

Agenda Item No. 5

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Board of Directors – 10 March 2006

**DRAFT DECISION NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REGIONAL
ASSEMBLY HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2006**

Chairman: Councillor David S Smith (Lichfield DC)
(Attendance – Appendix 1 (NOT INCLUDED IN DRAFT))

ITEM	DECISIONS/REPORTS
Apologies	<p>Apologies have been received from:</p> <p>Local Government sector</p> <p>Cllr Mick Salih (Vice-Chair, Stoke on Trent City Council), Cllr Brian Edwards (South Staffordshire), Cllr Richard Hyde (Warwickshire) Cllr Martin Jennings (Wychavon DC), Cllr Dr George Lord (Worcestershire CC), Cllr John Mutton (Coventry City Council), Cllr Clive Smith (Malvern Hills DC), Cllr Les Smith (North Warks BC) and Cllr Dave Tyler (Dudley).</p> <p>Business sector</p> <p>Martin Chambers, Sir William Lawrence, Chris Minshull and Chris Newis.</p> <p>Other Stakeholders group</p> <p>Valerie Broom (Vice-Chair), Richard Quallington and Roger McKenzie.</p> <p>Others</p> <p>Malcolm Harbour (MEP) and John Lancaster (British Waterways).</p>
Sarindar Singh Sahota	<p>The Chairman welcomed Sarindar Singh Sahota to his first meeting as the Vice-Chair (Business sector) of the Assembly.</p>
Elizabeth Newman	<p>The Chairman thanked Elizabeth for representing the Other Stakeholders Group on behalf of Valerie Broom who had presented her apologies.</p>
Trudi Elliott	<p>The Chairman advised the Assembly that Trudi Elliott had been appointed as the Regional Director of the Government Office for the West Midlands.</p>
New Year's Honours	<p>The Chairman opened the meeting by highlighting individuals who had been commended in the New Years Honours list. He advised that he would write on behalf of the Assembly</p>

Members to offer their congratulations.

- John Austin, formerly the Bishop of Aston and a former Assembly member, received an OBE for services to inter-faith relations.
- Councillor Cyril Woodall (Dudley MBC) received an OBE for services to Local Government.
- Colin Richards, a Conservation Officer at South Shropshire DC received an MBE for services to Local Government.
- Alan Doig, Chief Fire Officer at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue received a CBE.

West Midlands Rural Delivery Framework (WMRDF)

The Chairman advised members that the West Midlands Rural Delivery Framework was currently the subject of consultation. He encouraged members to take part in this process before the closing date of 13 February 2006. A summary document was available at the meeting for the information of members.

Members' Disclosures of Interests

Roger Stone (WMBC) referred to the importance of probity in the working of the Regional Planning Executive/Partnership. He advised the Assembly that he had written to Trudi Elliott setting out suggested measures to assist in this process.

Trudi Elliott (Chief Executive) thanked Roger for his letter and advised the Assembly that the English Regions Network (ERN) were currently developing a National Code of Conduct for Regional Planning Bodies which should address some of the issues he raised.

Chairman's and Vice-Chairs' Reports

Councillor David S Smith - Chairman

- He reported that on 12 January 2006, Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart and John Ransford, the Chairman and Deputy Chief Executive of the national LGA visited the Regional Partnership Centre and met with members of the WMLGA's Executive Committee, and West Midlands members on national LGA bodies.

The visit had been positively received and the potential benefits in closer working between the national body and regional associations like WMLGA would be the subject of further discussion.

Sarindar Singh Sahota – Vice Chair (Business sector)

- He thanked the Chairman for his warm welcome and paid tribute to the significant contribution made to the work of the Regional Assembly by his predecessor Ben Reid.
- He reported that the Business Council had submitted its response to the Choices for the Black Country Consultation report.

Elizabeth Newman (representing the Other Stakeholders Group)

- She offered congratulations to Trudi Elliott on the news of her appointment.
- She restated the concerns of the Other Stakeholders Group regarding the duration of the Assembly meetings and requested that this be re-examined.
- She referred to the additional responsibilities being placed on members of the group, citing the transfer of the housing function as an example, and asked that the long-term support for the Other Stakeholders Group be considered as soon as possible.

Decision notes of the meeting held on 26 October 2005

Members **confirmed** the Decision Notes of the Assembly meeting held on 26 October 2005 as a correct record.

Draft Budget and Business Plan 2006-2009

Trudi Elliott (Chief Executive) presented the draft Budget and Business Plan 2006-09 (attached as an appendix) for endorsement prior to its submission to ODPM via GOWM on 24 January 2006.

