

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

8th DECEMBER 2006

Report by Chief Executive

UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

Context

1. This report is now a standard item at each meeting of the Partnership and provides an overview across all areas of Partnership activity. On this agenda there are detailed reports from three work areas – transport, waste and economy and skills. At the March meeting there will be similarly detailed reports dealing with housing and with culture, including consideration of a sub regional Tourism Development Plan which is currently being prepared. In due course all work areas will be covered.

Meeting with the Secretary of State

2. A delegation from the Partnership met Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, on 3rd October 2006. The meeting was held in a positive atmosphere and there was general acceptance that current governance arrangements in the West of England were 'fit for purpose' and were acceptable to the unitary authorities and to partners. The meeting therefore focussed on delivery of the growth agenda and the need to assess options for future delivery arrangements.

New Growth Points

3. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has announced that the West of England is one of 29 areas to be granted the status of New Growth Point (NGP). It is anticipated that this status will assist in attracting external resources for the provision of infrastructure although details of how this will work in practice have yet to be announced.
4. The Partnership made a series of bids for a share of the NGP 'pilot fund' and was successful with the following:
 - I. Homes West land banking project (£1.1m capital). This bid was made to part fund land or property purchases by the HomesWest consortium, which will be matched by the RSL's themselves. The objective is to create a number of new affordable homes. Details of the project are currently being worked up but it is likely that one or two sites will be acquired, probably in Bristol and South Gloucestershire, for schemes comprising a mix of open market, social rent and shared ownership, offering a mix of different equity stakes to meet a range of needs and incomes.

- II. Green Infrastructure toolkit (£55,000 revenue). This project will build on work already carried out by the West of England Green Infrastructure Group and will produce a practical and accessible Green Infrastructure Tool for use mainly by planners, developers and community organisations. The partnership will be kept up to date with this project.
- III. Sub-Regional Delivery Plan (£100,000 revenue). Details are provided in the following section.

Sub Regional Delivery Plan

5. The need for this work was identified by the Partnership at its meeting in July and a bid was subsequently made to the New Growth Points pilot fund. The bid noted "a delivery plan is essential if growth in the sub-region is to take place in a managed and controlled manner."
6. In working up the detail it is proposed to:
 - I. Arrange a workshop for all the working groups and partners of the Partnership. This will ensure that all aspects of the Partnership's work are properly inputted into the Delivery Plan and will also significantly strengthen the operation of the Partnership itself. A number of the groups have reported that they wish to have closer working relationships with the rest of the Partnership.
 - II. Appoint suitably qualified consultants to prepare the Delivery Plan itself so that it represents the best possible documentation to secure external resources for infrastructure and for capacity building.
7. In terms of programming it is anticipated that considerable progress with the Delivery Plan will be made in the period between this meeting of the Partnership and the next meeting in March. The Partnership will therefore be kept up-to-date with progress by means of update reports and through the workshop.

Regional Spatial Strategy

8. Preparations for the forthcoming Examination in Public (EiP) are now underway. The Partnership Office has a project management role in order to ensure comprehensive involvement of the unitary authorities and appropriate partners. The EiP will be held in Exeter from 17th April to 29th June 2007.
9. The Joint Study Area 2 submission (JSA2) that was earlier considered by the Partnership and by PTEG has now been refined to consist of a chronology of key activities and reports together with their status and is currently being finalised. There is considerable, and increasing, work relating to the EiP in response to requests for information from the EiP Panel and from consultants working for the Assembly and SWRDA and in ensuring that the sub region makes the best possible case to the EiP.

Planning, Transport and Environment Group (PTEG)

10. At its meeting on 29th November PTEG made three decisions. It agreed its proposed role and mode of operation (to be considered by the Partnership); it agreed to change its meeting dates so that they take place before Partnership meetings, thereby enabling PTEG advice to be submitted in good time to the Partnership; and it agreed a series of recommendations relating to transport, again to be considered by the Partnership.

11. The following vision is proposed for PTEG:

“ The PTEG is the sounding board and advisory group for WEP on planning, transport and the environment. Its purpose is to develop awareness of these subjects across the sub region; to have well developed linkages with all the WEP working groups to ensure a good level of integration across all WEP activity and to provide a clear work programme for the Group.

PTEG shall also promote awareness of best practice across the UK and relate this to projects and policies in the West of England.

In delivering this vision Members of PTEG shall keep well informed about the subject matter and engage in positive creative debate. Officers shall produce succinct, well researched reports, circulated in good time to inform and stimulate the Group's discussions.

