

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

23 October 2009

**Regional Policy Partnerships' Activity for West Midlands Regional
Assembly**

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Assembly on key issues undertaken by the Secretariat on behalf of the Board and Assembly Partnerships over the last quarter.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Assembly considers the report and **notes** progress made.

3. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS)

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Assembly, as the Regional Planning Body, is bringing forward the partial phased revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy. In addition, ongoing work is being conducted in relation to RSS implementation, monitoring and conformity. Reports have been submitted to Assembly Members on a regular basis to update and inform them of the progress.

RSS Phase Two – See Agenda Item 6

RSS Phase Three – See Agenda Item 7

RSS Implementation

- 3.2 It will be recalled that a 'supplement' to the RSS Draft Implementation Plan was prepared ahead of the Examination in Public. In practice, this provided a valuable input to the EiP demonstrating the deliverability of the strategy and particularly the infrastructure requirements needed to support it.

- 3.3 The recent Draft Policy Statement on Regional Strategies has once again confirmed the importance of preparing an Implementation Plan to accompany any submission of the Regional Strategy in the future.

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Conformity

- 3.4 The Regional Assembly has recently given a formal opinion that the Central Telford Area Action Plan is in general conformity with the published WMRSS. Meanwhile, following an Examination in Public, the joint Core Spatial Strategy submitted by Newcastle-under-Lyme and City of Stoke Councils has been found "sound", subject to a number of changes. The Assembly also considered that this Document was in general conformity with the WMRSS.
- 3.5 The Regional Assembly has also reported on its record of responding to consultations on planning applications for the year ending 31st March 2009. In line with previous years the Assembly has responded in time to all consultations as agreed with the relevant local planning authority. The number of applications sent to the Assembly for comment was slightly down on the previous twelve months.

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4. RURAL

West Midlands Rural Affairs Update

- 4.1 The 31st Meeting of the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum was held on 10th September 2009 at Quatt in Shropshire. In addition to RDPE updates, the Options for the Cross-Border MoU successor arrangements were reviewed; presentations were received on the West Midlands Food and Farming Statement, Heart of England Fine Foods and the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. A specialist seminar on Climate Change – risks and opportunities – was held in the afternoon.
- 4.2 Meanwhile, the review of WMRAF continues with the task and finish group have presented their outline paper and recommendations. This is now out for wider consultation and the outcome will be presented at the next Forum meeting in Birmingham on 10 December.

Rural Proofing

- 4.3 Work on producing a Rural Disadvantage Indicator that will help to gather the most effective statistics for the monitoring of the WMES Delivery Framework is still ongoing; with still further work having to be undertaken by the West Midlands Regional Observatory.

- 4.4 WMRAF members have contributed to the Regional Response to the draft Policy Statement on Regional Strategies. They would like to see the requirement to rural proof regional strategies more clearly stated in the policy statement and guidance. The Policy Statement implies that rural proofing may be undertaken (para 5.29) but there is no specific requirement for the strategy development process to include rural proofing. Given that it is government policy to rural proof all policy and plans we would expect there to be a stronger steer in the guidance.
- 4.5 The Commission for Rural Communities held a joint summit with AWM and the East Midlands Development Agency in Rugby on 11th September on Releasing the Potential of Rural Economies: Investment. This is one of a series of four being held throughout England and reporting to the Secretary of State.

Rural mainstreaming

- 4.6 The European Strategy Environment and Rural Group meet again on 30 September. It is pleasing to report that there has been a continued upsurge in interest with bids received for INTERREG and LEONARDO funding. Contact and capacity building will continue with the assistance of Stephen Fox, EU Connects Rural Champion.
- 4.7 The Rural Economy Group last met on 12 August 2009. The matters discussed included Business Link's proposed new Farming Theme, broadband coverage in rural areas, funding for cross-border public services (Welsh Affairs Committee Inquiry), RSS and the rural economy, and matters to raise at this meeting of the Forum.

Rural Renaissance Working Group – Sara Roberts

- 4.8 Together with WMRAF Members, a number of the Group were involved in both putting together the WMRAF response to the RSS Phase Three Options Consultation and also in the series of sub-regional meetings that were held during July and August. The next activity will be in relation to reviewing the responses and assisting the Rural Policy Lead to develop policy and supporting text with regard to Rural Services: Identification and provision of services that are critical to the sustainability of rural communities.

Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)/Leader

- 4.9 The RDPE Programme is continuing to take shape with the awarding of funds and delivery of projects.

- 4.10 RDPE Partners, Advantage West Midlands, Natural England and the Forestry Commission are holding the next Stakeholder Event in early October on the Woolhope Dome in Herefordshire, highlighting and demonstrating the support available for landowners, managers and businesses under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in the West Midlands. Environmental, economic and social elements of the RDPE are all being covered during the event.

Cross Border working with Wales

- 4.11 With the forthcoming demise of the Regional Assembly, an options paper outlining proposals for the successor arrangements for the Central Wales-West Midlands Cross Border Memorandum of Understanding will be discussed at the next Joint Strategy & Investment Board RAG Meeting in October seeking their advice
- 4.12 Meanwhile, the work of the thematic task groups continues and, in particular, the Offa's Dyke Regeneration Strategy Study has been completed. With financial support from Natural England, AWM and the Welsh Assembly the consultants published their final report at the end of July. A series of strategic and thematic interventions are proposed with funding opportunities highlighted. Continued buy-in from partners and stakeholders is vital if we are to realise tangible benefits from closer working and collaborative projects helping to enhance the economics and community vibrancy
- 4.13 Additional funding has been secured from the Welsh Assembly Government and AWM to finance a Co-ordinator/Facilitator Officer post as support for the Memorandum of Understanding is still strong and work areas are continuing to develop. Recruitment through secondment has been delayed but is likely in late autumn

Trees, Woods & Forestry - Regional Forestry Framework

- 4.14 Monitoring and evaluation of the 2008-2009 Delivery Plan was completed and the 2008-2009 Summary Annual Report published in July.
- 4.15 The "refresh" of the Regional Forestry Framework is underway. Not only will it inform participants of its achievements in the last few years, and the current context for trees, woods and forests in the West Midlands but it is hoped that it will re-enthuse participants of the value of joint/partnership working to increase the profile of the trees, woods and forests sector.

4.16 The West Midlands Woodland and Forestry Forum meet next in November.

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**5. HOUSING UPDATE – ASSEMBLY 09/2009
Regional Housing Pot 2010-11**

5.1 CLG has recently notified the West Midlands Regional Assembly that the Region is to receive £54.681m Regional Housing Pot funding for 2010/11 for the housing capital funding local authorities receive. This covers funding for Decent Homes Municipal and Private Sector Renewal. The amount is less than the indicative allocation for 2010/2011 as there has been a £10m switch in funding from the local authorities Private Sector Renewal programme to the affordable homes programme due to the Government's Housing Pledge commitment to fund extra affordable homes. The Regional Housing Executive need to submit its advice on the switch of allocation from the local authorities within the Regional Housing Pot by 27th November 2009.

The Kick Start Equity Loan Partnership

5.2 The Kick Start Equity Loan Partnership delivers a programme of private sector home improvements through equity loans and other financial products and is continuing to roll out the programme with new groupings of local authorities joining in order to improve the efficiency of service delivery. Recent correspondence from CLG highlights their continued commitment to the programme as a way of using public resources as efficiently as possible.

RSS Revision Phase 3 Public Consultation – Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

5.3 The consultation phase of the RSS Phase 3 Revision process was successfully completed in August 2009, with over 400 responses having been submitted in total. In regards to the Gypsy & Traveller element of the Review, 186 specific responses were received, largely from local authorities, the Gypsy & Traveller community, Agencies, Parish Councils and individuals and the responses are currently being analysed by consultants. WMRA Officers considered the specific consultation with the Gypsy and Traveller communities to have been worthwhile and a post-consultation wash-up meeting was held on 25 August, to identify lessons which could be learnt for the future and inform the drafting of a 'Consultation Statement', which is a formal document required as part of the RSS Revision process and which will

be drafted shortly. In regards to the next stage of the process, it is likely that the current work will be progressed via a Regional Policy Statement and later into the new Regional Strategy.

