

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 16 December 2005

Subject: **SEEDA Scrutiny**

Report of: Head of Policy

Recommendation:

1. That the Committee agrees the following topics for the scrutiny programme of SEEDA for 2006:
 - a) Sustainable use of natural resources
 - b) Social enterprise
 - c) Business support and Business Links
 2. That the Committee note progress relating to the recommendations of the Select Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion
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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on the scrutiny programme for 2006 and the impact of recommendations from the Select Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion.

2. Context

- 2.1 Members will be aware of the ongoing programme of select committees that examine SEEDA's work. Each scrutiny is based on the track record of SEEDA, with the select committee making a number of recommendations to inform their ongoing work programme. Three themes are identified for scrutiny each year.

3. Themes for Scrutiny in 2006

- 3.1 The Assembly has scrutinised ten areas of SEEDA's business. The areas covered are poverty and inclusion (2005), manufacturing (2005), regeneration and AIFs (2004), urban renaissance (2004), Enterprise Hubs and Gateways (2004), inward investment (2003), workforce skills (2003), culture and regeneration (2003), the rural economy (2002) and areas of economic success (2002). In addition, the final scrutiny of 2005 will examine SEEDA's impact through business engagement and corporate social responsibility.

3.2 Further topics for the forward programme for scrutiny were discussed at the recent Board level liaison meeting between the Assembly and SEEDA. The following subjects were considered:

- Sustainable use of natural resources (including a specific focus on sustainable land management and land-based industries) - The Regional Economic Strategy highlights the need to ensure economic activity is not accompanied by environmental degradation and also the opportunities of the environmental economy of the South East. This scrutiny would examine both SEEDA's approach through projects to secure sustainable land management, achieve sustainable management of water, waste and energy but also examine how the issue is mainstreamed across broader economic development activities.
- Social enterprise - Following two years of research, consultation, engagement and strategic input from key players, SEEDA launched the South East Social Enterprise Strategy in July 2005. This scrutiny would allow members to make an early evaluation of SEEDA's role and the impact of the strategy on social enterprises in the region.
- Business support and Business Links- SEEDA has committed itself through its new Corporate Plan to supporting more businesses to reap the benefits of access to high quality business support as a key route to innovation and greater competitiveness (e.g. rural business communities, training among SMEs, support for science and innovation). This scrutiny would assess the impact of the regional Business Support Strategy and the value of SEEDA's new responsibility for Business Links in the region.

3.3 Members are invited to consider these possible areas of scrutiny. In addition, it is also worth noting that the current RDA monitoring framework will be replaced by a new regime based on the Local Authority Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The National Audit Office, which will be working with the RDAs to evaluate their performance, expects to report back on SEEDA's performance in September 2006. The NAO have indicated that the Regional Assembly will play a key role in this assessment and they will draw heavily on scrutiny reports. It is also suggested that the Assembly and SEEDA work together to identify how the findings of this assessment can be properly debated, possibly through the introduction of a further 'task and finish' select committee to scrutinise the NAO's findings.

4. Select Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion

4.1 Members will be aware that this Select Committee was something of a departure for the Assembly, as its focus went beyond scrutiny of SEEDA and examined the role of the wider network of statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations working across organisational boundaries to alleviate social exclusion.

4.2 A number of recommendations have since been taken forward by organisations in the region

- It was recommended that the Social Inclusion Partnership South East (SIPSE), which brings together a wide range of regional organisations, has a key role over the next twelve months in leading the review and dissemination of an updated Social Inclusion Statement, to reflect policy changes and new ways of working. SIPSE has now appointed a new policy and development officer, who will lead this review and address the fragmented nature of partnerships at a regional level.
- The Committee advocated a key role for Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships, which provide an opportunity for organisations to devise solutions that meet local needs, and engage a wider number of mainstream providers in the process. Copies of the report were distributed to local authorities, key officers in GOSE, local strategic partnerships and a wide variety of statutory providers, highlighting the issues raised.
- In addition, I have also held meetings with representatives of the Social Exclusion Unit and Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. This discussion was wide ranging but I was able to press the case for further devolution of responsibility for decision making, to make it closer to the point of delivery, in recognition of the need for a long-term, joined-up approach to dispersed deprivation in the South East

4.3 The Committee was also aware that many local delivery bodies are very small so there was a need to identify ways to ease the full burden of application and reporting protocols. One proposal was for Councils and other Statutory Bodies to disseminate funding opportunities more effectively and reduce the on-going costs and bureaucracy associated with bidding for funds. Regional bodies, including RAISE, SEEDA and others are actively taking this agenda forward.

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29 November 2005

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