NOTES OF SCRUTINY AND REGIONAL STRATEGIC REVIEW PANEL

28th February 2007
Quadrant Court, Dennett House, Taunton

Present:
Ian Munro (Chair) SEEP – Learning, Skills and Business Support
Cllr Mike Bawden Swindon Borough Council
Cllr Brian Clements Borough of Poole Council
Barry Griffiths SEEP – Business and Economic Sector
Roger Haworth SEEP – Voluntary and Community Sector
Cllr Joanna Lewin-Harris Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Saxon Spence Devon County Council
Stephen Wright SEEP – Voluntary and Community Sector
Cllr Richard Yonge South Hams District Council

Also in Attendance:
Hazel Evans, David Fletcher and Craig Frost, SWRA Secretariat

1. **Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were received from Eddie Dennis, Mid Devon District Council, Alan Hockridge, North Somerset Council, Peter Metcalfe, Bath and North East Somerset Council, and Barry Thompson, Swindon Borough Council.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

2.1 Stephen Wright declared that his organisation, South West ACRE Network, do have contracts with the South West RDA. However, these do not relate to any issues surrounding the current review topic.

3. **Notes of the last Meeting**

3.1 The notes of the last meeting dated 10th January 2007 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. **Matters Arising**

4.1 Members agreed that whilst the radio debate discussed in previous meetings remained a worthwhile idea for future reviews, time pressures meant that it would not be possible for this topic.
5. **Sustainable Energy Regional Strategic Review: South West RDA response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations**

5.1 Members expressed concern over the delay in receiving the response to the Panel’s recommendations from the South West RDA.

5.2 Craig Frost, the Secretariat’s Regional Policy Manager for Environment, Waste, Energy and Minerals offered his opinions of the response. The key points he raised were:

- whilst there were a number of positive aspects within the ‘agreed’ responses, there was an overall lack of priorities and deadlines for action;
- item 14 claimed that the South West RDA had undertaken consultation with the Regional Assembly but to his knowledge this had not taken place.

5.3 Members considered the main aspects of the South West RDA’s response. Members made the following comments:

- in general, where the South West RDA agreed with recommendations, their response was positive;
- in areas where they had not explicitly agreed, the South West RDA’s response was largely based on highlighting the work of others on relevant issues;
- Members expressed their disappointment that the 8th March Regen SW conference was not advertised to them. However, other Members noted that there were very few places and these were booked up within hours; advertisement and invitations were therefore limited.

5.4 Members discussed the need to follow up the South West RDA’s written response with a face-to-face meeting, the timing involved and the parties that should be invited to attend.

Possible parties to invite included South West RDA officers, the South West RDA Board Scrutiny Advocate, the Regional Housing Body and the Regional Assembly’s Energy Task Group.

**Members agreed:**

1. that officers arrange for the South West RDA to attend the next Panel meeting;
2. that the South West RDA Board Scrutiny Advocate, Christine Reid, should also be invited to attend;
3. that a strong link should be maintained between the Regional Assembly’s Energy Task Group and the Scrutiny Panel. Outcomes and outputs of this Group should be fed back to the Panel and representatives of the Group should be invited to future Scrutiny Panel meetings.
6. Independent Performance Assessment: Update and meeting with the National Audit Office and South West RDA

6.1 It was proposed that representatives of the South West RDA and NAO attend the May 23rd Scrutiny Panel meeting.

6.2 The South West RDA has produced an improvement plan which will be integrated into the organisation’s change management programme. The meeting with the Scrutiny Panel is designed for the NAO to give feedback to Members on their input into the IPA.

Members agreed that there is a need for officers to communicate with the NAO in order to manage their expectations of the meeting, in terms of content and timing.

7. Scrutiny Memorandum of Understanding

7.1 Officers thanked Members for their inputs to the national level Scrutiny Memorandum of Understanding.

7.2 The Memorandum of Understanding was launched at the English Regions Network Annual Conference in January. Members commented that the South West Regional Assembly has offered to host the next English Regions Network Annual Conference.

Members agreed that feedback on Scrutiny and Strategic Review in other regions should be added to the agenda for a future Scrutiny Panel meeting.

8. Quality of Employment Opportunity Regional Strategic Review: Trade Union Focus Group

8.1 Members felt that the Trade Union Focus Group provided a valuable insight into issues surrounding Quality of Employment Opportunity

8.2 Members felt that the Focus Group style of enquiry provided greater access to key stakeholders and was overall more informative than the Regional Workshop, although part of issue with the QoEO Workshop may have arisen from the nebulous nature of the topic itself.

8.3 Officers noted that Focus Groups with a greater input from Members offer an extremely content rich resource.

8.4 Members felt that Learning Works for All is not offered enough support or funding compared with other South West RDA programmes.
9. Quality of Employment Opportunity Regional Strategic Review: Bilateral and Follow-up Interviews

9.1 Stephen Wright met with Barry Warburton from the Engineering Employer Foundation. Key issues raised included:
- the comprehensive lack of careers advice;
- the need for long-term engagement and funding for sector support programmes;
- although the region will inevitably lose some jobs from the aerospace industry, there is a need to focus on the development of cutting edge technology;
- there is a need for a sector champion on the South West RDA board.

