

## **Agenda Item No. 18**

### **WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**Annual General Meeting – 12 July 2006**

#### **REGIONAL POLICY PARTNERSHIPS ACTIVITY**

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##### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update the Regional Assembly on the current status and activities of Regional Partnerships, established by or working closely with the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

##### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Regional Assembly considers the report.

##### **3. Partnerships**

There are a number of regional policy Partnerships which are led by or have representation from the Assembly. The following report provides details of current activities and priorities for each of the Partnerships. Additional information regarding past activities and future plans can be obtained from the named officer contact. Appendix 1 provides contact details for all officers that support these partnerships.

#### **Rose Poulter**

Director of Policy

0121 678 1024

[r.poulter@wmlga.gov.uk](mailto:r.poulter@wmlga.gov.uk)

### 3.1 **Planning Partnership and Executive**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Rex Roberts OBE, Staffordshire CC  
Officer Contact – Kate Docherty

Purpose - The Regional Planning Partnership, supported by the Planning Executive, carries out the Regional Planning Body function on behalf of the Regional Assembly leading on the development and delivery of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Current Activities:

- **Conformity:** Since the last Assembly meeting, the Planning Partnership has provided opinions of conformity on 5 regionally significant planning applications; a further 2 are in consultation. Of these 5 opinions 3 gave advice to the Council's concerned that the applications were not in conformity with the RSS. No opinions have been made on a submission version of a Development Plan Document (DPD), although one was provided with regard to a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). A larger number of informal officer responses have been made on pre submission DPD's. Local Planning Authorities are now gearing up to develop their Local Development Frameworks and the scale of the conformity task is likely to increase in the future. A review of the Conformity protocol will now be undertaken taking into account the experience of operating the system over the last 18 months and a Working Group has been formed to undertake this work. A Conformity Panel for decision making is also being established.
- **Phase One of the RSS Partial Revision - the Black Country Study (BCS):** Phase One of the RSS Partial Revision, the Black Country Study was submitted to the Secretary of State on the 31<sup>st</sup> May. The Government office will release the document on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August for consultation. The Examination in Public into the key issues arising from the consultation will start on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2007.
- **Phase Two of the RSS Partial Revision:** Following the advice received from the Strategic Authorities, subject to Members' approval, there will be an adjustment to the Phase Two Revision Timetable. An adjustment will enable WMRA:-
  - to take into account the ODPM Household projections figures published in April and fully understand the implications for the region and its component parts.

- Hold further discussions with the Strategic Authorities re the Section 4(4) advice.
- to ensure greater alignment with the RES Review timetable.
- incorporate a number of additional pieces of work which are coming forward.

The proposed new timetable will be :

- Options signed off for the Sustainability Appraisal by the end of September.
  - Member and Officer approvals late October
  - Design and print mid November - Christmas
  - Options launch first week Jan followed by an eight week consultation period.
  - Preferred Option ready for the SA by end of April
  - Member and Officer approvals September
  - Submission December 2007
- **Monitoring** – The Contextual Monitoring Report for Urban and Rural Renaissance was recently launched. The report examines the regional position in relation to urban and rural renaissance which are the key planks of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The full report and a summary version can be downloaded from <http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=47>
  - The **City Region Initiative** is progressing with the City Region Development Plan work underway. The event following the Assembly meeting will provide further information.

### 3.2 **Transport Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Roger Phillips, Herefordshire Council  
Officer Contact – Danny Lamb

Purpose – To hold policy lead responsibility for transport and to support and advise the Regional Assembly and the Planning Partnership/Executive.

Current Activities:

- Regional Transport Partnership has responded to the DfT consultation re Rail Closures ([www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=196](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/page.asp?id=196))
- Regional Rail Forum is preparing a response to the DfT's consultation on the three rail franchises affecting the region i.e.

