

Speaking Out



// July 2009 // The news magazine for West Midlands Regional Assembly and West Midlands Local Government Association.

Issue 23



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// Strategy Update: Examination in Public Concludes as Phase Three Consultation Begins

// Consultation into Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Commences

// Tacking the Economic Downturn Through Effective Partnerships

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West Midlands
Regional Assembly

West Midlands **LGA**
local government association

Speaking Out

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Olwen Dutton (CEO WMRA and WMLGA)



// Olwen Dutton

Welcome to Speaking Out

Welcome to what will be the last issue of Speaking Out from the West Midlands Local Government Association and the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

Significant progress has been made this year in terms of regional working and the new governance arrangements, with the Leaders Board established and already making major decisions.

The last Association Annual General Meeting was held on the 8th of July, where members voted on the change of name from the West Midlands Local Government Association to the West Midlands Leaders Board and adopted a revised constitution. The first

West Midlands Leaders Board (WMLB) meeting on Monday 13th saw the formal beginning of the new organisation.

The West Midlands Leaders Board is in the process of identifying the strategic priorities and member support structures for its new organisation. Whilst details have not yet been finalised, there is broad agreement that the new organisation will provide support both for the constituent authorities and delivering the new Regional Strategy. This includes many of the areas the Assembly is currently responsible for, such as housing and regeneration, planning and the environment and transport, and will require close working with AWM.

Step by step, the new governance arrangements are gradually

piecing together, working towards a single voice for local government in the Region. With all the changes taking place, we look forward to developing a new publication which will reflect the changing focus of the Leaders Board. 📄

David S Smith (Chairman WMRA)



// Cllr David S Smith

A great deal of work has gone into the many projects highlighted in this issue of Speaking Out, and it is important that the team here at the Regional Partnership Centre, local government and their partnering organisations and businesses continue delivering at this high standard until the formal closure of the Assembly in April 2010.

I was pleased to be at the Opening of the Examination in Public into the Phase Two Revision of the West Midlands Spatial Strategy at the end of April, and can't quite believe it has already come to an end.

The seven week public examination saw the entire future of the West Midlands for the next twenty years being considered. Examining weighty issues such as employment, environment, transport, waste and of course - housing, it has been essential for participants to

contribute fully and seriously to the challenging debates at hand.

In my opening speech, I raised the concern felt by many councils and their residents, including my own at Lichfield, that their communities should not be overdeveloped out of all recognition. I therefore asked the panel to examine carefully the range of alternative (and higher) growth proposals before them from other parties and to consider how desirable and deliverable they were.

A considerable amount of research and partnership involvement underpins the submitted Phase Two Revision and it does, I believe, represent the most fully developed strategy before the Panel. Whilst the strategy is ambitious, particularly in current economic circumstances, it is by no means undeliverable.

Where the Phase Two Examination in Public drew to a close at the end of June, the Phase Three Options Consultation began. Running from the 29th June to 14th August, the consultation provides a chance for the public to say what they think about a range of Options proposed surrounding rural services, gypsies & travellers, culture, sport and tourism, environment and minerals.

Ken Taylor (Chairman WMLGA)



// Ken Taylor

This is my last opportunity to write as Chairman of the West Midlands Local Government Association, which transferred its responsibilities to the West Midlands Leaders Board (WMLB) at its AGM on 8th July. Whilst there is a significant amount of work ahead of us to complete this process, we must not lose sight of the major issues currently affecting the Region.

Nowhere more can the UK's rapidly changing economic climate be seen than in the West Midlands, now confirmed with the highest rate of unemployment in the country - 9.2 per cent compared to the national average of 7.2 per cent.

Between January and March, we saw the steepest fall in business output of all English regions with particularly steep contractions in manufacturing, second only to Northern Ireland. Whilst our unemployment rates continue to increase, our position in league tables fail to improve. As a Region, we seem all too often to be top

of the lists where we'd like to be bottom (even when it comes to swine flu!), and bottom of the lists where we'd like to be top.

But despite these challenges, it is important we do not lose sight of our ambition; there are clear opportunities for change in our Region. In order to compete at a national and international level, we need to find every opportunity to raise our game and use our potential to transform ourselves - just as we have done in the past.

Councils are all too aware of current predictions that up to 350,000 jobs may disappear from the public sector over the next 15 years, and are battling with increasing demands on public services. Despite these challenges however, many are still providing creative and sustainable responses to mitigate the affects of the downturn (page 5).

