

Agenda Item No. 14

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Board of Directors Meeting – 16th September 2005

Regional Engagement in the European Agenda

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

To seek the Board's agreement to the future approach to regional engagement in the European agenda.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the existing principal regional partnership arrangements of the Regional Assembly European and International Affairs Partnership (EIAP) and the West Midlands in Europe Partnership (WMIÉ) continue for the time being.
- 2.2 That the Board endorse a closer alignment of the EIAP and WMIÉ through cross membership and co-ordination of objectives and activities
- 2.3 That the Assembly contribute to and support a cross agency virtual European secretariat.

3. Background

- 3.1 At their meeting on 8 April 2005, the Board agreed there was a need for a fresh approach to engagement in the European agenda to counter what is generally perceived as a more fragmented and less effective regional effort than previously. The agreed guiding principles of a review of the situation are:-
 - Greater clarity concerning leadership on European issues in the region and to build greater political and agency commitment to European and international working;
 - Fewer and/or more effective structures to reduce time and resource demands for Partnership members and staff;
 - A better engagement with and utilisation of the professional resources in WMIÉ, along with WM based European policy staff working in local authorities and regional agencies;

- A clearer relationship with resources being provided by partner organisations through WMiE and others to the European policy agenda.
- 3.2 The report to that meeting proposed revisions which included institutional changes; either the merger of EIAP and WMiE Board or the creation of a new regional partnership. However as such structural changes have not universally found favour it is proposed that we seek to achieve the necessary improvements through organisational changes alone and review the position on Partnership structures in 2006.
- 3.3 The Assembly has now filled the post of Strategic Advisor Europe and Esther Knight currently with Wolverhampton City Council takes up her post in October.

4. Institutions

The existing European Partnership mechanisms – namely the European and International Affairs Partnership, WMiE Board and Programme Monitoring Committee (GOWM administered re EU funding) should remain for the time but with a review of terms of reference and memberships to ensure complementarity and coherence. To this end WMLGA has already agreed to align elected member representation on these bodies. It is also suggested that meetings of the EIAP and WMiE Board be held on the same day. This will facilitate attendance by all those from a number of bodies who attend both. A review of partnership structures will be undertaken in 2006.

5. Resources

- 5.1 The collective contribution to this area of work by WMLGA, WMRA and WMiE can be utilised more effectively, through greater linkage and alignment of officer working both in the Regional Partnership Centre and the Brussels Office.
- 5.2 Whilst this development can provide a stronger focus for regional European working, there also needs to be further development of an extended or 'virtual' regional secretariat, particularly engaging AWM and GOWM as major partners but also drawing in local authority and other contributions. Matching funding through ERDF Technical assistance for such contributions will be sought where feasible.

6. European Partnership Event – 11 November 2005

- 6.1 As a link to the current regional European Strategy and Action Plan, the EIAP is to hold an event for senior regional decision makers at the Coventry Technocentre on 11 November to focus on new EU policy and funding opportunities after 2006 and identify how this region can achieve both a fair share of such funding and a stronger voice in EU policy development for the benefit of the region. This will be important for Assembly members. Board Members will be invited to that event.

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