She advised the Assembly that the budget settlement from ODPM for 2006-2007 was £2,191,000 - an increase of approximately 6% on the 2005-06 grant. In addition, she highlighted:

Income (Projected)

- the Assembly had submitted a budget for undertaking the Regional Housing Board function. Although not likely to commence until September 2006 - a pro rata figure for 2006-07 of £116,917 is included (income strand 3).
- As a result of the current freeze on all Department of Health (DoH) budgets there is an absence of income (income line 7) to support the work of the Regional Health Partnership. The remaining allocated funds would only secure the Health Policy Officer post until December 2006.
- a reduction in the contribution to costs from the English Regions Network (ERN) reflecting the end of our chairmanship in July 2006.
- the Advantage West Midlands (AWM) grant for the RTPP had been excluded at this time, as it had a match funding requirement. Discussions with AWM were on-going.

Expenditure (proposed)

- The expenditure budget reflected a combined officer support structure within the Regional Partnership Centre and the resulting efficiencies resulting in the indirect

subsidy from the WMLGA to the Assembly reducing from £270,000 to £233,000.

- Fulfilling the Regional Planning function was placing a strain the Assembly secretariat, our partners and those lead members involved in the task. In view of the limited resources available the formal commencement of Phase 3 of the review of the RSS would be deferred to 2007 – 2008.
- £25,000 transferred from within existing resources to the meet the costs of identified support for the scrutiny function, in response to concerns expressed by the Strategic Review Group (SRG).
- £25,000 of ODPM funds had been set aside as a contingency (WS29) against the potential risk of costs of attending or being represented at inquiries, hearings or other legal proceedings relating to this role.

The Assembly

- (a) **endorsed** the Draft Budget and Business Plan for 2006-2009.
- (b) **delegated** to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Regional Partnerships Secretary, Chair and Vice Chairs, authority to make such modifications as are necessary to the draft budget and/or business plan upon receipt of comments from ODPM.
- (c) **noted** that the final budget and business plan be submitted to the April Board meeting for approval.

West Midlands Regional Funding Allocations – Advice to Government

Rose Poulter (Director of Policy) presented a revised draft of the "West Midlands Regional Funding Allocations – Advice to Government" document for consideration. (This was circulated at the meeting). The closing date for submission was 31st January 2006.

The draft advice, which represented a joint approach to the challenge set by Government, had been informed by debate and discussion at officer meetings, meetings of the Assembly, its Board of Directors and the Policy Partnerships, especially Transport and Planning. It had also been discussed within Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) and Advantage West Midlands (AWM).

Members were advised that although the substance of the advice would not change, it would be subject to further editing as it was important that the key messages from the region were clearly stated.

Gerald Kells (OSG) referred public engagement and participation in the development of transport proposals including Shrewsbury North Relief Road. He considered it important that all interested parties had the opportunity to contribute to the process. He also expressed the concerns of the environment sector regarding the perceived and potential environmental impacts of some of the regional transport priorities.

Cllr Malcolm Pate (Shropshire) assured the Assembly that the Shrewsbury North Relief Road had been subject to wide consultation with all stakeholders and members of the public.

Brian Summers (WMBC) considered the development of the Regional Transport Priorities to be a considerable achievement which offered a 'regional' view for consideration by Government. It was clear that the resources available were insufficient to achieve the desired goals.

He also thought it critical that in order to deliver the housing and transport programmes beginning in 2006 – 2007 for approval to be given to the various outstanding projects before the end of this financial year.

Roger Phillips (Herefordshire) advised that this Assembly was well advanced across the other regions in developing this advice and offered his thanks to all who had participated in the process. The advice did not currently include any major rail expenditure which was critical for the infrastructure of the region.

John Hart (WMBC) welcomed the work that had been undertaken and felt that it should be extended in future to address the issue of funding for skills which was accepted as a regionally significant issue.

The Assembly

- i) **endorsed** the approach being taken to the content and arrangements for finalising the West Midlands Regional Funding Allocations – Advice to Government, and
- ii) **agreed** to delegate to the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Assembly responsibility to sign-off the final document in conjunction with the Chairman and Chief Executive of AWM and the Director of GOWM.

**Draft Statement
– West Midlands
Region –
Incorporating A
City Region and**

Rose Poulter (Director of Policy) presented a draft statement entitled "West Midlands Region – Incorporating A City Region and Sub-Regional Approach" for consideration.

