodic economic updates
   • SEEDA's Business Survey findings
   • SEEDA's Commissioned economic research
   • Several theoretical economic forecasting models purchased by SEEDA in the past
   • Historic databases of economic data.

3.4 There is a large quantity of material, primarily in electronic format, which SEEC has only very recently received from SEEDA. Once this information has been assessed by the SEEC secretariat, we propose putting relevant archive information on the SEEC website before SEEDA, and its website, close in early 2012. Some modifications will be required to SEEC's website to host this historic information and make it easily accessible for users.

3.5 We will assess whether any limited additional information should be incorporated from SEEDA's archive into the SEEC Data Dashboard and updated in the future. We also understand BIS will be commissioning business surveys and we will liaise with BIS Local regarding this and any other information it holds to identify relevant material for the Dashboard.

4. Member Task and Finish Group

4.1 The Task and Finish Group was an effective mechanism to bring members together to identify priorities and key issues. As well as steering the Dashboard development, it also helped identify other areas for SEEC to act; for example advising SEEC to write to ministers about changes required to the Regional Growth Fund assessment criteria to give the South East fairer access to it.

4.2 We therefore **propose continuing the task group, initially for one year** primarily in 'virtual'/email correspondence format, to help maintain member leadership, focus and momentum on the Dashboard and related issues set out in this report.