The crisis has also seen quick reactions from new and successful cross-sector partnerships, with

seminars and publications that directly address the difficult issues facing the Region. The West Midlands was, for example, the first in the UK to organise a workshop promoting The Future Jobs Fund, which was hugely successful and attended by the majority of local authorities.

I know we have the ability to tackle this downturn - we're already proving this all over the Region. Partnership work is more vital than ever and the new regional bodies emerging from the sub national review now need to work with councils, businesses and people on local solutions, and showcase the West Midlands as a leading national and international Region.

Delivering a Sustainable Transport System



Last November the Department for Transport (DfT) published 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System' (DaSTS), setting out government's proposals for developing a long term strategic transport planning and investment programme.

DaSTS builds on the Eddington analysis which identified three main types of network (City and Regional, National and International) as a basis for option generation. It focuses on putting in place a strategy which both tackles immediate problems and also shapes the transport system to meet the longer term challenges, such as climate change, that are critical for prosperity. The DaSTS process concentrates specifically on the period between 2014-2019.

The shadow Joint Strategy and Investment Board (JSIB) responded to the DfT on 29th June 2009. Amongst a number of messages, they stressed that the DaSTS process needs to build on regional strategy, the Regional Transport Priorities Action Plan and the round

2 Regional Funding Advice, identifying three priority themes:


1. More sustainable communities across the West Midlands;
2. Better travel choices supporting a stronger, lower carbon economy; and
3. More efficient and reliable journeys in urban areas and connecting the Region.

The proposed work programme includes four specific studies:

1. Reducing the demand for travel and changing travel behaviour ('Smarter Choices');
2. Access to Birmingham (A joint study with DfT focusing on Birmingham, Black Country and Solihull);
3. Improving connectivity in the Coventry north-south corridor; and
4. Improving connectivity to and within North Staffordshire.

The full response may be found at www.wmra.gov.uk.

DaSTS Stage 2 begins this month, when the DfT intends to provide further guidance. The entire process is expected to be completed in 2011.

Contact: Danny Lamb, Strategic Transport Advisor, at d.lamb@wmra.gov.uk 

Planning for Floods in the West Midlands

The disastrous floods of 2007 affected 55,000 properties in the UK and saw the largest loss of essential infrastructure since the Second World War.

As well as flooding from rivers, over two thirds of the catastrophic damage was a result of flash floods from drains and sewers. Particularly hard hit was the south western part of the West Midlands, not only from the River Severn but from surface water flooding.


With predictions that flooding is likely to become more frequent and intense, the Assembly commissioned a Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA) to examine the flood risk implications of new planning policies being proposed in the Regional Spatial Strategy. The study looks at the implications of flood risk on houses, roads and other infrastructure, outlining high and low flood risk areas. It also introduces the assessment of flooding from drains and sewers and, for the first time,

takes into account the effect of a changing climate on flood risk.

This updated RFRA provides a more rigorous analysis of regional flood risk and, amongst many recommendations, the study suggests that local authorities undertake Surface Water Management Planning in all flood risk zones.

Every local authority has to undertake strategic flood risk assessments as part of the

development of plans, and will be able to use the study in their future flood risk work. Information on the probability and consequence of flood risk are set out together with conclusions on proposed development set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Read the report at: <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/documents/RFRAUpdatefinal.pdf> 

Tackling the Economic Downturn Through Effective Partnership



The West Midlands was last month confirmed as Britain's worst hit region by the recession, with the highest rate of unemployment in the UK – 9.2 percent compared to the national average of 7.2 percent.

The Economic Downturn has continued to dominate the work of the West Midlands Local Government Association and our constituent authorities over the last few months, with a number of organised events and publications.

First published in March and

then updated in May 'Weathering the Storm and Preparing for Recovery' highlights the key impacts of the recession on the West Midlands' local authorities and identifies some of the creative activities they are currently undertaking in order to mitigate the effects of the downturn. A Credit Crunch Newsletter is also sent to all local authority Chief Executives and the nominated Economic Contact at each Council, providing up-to-date information relating to local authorities and the current economic downturn. It seeks to summarise regional and national activity, signpost useful publications, highlight best practice and promote good news stories.

