

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

29 October 2008

**Decision Notes of the West Midlands Regional Assembly Meeting
Held on 9th July 2008
At the National Metalforming Centre, West Bromwich.**

Chairman: Cllr David S Smith (Lichfield DC)

1. Apologies

Apologies and attendance are attached in appendix 1

2. Members Declarations of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest stated.

3. Chairman and Vice Chairs reports

The Chairman:

Thanked all Assembly Members for their hard work and commitment during the last year. He acknowledged with gratitude the 3 Vice Chairs and thanked them for supporting him and their partnerships in both the past and future working.

He reminded Members that the Regional Assembly still had a responsibility to continue its good work and emphasised the importance of continuing Members enthusiasm and contributions until 2010.

He reminded Members that there was great concern regarding the SNR legislative timetable, and whether it could be realistically achieved. He advised that there was a need to consider arrangements in the possible event that the timetable did not progress as is planned. There would be a need to concentrate on delivering clear actions and responsibilities.

The Vice-Chair Dr Sarindar Singh Sahota – Business Sector:

Echoed the Chairman's comments and highlighted the successful Partnership work that continued in the region.

He felt that Whitehall should have researched what was working at the regional level and should also have requested examples from the West Midlands for evidence of good practice.

In reference to the Business Supplement, he advised that the Business Council had held discussions with Pat McFadden, MP.

He further advised that the Business Council would be continuing to work hard at this difficult time to keep members interested in regional working and made assurance that a full role at regional level would be maintained.

The Vice-Chair Roger McKenzie – OSG Sector

Reiterated the comments made by the Chairman and Vice Chair. He thanked all partners on the Assembly for their commitment of working successfully together and outlined the importance of partnership working.

The OSG sector had assisted with the work of the Assembly and had also been involved in a lot of sub group work. To this end, he thanked the staff at the Assembly and, in particular, the ***Scrutiny and Equalities and Diversities teams.***

The Vice Chair - Cllr Terry Dix - Local Government Sector:

Informed the Assembly that this was his last year as Vice Chair on the Assembly as he would not be standing for re-election next year.

He felt that it had been a very constructive year and that it was important to remember that communication was at the heart of good partnership working. The Assembly should not lose the work that had been done in the last year and should look forward to next year.

4. Election of Chairman 2008/09

Cllr Rex Roberts (Staffordshire County Council) nominated Cllr David S Smith to be Chairman this was seconded by several members. It was noted that the LGA Chair had been handed over to Cllr Ken Taylor of Coventry.

The Assembly agreed that:

Cllr David S Smith was nominated, seconded and duly elected as Chairman for 2008/09

5. Election of Vice Chair's 2008/09

The Assembly agreed the Vice Chairs would remain the same as elected as 2007/08.

6. Draft Decision notes of Full Assembly Meeting held on 23 April 2008 and matters arising.

Roger Trotman queried the comments attributed to him and Sarindar Singh Sahota requested that his comments were reworded.

It was **agreed** that the minutes were a true record of the meeting (subject to the above amendments being made).

7. Assembly Board of Directors 2008/09

The Assembly **agreed** WMBC and OSG representatives would remain the same as 2007/08. The conservative group leader advised of the following Board members:

Cllr D Smith, Cllr Rex Roberts, Cllr S Croad, Cllr C Saint, Cllr J Lines, Cllr J Jones and Cllr R Phillips

8. West Midlands Regional Assembly Membership 2008-09

Olwen Dutton paid tribute to all the hard work and effort of all Chairs and Vice Chairs.

The Assembly thanked Chilufya Dawo for her hard work and wished her well in her new position.

The Assembly **agreed**;

-the current membership structure of the Assembly

- the Board decision that in the spirit of openness and transparency members of all three sectors and across the Assembly's governance structures should be encouraged to make available for publication on the Assembly's website Members' contact email addresses.

- that the Assembly's nominating bodies finalise their nominations to the various groups at the earliest opportunity

- the current lead member arrangements, and delegated authority to the Chairman and Vice-Chairs of the Assembly to approve outstanding nominations, for the offices for 2008/9.

