

**Agenda Item No. 4**

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
Assembly Meeting – 17 January 2007**

**DRAFT DECISION NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REGIONAL  
ASSEMBLY HELD ON 25 OCTOBER 2006**

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**Chairman: Cllr David S. Smith (Lichfield)**

**1. Apologies and Attendance**

The apologies and attendance are attached as Appendix 1

**2. Members' Disclosures of Interests**

No declarations were made at this meeting.

**3. Chairman's and Vice-Chairs' Reports**

Cllr David S Smith (Chairman) referred to the following points during his report:

- Extended a warm welcome to Olwen Dutton who was attending her first meeting of the Regional Assembly as Chief Executive of the Regional Partnership Centre.
- Welcomed Jim Graham, Chief Executive of Warwickshire County Council who had recently been appointed Regional Partnerships Secretary following Michael Frater's appointment as Chief Executive to Nottingham City Council.
- Stated that he looked forward to a strong and productive relationship with both Olwen and Jim.
- Following the recent retirement of Chris Bonnard, the Chairman advised the Assembly that Phil Davis had been appointed to the post of Executive Director for Regional Action West Midlands and welcomed him to the meeting. The Chairman acknowledged Chris' dedication to the development of the Assembly wished him well in his retirement.
- The Assembly was also formally advised that John Hart had stepped down as Chairman of the West Midlands Business Council. John was thanked for his valuable contribution to the work of the Assembly.

Dr Sarindar Singh Sahota (Vice-Chair – West Midlands Business Council) referred to the following points during his report:

- Extended a welcome to Olwen Dutton for her first meeting of the Regional Assembly.
- Sincerely thanked John Hart for the work that he had undertaken on behalf of the region in his position as Chairman of the West Midlands Business Council and wished him well for the future.
- Welcomed Barrie Williams (EEF) as the new Chairman for the WMBC and stated that he would be nominated as an Assembly member
- Congratulated Chris Newis on recently receiving a Doctorate from the University of Wolverhampton.

Elizabeth Newman (WMRA Board Member – Other Stakeholders Group) referred to the following points during her report:

- On behalf of the Other Stakeholders Group also welcomed Olwen Dutton to her first meeting.
- Paid tribute to Chris Bonnard for his valuable contribution to regional working within the Assembly and welcomed Phil Davis to the post of Executive Director within RAWM.
- Stated that the Other Stakeholders Review currently taking place would be brought for consideration by the Assembly in due course.
- Congratulated the Assembly on the successful conference on Climate Change and stated that a key question raised from the floor of the conference related to how the region could reconcile the economic benefits versus the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from airports/flights from the region.
- Requested that the Regional Assembly consider issues relating to migrant workers and facilitate the drawing together of different strands and work streams.

4. **DRAFT Decision notes of the Annual meeting held on 12 July 2006 and Matters Arising**

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Brian Summers asked that the paragraph attributable to him be amended to accurately reflect his comments as follows:

*'Brian Summers (WMBC) commended the Black Country Study to members however expressed formal objections on the transport plan due to the lacked detail on projects and underplayed rail plans.'*

The notes of the annual meeting on 12 July 2006 were **agreed** as a true record subject to the inclusion of the above amendment.

There were no matters arising.

5. **WMRA Audited Accounts 2005-2006**

The Assembly considered the WMRA Audited Accounts and **agreed** to receive and adopt the Directors' report and the accounts of the Company for the accounting period ended 31 March 2006, and the auditors' report on them.

6. **Regional Assembly Annual Conference on Climate Change**

The Chairman provided the meeting with feedback from the recent Annual Conference on Climate Change which was led by the Regional Assembly. With over 280 attendees and high quality speakers, the event was considered to have been very successful. It was emphasised that the conference had practicable outcomes that would be taken forward. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the speakers and the Secretariat team for ensuring the success of the annual conference.

