

Agenda Item 4

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Draft Decision Notes of the West Midlands Regional Assembly Meeting held on 16 January 2008

Chairman: Cllr David S Smith (Lichfield DC)

1. Apologies and Attendance

The apologies and attendances are attached as Appendix 1.

2. Members' Disclosures of Interest

The following declarations of interest were stated:

- Dr Sarindar Singh Sahota: Non Executive Member of Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust
- Roger Trotman: Vice Chair of Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

3. Chairman's and Vice-Chairs' Reports

Cllr David S Smith (Chairman):

- Advised Members of those individuals with close links to the WMRA who had received honours in the New Year's list; these included Rob Sykes (former Chief Executive of Worcestershire County Council and WMRA Secretary), Nina Dawes (Chief Executive of Lichfield DC and deputy Partnership Secretary), Brian Woods-Scawen, Elisabeth Buggins, David Cragg and Frances Beatty. Letters of congratulations would be sent from the Chairman on behalf of the Assembly.
- Stated that in this period of significant change there was a need to work collectively to achieve a successful transition in the best interests of the communities in the West Midlands.

- Following the submission of the Regional Spatial Strategy – Phase Two to Government, a letter had been received from Baroness Andrews (Communities and Local Government) which stated that as the region had not fulfilled the Government's requirement to incorporate the increased housing provision set out in the Housing Green Paper (July 2007), consultants would be commissioned, managed by GOWM to undertake further work looking at options that could deliver higher housing numbers. The Chairman stated that, through the Regional Planning Partnership, much considered work had been undertaken with local authorities and partners to ascertain the maximum level of increased housing that could be accommodated in the region. Members would be kept informed of progress.
- Concern was raised that through the RSS process it was the region's aim to maintain communities which were sustainable, the decision as to where to place an ecotown in the region would be with Government. The development of an ecotown proposal had not been shared with the Assembly (as the planning body), which was a matter of concern. It was anticipated that an ecotown would consist of around 5,000 homes.
- Confirmation was given that the RSS Phase One – Black Country Study, which had been submitted to Government, had been approved. The Chairman expressed his thanks to Assembly members, partners and officers for work undertaken.

Elizabeth Newman (OSG – Board Member)

- Extended New Year's greetings on behalf of Roger McKenzie (Vice Chair – OSG) who was currently on a scholarship to Harvard University.
- The OSG welcomed the opportunity to be represented on the SNR Transition Board and would endeavour to play a full part.

Dr Sarindar Singh Sahota (Vice Chair – Business Council)

- Emphasised the benefit that different organisations brought to the strategic level to demonstrate added value, such as in the success of RSS Phase One.
- 2007 had been the most successful year yet for the West Midlands Business Council and an annual report had been published.

- SNR was an important development in the region and to date WMBC had not been invited to make a nomination to the SNR Transition Board or any other groups. The view of the business sector was valid and as the representative of business in the Assembly WMBC should be actively involved in defining future arrangements.

Cllr Terry Dix (Vice Chair - LA)

- Agreed with all comments made from the Vice Chairs.
- He reminded the Assembly that he was currently Chairing the Strategic Review Group for Transport. He requested that any input to the Review could be made to himself, Dagmar Waller or Daryl Davies.

4. **Decision Notes of the Assembly meeting held on 24 October 2007**

The notes were **agreed** as a true record.

5. **Company Secretary's Report**

The Assembly received a report which provided a general update on the following issues;

2007-08 Half Year Progress Report, Member Allowances Scheme, City Region Company, 2008-09 Budget Planning and West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision

The Assembly **noted** the details of the report and specifically:

- (i) **received** the 2007-08 Half Year Progress Report
- (ii) **noted** the Board decision not to change current practice in respect of Allowances.
- (iii) **noted** the Board decision to take up a share option in the new City Region Company.
- (iv) **noted** the receipt of correspondence from Government with relation to West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision.

6. **Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration**

Members received an update report on SNR related activity both nationally and within the West Midlands. The publication of Government guidance was still awaited. Partnership working was emphasised as a important element to retain and Members were reminded of the Assembly Conference to be held on 28 January which would focus on effective partnership working and the development of the regional concordat.

The Assembly was formally notified of the secondment of Rose Poulter – Director of Policy to lead transition team which would report to the newly established Transition Board. The secondment would be based at AWM from the beginning of February 2008. A secondment would be sought to back fill the position in the Assembly although it was recognised that Rose would remain in close contact with the Assembly as the future progressed.

During discussion the following points were raised:

- The Business Council raised concerns that:
 - (i) there seemed to be a growing emphasis on achieving sustainable development to the detriment of economic development
 - (ii) WMBC had not been requested to submit a representative to the newly established transition board.
 - (iii) There was a need to be a proper discussion around business rate support.
- Local government would need to consider its role and structure and sectoral partners would need to be aware of this work
- Scrutiny would be a critical role that would need to have considered work undertaken and there was a need to build on the good work undertaken within the region to date.

