

# The West of England Partnership

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## Board Meeting

14 March 2008

The Campus, Weston-super-Mare

### Present:

#### **Bath and North-East Somerset**

Cllr Francine Haerberling

Cllr Adrian Inker

#### **Bristol City Council**

Cllr Helen Holland (Chair)

Cllr Steve Comer

Cllr Richard Eddy

#### **North Somerset Council**

Cllr Nigel Ashton

Cllr Nan Kirsan

#### **South Gloucestershire Council**

Cllr John Calway

Cllr Ruth Davis

Cllr Roger Hutchinson

### **Social, Economic & Environmental Partners**

John Savage, Executive Chairman, Business West

Steve Grainger, Avon Wildlife Trust

### **Observers**

Hilary Neal, Government Office for the South West (GOSW)

Ian Knight, South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)

### **In attendance**

Graham Turner, Chief Executive, North Somerset Council

David Turner, Director of Development and Environment, North Somerset Council

Amanda Deeks, Chief Executive, South Gloucestershire Council

Peter Jackson, Director of Planning, Transportation & Strategic Environment, South Gloucestershire Council

Terry Wagstaff, Assistant Chief Executive, Bristol City Council

John Everitt, Chief Executive, Bath and North East Somerset Council

Sally Gregory, Policy Officer, West of England Partnership

David Redgewell, Campaign for Better Transport

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr Elfan Ap Rees, North Somerset Council

Cllr Nan Kirsan, North Somerset Council

Ian Ducat, SW Trades Council

Prof. David Clark, University of Bristol

Peter Connors, ChangeUp Consortia

Sonia Mills, North Bristol NHS Trust

David Rapley, Wiltshire County Council

Simon Birch, West of England Partnership

Paul Hickson, Somerset County Council

## **2. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2007**

### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes be noted.**

## **3. PUBLIC STATEMENTS**

David Redgewell of the Campaign for Better Transport spoke to a statement which was circulated to members of the Board. His organisation considered the formation of an Integrated Transport Authority was the only way to successfully tackle the transport problems in the area. Their main concern was that the Partnership was in danger of missing this opportunity to get powers from central government by proposing a body which was a 'half measure'.

## **4. UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY**

Sally Gregory presented the paper on behalf of the Chief Executive. She said that potential projects for Growth Points funding had been assessed and prioritised, with the resulting priorities considered by the Programme Steering Group. Work was being carried out to progress major transport schemes but the approval for the Greater Bristol Bus Network was still awaited. Progress was also being made in the development of the Waste Management Strategy and a Joint Waste Core Strategy. The Sub-Regional Development Plan was due to be delivered by the consultants SQW that week, but would then need to be updated, eg by taking account of the Examination in Public Panel Report and the Growth Points projects.

David Turner (North Somerset) said that earlier in the week the Waste Management Board had recommended that the Joint Waste Management Strategy be referred back to each unitary authority for consideration. They also agreed the submission of an Expression of Interest to Defra.

Steve Grainger (Avon Biodiversity Partnership) said that he had serious concerns about the process of agreeing Growth Points projects. David Turner said that projects had been reviewed against a range of criteria and submitted to the Programme Steering Group, which consisted of Executive Members from the four unitary authorities, and they had approved the projects on the basis of the prioritised score. Cllr Helen Holland thought the process should include partners and Steve Grainger asked for the matter to be put right.

Cllr Steve Comer (Bristol) was concerned that the media was giving misleading and mixed messages about technologies in relation to the waste procurement. David Turner clarified, saying that the Expression of Interest could include a preferred technology, but that it was not binding. The next stage would be the submission of an outline business case in October, including a reference project with a preferred technology, but this wasn't binding either. It would not be

binding until the signing of the PFI contract. It was currently too early to say that they were committed to any technology.

Steve Grainger said that he supported the work on the major schemes but information made public through the Freedom of Information Act had raised a lot of environmental concerns and appeared to suggest that the Board had backed the proposal. He felt that clarity was required. Cllr Helen Holland said that there had been a lot of correspondence on this and that Barbara Davies had prepared a statement in connection with the PTEG meeting on 28 February 2008. The Partnership had not made a decision and the publicity had focused on options which were currently being prepared by consultants for consideration by the authorities in due course. Apologies had been made for the appearance that a decision had been made.

**Resolved that:**

- **The lack of partner involvement in agreeing Growth Funds projects be addressed**
- **The briefing note in relation to the meeting with Tom Harris MP would be circulated to all members of the Partnership**
- **Barbara Davies's statement would also be circulated.**

## **5. MULTI-AREA AGREEMENT**

Terry Wagstaff (Bristol) presented his report and said that the MAA needed to show added value. He said that there was now a dialogue with government on the MAA and that he expected that the current indicator list would be final. The Local Development Frameworks allowed the flood protection process to operate without the need for it to be included in the MAA. Discussions were still continuing on whether business continuity should be included. It was necessary to now be very specific about the 'asks'. He proposed to report to the next meetings of the Programme Boards.