It was also **agreed** that all the membership structures would be re-circulated once all nominations had been received.

9. Chief Executive and Company Secretary's report

The Assembly **noted** the 2008-10 Business Plan & Budget.

9.1. The Assembly **noted** the 2007-08 Final Progress Report which was submitted to Government Office in April and duly reviewed and approved.

9.2. The Assembly **agreed** that the 2008-09 the requirement to submit a Declaration of Interest will be extended to anyone nominated to participate in Assembly activities with decision making powers, ie regional partnerships.

9.3. The Assembly **noted** the details of the Financial Statements which would be filed with Companies House.

9.4. The Assembly **agreed** that a review of the arrangements by which the Assembly operates would be carried out.

10. Sub National Review Consultation Regional Response

On 31 March 2008 the government published a consultation document about the implementation of the Sub National Review – Economic Development and Regeneration. In the West Midlands, a group representing the Assembly, including other stakeholder and business representations, local government and AWM have worked together to draw up a joint response to the consultation document.

On 18 June, this was considered by the Regional Forum of Leaders, the WMLGA Executive and the West Midlands Regional Assembly Board, all of whom met in succession on that day. Following these meetings and the results of discussion, the response was endorsed and was submitted on behalf of the Region in draft before the consultation deadline on 20 June.

Following significant discussion the following comments were made:

- The West Midlands Business Council (WMBC) stated that it would be disastrous to get rid of the Regional Assembly,

especially since there were no business representatives at local authority level groups. It was hoped the work and added value that the Business Council had contributed would allow them not just to be an advisory body, but to be involved in decision making. It was clear that Government were allowing regional variations so that the West Midlands could continue to include Business at all levels and avoid tokenism.

- Roger Phillips, Chair of Regional Forum of Leaders, commented that proposals had been put forward for a group with Other Stakeholders and WMBC. Regional Development Agencies realised there were lots of different organisations that needed to be fully included – but there was still lots of work to do. There was also concern regarding the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency's involvement.
- The Other Stakeholders Group (OSG) welcomed Cllr Phillips comments but requested clarification on the purpose and role of the strategic groups.

The Assembly **noted** the Regional response to the SNR consultation document and also **noted** the ERN response.

11. West Midlands Partnership Review

The Assembly was advised that as part of the regional SNR transition work AWM and the Assembly had commissioned consultants GHK to review existing regional partnership arrangements to inform future arrangements. This would include relevant Assembly and AWM partnership/stakeholder bodies as well as a small number of partner-led partnerships

Cllr Chris Saint informed the Assembly that notice had been given from Department for Media Culture and Sport that Regional Cultural Consortia's would be having their funding withdrawn - in the West Midlands this is Culture West Midlands. The consortia's will cease to exist from March 2009.

The WMBC raised concerns about public money being spent on consultants but welcomed Louise Bennett on to the Project team for the review.

The OSG were concerned that a more rounded approach should be taken and the focus should be widened.

The Assembly **noted** the report and **agreed** to receive further updates as appropriate.

12. Review of the Regional Concordat

The Assembly were advised of the outcomes the assessment of the Regional Concordat carried out as part of the scrutiny and strategic review work plan.

The Assembly **noted** and **agreed**:

- a) to produce a set of key principles and values of partnership working, based on the Concordat's commitments and issues raised in the review, to be drafted in a concise form, affirmed by Concordat partners but more widely shared and publicised.
- b) to focus its attention on the SNR outcomes and transitional arrangements in particular to ensure: -
- c) that the Assembly does not engage regional partners in the production of a fourth version of the Regional Concordat; and that the current version of the Concordat be retained for the period up to the disestablishment of the Regional Assembly.

13. Future of Regional Scrutiny

The Assembly was provided with advice from the Strategic Review Group in respect of regional scrutiny post SNR.

