

### **SEEDA Social Dialogue Forum 17 September 2007**

1. The Social Dialogue Forum (SDF) includes representatives from employer and employee organisations. This is a unique opportunity for these groups to meet in a non-adversarial environment to discuss regional issues and to contribute to SEEDA's policy development and delivery of its work programme.
2. The SDF will be joined by a number of new representatives in future, including Job Centre Plus. Members recognised that the continued growth of the group strengthens its effectiveness. SEEDA is keen to expand this influence and is working to develop an effective network of contacts to engage in the SDF's activities.
3. The draft Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Implementation Plan identifies the SDF as the lead organisation for establishing a regional flexible working forum, promoting flexible working and supporting public sector organisations to implement flexible working. Members suggested that promotional activities should include case-studies of organisations that are not traditionally seen to engage in the agenda, such as smaller enterprises and those in the manufacturing sector. The group also felt there is a need to work directly with organisations that are implementing flexible working and to provide support during transition. For example, managers need support to adapt to new ways of managing staff; there is a need to combat workplace resentment from those not benefiting from flexible working; and the risk of detachment by staff working remotely must be dealt with. The SDF also highlighted the need to build links with the embryonic Workwise South East initiative.
4. The SDF is also tasked with 'making the case for diversity'. In the lifetime of the RES, the aim is to work through Business Link to target every registered business with employees, with the aim that one in five will change their recruitment practices as a result. Members suggested that this particular action should consider migrant workers as there is currently little explicit mention of them. Links also need to be made to the flexible working agenda, which will be instrumental in enabling excluded groups to engage in employment (for example, those with caring responsibilities).
5. The SDF's work programme has now been agreed with SEEDA. Most of the actions relate directly to the RES but there is also a commitment to running seminars with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) and the Health and Safety Executive. In particular, there is a desire to extend these seminars to managers, as the focus has, so far, been on Trade Union representatives.

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