Recommendations from PTEG shall carry weight and be considered by the Partnership and by appropriate working groups. The output from PTEG is intended to be influential within the Partnership.”

12. PTEG agreed the following recommendations relating to transport issues:

- i. To note and congratulate the progress made with delivery of the Joint Local Transport Plan.
- ii. To request DfT to carry out an early review of the rail franchise in the West of England, especially relating to commuter rail services.
- iii. To invite the rail officer from DfT responsible for the sub region to attend a future PTEG meeting.
- iv. To request a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss urgent rail issues.
- v. To request that the local authorities in the West of England review staffing resources in order to ensure that sufficient resources exist to deal with rail issues.
- vi. To request that the Partnership prepares an effective lobbying strategy for dealing with transport and other issues, involving MP's and MEP's and other key contacts.

Economy & Skills

13. This Group has made its priority the production of the Sub Regional Economic Strategy and the draft Strategy is included elsewhere on this agenda. Once the Strategy has been completed the Group will develop its future work programme based upon the Delivery Plan.
14. The IT @ Work project is continuing to work well and to deliver to its agreed targets. The Science City Initiative is refining its scope and delivery plan and a full report on its activities will be submitted to the Partnership in March.

Waste Management and Planning Strategy

15. Again, the work of the Group is described as a specific agenda item.

Transport

16. Governance arrangements for the development of the major transport schemes are described within a specific report on this agenda. The Partnership is also working on all aspects of the Joint Local Transport Plan, and is heavily involved in such matters as rail and concessionary fares. A comprehensive presentation was made to the meeting of PTEG on 29th November 2006 and a Joint Transport Forum (involving over 100 people) was held on 6th December 2006.

Housing

17. The Housing group has a wide ranging and comprehensive operation with six sub groups covering Access to Housing; Supporting People; Private Sector; Homelessness, Advice and Temporary Accommodation; Enabling; and Gypsies and Travellers. The group is in the process of producing its Delivery Plan for 2007/08 with a group workshop in January. The plan will be finalised in February and submitted to the Partnership in March. It is therefore intended that there will be a significant item dealing with housing issues at the next Partnership meeting.

Culture

18. The work programme is being refined and it is planned to submit a full report to the March meeting of the Partnership. The Tourism Development Plan is now in a final draft form and will also be considered in March.
19. The West of England Working Group for the 2012 Games continues to develop its work programme and an ambitious bid has been made for the UK School Games in 2008 or 2009. An announcement on this bid is expected shortly.

Rural Strategy

20. The Group considered a report on its future at its meeting on 13th November 2006. It agreed that the Partnership office should take over responsibility for its organisation and for a review of its membership together with the linkages to the Rural Renaissance Partnership Board (and the membership of that Board). At the next meeting, early in 2007, a programme will be considered leading to the review of the sub regional rural strategy with the objective of providing an up-to-date framework for supporting and developing the rural area of the West of England.

Public Health

21. The potential for a sub regional initiative has been raised previously. A meeting is being scheduled with GOSW and others early in the New Year and progress will be reported to the Partnership in due course.

West of England Partnership Office (WEPO)

22. All appointments have now been made to the new staffing structure although three staff are currently working their notice and will be joining WEPO early in 2007. All the team is now accommodated on the 5th floor of Wilder House. An 'Open Day' is being held on Monday 18th December so that members, officers and partners can have the opportunity to visit the office to meet staff and to discuss ongoing and future work.
23. The budget arrangements for WEPO are in the process of being finalised with officers from Bath and North East Somerset (the lead authority). It is envisaged that there will be individual cost centres – for transport, economic development, policy and research and for the 2012 Games. This will facilitate close budgetary control. As this work is being completed there will be close consultations with appropriate officers in each authority.
24. A Business Plan for WEPO will be submitted to the next Partnership meeting containing proposed outputs for 2007/08 together with details of budget.

Recommendations:

That the Partnership:

1. **Notes the update report and the plans for future reporting (para. 1)**
2. **Approves the proposed arrangements for progressing the sub regional delivery plan (para. 6)**
3. **Considers the proposed vision for the role and operation of PTEG (para.11)**
4. **Considers the recommendations from PTEG relating to transport issues (para. 12)**
5. **Approves the changes to the management of the Rural Strategy Group (para. 20).**
6. **Notes the progress with the establishment of the Partnership Office and the [preparation of a Business Plan (para 24).**