

Agenda Item No. 13

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

**Focussed Discussion Session: The Future of Regional
Scrutiny**

Introduction by the Regional Scrutiny Manager

1. **Purpose**
To allow Assembly Members to discuss the broad direction for regional scrutiny post 2010.
2. **Recommendation**
That Assembly Members discuss the specific questions as detailed in this report
3. **Background**
 - 3.1 Scrutiny of Regional Development Agencies is one of the core functions of Regional Assemblies. Although the legislative basis for this is slim and national guidance has not been provided, there is a general acceptance of the importance of this role. In 2006 a national Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between Assemblies, Regional Development Agencies and the Department for Communities and Local Government that provides a framework for scrutiny. Many Assemblies have also developed arrangements by which other organisations can be questioned regarding activities within the region.
 - 3.2 The West Midlands Regional Assembly has developed a robust scrutiny process over the last five years based on a partnership approach. This is governed by the Scrutiny and Strategic Review Protocol, now in its third iteration, which is agreed by the Assembly, Advantage West Midlands and Government Office for the West Midlands. Scrutiny reviews of Advantage West Midlands, and wider strategic reviews of issues that are important to the Region, are now evidence based, forward looking and add value.
 - 3.3 The approach to scrutiny in this region has developed over time and it is recognised that improvements can still be made. Its success to date can be measured by the increased level of engagement by stakeholders and the number of

recommendations that have been or are in the process of being implemented by Advantage West Midlands (26 out of 27 due to be completed during 2006/7).

4. **Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration Review**

- 4.1 The SNR proposes significant changes to regional governance structures including the abolition of Regional Assemblies. The report recognises the Assemblies' scrutiny role but disappointingly states that "Regional Assembly scrutiny of the Regional Economic Strategies can sometimes lend itself towards defending local interests rather than recognising the need to make strategic decisions based on robust evidence for the wider benefit of the region's economy. Similarly, scrutiny of the RDAs is not as effective as it should be." It does not mention the activities that have begun to hold other regional organisations to account within the region.
- 4.2 The SNR does recognise the need for scrutiny of regional development agencies within the regions and states that "This needs to be based on giving elected local authorities acting at the regional level greater responsibility for scrutinising and signing off the draft regional strategy, covering both spatial and economic development priorities, and for scrutinising the economic development delivery functions of the RDAs."
- 4.3 It also proposes an enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of regional institutions in order to "provide an opportunity for informed public debate, scrutiny and accountability". As yet it is not clear what form this will take although it has been suggested that nine Regional Select Committees are established made up of regional MP's. There is a clear need for the development of close links between this mechanism and regional scrutiny arrangements.
- 4.4 Members should also be aware that regional development agencies are also named within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill as a partner organisation with a duty to co-operate with local authorities in the development of Local Area Agreement targets. This also means that local authority overview and scrutiny committees will be able to hold them to account for how these targets are delivered.
- 4.5 The Assembly will continue to carry out its scrutiny and strategic review role in a robust and effective manner.

However there is a clear need to start developing future arrangements for post 2010.

5. **Format of Discussion**

5.1 In order to allow members to discuss this key issue in detail it is suggested that the meeting break into three groups for a 40 minute discussion. This will be followed by a short plenary session to allow the key points from each group to be shared. The locations for the individual groups are as follows

- **Main Auditorium**
- **Brunel Room**
- **Armstrong Room**

5.2 Each discussion group will be chaired by an Assembly Member and supported by an officer. The groups will be asked to consider three questions.

5.3 What outcomes do we want from future scrutiny?

- What are our aims?
- Is there a need for co-ordination/consideration of region wide issues?
- What should the relationship be with Regional Select Committees?

5.4 Who should carry out this role?

- Individual local authorities and if so just strategic authorities or all authorities?
- What role is there for sub regional/regional organisations?
- What role could business and other stakeholders play?

5.5 What and who should be scrutinised?

- Just Advantage West Midlands or other regional/sub regional organisations?
- Development of strategy or how this is delivered?
- Just the proposed integrated strategy or other regional strategies?

6. **Next Steps**

6.1 The outcomes from the discussions will be collated and reported to the West Midlands Regional Assembly Board and the West Midlands Local Government Association Executive. These will form the basis for the development of possible options for future regional scrutiny.

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