

Evolving a Regional Strategic Partnership

A **DRAFT** Proposition (V10 - 050407)

Introduction

Set within the context of the Local Government White Paper and the sub national review of Economic Development and Regeneration, this paper sets out a proposition for the West Midlands Region with regard to improved and extended collaborative working across the region on matters of policy and subsequent delivery that have a strong regional and pan regional dimension.

In summary, the proposition to develop a **Regional Strategic Partnership**;

- aims to **enhance the current strong regional working across partners** in a way which provides for a greater degree of **democratic accountability** without creating additional layers of bureaucracy, delays and expense. It represents an evolution of an approach that is already in existence and which partners accept and value, in which the **involvement of economic, social and environmental partners** is critical to rounded and responsible policy-making as well as to effective delivery.
- requires **no change to the respective statutory responsibilities** laid upon existing bodies, or funding arrangements, but is **focused upon improving the performance and profile of the region as a whole** through the identification of key issues and challenges and securing agreement upon the most effective response, with all partners working in concert
- mirrors the approach of the most effective Local Strategic Partnerships, demonstrating the collective **leadership role of Local Government**, acting as the convenor and co-ordinator, working with all partners and agencies, through a **Regional Partnership Board**, which would;

agree the **strategic framework** for the Region (ensuring alignment of RSS, RES and other key strategies such as Health & Well Being and Skills);

be **prepared to prioritise intervention and resource allocation** to achieve a **shared vision** utilising a single strategic performance management framework

develop a **single set of clear strategic objectives and outcomes** for the region that will also set out the contribution the region would make to nationally agreed PSAs

improve co-ordination of regional **research** activity to provide a **single evidence data base** for consistent application across strategies and funding regimes

drive greater alignment of expenditure and delivery by regional agencies (or national institutions with a regional presence) using **Regional Agency Agreements**

## Evolving a New Model

The case for change upon which this proposition is based is that;

- there is a clear need for a certain set of decisions about policy and funding to be taken by key partners and stakeholders at the regional level;
- existing decision making and governance arrangements are already in place upon which we can further develop and deliver against shared economic prosperity targets and ambitions for urban and rural renaissance;
- sub-regional and local partnerships, particularly the developing City Region and sub-regional collaboration and interventions, must underpin and inform regional priorities and activity, and;
- regional working could be significantly more effective if a new model of regional partnership is adopted by the region with support from Government.

This proposition is aimed at enhancing the current strong regional working across partners in a way which provides for a greater degree of democratic accountability without creating additional layers of bureaucracy, delays and expense. It represents an evolution of an approach that is already in existence and which partners accept and value, recognising and fully supporting the principle that there are a number of different levels at which decisions are and should be taken; regional, sub regional and local and that decisions should be devolved to the most appropriate level.

The role of local government at all levels is pivotal with local authorities

- driving forward and leading on the policy agenda, either directly within their own area, or in partnership at sub regional and regional level;
- working with other public sector partners and regional bodies such as Health, the RDA, LSC, GOWM and VCS organisations, business and individuals to influence regional debate, shape regional strategies and provide effective and efficient delivery.

Mirroring the most effective Local Strategic Partnerships, this approach is designed to;

1. Be **locally facing** by providing the environment within which city regions, sub-regional arrangements and local strategic partnerships can operate to maximum impact. It would identify and develop mutually beneficial links between LAA, emerging MAA's and collective regional priorities.
2. Co-ordinate the **regional strategic framework** for planning, transport, climate change and housing as the Assembly currently does, but would also encompass economic growth, skills, environment and public health.
3. Be **outward facing** by negotiating an agreement on behalf of the West Midlands with Government to secure thriving, sustainable and cohesive communities and sustainable growth.

## Building on Success – Enhancing the Concordat Approach

Key regional partners have already signed up to partnership working through the Regional Concordat. This provides a framework for joint working between regional organisations and for the integration of regional strategies. The current joint work between AWM and WMRA in respect of the review of the RES and its alignment with the RSS are a manifest of the Concordat approach. This enhanced level of partnership working has already recognised as adding value at regional and sub regional level (see figs. 1 – 4 below).

The Concordat commits its signatories to deliver against regionally agreed strategies and priorities and is peer governed in the sense that each signatory has the ability to call others to account if there is deviation from the collective agreement. The Assembly provides the democratic legitimacy to this process as each of the councils within the West Midlands has elected members appointed to represent their councils on regional issues and ensure that local and sub-regional dimensions are properly reflected.