In response the Chief Executive stated that;

- Sustainable development needed to be taken account of as an important issue together with economic development.
- She would contact AWM and WMBC with relation to representation on the transition board
- Officers would note the statement made about business support rate.

7. West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy

Assembly Members were updated on progress and key issues in relation to the RSS Revision. Members were advised of the implications of Barnoness Andrews' decision to commission consultants, managed by GOWM to carry out further work to consider options that could deliver higher housing numbers. The implication of the additional work was to extend the timetable for the Examination in Public for Phase Two which would therefore have an impact for Phase Three in terms of time and resources. Further consideration would be given to the

timetable for Phase Three which would be submitted to Baroness Andrews.

During discussion the following views were expressed:

- concerns were raised that the amended timetables for Phase Two and Three could provide potential difficulties for partners as the same contributors would be inputting into both Phases, therefore it was imperative that there should be no overlap in timescales due to capacity restraints.
- It was emphasised that with the additional issue of the implications of the Sub National Review it was imperative that Phase Three was given appropriate time to consider issues relating to rural regeneration and environmental policies.
- The region had worked hard to provide realistic and challenging housing figures and concerns were raised that Government would reconsider housing number without giving due regard to appropriate infrastructures. It was essential that the region was not compelled to build inappropriately at short term.
- Within Phase One, additional details were submitted to Government to strengthen the section on transport issues, however this was not successfully included.
- It was stated that in relation to ecotowns, shortlisting would be held in February 2008, with confirmation of the successful area in July 2008 and the application process undertaken by the end of 2008. It was expected that each region would gain at least one ecotown.

Members **agreed** to note the content of the report and the above comments.

8. West Midlands Economic Strategy Delivery Framework consultation

Assembly members were advised of the current consultation on the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) Delivery Framework; and the process that was being undertaken to develop a Regional Assembly response to the consultation.

Members **agreed** to

- **note** the process for developing the WMRA response;
- Sign off of the response for WMRA by the WMRA Chair and Vice Chairs; and
- submit any comments which they wish to be included to the Secretariat.

9. Revision of the Scrutiny and Strategic Review Annual Plan 2007/08

The Assembly was presented with a revised 2007/8 Annual Plan commencing September 2007 which was **endorsed**.

Members additionally requested that the action notes of the scrutiny event held on 17 December 2007 **be circulated**.

10. Submission to House of Commons Modernisation Committee

Members were informed of the submission made by the Assembly to the Modernisation Committee in respect of its enquiry into regional accountability.

The content of the submission was **noted** by Members.

11. Health and Well Being Strategy

The Regional Assembly was presented with the final West Midlands Regional Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the early draft action plan.

In addition, the Assembly was informed that the West Midlands had been successful in gaining £6.8m to support the 'Living Well in the West Midlands' project, which was to be formally launched on 4 February.

Formal thanks were expressed to Zena Lynch from the West Midlands Regional Assembly and colleagues from the Department of Health, Rashmi Shukla and Janet Baker, for the significant amount of work and direction given in the development of the Health and Well Being Strategy.

Members **agreed** to:

- **Receive** and **note** the content of the West Midlands Health and Wellbeing Strategy (available at the meeting)
- **Note** the progress that was being made with respect to the action plan and **endorsed** the process outlined for developing the detail of this action plan.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Assembly members, thanked Cllr Steve Eling, Chair of the Health Partnership for his drive and leadership prior to and during the development of the Strategy.

12. Transport Challenge

Members considered a report informing them of the on-going

process to respond to the Regional Minister's 'Transport Challenge'. The Chief Executive advised Members that Rosie Winterton MP (Minister of State, Department for Transport) at a recent event in the House of Commons had spoken of the work of the Regional Assemblies in taking forward transport issues.

In discussion the following points were raised:

- The region should not be seeking additional infrastructure at the cost of much needed infrastructure in places such as the Black Country and North Staffordshire.
- There was a need through the Regional Funding Allocation to have a methodology as to how to address the policy impact of climate change
- There was a need to press ministers on issues relating to transport in the West Midlands as, despite the work undertaken on this issue, there seemed to be a lack of government action.
- It was stated that in discussion with MEPs, it was stated that the West Midlands was not linking into as much euro funding on transport infrastructure as may be available. As there had been £5m cut in British Waterways from DEFRA removed, an opportunity could present itself through an integrated transport plan.
- Whilst it was considered that the transport plan was adequate for the majority of the region, additional support was called for in terms of meeting more locally required needs e.g the West Coast Railways had invested much money in the region, but services to rail stations had diminished. Could the Regional Assembly help deliver local concerns?
- The regional scrutiny of transport currently being undertaken would highlight several issues including the Trans European NS it would be hoped that the Regional Assembly would taken note of its recommendations. With the timetable for scrutiny now extended, Members were encouraged to submit any information or points through Cllr Terry Dix or Dagmar Waller.

