

**WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
Board of Directors – 5 December 2007**

**Headline Issues for West Midlands Regional Assembly**

**Report of the Director - Policy**

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**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update the Assembly Board on key issues undertaken by the Secretariat on behalf of the Board and Assembly Partnerships over the last quarter.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Assembly Board considers the report and notes progress made.

**3. REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS)**

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy is currently undergoing a partial revision in three phases. Reports have been submitted to Assembly Members on a regular basis to update and inform them of the progress.

**Phase 1 – the Black Country**

- 3.2 Following the Examination in Public earlier in the year, the Panel Report largely welcomed the proposed Revision submitted by the Regional Assembly (jointly with the Black Country Consortium) acknowledging that this built on and developed the previously agreed principles of the West Midlands RSS.
- 3.3 Having considered the Panel Report, the Secretary of State published Proposed Changes on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007. These were made available for public inspection and responses were required by the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007. A joint response from the Regional Planning Body and the Black Country Consortium was submitted to the Secretary of State in early November.
- 3.4 The Regional Planning Body and the Black Country Consortium welcomed the Secretary of State's proposed changes as a landmark in taking forward the urban renaissance of the Black Country, the largest Major Urban Area in the Region. The endorsement of the Panel Report, which supported the approach to urban renaissance with a strategy for future growth and competitiveness through transformation land use and transport restructuring, will contribute

significantly to both the sustainability and the competitiveness of the Region while enhancing quality of life for over a million residents of the Black Country.

### **RSS Phase Two Revision**

- 3.5 The Phase 2 Revision has included some important issues for the Region, including future housing and employment land provision, the development of the Region's towns and cities, transport and waste management provision. Central to this is has been the scale and distribution of housing provision that should be made in the Region over the next 20 years.
- 3.6 As Members are aware the Preferred Option for the Phase 2 Revision has been prepared following a period of extensive discussion and debate, including consultations across the Region. Both the Phase 2 RSS Revision and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) Review have run concurrently and actions have been undertaken to ensure that they are appropriately aligned and that the two strategies are mutually supportive. In taking forward this process a Working Group was established comprising of officers from the Regional Assembly (including RSS Policy Leads and the Assembly's Planning Team) and AWM, to oversee the alignment of the revised RES with the emerging Phase 2 Preferred Option.
- 3.7 At the last Board meeting on the 26th September, Members were informed of the outcome of the RPP meeting of the 24th September with regards to the shaping of the final Preferred Option and in particular the housing distribution figures. At the meeting, Members were informed that Officers had advised RPP members that following liaison with local authorities (including the City Region authorities of Birmingham and Coventry), the Region could accommodate around 363,000 net dwellings. Following the RPP meeting of the 24<sup>th</sup> September, Officers were asked to finalise the Preferred Option. The final Preferred Option included a further amendment to the housing distribution figures to reflect an additional requirement of 3,000 dwellings for Stoke on Trent to be provided post 2016. This brought the overall distribution figure to 365,600 net dwellings over the period 2006- 2026.
- 3.8 At RPP on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, Members agreed and signed off the Preferred Option for submission to Secretary of State by the end of year. Following the submission a formal 12 week consultation will commence on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008 to 28<sup>th</sup> March, to be followed by an Examination in Public in September 2008.

### **RSS Phase Three Revision**

- 3.9 The Phase 3 Revision will consider a number of detailed issues including critical rural services, recreational provision, various regionally significant environmental issues and the provision of a framework for sites for Gypsies and Travellers. In order to take the revision forward, a Draft Project Plan has been prepared and was signed off by RPP on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October to be launched for public consultation.

- 3.10 The Draft Project Plan sets out what elements of the RSS will be revised, how partners and the public can get involved, what timetable will be worked to, what resources and technical work are available and required, and how the Revision will be aligned with other regional strategies.

The launch of the Draft Project Plan marks the formal start of the Phase Three Revision process. The outline timetable for launching the Draft Project Plan and undertaking the Phase Three Revision has been agreed by the Regional Planning Partnership and is as follows:

- Draft Project Plan launch – November 2007;
- Final Project Plan launch – April 2008;
- Spatial Options launch – December 2008;
- Preferred Option launch – August 2009.

- 3.11 The Draft Project Plan was launched at a public event which was held on 27 November 2007 at the Burlington Hotel in the centre of Birmingham. There will follow a formal seven week consultation period between 27 November 2007 and 18 January 2008, allowing opportunities for stakeholders and the public to comment on the Draft Project Plan. Following the consultation, the comments received will then be considered in finalising the Project Plan to be published in Spring 2008.

