

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 16 June 2006

Subject: **Proposal for a Regional Sustainable Development Board**

Report of: Chief Executive

Recommendation:

That the Executive Committee supports the proposal for establishing a Regional Sustainable Development Board (SD Board) for the South East subject to further consultation and working up of details.

Purpose of Report:

To propose a way forward for promoting sustainable development in the region in response to the Government's recent statement *Securing the Regions' Futures*, published on 24 April 2006.

This paper sets out how we propose to rationalise existing arrangements which we see as the most economic and effective way of establishing a Regional Sustainable Development Board. The report emphasises the importance of maintaining the collaborative approach to working which has been adopted in the South East and suggests the principles that should be adopted in establishing the SD Board for the South East.

Key Issues:

In summary the proposals are:

The role of the SD Board is to act as advocate and champion for sustainability throughout the region, lead on the IRF, lead on regional aspects of the national sustainable development strategy, monitor quality of life in the South East and scrutinise the sustainable development performance of the region;

Members of the SD Board should be high profile, capable of acting as advocates and champions and should include non-executive Assembly representation from the main parties/economic partner/social/environment partners as well as executive representations drawn from GOSE, SEEDA, the Assembly, Environment Agency, health and business sectors (model for structure currently being investigated); and

The SD Board should be supported by an officer team based on the IRF working group and will provide the opportunity for improving co-ordination between the regional groups which currently deliver sustainable development in the region. A limited budget will be required from partner organisations for project work and DEFRA are providing, via GOSE, part funding of up to a maximum of £46,000 in 2006/7 and £72,000 in 2007/8 to support the work of Sustainable Development Roundtables.

1. The Government's requirements – Securing the Region's Futures

1.1 Just over one year on from the publication of *Securing the Future*, the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, the Government has published *Securing the Regions' Futures*. *Securing the Future* included a commitment by the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) to review the regional arrangements for delivering sustainable development. The SDC published its review in November 2005 and the Government have accepted their analysis and set out in *Securing the Regions' Futures* 20 commitments along with guidance.

1.2 The Government welcome the SDC recommendation to strengthen the role of roundtables through the establishment of champion bodies. The Government state that the recommendation is best served by clarifying the purpose of these bodies and the way in which they can be supported. They state that:

“An effective regional sustainable development roundtable or champion body should be:

- a. Independent (providing an effective critical friend role to regional bodies and where appropriate constructively challenging regional policies or strategies from a sustainable development perspective).
- b. Inclusive (with wide-cross-sectoral representation).
- c. Influential (as a result of its membership and actions).
- d. Capable of delivering campaigns, programmes and projects that exemplify sustainable development excellence.
- e. Well-networked (through partnerships within and beyond the region, including the SDC).
- f. Sustainable (run effectively with resources secured from within the region to ensure stability and from outside the region where relevant opportunities arise).”

1.3 In relation to the first principle the Government believes the existing roundtables have benefited greatly by including Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies in their membership and only by involving those bodies can they aim to influence major regional plans and decisions. This inclusiveness need not be at odds with an effective role as a ‘critical friend’ to advise these same bodies on sustainable development issues.

2. Current Arrangements in the South East

2.1 Currently in the South East a working group of regional organisations exists to produce and review the IRF (the region's key sustainable development strategy), monitor quality of life and act as an advocate and champion for sustainability throughout the region. The group consists of officers from the Assembly,

GOSE, SEEDA, the Environment Agency, Department of Health, SEFS and RAISE and has recently been chaired by Chris Corrigan.

- 2.2 The group has felt and the research by CAG has confirmed that the current arrangements for delivering and mainstreaming sustainable development need to be strengthened to meet the task. To date there has been insufficient engagement with business and the voluntary and community sector and we need to increase awareness of the IRF within the region.
- 2.3 The Government's report states that "Regional sustainable development roundtables should be appointed jointly by Government Offices, Regional Assemblies and Regional Development Agencies, who are best placed to identify the relevant stakeholders in their regions." The IRF Working Group has agreed that they should jointly take forward the proposals to establish a SD Board led by the Regional Assembly.
- 2.4 We see close parallels between the SD Board and the establishment of the South East's Regional Transport and Housing Boards (RTB and RHB) and propose that we should build on this existing structure. Both boards have benefited from a significant democratic dimension; they comprise Assembly members and nominees (board members and officials) from other partners e.g. GOSE, the RDA, Highways Agency, the SEFS, Network Rail and the Housing Corporation and they are supported by an officer group. Both boards have close links with a wider group of stakeholders, mainly the local transport and housing authorities.
- 2.5 Independence, as identified by the Government's report, is a key characteristic of an effective SD Board. The Board needs to have a truly independent voice to effectively fulfil its role as a critical friend and to gain the respect of external bodies and partners. The SD Board will give advice to the Assembly, who will not have authority to overrule the Board. Assembly members who sit on the Board will be accountable, so if disagreement emerges, the Assembly can request its nominees to press a particular line. If consensus remains out of reach, the Assembly, and any other partner on the Board, is also at liberty publicly to demur. The price of course is that conflicting views within the region weaken our collective influence.