Gypsy and Traveller Site Grant Programme 09/10

- 5.4 As in 2008/09, the Region has £2.5M allocated to contribute to the funding of new pitches provided by RSLs and Local Authorities. Four bids were submitted to the 2009/10 bidding round from Sandwell MBC, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby and Bromsgrove in conjunction with Rooftops Housing Group and the Regional Housing Executive will consider these bids at its next meeting to be held on 24 September 2009. A Regional recommendation for funding will then be presented to Ministers, as to which bid/s the Region supports to receive Grant funding, with an announcement on successful bids expected in October 2009.

Sub-Regional Housing Market Area Partnerships (HMAPs)

- 5.5 The HMAPs continue to meet on a regular basis and progress regional housing issues sub-regionally and locally. The Central HMAP is developing a brief to produce a sub-regional housing strategy and is giving consideration to work around issues of overcrowding and the role of the private rented sector. The North HMA is also undertaking preparatory work on a sub-regional housing strategy and is updating its original Strategic Housing Market Assessment, to update information in light of recent housing market changes. In the South and West HMAs, new constitutional arrangements have recently been introduced and both Partnerships will commence a new programme of activity for the 2009/10 timetable shortly. WMRA's Secretariat continues to support the Partnership meetings and provides particular support in regards to sub-regional housing strategy development and the dissemination of National policy and formulation of Regional advice to Ministers (e.g. Regional Funding Advice).

Research Programme

- 5.6 The Regional Housing Executive has commissioned updating work to inform the RSS Phase 2 Public Examination, and in refreshing the joint shared evidence base (for the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Housing Strategy) is putting in place some of the essential Regional Housing contribution to the forthcoming Regional Strategy.

5.7 The following commissions have been signed off and are available http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Housing/Publications_Guidance_and_Research/Research_Programme_200810.aspx

- Implications of Market Conditions for West Midlands Housing Markets and Regional Housing Policy June 2009 (Credit Crunch Report).
- House Price Analysis 2004-2008.
- Low Carbon Housing - developing a baseline for refurbishment in the West Midlands.
- http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/Final_GBAffordabilityReport_Word2007Version_AGP_2.pdf Affordability and Housing Supply - A review of the implications for the West Midlands of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit recommendations.
- Analysis of Strategic Housing Market Assessments in the West Midlands: Stage 1 Technical Report.
- Housing demand and need in the West Midlands: 2009 revision to regional estimates for 2006 to 2026 April 2009.
- The Implications of the Economic Downturn for Regional Housing Targets (Credit Crunch Planning report).

The following research commissions have also been let:

- Most recent occupiers in new build housing, survey for 2005-2008 and written report;
- Additional work to provide a regional overview of the Strategic Housing Market Assessments;
- A literature review on the contribution of new housing development to the delivery of Urban Renaissance;
- An update on sub regional Housing Market Area geographical analysis;
- Work to explore the links between housing and health;
- An exploration of the impacts to date of the recession on housing markets in the Region and an evaluation of responses to these impacts;
- An update of work to examine the interface between housing and economic growth to provide an up to date picture given changes in housing markets and economic structure.

Monitoring of the Regional Housing Pot

- 5.8 The Regional Housing Executive in its capacity as Regional Housing Board for the Region is required by CLG annually to monitor use of the Regional Housing Pot (RHP). A request has been sent to Lead LA Strategic Housing Officers asking them to report on their use of the capital housing allocations they receive as part of the Regional Housing Pot. Some local authorities have yet to respond and the housing team are currently contacting these authorities again to ensure the monitoring pro formas are returned.

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6. TRANSPORT Regional Strategy

- 6.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Phase 2 Panel Report is expected to be published at the end of September 2009. There is a significant element of transport included in this revision so it will be necessary to consider the Panel's considerations further and report them to the Assembly.
- 6.2 In August 2009 the Government published a consultation document setting out guidance for future Regional Strategies. The guidance includes infrastructure/transport.

Regional Funding Advice (RFA) - Transport

- 6.3 In July 2009 the Government responded positively to the Regional Funding Advice. Regional partners are working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) and transport authorities to actively manage delivery of the programme.

Delivering a Sustainable Transport System (DaSTS)

- 6.4 In July 2009 the DfT responded positively to the West Midlands' DaSTS proposal. Study briefs are being developed for three projects that will increase the evidence base in the West Midlands metropolitan conurbation, Stoke/North Staffordshire and the north/south corridor in Coventry/Warwickshire.
- 6.5 The briefs need to be agreed by the region and DfT and the studies commissioned as soon as possible. While it is expected that the DaSTS process will continue into 2011, the DfT requires significant progress by April 2010.

