

STRATEGIC REVIEW GROUP – 24 JANUARY 2007

ACTION NOTES

Attendance:

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| Cllr Phillip Atkins (Vice-Chair – in the Chair) | Staffordshire County Council |
| Cllr David Beechey | Bridgnorth District Council |
| Cllr Mrs Jo Jones | Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council |
| Fraser Mitchell | West Midlands Business Council |
| Steve Mullaney | Advantage West Midlands (associate member) |
| Nic Cole | Government Office for the West Midlands (associate member) |
| Dagmar Waller | Regional Scrutiny Manager |
| Daryl Davies | Regional Scrutiny Support Officer |

Apologies:

Valerie Broom (Chair) (Other Stakeholders Group); Cllr Terry Dix (Staffordshire County Council), Olwen Dutton (Regional Partnership – Chief Executive (associate member)), Cllr Steve Eling (Sandwell MBC), John Hall (Other Stakeholders Group) and Cllr Liz Tucker (Worcestershire County Council).

1. Announcements

i) Valerie Broom

It was **agreed** to send Valerie Broom some flowers on behalf of the group.

ii) Nic Cole

It was reported that Nic Cole had been promoted and would be working on the DEFRA agenda within GOWM, as Assistant Director Environment, Rural Affairs and Sustainable Development. Cllr Atkins congratulated Nic on the news of his promotion on behalf of the group.

iii) ERN Scrutiny Conference 2007

Dagmar reminded members that the third Annual Scrutiny Conference was being held in Newcastle upon Tyne on 25 January 2007. The Assembly would be represented by SRG members and Assembly members engaged in scrutiny and strategic review activity. A conference report would be presented at the next meeting.

2. Action Notes of the meeting held on 22 November 2006 and Matters Arising

Notes of the last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 22 November 2006 were tabled at the meeting. The action notes were therefore **received**.

Matters Arising

Item No. 2 – Matters Arising: Rural Renaissance – Final report

Dagmar reported that a sub-group of the Rural Affairs Forum had been asked to carry out 'rural proofing' of the West Midlands Economic Strategy by Advantage West Midlands. This was **noted**.

Item No. 9 – Progress report – European Strategic Review

Dagmar reported that the focus of the review had shifted and was now chiefly address the approach to collective working at the regional level including:

- Clarity of roles and relationships between structures and/or organisations;
- Effective engagement with MEPs' and Committee of the Regions' Members; and
- Resources available to support regional European working.

The evidence gathering phase of the review would conclude on 2 February with the formal hearing. The final report will be presented to the full Assembly meeting in April. It was expected that there would be implications for the WMLGA/WMRA arising from the Panel's report. As a result, a briefing session had been arranged for key players. This was **noted**.

Items for Discussion and Decision

3. Regeneration Zone Revisited - Action Plan

The Group considered an action plan developed by Advantage West Midlands in response to the outcomes of the Regeneration Zone Revisited scrutiny review.

At its last meeting, the Group agreed to defer this item. The action plan and progress made, as of January 2007, was appended to the report.

Issue 2 – Linkages between delivery mechanisms

Steve Mullaney **agreed** to report back on the new date for the 'Delivery Vehicle Conference'.

Issue 4 - Understanding of Partners' expectations, responsibilities, capacity and ability to deliver

Steve reported that Advantage West Midlands were seeking to provide targeted assistance based on analysis undertaken sub-regionally.

Issue 6 – Completion and use of Zone Charter

Steve **agreed** to provide Dagmar with a copy of the Zone Charter.

Cllr Mrs Jones referred to the extension of High Technology Corridors. Dagmar advised the Group that although evidence had been submitted to the High Technology Corridor scrutiny review, the Panel did not feel it appropriate to comment on individual cases. In addition it emphasised that developing innovative and new technologies within the region was not limited to High Technology

Corridors. The 'HotHouse' in Stoke on Trent, visited during the current Europe Strategic Review, was cited as an example.

Cllr Mrs Jones was advised that this matter could be pursued within the context of the review of the West Midlands Economic Strategy.

The Group:

- (i) **approved** the action plan;
- (ii) **noted** the progress made to date; and
- (iii) **agreed** to include future progress reporting via the monitoring mechanism.

4. **The Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy and the Review of the West Midlands Economic Strategy**

Members considered a report which provided an update on current progress in revising the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS) and in reviewing the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES). In addition, it requested that the appropriate responses were provided to the WMRA secretariat.

The Group's response to the WMES consultation, reflecting their discussion, was appended to the notes of the meeting.

The Group:

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report; and
- (ii) **requested** that a response, based on their discussion, is provided to the WMRA secretariat as set out in paragraph 7.1 of the report.

5. **Implementation of Scrutiny Review Recommendations - Progress Report**

The Group considered a progress report on the implementation of Scrutiny Review recommendations from November 2005 to January 2007.