The Chief Executive advised the Assembly of the two main messages of the conference namely;

- *no matter how well we stop releasing greenhouse gasses today, the climate is already changing and we have to mitigate this by acting now;*
- *each year that we do not act to mitigate the longer term impacts of climate change means that greater adaptation will be required in later years*

It was recognised that there was a need to balance the economic growth agenda and the environmental impact of the growth. Additional information relating to the climate change agenda would be provided on the WMRA website including a link to the Kyoto agreement. The Secretariat would also be communicating further with the conference delegates.

The Regional Assembly **agreed** to:

- (a) Note the key issues arising from the Annual Conference on Climate Change;
- (b) Support the signing of the West Midlands Declaration on Climate Change ("Nottingham Declaration")
- (c) Approve the establishment of a Regional Climate Change Task Group to develop a Climate Change Action Plan and report progress through the Regional Environment Partnership.

7. **Advantage West Midlands – Update and Progress on Activity**

- (a) **West Midlands Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2004 – 2010: Progress Report 2005 – 2006**

Nick Paul, Chairman of AWM, introduced the Progress Report for 2005-06, which reported on the delivery of the Actions of the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) Action Plan 2004 – 2010. It was stated that progress was being maintained and as more activities progressed information would be available on the AWM web site.

Cllr Smith thanked Nick Paul for his contribution and assured the Assembly that relations with AWM were healthy and had strengthened and improved over the years.

The Assembly **endorsed** the contents of the report.

(b) **Independent Performance Assessment of Advantage West Midlands**

Nick Paul provided the Assembly with an update on the Independent Performance Assessment being carried out by the National Audit Office on the work of Advantage West Midlands. He thanked the Assembly for co-hosting a successful meeting in September which emphasised the effective partnership approach between the Assembly and AWM and which provided a valuable opportunity for the Agency to hear first hand the view of stakeholders and partners on their performance. It was acknowledged that whilst there was still much to do it was reassuring to note the consensus view of stakeholders and partners at the consultation event was that the Agency is seen as an improving and maturing organisation. The support provided to the agency from the Assembly through its Strategic Review Group during this IPA process, was acknowledged.

The Assembly **agreed** to note the contents of the report

(c) **Revisions of the Regional Spatial Strategy (WMSS) and the Regional Economic Strategy (WMES) - update report**

Rose Poulter, Director of Policy introduced the report which provided an overview of the parallel processes of revisions of the WMSS and WMES. It was stated that both processes shared evidence which had been gathered in relation to; transport, economy, environment and housing. Regional Assembly members were assured that action (such as the sharing of key information) was being taken to ensure effective linkages between the two key regional processes.

Nick Paul invited Assembly members to attend Advantage West Midlands' Annual Conference on 10 November at which Panels would debate options around the development of the WMES.

During discussions the following points were raised:

Cllr Chris Saint (local Authority – Assembly Board Member) stated that

many local authorities were concerned about the direction of strategic housing provision and asked how people were being engaged with the consultation process?

In response the Director of Policy stated that the recently announced Growth Points Initiative had indicated that an additional 82k homes could be provided in the region to 2016 by Birmingham/Solihull, Worcester, Burton, Coventry, Telford, Hereford, Shrewsbury. It was recognised that this could be the sources of tensions within the region. Members were reminded that the Government had in parallel published that the region would provide 500k new homes by 2026 and have stated their expectation that this would be achieved. The figures outlined were all subject to testing through the WMSS Phase Two revisions. Consultation on the options will commence in January and it was stated that whilst growth within the region was to be welcomed, it needed to be managed sensitively and sensibly.

The Vice –Chair (Business Sector) stated that there was a need to ensure the connectivity of regional initiatives e.g. linkages between the Regeneration Zones, Clusters and High Technology corridors.

Cllr Bob Badham, Vice-Chair of Regional Planning Partnership advised the Assembly that it was recognised that the planning function and system had an important part in contributing to the reduction of the environmental impact over the next 100 years.

