

## **Draft European Social Cohesion Group (ESCG) Work-Plan**

### **1. Introduction**

The West Midlands European Strategy (WMES) was published in Spring 2008 and focuses on the region's engagement with Europe, what our priorities should be and how we intend to make a success of them.

Over the past two decades most of the day-to-day European activity undertaken within the West Midlands has focussed on the use of EU Structural Funds, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Many parts of the region have benefited greatly from resources made available under ERDF while all parts of the West Midlands have been eligible for ESF resources. The retention of these Funds for 2007-2013, albeit on a reduced scale, means that continued attention will need to be given to the most effective use of these monies in the forthcoming period.

However, the strategy looks beyond Structural Funds and makes the case for a more comprehensive approach to European working. It has been drafted at a key moment in the EU's development, as Europe strives to fulfil the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and to adopt to the challenges posed by climate change and wider impact of globalisation. During 2008-2009 the EU will conduct a root-and-branch review of its budget to suggest how it can be best aligned with the Union's policy priorities. These are among the matters that form the background and context to this strategy.

The West Midlands European Strategy focuses on the following four priorities:

- maximising the opportunities of the Single Market
- becoming a more successful player within the innovation, research and development arena
- responding to the challenges of climate change and environmental protection
- engaging with the social cohesion dimension

### **2. Engaging with the Social Cohesion Dimension**

The Strategy seeks to highlight the linkages between key developments at the European level with regional priorities in the West Midlands. This work-plan sets out actions which will enable the West Midlands to address these issues in relation to the fourth priority mentioned above.

## 2.1 European Context

**Policies:** The main related European policy is the *Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe*.

Following the adoption of the European Social Agenda (2005-2010) in 2005, it became apparent to social policy-makers and practitioners by late 2006 that an update of the Strategy would be needed ahead of schedule as new emerging social trends appeared to be lacking a joined-up European approach<sup>1</sup>. This was further underlined in 2007 by the EU-wide *Social Reality Stocktaking Consultation*<sup>2</sup> which highlighted dramatic change underway in European societies, in the nature of work; modern family life; demographic trends; the position of women in society; social mobility and the incidence of poverty and inequality - values changing and societies becoming increasingly multi-cultural. Some of these developments were brought to the fore by the impact of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Technological change and global food and fuel prices have also risen steeply in recent years prompting an increase in the numbers of people living on the poverty line.

Launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008, the *Renewed Social Agenda* can be examined on a new website: [www.europa.ec.eu/social](http://www.europa.ec.eu/social). The main Communication which presents the new strategy identifies the following key social trends:

- Globalisation, both its benefits and negative impacts
- Technological developments, especially skills needs and accessibility of new technologies
- Demographic developments, particularly the issue of intergenerational solidarity
- 3rd country immigration, with issues surrounding integration and labour market access
- Climate Change, including impact on health and well-being, transforming industry and creation of new jobs.

On the basis of new major social trends the European Commission's *Renewed Social Agenda* is based on three main priorities:

- Opportunity
- Access
- Solidarity

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<sup>1</sup> See report of Bureau of European Policy Advisers of the European Commission [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy\\_advisers/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/citizens\\_agenda/social\\_reality\\_stocktaking/docs/background\\_document\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/docs/background_document_en.pdf)

Through the *Renewed Social Agenda* the ESCG will seek to assist West Midlands stakeholders to manage societal change through use of the:

- ✓ New legislation to combat discrimination
- ✓ Recommendations addressing early school leaving, special needs, teacher training and numeracy and equity in schools
- ✓ Improved legislation on European Works Councils
- ✓ Improvements to the European Globalisation Fund
- ✓ Changes to the Social Open Method of Coordination
- ✓ Biennial Reports on Local Services across Europe
- ✓ Green Paper on Education and Migration

The ESCG will aim to play into European policy and funding opportunities by:

- ✓ Raising concerns directly with EU decision-makers by responding to EU-wide public consultations, commenting on European Parliament Reports on:
  - ❖ West Midlands views on the extension to the Discrimination Directive to cover age, sexuality and religion
  - ❖ West Midlands views on proposals for a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

