

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PARTNERSHIP
29 September 2006**

**Notes of Meeting held 16 June 2006
At Advantage West Midlands**

PRESENT:

Members

Cllr Sir Albert Bore (WMLGA) – Chair, Cllr Eddie Boden (WMLGA), Louise Bennett (for David Burton (CWMCC), Professor Michael Clarke (WMHEA), Cllr Martin Heatley (WMLGA), Cllr Roger Lawrence (WMLGA), Isabella Moore (AWM), Cllr Paul Tilsley (WMLGA)

Observers

David Clarke (WMRA), Cllr Sir William Lawrence (Heart of England Tourism), Julie Robson (LSC), Dagmar Waller (WMRA), Christopher Watson (Shizuoka Management Group)

Advisers/Officers

Jon Bloomfield (AWM), Esther Knight (WMRA), Helena Muskett (Staffordshire CC – Chair REIOG), Kishor Pala (Birmingham Chamber of Commerce), Jill Robinson (Birmingham City Council), Roger Sumpton (AWM), Glynis Whiting (West Midlands in Europe), Patrick Willcocks (Birmingham City Council – Chair REPFG), Louise Chilton (WMLGA)

Item	Discussion and Decision	Action
1.	<p>Apologies Apologies had been received from: Members: Doug Mahoney (UKTI), Cllr David S Smith (WMLGA), Val Tomlinson (AoC), Cllr Mike Whitby (WMLGA) Observers/Officers: Cllr Michael Angell (CoR), Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, Trudi Elliott (GOWM), Cllr Sue Davis (LGA/LGIB Member Liaison Group on Regional Policy), Cllr Pauline Dee (CLRAE), John Edwards (AWM), Malcolm Harbour MEP, Jerry Hutchinson (WMiE Secretary), Cllr Syeda Khatun (CoR), Liz Lynne MEP, Mike Nattrass MEP, Cllr Milner Whiteman (CoR), Judith Young (Warwickshire CC)</p>	
2.	<p>Notes of 24 February 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>	
4.	<p>The Regional Response to the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) This item was moved up the agenda.</p>	

<p>(a)</p>	<p>The Regional Response</p> <p>The main principles in the regional response were agreed by the EIAP at its 24 February meeting. The West Midlands had made a strong case for management of the ESF programme by individual regions and for a combined programme linking ERDF and ESF and suggestions for its delivery. The English Regions Network (ERN), currently chaired by the West Midlands, had submitted a shorter response which had drawn on the West Midlands principles with added contributions from other regions. ERN representatives had met with Margaret Hodge MP, Minister of State for Industry and the Regions, on 5 June to emphasise the wish to manage the funds regionally. The Department of Trade and Industry had urged lobbying direct with the Department for Work and Pensions and this was being taken up by Nigel Rudd, Chief Executive of the East Midlands Regional Assembly on behalf of the ERN.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantage West Midlands reported that the West Midlands principles were fully in line with those of the other 8 Regional Development Agencies in response to the consultation. The ERN was also keeping up the pressure across RDAs. AWM wanted a regional programme but was not very keen to administer it. Indications showed, however, that there would be an 'August Whitehall' announcement that RDAs should take on programme administration. • The Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) would still support the regionalisation of ESF funding. Their main concern was the alignment of ESF against regional strategies as this must fit in with regional planning. It was crucial that the regional part of Objective 3 aligned with regional plans and ERDF. • The Region still needed to keep up pressure about emphasising <u>higher</u> as well as basic level skills. 	
<p>(b)</p>	<p>Progress Report on the new Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) Programme 2007-2013</p> <p>A draft analysis document prepared for the 12 June Conference on Regional Competitiveness and Employment (RCE) was available at the meeting, and a summary of points from the four workshops was handed out.</p> <p>There was discussion regarding the four main priorities in the West Midlands RCE Programme which had been discussed at the Conference, in particular concerns were expressed about the Sustainable Urban Communities priority which, it had been proposed, would concentrate only on the two main conurbations in the region. This would reflect the Commission's aim for an urban focus in the new programmes as illustrated by Regional Policy Commissioner Danuta Hübner's address to the Committee of the Regions on 14 June during which she confirmed that the Commission would be using a broad definition of what constitutes an urban area in the new funding programmes ie an urban area could include a city and its surrounding region. Points made during discussion included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be likely that outside the urban areas, funding could be 	