### *Figure 1 - Place Making: The West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy*

The West Midlands RSS aims to deliver a significant change in the pattern of development in the region. Its focus is urban and rural renaissance, using the planning framework to concentrate development in the region's major urban areas and reverse the outward drift that has been a feature of the region in the recent past. Change of this order required strong commitment from regional, sub-regional and local partners since it was predicated upon a marked shift in approach to planning decisions. The West Midlands secured this commitment by using Thematic Reference Groups of local authority and partner representatives to help develop RSS policies from the outset. The result is a Regional Spatial Strategy that is clearly aligned with the RES. Key spatial focal points for development – High Tech Corridors and Regeneration Zones are shared across the two strategies. The RSS sought to demonstrate how the region could draw investment back into urban areas through them. The Assembly and AWM are working together to pool evidence as the RSS / RES come under review.

*Regeneris Consulting – ERN Submission to CSR07 - 2006*

### *Figure 2 - Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies*

In general, the recent round of regional plan making can be seen as a success. In particular the extent of the evidence base is much better than anything that has gone previously, as planning funding from DCLG to the Assemblies has been used to commission consultants to undertake specific studies and to strengthen in-house technical resources. It is also clear that regional planning and transport is now a much more central policy function in the assemblies, as the RPB role has matured.

The new round of RSS takes a pragmatic and functional approach to sub-regional planning, breaking away from the old county-based sub-regions to functional sub areas and city regions. These sub-areas respond better to the concept of city-regions as economic drivers and allow the RSS to include more responsive spatial policies.

The Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) task set was a challenging one for the regions. It tested the resolve of regional partners to work together, and more importantly, to work together to make some challenging decisions. What the RFA process demonstrated is that the regions are capable of making substantial decisions within relatively limited timescales. Some regions have recognised the value of the experience and propose to permanently adopt variations of the decision making structures that were created for the RFA process.

The process brought greater realism in policy on investment priorities, with the finite allocations requiring regions to avoid a "shopping list" approach. The process also resulted in greater understanding of the importance of a robust evidence base to underpin investment strategies. In most regions a productive dialogue, joint-working and a greater consensus was forged between senior decision makers in the region on shared regional investment priorities. The RFA process enhanced integrated working between senior housing, transport, economic development and spatial planning professionals, with evidence in most regions of a more integrated strategy for main regional investment priorities.

*Ove Arup on behalf of CLG - Second Annual Interim Report 2006*

### *Figure 3 – AWM – Success through Partnership*

AWM has worked proactively with both the Government Office West Midlands and the West Midlands Regional Assembly on the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy and excellent working relationships have been established with these bodies. The RSS and current RES are very strongly strategically aligned, which is a tremendous achievement, and there is a clear understanding of the priorities flowing from both documents. The three bodies also worked well together on the production of the Regional Funding Allocations submission – which received support from central government. Overall, therefore, there is good collaboration on the high level ambitions for the region.

This level of strategic partnership is becoming widely accepted and developed with increasingly good relationships across the region. Many stakeholders are becoming more closely aligned with the RES priorities within their own aims and objectives. To further consolidate these advances there is a need for increased and better targeted communications, knowledge sharing and strategic alignment. (With regard to the Rover Taskforce) The Agency is seen to have been a clear leader in the process, having acted quickly to bring together the key necessary organisations and ultimately leading the development of a holistic partnership response delivering practical results.

*National Audit Office Independent Performance Assessment -2007*

### *Figure 4 – Accountability and Credibility*

While individual local authorities are essential for the implementation of strategy and for service delivery, the evidence we have received both from those supporting the existing regional structures and from proponents of city-regions is that strategy is often best determined on a regional or sub-regional basis. This is particularly the case in relation to issues such as environment, resilience and strategic planning for housing, industry and transport.

Our recommendations are particularly focused upon improving accountability of the 'three pillars' within the regions—which we believe is fundamental to their credibility—and on providing for more comprehensive dialogue between the regions and the centre. In the short to medium term the further development of relationships between the reformed GO's, the RDAs and more confident Regional Assemblies, coupled with a greater willingness by the Government to involve these bodies in strategic decision-making (for example, through the Regional Funding Allocations), may make for a more effective and responsive approach to the specific needs and requirements of each region.

*House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee  
'Is there a future for Regionalism?' 4<sup>th</sup> Report of Session 2006-7*

### A Regional Partnership Board

**As with the LSP model, the proposition recognises and reflects the complexity and breadth of the social and economic agenda and the range of stakeholders at local, regional and national level.** As an alternative to major institutional reform and the inevitable disruption and diversion from delivery this would bring, it seeks to build upon the Concordat approach to form a **Regional Partnership Board** (see figure 5), which would set the **strategic framework** for the Region (ensuring alignment of RSS, RES and other key strategies such as Health & Well Being and Skills) and be **prepared to prioritise intervention and resource allocation** to achieve a **shared vision** utilising a single strategic performance management framework.

