

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 17 December 2004

Subject: **Chief Executive's Report**

Recommendation:

This report is for the Committee's information.

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report updates the Committee on the following issues:

- The future of the Government's regional agenda.
- The recent meeting of the English Regions Network
- The Assembly's comments on SEEDA's draft Corporate Plan

2. The Regional Agenda

2.1 Following the outcome of the referendum in the North East on 4 November, both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have restated to Parliament their clear commitment to maintaining voluntary assemblies such as our own in all the English Regions. Members will recall that the White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' explicitly allowed for the prospect of some regions continuing with the partnership model of regional governance that we have developed so strongly in the South East. Chapter 2 of the White Paper will now guide the agenda for all regions. It confirmed important roles for voluntary regional assemblies, and these have been implemented and developed since its publication. For example the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 has strengthened the assemblies' planning function, Regional Housing Boards their role in housing. Assemblies' roles as advocates for their regions (in respect of this year's Spending Review), and as scrutineers of RDAs and other regional bodies have also been enhanced. The anticipated announcement of regional indicative budgets will further confirm the growing role for voluntary assemblies within the Government's regional agenda.

2.2 Members will appreciate the importance of this message for our Assembly team in particular, as staff have been giving their utmost this year to preparing the

South East Plan in as inclusive and technically robust way as possible to a very challenging timescale. If our small team of excellent people is to continue to deliver - and the pace shows no sign of slowing - it is essential that members and partners alike continue to signal their confidence both in our work for and in our role within the region.

3. English Regions Network

3.1 A member-level meeting of the ERN took place on 26 November at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I attended with Cllr Don Turner, Deputy Chair. The following points were covered:

- **Governance:** ODPM officials confirmed Government's commitment to regional assemblies. There are no proposals to alter the organisation of assemblies; ODPM continue to see assemblies developing according to regional needs. ODPM confirmed that Chapter 2 of 'Your Region, Your Choice' remains the basis for Government policy.
- **Funding:** Increased ODPM funding for assemblies has been announced for 2006-07 (+5.6%) and 2007-08 (+16.7%). However, despite the acknowledged service pressures, there is no uplift in overall grant for 2005-06.
- **Regional Housing Boards:** ODPM expect that assemblies will perform the new function drawing on existing resources. ERN was clear that additional resources would be necessary to do the job effectively and have submitted a response to the recent consultation accordingly.
- **Realising the Potential of Our Regions:** ODPM accepted the need for greater assembly involvement in this Government statement concerning the contribution of regional agencies to improving economic performance.
- **Regional round up:** Whilst assemblies are clearly in the spotlight both nationally and locally over the referendum result, housing numbers and national politics, the mood around the table was positive and upbeat.
- **The 2005 ERN conference** will be held on Monday, 28 February at Warwick University. A review day for members and chief executives will follow on Tuesday, 1 March.

4. SEEDA's Draft Corporate Plan

- 4.1 Following the brief discussion at the last meeting of the Executive Committee on SEEDA's draft corporate plan, the plan was discussed in more detail at a board level liaison meeting between the Assembly and SEEDA, as reported by the Chair to the Assembly plenary on 29 November. A number of members emailed comments for input to that discussion, and the attached paper was subsequently produced as the Assembly's response to this initial draft of the corporate plan. I expect a more developed, final version of the plan to come before the Executive Committee on 21 January 2005.

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2 December 2004

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