In summary, the report covered 27 recommendations that were either required to be completed by 1 January 2007 or had no timescale identified. These arose from the completed reviews of High Technology Corridors and Rural Renaissance. Advantage West Midlands identified 16 recommendations as completed, 10 ongoing and 1 that would not happen.

Steve **agreed** to provide Dagmar with copies of the Rural Affairs Forum minutes referred to on page 2 of the report.

Steve Mullaney advised the Group that following IPA it would be necessary to revisit the format and timing of future reports.

The Group:

- (i) **expressed support** for this iteration of the monitoring mechanism;
- (ii) **noted** the progress report on the implementation of scrutiny review recommendations; and

(iii) **agreed**, subject to the post IPA review, that the “comments” and “evidenced by” columns be merged.

6. **Scrutiny Review of Advantage West Midlands: Access to Finance – Draft Framework**

To present a draft framework for the forthcoming scrutiny review of Advantage West Midlands: Access to Finance.

At its last meeting, the Group agreed the Annual Work Plan which included a scrutiny review of Advantage West Midlands activity: Access to Finance.

The broad aims and objectives detailed in the framework, and attached as an appendix to the report, would be used to develop the review terms of reference to be agreed by the review panel.

The Group **approved** the broad aims and objectives as detailed in the framework document.

7. **The Region’s approach to post 16 education, training and skills - verbal update**

Dagmar advised the Group that £30,000 had been secured from the Learning and Skills Council towards the funding of a post to support this review. John Wright (formerly Bromsgrove District Council) had been appointed and would commence on 30 April 2007. The review itself was expected to report to the full Assembly meeting in October.

It was **agreed** to invite John Wright to the next SRG meeting.

The verbal report was **noted**.

8. **National Memorandum of Understanding**

Members considered the draft National Memorandum of Understanding as part of the consultation process. The draft document was attached as an appendix to the report.

As reported at the last meeting, following discussions between representatives of national government, Regional Assemblies, Regional Development Agencies and Regional Government Offices, it was agreed to develop a joint “principles” document. This would outline the agreed aims of regional scrutiny and provide a framework within which individual regions would develop their own protocols.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding had been prepared by a core group and was circulated for initial comments to Regional Development Agencies and Assembly Chief Executives. This had been amended in the light of responses received.

A copy of the Regional protocol agreed between the Assembly, Advantage West Midlands and Government Office was attached an appendix to the report.

Dagmar advised the Group that she had been commented on early drafts of the document in her capacity as Chair of the ERN Regional Accountability Group.

During brief discussion, the Group **endorsed** the draft National Memorandum of Understanding as a high level document and **restated** its support for the Regional Protocol

Items for information

9. Budget Update

The Group **noted** the budgetary position as at 31 December 2006.

10. Any Other Business notified prior to the meeting

(i) Dates of future meetings 07/08

The Group considered meeting arrangements for the new municipal year. The Group had previously agreed to meet on the afternoons following Assembly meetings. The recent growth of "conversations"/events following the Assembly meeting had led to changes in SRG meeting dates resulting in a reduced attendance.

The Group were very clear that they wished to continue their previously agreed arrangement and accepted that at times Members may have to choose if there were relevant "conversations" that clashed with the meetings.

11. Dates of Future meetings

The following dates were **noted**:

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 25 April 2007 (p.m.) | Staffordshire County Council |
| 18 July 2007 (AGM) (p.m.) | venue to be confirmed |

**West Midlands Regional Assembly
Strategic Review Group
Discussion re RES Review – 24 January 2007**

At its meeting on 24 January 2007, the Assembly's Strategic Review Group discussed the joint Assembly/Advantage West Midlands paper regarding the revision of the RSS and review of the RES. It was agreed that the discussion should primarily focus on the linkages between the strategies in line with the remit of the group. There was no discussion regarding individual policy options.

Key points arising from the discussion included

- The importance of infrastructure issues to the region
- The strategies should flag key problems for the region but should not try to resolve them all – aim is to provide a regionally co-ordinated approach
- The RSS/RES should provide a basis or framework for future specific strategies around "big" issues e.g. transport
- Should consider access rather than transport
- Concerns re understanding of the role of the RES – not a panacea
- Concerns re linkages across specific policy areas
- Alignment of RES and RSS is essential – they should be achieving different things in harmony
- Region must deal with crunch issues – where could have disagreement between RSS and RES – early on but regional partners are good at talking to each other
- Engagement in the process is essential – good that we have an opportunity to engage at an early stage in RES revision
- Strategies can often be driven by noise rather than thought – need to accept there will be winners and losers
- Need to consider wider impacts when looking at Local Development Frameworks
- Is there enough linkages with strategies in adjoining regions?
- Need to consider three dimensions – national, regional and local – and need co-ordinated actions in each to make progress
- Infrastructure is the key issue that should be addressed in both strategies
- Importance of quality of environment – need an incremental approach

The group looked forward to future discussions regarding the direction of the RES and delivery mechanisms.