

Agenda Item No. 5

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY
Board of Directors – 8 December 2006**

(previously submitted to the WMLGA Executive Committee on 29 November 2006)

Regional Partnership Review

Joint Report of the Chief Executive and Secretary

Purpose of Report

1. To seek agreement to conduct a review of the work, focus, and direction of the Regional Partnership organisation and approval to the principal terms of reference and methodology.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that;
 - a) the proposals be approved for a wide ranging review of regional partnership activity, as set out in this report, and;
 - b) That the WMLGA Executive Committee approve the use of WMLGA reserves, up to the value of £15,000, in order to meet any additional costs associated with undertaking the review

Report Detail

3. The Basis for the Review

The pace of change affecting regional working continues to accelerate, with a wide range of external pressures and influences impacting upon the work of the regional partnership organisations and their joint Secretariat. In addition, the existing portfolio of activity is increasingly subject to scrutiny in light of resource constraints. In this context, a formal review is proposed of the current range of activities provided through the Secretariat in order to provide;

- a) a rounded assessment and evaluation of the existing portfolio of activity in relation to achievement of objectives; level and quality of support and service, and; value for money.

- b) a clear direction and refreshed set of strategic priorities, which relate to the statutory responsibilities where necessary and have the support of the large majority, if not all, key stakeholders and constituent / funding bodies.
 - c) arising from the above, an analysis of the impact upon existing priorities and work programmes together with resource implications.
4. The scope of the review will include the separate and collective contributions to regional working of the regional partnership constituent bodies - West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA), West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) and West Midlands in Europe (WMIÉ).
 5. It is proposed that the current strategic review on regional European engagement will represent the core element of the wider exercise in relation to WMIÉ, although this will need to be set in the context of the overall findings. Furthermore, the review will also need to take account of other significant regional partnerships integrated within the Secretariat e.g. the Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (RIEP). This will be informed by work already in hand on integration and prioritisation of improvement and efficiency programmes.
 6. The wider context is provided by the various UK and EU policy reviews, developments and challenges which will impact on regional activity. Set within the umbrella of CSR07, these include;
 - the Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'
 - the HMT/DCLG Sub-National Economic Study
 - DCLG / Arup report - Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Assemblies
 - the Audit Commission review of Regional Assemblies
 - Statement on City Region approach and sub-regional arrangements
 - RSS revision and RES review
 - New EU funding programmes 2007-13
 - Emerging national policy priorities e.g. climate change and social cohesion issues.
 - DCLG review of regional Improvement and efficiency programmes

7. Perhaps most important is the need to ensure the continued commitment and support of all key stakeholders for regional working, defined against a common set of policy development and service priorities. Principally, this includes constituent local authorities, the business community and other directly engaged social and economic partners across the region; but must also incorporate government departments such as DCLG and HO and regional agencies such as AWM, GOWM, LSC etc.

8. Scope and Focus

A 'nothing left out' review is proposed in order to examine all regional partnership activities at a strategic level, notwithstanding existing commitments or statutory/quasi statutory functions. Subject to further deliberation, it may be appropriate to utilise the National Audit Office's 'key lines of enquiry' for Independent Performance Assessment (IPA) of RDA's to provide the review framework;

- **Ambitions**
- **Prioritisation**
- **Capacity**
- **Performance management**
- **Achievement**

The resonance of these themes with the established CPA framework for Local Government is evident.

9. The review will need to consider the following issues;
- Breadth - Is the current breadth of activity and engagement appropriate? e.g. is there a regional role in relation to other local authority services? Are there areas of regional policy which require higher prioritisation or others within the current portfolio of activity which could / should be withdrawn? What scope or opportunities exist to strengthen / broaden institutional engagement e.g. the public protection services
 - Depth - Is there need or demand for greater focus and depth in certain areas e.g. social inclusion/cohesion; sustainability; Europe? Alternatively, are there areas we could/should scale down?
 - Sectoral Challenges - How will the White Paper impact upon the work of the regional partnerships e.g. is there a regional place shaping/convening role? Is the time right to consider an integrated regional strategy? The need to

examine whether the current 'devolved' model using SLAs with Strategic Planning Authorities is the most effective way in this region to deliver regional planning? (in line with the undertaking given to Yvette Cooper MP). How important is an extended scrutiny role e.g. skills, health, culture? How can we improve public sector co-ordination and best respond to greater devolvement of the improvement and efficiency resources? Is the time right to work towards a federal LGA?

- Resources – Matching aspirations and objectives against availability of current and future resources. Is there scope for securing additional resources through greater income generation, devolved resources, increased grant, or wider partnership working?

10. Review Methodology and Process

The Review will be commissioned on behalf of the Regional Partnership Executive bodies by the Secretary and Chief Executive with a timeframe from December 2006 to April 2007. The endorsement of the WMLGA / WMRA / WMiE executives will be integral to the commissioning and monitoring processes

11. In order to provide an independent oversight and full stakeholder engagement, it is proposed to establish a Review Reference Group (RRG). This group will provide strategic direction and monitoring for the review, approve the detailed terms of reference and act as 'sounding board' on emerging findings

12. The composition of the RRG is proposed as follows;-

- 4 Local Authority Elected Members
- 1 Business Sector representative
- 1 'other stakeholders' representative
- 4 Local Authority Chief Executives (or their nominees)
- 1 Senior Academic from a WM University,
- 1 Senior WM Management Consultancy Practitioner.

It will be an important selection requirement that RRG members should not currently be actively and directly engaged in the governance of the regional partnerships bodies or the delivery of their work programmes

13. A dedicated resource is required to facilitate detailed review work, which will include;-
 - Construction of deliberative and consultative processes and timetable
 - Leading / undertaking a wide ranging consultation exercise
 - Collation and analysis of results
 - Developing summary findings, drafting conclusions and presenting to RRG

14. The RRG will be responsible for determining and agreeing appropriate and cost effective delivery and support arrangements. It is proposed that if necessary costs of up to £15,000 will be met from WMLGA reserves. It is anticipated that the draft review outcomes will be presented to RRG by April 2007 and their recommendations to the Regional Partnership Executives by May/June 2007.

Olwen Dutton
Chief Executive

Jim Graham
Secretary