

The West of England Partnership

Board Meeting

7th December 2007
Keynsham Town Hall

Present:

Bath and North-East Somerset

Cllr Francine Haerberling
Cllr Paul Crossley
Cllr Adrian Inker

Bristol City Council

Cllr Helen Holland (Chair)
Cllr Jon Rogers (for Cllr Steve
Comer)

North Somerset Council

Cllr Nigel Ashton

South Gloucestershire Council

Cllr John Calway
Cllr Ruth Davis
Cllr Roger Hutchinson

Social, Economic & Environmental Partners

John Savage, Executive Chairman, Business West
Prof. David Clark, University of Bristol
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
Karuna Tharmananthar, Assistant Director – Development & Policy, North Somerset Council
Amanda Deeks, South Gloucestershire Council
Matthew Smith, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Terry Wagstaff, Assistant Chief Executive, Bristol City Council
Peter Jackson, Director of Planning, Transportation & Strategic Environment, South Gloucestershire Council
Simon Birch, Chief Executive, West of England Partnership
Sally Gregory, Policy Officer, West of England Partnership
Barbara Davies, Head of Joint Transport Team, West of England Partnership
David Draycott, West at Work
Scott Dickinson, SQW
James Durie, Business West
David Redgewell, Campaign for Better Transport

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Richard Eddy, Bristol City Council
Cllr Steve Comer, Bristol City Council

Cllr Elfan Ap Rees, North Somerset Council
Cllr Nan Kirsan, North Somerset Council
John Everitt, Chief Executive, Bath and North East Somerset Council
David Turner, Director of Development and Environment, North Somerset Council
Ian Ducat, SW Trades Council
David Rapley, Wiltshire County Council
Emma Collier, Change Up Consortia

2. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 14TH SEPTEMBER 2007

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted

3. MATTERS ARISING

Simon Birch said:

Item 4 - The West of England Economy Strategy was in its final stages. The summary was in draft form and had been considered by the Economy and Skills Group.

Item 6 – It had not been possible to arrange a visit because of difficulty getting a date. It was agreed that dates should be arranged for next year. E-mail updates would start in January. It was suggested that it should be made possible for people beyond the Board to subscribe to these.

4. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

David Redgewell of the Campaign for Better Transport urged the Board apply to set up an Integrated Transport Authority under the Local Transport Bill. He suggested that this would overcome current rail problems arising from a lack of rolling stock in the area. He thought that the Social, Economic and Environmental Partners' (SEEPs') report should be supported and that this area shouldn't be the last to apply to form an authority under the Bill.

5. UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

Simon Birch said that there was good news in the pipeline, with the go-ahead on GBBN imminent and one of the highest awards of New Growth Points funding announced this week. The challenge would now be to move to delivery. The Partnership was also awaiting the panel report on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy.

The Planning, Transport & Environment Group (PTEG) the previous day had discussed the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) bid and agreed on the principle that quality public transport should be in place before road charging is introduced. There would also need to be substantial public engagement beforehand and the involvement of bus and rail companies to make it work.

PTEG had given its support to paragraphs 1 – 4 of the report tabled by Partners concerning a possible Strategic Transport Authority.

Cllr Jon Rogers (Bristol City Council) said that the housing protocol made no mention of climate change. Karuna Tharmananthar (North Somerset Council) explained that this was because the areas it focused on were about relationship management.

Simon Birch was asked for further detail concerning the parish council representation at the forthcoming Examination in Public relating to Gypsies and Travellers.

RESOLVED:
That the report be noted.

6. TRANSPORT INNOVATION FUND

Barbara Davies gave a presentation (available at www.westofengland.org/downloads/OurFutureTransport.pdf). She said that the bid made was a first step in a long on-going process, which provided a significant opportunity for the West of England. There were 3 important work streams: technical development; political and stakeholder engagement; and wider consultation. The submission of the initial business case in Spring 2008 would be subject to agreement of the four authorities, with full consultation during 2008. The earliest it could be introduced was 2013. The TIF money was in addition to current and planned schemes. Enhanced governance would be necessary and was currently being considered by the four councils.

Barbara Davies was asked to send members a hard copy of the TIF document, and send spares to the authorities.

Cllr Paul Crossley (Bath and North East Somerset Council) said that the proposals also needed business and community endorsement. He was concerned to ensure that it could be fed into the agenda of full council. Barbara Davies said that the timing was dependant on completion of the technical work.

It was pointed out that the proposals did not highlight workplace charging. Barbara Davies said that this was because the government was most interested in road user charging. Hilary Neal (Government Office for the South West) confirmed this. John Savage (Business West) said that his organisation supported road user charging but workplace charging had little hope of support from his members. David Clark (Bristol University) outlined the University scheme and said that, although it had been heavily objected to, it was now accepted because it was seen to be an equitable scheme. John Savage said that the experience of UBHT was similar, but that it was different for business.