Chief Executive thanked members for comments.

Members agreed to **note** the on-going process and the next steps as outlined in the report..

13. West Midlands Biodiversity Strategy

Peter Shirley, Assembly Member representing the Environmental Sector, presented the meeting with a report informing of the

progress regarding the implementation of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy for the West Midlands. He reminded Members that it had been three years since the strategy had been brought forward for consideration by the Assembly.

The Chief Executive advised Members that at the Association Council held earlier that day, that local government had endorsed a pledge.

The Regional Assembly **agreed** to;

- Note the progress that has been made regarding the implementation of the Regional Biodiversity Strategy.
- Continue to support the work of the West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership.

14. Regional Sustainable Development Framework - Refreshed

The Assembly was provided with the draft version of the “refreshed” Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) for endorsement. The Framework had been led on behalf of the Concordat partners by Sustainability West Midlands, and the Chief Executive expressed the Assembly's thanks to SWM for their work.

The Assembly **endorsed** the refreshed RSDF which was attached as Appendix B and were advised that the Framework would now be forwarded to DEFRA.

15. Regional Policy Partnership Headline Issues

Assembly Members were updated on key issues undertaken by the Secretariat on behalf of the Board and Assembly Partnerships over the last quarter (that were not subject to other reports on the agenda).

Rose Poulter, Director of Policy advised Members that with relation to housing funding, confirmation had been received that the region would receive £679m over three years split between the Housing Corporation and directly with local authorities. Whilst the receipt of monies was to be welcomed, there would be challenging times ahead as the financial split was prescriptive with 69% of the total funding allocated to the Housing Corporation and 31% to local authorities.

The Assembly **noted** the content of the report

16. Decision Notes of the West Midlands Regional Assembly Board of Directors held on 26 September 2007

Members **noted** the decision notes of the Board of Directors.

17. Assembly Conference Programme : 28 January 2008

Members **noted** the content of the Assembly Conference Programme. All were encouraged to attend and to register their attendance with the Secretariat.

The Chairman advised Members that this would be the first opportunity for the Regional Minister to address Assembly Members collectively.

18. Any Other Business

There was none.

19. Dates of Future meetings:

- **23 April 2008**
- **9 July 2008 - Annual Meeting**

Appendix 1**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING**

Cllr Phillip Atkins	Staffordshire CC
Cllr Keith Austin	Telford and Wrekin
Cllr Bob Badham	Sandwell MBC
Cllr Albert Bore	Birmingham CC
Cllr Neil Campbell	Rugby BC
Cllr Serena Croad	Malvern Hills DC
Cllr Norman Davies	Solihull MBC
Cllr Terry Dix	Staffordshire CC
Cllr Brian Douglas Maull	Walsall MBC
Cllr Andrew Eade	Telford and Wrekin
Cllr Steve Eling	Sandwell MBC
Cllr Liz Eyre	Worcestershire CC
Cllr Ian Fletcher	Telford and Wrekin
Cllr Mrs Jean Griffiths	Bromsgrove DC
Cllr John Hammon	Warwick DC
Cllr Dennis Harvey	Nuneaton and Bedworth BC
Cllr Richard Hyde	Warwickshire CC
Cllr Mick Jones	Warwickshire CC
Cllr Mrs Jo Jones	Shrewsbury and Atcham
Cllr John Lines	Birmingham CC
Cllr Andy Matchett	Coventry CC
Cllr Ken Messon	Solihull MBC
Cllr Paul Middleborough	Wychavon DC
Cllr John Mutton	Coventry CC
Cllr Jeremy Oates	Tamworth BC
Cllr Chris Saint	Stratford on Avon DC
Cllr Tersaim Singh	Wolverhampton CC
Cllr Sadie Smith	Sandwell MBC
Cllr David S Smith	Lichfield DC
Cllr Ken Taylor	Coventry CC
Cllr Liz Tucker	Worcestershire CC

Frances Beatty, Mike Cherry, Prithvi Chopra, Mike Hill, Sarindar Singh Sahota, Roger Stone, Brian Summers, Roger Trotman, Deborah Walsh and Barrie Williams.

Valerie Broom, Roger Evans, Patricia Fairclough, Revd John Hall, Gerald Kells, Marcia Lewinson, Elizabeth Newman, Peter Shirley and Alan Weaver

Also present: Malcolm Cook, Laird Ryan Paul Lancaster Nick Paul Jim Graham Mike Kinghan and Andrea Whitworth (GOWM)