

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Date: 15 December 2006

Subject: **English Regions Network (ERN)**

Report of: Chief Executive

Recommendation:

This report is for the Committee's information.

1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on ERN business and to present assemblies' submission to Government in respect of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07).

2. Summary

- 2.1 The period since July 2006, when the South East took the lead on the ERN, has proved to be a critical time for regional assemblies. Members will be aware that the CSR promises to be a tough spending round and the role of assemblies, along with other regional bodies, is under intense scrutiny, particularly through the cross-cutting review of sub-national economic development. The ERN has been concerned to protect and enhance the role of assemblies by virtue of the influence they afford to locally elected politicians and stakeholders at the regional level. The perceived risk is a streamlining of regional architecture that will diminish that democratic influence and leave the regional arena to quangos.
- 2.2 Accordingly our Chairman, now also Chairman of ERN, together with myself as lead chief executive, have engaged with Ministers and senior civil servants over the past few months in order to promote the value that assemblies add. We have been keen to demonstrate that as regional planning bodies assemblies make a vital contribution to delivering sustainable economic growth, and, through regional housing and transport boards and RDA scrutiny, are able to align funding streams regionally to improve the impact of public expenditure. Recent ministerial encounters have included meetings with Secretary of State Ruth Kelly and Treasury Secretary Ed Balls; in addition I have had a series of discussions with key civil servants in the Department for Local Government and Communities. Forthcoming meetings

are arranged with Housing Minister Yvette Cooper and with Treasury civil servants.

- 2.3 In order to support this work, the ERN commissioned and published the attached assessment of assemblies' work - 'Adding Value to the Regions'.
- 2.4 Elsewhere, as the Chairman reported to the Assembly plenary meeting, following his approach to the Mayor of London, London has agreed to join the ERN, with the result that it will henceforth be a voice for the whole of England.
- 2.5 Cllr Mitchell has also embarked upon a series of fact-finding visits to other regions in his capacity as ERN chairman. The first of these was to Yorkshire and Humber, immediately following the last plenary meeting.
- 2.6 Finally, members are invited to note forthcoming ERN meetings. The next meeting for assembly chairmen, to which Ed Balls has been invited, is 1 February 2007; a stakeholder vice-chair would normally attend in addition to the Chairman and myself. The ERN annual conference next year will take place in Leeds on 13 March, followed by a review day for chairmen and chief executives on 14 March.

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