

Minutes

South East Business Support Advisory Board (SEBSAB) SEEDA Offices, Guildford – 2 October 2008

Present: Alex Pratt (Chair), Jeff Alexander (SEEDA), Kieran McNamara (East Sussex County Council), Rafiq Chohan (Slough Borough Council), Fay Webster (ICAEW), Roger House (FSB), David Seall (EEF South), Malcolm Hyde (CBI South East), Gina Fegan (South East Media Network), Peter Marsh (LSC), Deborah Wyatt (Business Link Hampshire & Isle of Wight), David Rowland (Skills South East), John Weston (HESE), Catherine Hilton (AOSEC), Sheila Carroll (GOSE), Alastair Reid (Sub Regional Strategic Partnerships), Lynda Jones (jobcentre Plus), Carol McKinley (RAISE), Rory Pereira (UKTI), Marilyn Huckerby (SEEDA), Phil Bailey (SEEDA), Sarah Watson (SEEDA), Ann Johnstone (SEEDA), Ivan Perkovic (SEEDA – Item 7)

Apologies: Bernie Topham (Eastleigh Borough Council), Rodger Broad (IOD), Ross McNally (SE England Chambers of Commerce), Terry Watts (Proskills), Janice Munday (BERR), Nick Woolfenden (SEERA), Oona Muirhead (SEEDA)

1. Welcome to New Members and Introductions – Alex Pratt

AP introduced himself as the new Chair of SEBSAB. He is a SEEDA Board member, runs his own business and has worked within DTI shaping the innovation and business support agenda. He welcomed all, especially fellow “first timers”.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting – Alex Pratt

The minutes were agreed. All actions had either been delivered or would be covered during this meeting.

3. SEEDA Update – Organisational Changes – Jeff Alexander

JA explained changes within SEEDA. John Parsonage is stepping down from his Executive Director role (although will still be working for SEEDA on a part-time basis). He will not be replaced and his directorate will be split between Oona Muirhead (taking Employment & Skills) and JA (Enterprise agenda, Business Link). The changes reflect SEEDA’s move to becoming a more strategic, less hands-on organisation. Robert Crawford, ex CEO of Scottish Enterprise, has joined SEEDA as new Chief Operation Officer.

4. Business Support Simplification Update – Ann Johnstone

AJ gave an update on BSSP, particularly focusing on the national portfolio of 30 business support products, to be announced by Government on 23 October, and the new branding architecture, to be applied to all products (except Train to Gain and UKTI). (See attached slides).

Action: (1) To explore implications on University HEIF funded activity and discuss at the next meeting (AJ/John Weston), (2) To cascade further information on the products ASAP (AJ – further information sent 7/10/08) (3) To discuss the introduction of the products at the January meeting, drawing particularly on the Business Link Experience (Deborah Wyatt)

5. South East Business Support Strategy (consultation draft) – Phil Bailey

PB presented the consultation draft of the Business Support Strategy, summarising that the document's purpose was to provide a framework and direction for funders and providers of business support through the 4 strategic objectives (slides attached). This is the first time that the region will have such a document, bringing everything together in one place, and enabling the region's offer to respond to the 2 recent national strategies ("Enterprise: Unlocking the UK's Talent" and "Innovation Nation"), the Regional Economic Strategy targets, BSSP and the Sub National Review. PB explained the proposed consultation arrangements, that the consultation will run for 6 weeks, from 3 October to 14 November, and that the document and response proforma will be available on the SEEDA website. PB asked for any final comments on the text and, specifically, if the questions were the right ones.

Carol McKinley asked why the consultation was 6 and not 13 weeks, and therefore not Compact compliant. PB replied that both this, and the Business Link consultation, are non-statutory. It was agreed that this would be taken as a learning point. Members raised a range of points, particularly about linkages to LAA national indicators, measuring success and linkages to GVA, the placing of the Voluntary and Community Sector and specific reference to BME as an underrepresented group. PB agreed to take these points on board in order to finalise the document.

Action: PB to bring the response to the consultation to the January meeting.

6. Business Link Consultation Paper – Sarah Watson

SW presented the context for the consultation on the shape of the Business Link service in the South East, in that new contracts would run from 1 April 2010 that will be delivering an enhanced and fully integrated service (slides attached). This provides opportunities for:

- more consistency
- stronger adviser skills
- clearer definition of brokerage
- better measures of quality
- stronger links between BL and other business support providers

There are some fixed national elements to the model, but also some variable elements. The arrangements for the consultation process are the same as for the Business Support Strategy but, in addition, SW will be running 5 stakeholder events during the consultation period to enable further discussion.

AP clarified that the aim is to engage SEBSAB's help in shaping the consultation document, the specification that follows and, ultimately, the service delivered.

Comments were received on the timing and arrangements of the workshops, drawing lessons from other RDAs (both good and bad), making the enhanced role more explicit (especially around skills brokerage), what this consultation will mean to business (and is it aimed at business) and building the section on sub-regional partnerships. SW agreed to take these points on board in order to finalise the document.

Action: (1) SW to consider arrangements for workshops, and contact with specific individual stakeholder, to increase engagement (2) SW to bring the response to the consultation to the January meeting.

7. South East Economy Update – Ivan Perkovic

IP presented a very thorough assessment of the state of the south east economy (see attached slides) and announced that the South East Economy Review (October 2008) would be published the next day. The South East economy is starting to show the effects of the current economic downturn, the research indicated that the impact is set to increase and it now looks inevitable that the economy will slip into a recession. Some key statistics are that exporting in the Eurozone is now flat, and that 60% of exports in the SE are to Europe (25% alone to Germany), the SE accounted for a third of the rise in the latest national unemployment figures, and high utility, fuel and food bills were now affecting consumer spending.

AP summarised by saying that the work SEBSAB is leading is of great significance in the current climate. Business needs this support.

Action: South East Economy Review (October 2008) to be circulated with the minutes (AJ).

8. AOB and close

AP brought the meeting to a close, confirming that the meeting had achieved two important things, having shaped both the Business Support Strategy and the Business Link consultation documents.

Dates of the next 2 meetings are:

14 January 2009, 10am – 12.30pm (plus lunch)

21 April 2009, 10am– 12.30pm (plus lunch)

It was agreed that the next meeting should cover:

- i. Update on feedback on the two consultations, and amendments inspired by them.
- ii. Update on the Business Link Procurement Process
- iii. Review of the new product portfolio and how it is working on the ground
- iv. FSB presentation on findings from “Barriers to Growth” research
- v. HEFCE/HEIF funded business support

The agenda might also cover an update on the Transition Management Plan and an item on the Role of SEBSAB.