In May, the West Midlands was the first region to hold an event to promote the Future Jobs Fund – the £1 billion national pot to

create 150,000 jobs for 18 to 24 year olds who are approaching 12 months of unemployment. The Association lead a successful partnership approach with key regional partners including Job Centre Plus, Government Office for the West Midlands and the Learning and Skills Council to organise this workshop which was attended by representatives from the majority of local authorities in the Region. In September, both West Midlands and East Midlands LGA will be holding a joint event on the recession with National LGA.

The next steps are to ensure that the Region as a whole benefits, not just in terms of bidding successfully for the funding but also ultimately delivering real hope and opportunities for individuals and the communities they live in.

"Who Wants to be a Euro-Millionaire?" in Birmingham's Economic Downturn



// Successful applicants receive their certificates

Amidst the doom and gloom of financial and economic forecasts, businesses and organisations in the West Midlands are being offered a glimmer of hope – funding grants for European projects worth up to a Million pounds each.

EU Connects, the free European funding advice centre for the West Midlands, organised a free seminar in Birmingham in May to explain how the funding schemes work and to showcase examples of local projects that

have already received funding to deliver innovative projects to boost competitiveness in the Region.

Over 120 organisations attended the high profile free event "Who Wants to be a Euro-Millionaire?", including fourteen "EU Millionaires" that have applied for European projects worth over £1 million.

The event focused on the current economic downturn and how businesses and other organisations can use this funding to help build resources

and capacity to become more competitive. EU Connects was pleased to welcome keynote speaker, Jamie Murray Wells who is the founder of Glasses Direct and one of the nation's best known award-winning young entrepreneurs.

Dr. Julia Buckley, Manager, EU Connects added: "In difficult economic times we want to ensure that our Region is maximising all the opportunities for grant funding from Europe to help our industries and research

centres become more competitive for the future. So far we have helped over 350 organisations make funding applications to the EU with a 63% success rate. All our services are free; we are focused on working to boost the economic growth of our Region".

For more information about how to apply for European funding, contact EU Connects for free advice on 0121 245 0180 or marketing@euconnects.org

Assembly launches WMRSS Phase Three Consultation



The public are being urged to have their say on accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople, rural services, environmental issues as well as culture, sport and tourism.

These are just a few of the issues up for discussion in a seven-week consultation as part of the Phase Three Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS).

The Phase Three Options consultation was launched on Monday 29th June, following the end of the Phase Two Examination in Public. Whilst the big issue in the Phase Two Revision was the development of housing and employment land, Phase Three forms a tighter focus on five key


areas: critical rural services, quality of the environment, culture, sport and tourism, minerals, and the provision for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople.

“The Strategy is not only about the way we look at homes and commercial development but environment and climate change too – issues that need to be incorporated into our planning structure. There are some tough choices at hand, and I would encourage as many individuals, businesses and organisations to get involved and have their say in shaping the future of the West Midlands.” said Cllr David Smith, Chairman of the Assembly.

The consultation will run from 29th June – 14th August, where the public will have the opportunity to submit their views via an online questionnaire or in writing. A Preferred Option will be drafted based on consultation feedback later this year, and be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval.

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill which is currently before parliament proposes the introduction of a Single Regional Strategy to replace the existing RSS and Regional Economic Strategy (RES). It remains to be seen whether the partially completed Phase Three work will be incorporated into a revised RSS or the new Regional Strategy. In either event, the policy content of the Phase Three Revision will remain relevant to regional interests and necessary to fill policy gaps until the new Regional Strategy is developed.

Further details about the Phase Three Revision can be found at: http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Planning_and_Regional_Spatial_Strategy/RSS_Revision/RSS_Revision_Phase_3.aspx

If you have any questions related to the Phase Three consultation, please contact David Clarke at the Assembly on 0121 768 1023. 



Regional Spatial Strategy Revisions Come Under Spotlight – by Mark Middleton



The Examination in Public into the Regional Spatial Strategy Phase Two Revision drew to a close at the end of June, after an intensive seven-week programme at the Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton. The Government-appointed Panel conducted the Examination and invited contributions from a wide range of organisations to help inform their report and recommendations to the Secretary of State.

On the first day of the Examination, the Panel invited


Assembly Chairman, Cllr David Smith, to make an opening address. In his remarks, Cllr Smith emphasised the partnership working that underpinned the submitted RSS Revision and the broad consensus in favour of growth. He said that the Revision represented a balanced package of growth, endorsed by nearly all of the Region's local authorities.