Steve Grainger (Avon Biodiversity Partnership) noted that the government had minimum expectations. Barbara Davies said that the package had to be proportionate to charging measures. It had been received favourably to date, but the detail had yet to be resolved.

RESOLVED:
That the report be noted.

7. TOWARDS A SUB-REGIONAL TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

John Savage introduced the report by the Social, Economic and Environmental Partners (SEEPs) saying that, although there were larger problems that local authorities faced, business saw transport and access as the key problems and always had. There was a need to show both government and the business community that there was an adequate governance body. The sub-region needed a powerful transport authority and the SEEPs looked to the Leaders to form such a body as soon as possible. They felt that the councils were dragging their feet.

David Clark totally supported this. Half Bristol University's employees travelled from outside Bristol. Higher Education was the fourth biggest export earner, and transport and housing were very important in attracting staff to the area.

Cllr Helen Holland (Bristol City Council) said that in the Bill the authority was now called an Integrated Transport Authority.

Cllr Jon Rogers welcomed the clarity and brevity of the report. He asked if opposition leaders could also be represented on the body, as the potential of cross-party agreement would bring stability.

Graham Turner (North Somerset Council) was concerned that councils had spent years trying to integrate housing, planning and transport and this proposal endangered that. The paper didn't set out the costs and benefits. He thought that they should be looking at improving the West of England Partnership. Cllr Francine Haeberling (Bath and North East Somerset Council) also said that they needed to ensure that housing and transport were linked. She didn't think transport should be hived off.

Cllr Roger Hutchinson (South Gloucestershire Council) thought the sub-region should have a Transport Authority because it was about delivery. He would like to see work done as quickly as possible to identify what their options were, so that the best route forward could be identified.

Cllr John Calway (South Gloucestershire Council) said that they all agreed that governance needed to be improved, but he didn't want to look at transport in isolation. Rather it should be looked at in the round including housing, growth, and economic development.

John Savage said it was a process point: the government required a credible body and the question was how to make it credible.

Hilary Neal said that the Bill provided an opportunity to move in the direction of a Transport Authority, but it was flexible. The sub-region could do what was most appropriate – but it was right that the West of England needed improved governance and accountability. The length of time it had been taking to get

approval for GBBN had been because governance was an issue. If GBBN were to be approved, it would be on the condition of improved governance. She thought the Partnership needed to look at how the arrangements could be strengthened and what the options were. The MAA also provided an opportunity to think about it and the need for it applied to New Growth Points funding as well. The work needed to be done quickly and detailed work was required.

Cllr Paul Crossley said that they needed to look beyond the West of England. Swindon was a major player and one option should be a transport authority for the wider area, including Swindon and Gloucestershire. It was pointed out that these councils should be notified that this was being considered.

Amanda Deeks (South Gloucestershire Council) said that the councils were all clear that they needed to make open challenged decisions with much more robust arrangements for the money. Although they could come up with smarter decision-making there would be no easy way of making difficult decisions.

John Savage said he had sympathy with the wider picture but they had been missing the bus. They urgently needed to agree the detailed work required to establish an effective governance body.

Cllr Helen Holland thanked the SEEPs for bring the paper and said that they had to be mindful of the timescale.

Resolved:

A workshop session be arranged on governance and delivery models, providing details of models and what needed to be done.

8. DELIVERY PLAN

Scott Dickinson (SQW) gave a presentation (available at www.westofengland.org/downloads/SQWpresentation.pdf). Scott said the Delivery Plan covered the period up to 2026. Its purpose was to share information, so that this could lead to more effective decision-making, and for use for funding bids. He said that this wasn't new information. Following the New Growth Points funding announcement, work would be needed to develop projects. Transport was clearly the number one issue and there would also be a challenge to meet the housing numbers. It would be important to ensure the infrastructure was in place to enable a regular flow of new housing to be maintained and there was a need for a body which took responsibility for this.

Terry Wagstaff (Bristol City Council) thought it was useful as a catalogue of projects. Peter Jackson (South Gloucestershire Council) saw it as a position statement but he thought it needed more detail if it was to move everyone forward. Scott Dickenson said that people had not been able to provide the detail, but that SQW could map out a timetable. Karuna Tharmananthar saw the Delivery Plan as an essential first step to providing a coherent story; however, he agreed that they needed to do a lot of work to answer the questions which had been raised.

Cllr Helen Holland said that a lot of officer work was needed and the board would want reassurance that the Delivery Plan had political ownership and that the SEEPs had been engaged.

Resolved:

The work be noted and SQW's final version of the Delivery Plan would come back to the Board.

9. WEST AT WORK

West at Work's presentation was introduced by Malachy McReynolds, Chair of West at Work. He said that West at Work was a co-ordinating, rather than a delivery body. The challenge was to get new jobs filled by people in the area. There were four projects (in Bath, Emerson's Green, Bristol and Weston). The work focused on wards with high worklessness and was something which he felt passionately about.