3. Establishment of a Sustainable Development Board

Role of SD Board

- 3.1 The Government's report lists three purposes which it feels all roundtables share. Building on these the key task of the South East SD Board will be to assess and improve the sustainable development performance of the region. The Board will:
 - Act as an advocate and champion for sustainability throughout the region
 - Lead on the IRF
 - Lead on regional aspects of the national sustainable development strategy
 - Monitor quality of life in the South East
 - Scrutinise the sustainable development performance of the region

Structure

- 3.2 The proposed structure builds on the current arrangements for delivery of sustainable development in the South East. There are three main parts to the structure; the SD Board itself, a supporting officer group and a wider stakeholder group:

The SD Board

- 3.3 We are currently investigating various models for the structure of the SD Board. We are considering a model based on the structure of the RTB and the RHB but also looking at who would provide value to a group of this sort in terms of knowledge and profile.
- 3.4 The Government's recommendation state that a champion body should include GOSE, SEEDA and the Assembly. A model based on the RTB and RHB would see a further five places from a non-executive Assembly representation – three elected councillors, one from each main party, plus an economic partner and a social/environmental partner. Additional places could be filled from nominated officials from stakeholders including the Environment Agency, health and business sectors. In this way, a partnership board would be established within the Assembly structure.
- 3.5 Not only the Assembly membership, but also the stakeholder membership must be a balance across the economic, social and environmental 'pillars' of sustainable development and cover priorities identified in the national sustainable development strategy. Also, there should be representation geographically from across the region. Individuals will be expected to draw on their knowledge and expertise as individuals rather than to represent their organisations.
- 3.6 Members of the SD Board should be high profile, capable of acting as advocate and champion and should have prolific links with organisations in the region that deliver sustainable development. Chairmanship of the group should rest outside of the main regional bodies to enhance the independence of the Board. It would ideally be a high profile person.

Officer Group

- 3.7 The SD Board would be supported by an officer team drawn from the partner organisations and led by Assembly officers for both technical and administrative purposes. The current IRF working group is well established and we would suggest it should form the basis of the officer group. The team will coordinate the work of the Board by developing the Board's work programme.

Wider stakeholder Group

- 3.8 The establishment of the SD Board provides the opportunity for improving co-ordination between the regional groups that deliver sustainable development in the region. It also provides a platform for regional groups to disseminate their message wider and add weight. The relationship between the groups and the SD Board will need to be discussed on an individual basis. An annual event

should be held to ensure the links with these wider groups are made and reflected in the work of the SD Board.

Funding and Staff

- 3.9 Since the officer resource supporting the Board's work is based on the existing arrangements, substantial additional funding will not be required. The Regional Assembly has recently established and filled a new position of Sustainable Development Planner to booster the resources which are available and partner organisations will need to consider the level of support they can continue to offer. The establishment of the SD Board also provides an opportunity to rationalise some existing regional groups including the Sustainability Appraisal Sounding Board and the SEEDA Sustainable Development Committee. Additional budget would be required for meetings, events and contributions to project work and DEFRA are providing, via GOSE, part funding of up to a maximum of £46,000 in 2006/7 and £72,000 in 2007/8 to support the work of Sustainable Development Roundtables.

Key Tasks

- 3.10 Key tasks for the SD Board will include:

- Advocacy and championing: for example supporting the regional groups in disseminating messages;
- Agreeing a work programme for the SD Board, including identifying responsibilities and resources;
- Support organisations to mainstream sustainable development on a sectoral basis, in partnership with sectoral organisations;
- Promote the use of the IRF in appraisal of regional strategies and link it to the new legal requirements for sustainability appraisal and SEA;
- Co-ordination and assessment of regional strategies to act as a central source of information and to encourage strategy makers to link their strategies with the IRF;
- Agreeing an action plan for the promotion/communication strategy of the IRF;
- Reviewing the IRF;
- Assisting in the delivery of the South East Plan, specifically by influencing behavioural change;
- Influencing Government policies;
- Liaise with those responsible for producing the Assembly's Annual Monitoring Report, to ensure that the IRF objectives are monitored and the outcomes are used to inform the best way forward; and
- Link with other regions, through the existing English Regions Network SD group and with adjacent regions to discuss issues of common interest e.g. Thames Gateway growth area.

4. Consultation and Next Steps

- 4.1 There is a need to consult widely on the arrangements. The proposals made in this report are therefore offered as the basis for discussion with stakeholders through July and August. Details will be finalised and presented to the Executive Committee on 15 September for consideration.

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30 May 2006

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