

NEWS RELEASE

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Sub National Review Consultation Document Released

The government has published the long awaited consultation document for the Sub National Review (SNR) of Economic Development.

SNR considers how to strengthen economic performance in regions, cities and localities throughout the country. Led jointly by the Treasury, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and their predecessor departments, it will see key changes taking place from 2010 with the abolition of Regional Assemblies and a proposed duty for councils to analyse the economic circumstances and challenges of their economy.

The role of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will change with a focus on increasing economic growth, with increased scrutiny by councils and simplified and strengthened performance management by central government. RDAs will also be required to delegate funding to local authorities where possible.

Chairman of the Assembly and West Midlands Local Government Association, Cllr David S Smith said: "I remain disappointed that the government has chosen to abolish Regional Assemblies. In the West Midlands the Assembly has been the key to ensuring that local authorities, the business community and social partners have had real influence over regional agendas and public spending.

"Over the next year we will be working out what will happen to both the functions which will transfer to the RDA and how that will work post 2010, but we will also consider the other activities the Assembly has undertaken; activities which have been carried out with little cost to the public purse but with a major contribution to public benefit, which have involved intelligence, skill, perseverance and flair. As chairman of the Assembly it is those qualities which I most value and I believe the way in which we have applied them has served this Region well, we must not lose this expertise."

Cllr Smith added: "We appreciate there may be gains to be found in the detail of SNR, but whatever the gains may be, we must balance them against the significant loss of local government control of the key functions of regional housing, transport and planning.

“In our Region we have coordinated these functions for the past 50 years starting with the Birmingham overspill committee. Since then we have delivered these services continuously with the Association team working together with all 38 councils in the West Midlands and more recently the same team delivering with our partners in the Assembly.

“My hope is that the proposed Forum of Leaders, consisting of a fully representative group, will come together with a re-focused Association to deliver all the services that require regional coordination.

“This is a cross party challenge facing all elected representatives. We need to develop and deliver the prosperity that must come from within, but also needs the support from national government.

“We sometimes forget that it is local government that delivers the services that matter most to our communities. We will be responsible for the planning that will generate the jobs growth, housing, leisure and transport that make our communities the place people wish to live.

“That is why we were elected. That is why we break our hearts to improve the lives of our residents. That is why we should renew our role as local leaders to deliver a better way forward.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

Key Aspects of SNR

- SNR provides a range of opportunities for local authorities at local and sub-regional level to grasp a leading role on economic regeneration, including greater devolved funding and flexibility over how this is deployed to meet locality priorities.
- There will be a new single integrated regional strategy setting out the economic, social and environmental objectives for each region, bringing together the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) and the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS). This Region is already in a strong starting position in the development of the first single integrated strategy for the West Midlands following the presentation of the WMRSS Phase Two Revision alongside the WMES by Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the Region at an event in December 2007.
- The statutory functions of Regional Assemblies with respect to the RSS will transfer to the RDA and Assemblies will no longer be funded by government or have any statutory role.
- Local Authorities in the Region will be responsible for agreeing the regional strategy with RDAs. Local Authorities will also have responsibility for effective scrutiny of RDA performance based on a national performance framework.
- Government will work with parliament to develop and agree the best way of enhancing parliamentary scrutiny of regional institutions and economic policy. The new Minister for the Region and a Select Committee will be central to this.

About the WMRA

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
5. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.
6. For further information, visit our website www.wmra.gov.uk

For further information please contact Jay Rana, Press Officer on 0121 245 0181.

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