The Examination considered the principles of the Spatial Strategy and the sustainability issues underpinning it. The

WMRSS represents the most fully developed strategy in front of the Panel and offers the best prospect of achieving the Government's aim of improving the Region's housing supply in a sustainable manner.

Various aspects of housing provision were debated in detail, including proposals to increase the housing target figure by up to an additional 150,000 houses above the Assembly's 365,000. Debates on employment, town centres, transport and waste also dominated discussions,

as well as a series of fifteen sessions examining various parts of the Region in more detail, including the eco-town proposal at Middle Quinton.

The Panel will make its report to the Secretary of State in September. A draft version of the Secretary of State's response will be issued for consultation, prior to changes to the RSS being published next year. 

An RSS Spotlight on...



Housing

Amongst the many issues being debated at the Examination, major concerns undoubtedly surround the level and distribution of additional housing development, as well as the Region's ability to provide the required employment land and infrastructure to match this growth.

The study on behalf of government proposes up to 445,000 net additional homes in the Region, a figure much higher than the 365,000 net total of homes that the Assembly has proposed.

Housing is more than just crude numbers however; it is about location, deliverability, affordability and need. The holistic and well-researched approach to delivering the Assembly's 365,000 net housing target will ensure its long-term success.

New housing development must be prioritised within the Major Urban Areas, minimising the amount of greenfield and greenbelt land we release for development. Where housing is to be allocated outside of Major Urban Areas, it should be focused in specific locations where supporting infrastructure can best be provided, and not spread around the Region at random.

Employment Land

The Assembly proposes to develop up to 3,165 hectares of land for employment purposes in the Region over the next 20 years, arguing that in spite of the economic recession, a healthy supply of employment land, of the right type and in the

right locations, is essential for allowing new jobs to be created across the West Midlands.

The 2009 Budget Report has highlighted a significant reduction in public sector spending, so we will need to prioritise our economic regeneration activity. Whilst concerns will be raised over the economic and environmental sustainability of releasing additional land for employment, our Strategy ensures a tight focus on the locations where we can make the biggest difference. By focusing development in Urban Regeneration Zones and areas earmarked for high-technology development, the Strategy will broaden the Region's employment base and create jobs of the future.

Transport

Key transport policies that examine airports, park and ride facilities, car parking and traffic congestion all aim to encourage behavioral change and the use of transport modes that reduce congestion and have a lesser impact on the environment.

Depending on the locality, these measures could include the development of readily accessible park and ride facilities, improved public transport and potential road charging schemes. In addition, minimising the impact of air travel in the Region is best done by reducing the number of passengers travelling to and from the Midlands via airports in the South and East, and focusing on the growth of Birmingham International Airport, which is easily the most accessible by all modes of transport.

Eco-towns

The Assembly has long argued the proposed Eco-town in Middle Quinton undermines the key objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the Panel conducted a debate at the Examination on whether the controversial Middle Quinton Eco-town in Long Marston is something the Region could sustainably deliver. They questioned how financially viable the proposal was and whether current transport and infrastructure was enough to support the new development, in particular whether the rail links to Honeybourne and new road connections, including the Stratford western relief road, could actually be provided.

From all the evidence the Assembly has seen, we do not believe there is a credible case to support this proposal. All it will do is detract from regenerating major urban areas. The Regional Spatial Strategy sets its own very high environmental policy standards, with eco-standards being applied across all new developments, not just in one small eco-town.

The Secretary of State decided earlier this year to put off a decision for Middle Quinton until recommendations on the Regional Spatial Strategy have been published at the end of 2009, in light of the Panels report to him.

Assembly Consults on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs



How many new caravan pitches and plots are needed for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople over the next ten years, and how should they be distributed throughout the Region? These are some of the key questions being asked in the seven-week consultation that was launched on 29th June as part of the Phase Three Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS).

Based on findings from the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments, the Phase Three Revision suggests a regional need for 939 additional residential and 244 additional transit pitches for gypsies and travellers over 2007-2017 period, as well as 118 additional plots for travelling showpeople over 2007-2012 period.

“Research has shown a clear under-provision for gypsy and traveller accommodation in the Region. Government guidance requires us to plan for

travelling communities to give them places where they can live. Providing authorised sites for accommodation will reduce the level of illegal camping and the difficult problems this can cause.” said Mark Middleton, Assembly Director of Policy.

The consultation presents a number of Options on the broad geographical distribution of these sites across the Region. It will be up to individual local authorities to decide on the specific locations in their Local Development Frameworks.