Cllr Helen Holland said that this could give a strong signal to government that the West of England was serious. The complementarity with the Local Area Agreements (LAAs) was important. The West of England was much further ahead than the other parts of the South West region and had the opportunity to show best practice.

Graham Turner (North Somerset) thanked Terry Wagstaff for his work and said that discussions were still going on in relation to the worklessness and NEET aspects. Cllr Helen Holland was concerned that partners were involved in this. Graham Turner said that partners were heavily involved through the LSPs and that officer discussions were informed by these discussions.

Steve Grainger said that although there was a strong strategic commitment in the Partnership's Vision to delivering an improved quality of life including a high quality environment, these issues did not appear to be addressed in the MAA. It had been suggested that the MAA was focused on economic indicators rather than environmental ones, but this was to fail to understand that economic success depended on addressing social and environmental issues. He thought that the Partnership needed to look again at addressing these issues in its MAA.

Graham Turner said that it was important to have a focused MAA and that the MAA and LAAs should be viewed as a package and it was agreed that the LAAs should be circulated. Cllr Helen Holland said that there were environmental indicators in the MAA, eg on congestion. Cllr Ruth Davis said there was no doubt about the commitment to the environment but it wasn't a headline issue in the MAA. More work needed to be done to pull out environmental issues. It was agreed that these issues should be addressed through the development of a narrative with a strong statement about environmental sustainability.

Hilary Neal (GOSW) said that the MAA was on the right lines and welcomed the development of a narrative. Progress was extremely positive and it was important to send the right messages to government and to the region. It was also important to be clear to government about the 'asks' and to understand what could already be done. As it went forward the Partnership should engage with SWRDA and GOSW, as they could help by testing out proposals with government.

Peter Jackson (South Gloucestershire) said that resources would be important and, as these would be determined by at regional level, officers needed to consider the relationships with SWRDA and regional bodies in connection with the Regional Funding Allocation process.

Ian Knight (SWRDA) said that they were already heavily involved. He was enthusiastic about the MAA, especially with the focus on the economy. The issues SWRDA wanted to take forward needed sub-regional involvement. However, there would be challenges because previously the RDA hadn't had to operate at a sub-regional level. They were working on a Strategic Investment Framework for key areas, including the West of England. The next layer would involve a Business Plan for RDA funding within the MAA. It was important to work together to get the best Regional Infrastructure Fund input.

Terry Wagstaff said that in November a Joint Business Plan had been agreed by the RDA. Colin Molton (SWRDA) and David Edwards (English Partnerships) had agreed to talk through these issues. He felt that there was an open door to the RDA but it was important to get down to specifics.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Partnership notes progress and next steps**
- **Officers draft and circulate a narrative within the next two weeks which shows how the MAA will deliver the Vision, shows clearly the added value of the MAA and includes a strong statement about environmental sustainability.**

## **6. GOVERNANCE**

Terry Wagstaff said that it was important to strengthen how the Partnership worked collectively. Proposals for this were set out in paragraph 7. There were two joint committees at the heart of the proposals. When setting the framework it would be important to get a balance between decisions of the four Cabinets and the Joint Committees. It would be important to ensure that the views of other parties and of specialists could be taken account of and this was proposed

through the strengthening of Joint Advisory/Scrutiny Boards. Proposals also included delivery companies.

Terry Wagstaff said that the workshops had involved much discussion about powers and how what was proposed compared with an Integrated Transport Authority (ITA). An ITA had been discounted because it would not allow democratic accountability through Cabinets' involvement in setting the framework. Following a preliminary discussion with an official from the Department of Transport (DfT) on the basis outlined in paragraph 12, he thought that terms could be defined which would allow the Transport Joint Committee to tackle public transport quality. However, the technical work would need to be done quickly to enable the Joint Committees to be implemented from May.

Cllr Helen Holland said that this was a watershed moment for the Partnership. She thanked the chief executives and others for the work they had done. Cllr Francine Haeberling (BANES) echoed this, saying she had no hesitation in supporting the proposals.

Amanda Deeks (South Gloucestershire) also said that she supported the proposals in principal. However, there was detail to be agreed in relation to the schedule of delegation, which was needed speedily, and there was a need to test the proposals with investors. South Gloucestershire saw these proposals as the route to delivery because they maintained democratic accountability and cross-party ownership and maintained the role of the SEEPs. South Gloucestershire wanted to see delivery solutions which were joined up and wanted safeguards built in so that no aspect was seen in isolation. Cllr Helen Holland said that it was the responsibility of the Cabinets to ensure that the strategies were integrated and then to pass on the delivery to others.

Cllr John Calway (South Gloucestershire) and Cllr Nigel Ashton (North Somerset) both welcomed the paper but agreed that further discussion was needed on the detail.

