

## EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PARTNERSHIP

### Notes of meeting held 23 February 2007 At the Regional Partnership Centre

#### PRESENT:

#### Members

**(Please note: following the acceptance of proposals regarding membership at the 16 June 2006 EIAP meeting, a distinction is no longer made between formal and ex-officio members of the Partnership)**

Cllr Sir Albert Bore (WMLGA) – Chair, Cllr Philip Atkins (WMLGA), David Burton (CWMCC), Philip Bushill-Matthews MEP, Mike Cherry (FSB), Prof Michael Clarke (WMHEA), Cllr Sue Davis (CLRAE), Olwen Dutton (West Midlands Regional Partnership), John Edwards (AWM), Richard Elsdon (Sustainability West Midlands), Tim Gebbels (AWM), Ray Gillespie (Office of Philip Bradbourn MEP), Jerry Hutchinson (North Warwickshire Borough Council (EIAP Secretary)), Cllr Roger Lawrence (WMLGA), Cllr David S Smith (WMLGA), Cllr Ken Taylor (WMLGA), Cllr Paul Tilsley (WMLGA), Cllr Milner Whiteman (CoR)

#### Officers

Jon Bloomfield (AWM), Daryl Davies (WMRA), Esther Knight (WMRA), Helena Muskett (Chair REIOG), Glynis Whiting (WMIÉ), Patrick Willcocks (Chair REPGF), Louise Chilton (WMLGA)

Item	Discussion and Decision	Action
1.	<p><b>Apologies</b> Apologies had been received from: <b>Members:</b> Cllr Eddie Boden (WMLGA), Philip Bradbourn MEP, Cllr Pauline Dee (CLRAE), Trudi Elliott (GOWM), Malcolm Harbour MEP, Liz Lynne MEP, Doug Mahoney (AWM), Isabella Moore (AWM), Julie Robson (LSC)</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Richard Elsdon, Regional European Sustainability Ambassador, and Sue Davis (CLRAE) to the meeting.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Notes of 24 November meeting and matters arising</b> The notes were <b>agreed</b> as a correct record of the meeting. DB and OD to be added to the list of apologies. Under Item 5 (consultation by WMIÉ) the requested amendment had been made.</p>	
	<p><b>For Discussion</b></p>	
3.	<p><b>EIAP Policy Priorities for 2007-2008</b> Whilst the EIAP had always discussed EU policy matters in general, it now needed to take the next steps in attempting to become more aware of EU policy issues and how the Region could influence the future agenda. The starting point for this was the European Commission's workplan, which also forms the basis of the annual workplans of the European Parliament and Committee of the Regions.</p> <p>This was the first time a comprehensive look at upcoming European Commission activity had been taken by the Region. Conclusions had been based on both the work of the Regional European Policy and Funding Group (REFPG) and the recent West Midlands in Europe consultation survey regarding its members' policy priorities. The ongoing WMRA Strategic Review of the Region's relationship with Europe had also highlighted the need for closer links between WMRA</p>	