West Midlands, Cross Country and East Midlands  
([www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_railways/documents/divisionhomepage/039846.hcsp](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_railways/documents/divisionhomepage/039846.hcsp))

- Regional Transport Officer Group is preparing a response to the DfT's consultation on Ports Policy Review  
([www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_shipping/documents/divisionhomepage/611692.hcsp](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_shipping/documents/divisionhomepage/611692.hcsp))
- WMRA has been informed that our 'corporate' membership with Network Rail will cease later this year. The WMRA Secretariat has contacted Network Rail to attempt to address this matter.
- Regional Transport Partnership has considered the RSS Phase 1/ Black Country Study and has agreed to consider and provide input to the emerging Delivery Plan.
- Regional Transport Partnership continues to work with partners in the RSS Phase 2 process and has agreed that a Transport Reference Group will be established to help consider policy options.
- Regional Transport Officer Group, on behalf of the Regional Transport Partnership is preparing input to the Regional Health Strategy Scoping Exercise.

### 3.3 **Housing Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Steve Gregory, Sandwell MBC  
Officer Contact – Emma Kiteley

Purpose – On behalf of the Regional Assembly and Regional Housing Board the aim of the Partnership is to provide leadership, coherence and support to the achievement of the Regional Housing Strategy for the Region and to support the Regional Planning Partnership on housing issues.

Current Activities:

- Work is continuing in preparing for the merger of the Regional Housing Board function with the Regional Planning Body and of a launch event for Members which will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006
- The Housing Secretariat have met with the current Regional Housing Board's GOWM Secretariat and GOM geographical teams to prepare for the forthcoming merger

- Briefing notes on constitutional aspects, roles and activities of the Four sub-regional housing market areas have been consulted on prior to being presented to the Regional Housing Board for agreement
- As part of the implementation of the Regional Housing Strategy, a pilot South Housing Market Area Assessment has been tendered (Worcestershire, Stratford and Warwick)
- The Affordable Housing Group (a sub-group of the Regional Housing Partnership) is continuing its work to produce a Regional Guide to the Delivery of Affordable Housing which is now due to be published Autumn 2006
- The Regional Housing Partnership prepared a response on its contribution to sustainable development principles
- The Housing Secretariat and Regional Housing Partnership is supporting the Housing policy development work for the City-Region
- The Regional Housing Partnership continued to participate in the Regional Spatial Strategy Partial Review, through both the Housing Reference Group and Housing Technical group

### 3.4 **European and International Partnership**

Chair of Partnership – Cllr Sir Albert Bore, Birmingham City Council  
Officer Contact – Esther Knight

Purpose: To provide the West Midlands with the means of agreeing a single, coherent, cross sector voice on European policy issues of importance within the region by providing the lead for the region in relation to European Policy, European Funding and Strategic Region to Region working. It also provides wider policy context for the work of West Midlands' partners and the West Midlands in Europe office in Brussels.

Current Activities:

- The Partnership has provided the formal regional response to the DTI consultation on the Assisted Areas review.
- The Partnership provided the formal regional response to the DTI on the National Strategic Reference Framework, and worked with the English Regions Network to register concerns with government.

- The Partnership is contributing to the new structural funds programme for the region.
- The partnership is currently reviewing its strategic region to region relationships.
- The partnership is also reviewing a series of projects, established a year ago, and designed to develop the regions capacity to attract funding on a competitive basis. The projects focus on Research and Development, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness and Innovation
- Members of the partnership will be contributing to both the Regional Assembly's Strategic Review of regional European Activity, and to the review of the Regional Economic Strategy

### 3.5 **Health Partnership**

Chair of the Partnership – David Littlemore  
Officer contact – Zena Lynch

Purpose – to work in partnership to address health inequalities, ensure better health and to improve quality of life within the West Midlands.

