

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Assembly Meeting – 25 April 2007

SCRUTINY AND STRATEGIC REVIEW UPDATE

Report of the Regional Scrutiny Manager

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Assembly in respect of recent Scrutiny and Strategic Review activity.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Assembly is requested to note the content of the report and offer comments as appropriate.

3. Independent Performance Assessment of Advantage West Midlands

- 3.1 The concept of Independent Performance Assessment was introduced in the 2005 Budget. This consists of a 3 yearly assessment of all Regional Development Agencies by the National Audit Office (NAO).

- 3.2 Advantage West Midlands had formally requested the Assembly's involvement which was led by the Strategic Review Group and the Regional Scrutiny Manager. This involvement included a sub-group of the Strategic Review Group offering comments on early drafts of the self assessment document which informed the Assembly's formal response; and co-hosting a stakeholder consultation event.

- 3.3 The National Audit Office has been examining the performance of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and making assessments of performance in five areas: ambition, prioritisation, capacity, performance management and achievement. The performance of each RDA was scored to give an overall rating of performing strongly, well, adequately or inadequately.

- 3.4 The National Audit Office has now published the final report. (It can be access from the following link:

http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/AWM2007.pdf).

It assesses Advantage West Midlands as “Performing Strongly”. The score of 20 out of a possible 24 reflects not only the hard work and successes of the Agency but how partners across the Region are working together to address key issues.

- 3.5 The Strategic Review Group will consider the issues identified in the report and continue to monitor progress on behalf of the Assembly.

English Regions Network (ERN) Scrutiny Conference 2007

- 3.6 The third Annual Scrutiny Conference was held in Newcastle upon Tyne in early January 2007. The West Midlands Regional Assembly was represented by and Strategic Review Group members and Assembly members currently engaged in scrutiny and strategic review activity together with scrutiny officers.
- 3.7 The conference included presentations from Ciara Mulligan – Deputy Director, Local Democracy, Communities and Local Government on the National Scrutiny Memorandum of Understanding and Chris Leslie – Director, New Local Government Network looking at the future of regionalism, particularly with the aim of adding value to existing operations. In addition, there were three parallel workshops: Supporting Scrutiny Skills, Selling the Scrutiny Story and Extending Accountability: Two regional case studies – South West and South East.
- 3.8 The conference was well attended and provided a timely opportunity to consider the future direction of regional scrutiny and to share best practice about scrutiny and accountability activities around the regions.

4. Memorandum of Understanding

- 4.1 A national Memorandum of Understanding has been developed by DTI, CLG, GOs, the RDAs and RAs which seeks to set out basic principles for regional scrutiny. This is expected to strengthen a shared understanding of the issues based on dialogue and sound evidence, enable findings to be monitored and to be relevant and timely.
- 4.2 The Strategic Review Group endorsed a draft consultation document acknowledging that it provides a national context for regional scrutiny and is underpinned by our Regional Protocol. This document is now awaiting ministerial sign-off.

5. Scrutiny Review of Advantage West Midlands: Access to Finance

- 5.1 The current scrutiny review of Advantage West Midlands’ activity is examining Access to Finance. The aim of this review is to examine Advantage West Midlands’ broad approach to financial support for businesses, an assessment of gaps in the market, take up and impact of financial support packages.

5.2 As part of the review, the Panel is considering views from a wide range of partners and organisations in the Region. Two consultation events are planned for stakeholders and providers in April together with a meeting with representatives of the Regional Finance Forum. This phase of the review will conclude with the formal evidence session with Advantage West Midlands on 10 May 2007.

5.3 A draft report will be available for consultation from early June. Following which the Assembly will receive the final report for endorsement at the Annual General Meeting on 18 July 2007.

6. The Regional Approach to Post 16 Education, Training and Skills

6.1 Following an approach by David Cragg, Regional Director, Learning and Skills Council (LSC) it has been agreed to carry out an additional strategic review. The LSC are providing £20,000 which has enabled the fixed term appointment of John Wright to support the review process.

6.2 The review will not duplicate existing accountability arrangements but is intended to contribute to the development of partnership arrangements and to the understanding of how skills issues impact across the region in terms of policy areas and geography. Terms of reference are currently being developed around broad objectives agreed with the LSC.

6.3 Timescales for the review are as follows

March - April 2007	Preparation
May – July 2007	Evidence Gathering
September 2007	Consultation
October 2007	Final Report to LSC/Assembly

6.4 Panel members are currently being identified and a call for evidence has been circulated to partners and stakeholders. Any interested Assembly Members should contact the Regional Scrutiny Manager.

Contact Officer: Dagmar Waller
Tel No: 0121 678 1054
e-mail: d.waller@wmra.gov.uk