

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

14 January 2009

**Parliamentary Regional Accountability
West Midland Regional Select and Grand Committees**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update of progress in establishing the West Midland Regional Select and Grand Committees

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That members note progress to date

3. Background

- 3.1 On 12 November 2008, the House of Commons approved proposals to improve regional accountability at the Parliamentary level based on recommendations of the Modernisation Committee. Eight Regional Select and Grand Committees, one for each of the English Regions initially excluding London, will be established for a trial period from 1 January 2009 for the life of this Parliament.
- 3.2 Regional Select Committees will examine regional strategies and the work of regional bodies. Each will have nine members, reflecting the national political balance, MPs may be nominated from outside the Region where required. Meetings will be less frequent than departmental select committees with an expected 6 public hearings a year probably held within the Region. A proposal to enable the inclusion of specified elected councillors from within the region was rejected. An amendment was agreed not to pay select Committee Chairmen.
- 3.3 Regional Grand Committees will comprise of all MPs from a Region and are envisaged to meet once or twice a year within the Region. They will question the Regional Minister and hold general debates on specified matters.

4. **Implementation**

- 4.1 The main focus of activity has been in relation to the Regional Select Committee. An announcement regarding membership is expected in mid January with no Members required from outside the West Midlands Region. An initial meeting is expected to take place fairly quickly, probably at Westminster, to formally agree a Chair and identify initial activities.
- 4.2 Support for select committees is provided by the House of Commons and will consist of a Clerk, Celia Blacklock and administrative support. In addition the National Audit Office will assist in the provision of evidence and technical expertise. There is a clear appetite to utilise the expertise and knowledge developed as part of the Assembly scrutiny role. The Regional Scrutiny Manager is currently exploring ways of supporting the committee Clerk both informally and formally in order to ensure support arrangements take into account the regional context.
- 4.3 Government Office for the West Midlands' role will be primarily in supporting the Government to develop submissions to inquiries and in responding to any reports. National protocols are currently being developed and will include the role of the Regional Minister. In addition both Government Office for the West Midlands and the Assembly are working with the Committee Clerk to address logistical issues including venues.
- 4.4 As part of her work for the WMLGA, the regional Scrutiny Manager is starting to work with local authorities to facilitate engagement with the Select Committee. Information will be shared with wider regional partners to assist their involvement.
- 4.5 It is anticipated that the first Grand Committee will be held within the Region in May 2009. Details of this will be circulated as soon as possible.

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