

## NEWS RELEASE



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### **It's Only Brussels?**

Comments are being sought on the outcomes and recommendations of a study into how the West Midlands relates to and with Europe.

The study which is called 'It's Only Brussels? - The West Midlands' Relationship with Europe', has been carried out by the West Midlands Regional Assembly. In addition to its statutory responsibility to scrutinise the work of the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands, the Assembly also carries out investigations/assessments into wider issues which have an impact across the entire Region.

The Strategic Review Panel gathered evidence over a six month period from a wide range of regional, national and European organisations as well as MEPs and individuals working in the field.

The Panel have made 11 recommendations for improving the way the West Midlands engages with and benefits from Europe. These cover strategic direction, governance arrangements, the role of the West Midlands in Europe office, officer support, influencing policy, funding opportunities, resources and intelligence.

Assembly Member, Roger McKenzie, West Midlands TUC, who chaired the Panel commented: "Our findings show that there is a clear commitment to engagement with Europe and also retaining a regional presence in Brussels. However the Panel were concerned that the Region has allowed its response to the European agenda to drift over recent years with a lack of strategic direction exacerbated by confused governance arrangements, an imbalance in the distribution of resources and an excess of information rather than useful intelligence."

"European engagement is not and should never be an end in itself. Europe provides a context in which the Region works. Its influence and the opportunities it offers should be considered as routinely as national government. After all it is only Brussels - isn't it? ", added Roger McKenzie.

The consultation period on the Report will run from 12<sup>th</sup> March to 13<sup>th</sup> April. To view the Report and make a comment visit [www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=278](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=278)

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**Notes to editors:**

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
5. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.

6. For further information, visit our website [www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)