#### **4. REGIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY**

- 4.1 The final Health and Well-being Strategy will be signed off at the Regional Health Partnership meeting on the 6th December. This will be presented to the Regional Assembly on the 16th January together with an early draft framework for action. One of the key tasks for the new Health Policy Officer in the New Year will be to further develop the draft action plan and secure sign up to actions with partners. Setting up of the 'Living Well in the West Midlands' portfolio of projects is progressing. The Director (job-shaer) for the portfolio has been appointed and interviews for the Support officer and Project Manager planned. Interviews for the monitoring and evaluation contract (£341,000) under this portfolio are due to take place on the 28th November. A formal launch of the portfolio is planned for late January.

- 4.2 One of the key challenges for health over the next year is to ensure that it is properly accounted for under the SNR review work and proposed changes. The Health and Well being Strategy forms a good baseline for integrating health with other policy areas and the 'Living Well' portfolio is a good example of bringing health and regeneration agendas together.

#### **5. DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN**

- 5.1 Following consultation a draft Climate Change Action Plan was endorsed by the Regional Assembly in October 2007. This will be launched in December and be taken forward by the GOWM with partners. The Regional Minister has also included climate change in his list of key regional priorities and will be updated on progress. Meetings with partners are continuing on the development of the

draft actions and potential climate change projects to be incorporated into the business planning process of partners for 2008/09.

## **6. HOUSING**

### **Regional Housing Pot 2008-2011: Final Advice to Ministers**

- 6.1 The intended split of housing funding between the Regions' has been made known by CLG on 16 October 2007 and final advice sought from the Regional Assemblies. The announcement sought further advice by 2 November on how the funds should be allocated. In summary the West Midlands is posed to receive **£679M** over three years, 20% more than the Region received in 2006-2008. This is for the Housing Corporation's National Affordable Housing Programme and for capital funding to local housing authorities.
- 6.2 Whilst this is welcomed, the use of this money will be very challenging for the Housing Corporation, RSLs, and others developing social rented and intermediate tenure housing. There are challenges too for Local Authorities, especially the development of equity release loans for the improvement of private sector homes. It is pleasing to see the West Midlands Kickstart model is presented as the exemplar model for the rest of the country to follow.
- 6.3 This funding is intended to deliver the commitments given in the Housing Green Paper (July 2007). In the West Midlands, the Housing Corporation have to achieve an annual average output of minimum of 2400 social rented homes a year, (averaged over the three years). They also have to deliver 1200 low cost home ownership (intermediate tenure) properties. The challenge here is that currently in 2006-2007, the Housing Corporation is delivering 1400 social rented homes a year (and 1100 low cost home ownership). So as well as very substantially increasing the number of homes for rent, higher sustainability standards are being required, as well as efficiency savings. To meet these minima targets over the 2008-2011 period, the WM Region was required to make a substantial change to the high-level split which had previously been recommended to CLG by the Regional Housing Executive in the Summer of 2007.
- 6.4 Consequently, the new high-level split will see 69% of the total funding being allocated to NAHP and 31% to local authorities, in comparison to the existing split of 48% to NAHP and 52% to local authorities. As a result, concerns in relation to the potentially adverse impacts this may have upon existing local authority programmes has been expressed and WMRA's Housing Team has requested a meeting with Ministers, at which the full implications posed by its strong drive for affordable housing can be explored.

## **7. WEST MIDLANDS RURAL AFFAIRS FORUM**

- 7.1 The West Midlands Regional Assembly, together with a number of other partners, sponsored this year's WMRAF Conference focusing on Sustainable Rural Communities – Our Future in Your Hands. Held at Dunchurch in Warwickshire, the conference provided an opportunity for rural stakeholders to identify the essential ingredients of a sustainable rural community, the

challenges faced and explored solutions through a number of case studies. Alongside speakers from Defra and the Commission for Rural Communities, our Chief Executive, Olwen Dutton, gave an impassioned speech from the regional rural perspective.

- 7.2 The West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum will be holding a Specialist Seminar on Rural Proofing on 6th December 2007. This seminar will help to raise awareness of rural proofing, demonstrate how to apply it to policies and strategies and discuss how it might affect the Local Area Agreements. It will be particularly relevant for those from both the public and voluntary sectors involved in the development of Local Area Agreements.