David Draycott (West at Work) gave a presentation (available at www.westofengland.org/downloads/WEP-Presentation.pdf). He said that the Leitch report had been the driver for this work. The growth in the economy would involve 4,000 new jobs a year and these would pose a major challenge. The sub-region still had significant pockets of worklessness, despite full employment, and significant numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). West at Work sought to co-ordinate the public sector players and this work was already underway. Priorities included: a joined up approach to NEET young people; a joined up and focused approach to worklessness and engagement of disadvantaged adults; and a standardised recruit and train offer. Their aim was to accelerate the journey from worklessness into work.

Amanda Deeks was concerned that this approach missed out higher technical qualifications and thought that there was a need to get a balance. David Draycott said that this focus was necessary – NVQ Level 2 was a step on the way to Level 4. It was important to get people from deprived backgrounds into higher education. However, the West at Work Board would look to refine the targets.

John Savage said that this wasn't a sticking plaster but had to be long term. Cllr Paul Crossley said that he had serious concerns particularly about duplication and thought these issues should be taken forward through the Economy and Skills Group (E&SG). Graham Turner agreed and wondered what the governance arrangements were. Terry Wagstaff said that West of Work would relate to the E&SG, but that its benefit was that it was employer driven, when previously the work had not been properly connected to employers. James Durie (Chair of the E&SG) said that the Group was aware of the need to focus on skills, which was much better done by West at Work. A report about their work had been made to the E&SG the previous week. He thought that resources focusing on this were needed at the Partnership office.

John Calway said that ambition was an issue. He was alarmed at the mismatch which was apparent in relation to GCSE grades and apprentices at British

Aerospace. People with skills at Level 3 were not available and the jobs were going abroad. An event the previous day had underlined that the priority was Level 2, but he thought that this shouldn't be at the expense of level 3.

Malachy McReynolds said West at Work was not another quango, nor was it a strategy group. It had identified the need to co-ordinate the public sector in order to deliver. The Level 2 focus was because employers complained most about the levels of literacy and numeracy. They had a narrow remit, targeted at 16 to 18 year olds. John Savage said the Learning and Skills Council and the Regional Development Agency were financing the work.

Cllr Adrian Inker (Bath and North East Somerset Council) said that in some families there were two and three generations of worklessness and that it was important to engage with secondary schools. David Draycott said that this was what Connexions was doing. The aim was to avoid NEETs young people by creating motivation in early years.

Matthew Smith (Bath and North East Somerset Council) was concerned about pockets of deprivation below ward level. David Draycott said that they could do the analysis down to Super Output Area level, but at this stage the 11 worst wards were the best proxy. They may end up with a more sophisticated approach at a later stage.

Cllr Helen Holland asked for information which would lead to a clearer understanding of the relationship between the Partnership, its sub-groups and those they commission.

Resolved:
That the presentation be noted.

10. MULTI-AREA AGREEMENT

Terry Wagstaff introduced the paper on a multi-area agreement (MAA), which he said would also involve governance and delivery issues. For success an MAA needed to focus on a limited number of outcomes for delivery. He drew attention to the benefits of negotiating an MAA. It could be a way of connecting regional and other government bodies and it could also simplify ways of working. To be worth pursuing, it must be of clear benefit to the West of England. He suggested priority outcomes in four areas, outlined in paragraphs 6 to 9. The underlying purpose was to support economic development and growth and a further priority outcome could focus more specifically on this, possibly in relation to employment sites.

Cllr Paul Crossley said he was happy with the principle of developing an MAA for over-arching themes. However, he was concerned about developing consultation on waste options and he was particularly worried about paving the way for a PFI, which he saw as mortgaging the future. He thought that they needed to look carefully at how the authorities got sign-up to this. Steve Grainger said he had no problem with paragraphs 6 to 9 but thought that sustaining the environment should be an additional outcome and Cllr John Calway agreed that it was hugely important. He said that the councils needed

to put governance arrangements in place. There were high stakes on delivery of their aspirations. Democratic responsibility must be built in and then they would be able to deliver. It was ambitious. There was a need to stick with the West of England vision in paragraph 10. Matthew Smith said that the governance would have to recognise that all four authorities may not agree on some issues.

Hilary Neal said that it was a big opportunity for the West of England. She wanted to go back to government with a strong case. The West of England was in a good position to build on the work done so far. The MAA would be very difficult and challenging in the timescale and she thought that the Partnership should go for it vigorously.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

(John Savage took over the Chair)

11. UPDATE ON CORE CITIES ACTIVITY

Terry Wagstaff said that this report was in response to a request for a regular report. In summary, the Core Cities were focused on the challenge to make sure that the Sub-Regional Review was delivered. They were working together for the benefit of many sub-regions. The cities recognised that they had a special responsibility for tackling climate change and had signed the Shared Commitment with the government. A meeting had been set up with the Department of Work and Pensions about taking forward work on skills.

Cllr John Calway welcomed the report.

Resolved:
That the report be noted.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 14th March 2008 at The Campus, Weston-super-Mare

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