The Regional Assembly Housing team, supported by its partners, will be undertaking a range of activities to encourage participation by all members of the community. These include a series of sub-regional ‘Focus Groups’ held across the Region this month where it is hoped comment from travelling communities can be directly obtained.

Local authorities are urged



to provide support to the Consultation period wherever possible, in particular working to inform Cabinet Members for Housing and Planning of the proposed policy Options, and fostering a joint approach to delivering additional Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites in the future.

For further information on the Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Public consultation, please contact Joanne Rosa at the Assembly’s Housing team on 0121 678 1033 or email j.rosa@wmra.gov.uk

Equality and Diversity Team Hit the Ground Running



// Attendees at the OPEN project launch meeting

In recent weeks, the Regional Assembly appointed a new Strategic Adviser, Laird Ryan, and Policy Officer, Dally Panesar, to progress a wide-ranging Equality and Diversity agenda over the next six months.

A top priority is creating new forms of regional partnership working in this field after the Assembly is wound up and the new team has been meeting with members of the Equality and Diversity Partnership and other major

players to consider the options.

They have also been progressing the Region’s European social cohesion agenda. In April, they hosted a two-day launch meeting of the OPEN project, a partnership between the West Midlands, and the regions of Marche (Italy), Aragon (Spain) and Saxony (Germany). OPEN seeks to combat poverty and social exclusion through better ways of communicating policies and best practice.

Between September and December, the Assembly will organise 6 themed seminars on barriers to employment in the following areas:

- Children’s rights and conditions
- Human exploitation in the labour market
- Family policies and decent housing
- Inclusion for people with disabilities
- Immigrants and ethnic minorities and

- Health and long-term care for the elderly

Next year, a second round of seminars will focus on delivering the messages from this year’s events to politicians, senior decision-makers and the media. These will focus on social inclusion and social protection issues.

For more contact Strategic Adviser, Laird Ryan at l.ryan@wmra.gov.uk

My Region with Terry Dix



I was born in Tamworth, which is now part of the West Midlands. I served a five year apprenticeship as a toolmaker in the automotive industry in Birmingham, and I worked in the industry for a number of years.

I was elected to Tamworth Borough Council in 1968 and served on a number of committees until 1984. I had long wished to represent Tamworth at County level and was then elected to Staffordshire County Council in 1981. I became Leader in 1996 until 2007 and I have been Chairman from 2007 until 2009.

I have always had a strong commitment to the West Midlands Region and have served as Chairman of the West Midland Local Government Association and Senior Vice Chairman of both the Association and the Assembly, until I stood down in May.

As I come to the end of my politically active life I would hope that the steps forward and the advances we have made over the years continue. Where the local authorities, business sector and the other stake holder groups have worked for the benefit and enhancement of the Region. Where methods and plans are scrutinised, amended and modified and best practice is shared. Where diverse problems are recognised and individual projects are put aside.

We are working through difficult and unique times and if we do not work together across all sections it could result in disaster for this Region.

The changes in the Region over the last decade have seen a fundamental move in the lives of the people of the area. These events have been traumatic. With the loss of coal mining, pottery industry, automobile industry and heavy industry, we have been forced to plan for the near future with knee jerk reaction. Not as used to happen where long term planning, tools and equipment was the fashion and stability was the key.



// Cllr Terry Dix

My fear is that the Sub National Review will, with its single leader board, dismantle all the good that has happened in the Region and bring the policies into the total political arena, which would revert to confrontation and not benefit the Region.

These are my own personal opinions and do not in any way reflect any party political view.

ESF Providers Sign Up to Sustainability



New guidance to promote environmental and social sustainability, backed by the European Social Fund (ESF), has been launched in the West Midlands.

The guidance, in the form of a practical toolkit, aims to make sustainable development and equal opportunities policies an integral part of the delivery of all ESF-backed projects in the Region.

The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up by the European Commission to help reduce differences in living standards between the regions of the

European Union, aiming to help social minorities and excluded groups; businesses and local communities.

The guidance was developed and presented by ECOTEC and Action Sustainability on behalf of the West Midlands ESF co-financing partners: the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus and the West Midlands Local Government Association.

