

Agenda Item No. 12

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Assembly Meeting – 18 January 2006

REGIONAL POLICY PARTNERSHIPS ACTIVITY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Regional Assembly on the current status and activities of Regional Partnerships, established by or working closely with the West Midlands Regional Assembly; and to seek Assembly members' support for a proposal for annual reporting from Regional Partnerships on how their work addresses sustainable development.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Regional Assembly considers the report, and endorses the proposals for annual reporting by Partnerships on their contribution to sustainable development.

3. Partnerships

There are a number of regional policy partnerships which are led by or have representation from the Assembly. The following report provides details of current activities and priorities for each of the Partnerships. Additional information regarding past activities and future plans can be obtained from the named officer contact. Appendix 1 provides contact details for all officers that support these partnerships.

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3.1 **Planning Partnership and Executive**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Rex Roberts OBE, Staffordshire CC
Officer Contact – Kate Docherty

Purpose - The Regional Planning Partnership, supported by the Planning Executive, carries out the Regional Planning Body function on behalf of the Regional Assembly leading on the development and delivery of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Current Activities:

- Maintaining an overview and coordination role to ensure the work of the Assembly's Partnerships and officer groups contributes to the development and implementation of the RSS.
- Overseeing Phase 1 of the RSS Revision - the Black Country Study (BCS), including the development of, and responses to, the Choices Consultation Report.
- Initiating Phase 2 of the RSS Revision, including the development of and consultation on a Draft Project Plan
- Supporting the development of the RSS Implementation Framework, including initiatives to increase awareness of the RSS.
- Refining and operating the Development Planning Conformity Protocol leading to 'conformity opinions' being issued on Development Plan Documents and Regionally Significant Planning Applications
- Consideration of other significant strategic issues including:
 - the development of urban and rural renaissance issues and policy
 - the implications of the Gambling Act 2005;
 - the development of the Regional Waste Strategy;
 - the merger of RPB and Housing Board functions;
 - Regional Funding Allocations
 - the development of the City Region initiative;
 - inter-relationships with the Milton Keynes Growth Area.

3.2 **Transport Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Roger Phillips, Herefordshire Council
Officer Contact – Danny Lamb

Purpose – To hold policy lead responsibility for transport and to support and advise the Regional Assembly and the Planning Partnership/Executive.

Current Activities:

- Working with partners in response to the Government's request for advice on Regional Funding Allocation and Transport Priorities.
- Working with key organisations and bodies in the region to prepare technical evidence to support the RSS Review process.

- Working with key organisations and bodies in the region to monitor the progress of measures identified in the Region's Transport Delivery Plan.

3.3 **Housing Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Steve Gregory, Sandwell MBC
Officer Contact – Emma Kiteley

Purpose – On behalf of the Regional Assembly and Regional Housing Board the aim of the Partnership is to provide leadership, coherence and support to the achievement of the Regional Housing Strategy for the Region and to support the Regional Planning Partnership on housing issues.

Current Activities:

- Supported the WMRA's work with the Regional Housing Board on the completion of the Regional Housing Strategy 2005-2021, which was formally launched to the Media on Tuesday 6 December 2005.
- Submitted a formal response to ODPMs Committee on Affordability and the Supply of Housing and was subsequently invited to an evidence session on Tuesday 6 December 2005 at the House of Commons.
- To participate in the Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review process, to ensure Housing issues are well represented and fully considered as part of all wider discussions.
- Continue to support the WMRA in undertaking work to successfully implement the Regional Housing Strategy 2005-2021, for example the establishment of the four Housing Market Areas Partnerships (Central, North, South & West), the creation of a Joint Monitoring regime for RHS and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and the commissioning of further research.
- Regional Funding Allocations - Continue to assist the WMRA Secretariat in working in partnership with the Government Office for the West Midlands and Advantage West Midlands in providing advice to Government on the Regional priorities for Housing, Transport and Economic Development.
- Following on from this Officer event, an Affordable Housing Seminar for Elected Members is being arranged for Monday 6 February 2006, to facilitate discussion on the need for Housing and Planning Members to share the challenge posed by the Affordability issue and to work together to improve overall understanding and to develop workable solutions.

- Sought engagement with the newly emerging City-Region initiative, to ensure the Partnership is fully involved in its progress and able to influence the development of any future policies on Housing.

3.4 **European and International Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Sir Albert Bore, Birmingham City Council
Officer Contact – Esther Knight

Purpose: To provide the West Midlands with the means of agreeing a single, coherent, cross sector voice on European policy issues of importance within the region. It also provides wider policy context for the work of West Midlands partners and the West Midlands in Europe office in Brussels.