	<p>policy partnerships and the European agenda.</p> <p>Priority areas defined by REFPG included Competitiveness (Lisbon Agenda), Cohesion, Research and Innovation, Skills and Education and Energy and Climate Change. Groups now needed to be identified to take any initiatives forward, including those groups already working in certain areas identified in the annex to the Report, which need to acknowledge European aspects of their work.</p> <p>The EIAP now had to indicate where its priorities lay by deciding on the areas in which it wanted to place major effort and which areas to signpost to other groups, whilst being mindful of resources available.. Although the potential opportunities for opening up the market were acknowledged and preparatory work was often done, follow-up work would also need to take place.</p> <p>From the work programme the three areas that would appear to be of interest to the EIAP were (i) Cohesion and competitiveness, (ii) Research and Innovation arena and (iii) Climate change/waste. During discussion the following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority areas chosen would also need to tie into the WMES policy choices consultation which would set the economic framework for the Region for the next 15 years. The four big issues that would impact on the Region’s ability to compete economically were globalisation, climate change/energy, demographic change and manufacturing technology.</li> <li>• The Region must put more effort into improving skills, business start-up and retraining rates. Links also needed to be made to the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013 and the Framework Programme.</li> <li>• Stated regional priorities would assist the work of the Region’s MEPs.</li> <li>• New procurement rules would open up opportunities for smaller businesses in terms of public procurement. The WMRA was working on procurement thorough the Centre of Excellence and the Improvement and Efficiency Partnership.</li> <li>• Energy/Climate change was an extremely important market in which the West Midlands could prosper. Biodiesel fuels was a growing industry but production costs meant that Government encouragement was needed. The EIAP would need a strong voice to set the strategy and provide ways to influence it eg signed statement committing to work in Europe. There had already been some delivery on the ground regarding Biofuels eg some local authorities were examining the possibility of running their car fleets on biofuels.</li> <li>• Waste recycling/incineration were not mentioned in the report but were of increasing importance due to both the removal of waste and the need for countries to be less dependent on outside sources and generate their own energy. Should the Region be promoting small (usually virtually emissions-free) incinerators? Both Brussels and the UK Government had decided not to include bottom ash in recycling figures – PT to forward article in EP news to PBM.</li> <li>• Following the Services Directive, should services become an important part of the West Midlands agenda eg should there be guidance/lobbying/a regional view on keeping post offices open?</li> </ul>	<p>PT</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of Research and Innovation to the Region had already been stressed by several different regional organisations and a joined-up approach was essential.</li> <li>• The 4<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report would be published in late spring.</li> <li>• There had been a 25% return rate to the WMiE Consultation which had been spread across the sectors. Cohesion was a given and top priority went to Education and Skills where there would be huge opportunities, particularly with the Lifelong Learning programme. The Directorate General for Education and Culture was developing the European Institute of Technology, for which support was being provided in the West Midlands through Science City. This was followed by: Research and Development, Enterprise, Spatial Planning, Employment, Environment, Culture and Global programmes about the EU in the wider world (to help business and others into Asia, China, etc).</li> <li>• There should also be a priority related to human resources. The Region's skills record was poor and globalisation would bring more skills challenges eg skills for engagement, cohesion and employment which would unify the demographics of the Region.</li> </ul> <p>It was <b>agreed</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers to prepare a short paper for circulation to EIAP members setting out thoughts that had emerged and resulting options.</li> </ul>	EK
4.	<p><b>Strategic Review of the Region's Relationship with Europe – Report of the Panel Chair</b></p> <p>The Review would hold a consultation on the draft Review report from 12 March-13 April. Key issues were identified in the Panel Chair's report.</p> <p>It was <b>agreed</b> that a small sub-group should produce a draft response on behalf of the EIAP; members to include OD, DS, AB, DB, TG and JH.</p>	WMRA
5.	<p><b>West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy Review – Consultation on Policy Choices (Presentation by Advantage West Midlands)</b></p> <p>Tim Gebbels of AWM gave a brief presentation on the regional consultation on the WMES Policy Choices that provide a structured approach to the revision of the West Midlands Economic Strategy. The Consultation would run until the end of February 2007. The main points to note were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The choices were divided into six major themes impacting upon economic performance. The issues and challenges facing the Region in each theme were as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Enterprise – there are distinct areas of under-representation in entrepreneurial activity (eg female and ethnic minority engagement) and enterprise was not bridging the wealth gap, with manufacturing production 17% below the EU average. There are, however, favourable attitudes to enterprise and entrepreneurship</li> <li>(ii) Innovation - R&amp;D investment levels in the West Midlands are the lowest in England and continue to fall relative to the English average</li> <li>(iii) Skills – the Region has the highest proportion of non-qualified workers in England</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

