



JOINT MEETING BETWEEN SOUTH EAST EXCELLENCE ADVISORY BOARD AND SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS

Date: 22nd January 2010
 Subject: South East Excellence
 Report of: Angharad James, Urban Renaissance Development Manager

Background

- 1.1 In April 1998, the then Government asked Sir Richard Rogers to set up the Urban Task Force to investigate the causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods. It was in the Task Force's report 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' (June 1999) that the creation of Regional Centres of Excellence (RCEs) were first proposed. Termed Regional Resource Centres for Urban Development, they were intended to stimulate and co-ordinate the provision and take up of cross-disciplinary training and provide mentoring and best practice advice.
- 1.2 In the Government's Urban White Paper of 2000, the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) were asked to establish RCEs that could identify how best to improve skills and training in the built environment within each region.
- 1.3 In April 2005, the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) prepared a three year Action Plan to provide a delivery framework for the South East Excellence programme. The Action Plan together with the South East Excellence website was formally launched on the 14th September 2005 in Reading.
- 1.4 In July 2006, an Advisory Board chaired by Trevor Osborne from Trevor Osborne Property Group, was established, and currently includes representatives from the house building industry, local government, universities and built environment consultancies. The reason for setting up the Advisory Board was to: provide advice and support to the South East Excellence Executive team based within SEEDA; review progress; identify barriers; promote collaborative or inter-agency projects; and assist in the assessment and review of impacts. Members of the Advisory Board were selected for their specialist advice, gained through their expertise as individuals.
- 1.5 The key areas of work the South East Excellence addressed were to:
 - Build capacity to deliver through generic skills such as leadership and negotiation skills – for example a series of seminars for both the public and private sector on the rules of engagement through the planning process were held to go some way to clarify the messages given out about pre-application discussions.

- Build capacity to deliver through technical skills such as sustainability and design – for example a series of seminars looking at development finance and housing affordability were held to help the public sector understand about scheme viability.
- Engage and inspire young people – for example research was carried out looking at the provision of courses on the built environment and a work placement guide for built environment employers was produced.
- Transfer knowledge between universities and practice – for example SEEDA have been working with the Academy of Urbanism on the UniverCity concept – bring universities and local authorities together to deliver quality places.
- Promote and share good practice - for example the South East Excellence website holds a vast amount of good practice information and signposts to other local, regional and national organisations – the site currently receives over 20,000 unique hits a month.

Current position

- 2.1 As a number of you will know there have been significant cuts in RDAs budgets and the Government has asked them to focus more on business support and innovation. SEEDA has reviewed its purpose in light of these changes and prioritised its activities around the twin themes of:
- helping business to survive the economic situation in the short term;
 - investing in developing the capacity and capability of the region to respond to the eventual upturn from a position of strength.
- 2.2 Parallel changes in national and regional governance such as the Government identifying the Homes and Communities Agency and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships as the bodies responsible for driving forward much of the South East Excellence agenda, means that SEEDA has taken the decision to reduce its role in the direct delivery and financing of skills support currently provided under the South East Excellence banner.
- 2.3 SEEDA will continue to have a strong influencing role. For example SEEDA together with the South East England Leaders' Board form the South East England Partnership Board (SEEPB) responsible for producing the Single Integrated Regional Strategy.
- 2.4 It was inevitable due to funding constraints that the programme would not continue in its current form beyond March 2010. However, SEEDA believes it is important that, wherever possible, the successful aspects and lessons of the programme are not lost and we are working with regional partners, including the SEEPB and the Leaders' Board to ensure continued support for them.