

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

22 April 2009

Parliamentary Regional Accountability: West Midlands Select Committee

1. Purpose

To provide the Assembly with an update on progress in establishing the West Midlands Select Committee.

2. Recommendation

2.1 The Assembly is asked to note the position to date.

3. Background

3.1 In 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, were to be established for a trial period from 1 January 2009 for the life of this Parliament.

3.2 On Tuesday 3 March, the House of Commons debated and agreed motions to appoint Labour members to the Select Committees. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats did not nominate members to any of the eight Regional Select Committees.

4. West Midlands Regional Select Committee

4.1 Current membership is as follows:

Richard Burden - Chair of Committee (Birmingham, Northfield)

Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West)

David Kidney (Stafford)

James Plaskitt (Warwick & Leamington)

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North)

4.2 On 19th March 2009, the West Midlands Select Committee issued a call for evidence for its first inquiry into the impact of the current economic and financial situation on businesses in the West Midlands Region. Submissions were required by 20 April 2009.

4.3 It is anticipated that the Committee will hold three evidence sessions within the Region. The first of these is expected to be held in Birmingham on 20 April to take evidence from financiers. No other details are available at this time. The other two sessions are expected to be based on written evidence submitted.

5. **West Midlands Regional Grand Committee**

5.1 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 are expected to question the Regional Minister and hold general debates on specified matters. No details are available regarding the first meeting of the West Midlands Committee

6. **Business and Enterprise Select Committee**

6.1 On 13 March 2007 the Business and Enterprise Select Committee published its report into Regional Development Agencies and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. The Committee report in full can be found via the following link - <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmberr/89/89i.pdf>

6.2 The key findings of the report include

- RDAs serve a useful function and should be business led
- Concerns that RDAs responsibilities have been increased "piecemeal" and impact of this on their ability to maintain a strategic outlook
- Concerns regarding the current experience of RDA staff and the ability to take on new planning responsibilities while remaining business led
- While recognising challenges re recession, any budget cuts should only be made after comprehensive and thoughtful review of RDA budgets and programmes
- Need clarity and detail within the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill
- Business interests cannot be presumed to take precedence over democratically expressed wishes of local communities
- Concerned with the creation of an accountability gap and that regional select committees will have time/resources to scrutinise regional strategies
- Concerned that proposed Economic Prosperity Boards might unnecessarily add to "the plethora of organisations and strategies"
- RDAs will be better able to focus on strategic economic and spatial planning if as much of the delivery as is reasonable is undertaken by LA's and other sub regional partners

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