

## Minutes

### South East Business Support Simplification Transition Management Advisory Board, SEEDA Offices, Guildford – 12 March 2008

**Present:** Jeff Alexander (SEEDA – Chair), Henry Ball (LSC), Nick Woolfenden (SEERA), Lewis Scott (UKTI), Bernie Topham (Eastleigh Borough Council), Fay Webster (ICAEW), Roger House (FSB), Rodger Broad (IOD), David Seall (EEF South), Ross McNally (SE England Chambers of Commerce), Malcolm Hyde (CBI South East), David Rowland (Business Link Sussex), Tom Fourcade (Envirobusiness), John Weston (HESE), Janine Hobbs (Jobcentre Plus), Andy Bradburn (Proskills), Sheila Hopson (GOSE), Alastair Reid (Sub Regional Strategic Partnerships), John Parsonage (SEEDA), Oona Muirhead (SEEDA), Julie Kapsalis (SEEDA), Greg Ward (SEEDA), Phil Bailey (SEEDA), Ann Johnstone (SEEDA)

**Apologies:** Catherine Hilton (AOSEC), Jonathan Blackburn (RAISE)

#### 1. Welcome and Introductions – Jeff Alexander

JA welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of this new, regional Board, and outlined the context. This is a group with a real task, to drive forward the reshaping of the public sector business support offer in the region by shaping a business support strategy that enables the RES commitments to be delivered, whilst being fully compliant with BSSP. He stressed the importance of the business representatives in achieving this, ensuring that focus is always kept on the end user, the business. There are deadlines, and the current offer must be fully aligned to the BSSP national framework by the end of 2010. SEEDA is the lead RDA in terms of BSSP, which has given us the opportunity to influence the programme as it has been developing. JA suggested that, the context having been established, the name of the Board be changed to better reflect the wideness of the role. He proposed the Board be known from now on as the **South East Business Support Advisory Board (SEBSAB)** and this was accepted.

**Action: The Board to be known as the South East Business Support Advisory Board (SEBSAB) from now on.**

#### 2. Business Support Simplification – Ann Johnstone

AJ recapped the history of the BSSP initiative, that it was announced in March 2006 by the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown, with the aim of streamlining publicly funded business support from around 3000 products and services to no more than 100 by 2010. Ensuring that support for business is targeted, efficient and fit for purpose. Following a public consultation over the summer, the Pre Budget Report announced in October 2007 a national portfolio of 18 product offers and confirmed the role of Business Link as the primary access channel to business support. The detail is now being developed including delivery, procurement, branding and monitoring guidelines, and the establishing of national and regional strategic management arrangements. SEBSAB will perform that role in the South East.

JA confirmed that there will only be public sector provision where there is market failure, and that it must have a market making role and a clear exit strategy. He clarified that Business Link will broker to public and private sector provision as now, and that it would be valid for this group to look at the

public/private sector interface. The differentiation in the quantum of public provision across the regions would continue as it is driven by such things as RDA and EU budgets. The suggestion to take into account what goes on in other countries was accepted.

3. Terms of Reference (TOR) – Jeff Alexander/All

The draft TOR were discussed and the following points were identified for inclusion:

Must be very customer focused up front. Simplification for a purpose.  
Need to see the word “quality” captured.  
Communication and engagement must be covered, and that there will be a responsibility on the membership to communicate, disseminate and bring news back. The TOR will be kept under review and amended in response to the task in hand.

**Action: The draft will be revised to reflect comments (SEEDA).**

4. Draft Transition Management Plan – Ann Johnstone/All

AJ introduced the Plan, informing the Board that Government has asked each region, led by the RDA, to produce a Business Support Simplification Transition Management Plan which shows how the region will move from the current business support pattern to one which is BSSP compliant. Each region must submit its plan on 6 May for consideration by the national BSSP Transition Board on 15 May. The plan has to show how each current publicly funded scheme will migrate to the new portfolio, how the new vision for Business Link will be implemented and the arrangements for branding, procurement and delivery. The draft is SEEDA- centric at the moment and needs to broaden to capture all publicly funded activity. The Local Authorities are key to this.

**Action: JA and BT to further discuss how to capture the business support activity funded by LAs.**

The following points were raised:

The purpose and principles need to reflect BERR’s new Enterprise Framework and the new DIUS Innovation Strategy.

The link between the new Employment and Skills Boards and this Board needs to be established.

Machinery of Government changes are expected next week affecting DCFS and DIUS. Expected to announce how the LSC will change. There is likely to be National Skills Agency, with a national/regional remit. This will provide the opportunity for a much more coherent strategy for investment in skills in the SE. The skills agenda will be more driven by the needs of employers.

This group can influence the way employers interact with skills providers.

