

## Launch of the South Economic Development Network 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011

Over 70 delegates participated in the launch of the South East Economic Development Network at Hamilton House, London, on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The event, a joint venture between South East Employers (SEE) and the Institute of Economic Development (IED), was set up in response to demand from member organisations who wanted a forum for learning, networking and sharing good practice across the South East. It was chaired by Alex Pratt OBE, Chair of Buckinghamshire Business First, and Managing Director of Serious Brands, a prominent Bucks business.

The event explored a number of issues facing the region. Cllr Rory Love, Chair of SEE and Deputy Leader for Shepway District Council, opened the inaugural meeting by highlighting the importance of economic development as a discipline, not just for wealth creation for its own sake, but as a major contributor to wider financial and social inclusion. Deputy Chair of IED, Dawn Hudd, echoed his remarks, calling for greater collaboration and stressing the importance of 'economic development' as an umbrella term which encompassed not just those with the term in their job title, but also those who work with communities in different capacities, to enable them to live in healthier, wealthier communities in which they are proud to live. Next, Jennifer McNeill, Regional Director of SEE, and John Lockett, Executive Director of IED, discussed the importance of the network to their respective organisations, focusing on increased ability to influence, and extend their work with relevant partners.



SEEDA's Dr Susan Priest then gave a presentation on the changing face of the economic development landscape; the impact on the loss of SEEDA and the other RDAs, and where businesses could now go for support. She concluded with an introduction to The Knowledge Bank, a resource currently hosted by SEEDA which contains advice and information on growth businesses, innovation, key sectors, skills development, regeneration, supporting rural areas, accessing European funding, economic shocks, supporting the green economy, evaluations, and case studies.

Susan was followed by Mark Pearson, Chief Executive of the Surrey Economic Partnership, who discussed the principles of Smart Economic Growth. An American model of growth which is becoming increasingly popular in the UK, Smart Economic Growth, focuses achieving a sustainable development strategy rather than growth at any cost, extracting more from less, and harnessing innovation and technology to develop innovative ways of working that increase productivity without damaging the quality of life or environment. Surrey has identified the growth sectors computing and gaming technologies, electrical and mechanical engineering, financial and business support services, pharmaceuticals and advanced manufacturing and is working with those sectors to achieve growth through its knowledge economy, innovation culture, global competitiveness and driving enterprise.



After the break, Paul Kinvig of the Hampshire Economic Partnership chaired a lively session on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and an alternative model espoused by Buckingham, namely the Free Economic Partnership Model (FEPM). Simon Neilson, Assistant Director at Essex County Council, and lead on the South East LEP (an area comprising Kent, Greater



Essex and East Sussex) discussed its challenges – sheer size of the area, and the structure and complexity of the board, against its opportunities – the ability to influence and attract investment and its strategic importance politically. He had a clear view that the remit of the LEP was to focus carefully on priorities that the LEP could achieve; to steer clear of competing district / county priorities and to look only at where the it could add value. Stuart Jones, the Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Business First,

discussed the FEPM as an alternative to the LEP offer. In Bucks, business was driving the growth agenda, with financial support from the County Council, but without heavy council influence. Like Simon, Stuart was clear about the focus of the FEPM, and that it should focus only on those things which explicitly drove growth, but he feels that less local authorities influence will lead to a lighter, nimbler, more responsive partnership, focused solely on economic growth, and less likely to be sidetracked.



Dawn Hudd chaired the final session of the afternoon, leading a discussion about how the public and private sectors are working together to support new businesses in Kent. Jo James, Chief Executive of Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, discussed how the Chamber is working on a targeted service to provide advice and guidance to start ups across the county. The model relies on County Council support initially, but expects to become self sustainable by 2014. There was a great deal of interest in the model, particularly around how the service would become self sustaining. Advertising, sponsorship, and providing services to new businesses at a low cost were highlighted as key features of the model. Delegates were keen to receive an update of the service at a future meeting of the network.



Drawing the event to a close Alex, highlighted the importance of a forum like this for debate, sharing knowledge and information, and learning. He also asked delegates to consider future themes for the network and how they might like to get involved.

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**About SEE:** SEE is one of the nine regional employers' organisations which represent the interests of local authorities and public sector bodies in England. As the regional employer's organisation for the South East, we are independent and not-for-profit. Our organisation is member-led, and we aim to add value to our councils and communities through our wealth of local knowledge and professional expertise.

Our mission is to support and enhance councils and communities. We achieve this by working closely with our partners and other stakeholders to identify current and future challenges and aligning our services to meet those needs. As an independent organisation supporting our partners, we represent their collective interests at a national and regional level, assist them in procuring resources and services cost-effectively, and establish and facilitate professional networks and partnerships. As a central 'hub', we provide an effective forum to collate management information and data to share best practice and benchmark.

**About IED:** The Institute of Economic Development (IED) is the leading United Kingdom organisation for economic development practitioners. It is committed to demonstrating the value of economic

development work for local and regional communities, to the pursuit of best practice in economic development and to the attainment of the highest standard of professional training and competence.

IED, like most professional institutions, is a non-profit making company. It is run by a Council consisting of directly elected Directors and representatives of local branches. IED's task is to represent the interests of economic development practitioners throughout the United Kingdom and ensure that their views are widely expressed. It also sets standards of professional conduct and seeks to enhance the status and competence of practitioners through education and training and by the dissemination of information and technical knowledge.