John Savage (Business West) said the SEEPs could support these proposals. However, he did think it was important to ask whether the Partnership had the right SEEPs involved. From the business viewpoint, he encouraged everyone to make sure it worked. It was important that there was a response to the West of England as the economic power for the South West.

Steve Grainger said he was concerned to retain a holistic view and wanted clarity about what the SEEPs could add to the process because he felt that it wasn't working at present. Cllr Helen Holland agreed that it was not working well, but hoped it would improve. She expected that there would be a clearer basis for involvement of the SEEPs in the new arrangements. Cllr John Calway said it was crucial that the Partnership team was strengthened to support the SEEPs. John Everitt (BANES) said that there was considerable engagement with SEEPs on the LSPs and there needed to be more joining up.

Hilary Neal welcomed the proposals as a strong step forward and said it would give government departments the comfort of stronger governance. She asked why there wasn't a move towards a Joint Committee for Planning and Housing. She also said that government departments would want to explore whether these proposals were strong enough to pursue the ambitious transport agenda

under the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) and wondered if there was a way of further strengthening what was being proposed to bring it nearer to an ITA, which may help in raising the borrowing required. She said that further exploration was necessary to work out the details. She also recognised that there needed to be a dialogue about the detail in any case, to ensure that the proposals were sufficient to allow the Partnership the additional powers.

Cllr Helen Holland said she was a little disappointed by this response. The Partnership wanted a model which would deliver TIF. She said the message from ministers had been that they should go to the DfT with the model that suited the West of England and that it wasn't a 'one size fits all' situation.

John Everitt said that it was important to maintain the element of local democracy. They accepted that the involvement of significant amounts of money meant that there needed to be discussion with central government, but hoped that there would be flexibility on both sides. They wanted central government to tell the West of England what their concerns were and to enter into debate.

Cllr Steve Comer (Bristol) wanted clarity from the DfT so that officer time wasn't wasted. Terry Wagstaff said that his initial contact with the DfT suggested they were keen that the West of England remained interested. John Savage thought that Whitehall should support local government in making this work and was prepared to make the business voice heard if necessary. Terry Wagstaff said that the timing of the meeting with the minister was critical. He suggested that a date was arranged now and that officer discussions progressed in the meantime; also that use was made of the meeting with Tom Harris MP.

Hilary Neal agreed with the points which had been made but couldn't say that it would be easy. The DfT needed to understand the model and there needed to be clarity from them about ways to develop it. She supported bringing the minister down at an appropriate time.

Cllr Helen Holland said that reassurance and phasing were vital. It would be very damaging if the members persuaded their authorities to approve the proposals and then found that the government wanted something different.

**Resolved that the Partnership:**

- **supports the strengthening of Partnership governance (as outlined in paragraph 7 and Appendix C)**
- **seeks to pursue discussions with officials and relevant ministers from the Department of Transport, and seeks the support of the Minister for the South West**
- **considers implementation in May to gain immediate benefits**
- **notes that MAA negotiations with government departments, its agencies, the strengthened RDA and the Homes & Communities Agency will continue and may warrant further developments in our governance arrangements (as outlined in paragraphs 8 to 13).**

## **7. DELIVERY**

Terry Wagstaff said that when further legal and financial advice had been taken he would bring a further report to the Partnership.

**Resolved that:**

**Subject to legal and financial advice, the Partnership approve the action proposed in the report to establish a delivery vehicle to:**

- **provide consultancy services to the Partnership on the best means of specifying and delivering individual major infrastructure projects, once they are financed and approved, to ensure consultants / contractors are commissioned / procured effectively**
- **once specified, ensure the delivery of major infrastructure projects within agreed timescales, specification and budget, by effective commissioning of consultants and contractors**
- **ensure top quality project management.**

## **8. BUDGET**

**Resolved that:**

**The report be deferred and a revised report with full details be considered at the next meeting.**

## **9. UPDATE ON CORE CITIES ACTIVITY**

Jenny Ford (Bristol) said that there were two main areas: the Sub-National Review and financing major infrastructure projects. Cllr Helen Holland said that there had been a good discussion at the meeting with John Healey and Pat McFadden, which revealed different views from different government departments. Bristol was asking for the Homes and Communities Agency to agree in principle to upfront finance for major infrastructure projects. They were looking at the possibility of paying it back through the retention of business rates in a particular zone and there would be more details on this in due course.

In response to a question about the relationship between the core cities and the city regions, Jenny Ford said that the Core Cities reflected the work done in the city regions but did not speak on behalf of the other authorities. Cllr John Calway said that in the past representations made by the Core Cities had affected South Gloucestershire. Graham Turner said that he found the report useful and it would be helpful if they had known beforehand and had an opportunity to comment.

**Resolved that:**

- **In future Core Cities papers would be made available through chief executives to enable the other councils to notify Bristol if there is anything they would wish Bristol to raise**
- **The report be noted.**

## **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Friday 4 July at the Council House, Bristol, followed by a sandwich lunch.