

Agenda Item No. 12 (a)

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Assembly Meeting – 5 April 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.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Regional Assembly considers the report.

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:

- **Conformity:** Since the last Assembly meeting, the Planning Partnership has provided opinions of conformity on four regionally significant planning applications, a further two are in consultation. A single opinion has been made on a submission version of a Development Plan Document (DPD) and three informal officer responses have been made on presubmission DPD's. Local Planning Authorities are now gearing up to develop their Local Development Frameworks and the scale of the conformity task is likely to increase in the future. A review of the Conformity protocol will now be undertaken taking into account the experience of operating the system over the last 18 months.
- **Phase One of the RSS Partial Revision - the Black Country Study (BCS):** The draft submission to the Secretary of State is in its final stages of preparation it will be signed off by the Regional Planning Partnership on the 26th April for submission on the 31st May.
- **Phase Two of the RSS Partial Revision:** The Section 4 (4) Briefs are currently with the strategic authorities, they are due to provide their advice by the 16th May. A Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report has been consulted upon. We are now gearing up to developing the Options during May to July; these will be considered and signed off by the RPP on 28th July. Public consultation on Options starts in September 2006.
- The **Annual Monitoring Report** for 2005 was published on time in February. This year a greater emphasis has been placed on establishing links with the implementation of the RSS with a more rigorous assessment of progress towards the achievement of policy being made. Copies are available?
- The **City Region initiative** is progressing with Telford having recently been included (Agenda Item No. 6 will provide further detail).
- The WMRA joint urban and rural renaissance statement was published in February. The statement sets out a balanced position in terms of the Regional Spatial Strategy for Urban and Rural Renaissance. Copies are available.

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:

- **RSS Phase One Transport Issues** - to be reported to the Transport Partnership on the 8th May 2006;
- **RSS Phase Two Transport Issues** – developing the Options for Airports, Demand Management, Parking Standards and Strategic Park and Ride;
- **Regional Funding Allocations** – Regional Transport Officer Group (RTOG) will report to the Transport Partnership on their consideration of how to update the transport priorities process and monitor scheme delivery;
- **Regional Freight Strategy** – in May 2006 the Transport Partnership will be asked to consider a draft Regional Freight Strategy for stakeholder consultation and publication later in the year;
- **Sustainable Development reporting** – the Transport Partnership will submit a report to the Annual General Meeting of the Assembly detailing how our work has contributed to the region's sustainable development objectives as set out in the Regional Sustainable Development Framework;
- **Network Rail** – this key stakeholder has recently agreed to take an active role in engaging with the Transport Partnership;
- **Rural Transport Issues** – working with regional stakeholders, including the Rural Affairs Forum transport sub group;
- In response to a recent (15th March 2006) statement by the Secretary of State for Transport on the future of rail and the relationship with City Regions, RTOG and the Regional Rail Forum will consider these matters and report to the Transport Partnership.

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:

- Submitted a proposal to ODPM, outlining future structures for the merger of the Regional Housing Board with the Regional Planning Body, under the Assembly
- The Affordable Housing Group (a sub-group of the Regional Housing Partnership) is producing a Regional Guide to the Delivery of Affordable Housing which is due to be published during Summer 2006.
- The WMRA Housing Secretariat prepared a response to the Planning Gain Supplement consultation and submitted to the HM Treasury on behalf of the Assembly
- The Regional Housing Partnership considered a response, drafted by the RSS Policy Advisor on Housing to the Planning Policy Statement 3 consultation and input comments
- The Regional Housing Partnership prepared a response to the Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) consultation version 2
- The Regional Housing Partnership supported the proposal that the Central Housing Market Area should be the relevant area for Housing policy development for the City-Region
- The Housing Secretariat assisted in arrangements for the Regional Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Implementation Workshop Event in the Central Housing Market Area
- The Regional Housing Partnership continued to participate in the Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review, through both the Housing Reference Group and Housing Technical group
- The Regional Housing Partnership engaged with the WM United Campaign, launched by the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing to promote better promote the WM Region at the National level.

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.

Current Activities:

- **EU Budget**

- **Recap – Structural funds**

- 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.

