

**Agenda Item No. 9(a)**

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

**Progress Report – European Strategic Review**

**Report on behalf of the Review Panel**

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**1. Purpose**

To provide the Board with an outline of the progress to date in the Strategic Review of the Region's Relationship with Europe.

**2. Recommendation**

That the Board note the update.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 It had been previously agreed that the next thematic or strategic review to be completed should examine the Regions' relationship with Europe. It was recognised that this review had the potential to cover a wide range of issues but it was important that it would 'add value' to existing discussions regarding European issues. The terms of reference as agreed by the Panel are set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

**4. Review Panel and further process issues**

4.1 The current Review Panel consists of:

Cllr Philip Atkins	East Staffordshire Borough Council EIAP and SRG member
Professor Michael Clarke	WMBC – West Midlands Higher Education Association EIAP member
Cllr Mrs Pauline Dee (co-opted)	North Shropshire District Council EIAP member Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (substitute member)
Cllr Veronica Fletcher (co-opted)	Borough of Telford and Wrekin
Cllr Mick Jones	Warwickshire Country Council
Roger McKenzie	OSG - TUC
Cllr Paul Middleborough	Wychavon District Council
Chris Newis	WMBC - West Midlands Co-operative & Mutual Council
Cllr Ken Taylor	Coventry City Council
Cllr Tony Ward	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Milner Whiteman (co-opted)	Bridgnorth District Council EIAP member Committee of the Regions - member

4.2 The Panel are supported by the Assembly Scrutiny Team and Esther Knight (Strategic Advisor – European and International) who acts as specialist advisor.

## 5. **Progress to date**

5.1 Their first meeting in September was a closed briefing session to introduce the strategic review process and allowed a broad discussion of issues. Submissions were made from Government Office for the West Midlands, Advantage West Midlands, EIAP and WMiE in order to provide context and background information. It is intended to request verbal evidence when the Panel have had an opportunity to develop their understanding of the issues.

5.2 At its second meeting in early October, the Panel elected Roger McKenzie and Cllr Veronica Fletcher as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel. It discussed and agreed content for future review sessions which have since been revisited due to time constraints.

5.3 In addition, the Panel discussed and agreed to investigate further the following proposed meetings:

- A case study based visit to Stoke to examine the link between European working and economic development
- A visit encompassing the urban/rural dimension within the new funding regimes – possibly to the Herefordshire area
- Workshops with Committee of the Regions (CoR) members and European officers
- A two day visit to Brussels to meet MEPs, visit West Midlands in Europe and UKRep and hold a session with an appropriate EC Directorate-General
- A session with MEP involvement
- Introduction to European Working seminar at WMiE Brussels Office in December
- Trans-national working and business engagement session (led by Richard Bindless formerly of the Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce)
- Workshop with other stakeholders (voluntary and community sector)

### **Evidence received to date**

5.4 This has included:

- a more detailed introduction to Regional European Working Structures and Funding; and discussed Regional experiences of European Networking with Tony Dunn (European Policy and Funding Advisor at Black Country Consortium), Zena Lynch (Health Policy Officer at WMRA) and Andy Smith (European Secretariat/Warwickshire County Council).
- a discussion session with Assembly policy officers to assess the approaches to addressing the European agenda within each policy area and a workshop with member of the European and International Affairs Partnership which considered its role, delivery arrangements and resourcing.

5.5 In addition, the Panel has commissioned Emma Szlapak from Aston University to undertake a mapping exercise which examines the regional officer groups in relation to engagement with the European regional policy agenda. This seeks to identify whether resources are being utilised to their best advantage.

5.6 It has been agreed that the evidence sessions will be completed by the end of January 2007 with a draft report available for consultation from late February to mid-March 2007. The final report will be presented to the full Assembly on 25 April 2007. A copy of the consultation draft report will be circulated to all Board members as soon as it is available.

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## **Appendix One**

### **West Midlands Regional Assembly Strategic Review The Region's Relationship with Europe Terms of Reference**

#### **Aim**

The aim of this review is to assess the effectiveness of regional activity in securing and utilising European funding for the West Midlands Region

#### **Method**

The review will be carried out by a Review Panel made up of Assembly Members with additional co-opted members bringing expertise and experience in this area. The process will be supported by the Assembly Scrutiny Team and policy support will be provided by Esther Knight, the Assembly's Strategic Advisor – Europe and International Affairs.

Evidence will be submitted to the review either in writing or by the review activities. These will include a briefing session, discussion events and hearings.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of the review are to identify:

- (i) The ability of the Region to respond to changes in the 2007-13 funding programme in order to secure future funding including
  - Learning from previous experiences and best practice in other regions
  - Capacity within the region to develop and effectively utilise European funding projects
  - Impact of regional priorities
- (ii) The approach to collective working at the regional level including
  - Clarity of roles and relationships between structures/organisations within the West Midlands
  - Effective engagement with European representatives (MEPs and Committee of the Regions' Members)
  - Resources available to support regional European working
- (iii) The effectiveness of regional working in respect of
  - Communicating and promoting understanding of European aims, priorities and funding opportunities
  - How different sectors are engaged in European working including funding
  - Developing productive trans-national partnerships/projects

Panel Members will develop issues to be considered during the review process. Additional areas may be identified as a result of preparatory work and input from partners and stakeholders.

#### **Cross Cutting Themes**

All reviews are required to consider how the cross cutting themes of Sustainable Development and Equalities and Diversity will be addressed within the review process.

#### **Outputs**

A final report will be produced by the Panel and circulated widely.

**Review Panel**

The Strategic Review Group, the Assembly's scrutiny co-ordinating body, has delegated responsibility for this review to the Review Panel. The Panel are required to report progress to the Strategic Review Group through officers and via the Strategic Review Group Member on the Review Panel. The final report is made on behalf of the Assembly and will not require further approval but will be reported to the full Assembly. In addition any recommendations made for the Assembly itself will need to be accepted by the full Assembly.

The Panel Chair will be selected by Panel Members and will be required to act as spokesperson for the Panel, with Assembly support, as required.

Panel meetings will be considered quorate if three Assembly Panel Members are present. All Panel Members should abide by the Assembly Code of Conduct and are required to declare any possible conflict of interests.

**Timescales**

The review will commence on 14 September 2006. It is expected that the final report will be completed by 31 March 2007.

Agreed by Panel 3 October 2006