Selection of Current Activities:

- **EU Budget**
 - After much uncertainty under the UK presidency of the EU a budget or 'financial perspective' was agreed at the end of 2005 for the period 2007-2013.
 - Total Structural and Cohesion Funds for the period 2007-2013 will be Euro 308bn,
 - Figures for individual regions are not currently available, but the Competitiveness Objective remains and this means that the West Midlands will be eligible for a new Objective 2 - type programme for the 2007-2013 period.
- **The Lisbon Reform Process**
 - The outcome of the budget negotiations outlined above, should not devalue the emphasis the region is seeking to develop for the major EU programmes where funds have to be won on a competitive basis.
 - The West Midlands held a highly successful event on 11th November 2005 ("EU Futures – new funding, new opportunities") for senior decision makers to alert them to the new funding regimes post 2007.
 - The West Midlands in Europe office also hosted an event on 30th November 2005 on behalf of the English Regions Network and Regional Development Agencies which launched a document showing the contribution of English regions to making Lisbon happen.
 - Both events stressed the need for the regions to be more fully involved in the Lisbon process and that it is not solely a national issue.

3.5 **Health Partnership**

Chair of the Partnership – David Littlemore
Officer contact – Zena Lynch

Purpose – to work in partnership to address health inequalities, ensure better health and to improve quality of life within the West Midlands.

Current Activities:

NHS as a corporate citizen

- Support on employment and social issues for people with mental health problems has been integrated into the RHP Corporate Citizen workplan
- Report on 'Getting the best from the NHS: Healthy Region, Healthy Economy' has been published and launched
- DH report on Health Inequalities in the region due to be published early in February
- Investigating the potential to develop a health policy watch tool

Smoking Cessation

- The RHP have Committed to the Draft Delivery Plan for Tobacco Control and Smoking Cessation in the West Midlands prepared by the West Midlands Tobacco Control Network

Developing Effective Health Alliances

- Regional compact framework for joint commissioning in the voluntary and community sector is being developed by RAWM

Physical Activity

- RHP members are promoting and signing up the 'Everyday Sport Campaign', launched in September
- Outline papers being developed for bid to the Big Lottery Fund
- West Midlands Physical Activity Network launched on the 7th December

3.6 **Environment Partnership**

Chair - Cllr Keith Austin, Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council
Officer Contact - Chris Blakeley

Purpose – To support and advise the Assembly on Environmental Issues and move forward the implementation of key policy areas.

Current Activities

- Submitted responses to the consultation on the Regional Housing Strategy , national Green belt Direction consultation and the Black Country Study Choices Consultation Report through small task group working by partners;

- Approved the development of waste scenarios work to be developed in consultation with sub regional groups, the waste industry and NGOs which will be essential to feed into the RSS review work in the summer 2006;
- Set up a RSS Environment Reference Group to participate effectively in the Regional Spatial Strategy Review process and RSS Sustainability Appraisal Group which will ensure Strategic Environmental assessment process is carried out in sound manner in the RSS review;
- Produced draft technical guidance for the development Of Biodiversity Enhancement areas, a key environmental policy approach in RSS, for consultation with local government and other partners;
- Continue to develop a partners approach to Green Infrastructure Planning for the region by the commissioning of research to consider how existing GI can be improved at the sub regional level;
- Promoted the use of anew report on Environmental Quality in Spatial Planning to all local planning authorities in the region.

3.7 **Social Inclusion Partnership**

Chair – Cllr Jo Jones, Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
Officer Contact for Equalities and Diversity Review – Dagmar Waller

Purpose – to identify how social inclusion can be embedded into regional policy development and into the work of other partnerships.

Current status – the role and structure of the Partnership is expected to change following the outcomes of the Assembly’s Equalities and Diversity Review. The Partnership is contributing to the process, but is not undertaking any other activities at this time.

3.8 **Sustainable Development Partnership (Sustainability West Midlands)**

Chair of Partnership – Bernard Doyle
Officer Contact – Fran Austins/John Sharpe

Purpose – Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) is the regional champion of sustainable development and the Assembly’s independent advisory partnership on sustainable development. SWM aims to achieve a more sustainable region by developing a continually improving link between sustainable policy and sustainability in practice.

Current Activities:

- The current review of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) is ongoing. **A consultation draft of “version 2” of the RSDF will be available for an eight week**

consultation period in February and March 2006 to which members of the Assembly are invited to submit a response. All of the Assembly's Policy Partnerships and officer groups will be formally invited to respond to the consultation via the Chairperson. Version 2 of the RSDF will be primarily web-based to allow flexibility and regular updates, although a printed version will also be available for circulation.