Olwen Dutton, Chief Executive of West Midlands Local Government Association said: "Sustainable development can only be achieved by designing policies which address economic, environmental and social issues. The West Midlands Local Government Association and its partners are fully committed to ensuring that such policies are embedded

in all ESF-backed projects. "By its nature, the Region's ESF programme is well-used to considering social and environmental concerns side-by-side and this guidance will help to drive this thinking further and put the programme at the forefront of sustainable practice." Using the guidance, providers will be able to use a self-assessment process which allows them to measure and improve their adoption of sustainable principles.

Getting Fit and Ready for Commissioning




Through consultation with projects from within the Living Well Portfolio, it became apparent that the main challenges faced by projects moving forward into the future beyond the end of their current funding in 2010 are centred around commissioning.

Living Well is a £6.8 million BIG Lottery funded initiative managed by the West Midlands Regional Assembly, that aims to improve the health and well-being of people in the Region. There are currently 29 projects across the Region within the portfolio that represent a diverse range of delivery organisation types, including Voluntary and Community sector organisations.

To support the understanding of World Class Commissioning and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, Living Well West Midlands recently held a one-

day workshop open to projects, third sector organisations, PCT's and local authorities.

After a series of presentations in the morning, delegates attended workshops on the expectations of world class commissioning; social enterprises; gathering evidence for commissioners; and the advantages and disadvantages of partnerships and consortia. These were led by representatives from the Institute of Entrepreneurs, Department of Health and West Midlands Regional Development Centre.

"Understanding the needs and requirements of service commissioners will help organisations prepare for future sustainability. Equally, it is important to understand the needs and barriers facing potential delivery organisations and to share this information" explained Director of Living Well West Midlands, Zena Lynch. 

Birmingham Centre Stage at EU Energy Week

West Midlands in Europe and Birmingham City Council have reinforced their environmental credentials on the European stage, showcasing the Region's work towards the creation of a low carbon, energy efficient future.

The seminar, 'Creating Smart Climate Cities – The Birmingham Way' was held during EU Sustainable Energy Week – the major European energy policy forum, which attracted local, regional, national and industry experts from around the world. Delegates at the seminar heard about Birmingham's vision for cutting the city's CO2 emissions by 60% by 2026.


Cllr Paul Tilsley, Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, emphasised Birmingham's leading role nationally on climate change - "This is a magnificent opportunity to promote our cutting-edge work to some of the key players

in Europe and demonstrate how Britain's second city is becoming its first Smart Climate City."

Jon Bloomfield, Head of European Policy at Advantage West Midlands, outlined the partnership approach across public, private and third sector at regional level, commenting "The transition to a low-carbon economy is one of the major challenges we face in Europe. The West Midlands was the home of the first industrial revolution and has been at the heart of engineering and manufacturing ever since. We now want to use these skills to lead a new low-carbon revolution which places the Region at the forefront

of developments in Europe."

Birmingham also formally signed the EU Covenant of Mayors on CO2 Emissions and Sustainable Energy, which requires cities to commit to reducing their carbon emissions.

For more information please contact Andrew Ing at Andrew.Ing@westmidlandsineurope.org 

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships : One Year On - by Cllr Norman Davies



It is now one year since the nine Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) were established under the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) and already RIEPs are reporting gains of over £100m for 2008/9 alone, with further ambitious efficiencies projected over the coming years.

The West Midlands has already come a long way in terms of increasing efficiency and improving performance; our improvement story over the last 4 years is amongst the best in the country, although we recognise there is still more to be done.

Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands, the RIEP for the Region, provides a key vehicle through which to deliver the sector led approach; promoting strong leadership and local ownership of the improvement agenda and enabling councils to access support from a variety of sources in a coordinated manner.


Over the past year we have successfully brought local authorities and partners together to engage in stimulating

