

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON SEEDA's APPROACH TO LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

Submission from: **Brighton and Hove City Council**

Date: **September 2008**

| | Question | Response |
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| 1 | <p>Within the RES, does SEEDA adequately capture the range of key issues and challenges regarding labour force and employment in the region</p> | <p>There is broad agreement with the issues and challenges for the region set out within the RES. The identification of the sub-regional areas is welcome as it helps to demonstrate the different challenges faced by localities.</p> <p>An example of this is the Brighton & Hove population figures which show that the age of the resident population is falling, contrary to the regional / national trend. This presents particular challenges for the city in relation to the provision of services such as education and the need for high quality job creation and retention.</p> <p>It is as yet unclear how SEEDA provision will be honed to the particular needs of localities and we welcome the suggestion that there will be more dialogue with organisations such as the local authorities to ensure that interventions are effective.</p> |
| 2 | <p>How effective are the key strategic regional agencies with an interest in labour force and employment, such as SEEDA, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council, in developing a joined up and coherent approach</p> | <p>There is evidence that Jobcentre Plus and the Learning & Skills Council have been developing a joint planning approach. In Brighton & Hove the services have been working closely with the local authority Housing department to streamline the transition to employment by simplifying the process and providing a more transparent process for claimants.</p> <p>Similarly Jobcentre Plus and the Learning & Skills council has been working with the City College the council and other partners to develop Tourism Futures which has led to a series of pre-employment training programmes for disadvantaged residents seeking work in the tourism / hospitality sector; it has also led to the creation of an employers charter endorsed by the major hoteliers in the city.</p> <p>Until April 2008 SEEDA has provided funds through the Area Investment Framework for local regeneration schemes; the scheme made a significant impact on the city by providing financial support to a range of infrastructure and employment schemes. In the period 2003 – 2008 the local AIF Board approved over 64 projects totalling over £4 million. Among the projects there are some notable examples of activities that continue to</p> |

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| | | <p>operate today such as Constructing Futures, Wired Sussex, the Crew Club youth activity centre; and, Yellowwave, the UK's first permanent beach sports venue.</p> <p>Good practice – LSC produce a commissioning strategy that highlights the specific elements of their wider strategic plan they wish to address in any one year. It would be useful to have sight of and influence such a document for SEEDA. Local Authority representatives have influence over LSC discretionary funding and feed into the planning process for the commissioning strategy via LSC colleagues/meetings etc.</p> <p>Since the demise of AIF, there has been no SEEDA supported activity relating to skills and employment outside of some work with the city universities. SEEDA are members of the City Employment and Skills steering group however that has not yet resulted in support for specific activity to address the issues and challenges identified within the City Employment & Skills plan.</p> <p>We would welcome any proposal that will result in cooperation between SEEDA and the main funders of training and employment schemes, particularly in the area of joint commissioning. The forthcoming rounds of ESF would be a useful testing ground for developing joint working protocols enabling the tender processes to be transparent, consistent and coherent, delivering a clear message to regional and local providers of the issues and challenges to be addressed.</p> |
| 3 | <p>SEEDA's Corporate Plan gives considerable emphasis to higher level management and technical skills. Is this focus appropriate and what should it do to also ensure the development of basic skills and employability</p> | <p>The RES highlights the pressures created by the hour-glass economy and the need to create jobs at both ends of the labour market. Clearly jobcentre Plus and the Skills Funding Agency will have the main responsibility for addressing skills and employment. However, there is an opportunity for SEEDA to intervene in areas were these two agencies are unable to have an impact.</p> <p>A local programme model similar to AIF that enables partners to direct resources to areas of identified need, particularly where resources are not available through the statutory agencies. This approach would also serve to address local differences that may not be significant at regional level.</p> <p>The funding and activities that the two main agencies support are targeted at specific National Targets such as Level 2 qualifications. The funds available through RDA's are less tightly defined and can therefore play a vital role in targeting areas of local need before they become critical.</p> <p>Coordinating and sustaining outreach activities that</p> |

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| | | <p>engage the hardest to help is an example of the added value that SEEDA funding could bring as it would link to the opportunities afforded by LSC/JCP but provide the longer term supported model which seems to be missing from the newer programmes – especially Pathways to Work and Flexible New Deal. The LSC is unable to fund the foundation and ongoing support work that will ensure that services are reaching those in need and that agencies are working effectively to maximise impact.</p> <p>The Corporate plan indicates that around £18 million was earmarked in 2008/09, (post AIF) towards local regeneration activity and through consultation with local authorities and partners. It is as yet unclear when these discussions will take place and whether the earmarked funds will now be rolled into 2009/10.</p> <p>For higher education we would welcome activity that facilitates stronger links between universities and the business community. In Brighton & Hove there is a very practical example between the University of Sussex and Wired Sussex; through consultation with the sector the university is creating a post-graduate certificate that will provide graduates with the skills necessary to be work and industry ready. Further work of this type will help to improve student destinations and reduce the skills mismatch that employers continually experience.</p> |
| 4 | <p>Is the range of SEEDA’s activities appropriate and suitably targeted to tackle labour force and employment issues? Where should the balance lie between strategic and local interventions?</p> | <p>Supporting, retaining and growing the business base is key to job creation.</p> <p>The RES confirms that the globalisation of markets brings particular challenges for businesses in the region. More work is needed to facilitate opportunities for business to business procurement, exploiting transport links and travel-to-work areas. SEEDA can play a role in ensuring that these connections are made by further supporting agencies such as the Economic Partnerships, Business Link and the emerging Innovation Centres.</p> <p>The evidence provided by the SEERA research suggests that SEEDA intervention in labour force and employment is patchy. SEEDA has provided support to the Brighton & Hove business community through the provision of Selective Finance for Investment in England (SFIE); however it is unclear whether there has been any involvement or investment in skills and employment since the demise of AIF, with the exception of some AIF funded projects that received an additional years funding.</p> <p>The SEEDA/ESF call for projects early in 2008 did not target areas of need for Brighton & Hove therefore there was little take up of the funding opportunity.</p> <p>There is clearly scope for SEEDA to engage in dialogue</p> |

