

Agenda Item No. 9(a)

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Board of Directors - Friday 10th March 2006

Review of Regional Policy Partnerships

Report of the Regional Partnerships Secretary

1. Purpose of Report

To seek the Board's views on draft protocols to govern the structures and memberships of WMRA Partnerships.

2. Recommendation

- (a) That, subject to the Board's views, the protocols set out in this report on Regional Partnership structures, be recommended for approval by the full Assembly.
- (b) That consideration be given to setting up a small task and finish group of Board members to review Assembly structures in the light of these protocols and report back to the Board.

3. Report Details

3.1 The Assembly's structure and regional relationships have evolved over time. The forthcoming establishment of the Housing Executive/Partnership and the establishment of a new Equality and Diversity Partnership (see next item) is an opportune time to review the basis of partnership structures, taking into account a number of imperatives and balancing factors:-

- the legal structure of WMRA Ltd
- relationship of form to function
- ownership
- inclusivity v effectiveness
- consistency v flexibility

3.2 It is not a simple matter to address all these issues within the Assembly structure without having some guidelines to inform the constitutions and modus operandi of various partnerships. The following protocols are therefore proposed to provide a governance framework.

4. Categories of Partnership

4.1 There are two proposed categories of WMRA related partnerships:

- (a) WMRA endorsed
- (b) WMRA created and supported

4.2 (a) WMRA endorsed Partnerships

These are partnership structures established and administered by other regional organisations but which WMRA formally recognise, endorse and work closely with. Such endorsements will be considered if the following criteria are met i.e. if the partnership:

- Is regionally focussed
- Deals with issues that legitimately fall within the Assembly's broad remit of quality of life issues and provide strategic co-ordination of appropriate matters
- Is one which the Assembly might otherwise have established itself
- Has representation which satisfactorily meets the Assembly or the Assembly's sectoral partners' requirements

4.3 Bodies falling within this category include : Regional Skills Partnership; Regional Rural Affairs Forum; Sustainability West Midlands; Regional Cultural Consortium (Culture WM); Regional Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support (WMSPARS)

4.4 (b) WMRA created and supported partnerships

The Assembly has two principal reasons for creating sub structures beyond the core governance bodies of the Company and its Board:-

- (i) to manage some aspects of the Assembly's statutory or quasi-statutory responsibilities
- (ii) to develop or enhance strategic engagement at regional level in agreed areas of socio-economic policy which fall within the Assembly's broad remit

4.5 These may be described respectively as 'executive' and 'influencing' bodies

5. Executive Bodies

5.1 These should always reflect the Assembly's core membership structure of 4:1:1 (local govt:business:other stakeholders) and will be required when one or more of the following conditions apply ie its work and authority:-

- relates to a statutory or quasi statutory delivery function of WMRA
- is required to operate within the limited liability framework of the Assembly company
- involves delegated powers, including any delegated to Chairs/Vice-Chairs to act between meetings
- impacts on WMRA resources and/or operating procedures

- impacts directly on the expenditure of other public funds
- 5.2 Bodies currently falling within this category include the Planning Partnership/Executive; Strategic Review Group; and proposed Housing Executive.
- 5.3 Executive Bodies should have clear terms of reference, including any delegations, be chaired by a WMRA Board member and should report regularly on their activities to the Board.

6. Influencing Bodies

- 6.1 These are established to provide broader partnership consultative and advisory bodies to help shape and inform the development of regional strategies and/or influence the actions of partner and other organisations and agencies in the implementation of strategies.
- 6.2 These bodies need not be formulaic regarding the 4:1:1 principle but should have memberships that reflect the partnership engagement needs of the particular policy agenda. There would be more flexibility in numbers and to allow members from outside the Assembly structure. The following protocols should however apply:-
- memberships and terms of reference to be approved by the Assembly
 - the Assembly or its sectoral partners should be satisfactorily represented or engaged
 - partnerships to be chaired by an Assembly member, preferably on the WMRA Board
 - all regional strategies and action plans to be approved by the Assembly
 - actions which may have a potential impact on the Assembly's resources or operations to be submitted to the WMRA Board in the first instance
 - partnerships to have ability to propose sub groups if required to deal with business in between meetings
- 6.3 Current bodies which fall within this category include the European and International Affairs; Environment; Health; Transport; and Equalities and Diversity Partnerships.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 It is not intended to create a two tier Assembly structure. All partnership working is valued. However it is necessary to adopt a 'horses for courses' approach to activities where

either the legal and operational framework demands closer control within the structure or, alternatively, the nature of the strategic activity demands greater flexibility in determining who should be at the table!

- 7.2 The Board is therefore asked to agree the framework set out in this paper. If agreed they will be formally submitted to the full assembly. The protocols will be used to review current structures and guide future proposals.
- 7.3 The Board is invited to set up a small task and finish group to work with the Secretariat to review Assembly structures and report back to the next meeting.

Nigel Summers
Secretary