- The SWM Policy Ambassador Group will be developing a series of themes around which to develop SWM's workplan, focusing on targets and outputs, at their meeting on 26th January.
- Key messages emerging from the Sustainable Housing Action Programme and SWM's ongoing Climate Change adaptation work streams will be highlighted at a workshop in February – for further details contact admin@swm.org.uk.
- SWM is also working with regional businesses to promote sustainable approaches. Next steps include a showcase of sustainable practice at Bulmers Cider in Herefordshire; an event on sustainable construction hosted by Carillion, and a visit from Elliot Morley MP.
- SWM are also providing the Chair for the RSS phase 2 revision Sustainability Appraisal Steering Group.

3.11 **Cultural Partnership (Culture West Midlands – The Regional Cultural Consortium)**

Chair of Partnership – Brian Woods Scawen DL
Officer Contact – Jenny Boylan/Laura Moore

Purpose – West Midlands Life is one of eight Regional Cultural Consortia in England and is the cultural 'mouthpiece' for the West Midlands, working to ensure that culture and creativity get a fair hearing across the region. It has four main areas of responsibility strategy development, advocacy, advisory, identifying and brokering links.

Current Activities:

- Culture West Midlands is working in partnership with Sustainability West Midlands to review the plans and strategies of regional cultural agencies and their alignment to the principles and objectives expressed in the West Midlands Regional Sustainable Development Framework.
- Work is currently underway on an action plan to support regional consultants providing expert advice and support on the development and delivery of services in the cultural and leisure sector.
- CWM is undertaking follow up work to the International Study previously completed by EUCLID, and the cultural delegation to

Brussels in September 05. This will include follow up on personal commitments made in Brussels and an initial feasibility study for a further delegation in 2006.

- CWM will, in the near future be commissioning work on Cultural Leadership, Regional Broadcasting and business support to the Creative Industries.
- Culture West Midlands and Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership are working together with other regional bodies to develop a Cultural Assets Audit framework. The framework will focus on the contribution that culture can make to the competitiveness and urban renaissance agendas and will be piloted in the Coventry and Nuneaton Zone before being rolled out further.

3.12 Rural Partnership (Regional Rural Affairs Forum)

Chair of Partnership – Rev'd Nick Read
Officer Contact – Kate Docherty

Purpose – The purpose of the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum is to bring together rural stakeholders within the region to inform and monitor the delivery of policy in rural areas. It was established by the DEFRA.

Current Activities:

- The Forum has agreed to move towards a business planning approach to ensure that it is proactive about setting agendas and developing its work load.
- Steering and supporting the development of the Regional Rural Delivery Framework (RRDF).
- Commenting on the WMRA Rural Services Scoping Study which is a precursor to the Critical Rural Services Review, part of Phase Three of the RSS revision.
- Consideration of AWM's work on its Rural Renaissance Framework, business support transformation and rural transport.
- Consideration of the proposals for the new England Rural Development Programme.
- Consideration of and support to the Region's Rural Pathfinders in Shropshire and the Peak Park.
- Ongoing work to review and support the progress of the Regional Forestry Framework Delivery Plan and the Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food Delivery Plan, on Transport, Housing and the RSDF and forming more effective linkages with young people.

4. **Annual reporting on sustainable development**

- 4.1 It has previously been agreed that the Assembly's commitment to sustainable development as the central principle of all its work should be monitored internally by way of an annual report from each of the Regional Partnerships setting out how their work is contributing to sustainable development in the region, to be submitted to the Assembly's Annual General Meeting. This reflected a recommendation of the 2004 Strategic Review of Sustainable Development delivery in the region.
- 4.2 It is now proposed that these reports should take the form of a brief summary of approximately 2 sides, detailing activity in relation to each of the four headline objectives in the current Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF), which are:
- To develop thriving sustainable communities
 - Enhance and protect the environment
 - To ensure prudent and efficient use of natural resources
 - To develop a flourishing, diverse and stable regional economy
- 4.3 Each of these headline objectives has a number of more specific sub-objectives which the Partnership's reports should refer to as appropriate.
- 4.4 It is proposed that the relevant Assembly contact officer should liaise with their Partnership Chair to determine the most appropriate arrangements for preparing the report. SWM's Policy Ambassadors will be available to advise on the preparation of the report and on key sustainability issues for each policy area. Reports will be submitted in advance of the Assembly's AGM in July.

Appendix 1

Officer Contact Details

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