

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PARTNERSHIP
16 June 2006

WEST MIDLANDS EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PARTNERSHIP

Notes of Meeting held on 24 February 2006
At Advantage West Midlands

PRESENT:

Members

Cllr Sir Albert Bore (WMLGA) – Chair, Cllr Eddie Boden (WMLGA), David Burton (CWMCC), Cllr Martin Heatley (WMLGA), Isabella Moore (AWM), Cllr David S Smith (WMLGA), Val Tomlinson (AoC)

Observers

Denise Craig (FSB), Phil Harris (Office of Neena Gill MEP), Russell Jones (UKTI), Cllr Syeda Khatun (CoR), Cllr Sir William Lawrence (Heart of England Tourism), Julie Robson (LSC), Christopher Watson (Shizuoka Management Group)

Advisers/Officers

Richard Bindless (CWMCC), Jon Bloomfield (AWM), Trudi Elliott (WMRA), Jerry Hutchinson (WMI E Secretary), Esther Knight (WMRA), Kishor Pala (Birmingham Chamber of Commerce), Jill Robinson (Birmingham City Council), Glynis Whiting (West Midlands in Europe), Louise Chilton (WMLGA)

Item	Discussion and Decision	Action
1.	<p>Apologies Apologies had been received from: Members: Professor Michael Clarke (WMHEA), Chris Crean (Friends of the Earth), Cllr Roger Lawrence (WMLGA), Doug Mahoney (UKTI), Cllr Paul Tilsley (WMLGA), Cllr Mike Whitby (WMLGA) Observers/Officers: Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, Cllr Sue Davis (LGA/LGIB Member Liaison Group on Regional Policy), John Edwards (AWM), Neena Gill MEP, Malcolm Harbour MEP, Malgorzata Januszewska (AWM), Liz Lynne MEP, Helena Muskett (Staffordshire CC – Chair REIOG), Mike Nattrass MEP, Roger Sumpton (AWM), Cllr Milner Whiteman (CoR)</p>	
2.	<p>Notes of 11 November meeting and matters arising The notes were agreed as a correct record of the meeting. Relevant action points were to be covered in the day's agenda.</p>	