- **EIAP Feb 24 2006 (I)**

- Agreed a set of principles for the region to work towards in setting the new programme, primarily to produce a regionally focussed 'by the region for the region' document for the Competitiveness Objective.
- Agreed to set up a steering group to produce a competitiveness Objective programme document, membership drawn from regional partners. Initial work having already taken place to draft regional priorities.
- To provide a response to the National Strategic Reference Framework, regional consultation event taking place on April 7th.
- Noted that the West Midlands were using the English Regions Network as a means of disseminating the idea of the regional – as opposed to a national approach to funding allocation and management.
- In addition the UK government is currently consulting both on Assisted Area status and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development -

- **EIAP Feb 24 2006 (II)**

- In addition the EIAP accepted a report on region to region working, and established a group to bring the recommendations forward.

- **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.
- West Midlands in Europe is hosting a major event on April 27th – to draw senior policy makers attention to the opportunities offered by FP7 for EU finance for leading edge research collaboration.
- These events will stress 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:

- The DH report 'Choosing Health in the West Midlands' has been published, which outlines some of the key health issues for the West Midlands and areas of prevalence. Copies of the document are available at <http://www.go-wm.gov.uk/gowm/PublicHealth/?a=42496> or for a hard copy e-mail WMPHG_enquiries@dh.gsi.gov.uk.
- Preparatory work is commencing for the development of a Regional Health Strategy, including the development of a steering group to take forward the strategy and a timetable for stakeholder involvement with the process.
- A consultation response has been made by the Regional Health Partnership, to the proposed PCT and SHA re-configurations in the West Midlands. This will be published on the WMRA website.
- The Regional Health Partnership put together outline proposals for Big Lottery Funding, in the areas of workplace health and increasing access to activity. Further development work will be required once the Big Lottery Fund eligibility criterion has been published on the 10th April.
- The 9th annual achieving excellence in Public Health conference is taking place on the 18th May 2006. The main focus of the conference will be current challenges to Public Health with a particular focus on Alcohol and Crime. For a booking form contact jenny.Aston@wmpo.org.uk.
- A Health and Biodiversity workshop is being planned for late May/early June, focussing around issues such as active spaces, recovery and well-being, education and awareness raising.

- The Social Exclusion Unit report on 'Mental Health and Social Exclusion' June 2004 has been shared with the Health Partnership and action around support for people with mental health problems to gain employment, come back to/stay in work is reflected in current HP action plan. <http://www.socialinclusion.org.uk/home/index.php>
- CSIP/NIMHE national guidance on 'Making it possible: Improving Mental Health & Well-being in England', was presented to the Health Partnership in January. This raised the potential for mental health becoming part of a strategic review theme across the WMRA partnerships and profiling mental health through the Regional Health Strategy <http://kc.nimhe.org.uk/upload/Making%20It%20Possible.doc>
- Consultation responses have been made by the Regional Health Partnership to the EU Green Paper on mental health and the EU Green paper on Food and nutrition. These will be published on the WMRA website.
- A conference on Health Inequalities, Regeneration and the role of the Voluntary and Community sector was held at Faraday Wharf, Birmingham on the 15th February 2006. The event highlighted some of the positive health work being carried out in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Details can be found on the West Midlands Health Network website, www.wmhealthnetwork.org.uk, listed under events.

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:

- Responded to Rural Delivery Framework consultation via a small task and finish group.
- Completed consultation on draft technical guidance for the development of Biodiversity Enhancement Areas, a key part of the implementation of the current RSS.
- Endorsed the dissemination of the first iteration Woodland Opportunities Map to local authorities and other stakeholders to assist in the targeting of woodland grants and help the development of woodland planning schemes which takes account of sensitive areas.
- Developed a brief for the development of the Green Infrastructure Planning approach in the region, consultants appointed to take forward and report.
- Responded to Regional Sustainability Development Framework consultation via an email group.

- Agreed to respond to the defra national Review of England's Waste Strategy via the regional technical advisory body for waste.
- Established the RSS Environment Reference group to input into proposed phase 2 options process.
- Considered the implications of the formation of two liaison panels for two new River Basin Management Planning areas along the Severn and Humber pan regions.
- Developed Partnership Forward Plan to consider key positions on waste/climate change and brownfield land during 2206.
- The setting up of the two River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) liaison panels begins the process of integrating the core requirement of the Water Framework Directive into the development of statutory River Basin Plans and assist in their implementation.
- For the Assembly, the integration and alignment of the consultation arrangements, policy and impacts on other regional strategies, including the RSS will be important considerations.

