

Agenda Item No. 10

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Assembly Meeting – 24 October 2007**

Scrutiny and Strategic Review Annual Plan 2007/8

Report of the Regional Scrutiny Manager

1. **Purpose**
To present the proposed 2007/8 Annual Plan commencing September 2007.
2. **Recommendation**
That the 2007/8 Annual Plan is endorsed.
3. **Background**
 - 3.1 The Strategic Review Group has the responsible for agreeing a forward plan for the scrutiny and strategic review activity to be submitted to the full Assembly for approval.
 - 3.2 At its last meeting the Strategic Review Group agreed the attached annual plan (Appendix 1).
4. **Influencing Factors**
 - 4.1 The Strategic Review Group considered progress made against the 2006/7 Annual Plan and agreed to carry forward two areas of work. The evidence gathering stage of the strategic review of the Approach to Post 16 Education, Training and Skills has been extended to allow a fuller exploration of the issues. This will now report in January 2008. The scrutiny review of Advantage West Midlands' Support for Skills will now therefore commence in November 2007.
 - 3.1 The plan does not address any additional activity resulting from the changes to regional accountability mechanisms proposed in the SNR report published in July 2007. At this time it is not expected that the proposals made by the SNR will impact on the identification of areas for review. The possible impact of SNR on each review are will be considered by individual review panels.

5. **Risks Associated with Proposed Plan**

- 5.1 There are a number of risks associated with the 2007/8 Annual Plan. These are primarily around resources and commitments required to support the review programme. Members should be aware that there is little spare officer capacity to deal with medium term absences or unexpected issues. These risks have been reflected in the Assembly's Risk Assessment.

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Appendix 1

West Midlands Regional Assembly Scrutiny and Strategic Review Annual Plan 2007/8

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This plan is intended to detail key scrutiny and strategic review activities to be carried out by West Midlands Regional Assembly during the scrutiny year September 2007 to August 2008. It should be read in conjunction with the Scrutiny and Strategic Review Protocol agreed between the West Midlands Regional Assembly, Advantage West Midlands and Government Office for the West Midlands.
- 1.2 The Assembly's Strategic Review Group will review and report progress in implementing this plan.

2. Process

- 2.1 The plan details indicative timings only. Detailed timescales will be identified as part of the preparation stage of individual activities. All scrutiny and strategic panel reviews comprise of briefing sessions, evidence gathering from partners and a review of outcomes. Where possible case studies will be used to support the process.

3. Scrutiny Review – Advantage West Midlands Support for the Skills Agenda

- 3.1 Aim – to examine how Advantage West Midlands is working with partners to support the skills agenda. In particular it will examine how the actions within the Regional Economic Strategy contribute to regional goals in relation to skills and the effectiveness of and support for the Regional Skills Partnership.
- 3.2 Timetable
 - Preparation – September to October 2007
 - Hearings – November 2007 to January 2008
 - Final Report – April 2008

4. Scrutiny Review – Advantage West Midlands Role in Marketing the Region

- 4.1 Aim – to assess the extent to which Advantage West Midlands has responded to concerns expressed by the National Audit Office that "there is a need to be more pro-active in marketing and promoting the region"¹

¹ Independent Performance Assessment of Advantage West Midlands - March 2007

- 4.2 Timetable
- Preparation – November to December 2007
 - Hearings – January to April 2008
 - Final Report – July 2008
 - Started within 2007/8 scrutiny year and to be completed within 2008/9 scrutiny year
5. **Scrutiny Review – Business Link West Midlands**
- 5.1 Aim – to assess the effectiveness of the change in provision of business support services in the region
- 5.2 Timetable
- Preparation – June to August 2008
 - Hearings – September to November 2008
 - Final Report – January 2009
6. **Strategic Review – The Approach to Post 16 Education, Training and Skills**
- 6.1 Aim - to contribute to the development of partnership arrangements and to the understanding of how skills issues impact across the region in terms of policy areas and geography. This review is to be carried out jointly with the Regional Learning and Skills Council.
- 6.2 Timetable
- Preparation – February to April 2007
 - Hearings – May to October 2007
 - Final Report – January 2008
 - Started within 2006/7 scrutiny year and to be completed within 2007/8 scrutiny year
7. **Strategic Review – Transport**
- 7.1 Aim – to assess the effectiveness of regional transport activity in contributing to the Region’s success in balancing economic, environmental and society’s needs
- 7.2 Timetable
- Preparation – April to June 2007
 - Hearings – September 2007 to January 2008
 - Final Report – April 2008
 - Started within 2006/7 scrutiny year and to be completed within 2007/8 scrutiny year

8. Advantage West Midlands' Annual Report

- 8.1 As agreed in the Scrutiny and Strategic Review Protocol, Advantage West Midlands' Chief Executive will provide a verbal annual report to the Assembly in October 2007.

9. Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Regional Concordat

- 9.1 Aim – to contribute to the development of the next iteration of the Regional Concordat. This will be led by Strategic Review Group Members and will consist of discussions with individual Concordat signatories to identify expectations and views of the Concordat process.

9.2 Timescale

- Preparation – December 2007
- Concordat partner discussions – January to February 2008
- Final Report – April 2008

10. Economic Analysis Project

- 10.1 West Midlands Regional Observatory has been contracted to provide analytical support for to support panel reviews.

- 10.2 In addition the Assembly is contributing to the development of a regional economic modelling tool. It is expected that this will provide empirical data in respect of options that will support the scrutiny process and monitoring of regional strategies. Progress reports will be submitted to Strategic Review Group as appropriate

11. Reporting Process

- 11.1 The Strategic Review Group will submit reports to the Assembly in respect of scrutiny and strategic review activity. Reports will also be submitted to the Assembly Board as required. It will also be responsible for the publication of an Annual Report detailing activities and key outcomes. It is anticipated that this will be circulated to Assembly Members and partners during July 2008

For more information please contact:

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