- 6.6 The decision on whether/how to progress a fourth study to investigate reducing the need to travel and changing travel behaviour, is dependent on the DfT's decision on whether the West Midlands is successful in the Sustainable Cities bid.
- 6.7 The Sustainable Cities bid is part of a DfT £30m package, aimed at increasing smarter travel choices in two parts of the country.

High Speed 2

- 6.8 In August 2009 Network Rail published their 'Case for New Lines' study which reviewed rail capacity through to 2020 and puts forward outline proposals for resolving constraints for a route from London to Scotland via Birmingham.
- 6.9 In September 2009 the organisation Greengauge 21 is expected to publish its views on a high speed rail network.
- 6.10 In December 2009 the company High Speed 2 plans to report its findings to the DfT. This work includes a route from London to Birmingham.

Regional Transport Priorities Action Plan (RTPAP)

- 6.11 A progress report that demonstrates delivery of the short term actions is planned for December 2009. It is expected that the report will be endorsed by the Regional Minister and the shadow Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JSIB).

Local Transport Plans

- 6.12 Local Transport Authorities and the Integrated Transport Authority in the region are currently preparing the next round of Local Transport Plans (LTP). These are being developed in conjunction with the region.

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7. REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

- 7.1 The West Midlands Regional Climate Change Action Plan was launched in January 2008. Progress on its 30 actions is continuing and progress reports has been presented to the Regional Minister. The next report to the Regional Minister sets out a range of projects that have been delivered. This includes the implications and next steps on the Governments Low Carbon Transition Plan, the promotion of the opportunities presented by climate change and the organisation of visits to leading edge examples of low energy schemes in the West Midlands. In respect of the specific Planning and Environment actions

work has been completed on a report to scope out the potential to improve energy efficiency to reduce CO₂ emissions from existing housing stock and prepared a report on the built environment and climate change for the West Midlands Regional Observatory annual conference.

- 7.2 The forthcoming Regional Strategy should include plans to tackle climate change, including energy and carbon reduction plans and targets. The GOWM are to look at plans and targets and a new body the Office for Renewable Energy Deployment will work to ensure the 2020 targets are achieved and will provide support to this process.. PPS 1 and PPS 22 are also to be updated and combined into new PPS.
- 7.3 A new Climate Change Adaptation Partnership has had its first meeting and it has published a report on Climate Change Adaptation in the West Midlands: A Framework for Progress. With the launch of the UK Climate Change Projections in June a number of workshops have been held to explain the implications of the changing climate might be for the Region and to encourage organisations to take account of this work. A further set of workshops are planned for this Autumn.
- 7.4 Further work is proposed on developing a communications plan and increasing awareness and understanding of the implications of climate change based on the results of new national research on the impacts of a changing climate on the West Midlands.

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8. QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 Consultants have completed an update on the Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA). This spatial understanding of flood risk issues will incorporate the latest national guidance as well as the substantial regional and sub-regional flood risk work that has been undertaken since the original RFRA was published and the outcome of the Pitt Review. This RFRA has been promoted to all local authorities in the region and has contributed to several local flood risk assessments. The new Flooding and Water Bill will be published in the Autumn that will require local authorities to undertake Surface water management Plans to improve local flood risk including from surface water with a range of partners.
- 8.2 Treweek Consultants are working to carry out a Regional Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). This will identify whether there is a 'likely significant effect' on any European sites arising from the WMRSS Phase Three Revision process. Where there is a 'Likely significant

effect' and adverse effects cannot be excluded this assessment will identify the avoidance or mitigation measures required to avoid any adverse effects on site integrity. Further work on the existing RSS Phase Two HRA is complete and this has supported the Examination in public process and the development of a new policy.

