

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
PLENARY MEETING**

Date: 17 October 2008

Subject: **Chairman's Report**

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**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This is my report on the work of the Executive Committee and Leadership Group since the Assembly's meeting in July. During that time there has been one meeting of the Executive Committee, in August, which was followed by a meeting of the Leadership Group.
- 1.2 Both the Executive Committee and the Leadership Group have monitored the Assembly's finances through regular budget reports. We also have the benefit of reports at every Executive Committee from both SEEDA and GOSE, usually via the Chief Executive and Regional Director.
- 1.3 In addition, the Executive Committee has received routine reports from the Chairmen of the Regional Planning Committee, the Regional Housing Board and the Regional Transport Board. All three colleagues have filed their own reports for you today on their work since the July plenary meeting. The Assembly's lead member for scrutiny is also reporting directly to you today. I will avoid duplicating in my report either issues that are covered in my colleagues' feedback to you, or other items that are separately listed on today's agenda.
- 1.4 My report, therefore, simply focuses on the following:
- The Sub-National Review
  - Business and Enterprise Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into the Role of Regional Development Agencies
  - Regional Funding Advice
  - Staffing changes.

**2. The Sub-National Review**

- 2.1 Members may be aware that at the time of writing, despite talk of news emerging by the end of September, the Government's response to implementing the Sub-National Review (SNR) is still awaited.
- 2.2 In the meantime our officer team has continued to work closely with SEEDA and GOSE with a view to developing a clear route map for change once the final destination is clearer. As we have highlighted previously, the risk from

prolonged uncertainty to the capacity of the Assembly team in particular is fully recognised: as our business plan testifies, we have a very busy agenda ahead and can ill afford to lose expertise and experience. Assembly officers will be meeting with GOSE during October to discuss Government's guidance for next year's business plan.

### **3. Business and Enterprise Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into the Role of Regional Development Agencies**

- 3.1 The Business and Enterprise Parliamentary Select Committee announced in June an inquiry into the role of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the implication of the SNR for them. An Assembly response to this was agreed at our Executive Committee on 12 September 2008. Our response, which emphasises our key concerns re SNR - including the opposition to the transfer of strategic planning responsibilities to the RDA and the need for democratic accountability in future arrangements - has now been submitted and will be posted on our website<sup>1</sup>.

### **4. Regional Funding Advice**

- 4.1 The timely delivery of investment in infrastructure to support planned growth is a critical issue for both the draft South East Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy. The purpose of the Regional Funding Advice (RFA - formerly known as the Regional Funding Allocation) is to enable the region to suggest to Government how regionally-allocated funding should be spent.
- 4.2 The scope of the RFA has been extended<sup>2</sup> by Government to include additional transport expenditure plus a significant proportion of the funding that will be managed by the new Homes and Communities Agency. In addition the guidance published by the Government encourages the region to submit views on regional priorities for investment in skills. The RFA therefore provides the region with a significant opportunity to ensure that public sector investment is targeted in the most effective way to support delivery of priorities in the region.
- 4.3 The expansion to include local transport block funding has already led to some debate amongst local authority members of the Assembly. This money enables local authorities to fund road maintenance and local schemes. The Regional Transport Board, which has close involvement from cabinet members of the 19 local transport authorities, will lead the consideration of whether there is justification for suggesting changes in the balance between investment made at the local level and that in major schemes.
- 4.4 Despite the opportunities afforded by the RFA, I have ongoing concerns that the scale of Government infrastructure funding is totally inadequate for the needs of the South East. With this in mind I have asked officers at the Assembly to update work previously undertaken on the infrastructure

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/advocacy\\_lobby.html](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/advocacy_lobby.html)

<sup>2</sup> Previously the Regional Funding Allocation covered housing, transport and economic development.

funding 'gap' in the region. This will be reported to the December Executive Committee meeting, as well as forming part of our overall Regional Funding Advice in the Spring.

- 4.5 We are requested to submit our advice to Government by the end of February 2009. We are currently planning development of our advice and work is underway at member and officer levels to progress this. I will of course take all opportunities available to continue to press the case to Government for adequate funding to deliver the infrastructure that is so critical across the region.

## **5. Staffing Changes**

- 5.1 Members will be aware that the July Assembly meeting was Paul Bevan's last as Chief Executive. Diana Pogson, previously Finance and Administration Director, has now taken over as Interim Managing Director. Members took the opportunity after Executive Committee to thank Paul for all his work at the Assembly and to wish him well for the future. A further change is that Communications Director, Heather Bolton, will be leaving the Assembly at the end of December after five years' service to take up the post of Communications Director at SEEDA. Work is in hand, with input from Heather and her team, to put in place new arrangements for managing and delivering the Assembly's communications function. I look forward to working with Diana and the Assembly Management Team in the future.

**Cllr Paul Carter**  
**Chairman**

7 October 2008