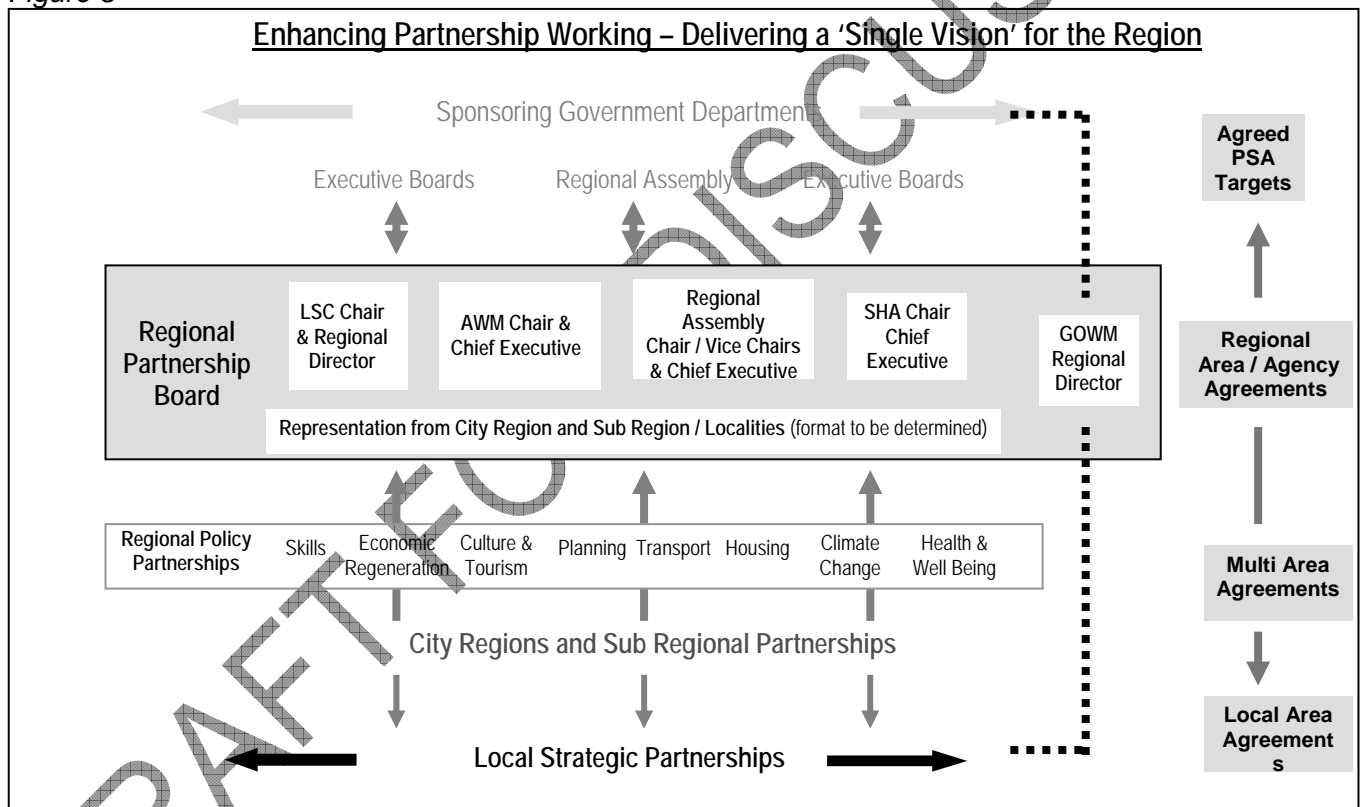
**This Partnership Board will have a co-ordinating and facilitating, as opposed to Executive role; its strength and success will rely upon the commitment of all partners to the shared vision.** Under the leadership of the Assembly, the Partnership Board would comprise Assembly Chair / Vice Chairs and The Chair / Chief Executive of the **key regional agencies** such as AWM, Strategic Health Authority and the Learning and Skills Council.

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, in order to deliver mutually supportive regional and sub regional plans, the **geographical** dimension of place would be secured through appropriate representation drawn from each City Region and LAA 'locality'.

The responsibility for leading key policy themes would be through a 'refreshed' set of Assembly Policy Partnerships (e.g. Planning, Transport, Housing, Climate Change, Community Cohesion and Health), with direct representation from all relevant strategic partners, whilst maintaining the essential engagement from the 'other stakeholders' and the Business Sector.