The Assembly **noted** the contents of the report.

#### 8. **Living landmarks Big Lottery Bid**

The Assembly received a presentation from the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium (BCC) Sarah Middleton and Steve Trow on a Living Landmarks Big Lottery Bid entitled 'A Million People – The Black Country as Urban Park'

The Bid submission was one of only six community led projects that had been selected from around the nation by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to go forward to the next stage of the process, an interactive television programme (to be screened in the Autumn 2007), the winner of which will receive a grant of between £25m and £50m. It was stated that it was necessary to ensure community involvement was key and the bid was considered the largest ever that had been formed specifically around the community (the population of which was 1.1million).

The Black Country Bid was underpinned by two main drivers:

- (a) To improve education and skills, and

- (b) A radical transformation of the environment.

A number of partners would be involved to ensure the success of the bid.

The three flagship projects around which the bid was based were:

- (i) Unique international tourist attraction - Proposals were in place to see Dudley's Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters Mines being fully restored with educational and visitor facilities.
- (ii) Green Bridges – bringing a corridor of the countryside into an urban setting by linking Walsall and West Bromwich town centres via their parks (Walsall Arboretum and Dartmouth Park ) which would equate to twice the size of Sutton Park
- (iii) Opening up of heritage canals and green spaces by regeneration of canal network and surrounding environments in and around Wolverhampton – which would equate to the length of Hadrian's Wall.

In discussions the following points were raised:

Pat Fairclough (Other Stakeholders) asked how could the initiative constructively link into other areas within the region to compliment the development of similar projects (e.g. canal networks)

Richard Chattaway (Local Government) raised concerns that the region had been previously been unsuccessful with high profile regional bids (e.g. City of Culture) and that it was essential that the region learned not only from previous mistakes, but also learned about the successes of others (e.g. Liverpool). There was a need to develop a strategy that was supported widely across the region to promote the initiative in as wide a forum as possible, not least by the region's 38 member authorities

Brian Summers (Chair of Tourism WM and Assembly Board Member) advised the Assembly that the BCC bid could be assured of the full backing of Tourism West Midlands. He emphasised that TWM would wish to engage more with the bid to ensure that the challenges of getting important messages and linkages across are met. It was acknowledged that there was much work to be undertaken on changing perceptions and managing a successful bid campaign would be a very significant factor in the winning or losing of a media focussed programme.

A question was raised from the floor as to whether there were issues of concern arising out of the funding cuts backs that had been announced regarding British Waterways?

Sarah Middleton and Steve Trow in response to the questions/points

raised stated:

That the BCC was working closely with British Waterways and other tourism and environmental organisations in the region to ensure that they worked together to make appropriate linkages with the region's wider assets.

That BCC had been in discussions with British Waterways in light of the cut backs in funding that had been announced. BCC had been reassured that the bid was considered to be a priority for British Waterways, however a close eye would need to be kept on the situation

It had been recognised that there was a need to ensure professional help to support and manage a successful media campaign and experienced people were being sought. The campaign brief would include the need to engage across the whole of the West Midlands. It was also acknowledged that there was a need to learn the lessons of past campaigns, both successful and unsuccessful. A key aspect to developing a successful campaign was the involvement of schools (of which there are 450 in the Black Country area) and young people.

Members **agreed** to:

- (a) Note the presentation, and
- (b) Formally gave their support to the Bid and wished it every success.

9. **City Regions – Update**

The Assembly was requested to consider a draft statement which was intended to be produced jointly by West Midlands Regional Assembly, Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region and Stoke and North Staffordshire City Region.

Chris Creen (Other Stakeholders) requested, in the spirit of openness and transparency, that an invitation be given to the Other Stakeholder Group to attend the governance structures.