### **Central Wales – West Midlands Cross Border**

- 7.3 Following on from the successful cross border event held in Ludlow last March, and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the Welsh Assembly Government and the West Midlands Regional Assembly, a Core Officers Group has been established to take forward the collaborative work between Central Wales and the West Midlands.
- 7.4 The role and purpose of the Officers Group is to implement the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), taking direction from the Strategic Forum. The group is developing and coordinating action programmes and working groups that seek to realise the aims set out in the MoU. It is anticipated that this group will continue to meet about 3-4 times per year.
- 7.5 Over 25 people attended the initial meeting of this group on **28<sup>th</sup> November 2007** in Shrewsbury where the meeting covered the Terms of Reference for both the Strategic Forum and the Core Officers Group, the membership and make-up of the groups, and proposals for the formation or alignment with Task Groups. This was in order to address future work and key areas of collaboration, so far identified as being: Health and Social Care; Community Safety; Access to Services / Transport; Skills and Business Support; Housing; and Environment.
- 7.6 The demise of the Assembly in 2010 raises questions as to the future of the MoU. A report on the matter will be prepared for a future meeting of the Board.

## **8. CULTURE**

### **RSS Revision Phase 3 - Cultural Input**

- 8.1 The draft Project Plan for Phase 3 of the RSS Revision is due to be launched on 27th November and Culture will feature as a key Revision topic. This Revision will help to strengthen RSS policy to meet cultural, sporting and tourism needs, and through this, support urban and rural renaissance.
- 8.2 Ultimately, the cultural aspect of the RSS Revision will contribute to:

- Improving physical and mental well-being by encouraging healthier more active lifestyles and greater and more inclusive access to, and participation in, cultural activities;
- Making the Region more attractive to residents and in-movers as a result of the cultural offer; and
- Supporting the growth and diversification of the regional economy to create a 'world class' visitor destination.

8.3 The technical work required to support policy development is now underway. Consultants have just been appointed to undertake a 'Mapping and Gapping' of the Region's significant cultural assets that will also include identification of any strategic gaps in provision and potential mechanisms or policy approaches that could ensure/facilitate appropriate provision at regional and local levels.

#### **Black Country as an Urban Park - Lottery Bid**

8.4 'Black Country as an Urban Park' has now been selected as one of 4 prestigious schemes vying for £50million of Lottery money that will be decided by a television programme and then public vote. The bid includes plans to unveil forgotten caverns beneath Dudley, build a 12-mile 'green bridge' park linking Walsall and West Bromwich town centres, create an inspirational visitors centre at Barr Beacon and regenerate widespread areas of Wolverhampton's canal network.

8.5 Online voting begins on Monday 26th November and the Black Country TV programme will air on 6th December at 11pm on ITV.

8.6 For further information about all of the projects and details about how to vote, can be found via the website - [www.thepeoples50million.org.uk](http://www.thepeoples50million.org.uk)

### **9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

9.1 The Partnership last met on 18<sup>th</sup> October, the agenda and minutes of the meeting can be found at [www.wmra.gov.uk/equalities](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/equalities). One of the key discussions at this meeting was around the affects of the Sub-National Review on equality and diversity and social cohesion in the region, as well as the commencement of the Equality and Human Rights regional hub on 1<sup>st</sup> October, and the end of funding for the post of Equality & Diversity Director in January 2009. As a consequence, the Equality & Diversity Partnership held an "away-day" on 15<sup>th</sup> November, to discuss the future options of the Partnership, including where it would best sit post-2010. An initial report on the findings of this event will be available shortly. In addition, a large element of the Partnership's 2008/09 work-plan will be the setting-up and running of a sub-group to look at, and discuss with, key stakeholders how the work of the Equality & Diversity Partnership is taken forward.

9.2 The Partnership continues to work with SWM on the Social Capital, Equality & Diversity programme (funded by Defra) and jointly hosted an event on 27th September at the Niskam Centre, Birmingham, where policy-makers and

practitioners shared good practice and looked at the delivery potential of policy decisions. The Partnership provides a steering role for this programme.

9.3 The Partnership continues to work with others and is looking at developing further work with:

- RAWM around the Civil Partnership and Social Inclusion agendas;
- Destination West Midlands in mainstreaming equalities in the Third Sector;
- Key stakeholders in consultation events on RSS Phase 3, RES Delivery Framework, and the regional European strategy;
- Local Authorities in capacity building and peer reviews to raise the Equality Standard of Local Authorities to at least Level 3; and
- Continues to work towards the West Midlands becoming the first UK region to sign-up to the European Charter on Women and Men in Local Life.

