

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 15 December 2006

Subject: **SEEDA Scrutiny**

Report of: Head of Policy

Recommendations:

That the Executive Committee:

1. Agree the proposal for enhanced select committee arrangements.
2. Request that each party and partner group on the Assembly nominates a single member to sit on the three select committees for 2007-08.
3. Agree the proposed programme for select committees for 2007-08.

Purpose of Report:

To set out proposals for enhancing the working arrangements of the Assembly select committees, and for members to agree the proposed programme for select committees for 2007-08.

Key Issues:

- The current select committee arrangements have worked well in the way they have evolved since they were put in place during 2001. However it is felt these arrangements could now be enhanced by establishing a core group of members who would sit on all three select committees during the course of each year. These members would be joined by additional nominees for each committee as appropriate.
- The Executive Committee have previously discussed proposed topics for select committees during 2007-08, and following discussions with officers at SEEDA we set out a final proposed programme for members' agreement.

I. Introduction

- 1.1 The Regional Assembly has responsibility under the Regional Development Agency Act 1998 to scrutinise the work of SEEDA. The Assembly currently undertakes this through a programme of select committees, as well as member level liaison and regular updates to Assembly members from the Chief Executive of SEEDA.
- 1.2 The Assembly holds select committee hearings to examine SEEDA's performance and to ensure its work reflects the region's needs and priorities. The select committees strengthen the accountability of SEEDA to the region and help SEEDA enhance its performance, targets and engagement with regional partners. The principle of select committees was agreed by the Assembly Executive Committee in 2001.
- 1.3 Three select committees are held each year, each examining SEEDA's impact in a specific policy area. While ways of working have evolved over time, the broad approach is for Assembly members to meet with regional stakeholders to debate the issues and evaluate SEEDA's performance in that area. The committee then meets with SEEDA to discuss the queries raised. These debates aim to be challenging and constructive. The committee then agrees a report and recommendations that suggest areas for improvement for SEEDA. Currently the committee is dissolved after the issue has been considered.
- 1.4 Chairs for each committee are agreed in advance of the commencement of each year's programme, and nine members (including the Chair) are nominated to sit on each individual committee (three Conservative, two Liberal Democrat, two Labour, and one each from the social, environmental and economic partners).
- 1.5 Select committee topics during 2006-07 have focused on:
 - sustainable use of natural resources;
 - social enterprise;
 - business support and Business Links.

2. Proposed Modifications to the Approach

- 2.1 The Leadership Group has been exploring ways of strengthening the scrutiny of SEEDA. The current select committee arrangements have worked well since they were put in place during 2001. However it is felt these arrangements could now be enhanced by establishing a core group of members who would sit on all three select committees during the course of each year. This revised approach would enable opportunities to be taken to develop capacity of this group more fully, and allow the nominated members to develop fuller understanding of the process and issues, increasing the effectiveness of the scrutiny work. This core group would be joined by nominees with specific interest in each topic under consideration.
- 2.2 The Leadership Group further agreed that a vice-chair should take the lead on our scrutiny work, and Ian Chisnall has agreed to provide member-level lead for this new group. The proposal is for each group on the Assembly to nominate one member to sit on this new scrutiny committee group on an annual basis.

- 2.3 We recommend that members support this proposal to increase the effectiveness of the Assembly's scrutiny work. Existing mechanisms for reporting back to the Executive Committee will be maintained, along with publication of the Assembly's annual scrutiny report. As part of the proposals, we would also commit to undertaking a brief review of the effectiveness of the revised approach at the end of the first year of operation, and report the findings to members for discussion.
- 2.4 Subject to agreement on the revised structure, we ask that each group advise the Assembly secretariat of the name of each group's nominee.

3. ERN Annual Scrutiny Conference

- 3.1 The English Regions Network (ERN) are holding their annual scrutiny conference on 25 January 2007 in Newcastle, at which members and officers from across the English regions will share experiences and good practice regarding scrutiny. This will provide a valuable opportunity for members to find out more about the scrutiny role, and we will ensure those members nominated to sit on the new select committee group receive information about this event.

4. Scrutiny Programme for 2007-2008

- 4.1 We are currently in the final stages of agreeing the forthcoming year's programme for scrutiny committees, following recommendations by Assembly members. It had been hoped that the programme would be confirmed at the board level liaison meeting between the Assembly and SEEDA at the end of October. Unfortunately SEEDA had to postpone this meeting till 18 January 2007. Given that preparatory work needs to start imminently for the first of the coming year's select committees, we have secured officer-level support from SEEDA for the programme in principle, which I hope will be endorsed by the SEEDA Chief Executive at this Executive Committee meeting.
- Meeting the global challenge (to include a range of SEEDA's activities, including the Global Regions programme).
 - Reducing the South East's ecological footprint (this would not only examine the work and role of SEEDA, but also a wider range of agencies/organisations – as was done for the social inclusion committee during 2005-06).
 - South East Coastal Strategy.
- 4.2 These will provide a timely, constructive and interesting programme of topics for the year.

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