

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND LEADERS BOARD/ SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE

Date: 16 October 2009

Subject: **Government Consultation on Regional Strategies and
Guidance on the Establishment of Leaders' Boards**

Report of: Aidan Shutter, SEEC Policy Officer

Purpose of the Paper

1. For SEEC to agree its specific response to Annex 3 of the consultation document which sets out proposals for the establishment of Leaders' Board schemes.

Background

2. SEEC will recall that regional reforms were first announced in the Review of Sub National Economy and Regeneration (July 2007). Consultation on the proposals took place through the document, Prosperous Places: Taking forward the review of sub-national economic development and regeneration in March 2008. As a result of the consultation, the Government made a number of significant amendments including a new joint responsibility between SEEDA and local Government to deliver a new single regional strategy. The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill was introduced in Parliament in December 2008 to provide the necessary legislative framework. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent this autumn.
3. On 6th August 2009, the Government published an accompanying 'Policy Statement on Regional Strategies and Guidance on the Establishment of Leaders Boards' for consultation. Much of the document focuses on the detailed guidance for the preparation of new regional strategies and is set out in four annexes:

Annex 1 – Process issues for developing regional strategies

Annex 2 – Draft regulations for regional strategies

Annex 3 – Guidance on establishing and operating Leaders' Boards

Annex 4 – Guidance on sustainability appraisals for Regional Strategies

4. At its meeting on 17 September, the Strategy Board agreed its response to Annexes 1, 2 and 4. As Annex 3 relates specifically to arrangements for Leaders Boards, it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for SEELB to respond.

Overview of Annex 3 – Establishment of Leaders' Boards

5. Annex 3 of the consultation document recognises the important role local government plays in the development of their respective areas and the importance of effective joint working with Regional Development Agencies to deliver effective regional strategies. The Government recognises that all regions are different and that there should be flexible arrangements to suit particular circumstances.

6. The guidance sets out that Leaders' Boards should meet three broad criteria. They should:
 - Be streamlined and manageable, able to make strategic, long term decisions, and be able to engage effectively with their region's RDA.
 - Be representative of Local Government across the whole of their region.
 - Comprise of local authority leaders who are members with sufficient authority to act on behalf of all Local Government in the region.
7. In the South East region, South East England Councils (SEEC) has already been established and its terms of reference agreed at its inaugural AGM in July. SEEC's executive arm – the South East England Leaders' Board, has also been established, so SEEC can respond to the consultation using the experience of actual operation of the process.
8. Clause 68(4) of the Bill will require that proposals for Leaders' Boards should be subject to consultation amongst the participating authorities and stakeholders within the region before it is submitted to the Secretary of State. Paragraph A3.11 of the Consultation document says that where an interim Leaders' Board has been operating within a region, then a reduced consultation period of six weeks on the scheme is likely to be appropriate. All proposals for Leaders' Boards must be approved by the Secretary of State.
9. In the light of the contents of the Consultation document, a draft SEEC response has been prepared

Recommendation

10. SEEC is invited to comment on the draft response attached as Appendix A. Final responses to the consultation must be submitted by 30 October 2009.

South East England Councils response to the Policy Statement on Regional Strategies and Guidance on the Establishment of Leaders' Boards

Annex 3 – Establishment of Leaders' Boards: Draft Guidance on the preparation of Schemes.

South East England Councils (SEEC) has been established to represent and promote the views and interests of residents and communities right across the South East Region. Comprising entirely of elected councillors, SEEC can rightly be seen as the democratically representative voice of South East England. The South East England Leaders' Board is the executive committee of SEEC.

SEEC has a wide remit. As well as providing a significant input into the development of the new Single Regional Strategy, SEEC also aims to ensure effective representation of local authority interests on regional national and international bodies; scrutiny of the activities of other agencies at the regional level and to provide a forum for the consideration and determination of regional issues including strategic and investment priorities.

The South East England Leaders' Board (SEELB) has been operating since April 2009 as the Executive Arm of SEEC. SEELB has 22 members and representation is balanced both politically and by authority type. SEELB is developing the way it works with both SEEDA and the Partnership Board.

SEEC wishes to make the following points in respect of the establishment of Leaders' Boards as set out in Annex 3:

1. In paragraph A3.1 we would suggest replacing the word 'revising' with 'developing' to better reflect the important role local government has under the current arrangements in delivering their region's new single regional strategy.
2. As an integral part of the process, the Leaders' Boards should receive sufficient funding commensurate with their responsibilities and for that funding to be clear and transparent.
3. The guidance is clear about the need for mechanisms for all participating authorities to engage with their Leaders' Boards. It is vital that all authorities have a voice and can express their views through the Leaders' Board arrangements. This is likely to be achieved through regular plenary meetings and other engagement arrangements which should be funded as an integral and essential part of the Leaders' Board arrangements. Whilst, it might be reasonable for local authorities to fund a percentage of the costs through subscriptions, additional funding should be made available for 'all council engagement' on all activities relating to the development of the new strategy.
4. We remain confused about the need for Secretary of State approval for Leaders' Board schemes. In paragraph A3.6, it specifically states that *"The Government does not wish to be prescriptive about regional structures and working arrangements. All regions are different and it is therefore important that they should be able to develop arrangements that suit their particular circumstances"* If this is the guidance, we therefore wonder why specific Secretary of State approval is necessary for Leaders' Board schemes?

5. In paragraph A3.11, the guidance says that where interim Leaders' Boards have been operating, a reduced consultation period of six weeks would be appropriate. SEEC would argue that, where interim Leaders' Boards can be judged to already be meeting the three broad criteria and overall arrangements are working effectively, there should be no need for any further consultation activity. This would clearly save time and valuable resources.
6. In conclusion, SEEC would also suggest that no significant changes be made to interim Leader Board structures or ways of working until the outcome of the next general election is known.

Yours Faithfully

Paul Carter to sign on behalf of SEELB