## **10. EUROPE**

10.1 Following the Assembly's Strategic Review of Regional European Working, a Project Board was established under Prof. Michael Clarke to take forward all of the reviews recommendations

10.2 During the past quarter the draft regional European has been out to consultation. The document sets four key priorities for regional European working

- Engaging with the single market
- Becoming a more successful player in the Research and Development arena
- Responding to the challenges of Climate Change and Environmental Protection
- Engaging with social cohesion

10.3 Work has also started to look at the delivery arrangements for the strategy.

10.4 The project board has as part of its remit, the responsibility to make proposals for regional European working beyond SNR.

## **11. TRANSPORT**

### **Transport Challenge**

11.1 There has been significant progress in responding to the Regional Minister's 'transport challenge'. A number of meetings have taken place involving high-level representatives from key organisations across the West Midlands. A special Transport Partnership meeting was held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2007 and a meeting involving key representatives, including Local Authority Cabinet Leads for Transport was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007. The response to the Minister will be discussed at the AWM Board meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2007 and the Assembly Board on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007. It is intended for Regional partners to meet with the Minister in January 2008 to take this process forward.

## 12. SCRUTINY AND STRATEGIC REVIEW ANNUAL PLAN 2007/8

12.1 At its meeting on 24 October 2007, the Assembly approved the annual scrutiny and strategic review work plan for 2007/08. Following a request from the Learning and Skills Council to extend the current strategic review of Post 16 Education, Training and Skills it has proved necessary to amend this work plan. The Strategic Review Group has approved amended review timescales and the postponement of the planned scrutiny review of Advantage West Midlands' role in marketing the region until 2009. This will impact on achievement of the outputs outlined in the scrutiny and strategic review work strand of the Assembly's 2007/8 business plan. At the request of the Strategic Review Group, a full report will be submitted to the Assembly meeting in January 2008.

### **Strategic Review of the Regional Approach to Post 16 Education, Training and Skills**

12.2 The Learning and Skills Council has requested that the timescale of this review be extended to enable the range of evidence that has been collected to be analysed by an expert advisor to ensure that the Panel have a full understanding of the issues and to provide an opportunity to interview witnesses again or to speak to other witnesses. This was approved by the Panel and a number of potential expert advisors have been approached. It is hoped that an appointment will be made by 23rd November.

12.3 The revised timescale for the review is therefore as follows

Evidence collection	early Feb 2008
Drafting of report	late Feb 2008
Consultation on draft report	March 2008
Finalisation of report	early April 2008
Presentation of report to Assembly	23 April 2008

### **Strategic Review of Transport**

12.4 The aim of this review is to assess how transport policy within the West Midlands contributes to the Region's success in integrating economic, environmental and societal needs.

12.5 The Review Panel received its initial briefing in September 2007 which included an introduction to the strategic review process and regional transport issues. Subsequently, a call for evidence was issued requesting that individuals or organisations indicate willingness to be involved by submitting written evidence or participating in evidence sessions.

12.6 Although the review will contain the following stages Members should be aware that anticipated timescales may change as the review progresses.

Evidence Gathering – will continue until March 2008. Meeting dates are currently being scheduled.

Consultation – on a draft report including recommendations for future action is expected to take place from 19 May to 13 June 2008. The responses to this will inform the final report.

Endorsement– It is expected that the final report will be submitted to the full Assembly for endorsement on 9 July 2008.

### **13. FLOODING: LESSONS LEARNT REVIEW**

- 13.1 Following this summer's floods an independent review was set up to see what lessons could be learnt. The Review is being chaired by Sir Michael Pitt, Chief Executive of the South West Strategic Health Authority and former local authority chief executive. Its focus is to examine how the risk and impact of floods could be reduced and how the emergency response could improve.
- 13.2 The *Flooding Lessons Learnt Review* team including Sir Michael and Bruce Mann the Cabinet Office Head of Civil Contingencies Secretariat met with some forty Assembly members, local authority councillors, officers and other partners following the Assembly meeting in October. It is understood that this was the only regionally arranged meeting and the Review team have valued the opportunity to hear the experiences and opinions of the region first hand.
- 13.3 Following this meeting a officer response to the Review was submitted. This covered a wide range of issues including improving the preparedness for flooding, the clarity of processes, structures and roles and responsibilities, communications with the public, the impact on businesses, communities and rural areas and long-term prevention and mitigation measures.
- 13.4 An interim report from the Review to government is expected in December with final recommendations next spring.

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