The Director of Policy agreed to raise this request in the appropriate forum for consideration in the proposals

Elizabeth Newman (Board Member – Other Stakeholder) stated that the statement would need to be considered in their light of imminent publication of the local government White Paper and any issues of relevance would need to be reflected in the statement.

Members **endorsed** the draft statement and requested that the comments above be appropriately reflected in the document.

### **Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country City Region**

The Assembly was advised of correspondence between Ruth Kelly, Minister for Local Government and Communities and Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country City Region.

Members **noted** the correspondence between the Minister and the Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country City Region.

## **10. Policy Issues – Report of the Director of Policy**

### **(a) Forward Planning Executive**

Members received a progress report on the establishment of the Forward Planning Executive.

The Assembly **noted** and agreed the terms of reference for the newly establishment of the Forward Planning Executive, as agreed by the Board of Directors

### **(b) Comprehensive Spending Review 2007**

The Assembly considered the joint submission made by the Assembly and AWM to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

Members **noted** the joint submission made by the Assembly and AWM to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

### **(c) Coventry Airport S78 Inquiry: Cost Application**

The Assembly was advised that a costs application had been made against the Assembly following the Assembly's involvement in the above inquiry.

Members **endorsed** the steps being taken by the Secretariat in consultation with Assembly Board members as detailed in the report.

### **(d) Regional Skills 'Conversation' 2.00pm – 25 October 2006 Recommendation**

Members were reminded of the planned discussion on skills that would be held following the conclusion of the Full Assembly meeting with members of the Regional Skills Partnership and were encouraged to stay for the debate.

### **(e) 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games**

The Assembly was provided with an update on matters relating to the preparation of the region's response to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Members were advised that the West Midlands was leading on cultural issues relating to the 2012 games and that the DCMS had published a tourism strategy for consultation to which the WM would respond. The Assembly was reminded that Lord Coe, Chair of London 2012 would be visiting the region on 11 December 2006.

Members **noted** the update on the 2012 Olympic Games and

11. **Regional Policy Partnerships Activity**

The Regional Assembly was updated on the current status and activities of Regional Partnerships, established by or working closely with the West Midlands Regional Assembly.

Further contributions to the partnership report were received as follows:

European and International Affairs Portfolio

Cllr Bore (Assembly Board Member) advised Members that the National Strategic Reference Framework had been published the previous day. The publication outlined the allocation of structural funds in the country and there was little surprise in the announcement. The allocation of funding to the West Midlands for 2007-13 would equate to 685million euros split between the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) = 355 million euros, and the European Social Fund = 330 million euros. This allocation was around half the amount provided for the 2000-2006 period.

The ERDF fund would be managed by the RDAs (a transitional Board of RDAs/DCLG and GOs would be established in all regions). The ESF fund would be managed on a national basis as opposed to the West Midlands preference of a regionally based programme.

Government had also accepted there needed to be complimentary between the ESF and ERDF programmes and a mechanism was to be established to provide an element of alignment.

Regional Health Partnership

A comment was made that there was growing concern that local authorities were providing increased levels of community based services (e.g. geriatric care) and that government was not appropriately funding local authorities to support such provision. The Acting Chair of the Partnership stated that the relationship between the NHS and local authorities had changed and there was recognition that there was an element of cost shunting taking place. It was stated that the issue may be referred to within the imminently published White Paper. It was emphasised that the pooling of social care budgets had not been discussed in WMLGA/WMRA or RHP forums.

Members **noted** the content of the reports.

12. **Decisions of the Board of Directors**

Members were advised of matters considered by the Board at its meeting on 6 October 2006 which are not otherwise the subject of a report to the meeting.

The Assembly **noted** the contents of the decisions of the Board of Directors

13. **Dates of Future meetings:**

Members were asked to note the dates of future scheduled meetings:

**Wednesday, 17 January 2007 – Priory Rooms, Birmingham**

**Wednesday, 25 April 2007 – Staffordshire County Council**

**Wednesday, 18 July 2007 – Venue TBA**