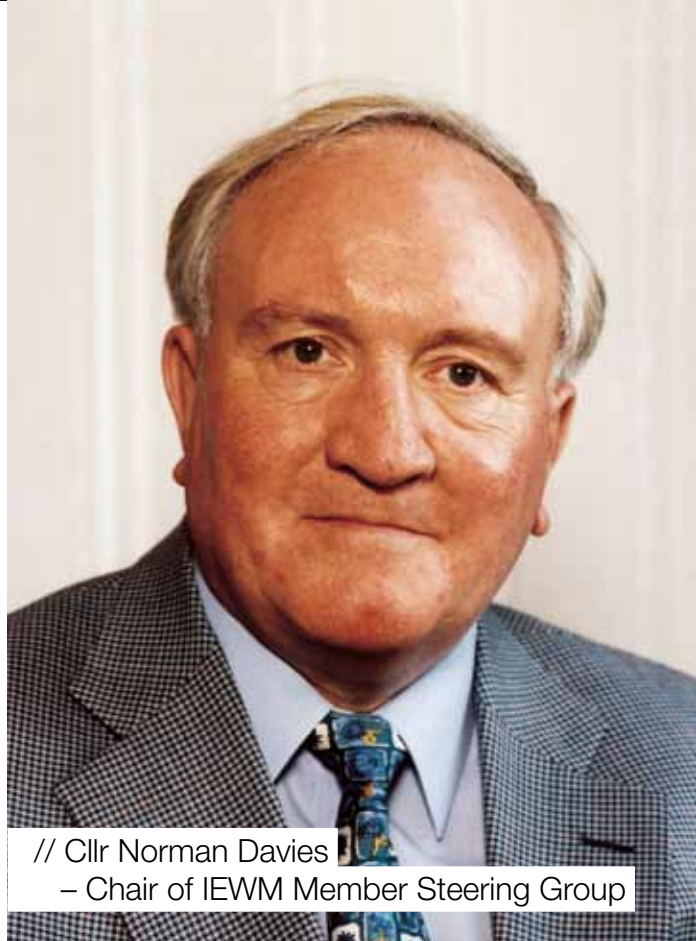
dialogue on innovation and performance improvement, actively supporting authorities to deliver LAA outcomes and ensuring a keen focus on efficiency and value for money.

Key to engaging with authorities and partners has been our seven core cross cutting work programmes: People & Leadership Development, Performance Improvement, Partnership Working & LAA Support, Procurement & Efficiency, Transformation & Process Improvement, Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

In the coming year, many challenges remain, not least of which is the current economic climate and the increasing pressure that places upon the public sector at large. We are however confident that we can continue to work together to deliver successful improvement.

- Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands Annual Report 08/09 can be downloaded here.

- A summary of key achievements entitled 'RIEPS - One year on' can be downloaded here. 



// Cllr Norman Davies
- Chair of IEWM Member Steering Group

Artemis – The Children's Workforce Induction Programme



Following the distressing Haringey case of "Baby P" and Lord Laming's report of child protection services in the UK, the public sector has been under considerable pressure this past year. The Artemis vision was about addressing Lord Laming's recommendations, and raising the standards of Children and Young People Services through providing a children's workforce induction programme for partners in the West Midlands.

The Artemis Children's Workforce Induction Programme is essentially a generic introduction to the five outcomes of "Every Child Matters" for everyone working with and supporting children, young people and their families. It is an innovative, high quality, e-learning programme that can be customised to fit into any professional development programme and is currently

being piloted in six West Midlands authorities.

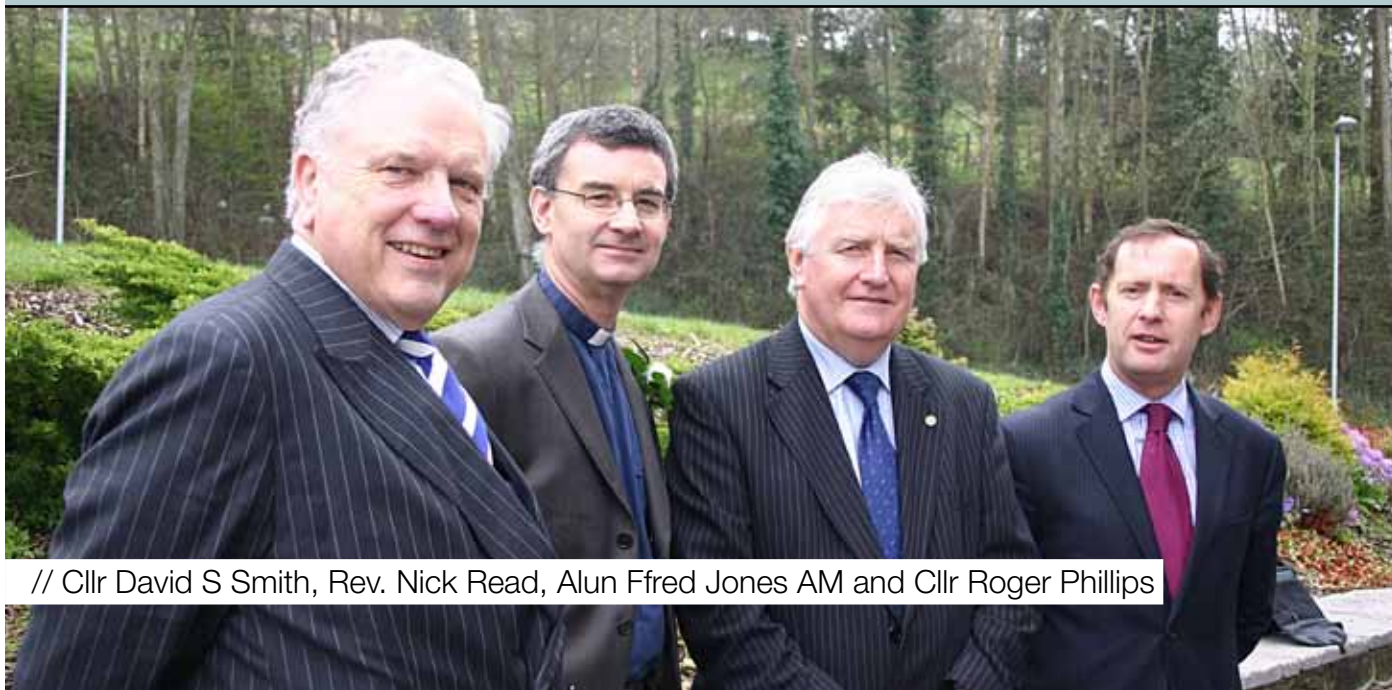
Funded by Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM) and the participating authorities, the project promotes an understanding of the variety of roles across the diverse children's workforce. It offers a holistic, learner centric experience that simulates real life experiences where people can, and do, make mistakes, and where learners can experience taking appropriate actions.

