

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

Note of meeting – 30 June 2004

Present:	Trish Haines (Chair)	Reading Borough Council
	Barry Dellar	ACTVAR
	Jill Farrell	Learning and Skills Councils
	Chris Lawrence-Pietroni	South East Counties
	Sean Holt	Sport England
	Megan McKibbin	Kent and Medway Economic Board
	Richard Russell	Arts Council South East
	Jackie Spiby	South East Public Health Team
	Deborah Wharton	SEEDA
	Roger Vickerman	University of Kent
	Paul Bevan	South East England Regional Assembly
	Mike Gwilliam	South East England Regional Assembly
	Philip Craig	South East England Regional Assembly

1. Minutes of the last meeting

- 1.1 The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 December were agreed. There were no matters arising not otherwise on the Agenda.

2. The South East Plan – Next Steps

- 2.1 The objective of the meeting was to move from the identification of broad themes to policy development, with implementation and monitoring key factors.
- 2.2 MORI polling for the Assembly highlighted the importance of social issues, particularly health, to respondents when asked about options for development. The Spring Debates confirmed that social infrastructure was key to the development of sustainable communities. However it is widely recognised that a plethora of national, regional and local policies already exist. The challenge was to identify where the South East Plan can assist existing initiatives to increase social inclusion, improve skill levels, and public health and coordinate patterns of provision. It was important to recognise where a policy in the South East Plan could add value (or, in some cases, reference could be made to other strategies).
- 2.3 The Policy Advisory Group would assist the Assembly in making the connections between spatial policy and the social challenges facing the region. The context for this work was the recently published Integrated Regional Framework, which would complement the plan making process. The group's work would need to take account of the scale of development expected in the region (including beyond the

growth areas). There was a commitment in the Assembly that the South East Plan must advocate change where needed rather than reflect existing changes.

- 2.4 Break out groups debated and suggested the spatial options needed. A review of the region's Community Strategies revealed that Local Strategic Partnership concerns with transport and affordable housing issues were widespread. The Assembly will examine the plans further to identify differences in approach and emphasis.
- 2.5 There was a suggestion that there is a danger of being over specific, and writing into the Plan requirements or standards that happen to be the current thinking but that will be surpassed in a few years, because of social change (including new technology, new science, etc.). As a consequence it was concluded that there was a role for the Plan in identifying clearly and passing responsibility down the line for the cultural/health/sustainable communities dimension. The Plan therefore requires a policy or policies that oblige local planning authorities to consider and provide for the health/cultural/social dimension in preparing LDFs, or in considering major development schemes, preparing planning briefs etc. For example:

In preparing LDFs and planning briefs, and in considering applications for major developments, local planning authorities should have regard for :

- a) design and facilities that provide opportunities for physical exercise;
- b) access to learning, cultural activity and community information;
- c) access to health services;
- d) etc.

- 2.6 In addition, a number of related issues were raised:

- It would be inappropriate to make mechanistic judgements on the allocation of social or community infrastructure to populations. Instead the Plan could highlight the importance of this infrastructure and guide decision making at a local level.
- A focus on flexible design was key to ensuring the housing needs of the ageing population were met.
- The cultural sector would benefit from similar regional and sub regional guidelines to those developed by sport.
- There is a balance to be met between a more rational distribution of resources and allowing freedom to innovate at the local level
- Lack of capital and revenue finance restrains social infrastructure – there is a need to advocate a range of mechanisms to kick start projects and promote requirements at an early stage of development.

- 2.7 The spatial options would be developed before the next meeting and presented as more specific policies at the next meeting. Bilateral work with agencies and

individuals within the group would continue where needed.

3. Scrutiny of SEEDA

3.1 Members of the group discussed the issues raised at the recent board level liaison meeting that took place between the Assembly Chair and Vice-Chairs Group and SEEDA Board members. The agenda included an item on developing the framework for scrutiny to improve effectiveness. Comments included:

- Scope to allow non Assembly members to sit on scrutiny committees, although the Chair should remain a member
- Concern that the use of outside experts would could bring outside bias to the scrutiny
- There was a role for SEEDA Board members to take a role

4. Date of next meeting

4.1 The next meeting of the Policy Advisory Group will be 28 September 2004 between 1pm and 3pm at the Assembly offices.