The meeting agreed that the scrutiny function needed to be reviewed. It was felt that the scrutiny experience gained was not replicated in the proposals. It was also suggested that the recommendations that came out of the Scrutiny exercises should not be lost and the task of carrying them forward should also be reflected in the report.

The Assembly agreed to

- (i) Endorse the principles, relationship with wider governance arrangements, focus and possible approach of future regional scrutiny arrangements; and
- (ii) Work to embed these principles within the development of wider regional governance structures

Additional Item: Business and Enterprise Select Committee

The Assembly was informed of the Select Committee inquiry into the future role and responsibilities of RDAs

There were concerns expressed regarding the timescales and ideally Assembly members would have liked the Assembly Board to have been consulted. .

*The Assembly **agreed** that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chairs, approve a written submission on behalf of the Assembly.*

FOR INFORMATION

14. West Midlands Regional Assembly Response to Eco Towns Consultation

The Assembly was informed of the Regional Assembly's response to the Government's consultation on "Eco-towns – Living a Greener Future" -

The Chairman informed the meeting that the application made in Lichfield had been withdrawn due to financial constraints. There was another site at Long Marston. There were concerns expressed about the money that may be made by the Ministry of Defense from the land. Members were adamant that the principles of the RSS are defended and upheld.

The Assembly **noted** the Regional Assembly response to the Eco-towns consultation document.

15. Regional Spatial Strategy

The Assembly was updated on key issues regarding the ongoing work on the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), including RSS revision Phases 1, 2 and 3, Monitoring, Implementation, Conformity, and the Eco Towns consultation response.

Cllr Rex Roberts expressed grave concerns regarding the NHPAU's Housing figures and commented that the Housing figures that the Assembly had achieved were through consensus with all local planning authorities.

Sarindar Singh Sahota commented that the housing the region provided needed to be sustainable but in order for this to happen there would need to be investment in infrastructure.

Gerald Kells expressed his concern regarding the urban regeneration strategy, infrastructure and environmental quality and suggested that support for the RSS be emphasised.

The meeting discussed the down turn in housing development and the construction industry and high density housing. The challenge of building more houses, whilst house builders had stopped and the economy is rapidly slowing, was also raised and the meeting agreed these were important ongoing issues that would have serious implications for the RSS.

The Chairman commented that the uncertainty over the RSS Phase 3 timetable was ongoing and suggested that running the two revision phases alongside each other during the EiP could threaten the whole process.

Elizabeth Newman expressed concern that yet again rural issues were being dealt with last but also stated that the opportunity to focus on one revision at a time would not only allow smaller organisations to participate but would give rural issues the same treatment as other topics throughout the revision process.

The Assembly **noted** the report.

16. Regional Policy Partnerships Activity

The Assembly was updated on key issues undertaken by the Secretariat on behalf of the Board and Assembly Partnerships over the last quarter.

Cllr Albert Bore requested that the Assembly acknowledged the work done by Professor Michael Clarke, Jon Bloomfield and Esther Knight on the successful establishment of the European Strategy Board.

The Assembly **noted** report.

17. Connecting to Success

Members were advised of the publication of 'Connecting to Success' the West Midlands Economic Development Strategy Delivery Framework.

The Assembly **noted** the report

18. Draft Decision notes of the Board of Directors meeting held on 18 June 2008

The Assembly **noted** the decision notes.

19. Any Other Business

Roger Mckenzie informed the Assembly of the establishment of a Economic Inclusion Panel and asked that it be included on the next agenda. He also suggested that the work of the Equalities and Diversity Partnership linked in with the forthcoming work of the panel.

Prithvi Chopra expressed concern as to whether the government would continue to listen to the regional Assemblies in light of the changes at a regional level in 2010. The chairman and Chief Executive made assurance that the Assembly still had statutory duties to fulfill and it was business as usual until 2010.

20. Dates of future meetings

- 29 October 2008
- 14 January 2009
- 22 April 2009 (*may be changed due to proximity to local government elections*).
- 8 July 2009

The Assembly **agreed** the future meeting dates.