After having approached a number of key members and also various organisations within the Children's Trust, Sandwell MBC launched Artemis Sandwell on 23rd March 09 and had a successful day with a large amount of attendees signing up for the training. This is now being rolled out around Sandwell and word

of mouth is spreading fast. To date, hundreds of people from the PCT, Sandwell MBC, Voluntary Sector and many more are currently undertaking the training. Cllr Ian Jones, cabinet member for Children and Young People, said it was ideal in meeting one of the Council's key priorities, Every Child Matters. He said, "I have already started this package and found it to be a fantastic experience. I would strongly recommend it to anyone working with children and young people in any capacity."

Artemis is now available to statutory and voluntary sector organisations across the West Midlands and will soon be rolled out nationally through the IEWM national lead on children's services. You can find out more about Artemis by going to the Children's Services area of the IEWM website www.westmidlandsiep.gov.uk/index.php?page=545. 

English and Welsh Governments Promise Common Sense Solutions to Improve Border Services



// Cllr David S Smith, Rev. Nick Read, Alun Ffred Jones AM and Cllr Roger Phillips

Over 150 delegates from private and public sector agencies working across Central Wales and the West Midlands met in April at the 'Strategic Forum for Central Wales and the West Midlands' in Newtown, Powys, to discuss their findings and explore key priorities for the future.

The event reflected on the progress that has been made towards achieving cross-border collaboration on both policy development and service delivery following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding

on Cross Border Collaboration back in March 2007 by the Welsh Assembly Government and the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

The loosely defined border area of Powys, Herefordshire and Shropshire, comprises around 60 Parish and Community Council areas in some of the most remote rural communities in England and Wales. This boundary and the differences in strategic planning, policy and agency working practices in neighbouring administrative areas, create complex and

differing levels of service provision and access for local people.

Since the conference was held, a number of steps have already been taken. A Cross Border Healthcare Protocol has been signed between the Department for Health and Social Services and the Welsh Assembly Government, agreeing procedures for residents who are registered with GPs on one side of the border whilst living on the other.

Alun Ffred Jones Minister for Heritage for the Welsh Assembly Government said,

"We should move from understandings to agreements in some key areas. In the fields of health and transport especially there are things that can be hammered out to improve people's lives. Already cross border trains have improved greatly and an officer is to be appointed specifically to develop Cross Border working for the forum, jointly funded by the Welsh Assembly and Advantage West Midlands".

Editorial/Contact

Speaking Out is published quarterly by West Midlands Regional Assembly and West Midlands Local Government Association. Editor Hafsah FitzGibbon. Editorial contributions have been received from a variety of individuals and organisations, and their content does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Assembly or Association. Contributions have been reproduced in good faith, and the Assembly and Association cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions in relation to them

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