Board members would be expected to represent the collective issues and interests of the members of their respective partnerships / agencies. More importantly, working through Regional Agency Agreements that are mutually supportive with MAA's and LAA's, would be a commitment to delivering against agreed priorities with a strong perspective on what is best for the Region.

Figure 5



In order to translate strategy into delivery and ensure effective co-ordination across Concordat partners, the Partnership would be supported by a **Regional Delivery Board (RDB)**. Working through the key regional strategies for which each organisation was responsible, the RDB would identify how resources and activity could be programmed and delivered to most effectively address the difficult problems which need to be resolved for the Region to improve its overall performance.

Through agreement and a strong peer review mechanism, utilising the **scrutiny and strategic review function of the Assembly**, the Board would review progress against agreed objectives, identify areas of excellence and tackle areas of concern.

To maximise effectiveness it is also suggested that the GOWM Regional Director attend meetings of the Partnership Board in order to strengthen the regional/national lines of transmission and support the response to the outcomes of the recent GO review the requirement on GO's to;

- be more effective advisers to central Government, providing feedback on the implementation of PSAs and the effectiveness of operational delivery;
- take an analytical role “supporting and challenging” regional strategies developed by the RDAs and Regional Assemblies, and;
- improve links with the work of the regional arms of national bodies operating at a strategic level within the region and support the co-ordination and delivery of their annual priorities

#### Delivering a ‘Shared Vision’

This proposition would improve the ability of the Partners to maximise their contribution to sustainable growth and prosperity across the Region. It provides a vehicle to further develop and deliver the agreed vision identified in the Concordat, bringing together strategy, delivery and performance.

A successful **Regional Strategic Partnership** will;

- represent a powerful **‘voice for the region’**, working towards an agreed single vision to raise the performance and profile of the West Midlands;
- identify a coherent and consistent set of mutually beneficial strategic objectives and targets for the region as a whole and **improve the accountability** to the region of agencies and institutions active within it;
- agree with Central Government a commitment to achieve an RAA / MAA across the Region utilising the value of public money to the best effect with **spend aligned against shared regional priorities in an agreed programme**;
- provide a framework through which clear relationships can be expressed between LAA's / MAA's, ensuring these inform and underpin regional priorities;
- strengthen the delivery of **sustainable development** through a co-ordinated approach to sustainability across integrated Regional Strategies;
- provide a single conduit at a regional level, through which other collaborative partnerships, such as the Faith and Rural Affairs Forum, can engage and exert influence.
- exploit the real potential that exist for improved partnership working and co-ordination between existing institutions, which is **underpinned by local democratic representatives**, enabling the region to take greater control of its own destiny.

Furthermore, this approach provides;

- a pragmatic and cost effective solution to enhancing co-ordination at a regional level **without** incurring expense and disruption brought about by substantial institutional redesign; building upon the momentum provided through the strong sense of partnership and trust that all stakeholders have been developing over the last decade;
- an opportunity to build upon the proven reputation of the region to demonstrate cost effective and 'joined up' approaches to regional working and organisational efficiencies achieved through the combined organisation and sharing of resources e.g. the co-location of key regional partners, single 'back office' services
- a vehicle through which clear priorities could be identified for West Midlands in Europe, avoiding competing priorities between the existing managing partners, leading to improved engagement with MEP's and across the European stage (addressing a key issue identified in the current Strategic Review of European working)
- a sound base upon which to further build relationships with the many public agencies responsible for investing substantially in the region e.g. Environment Agency, Natural England, Network Rail and Highways Agency. Each of these is already an active player in existing Assembly Policy Partnerships and could become signatories to the Concordat, mandated with a duty to co-operate and provided with greater freedom to align spend against shared regional priorities as well as national objectives and targets;
- a model that has the capacity to respond to fluidity in political priorities at national and sub national levels;
- an opportunity for the region to demonstrate capability to successfully deliver a regeneration agenda that reflects the aspirations of its communities leading to further extension of the concept of devolved funding allocations (see figure 6).

*Figure 6 – Extending Regional Funding Allocations*

We welcome the Government's initiative in developing the Regional Funding Allocations exercise. Although the success of the exercise in influencing Government expenditure has yet to be proved, we note that the trial was widely supported and support the calls both for the exercise to be repeated, and for the second trial to include allocations for skills and for rail expenditure. Once the relevant allocations have been agreed the Government should publish its decisions together with the advice submitted by the regions, so that the effectiveness of the process can be properly assessed.

*House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee  
'Is there a future for Regionalism?' 4<sup>th</sup> Report of Session 2006-7*