Current Activities:

- The Regional Health Partnership have submitted a consultation response to the on EU structural funds proposals
- A steering group has been set up, chaired by the Regional Health Partnership to pull together a regional portfolio for the Big Lottery Well Being programme. The Assembly Board are considering the potential for the Assembly becoming the lead body for the regional portfolio.
- Scoping work for the Regional Health Strategy has commenced with the Regional Partnerships. An issues paper pulling together the input from the partnerships will be taken to the Regional Health Partnership meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> July.
- The 9<sup>th</sup> Achieving Excellence in Public Health Conference was held at Dunstall Park on the 18<sup>th</sup> May. A regional report on alcohol consumption was launched (this can be found on the West Midlands Public Health Observatory website)

- The Regional Health Partnership has submitted a report on their annual contribution to sustainable development in the region as part of the RSDF process.
- A 'Health through nature' workshop was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May, exploring the links between the health biodiversity agendas. Information from this workshop will be used towards the Regional Health Strategy

### 3.6 **Environment Partnership**

Chair - Cllr Keith Austin, Borough of Telford and Wrekin Council  
Officer Contact - Chris Blakeley

Purpose – To support and advise the Assembly on Environmental Issues and move forward the implementation of key policy areas.

Current Activities:

- Submitted responses to national consultations on River Basin Management Planning and the review of the National Waste Strategy and regional response to the Rural Delivery Framework.
- Completed consultancy work on residual waste issues to feed into development of RSS Phase 2 revision and development of RSS Regional Waste Strategy.
- Working with key environmental organisations and bodies in the region to prepare technical work to support the RSS Phase 3 process, including consideration of the preparation of a Regional Food Risk Assessment.
- Roll out of technical guidance and maps on the implementation of Biodiversity Enhancement Areas and further work is planned to develop the approach through the "Living Landscapes" project.
- Set up an Environment Reference Group to participate effectively in the RSS revision.
- The Partnership will be working with other partners to strengthen the level of strategic leadership of the Regional Climate Change programme and developing a proposal to discuss climate change at the RA Annual Conference.
- A refreshed Forward Plan and Year Plan has been agreed for 2006/07.

- The Environment Partnership has agreed to bring forward topic discussions on sustainable consumption, climate change and brown field land during 2006.

### 3.8 **Sustainable Development Partnership (Sustainability West Midlands)**

Chair of Partnership – Bernard Doyle  
Officer Contact – Fran Austins/John Sharpe

Purpose – Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) is the regional champion of sustainable development and the Assembly's independent advisory partnership on sustainable development. SWM aims to achieve a more sustainable region by developing a continually improving link between sustainable policy and sustainability in practice.

Current Activities:

- Regional Sustainable Development Framework version 2 finalised and due for publication on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2006 – printed version to be accompanied by a web-based format on the SWM website ([www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk](http://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk))
- Ongoing project work including the Sustainable Housing Action Programme, climate change adaptation projects and a proposed project on social inclusion
- SWM is currently undertaking an internal review to ensure its membership and structures are fit for purpose, particularly given the roles outlined for regional sustainability round tables in "Securing the Regions' Futures", the government's proposal for regional arrangements to support delivery of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy

### 3.11 **Cultural Partnership (Culture West Midlands – The Regional Cultural Consortium)**

Chair of Partnership – Brian Woods Scawen DL  
Officer Contact – Jenny Boylan/Laura Moore

Purpose – West Midlands Life is one of eight Regional Cultural Consortia in England and is the cultural 'mouthpiece' for the West Midlands, working to ensure that culture and creativity get a fair hearing across the region. It has four main areas of responsibility:- strategy development, advocacy, advisory, identifying and brokering links.

## Current Activities:

### **London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games**

- Work around the 2012 Games continues to be the focus of the WMLGA/WMRA Cultural Affairs Portfolio. Priorities are currently:
- Final planning for the WM stage of the national 2012 roadshow on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> July
- Appointing a WM Co-ordinator for the 2012 Games
- Ensuring the most is made of potential business benefits from the Games
- Developing the WM Action Plan for 2012 – all nations and regions are required to have a plan in place by October 2006
- Preparing a regional response to the development of the 2012 Games Volunteering Strategy
- Organising the process, in line with national guidelines, for assessing the region's offer for the national Pre-Games Training Camps manual
- Developing the WM lead role (for nations and regions) on maximising cultural benefits from the 2012 Games. A visioning day for the cultural sector is being planned for Autumn 2006.