The report was intended to set the debate on the nature and role of City Regions in the context of the Assembly's core

Sub-Regional Approach

activities - as Regional Planning Body, the scrutiny of the Regional Development Agency (AWM) activity and facilitator of regional strategic partnership work.

Within the Regional Assembly, how the City Region approach would support existing regional and sub-regional arrangements had been discussed by the Board of Directors and the Regional Planning Partnership. Similar discussions took place amongst the Local Authorities Chief Executives and Leaders at a WMLGA event.

These discussions informed the draft statement which sought to confirm to ODPM that the Assembly was supportive of the City Region approach in the context of the Region as a whole with all its sub-regions. It also sought to clarify the expectations and agree in outline the nature of the relationship between the Assembly and the City Region approach.

Cllr Ted Richards (Solihull MBC) reported that the approach had been developed by the seven Metropolitan Authorities in the best interests of the Region as a whole.

Richard Moxon (WMBC) expressed support for the statement and considered that communications on the approach across the sectors and throughout the region was essential.

Roger Phillips (Herefordshire) stated that the non-metropolitan areas were keen to play their full part in this approach.

Nick Paul (Chair of AWM Board) expressed support for the approach. He was aware the partnership working within the West Midlands was well regarded across the country.

The Assembly

- (i) **noted** the comments of Members; and
- (ii) **endorsed** the statement entitled "West Midlands Region – Incorporating A City Region and Sub-Regional Approach".

Strategic Review of Equalities and Diversity - Final report

Rev'd John Hall (Chair of the Strategic Review Panel) presented a report detailing the recommendations arising from the strategic review of Equalities and Diversity. This had been the most extensive piece of strategic review work undertaken within in excess of 130 individuals participating in the process.

The review had initially been intended to seek views regarding the regional presence of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. However, discussions with regional partners had identified more fundamental issues around leadership, integration and regional structures for consideration.

The Panel's report set out fifteen recommendations for regional partners (NOT APPENDED IN DRAFT).

He offered his thanks to the Panel members for their commitment and contributions to the review and partner agencies for their support, particularly Advantage West Midlands, Government Office for the West Midlands and Business in Community.

He also thanked Dagmar Waller and her team for their support throughout the process.

He very much welcomed the three year secondment of Carmel Kerr from the Home Office who as Equalities and Diversity Director based in Assembly would lead the implementation process and was pleased to see her present at the meeting.

The Assembly **endorsed** the report and recommendations of the Strategic Review of Equalities and Diversity.

Response to the ODPM Request for detailed proposals on implementing the transfer of the Regional Housing Board function to the West Midlands Regional Assembly Limited

A report setting out the detailed proposals for implementing the proposed transfer of the Regional Housing Board functions to the Assembly was submitted for approval.

The initial proposals had been reconsidered in light of ODPM's revised guidance and legal advice received in relation to securing the functions within the Assembly's company structure.

The proposed terms of reference for the Regional Housing Executive (RHE) and Regional Housing Partnership (RHP) were appended to the report. These established a wide partnership (RHP) whose membership would not be restricted to full Assembly members enabling nominating bodies to nominate non-Assembly members with particular relevant expertise. This body would address the broad policy issues and make recommendations to the Regional Housing Executive.

The Regional Housing Executive would be a committee of the Assembly and its membership would comprise only RHP members who were also Board Members. This body would take executive decisions and both make the formal recommendations to Government and approve the policy recommendations of the RHP.

To achieve a shared perspective on housing and planning issues regionally, it was proposed that there should be a cross over membership of an agreed number of members (e.g. 5) from the Regional Planning and Housing Partnerships.

Discussions were ongoing to establish the best mechanism for engaging the support and expertise provided by the current Regional Housing Board and the Regional Housing Partnership.

Some modifications to the Company's Memorandum and

Articles of Association would be required.

Roger Stone (WMBC) expressed 'personal' concerns over the balance of authority between the Housing Executive and Housing Partnership. Trudi reminded the Assembly that if the RHP were to retain for itself any of the responsibilities of the Housing Executive its membership would need to be restricted to Assembly members which was not considered desirable.

The Assembly

- (a) **approved** the draft terms of reference for the Regional Housing Partnership and Regional Housing Executive, as attached as Appendix 1 of the report, for submission to ODPM.
- (b) **noted** that once ODPM had approved the proposals the Assembly, at a future meeting, approve modifications to the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association to
 - (i) allow the Board of Directors to create Committees of the Board whose members were not all members of the Board; and to
 - (ii) list the Regional Housing Board functions as Company functions.