	<p>(iv) Economic Activity - key groups of people are doing badly and this is strongly linked to educational attainments. The Region faces a serious demographic challenge – although migration has recently boosted the supply of labour, demand for employment is expected to outgrow supply</p> <p>(v) Quality of Life – the Region does not punch its weight in cultural and creativity terms – Birmingham comes 6<sup>th</sup> on the BOHO Creativity Index. How do we exploit diversity?</p> <p>(vi) Infrastructure (the role of places and the importance of the surrounding area) - manufacturing is still a key challenge - every manufacturing job supports an additional three jobs in the Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broader issues include the balance between themes, strategic focus and longer-term challenges</li> <li>• The main components of the Lisbon Agenda feature strongly throughout the current strategy. The current review was seeking to address the longer-term challenges articulated in the Lisbon Agenda around environment, continued globalisation, technological advance and demographic change</li> <li>• The deadline to respond on-line or in writing was 28 February – responses would feed into the production of the full draft strategy.</li> </ul> <p>The following points were made in discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was confirmed that the statement in section 2.3 of the Consultation on Policy Choices document regarding older workers being significantly less well-qualified than younger people and much less likely to undertake any form of learning activity was based on fact. There was some difficulty finding reasons for this</li> <li>• The number of VAT registrations in the Region was only one of many indicators of enterprise which had all been analysed.</li> </ul> <p>Members were asked to contribute to the debate in writing or via the AWM website using link <a href="http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/phase-3.html">http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/phase-3.html</a> by 28 February.</p>	All
6.	<p><b>(Standing Item) News from The European Parliament</b></p> <p>The Parliament was now half way into its fixed five year term. The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development was now chaired by Neil Parrish, a UK MEP. As Germany had taken over the presidency of the EU it had relinquished the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee which was now held by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, a Polish MEP.</p> <p>The Green paper on Labour Law would come to the end of its four month consultation period.</p> <p><b>The Committee of the Regions</b></p> <p>The CoR would be at the Mid point of its fixed term in Jan/Feb 2008, at which point AB would cease to be the Chair of the Territorial Cohesion (COTER) Commission. COTER would be putting building blocks in place over the next year justifying regional policy following 4<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report</p>	

	<b>For Update</b>	
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>Structural Funds – Progress Report</b></p> <p>The Partnership was informed that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was now out to formal consultation via GOWM until 12 March 2007. The vast majority of European Social Fund (ESF) money would be allocated to regions. The role of regional skills partnerships was being clarified.</p> <p>The Local Authority sector was working to increase the number of organisations that could take part in ESF in the future. PW had had informal discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions about the potential role of Local Authorities. Local Government was examining how local authorities could become co-financers.</p> <p>Attention was drawn to point 2.2 of the West Midlands response to the ESF England Operational Programme 2007-2013 which recognised and accepted the need for a Programme Monitoring Committee to input and oversee the alignment of ESF with ERDF Local Area Agreements and other funding initiatives in the Region.</p> <p>The report was <b>noted</b>.</p>	
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>West Midlands Involvement in European Networks</b></p> <p>The EIAP was updated on the three networks with which the Region was engaged: the Lisbon Regions Network (<a href="http://www.lisbonregionsnetwork.eu">www.lisbonregionsnetwork.eu</a>), the European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN) (<a href="http://www.errin-brussels.org">www.errin-brussels.org</a>) and the Peri Urban Region Platform Europe (PURPLE) (<a href="http://www.purple-eu.org">http://www.purple-eu.org</a>) and were encouraged to look at their websites for more information.</p> <p>Discussions had taken place at EIAP meetings regarding engagement in selected focused networks which would not demand excessive resources or heavy civic duties. Such involvement would pave the way for links with a number of driving regions in Europe which performed better than the West Midlands in a number of areas and would enable the Region to influence policy, share best practice and work with partners in European funding projects. EIAP members <b>agreed</b> that this approach was vital and a good way of going forward.</p> <p>The Region had started to look at networks in wider consultation (eg social inclusion network, skills and lifelong learning) and had made a very solid start – there were now over 40 regions in the ERRIN network.</p> <p>From January 2007 sectoral and strategic Working Groups had been set up according to ERRIN Members’ needs. It was confirmed that the West Midlands had logged interest in covering the priorities of Science City but there would need to be a regional volunteer to lead a group on this. WMiE would be happy to provide support - possibility of lead to be discussed by AWM and HE Sector.</p> <p><u>Regions for Economic Change</u></p> <p>It was reported that some West Midlands officers had met with the EC officer dealing with Regions for Economic Change projects and had indicated that the Region would be keen to be involved in the</p>	AWM/HE

