

Agenda Item 11

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

23 April 2008

The Future of Scrutiny – The West Midlands and Parliamentary Activity

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Assembly of progress being made with the development of new scrutiny and accountability arrangements resulting from proposals within the SNR.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Assembly notes progress.

3. Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the SNR proposed new scrutiny and accountability arrangements at a regional level suggested that Local Authorities would lead an enhanced regional scrutiny role with parliamentary oversight provided by regional select committees.
- 3.2 Considerable activity is being undertaken within in the Region and at a parliamentary level to explore how these proposals could be implemented.

4. Future Regional Arrangements

- 4.1 It is intended that the work being undertaken by the Assembly in respect of future scrutiny arrangements will feed into the various groups involved in the implementation of SNR in the Region. The Regional Scrutiny Manager is a member of the recently formed SNR Advisory Group that will advise the regional Forum of Leaders. It will also contribute to the forthcoming review of the West Midlands Local Government Association which will include scrutiny issues.

4.2 This work will consist of:

- Completion of an discussion paper (available on the Assembly website - <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=225>)
- Identification of a number of preferred options following discussion with regional partners and stakeholders
- Development of the options into viable propositions in order to allow the identification of a "West Midlands offer" with regional buy in to be presented to the Assembly in July 2008
- Development of a regional protocol with key partners that will translate the strategic intent into practical reality. It is hoped to complete this during 2009 to enable a smooth transition from current to new arrangements.

4.3 The discussion paper is intended to provoke thinking and discussion as to the possible form and function of any future regional scrutiny arrangements which will then feed into the transitional arrangements around SNR and the WMLGA review. It is anticipated that discussion events will be organised during April and May for partners and stakeholders. These will follow the publication of the SNR consultation document as it will be important to ensure that any proposed options will meet the expectation of Government.

5. **Parliamentary Activity**

5.1 Parliamentary scrutiny is a matter for parliament rather than government and following initial discussions the House of Commons Modernisation Committee announced that it was carrying out a short inquiry into Regional Accountability. Members will be aware that the Assembly provided a written submission responding to the following;

- What models of accountability might work;
- What the role of the House should be in regional accountability; and
- What resources would be needed to make regional accountability work in the House of Commons.

5.2 Four evidence sessions have been held or planned as follows;

- 30 January – Regional Development Agencies represented by Yorkshire Forward, EMDA and EEDA
- 6 February - Regional Assemblies represented by SERA, EERA, SWRA, Y&H RA and EMRA and the National LGA represented by Cllr Sparks Dudley, Cllr Parsons Leicestershire CC and the LGA Programme Director.
- 20 February – NDPB's represented by NHS East of England, NHS North West, North West LSC, Arts Council England North West and the Highways Agency.

- 27 February – Select Committees represented by the Chairs of the Liaison Committee, BERR Committee, CLG Committee and the Clerk of the Liaison Committee
- 5 March – Government Perspective provided by Hazel Blears Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ben Bradshaw Regional Minister for the South West and Trudi Elliott Government Office for the West Midlands.

Transcriptions of the oral evidence can be accessed via the:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmmodern.htm>

- 5.3 Considerable time has been spent to understand current accountability arrangements within the region prior to discussions about Parliamentary accountability. Nothing appears to have been ruled out with questions around local authority representation on select committees and the feasibility of different approaches in different regions. Common themes include that any parliamentary scrutiny should not focus purely on RDAs and that the purpose of parliamentary scrutiny should be to look at the effect of public policy within regions and how government enables delivery. There has also been a significant amount of questioning regarding the role and accountability of Regional Ministers.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that the Committee will report by the end of May 2008 and a representative has agreed to speak at the ENR Conference in York.

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