

## **Response of the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership to South East England Development Agency - Draft Corporate Plan 2008-11 - March 2008**

The Oxfordshire Economic Partnership (OEP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on SEEDA's draft Corporate Plan 2008-11.

The Corporate Plan has clearly been developed with much thought and consideration, a process which is particularly difficult in the current environment of change and uncertainty around the implications of the Sub-National Review.

The OEP welcomes the focus on joining up working, simplification of business support and cross-regional activity where appropriate, although this does need to be expanded to all the RDAs which have a boundary with SEEDA, SWERDA, AWM, EMDA and not just the Greater South East.

It is less clear how the Corporate Plan and the changes outlined for the organisation of SEEDA, will contribute directly to the delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy.

The focus for the Corporate Plan, in terms of both outcomes and budgets, is regional. This needs to be taken down to the locality so that there is ownership at a local level and thus a greater commitment to delivery. Currently, as the Oxfordshire sub-region, we do not know how the RES targets relate to us - without the context of the current situation in terms of RES targets there is little incentive to take ownership of the delivery of these targets or to develop plans to achieve these.

This same line of thinking follows for the budgets outlined in the Corporate Plan. Without understanding the current budget allocations it is impossible to make comment on the future allocations in terms of programme delivery or geographical focus. All these need to be taken down to an Oxfordshire level so that we as partners can understand the implications.

The focus on local authority and Local Area Agreements is understandable, however, it has become clear, certainly in Oxfordshire that the straightjacket of National Indicators and timescales exclude many of the activities which promote economic development and indeed contribute to the delivery of RES targets. Thus it is much better to look at the wider picture of Sustainable Community Strategy and the priorities developed by the OEP as the thematic partnership for the SCS, to enable economic development. The partnerships and working arrangements which have been developed through the process of the LAA and Sustainable Community Strategy are now beginning to bear fruit but these need to be seen as tools to better working and not as a total answer.

The OEP welcomes the strengthening of SEEDA's focus on the locality but would like this to be extended to the Area teams, Business Link and Local Skills for Productivity Alliance all of which function at the MKOB level which has no recognition as an economic sub-region.

Having strongly supported the focus on the sub-regions, it is clear that some activities are more appropriately and effectively carried out over a larger geography. The value of programmes such as the Innovation Advisory Service, which access regional expertise and knowledge should not be underplayed, although they clearly need to connect strongly into the local economy and the activities at that level.

The Corporate Plan seems to lack any recognition that the delivery of economic prosperity can only be influenced and possibly promoted by the activity of support agencies - the key is the private sector.

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