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| | | <p>with local areas to gain a fuller understanding of their needs; similarly such dialogue will enable localities to contribute more effectively to regional priorities.</p> <p>Partnerships such as the City Employment and Skills Steering group are ideally placed to work more closely with SEEDA; providing as it does a coherent voice from a range of sectors on both local and strategic issues.</p> |
| 5 | <p>Is SEEDA doing enough to encourage sustainable job creation in the region, particularly in under-performing areas? How and where should it focus resources on this issue to the best effect</p> | <p>SEEDA's contribution to sustainable employment centres on the support that it provides to businesses through Business Link. The current review on the impact of Business Link services and the Business Support simplification process (BSSP) provides an opportunity for the service to make a greater impact in the region.</p> <p>We welcome further information on how BSSP will be rolled out and how it will ensure that it is targeted for greatest impact.</p> <p>The current economic climate indicates that many existing businesses will have to diversify, seek new markets and form stronger business to business networks to survive. There is a need to increase provision and responsiveness so that intervention and support is provided at the right time.</p> <p>The Business Link and Business Link-funded providers' presence is limited in Brighton & Hove, for example demand for the Business Link start-up workshops and one-to-one advice sessions are high and extra capacity would be welcome.</p> <p>We recognise steps have been taken by the local Business Link to increase their impact on the city's business community, but it should make better use of the existing business fora who have established strong links with the private sector.</p> <p>Further promotion of workforce development is needed to encourage those in employment to engage in continuous career development thereby freeing up lower level jobs for those with fewer skills.</p> <p>The City Employment & Skills plan for Brighton & Hove identifies the need to intervene at all levels of the labour market. Integrated programmes such as Breakthrough, funded in part by Working Neighbourhood funds and Department of Health Skilled for Health funds, enable those in receipt of Income Support to access the employability and skills training that they need to enter the labour market via 1:1 support and in-depth work; the Pre – employment scheme enable those who are work ready</p> |

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| | | to acquire job-ready skills; Local Employer partnerships enable workless residents to access employment and City College and the Universities are developing new curricula informed by the local business community and the sector skills councils. |
| 6 | How effective is SEEDAS in engaging with businesses to understand their skills needs and in promoting employers' responsibilities regarding skills development? | <p>The Investor Development Manager (IDM) works with the 20 largest firms in the city to maintain dialogue, keep track of planned developments and provide the support necessary for them to stay in the city. There is scope for aligning the work of the IDM's more closely to local regeneration activity.</p> <p>The newly emerged Employment and Skills Boards are remitted to act as a conduit between the business community and the agencies tasked with delivering the skills and employment agenda. It is as yet unclear how the Boards will link and add value to local structures such as the City Employment and Skills Steering Group. It also unclear how the ESB's will ensure that they represent the needs of the business community and the diverse needs of the sub-region.</p> |
| 7 | What has been your experience of the Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance? What needs to be done to ensure its long-term effectiveness? What can SEEDA or other partners do to support the evolution of the LSPA into revised roles as Employment and Skills Boards? | <p>There is limited evidence that the LSPA influenced activity and provision in its lifetime. Originally set up to act as a vehicle for representing the business community it failed to secure the regular attendance or involvement of business people or business representatives.</p> <p>As above it is too early to say whether the newly formed ESB will adequately reflect the needs of businesses in the sub-region. ESB's represent an opportunity to identify common issues and challenges for the sub-region and look at joint solutions however to effect change ESB will have to engage more directly with the agencies and partners that commission, plan and deliver services.</p> <p>Local partnerships such as the City Employment and Skills Steering group can play an important role as the vehicle for local delivery / strategic decision making and for ensuring that interventions are appropriately targeted.</p> |
| 8 | How effectively do SEEDA and other strategic regional organisations engage with further and higher education sectors, voluntary and community sector, local partners and deliverers to tackle employment and labour issues in the region? What more needs to be done? | <p>Post AIF SEEDA has attended the City Employment and Skills Steering Group however this has yet to translate into activity on the ground or a revision of policy and practice that addresses local requirements or priorities contained in the CESP.</p> <p>It is still unclear whether there are plans to reinvest in localities post AIF or whether consultation is underway with other commissioners of services such as Jobcentre Plus or the Learning & Skills Council or indeed the Local Authority, which could be undertaken most usefully via the CESSG, regarding joint commissioning.</p> |

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| | | <p>There is an opportunity for SEEDA to engage in the partnership work already underway in the sub-region, for example in facilitating the roll out of the Business Support Simplification process; in commissioning the next round of ESF; in engaging with the voluntary and community sector in such areas as the development of social enterprise and working with those residents furthest away from the labour or education market.</p> <p>Ongoing and consistent dialogue with local authorities will enable SEEDA to contribute and support local and multi-area agreements ensuring that activities are aligned for maximum impact.</p> |
| 9 | <p>How effectively do SEEDA and local authorities work together on labour force and employment issues? In the light of an increasing role for local authorities in this area, what more needs to be done to ensure effective joined-up working arrangements</p> | <p>SEEDA is a member of the City Employment and Skills steering group and has been party to discussions on delivering the targets set out within it.</p> <p>There is a need for SEEDA to engage more tangibly with the delivery of the targets as many of them align with RES priority actions. We would welcome discussions on SEEDA's role in delivering the Local Area Agreement and CESP targets, in particular how SEEDA resources post AIF are to be allocated to maximum effect.</p> |