A significant proportion of the EU budget can be won through competitive bidding. The ESCG will aim to play into European policy and funding opportunities by supporting West Midlands stakeholders to win its fair share from the following funding programmes:

- PROGRESS
- The Life-long Learning Programme
- DAPHNE II
- Transnational ESF
- INTERREG IV B
- INTERREG IV C
- URBACT II
- Framework Programme for Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows
- Culture programme
- Youth in Action Programme
- Drugs Prevention and Information Programme

The ESCG will aim to deliver some of its objectives by joining or supporting membership of European networks that help West Midlands colleagues benchmark and share good practice and lobby for their interests, such as:

- ✓ European Network for Regions and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL)
- ✓ European Network for Regions and Local Authorities for Asylum and Migration (ERLAI)
- ✓ European Regeneration Areas Network (QeC)
- ✓ The European Older People's Platform (AGE)

## 2.2 West Midlands Context

**Policies:** The West Midlands European Strategy is based on established regional strategic policy, the *West Midlands Economic Strategy* and its *Delivery Framework* which highlight the need to address the social aspect alongside the economic one:

**Programmes:** West Midlands partners have recognised that there is currently a discrepancy within the region between the funding opportunities offered by the large number of EU trans-national funding programmes and the low level of our achievements. EU Connects, the major new initiative funded by the partners was established in order to help close the gap. EU Connects has published baseline research on the West Midlands performance in certain EU trans-national programmes during the 2000-06 period. The research focused on the Interreg, Life-long Learning and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programmes and provides a very useful baseline on the current experience of organisations under these funds. There are clearly opportunities to increase engagement in these funds and to deliver meaningful projects which contribute to regional and European priorities.

The ESCG will also seek to harness the expertise of the West Midlands European Network which specialises in advising and supporting voluntary and community sector organisations in relation to applying for and obtaining related European funding.

### 3. Membership

The workplan will provide the focus for the work of the region's European Social Cohesion Group (ESCG). Its membership is outlined below:

Name	Organisation	Contact details
Zahid Nawaz (Chair)	Equality and Human Rights Commission (Regional Manager)	<a href="mailto:zahid.nawaz@equalityhumanrights.com">zahid.nawaz@equalityhumanrights.com</a>
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Cllr Diane Rayner	Advantage West Midlands Board (Equalities Champion)	<a href="mailto:diane.rayner@btinternet.com">diane.rayner@btinternet.com</a>
Marie Greer	Advantage West Midlands (Director Sustainable Communities)	<a href="mailto:mariegreer@advantagewm.co.uk">mariegreer@advantagewm.co.uk</a>
Roger McKenzie	Trade Union Congress (Regional Secretary)	<a href="mailto:rmckenzie@tuc.org.uk">rmckenzie@tuc.org.uk</a>
Aaron Reid	Birmingham Professional DiverCity (Chief Executive)	<a href="mailto:aaron@birminghamdivercity.co.uk">aaron@birminghamdivercity.co.uk</a>
Jeremy Bruce	Sustainability West Midlands (Board Member)	<a href="mailto:jeremy.bruce@virgin.net">jeremy.bruce@virgin.net</a>
Andy Stowe	West Midlands European Network (Senior Policy Advisor)	<a href="mailto:andy@wmeuronet.org">andy@wmeuronet.org</a>
David Galliers	West Midlands Local Government Association (Assistant Director - LAA Support)	<a href="mailto:d.galliers@wmlga.gov.uk">d.galliers@wmlga.gov.uk</a>
Paul Winterbottom	West Midlands Regional Assembly (Director Health and Well-Being)	<a href="mailto:p.winterbottom@wmra.gov.uk">p.winterbottom@wmra.gov.uk</a>
David Barnes	West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (Regional Director)	<a href="mailto:d.barnes@wmlga.gov.uk">d.barnes@wmlga.gov.uk</a>
Jerry Conway	Learning and Skills Council	<a href="mailto:jerry.conway@lsc.gov.uk">jerry.conway@lsc.gov.uk</a>
Margaret Tovey	Job Centre Plus (Regional Director for the West Midlands)	<a href="mailto:margaret.tovey@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk">margaret.tovey@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Frank Reeves	Rights and Equality West Midlands	
Helen Ryman	RegenWM	<a href="mailto:helen.ryman@regenwm.org">helen.ryman@regenwm.org</a>
Carmel Kerr	West Midlands Regional Assembly (Equality and Diversity Director)	<a href="mailto:c.kerr@wmra.gov.uk">c.kerr@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Sophie Lainé	West Midlands in Europe	<a href="mailto:sophie.laine@westmidlandsineurope.org">sophie.laine@westmidlandsineurope.org</a>
Jo Sartori	EU Connects (PR and Marketing Officer)	<a href="mailto:euconnectsmarketing@wmlga.gov.uk">euconnectsmarketing@wmlga.gov.uk</a>
Joy Holland	WMLGA (ESF Programme Manager)	<a href="mailto:j.holland@wmlga.gov.uk">j.holland@wmlga.gov.uk</a>

