

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

Date: 13 July 2011

Subject: **BIS Local – An Introduction to Role and Remit**

Report by: Nick Woolfenden, SEEC Head of Policy Co-ordination



Recommendations:

That members:

- i) Note the new arrangements for the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) to engage at the local level
- ii) Agree that SEEC should write to the Government expressing support for the removal of regional bureaucracy such as GOSE but emphasising the importance of ensuring cohesion between different Government departments' new local engagement arrangements.

1. Background

- 1.1 Removal of unnecessary regional bureaucracy and quangos was a clear priority for the coalition Government, reflecting SEEC views expressed to Ministers. The closure of the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) earlier this year and the forthcoming closure of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) at the end of March 2012 are both clear examples of this.
- 1.2 The coalition Government also took forward the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) concept in order to help local private and public sector partners drive forward economic growth. There are now seven LEPs in South East England.
- 1.3 The Government is committed to the principle of localism and individual departments are currently establishing how they will work with local partners, including local government and LEPs, in the absence of past arrangements such as GOSE. The most developed of these is the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), which has recently set up a network of 'BIS Local' teams to support the drive for economic growth at the local level. These small teams will support the delivery of BIS policy on the ground by:
 - Supporting BIS Ministerial business including briefing and visits
 - Leading BIS relationships with LEPs and local government to help them understand BIS national policy priorities, assist in coordination of economic development delivery, and help partnerships build their capacity and capability
 - Providing hard and soft intelligence and ensuring effective coordination of Government responses to economic shocks, including major company failures
 - Maintaining strong links with selected large businesses, key sectors and local business bodies, to build local understanding and buy-in to BIS policies
 - Providing BIS with the local intelligence needed to understand the impact of policies and contribute to the development of new policies.

- 1.4 There are six BIS Local teams nationally, three of which include parts of the SEEC area:
- London and East, covering London, Kent, Medway, East Sussex, Essex, Thurrock, Southend, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Rutland – led by Ian Gregory
 - East Midlands and South East Midlands including Milton Keynes, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton – led by Rowena Limb
 - South Central and West, covering the rest of the South East and South West – led by Ian Coates.
- 1.5 Ian Coates will attend SEEC's AGM to explain how BIS Local will operate and engage with local partners.
- 1.6 Other Government departments' local engagement arrangements are emerging. We understand that the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) will engage with local areas through 14 specific named Directors (on different geographies to BIS local) but will not be establishing local teams.
- 1.7 The Department for Transport has set up three sub-national engagement teams across the country, with South East England covered by the South East and East Team. At present it is not clear whether other departments such as Department for Work and Pensions will be establishing specific local engagement arrangements.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 SEEC's Executive Committee received a presentation on BIS local at its June meeting and heard about other departments' emerging plans for local engagement. Executive Committee members felt that the removal of unnecessary regional bureaucracy and the intention to reduce excessive central control was a positive move by Government. However members were concerned that the new arrangements were rather confusing and lacked cohesion for local partners.
- 2.2 We therefore recommend that SEEC's Chairman should write to the Government expressing support for its moves to remove bureaucracy and ensure effective local engagement, but to advise that the proliferation of different arrangements could be counterproductive and confusing for local partners. The Government should seek to address this and ensure effective communication about how it expects new arrangements will work.

3. Related issues

- 3.1 SEEC members may also be interested in two economic development resources made available by partners, available through SEEC's website at <http://www.secouncils.gov.uk/page/4/view/19/localism-bill> :
- A redundancy taskforce toolkit – sharing experience and good practice from a range of partners' work dealing with major redundancies.
 - Presentations from a recent workshop held by SEEDA to explain how aspects of its work are being taken forward in light of its impending closure.