Review of the West Midlands Economic Strategy

Nick Paul (Chairman of AWM Board) set out the draft proposals from Advantage West Midlands for the review of the West Midlands Economic Strategy. AWM were keen to ensure engagement throughout the period of the review, with the Assembly and welcomed the comments and suggestions Members at this stage.

Government guidance specified that the Regional Economic Strategy should be reviewed every three years with the next publication date being 2007. The proposed timetable was set out in the report.

This review would be undertaken in line with the new Government guidance. The states that a RES should set out a medium to long term (5-10 years) strategy based on a substantive body of evidence and set out clear policy options and costed policies. In addition, it should be consistent with other key strategies, especially the Regional Spatial Strategy, and incorporate a full Sustainability Appraisal and a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

However, this review needs to take a firm look at the objectives of the strategy and whether they remain valid. That will include examining the key delivery mechanisms and their continuing relevance and purpose.

During discussion the following points were made which would inform subsequent officer discussion and the development of this process:-

- Cllr Saint (Stratford DC) asked that cross-boundary working be considered as an option. Stoke-on-Trent and South Cheshire were cited as an example were this might make economic sense.

- Cllr Bore (Birmingham) welcomed that the review would take account of changes in national and European policy.

He asked whether the research work lead by the West Midlands Observatory and its network of partners would be shared with partners. Nick Paul advised him that this would be the case. It would also be available via AWM's website.

In view of the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announcement in 2007, he asked to consider whether to have either a combined or separate Strategy and Action Plan. Separating the two documents would allow the Action Plan to be finalised post Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

- John Hart (WMBC) was broadly supportive of the approach as outlined and would welcome the opportunity to examine the contribution of specific programmes - what worked well and what not so well.
- Rosie Poulter (WMRA) felt it important for the current Revision of the RSS and Review of the RES must proceed in tandem and continue to align.
- She would wish to discuss a mechanism for capturing the expertise of the Assembly Secretariat and the officer support and technical groups to assist in the development of briefs and act as reference groups for technical work to support the RES Review.
- She also indicated that the Assembly and its Partnerships offered opportunity for formal debate as the RES Review progresses.
- Nick Paul expressed his thanks to Rose for the offers of assistance and to members for the contributions to the debate.

The Chair thanked Nick Paul for attending the meeting.

The Assembly **agreed** that officers from the Assembly Secretariat and AWM would meet to discuss utilizing the expertise of the Assembly Secretariat and the technical groups to assist in the development of briefs and act as reference groups for technical work to support the RES Review and report back with proposals to the Assembly meeting in April 2006.

Decisions of the Board of Directors

The Assembly were advised of matters considered by the Board at its meeting on 2 December 2005 which were not otherwise the subject of a report to this meeting.

The Board had considered the Scrutiny and Strategic Review Reporting and Publication Protocol and a number of corporate governance matters.

Nigel Summers (Partnerships Secretary) referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report which set out the development of a single integrated management structure which would more effectively deliver the objectives of both the Assembly and the WMLGA. An organisation structure was appended to the report.

In light of news referred to earlier, the recruitment of a new Chief Executive would be delegated to the Partnerships Secretary in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairs of the WMLGA and WMRA.

Gerald Kells (OSG) welcomed £12,500 from ODPM to meet part of the costs of participating in the public inquiry into the expansion of Coventry Airport. He felt it was important that the Assembly should have the sufficient resources to respond when its conformity decisions are legally challenged and asked officers to make appropriate representation to ODPM. Trudi Elliott indicated that this issue was being addressed through the English Regions Network.

Cllr Pate (Shropshire) referred to the developing situation at RAF Cosford and asked for an indication of the Assembly's position.

The content of the report were **noted**.

Regional Policy Partnerships Activity

A report setting out the current activities of the Regional Policy Partnerships; and a proposal for annual reporting from the Partnerships on how their work addressed sustainable development was considered.

The Assembly

- (i) **noted** the Policy Partnership activity as set out in the report, and
- (ii) **endorsed** the proposals for annual reporting by Policy Partnerships on their contribution to sustainable development.

Dates of future meetings

The dates for future meetings are 5 April 2006 and 12 July 2006 (Annual General Meeting). The venues had yet to be

determined. Members who were aware of potential venues were asked to contact the Assembly Secretariat.

The Assembly **noted** the dates of future meetings.

Chairman

DRAFT