9.2 Barry Griffiths met with Malcolm Gillespie from the Learning and Skills Council. Key issues discussed included:
- Leitch’s impact on the LSC
  - Result is move from funding course suppliers to funding employers
- How LSC and RDA roles fit together
  - Previously overlap of roles
  - Now more cooperative relationship
  - RDA funds capital, LSC fund revenue
  - Improvement in clarity over who earns learning and skills agenda
- Corrective training for those without Maths and English skills
  - Previously lack of feedback into pre-16 education
  - Improvements now in place
- Crucial issue in determining RDA’s role: balance of contribution of business and the State
- SMEs and training
  - Previously employers were offered wage compensation but it didn’t improve SMEs willingness to take part
  - Training employees creates major workload pressure on other employees

Members agreed:

(i) that the Focus Group provided a good model of information gathering for future reviews and Workshops were also valuable but this was dependent on the topic;

(ii) that officers would follow up with Trade Union representatives and maintain an open dialogue as the Review progressed;

(iii) that although the Trade Union Focus Group was extremely useful, care should be taken to ensure that Trade Union opinions should not be lent more weight than those of other groups.
Need for appreciation of the full range of employment opportunities available

9.3 Saxon Spence and Stephen Wright met with John Nash, Regional Development Manager and Annie Simmott, Vice Chair at Skills for Care and Development. Key issues raised were:

- Care is a vital and growing sector in the South West
- The care sector is undervalued and underinvested in by the South West RDA
- ICT has crucial role to play in training remotely
  - But only 40% of organisations have ICT access for non-managers
- Declining role of the public sector, growth of private organisations
- Migrant workers
  - Need for language training
  - Need for pan-EU recognition of skills
- Need to question why healthcare and social care sector are trained separately
- Given the dispersed nature of the workplaces involved, transport is a major barrier to participation in the workforce, particularly amongst young people.

9.4 Officers stated that John Chapman had cancelled his meeting with Members as he did not feel qualified to answer the Panel’s questions due to the focus on the situation in the South West. If he can find a colleague to support him at a meeting, John Chapman may contact officers to reschedule the meeting.

9.5 Peter Metcalfe and Eddie Dennis met with Peter Renshaw from Connexions Somerset. Officers provided feedback on the meeting based on the notes of the meeting. Key issues raised at the meeting were:

- who funds careers guidance and where the split lies between Connexions and schools;
- poor delivery of careers guidance in schools.

Members agreed:

(i) that the post bilateral interviews had proved to be a useful and interesting source of detailed information;

(ii) that future reviews should use interviews of this nature in the process of information gathering;

(ii) that there was not a pressing need to reschedule a meeting with John Chapman from People 1st.

10. Quality of Employment Opportunity Regional Strategic Review: Bilateral discussions

10.1 Members commented that the South West RDA appeared to be well prepared for the meeting and the meeting was a fruitful, two-way discussion.
10.2 Members discussed the value of employing a stenographer for bilateral discussions and agreed that the practicalities of detailed recording outweighed the costs.

10.3 Three of the documents that the Panel had requested from the South West RDA at the bilateral discussions were distributed by officers.

Members agreed:

(iii) that the bilateral discussions were a success;

(iv) that the transcript from the stenographer is a valuable resource for Members and officers to draw on for recommendations;

(v) that the outstanding documents requested from the RDA at the bilateral will be sent out by officers once they have been received from the RDA.


11.1 Members considered and agreed the proposed structure of the report.

11.2 Members discussed the possibility of undertaking sub-regional investigations into the Quality of Employment Opportunity in their area. Members agreed that a coordinated investigation would not be practical but that Members who wished to would take the necessary steps in their area.

11.3 Members commented on certain draft recommendations. Key comments were:

- the need for greater emphasis in the recommendations on boosting the understanding of the role of SMEs in the region, as the South West RDA focuses on the ‘big wins’ such as the aerospace sector;
- an appreciation of the poor access to training for micro-businesses as distinct from SMEs;
- general agreement about Recommendation 1 on the vague nature of the term ‘Quality of Employment Opportunity’;
- some Members expressed concerns that issues relating to Black and Minority Ethnic groups would only be mentioned in the final section of the report.
12. Future Scrutiny Topics

12.1 Members discussed the use of consultants in the selection of future scrutiny topics.

12.2 Members were assured that the use of a consultant would not limit their input to the process, particularly as the consultant would solicit Panel Members opinions. It was noted that the use of a consultant would offer a more robust basis for selection of a topic and that ultimately the final decision rests with the Panel.

12.3 Members suggested that possible topics could be an investigation of the links between the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy or a particular issue within regional transport.

Members agreed:

(i) that the report should be structured as proposed reflecting the Panel’s role to scrutinise the South West RDA, the topic beyond the role of the South West RDA and issues raised that cannot be overlooked but also cannot be focused on in detail in terms of the Panel’s report;

(ii) that officers will email a draft report to Members for their comment;

(iii) that the draft report will be presented to the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 11th April, in order to go before the Executive on 27th April and the Full Assembly on 13th July;

(iv) that Members can undertake sub-regional investigations if they wish but that these would have to take place in the next 10 days if their findings are to influence the report.

Chair (signature) ..............................................................

Date ..............................................................