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:

- **Regional Sustainable Development Framework:** The Assembly are collaborating on the current review of the Framework as members of the Task Group, led by SWM. The consultation on the draft revised Framework ended on 27th March, and the Task Group is currently considering consultation responses. The revised Framework will be made available via an interactive website as well as a printed document and will be launched in line with the Assembly AGM in July.
- **Regional planning checklist:** AWM and the Assembly have agreed to jointly lead a project to develop a regional planning checklist bringing together all current sustainability policy and legislative requirements for development. The checklist is being developed by BRE (the Building Research Establishment) in partnership with WWF, based on a model successfully used in the South East. The checklist will set out minimum requirements and standards for good and best practice, and is designed to help both developers, who will be able to ensure their planning applications comply with local, regional and national policy and

legislation regarding sustainability issues, and planners, who will be able to use the summary information from the checklist as a simple tool to measure the sustainability of a proposal.

- **Sustainability West Midlands:** As well as leading the review of the Regional Sustainable Development Framework, SWM is chairing the Steering Group for the current Sustainability Appraisal of Phase Two of the Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy. SWM's Policy Ambassadors are linking with the reference groups set up to inform the Partial Review. In addition to the existing Policy Ambassadors, SWM have also appointed Richard Davies of Marches Energy Agency to act as a Climate Change Ambassador, advising across policy areas on climate change issues and how different policy areas might respond. Following a workshop at its March meeting, SWM has also agreed to establish a task group for the development of a Sustainable Development communications plan. The task group will submit a report on progress, outlining a broad forward plan, to SWM's June meeting and to the Assembly for its AGM.
- **Regional Partnership SD reporting:** The Assembly Board has agreed that in order to monitor the Assembly's commitment to sustainable development, Regional Policy Partnerships should submit a report to the Annual General Meeting of the Assembly detailing how their work has contributed to the region's sustainable development objectives as set out in the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. Reports will be submitted by May 31st, following which Sustainability West Midlands will be invited to prepare an overall analysis of the report and a set of recommendations for the Assembly to take forward.

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:

- **London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games:** Work around the 2012 Games has been the focus of the WMLGA/WMRA Cultural Affairs Portfolio since the last Assembly meeting. See update provided at Agenda Item 12 (b).
- **Tourism:** Officers from WMRA, Culture WM and WM Tourism Development Officers Group met with representatives from DCMS in March to discuss the representation of Tourism within Regional Spatial Strategies.

Responses have been submitted to consultations on both the draft ODPM Planning for Tourism Guide and the regional Quality at Heart project. Possibilities for joint working with Transport Officers are currently being considered including preparing a West Midlands-wide tourism signposting strategy (to ensure consistency across the Metropolitan and Shire areas of the region).

Culture West Midlands

- Equality and Diversity - CWM are planning to build on the outcomes of the regional scrutiny review with plans for a student placement later in the year to review work across the cultural agencies and to pull this into a cohesive strategy for the region.
- CRAIG (Cultural Research and Intelligence Group) are close to finalising the Cultural Research Action Plan, which will focus in particular on compiling an evidence base for a new Cultural Strategy in 2007 and the contribution of culture to the Regional Economic Strategy.
- Culture and the Visitor Economy Strategy – CWM and the Regional Cultural Forum are developing an action plan designed to realise the potential of the contribution of cultural organisations to the Visitor Economy Strategy. With the support of Tourism West Midlands this will include the launch of a handbook in April designed to help tourism organisations find their way around the cultural sector and to learn from examples of good practice around the region.
- CWM is working with AWM to support the regional ambassadors programme, with specific responsibility to develop and define the cultural offer of the region. A dinner for the Cultural Ambassadors led by Brian Woods-Scawen will be held on 6th April to take the first step in this process.
- CWM is supporting a national programme called Creating Cultural Opportunity, which is financed through the Invest to Save budget. Regional initiatives including the Black Country Consortium, Culture and the Regeneration Zones and the planned phase three revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy will all help to inform the development of a national toolkit to develop good practice for cultural planning.
- A small working party (including Cllr Saint) is considering possibilities for the launch of a European Strategy for CWM following the CWM delegation visit to Brussels in Autumn 2005.

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 WM Regional Rural Affairs Forum (RRAF) has been heavily involved in the development of the Regional Rural Delivery Framework (See Agenda item 9 (c) for further information), this work has included consideration of a sustainability appraisal of the RDF.
- The Forum is considering how best to build relationships across the region with non Defra partners.
- The Forum has also considered the city region initiative and the potential implications for rural areas.
- The Forum will be inputting into the forthcoming review of the Regional Economic Strategy.
- The Forum are providing a lead in the region on Avian Flu and have asked all relevant partners to share information and contingency plans to begin to build up a regional store of information.
- A variety of thematic sub groups are taking forward work for the Forum on issues including transport, health and cross border issues.

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