

CENTRAL WALES - WEST MIDLANDS

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON CROSS BORDER COLLABORATION

The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding aim to achieve effective cross border collaboration between Central Wales and the West Midlands on both policy development and service delivery.

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CONTEXT

1. The border between Central Wales and the West Midlands winds for over 150 miles through deeply rural “Marches” communities. While the boundary will have historic roots, in most places it is now an artificial line which bears little relationship to the patterns of life for communities in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.
2. Communities in these rural areas face similar challenges, opportunities and needs. There are strong social and economic links across the border and a shared reliance on the opportunities provided by urban centres such as Hereford and Shrewsbury. There is a complex pattern of inter-dependence by local communities on services sourced from one or other side of the border.
3. However, while the England / Wales border appears an artificial one for local communities it does define operational units for national, regional and local governments and for most other public sector organisations and partnerships. As those organisations have evolved they have developed their own strategies, plans and policies, their own funding streams and modes of service delivery. This can lead to differences in policy, funding and services between Central Wales and the West Midlands which can have a detrimental impact on border communities.
4. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding recognise this risk and are keen to build stronger cross border collaboration. The Welsh Assembly Government has committed in the Wales Spatial Plan to establishing collaboration with West Midlands organisations in order to address key issues of common concern. These same cross border issues have been

recognised by the West Midlands Regional Assembly and the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum. The Forum commissioned research in 2005 to explore these issues and since then a Central Wales-West Midlands officer group has been established to develop arrangements for more effective collaboration.

NATURE AND STATUS OF THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

5. This Memorandum of Understanding is a voluntary arrangement rather than a binding agreement or contract and so does not create any legally enforceable rights obligations or restrictions. It does not create any rights to be consulted or prevent consultation beyond that required by statute. Any failure to follow the terms of this Memorandum of Understanding is not be taken as invalidating decisions taken by any of the parties.

SCOPE

6. It is intended that this Memorandum of Understanding should apply to all public sector organisations and public sector – led partnerships operating at the national, regional or local level in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.
7. Voluntary Sector and Private Sector organisations operating in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands (such as County Voluntary Councils, transport operators and utility providers) are also encouraged to follow the principles set out in this Memorandum of Understanding.

8. This Memorandum of Understanding is intended to embrace all aspects of policy development and service delivery which impacts on social, economic and environmental well-being and sustainability in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.

COLLABORATION ARRANGEMENTS

9. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding will so far as is reasonable and practical and within the resource capacity of their respective organisations:-
 - (a) share non-confidential information relevant to the development of policies and services which will impact on border communities in Herefordshire, Powys and Shropshire;
 - (b) “border proof” all proposals for change in policy, funding or service delivery which would apply to border communities, in order to ensure that any detrimental consequences for those communities are identified and mitigating action taken;
 - (c) consult each other in good time on proposals for change in policy, funding or service delivery that could impact on communities on the opposite side of the border;
 - (d) seek out opportunities for collaboration on policy development and service delivery wherever this could provide efficiencies and / or added value;
 - (e) share experience of good practice in rural policy development and service delivery across Central Wales and the West Midlands.

10. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding will establish a Central Wales – West Midlands Strategic Forum to oversee the implementation of this Memorandum of Understanding, to address strategic policy issues and opportunities for collaboration. That Strategic Forum will meet at least once a year. It will report to the Welsh Assembly Government through the Central Wales Spatial Plan Ministerial Group. In the West Midlands it will report to the Government Office, the Regional Assembly and Advantage West Midlands...
11. The Strategic Forum will be supported by a Core Officer Group drawn from the parties` respective organisations. Specialist task and finish groups will be established to address specific issues of cross border concern, reporting to the Strategic Forum.
12. A sub-group of the Strategic Forum will be established to monitor and annually review the effectiveness of the arrangements set out in this Memorandum of Understanding

CONFIDENTIALITY

13. Each party to this Memorandum of Understanding accepts that it can expect to receive information in confidence only if that information is treated with appropriate discretion. The party providing the information will state what, if any, restrictions there should be upon its usage and each party will treat information it receives in accordance with any such restrictions. Disclosure of information will be subject to the requirements of any relevant legislation, such as that relating to data protection, freedom of information , disclosure of environmental information, and any relevant code of practice relating to access to information.

LAUNCH SIGNATORIES

For the Welsh Assembly Government*

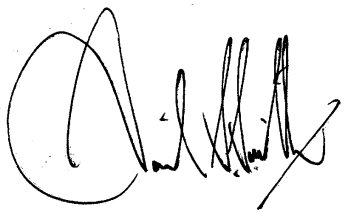


Carwyn Jones AM

Minister for Environment, Planning and the Countryside

* Until the Government of Wales Act 2006 is fully implemented, the Welsh Assembly Government is simply the executive arm of the National Assembly for Wales, constituted under the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the Minister signs this Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of that Assembly. When section 45 of the 2006 Act takes effect, references in this Memorandum of Understanding to the Welsh Assembly Government will be construed in accordance with that section. ,

For the West Midlands Regional Assembly



Cllr David Smith

Chair – West Midlands Regional Assembly

Date: 5th March 2007