### **Big Lottery Fund**

- WMRA submitted an overview response to the Big Lottery Fund on the strategic fit of WM Living Landmarks proposals with the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- CWM are establishing an equality and diversity group and have employed a student placement from Birmingham University to promote greater collaboration between cultural players in the region around the issues emerging from last years scrutiny review.
- CWM recently launched a new booklet promoting stronger collaboration between cultural organisations and the tourism sector.
- A recent meeting of the Regional Cultural Forum included discussions with the regional health forum and with the spatial strategy team about the contribution of the cultural sector to emerging regional policies.

- At their recent meeting, the board of CWM signed up to the principles contained in the draft revised policy concordat, with a call to include a shared commitment to fostering innovation and creativity in achieving a shared vision for the region.

### 3.12 Rural Partnership (Regional Rural Affairs Forum)

Chair of Partnership – Rev'd Nick Read  
Officer Contact – Kate Docherty

Purpose – The purpose of the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum is to bring together rural stakeholders within the region to inform and monitor the delivery of policy in rural areas. It was established by the DEFRA.

Current Activities:

- The Forum has given consideration to the low priority level for learning and skills funding which Land Based Skills have been given. The forum has lobbied the Regional Skills Partnership and the LSC to ensure that land based skills are reprioritised to a medium level.
- The Forum is in the process of developing its first ever annual report. The document will be used to publicise the role and membership of the Forum and its activities and to seek funding in support of its work.
- The Forum recently became one of the new signatories for the Regional Concordat and intends to use the Concordat and it's commitment to partnership working and sustainability to help it in its work to develop and support sustainable rural communities.
- The Forum will be inputting into the forthcoming review of the Regional Economic Strategy and is seeking to secure commitment from AWM that Rural Proofing will form an integral part of the RES review process.
- The Forum recently held the first in a series of seminars and events to raise it's profile and to engage more actively with rural stakeholders. The event examined alternative energy sources and how a climate could be created in which rural communities could make maximum use of these. It was well attended and contributions from the delegates will be used to develop a Forum Briefing Note which will assist the Forum to influence partners and strategies.

- A variety of thematic sub groups are taking forward work for the Forum in areas including health and cross border issues. The Transport Subgroup has recently undertaken a review and will now be called the Access sub group and have a remit which will include access to services in the widest sense, i.e. transport, e services and innovative provision of services within communities.

## Appendix 1

### Officer Contact Details

Rose Poulter	0121 678 1024	<a href="mailto:r.poulter@wmra.gov.uk">r.poulter@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Jenny Boylan	0121 678 1029	<a href="mailto:j.boylan@wmra.gov.uk">j.boylan@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Zena Lynch	0121 678 1055	<a href="mailto:z.lynch@wmra.gov.uk">z.lynch@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Kate Docherty	0121 678 1061	<a href="mailto:k.docherty@wmra.gov.uk">k.docherty@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Emma Kiteley	0121 678 1037	<a href="mailto:e.kiteley@wmraa.gov.uk">e.kiteley@wmraa.gov.uk</a>
Danny Lamb	0121 678 1048	<a href="mailto:d.lamb@wmra.gov.uk">d.lamb@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Dagmar Waller	0121 678 1054	<a href="mailto:d.waller@wmra.gov.uk">d.waller@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Chris Blakeley	0121 678 1056	<a href="mailto:c.blakeley@wmra.gov.uk">c.blakeley@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Esther Knight	0121 678 1043	<a href="mailto:e.knight@wmra.gov.uk">e.knight@wmra.gov.uk</a>
Fran Austins	0121 678 1018	<a href="mailto:f.austins@wmra.gov.uk">f.austins@wmra.gov.uk</a>
John Sharpe (SWM)	0121 449 4406	<a href="mailto:j.sharpe@swm.org.uk">j.sharpe@swm.org.uk</a>