- 8.3 Consultants have been appointed by English Heritage to develop a draft of the Regional Historic Environment Strategy supported by the Assembly that has completed its consultation phase and will be launched in the late autumn.. The Strategy has a four year lifespan up to 2013 and has been prepared to help policy makers ensure that the historic environment is considered in evolving strategic plans in the region.
- 8.4 Work has been completed on guidance on enhancing biodiversity across the West Midlands prepared by a task group lead by Natural England and supported by the Assembly. Treweek Consulting were appointed to update the regional habitat targets and a regional seminar has been carried out with partners a final report draft regional habitats targets will be incorporated into the RSS Phase Three work and development of the Regional Strategy.
- 8.5 An Environment working group has developed draft Policy Options for the RSS Phase Three public consultation for all the Quality of Environment topics, except waste policy which was considered in RSS Phase Two.
- 8.6 The Regional Environment Group has responded to the Severn and Humber draft River Basin Management Plan consultations and input into the new Regional Landscape Partnership.

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9. CULTURE

- 9.1 The Cultural element of Phase Three of the WMRSS revision is looking to identify the Region's most significant cultural assets, identify any strategic gaps in provision, establish priorities to address any shortfall and identify policy approaches that could facilitate appropriate provision in the future.
- 9.2 We anticipate the cultural section of this revision will help to strengthen WMRSS policy to ensure development encapsulates cultural, sporting and tourism needs to support urban and rural renaissance.

- 9.3 Consultation responses to the Phase Three Options are currently being analysed and the findings of this process will help shape the Preferred Option, which will be submitted to Government.

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10. EUROPE

European examples of integrated strategy development

- 10.1 West Midlands in Europe undertook a piece of work for the Joint Strategy and Investment Board and the European Strategy Board examining best practice in integrated strategy development and delivery. Initial findings were reported to the ESB and the JSIB in September.

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Committee of the Regions Automotive group

- 10.2 At the European level, the Chair of the European Strategy Board is taking the role of vice chair of a group of automotive industry regions - supported by Interreg and ERDF priority 4 funding bids.

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European Institute of Innovation and Technology

- 10.3 AWM continue to coordinate a bid for a Knowledge Innovation Community that would give the region the potential to act as a catalyst linking key climate change developments in the region with EU regions and cities in the same field, focussing particularly on domestic housing and transport.

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ESF

- 10.4 Local government colleagues have been considering how the European Social Fund will be delivered within the region following both the closure of the LSC and responsibility for 16-19 funding coming back to local authorities. The current co-financing agreement between the LSC and the WMLB is being cited as good practice to English regions by the LGA.

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11. HEALTH

- 11.1 The last meeting of the Regional Health Partnership took place will on 17 September 2009. Its focus was the outcomes of the Excellence in Public Health conference on 9th June 2009 which focussed on Work, Wealth and Health along with economy, skills and health. AWM and the LSC led the discussion.
- 11.2 The next meeting of the Partnership will be on 10 December 2009. The focus will be a review of the membership and role of the RHP so that it can best deliver the Regional Health and Well Being Strategy. This will be undertaken in the light of the imminent demise of the Regional Assembly and the emergence of the new regional agenda related to the Single Integrated Regional Strategy.
- 11.3 It is reassuring and encouraging that health features strongly in the government's consultation Policy Statement on Regional Strategies. Following its publication the Regional Director of Public Health has written to the Chair of the Leaders Board to establish how health inequalities can be embedded in the SIRS process.
- 11.4 The RHP in consultation with partners has refreshed its Action Plan to support the delivery of the Health and Well-Being Strategy. Cross cutting themes around diversity and mental health have been strengthened. Chapter champions across partner organisations have been identified for each priority. The Technical Annex to the RHWBS is being updated. The website is being reinvigorated with examples of good practice. One such example is the joint RA, GOWM, DHWM event on planning, transport, housing and health on September 14th 2009 which will look at the RHWBS priorities and how these are further embedded at regional and local levels.
- 11.5 Inter-professional learning in conjunction with the WMTPHN (West Midlands Teaching and Public Health Network) remains a strong focus for enabling delivery of the RHWBS with an initial focus on planning, transport and housing and the economy. Also with the WMTPHN is proposed to develop a summary "user friendly" version of the RHWBS for wider partner use and to produce training materials and resources to enable understanding and delivery of the priorities. Discussions are ongoing around how the IEP support capacity building for the RHWBS.
- 11.6 Further opportunities to promote and embed the RHWBS will be realised by connecting with the outcomes of the NST health inequalities visits and the Communities for Health Inequalities Network being developed in the region.

