

WEST OF ENGLAND PARTNERSHIP

14 March 2008

Report of Chief Executive

UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

1. This report provides an overview of Partnership activity. Partnership meetings are scheduled on a quarterly basis, preceded closely by PTEG and, wherever possible, by other group meetings. An up-to-date diary of Partnership group meetings and copies of papers for each meeting can be found on the Partnership website (www.westofengland.org).

Work in progress

Strengthening Governance and Delivery

2. Significant progress is being made to strengthen the Partnership's arrangements for governance and delivery. This is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

Multi Area Agreement (MAA)

3. A further important area of ongoing work, and the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

New Growth Points

4. At the beginning of October the Partnership submitted a Programme of Development to the Department of Communities and Local Government. On the basis of these submissions the government is allocating New Growth Points funding for the next three years.
5. The sub-region has now been awarded up to £23.8m, the second highest allocation in the country. In the first year (2008 / 09) the allocation is divided between capital (£7.5m) and revenue (£0.8m) to enable delivery of housing in "sustainable, prosperous and cohesive communities".
6. Initial assessments of potential projects have been made and a detailed expenditure programme drawn up. This programme was considered at a recent meeting of the Programme Steering Group.

Transport

7. There has been a substantial amount of progress across the range of transport initiatives. In summary:
 - Major transport schemes: significant progress has been made with Regional Funding Allocation approved major transport schemes. A decision is imminent on the approval of the £42m Greater Bristol Bus Network scheme, and work is progressing to submit a Business Case for a Bus Rapid Transit scheme from Ashton Vale to Emersons Green.
 - Rail: This continues to be an important issue and the Partnership has recently secured a meeting with the Under Secretary of State, Tom Harris MP to discuss the ongoing problems with West of England rail provision and franchises.
 - Congestion: In October, a first-stage submission ('Our Future Transport') expressed interest in bidding for a share of the Government's £1.4bn Transport Innovation Fund (TIF). This provides additional funding for authorities to tackle congestion by introducing quality alternatives to the private car in combination with demand management measures such as road pricing. The authorities in the West of England have already been awarded over £1.5m of development funding through TIF to investigate which package of measures would be appropriate and effective in helping to reduce existing and future congestion in the sub-region.
 - Rights of Way: In November 2007, a Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan was submitted. This will help to develop and improve the network of footpaths and other rights of way, providing better access for all.

Waste Management

8. The Partnership's work in developing a waste management strategy for the sub region is well advanced and it is envisaged that an Expression of Interest requesting government and financial support will be submitted to DEFRA by 31st March with a full business case by Autumn.
9. There are four phases to the implementation of the preferred Waste Strategy:
 - Maximise waste reduction, re-use and recycling
 - Short / medium term solutions to divert bio-degradable waste from landfill, to help reduce the risk of LATS penalties between 2010 and 2015
 - Commissioning solutions to deal with up to 200,000 tonnes per annum of residual waste
 - Procurement of additional waste treatment infrastructure (including new technology) to divert the remaining residual waste from landfill to support the vision of zero untreated waste to landfill by 2020.
10. The Partnership is also preparing a Joint Waste Core Strategy which will form part of the individual authorities Local Development Frameworks. This will provide the spatial context for waste planning in the sub region.

Sub-Regional Delivery Plan

11. The sub-regional delivery plan (funded by pilot funding from New Growth Points) is being finalised and will be important evidence to identify and to prioritise essential infrastructure. The delivery plan has been designed to be readily updated as LDFs progress and as future development sites are identified and planned. It is not yet possible to identify and to cost infrastructure requirements over the Regional Spatial Strategy plan period to 2026.

Update on working groups

Economy and Skills Group

12. The West at Work Programme Board continues to make real progress against a range of agreed priority areas, some of which will feed into the proposed MAA. These priorities comprise:
 - Young people – NEETS and jobs with training
 - Adults - worklessness and recruit & train offer
 - Sector approach to employer engagement
 - Economic and employment and skills intelligence
 - Linking skills to economic prosperity and competitiveness.
13. The Sub-Regional Economic Strategy has now been further refined and finalised.
14. The Economy & Skills Group met on 7th March to consider the following key agenda items – Consultation Draft Planning Policy Statement 4: Sustainable Economic Development; Investwest – end of year report 2007; proposed MAA; update on sub regional matters. A verbal update from the Group will be given to the Partnership if necessary.

Rural Strategy Group

15. Two workshops have now been held to begin to plan a programme of activity relating to the Rural Strategy. This has shown the huge amount of work required to ensure that all major activity is captured and fits together in a logical time sequence. Some initial work was also done on action planning in relation to needs assessments, diversification of farming, local energy production, new sustainable communities and young people. Another workshop exercise will take place during the March meeting and it is hoped that the Group can draw on experience from similar (non-county) areas.

Culture, Leisure and Tourism Group

16. At the last meeting there was a presentation on Green Spaces and Playing Pitch Strategies. There is a recognition of the importance of these strategies in ensuring that there are good quality green spaces and sports facilities in the future, and in providing development opportunities and a consistent approach in relation to planning, both within the authority area and, where possible, across the sub-region. Authorities are at different stages in the development of the strategies but all were concerned about not only the physical provision of facilities but also maintenance in the longer term. They were particularly interested in what role s106 funding could

play in ensuring that there was adequate provision in the future and hoped to be able to draw on work on sport and s106 being carried out by Oxford Brookes University.

Housing

17. The Housing Group key activities:

- **Protocol with the Housing Corporation**
The protocol has now been signed and sets out what each party will do to ensure that local authorities and partner housing associations are addressing housing needs in the sub-region. It includes actions to prevent homelessness, effectively use resources to deliver affordable homes, deliver choice based lettings and rationalise the ownership and management of housing association homes locally.
- **Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)**
Work is progressing on the SHMA for the West of England and the other areas included in the “housing market” (Mendip and West Wiltshire). Professor Glen Bramley has been appointed to conduct the housing needs assessment and a project manager has also been appointed. A well attended stakeholder event was held in February and the final report is scheduled for April.
- **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment**
The final report on the assessment was produced in time to provide the information needed by the Regional Assembly on the number of new pitches required. The Partial Review of the Regional Spatial Strategy is being held in Exeter at the beginning of March.

Recommendation:

That the Partnership notes the report.