**West Midlands in Europe** – Sophie Lainé will be a key source of information on the latest policy and funding developments in Brussels.

**EU Connects** – Jo Sartori and Joy Holland will provide advice and support to organisations in the West Midlands seeking to apply for EU trans-national funding.

#### 4. Workplan

Based on the actions identified the in the European strategy, the ESCG has outlined the following draft work-plan.

Action	Expected activity	Lead Partner(s)	Funding Sources / Resources	Timescale
1. Ensuring effective policy engagement on the major legislative issues that will have a significant impact on interests within the region.	Undertake a policy horizon scan to identify upcoming policy changes which will impact on the social cohesion theme and disseminate the findings to regional partners.	WMIE		By November 2008 Review on a rolling basis (every 6 months)
	Work with partners to collect and form regional responses to consultation exercises on European policies	Lead allocated according to policy under consultation		
	Participation in appropriate networks to positively influence emerging European policies and legislation.	Lead allocated according to policy area		
2. Supporting applications to EU Social Cohesion programmes which support regional and European priorities and targets.	Disseminate bidding opportunities and build capacity within regional partners to bid for and secure European funding.	ESCG Secretariat		
	Advise and support EU Connects to develop its plan for engaging local partners.	ESCG		
	Promote the sharing of advice, best	EU Connects		

	and good practice and information about bids which have been successful in the past.			
	Identify a short list of priority projects and programmes to target resources upon in the region.	ESCG partners		
	Explore the possibility of providing a project development/travel grant to support the development of bids to European Programmes.	ESCG Secretariat		
3. Contribute to the on-going debate on the Social Agenda.	Identify and respond to invitations to contribute a regional perspective on the <i>Renewed Social Agenda</i> . This will require the development of an appropriate and fully representative network of key partners.	ESCG		
4. Encourage inward and outward study visits, placements and partnership building with European partners on Social Cohesion issues.	Identify funding programmes to support this action and secure resources for study visits and partnership building exercises around agreed regional priorities, such as demographic change, in which the West Midlands is leading within Europe, and life-long learning another key issue for the region.	ESCG task group		

5. Build sustainable networks, within the region and with European partners, to share experience with partners and adopt innovative solutions to common issues.	Make use of small travel bursaries to enable short visits and interchanges to take place to support the prioritised and named network and partnerships	ESCG secretariat		
6. Establish links and encourage interchange with other European initiatives and programmes such as PURPLE and ERRIN and establish links with the other three European Strategy Priority Groups.	Identify opportunities and ensure the region is adequately represented and is making best use of the groups it already has.	TBA		
	Seek to learn from other existing partnerships in the regions and in successful regions in Europe and model a West Midlands approach to trans-national engagement which is based upon and informed by their experience.	TBA		
	Identify suitable members of the European Strategy's other three Priority groups to become Social Cohesion champions within those priority groups.	ESCG Chair		
7. Communications	Devise and develop a consistent communications plan which engages partners in the work of the ESCG and which disseminates information, good practice and key	ESCG task group or draft developed by Secretariat/EU Connects and WMiE		

	messages about the social cohesion aspects of the European Strategy.			
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