

Agenda Item 7

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

23 April 2008

Report of the Chief Executive and Company Secretary

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide the Assembly with an update on general issues: -

- 3.1 2007-08 Year End Report
- 3.2 2008-11 Business Plan & Budget
- 3.3 Staffing Update
- 3.4 Members Declarations of Interest
- 3.5 WMRSS Phase Two Revision – Extension of consultation 30 June 2008
- 3.6 Homes and Communities Agency
- 3.7 West Midlands Regional Assembly 2008 Conference
- 3.8 ERN Conference – 23 May, Royal York Hotel, York

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Assembly is asked to **note** the details of this report and in particular the Board Decision at [3.4]

3. Report Details

3.1 2007-08 Year End Report

The deadline for submission of the 2007-08 Year End Report to Government Office is 18th April 2008, the Board delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairs to manage the quarter four activity to ensure the budget is utilised effectively and approve final virements. All CLG funding provided in the year has been fully utilised and whilst approval was sought for a small contingency we do not believe there will be any underspend to facilitate this.

3.2 2008-11 Business Plan and Budget

The Assembly submitted its 2008-11 Business Plan to GOWM in accordance with the CLG timetable but has subsequently been asked to provide some additional outputs in relation to the WMRSS for 2009-10. We have complied with this request from Ministers and the additional information inserted into the Business Plan under [work strand 18] WMRSS Revision is captured in the attached appendix. At the time of writing we are still awaiting funding confirmation from CLG. The current draft Business Plan is available at Appendix 1

3.3 **Staffing Update**

Members are advised that Rose Poulter has taken up a role with AWM to lead a transition team working on the West Midlands' approach to SNR. Following a recruitment process, Mark Middleton has been appointed on a secondment basis from Worcestershire County Council to replace Rose. Mark commenced his secondment 31 March.

Our current Head of Planning, David Thew, is retiring on 31 May 2008. John Pattinson from Dudley MBC has been appointed to replace David from 28 April 2008 to enable appropriate handover arrangements.

3.4 **Members Declarations of Interest**

A report to the Board on 12 March provided an update on outstanding Declaration of Interest forms. The Vice Chairs and lead members for each sector have received email notification of those members from their sector who have yet to file forms.

Local Government 13 outstanding; of which 4 are Full Members and 9 are Alternate Members

Business 0 outstanding Full or Alternate Member

Other Stakeholders 2 outstanding Alternate Members

The Board is advised that all Declarations of Interest received have now been uploaded onto the Assembly website in accordance with our operational protocols. All members should now be advised that it is their personal responsibility to regularly check their declaration details and notify the Chief Executive in writing if there is a change to his/her declaration.

Declarations of Interest may be accessed on the web at url address; **<http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=431>**

Board Decision:

The 2007 audit criticised the lack of member documentation filed and despite officers efforts to encourage submission throughout the year a number of forms were still outstanding. **The Board therefore agreed that any Member who had not returned a Declaration of Interest form by 23 April 2008 would be advised that they are in breach of company regulations and their membership is suspended until their forms are filed.** Suspension of membership letters will therefore be issued following this meeting.

3.5 **West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) Phase Two Revision – Extension of consultation period until 30 June**

The Regional Assembly has received a response from Baroness Andrews to Cllr Rex Roberts' letter regarding the government's intention to commission

additional work to identify options to deliver further housing growth in the West Midlands.

Members of the Regional Planning Partnership had previously expressed considerable concern and disappointment at the Government's proposed intervention. In particular, concern was raised about the inference that certain of the underlying principles of the WMRSS could be open to question. Despite these serious reservations, Members agreed that the Assembly should constructively engage with the proposed study to ensure that the views of the Assembly are fully taken into account.

The Assembly suggested extending the consultation period until 30 June to provide an opportunity for consultees to consider the government's study when making responses to the Phase Two Revision Draft, particularly bearing in mind that council elections will be taking place in many authorities. In her letter, Baroness Andrews indicated she was pleased to note that the Regional Planning Body (RPB) was prepared to engage constructively with the study and share its views and expertise. She was also pleased to note the RPB's intention to **extend the consultation period to 30 June 2008**.

The Assembly Secretariat has made arrangements to inform Regional Partners and the Public about this extended consultation period.

3.6 Homes and Communities Agency

Sir Bob Kerslake has written to the Assembly to introduce himself as Chief Executive Designate of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and to update on progress. (Letter attached at Appendix 2)

Formed from the Housing Corporation, English Partnerships, the Academy for Sustainable Communities and delivery functions from CLG, the HCA will be formally created on 1 April 2009, as part of the current Housing and Regeneration Bill. However, it may be possible to get the HCA up and started by November 2008.

Sir Bob Kerslake was appointed in December 2007, and formally came into post April 2008.

Key for the HCA will be delivery of the Government's new homes target, the targets for affordable housing and to be an exemplar national regeneration agency. HCA's formal relationship with local government through the Local Government Association will be set out in a concordat based on the principles of the Central Local Concordat between central and local government signed in 2007.

The HCA is expected to have a presence in each of the Government Regional Offices where appropriate, corporate centres in London and Warrington, and possibly offices in those Regions where there is a regeneration need.

Sir Bob Kerslake has met with the Chief Executives of the Regional Development Agencies and they are working on details of the relationship and, in particular, how the Regional Funding Allocations process will work. The Assembly Chief Executive will be meeting with Sir Bob Kerslake on 4th June 2008.

3.7 Voice of the Region – Speaking out for the Region West Midlands Regional Assembly 2008 Conference

Partners from across the Region contributed to the Assembly's highly successful annual conference on Monday 28 January at Aston Villa Football Club. Speakers included Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the Region; Lord Bill Morris of Handsworth and Simon Topman, Chief Executive of Acme Whistles.

The Assembly was pleased to see the many delegates (who between them represented organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors) discuss the future of the regional partnerships, which have been developed during the past nine years through the Assembly.

The workshops produced some interesting views with the overall message that partnership working was still very much needed in this Region after 2010, when the Assembly ceases to exist.

To view the full outcomes from the Conference visit the WMRA Website at <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=394>

3.8 ERN Annual Conference

Members are advised that the 2008 ERN Annual Conference will be held on **Friday 23rd May** at the Royal York Hotel in York (next to York railway station) between 11.00am and 3.30pm.

This free conference will be a major national event focusing on the Government's Sub-National Review of economic development and regeneration (SNR) and the proposed single regional strategies. High profile speakers have been invited from Government, Regional Development Agencies, campaign groups as well as representatives of Regional Assemblies.

Following the recent publication of the SNR consultation document, the conference will provide a unique opportunity to listen, respond and exchange views on the Government's proposals and it will also help develop the ERN response. Additionally the report of the Modernisation Committee is expected in April and consideration will be given to this at the Conference (Shaz is this out?).

Conference details are available from Michael Craggs: - m.craggs@wmlga.gov.uk 0121 245 0155

**Olwen Dutton
Chief Executive**