	<p>given to areas that had not previously received structural funding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was necessary to concentrate resources and fit the analysis to the purpose of the funding in order to maximise development. The programme was going to be much smaller and had to be aimed more closely at need. • The LEADER programme was also changing to provide support to rural economies. <p>Although these points were accepted, some members were concerned that the shires would feel marginalised especially with current problems such as the planned closure of the Peugeot plant in Ryton in Warwickshire.</p> <p>The concept of a city region could, however, give the Region flexibility with regard to boundaries and would therefore mean money available to tackle problems such as the Peugeot closure, rather than concentrating on certain areas.</p> <p>The West Midlands was ahead of other regions in developing new programmes because of the good working relationship between the various regional partners, including the region's MEPs.</p> <p>Malcolm Harbour MEP had sent a message to the meeting urging the Region to be ready with project proposals under the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme. He also assured the Partnership that MEPs would continue to work with regional partners to maximise the Region's engagement with FP7 following the expected approval of the FP7 research programme in the European Parliament the following week.</p> <p>It was agreed to note both the reports.</p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Review of Strategic Projects</p> <p>The Partnership was updated on some of the regionally strategic projects established in July 2005 under three themes for regional working which had been proposed following the review of the European Strategic Action Plan. The themes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (I) A Powerful Voice for the Region – shaping and influencing EU Policy (II) The effective use of EU Funding to deliver regional priorities (III) Engaging with European and International partners. <p>It was suggested that project work on Research and Development and the Regional Project Support Centre being carried out under themes (I) and (II) continued, but that the Region would not pursue the Skills Interchange Project which had commenced as part of the Region's exit strategy to structural funds when no future access to structural funding was envisaged.</p> <p>Its potential to continue to offer the region benefit as a process would be determined by an evaluation.</p> <p>It was agreed:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To endorse the work taking place under themes (I) and (II) • To endorse that the R&D and Project Support Centre projects continue to develop subject to resources being identified by their sponsoring partners. 	
<p>5.</p>	<p>A Strategic Approach to Region to Region Links</p> <p>This was one of three elements under Theme (III) of the regional working themes. Acceptance by the EIAP in February of recommendations put forward by the Regional Criteria Group had led to the setting up of a Region to Region Task and Finish Group chaired by Richard Bindless of the Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce, to take forward the recommendations and find a modus operandi in selecting and continuing partnership arrangements.</p> <p>The Task and Finish Group expressed concerns about the number of new strategic relationships and suggested a formal procedure to be followed when considering future relationships. It also suggested looking closely at the Region's five strategic relationships.</p> <p>The Brussels Office had been investigating how other regions managed their region to region links and had discovered an emphasis on connecting with networks which gives more flexibility.</p> <p>Opportunities for joint working would never meet all needs, but widening the search and being proactive in linking into networks could lead to the benefits the Region is looking for in region to region working.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was general agreement that using a <u>network</u> approach would be of more benefit to the Region than finding matching regions, as there would be more flexibility in picking and mixing relationships. • Objectives must be looked at to ensure a win-win situation for both parties. • Existing links should be explored to see which are worth pursuing by studying the impact already felt and information coming out of the RES review. The region of Yorkshire and Humberside had used a 'start again approach' in its region to region relationships by examining their areas of interest and finding regions with the same interests. • There were broader issues than solely economic benefits and the criteria for judging networks needed to be set out. Operational responsibility should also be examined. It was stated however that as region to region work would not be centrally resourced work would have to be undertaken from individual perspectives rather than centrally and the approach would therefore have to be reappraised. It should also be made clear what the Region could and could not do. • The impact of what was being done and measured needs to link back to the objectives of the Partnership. <p>It was agreed:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That existing relationships be assessed – clarification must be made during assessment of whether this was being made against economic benefit or broader issues. • That no regional agreements must occur without explicit agreement of the Regional Assembly and AWM. • In the meantime, work to be carried out on identifying where the Region would like to have linkages on a thematic basis. • Report to be brought to the November meeting. 	<p>WMRA</p> <p>WMRA</p> <p>WMRA</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Regional Assembly Strategic Review of European Activity within the Region</p> <p>The Assembly’s Strategic Review Group was planning to carry out a strategic review of the Region’s relationship with Europe and the EIAP had been invited to contribute to the development of the scope of the review. Dagmar Waller, the Assembly’s Regional Scrutiny Manager, was present at the meeting to hear suggestions of issues the Review Panel could cover to add focus to the debate.</p> <p>The same question had been put to the West Midlands in Europe Partnership Board during its morning meeting and IM as Chair of the Board summarised the Board’s suggestions for review as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of the extent of the resource base for European working at the regional level. • Assessment of the effect European funding had had on the Region and what influence the next round of funding would have. The Commission was looking for evidence of the impact of structural funds to include in the 4th Cohesion Report and influence the 2008/2009 review. Therefore work on the difference European funding had made to the Region may be of use elsewhere, not just in the West Midlands. It was especially important to look at the evidence base rather than focus on structures. • Assessment of policy influence. <p>Whatever the focus decided on, the review should look at this against the context of other European regions and should give suggestions for how the Region could improve its working in the future.</p> <p>There had been concerns expressed at the Board about the timing of the review and the problem of over-publicising some of the more negative aspects of work during the recent past, especially as the Region was now at a good point in terms of renewed efforts on the European Policy front.</p> <p>Board members had made the decision that they would be prepared to give evidence but not be members of the panel.</p> <p>Partnership members agreed with these points, especially with focusing on funding.</p> <p>Dagmar Waller would be working closely with EK during the course of the review. Any specific thoughts or comments should be sent to</p>	