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12. LIVING WELL

- 12.1 Mental Wellbeing and Commissioning – Living Well 2nd Annual Conference (22nd October): Confirmed speakers to illuminate these issues include: Gregor Henderson from the National Mental Health Development Unit (NMHDU), who will be discussing New Horizons - the Department of Health's shared vision for mental health (currently being consulted on), emotional resilience and well-being and Karen Newbigging from the University of Central Lancashire commissioned by NMHDU who will be sharing developments on the forthcoming Commissioning Guidance for Public Mental Health and Wellbeing. Delegates will also have the opportunity to attend two workshops throughout the day where projects will showcase their activity across the Living Well Portfolio themes, providing specific information on their programmes from a commissioning perspective.
- 12.2 Living Well management have arranged for the projects to take part in an EU funded beginners workshop, which will go some way in supporting them on their quest for sustainability. The EU Connects funding advisors will use the information submitted in project outline forms to signpost and support applications to relevant EU funding opportunities.
- 12.3 Living Well were fortunate enough to receive a small sum of money from one of our Steering group partners, and spent this on a day of workshop based activity around Commissioning and the Third Sector. The delegate places were originally offered to portfolio projects and then opened up to other colleagues. Delegates who attended were from a variety of backgrounds, Living Well projects, local authority procurement and a lead representative from Chances for Changes in the South East.
- 12.4 Living Well attended the Taste of Birmingham for the second consecutive year in July. They were joined by Coventry Body and Mind and the Solihull SHINE project, both carrying out physical health checks with the general public, looking at BMI, body fat percentage, lung capacity and blood pressure. Farm to Fork from Wolverhampton (Woodfield Primary School) took part in a cookery demonstration with top chef Felice Tochini from Worcester's Fusion Restaurant using their own grown produce. This year Living Well at the Taste of Birmingham received regional coverage in the Birmingham Mail, BBC Radio West Midlands, Midlands today and the Express & Star.

12.5 The returns for this quarter show that in total there have been around 16,000 beneficiaries – an increase of around 7,000 since the last quarter.

12.6 Some key high level outputs to date;

- 3080 physical activity sessions
- 1500 mental wellbeing sessions
- 720 healthy eating sessions
- 770 professionals engaged in training activity
- 170 volunteers recruited/trained
- 24 sites improved

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13. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY (SOCIAL INCLUSION)

Regional Equality and Diversity Partnership

13.1 Because of the governance changes prompted by the Sub-National Review and the new social, economic and environmental challenges the region faces, it will not be possible to maintain the Partnership's existing structure or for the Leaders' Board to service its activities. The existing Secretariat, based at the Assembly, has been working closely with Partnership members to identify the best way of ensuring that equality and diversity issues remain part of the strategic regional agenda.

13.2 A logical step to facilitate this is to create a new Equality and Diversity Sub-Group, with members drawn largely from the existing Partnership, reporting to the regional Economic Inclusion Panel (EIP). The EIP is a high-level officer body, serviced by Government Office. This approach would also encourage more direct links between the grass roots and the strategic centre and reduce concerns about duplication of membership and terms of reference between regional bodies. The new Sub-Group, which will include the Leaders' Board Chief Executive, will continue to act as a strategic champion, reference point and forum for equality and diversity in the West Midlands. The Partnership and EIP secretariats have been working closely to ensure a smooth transition. The final Partnership meeting took place on 23 September, and the intention is to convene the first meeting of the new Sub-Group in November, to coincide with AWM-sponsored Diversity Week. It is envisaged that future Sub-Group meetings will take place on a quarterly basis.

Other Work Areas

- 13.3 Separate arrangements have been made for the European work currently undertaken by the Partnership Secretariat. Although Laird Ryan, the Strategic Adviser, leaves the Assembly on 30 September at the end of his contract, Dally Panesar, Policy Officer, will continue in post in the medium term. She will oversee delivery of the OPEN project, a transnational seminar series supported under the EU's PROGRESS regime. Arrangements are being finalised for 6 thematic seminars to take place between October and December, and for transnational meetings and a further round of seminars to proceed in 2010. The European Social Cohesion Group, one of four thematic groups linked to the West Midlands Regional European Strategy, will continue to report to the European Strategy Board. In addition, there will be close strategic and operational links between the new Equality and Diversity Sub-Group and European work through the joint involvement of several key players.

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