

1 November 2004

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Dear Gillian,

**Re: Area Based Regeneration**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SQW report on the Impact of SEEDA on regeneration and AIFs.

The report acknowledges that great tracts of the South East, including Berkshire, and its surrounding areas will not benefit directly from AIF funding. Furthermore as West Berkshire was not eligible for SRB funding, my comments will of necessity be of a general nature and should therefore carry a lower weighting than those from areas concerned about the demise of SRB, or those directly impacted because they are designed to be an AIF.

The demise of SRB in neighbouring authorities of Reading and Slough is a concern and the report is incorrect to generalise that mainstream agencies can take up any slack in provision. This is not the case in Berkshire Unitary Councils all of which have had to reduce budgets in recent years in the wake of adverse Government funding.

However, I fully accept that in areas where SRB funding is being replaced through the AIF scheme, then better targeted provision, linked to Tier 2/3 outputs may lead to regeneration and employment. However, here I share the concern of the Voluntary Sector that it will be very difficult for them to sign-up to Tier 3 targets.

Given the above, SEEDA does recognise that outside the AIFs, there are pockets of real deprivation and I am pleased that through TVEP, SEEDA has made c£200k available this year for regeneration programmes to help those socially excluded. Sustainability will be a major issue for one year funded regeneration projects. Importantly, by the time a programme is up and running and beginning to deliver value, it is time to plan the exit strategy, or to devote management resources trawling round for continuity funding. This is such a waste of energy.

Equally important, the problems surrounding deprivation are always longstanding and therefore unlikely to be solved in a year long project. Surely, therefore it would be more sensible to move moving towards commitment to something like a 3-year programme.

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With regard to the operating parameters of an AIF, I fully endorse the concept of pulling together all funding agencies at strategic level. This clearly makes sense and ensures common goals, better project management and true partnership. In consequence, is there not a case for designating know areas of deprivation in, say, areas such as Slough and Reading as 'Mini -AIFs' in order that they too can derive some hope of regenerating these communities in the wake of the demise of SRB? It should be remembered that these areas do not qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding either.

In sum, with the demise of SRB and its successor 'pot' limited and understandably targeted to the 9/10 most deprived areas, which is supported there is a case for lower level intervention elsewhere. I would strongly recommend some commitment to longer term assistance, say as a 'mini-AIF' to other pockets of known deprivation, else in a few years these areas will deteriorate even further with all the social misery and costs that mirror infrastructure decline.

Yours sincerely

  
Jim Graham  
Chief Executive