Transition for national providers, such as the Carbon Trust, will be via Departmental Transition Plans.

The draft is an exceptionally good paper and establishing the Board a good initiative, however, the vision could be better articulated to really steer the activity of the Board. Where are we, where do we want to be in 2010 and how do we get there.

We must be careful not to reinvent the RES, and to map against the new portfolio reflecting always against the RES.

To avoid proliferation, BSSP principles need to be enshrined in the LAAs.

There are some tensions with SNR which need to be addressed in a pragmatic way.

The Board will have a “policing” role. We need to work out how we can perform this role. This aspect should be better reflected in the TOR. In some cases Board members are the decision makers, in other cases, the influencers. A role of the group is to make the case, to bring other partners in.

The plan needs to capture how partners deal with conflicts eg who picks up the costs of redundancies.

The plan needs to capture how we, as a region, start to provide market intelligence and analysis to identify the market failures in the region and therefore the interventions needed. The aim being to clarify what the South East needs, which may be different to national thinking.

**Action: Transition Management Plan will be revised to reflect comments (SEEDA).**

JA clarified the relationship between this Board and the Business Link Providers as being through SEEDA, but that he envisaged using this Board to help us develop Business Link to become the BSSP enhanced version. JA restated the national policy position, that Business Link is the primary access channel, and that it was SEEDA’s role, advised by this Board, to work with the Business Link Providers to achieve this in the region. JA invited the business membership organisations to discuss their views and experiences of Business Link. There are issues around working in partnership and with capability, but the over-riding issue seems to be about the perception of Business Link, perhaps relating back to a previous model. A heavy marketing campaign is needed to alter perceptions. JA stated that the aim is to get to the position where this Board becomes the Champion of Business Link.

JA invited GW to talk through the Innovation Team concept, which gives a good example of how SEEDA is trying to simplify its programmes, whilst understanding the need for a place-based model. The model is based on detailed research, geared at working out how to reach the RES innovation targets. The clear message from businesses was to simplify things. The concept is to combine regional innovation services (Enterprise Hubs, Innovation advisory Service, High Growth Coaching etc) and deliver them through teams located in a number of different sub-regions, giving the flexibility to respond to the needs of local companies. The service would be targeted on the small number of innovative companies, all sizes, with growth potential, about 2,000 across the region. SEEDA is about to go out to consultation with the model, and SEBSAB members will receive it as part of this. There was general support and excitement for the concept.

AJ summarised next steps for developing the Transition Management Plan for submission to BERR on 6 May. It was agreed that a revised version would go out to the Board by email for final comments, approval, and that the Plan would be submitted as “work in progress”. It was agreed to hold the next meeting of SEBSAB around the end of May. It is particularly important the public sector funders contribute to the Plan as soon as possible.

**Action: Revised draft to be sent out by email for comments/approval prior to submission to BERR on 6 May (SEEDA). Public Sector funders to consider how to contribute to the plan (public sector Board members).**

5. Regional Business Support Strategy – Phil Bailey/All

PB gave the background to the development of a South East Business Support Strategy and introduced the scoping and principles paper. One of the recommendations of the SEERA Scrutiny Committee on business support was that SEEDA should lead the development of a regional business support strategy. SEEDA committed to doing this, and recognised that there were a number of key initiatives that would influence the development such as BSSP, SNR, RES Implementation, national Enterprise Strategy, leading to a decision that the first half of 2008 was the optimal time for doing this. Steering the development and delivery of the strategy will become the main focus of this Board.

**Action: SEEDA to provide a first draft of the Strategy for discussion at the next SEBSAB meeting.**

The following points were raised:

The paper was seen as very comprehensive. Areas such as competition and procurement would be developed in the strategy, as well as areas such as sustainable prosperity and rural business.

The Board supported the establishment of a regional CRMIS and saw this as critical to the strategy. The difficulty in achieving it was recognised and the Board expressed the wish to see and talk about the detail as it developed. There was a desire to see such a system spread across the Greater South East area.

There was no mention of effective recruitment practices in the paper, and that it needed to show support for the public agencies involved in this. A link to Employment and Skills Board was made. It was agreed this should be brought in,

Must keep the strategy focused on the customer perspective. Key principles on pages 4/5 should add “customer driven”.

The strategy should avoid the use of jargon.

It needs the recognition that it will be continuously reviewed.

**Action: the first draft to reflect these points (SEEDA). Explore idea of establishing a sub-group of the Board to focus on developing the strategy (SEEDA).**

6. Next Steps and date of next meeting

RH thanked SEEDA for establishing the group. The agenda was ground breaking and there was a real task to perform. All agreed.

**Action: Next SEBSAB meeting to be set for around the end of May (SEEDA). Other steps as recorded in “actions” throughout minutes.**