<p>3.</p>	<p>For information International and Region to Region working International and region to region working is one of the small number of key policy fields the EIAP is concentrating on to establish itself as the policy making forum for regional European activity. Due to the fact that there has never been a strategy behind the selection of partners and no overall objectives or strategic aims identified for regional partnering, regional transnational partnerships have had mixed success and the EIAP must now come to a modus operandi in selecting and continuing partnership arrangements.</p> <p>The Regional Criteria Group had looked at the economic benefit of Regional Partnerships and had made several recommendations. The existing five regional strategic partnerships were carefully examined and the consensus was that in future it would be better to concentrate on specific types of opportunities where the region would be approached, instead of falling into bigger relationships by accident. The Group recommended looking at best practice models of Scotland and the North East.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EIAP must decide what it wants from such relationships – different sectors would have different views on this. • Much effort had gone into current relationships and it would be inadvisable to just sweep these away. • The agreement with Shizuoka set up by WMLGA in November 2001 was due to run until November 2006. This had been mainly cultural/ educational/people to people exchange which had worked well but since the retirement of Cllr Colin Beardwood at the last elections the Shizuoka Management Group had had no Chair and main steer. The £10,000 allocated for 2006 also needed to be administered. A programme was in the process of being arranged and the Governor of Shizuoka would be visiting the region in the Autumn. <p>It was agreed that Sir William Lawrence take the Chair of the Steering Group. Agreeing terms for after November 2006, however, was a complex matter and should be considered in terms of the wider review. The Assembly would have neither budget nor significant officer resource after March and therefore no prospect of delivery. Shizuoka has big expectations but these could be met culturally rather than economically and Culture West Midlands was looking into whether such cultural links would be of benefit to the West Midlands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was support for the Regional Criteria Group’s proposal that the ‘default position’ for the region should be that subject or topic specific cooperation agreements would be the preferred form of agreement. Strategic regional partnerships should only be considered when they are essential to achieve clear economic benefits in the longer term ie as a last resort. This had been Birmingham City Council’s experience of the most effective way forward for making partnerships. • Many of the new EU Structural Fund Programmes would offer the opportunity to take this agenda forward. • EIAP Members were disappointed that suggestions for models of best practice were Scotland and the North East – better comparatives would be other European regions such as Grand Lyon or Rhones Alpes. • It may also be interesting to get new member states’ perspectives on 	<p>WL</p>
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	<p>partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was essential to be clear about whether the region would have the necessary resources at its disposal and it needed to be strategic and not prioritise what would be impossible to deliver. This was clear in the case of the region of Lodz in Poland, which the WMRA Chairman/Chairman of CWMCC had recently visited to sign a two year letter of Intent of co-operation between Lodz and the West Midlands. Lodz had asked for help with construction and development, science parks, contaminated land, housing and disposal of asbestos; there was also a need to clarify some confusion about PFI contracts and public/private partnerships, which were now legal in Poland. There could be huge opportunities but resources would need to be discussed and arranged before any projects could be embarked upon. • All current work and arrangements within Poland needed to be drawn together. There were not necessarily the resources to sustain these links, however useful they may be, and their usefulness should therefore be quantified. How would the region link what Lodz expected with the three delivery vehicles for the Regional Economic Strategy (regeneration zones, business clusters and high technology corridors)? • Attention was drawn to the Regional Criteria Group's proposed set of questions that should be asked when considering any Strategic Regional Partnership. It was agreed that the reference to 'lower level' cooperation type agreements should read 'micro level' partnerships/co-operation. <p>It was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accept the conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Criteria Group including the setting up and resourcing of a committee which would adopt the Group's Framework Criteria and review the benefit of existing partnerships against it, consider other areas where a Strategic Partnership may add value, agree the default position for the region and look at best practice in other European regions. • To note that many of the EU funding programmes would have a transnational element, giving the opportunity to make funds available for taking forward this agenda. • Richard Bindless of the Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce to chair a working task and finish group which would bring a report on progress to the 16 June EIAP meeting. • To receive a presentation from a region working well in this field at a future meeting. • To formalise that the Shizuoka Management Group carries on under the Chair of Sir William Lawrence and discussions continue in the meantime with Culture West Midlands to find resources to take the partnership with Shizuoka through to the autumn as a cultural link. 	<p>RB</p> <p>CWM</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>EU Funding 2007-2013 – A Proposed Approach for the West Midlands The Partnership was asked to agree both the principles the region would take forward in approaching the new structural funds and how the region should react to the forthcoming consultation on the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) which would steer how funds would be allocated and spent.</p> <p>The preferred approach of the West Midlands is that EU funding should be designed and managed at a regional level. In respect of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) this approach would build on the</p>	

