

**Delivering the West Midlands European Strategy:
European Routes to Regeneration
2 October 2009**

Roger McKenzie OBE

Social Inclusion

Roger McKenzie gave a presentation on the OPEN project which is funded through the PROGRESS funding stream looking at the Open Method of Communication. The project is working with partners from Italy, Germany and Spain and runs through to the end of December 2010. The main points of Roger's presentation were as follows:

- It is vitally important for the Region to engage with the OPEN project; OPEN is being used in the West Midlands to promote open debate and dialogue about particular social challenges and feed messages back to policy-makers. There are a range of events taking place across the Region on a number of topics.
- The key to success in the social inclusion agenda is the engagement of the people on the ground, rather than the listing of problems and definitions.
- The OPEN project bridges the gap between policy makers and frontline staff.
- It gives energy to debates around Europe with the involvement of ordinary people in transnational projects.

The overarching objectives of the Open Method of Communication are:

- Common identification of short, medium and long-term objectives.
- Measurement tools (statistics, qualitative and quantitative indicators, guidelines) that have been collectively identified on the basis of member states' needs.
- Transferral of European guidelines to national and regional policies.
- Benchmarking – comparative analysis of member states' achievements and the exchange of best practise.

Overarching project objectives for the OPEN programme:

- Open up debate and raise awareness around social inclusion and protection issues with organisations and individuals working at grassroots level. OPEN uses a bottom up approach to consultation – gaining information on the issues at a grassroots level first and then taking these back to policy level.
- Identify key regional issues and areas of work that can be taken to regional policy makers and EU Commissioners. Determine the potential for the EU to take action.
- Improve communications between grassroots organisations and strategic policy makers, ensuring voices are heard and information is accessibly provided.
- Highlight and promote best practice in the Region and amongst EU partners.

- Develop dialogue with regional media to produce quality information on social issues.
- Enable the partner countries to exchange information and identify cross cutting themes giving them a clearer view on how to tackle social exclusion issues and actively participate in defining social agendas and policies.
- Development of a handbook/toolkit providing analysis and best practice on each thematic area.

- Two series of activities are planned for the West Midlands. The first series are six thematic seminars on social inclusion issues – these will lead to Social Policy Action Plans with people working together. The first series of seminars will focus on:
 - Children’s Rights and Conditions
 - Family policies: decent housing for all
 - Ethnic minorities and immigrants: actions to promote tolerance and respect
 - Pathways to social and job inclusion for people with disabilities
 - Health & long-term care for the elderly
 - Labour Market: a place free from human exploitation
 - The first seminar held on 1 October on Children’s Rights and Conditions was attended by 50 people mainly from frontline organisations. Discussions were had around Child poverty, Safeguarding children and Involving children and young people in the decision making process. By the end of December the OPEN project will have consulted with over 300 frontline and public sector organisations across the Region.

- Each region involved in the OPEN project will run the same series of seminars.
- Best practice identified as a course of this project will be highlighted and policy recommendations for all levels of governance will be presented up to the EU Commission
- These seminars must build on good regional partnership working and harness willingness to get involved. The region needs to think what we need to do to encourage more of that.
- The second stage seminars will take place next year, they will take the key issues and areas of work from the first stage seminars back to regional policy makers and EU commissioners.
- Roger said it was essential that as the Region prepares to come out of the recession that no one must fall behind. All sectors of the community must be supported equally.
- OPEN is more than a technical exercise. It is helping to highlight the issues; the Region now needs to look at how it will respond to this. The knowledge base and involvement from grassroots is essential.
- Greater diversity leads to greater alienation which means greater engagement by OPEN.