	Dagmar on (d.waller@wmra.gov.uk).	
7.	<p>Review of the Membership of the European and International Affairs Partnership</p> <p>All Assembly Partnerships were undergoing review and the review of EIAP membership should be seen in that context. The aim was to make the EIAP the focus for European and International policy across the Region and the review of EIAP membership would help to strengthen that. A small number of members of the partnership had not attended meetings for some time and there were several member places which had not been filled. Organisations such as the Learning and Skills Councils also needed to be fully represented. If the partnership was to be of any value it was necessary to attract the right mix of representatives and for full meeting attendance.</p> <p>The Partnership's Terms of Reference had also been updated to take account of previous revisions and the membership proposals set out in the paper.</p> <p>It was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the revised membership structure for the EIAP as set out in the report be endorsed • That the revised Terms of Reference for the EIAP be submitted for approval by the Regional Assembly. 	WMRA
8.	<p>For information</p> <p>Review of the Regional Economic Strategy</p> <p>The Review of the RES which had been launched in March 2006 was considering the agreed actions which would be required to ensure existing targets for 2010 were met and was looking to 2020 to establish what the Region would need to do to continue to improve economic performance.</p> <p>It was agreed to put the Review on the September EIAP agenda for discussion about the emerging political options that would be out for consultation.</p>	WMRA
9.	<p>Regional Spatial Strategy Reference Group – considering RSS options</p> <p>Each of the Regional Assembly's Policy Partnerships including the EIAP was being consulted on the review of the Regional Spatial Strategy as it developed and were being designated 'Reference Groups' for the strategy.</p> <p>It was agreed to put the Review on the 29 September EIAP agenda to consider some of the options that were coming forward in the review.</p>	WMRA
10.	<p>EU Futures: Countdown to the New Generation of Programmes 29 September 2006</p> <p>This joint EIAP/West Midlands in Europe event would follow up the "EU Futures" Event held in Coventry on 11 November 2005 and would demonstrate the pilot services of the Regional European Project Support</p>	

	Centre. It was agreed to note the draft programme. GW to work with JB to investigate how to effectively bring R&D into the programme.	GW/JB
11.	Assisted Areas Review: West Midlands Response The second stage of the Assisted Areas Review consultation was due to come out in early July and would be open for comment for four weeks. The DTI would submit the results in the form of a map to the Commission in August with a final map two months later. Regional Officers would only have a short time to agree and respond to the map. It was agreed to note the Response. AB to be consulted before a response goes forward.	WMRA
12.	(Standing Item) News from the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions The Committee of the Regions was debating the leverage effect of structural funds. The Commission was looking for input into the 4 th Cohesion Report to feed into the 2008/2009 review of the financial framework which would confirm added value in having EU policy backed up by EU funds. Work was being co-ordinated through the Austrian Research Institute in the form of case studies. The Masshouse case study had been put forward for consideration. Members with any ideas or who would like a copy of the material should contact EK (e.knight@wmra.gov.uk).	
13.	Dates of next meetings:- Friday 29 September 2006 – meeting and EIAP/WMiE Event (Birmingham Council House, 8.30 am for EIAP meeting, event to finish at approximately 4.00 pm) Friday 24 November at 2.00 pm – venue tbc (note change of date from 15 December)	