

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

9th MARCH 2007

Report by Chief Executive

WEST OF ENGLAND: ECONOMIC STRATEGY

1 Purpose of Report

1. To advise the Partnership about the outcome of recent consultation on the Draft Economic Strategy with stakeholder organisations;
2. To submit the revised draft Economic Strategy, as agreed by the Economy and Skills Group following the consultation, to the Partnership for approval; and,
3. To propose a set of sub-regional priority initiatives to be pursued by the Economy and Skills Group in order to deliver the Economic Strategy.

2 Background

2.1 Members of the Partnership will recall considering drafts of the Economic Strategy and associated Delivery Plan at their last meeting held on 8th December. The drafts have emerged from work of the Economy and Skills Group. The Strategy offers long-term strategic direction, in accord with the 'vision' of the Partnership, to the job creation and training activities of the local councils, other public agencies, business and other interests. It would be refreshed at 3-year intervals. The Delivery Plan deals with the short-term and the implementation of the Strategy. It would be reviewed annually.

2.2 The range of activity embraced by the draft Strategy and Delivery Plan is comprehensive reflecting the diverse responsibilities of the partners and their commitment to working jointly towards the delivery of the 'vision'. The Strategy is expressed in terms of objectives and strategic initiatives arranged under some 7 themes as follows:

- Business competitiveness, productivity and support;
- Skills and workforce development;
- Business sites and premises;
- Infrastructure, regeneration and the environment;
- Tourism;
- Promotion and influence; and,
- Monitoring and intelligence.

2.3 The draft Delivery Plan identifies the key priority initiatives and actions required of partners over the next 3 years in order to implement the Strategy. The actions therefore, seek to offer more detail about how over the short-

term, the initiatives of the Strategy are to be implemented and objectives pursued.

2.4 Members will also re-call, that at the last meeting of the Partnership, it was agreed that the emerging drafts of the Economic Strategy and associated Delivery Plan should be approved for consultation with stakeholder organisations. As a result, stakeholder organisations were invited to give full and formal consideration to these drafts with comments to be reported back to the Partnership office by 2nd February 2007.

3 The outcome of consultation with partners

3.1 Comments on the draft Strategy and Delivery Plan have been received from the four local authorities, SWRDA, Jobcentre Plus, West of England LSC, Midsomer Norton Chamber of Commerce and the University of Bristol. Together these organisations have raised over 90 concerns. A summary of the key concerns is set out below.

Business Competitiveness, Productivity and Growth

- The on-going review of business support services being led by SWRDA and Business Link should ensure convenient access to such services across the sub-region and a range of services 'tailored' to local requirements.
- Greater acknowledgement should be given to the development of the Bristol and Bath Science Park at Emersons Green and the need to realise further opportunities for such developments elsewhere in the sub-region.

Skills and Workforce Development

- The need to establish an employer led, 'Employment and Skills Board' for the West of England to provide a partnership framework for carrying forward the South West LSC Skills Strategy should be acknowledged.
- The following schemes should be highlighted: the JobCentre Plus, 'Pathways to Work' programme, designed to encourage persons off benefit and into employment; the intention of LSC to prepare a 'community strategy' to facilitate and coordinate the provision of training to disadvantaged communities; and, the intention of JobCentre Plus and Connexions to jointly develop a plan to coordinate Information, Advice and Guidance Services.
- The need to raise educational attainment in general should be emphasised and the crucial role in this respect, of education authorities should be highlighted.

Business Sites and Premises

- More specific direction should be offered about the role of key employment locations and the issues arising in realising their potential.
- More specific direction should be provided about the need for employment land within the 'urban extensions' proposed for South Bristol.

Infrastructure, Regeneration and the Environment

- Insufficient acknowledgement is provided about the emerging spatial strategy, how the economic aspirations are to be delivered, in particular for the regeneration of South Bristol and economic expansion at Weston-super-Mare.

3.3 In addition, many suggestions have been made about textual amendments, largely to improve accuracy.

3.4 A number of organisations have expressed concern about how the Strategy is to be implemented. SWRDA suggest the setting up of a sub-group to work-up the Delivery Plan. Bristol and South Gloucestershire express concern that the Delivery Plan may be too ambitious given the resources available to WEPO, the local authorities and other delivery agencies. For these reasons, South Gloucestershire proposes that the Delivery Plan should focus on 6 or 7 'must do' initiatives. These might be:

- The provision of a comprehensive and high quality business support service.
- The provision of a comprehensive West of England inward investment service.
- A year on year increase in the percentage of the workforce attaining level 2.
- The extension / consolidation of programmes for supporting disadvantaged / excluded groups into sustainable employment across the West of England.
- A sub-regional review of employment land allocations (to inform local development frameworks).
- Progressing development on key regeneration sites and the Science Park at Emersons Green.
- An extension / consolidation of sector initiatives where public sector intervention is required.

4 Conclusions

4.1 The outcome of the consultation on the draft Economic Strategy and Delivery Plan was considered by the Economy and Skills Group at the meeting held on the 20th February. It was agreed that the majority of the concerns and other issues raised by the consultation could be accepted without affecting significantly the direction of the Strategy. The resulting revised draft of the Strategy is attached.

4.2 The Economy and Skills Group also concluded at the meeting held

on the 20th February that further refinement of the draft Delivery Plan should be undertaken before seeking the approval of the Partnership. Finally, the Group concluded that this further refinement, owing to resource considerations, should focus on addressing the key, 'must do' initiatives, essential to the delivery of the Strategy.

4.3 The Economy and Skills Group agreed that that the priority, 'must do', initiatives to be pursued in order to deliver the Strategy should in broad terms, reflect the listing put forward by South Gloucestershire (see para 3.4). However, the Group considered that in finalising the priority initiatives greater emphasis should be given to re-engaging persons on incapacity benefit, supporting younger persons, specifying target sectors, supporting regeneration areas as well as key regeneration sites, and supporting the delivery of the sub-regional spatial strategy.

4.4 In order to progress the key, 'must do' initiatives, the Economy and Skills Group propose the establishment of a set of focused 'task and finish' groups to determine required actions, outputs, timescales and the targets to be met, and thereby a Delivery Plan that can be approved by the Partnership. The need for groups focusing on 'business support', skills and workforce development', and 'sites and premises', was highlighted. It was also agreed that the Chair of the Group and the Chief Executive of the Partnership should seek to establish the required 'task and finish' groups. The formation of the groups and their progress in delivering the listed priorities should be reported to the next meeting of the Group scheduled for May 22nd.

Recommendations.

That Partnership:

- 1 Approves the West of England Economic Strategy.
- 2 Considers the list of priority 'must do' initiatives set out above by paras 3.4 and 4.3 as a basis for developing an effective and focused Delivery Plan.

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