	<p>experience of managing the current Objective 2 programme in the region. The European Social Fund (ESF) programme had always been a national programme and it was now important to have a regional ESF operational programme which would allow for more efficient use of resources and greater responsibility for the region. The West Midlands had used the English Regions Network (ERN) to disseminate this idea to other regions. The NSRF would be out to consultation amongst partners at the beginning of March and it was essential to persuade the government that there should be this regional element to the programme which would give some coherence to funding programmes.</p> <p>Partners from all sectors were therefore asked to give their support to the position. During discussion, the following points were put forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Learning and Skills Councils gave their support to the paper's principle of a regional element and the setting up of a group to develop the programme and expressed the wish to be involved in the regional picture. As there had been recent regional programmes able to run on a regional level, despite the fact that ESF had been a national programme, it was important not to go back to the 90's. • The fundamental principle of managing EU funding at a regional level would mean a need to ensure proper links/joined-up thinking across the region. • Programmes could only be operated on a partnership basis. Although it was uncertain how programmes would be managed, GOWM would need to co-ordinate the Steering Committee to compile the Programme. The region would need to get ahead before the programmes started (supposedly January 2007, although probably later). • The region's allocation would be less than at present and money would not be available for everyone. No specific maps would be issued. • The region must lobby strongly nationally on the amount of money it would receive. • Business links must be fully integrated into the process. <p>It was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That GOWM should co-ordinate a small Steering Committee to compile the combined Operational Programme with AWM to provide the policy lead. • That the Steering Committee should ensure coherence and consistency with other EU policies and programme opportunities for the region, in particular in support of the Lisbon Agenda. • That the Draft combined Operational Programme should include proposed mechanisms for management and delivery which should be consistent with delivering one programme. • That the Draft Operational Programme should be based on the principle of spatial and sectoral concentration. • That the EIAP should provide a central conduit for the strategy development with approval via other Boards and decision making bodies as appropriate. • That the membership/attendance of EIAP should be revisited to reflect wider ownership and interests in the region. • That the Programme should be delivered by GOWM. • To request that the Programme Monitoring Committee seek a formal briefing from ODPM on their proposals for delivering the new programme. 	<p>GOWM</p> <p>WMRA</p> <p>GOWM WMRA</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a draft response to the NSRF be circulated by email to EIAP members for comment and that the Chair, in consultation with the WMRA and AWM, should be delegated to agree a response. • To receive further reports as the draft programme document was developed. 	WMRA AB AWM/ WMRA
5.	<p>Regional European Project Support Centre</p> <p>The development of the Regional Project Support Centre was a key project agreed by the EIAP following the review of the European Strategic Framework Action Plan in May 2005 and this progress report had also earlier been endorsed by the WMiE Partnership Board. The aim of the Centre was to set up an infrastructure that would help the West Midlands increase its take-up of EU transnational programmes post 2006.</p> <p>The concept of the Centre was welcomed by the EIAP, although it was essential to ensure that resources were in place and that the Centre was sustainable.</p> <p>It was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the approach as set out in the report. • To approve the two main pilot activities of developing future bids and looking at lessons learned. • To support the launch of the Centre services at a joint EIAP/WMiE event on 29 September 2006. 	ALL
6.	<p>For information (Standing item) News from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Parliament • Committee of the Regions <p><u>2006 Open Days European week of Regions and Cities – Brussels</u></p> <p>This annual event is organised by the Committee of the Regions and European Commission Directorate-General for Regional Policy and this year's event would take place on 9-12 October. Twenty six countries would take part and 3,000+ people would participate during the course of the week. The European Commission, Parliament and the European Investment Bank would be involved. The West Midlands had been listed as a participating region under the Lisbon Regions theme and work now needed to be done that would set out the region's involvement. The press release was circulated.</p> <p><u>CoR Declaration: "Preparing the Spring European Council: a true partnership for jobs and growth with Local and Regional Authorities"</u></p> <p>A declaration agreed by the Economic and Social Policy (ECOS) and Territorial Cohesion (COTER) Commissions of the Committee of the Regions would be going forward as the CoR contribution to the Spring Council at which progress on the Lisbon Strategy would be reviewed. The paper was circulated.</p>	
7.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Two papers were tabled at the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation of the seventh Framework Programme for research and demonstration activities (2007-2013). Budgets had changed so figures put against each strand should be ignored - the total budget was now €48 million. FP7 to be put on the 16 June agenda. 	WMRA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A flyer about a seventh Framework Programme seminar to be held on 27 April at the West Midlands in Europe Brussels Office. This would help the region's profiling. All were asked to encourage appropriate colleagues to attend. 	ALL
8.	<p>Dates of next meetings: Friday 16 June 2006 at 1.30 pm at Advantage West Midlands Paper on remit/composition of the EIAP to be brought to the meeting. Friday 29 September 2006 – meeting and EIAP/WMiE Event (Birmingham Council House, time to be confirmed)</p>	