	<p>transmission of innovation from universities into new industries, which would fit both into the issues outlined in the RES Policy Choices document, and the RCE programme priorities. However, the project offer from the EC had been concerned with an air quality project that Coventry City Council was involved with, not a priority of the RCE programme. A protest had been lodged. Although it was acknowledged that the Region had not lobbied as strongly as others, some of these other regions were equally unhappy. WMiE had been working with UKRep to try to change the project.</p> <p><i>Update: The current 'fast track' initiative had been abandoned by the EC to be replaced by priority projects to be set by the new INTERREG IVC PMC in the autumn.</i></p> <p>The report was <b>noted</b>.</p>	
	<b>For Information</b>	
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>The Impact of Languages on the European Economy</b> This item was deferred to the 29 June EIAP meeting.</p>	
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>WMiE/WMRA Annual Event</b> There had been a good response to the "EU Futures: Countdown to the New Generation of EU Programmes" event held on 29 September 2006. It was proposed to hold a second Annual General Event in September 2007 which would demonstrate the huge opportunities in the new programmes and be an opportunity to launch the newest Midlands-EU Connects project.</p> <p>The proposed theme of the 2007 annual event is Skills and Lifelong Learning with an emphasis on opportunities in the EU's new Lifelong learning programme. The event would aim to provide support for new partners. WMRA was proposing to co-sponsor the event with WMiE. Ecotec (the EU's National Agency in the UK for Leonardo, Grundtvig and the Transversal sub-programme) would be holding a Thematic Network Conference on the Lifelong Learning programme towards the end of September 2007 in Birmingham and it may be possible to run the two complementary events close together.</p> <p>Partners including the CWMCC gave pledged their support to the event. The report was <b>noted</b>.</p>	
<b>11.</b>	<p><b>Committee of the Regions Open Days – 8-11 October 2007</b> Members were urged to register as soon as possible for these popular events – registration must be made individually and via the internet. It is expected that the online registration website would be available from 1 July 2007.</p> <p>The report was <b>noted</b>.</p>	
<b>12.</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business</b> The interim response on behalf of the (English) West Midlands Regional INTERREG Group (RING) to the Consultation on the Draft Operational Programme Objective 3 Interregional Territorial Cooperation Programme (INTERREG IVc) was tabled.</p>	

	<p>The UK Office of the European Parliament was planning to hold a reception for 200 guests in Birmingham in the early evening of Friday 4 May to facilitate networking and give the UK office a greater view into regional working at European level. This would follow similar receptions held in the past two years in the North East and North West Regions. Members were advised that WMRA officers had drawn attention to the fact the local elections would be held in the Region on 3 May.</p>	
<p><b>12.</b></p>	<p><b>Date of next meeting</b>  <b>Friday 29 June at 1100</b></p> <p>Jerzy Buzek MEP, European Commission's Rapporteur for R&amp;D work, would address the Partnership. Mr Buzek would be in the Region from 28 June and any colleagues who would like to attend dinner on 28 June should contact JB or EK. A possibility for the visit programme would be a visit to the Cancer Research Group at Aston University. Any other ideas should be forwarded to JB.</p> <p>It was noted that the visit had been facilitated by Joanna Pierozynska of AWM and was a good example of work enabled by the EIAP's foresight to employ colleagues from the accession countries in the Region.</p> <p>It was suggested that press coverage should be arranged, including the possibility of Patrick Burns leading a TV discussion on the close links between Poland and the West Midlands.</p>	<p>All</p> <p>AWM to arrange</p>