

The West of England Partnership

Board Meeting

19 September 2008
BAWA, Southmead Road, Filton

Present:

Bath and North-East Somerset

Cllr Francine Haeberling
Cllr Paul Crossley
Cllr Adrian Inker

Bristol City Council

Cllr Helen Holland (Chair)
Cllr Gary Hopkins
Cllr Dennis Brown

North Somerset Council

Cllr Nigel Ashton
Cllr Elfan Ap Rees
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 Biodiversity Partnership
Martina Peattie, ChangeUp Consortia
Prof Len Hall, University of Bristol
James Durie, Business West

Observers

Hilary Neal, Government Office for the South West (GOSW)
Ann O'Driscoll, South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)
Maros Sagan, Hollen Ltd, Slovakia
Pat Hockey, South Gloucestershire Council

In attendance

John Everitt, Chief Executive, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Jan Ormondroyd, Chief Executive, Bristol City Council
Jenny Ford, External Relations Manager, Bristol City Council
Graham Turner, Chief Executive, North Somerset Council
David Turner, Director, North Somerset Council
Amanda Deeks, Chief Executive, South Gloucestershire Council
Terry Wagstaff, Chief Executive, West of England Partnership
Barbara Davies, Head of Transport, West of England Partnership
John Malyckyj, West of England Partnership

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Barbara Janke, Bristol City Council

Stuart Todd, Regional Secretariat
John Savage, Business West
Cllr Richard Eddy, Bristol City Council
Peter Brown, South West Regional Assembly
Ian Knight, South West Regional Development Agency
David Rapley, Wiltshire County Council
Paul Hickson, Somerset County Council
David Halkyard, Gloucestershire County Council

2. MINUTES OF MEETING ON 4th July

Resolved:

That the minutes be noted.

3. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

None had been received.

4. UPDATE ON PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS

Terry Wagstaff updated the board on the establishment of the Joint Transport Committee and Joint Waste Management Committee. The proposals would be first considered by the Bristol Cabinet and the other unitary authorities in October. The agreements would then be finalised within a legal framework. The preparatory work had identified some key issues, which he wanted to highlight:

- Democratic accountability
- The opportunity to set long-term plans with confidence
- The need to work within budgets set by councils
- Indemnities.

He explained that the agreements had already been discussed and examined by the Joint Scrutiny Committee and they had explored the question of indemnities in some depth. The indemnities were standard legal agreements, which would enable the Partnership to deliver its initiatives without financial risk should one of the unitary authorities withdraw from a particular project. However, the risk of this happening would be minimal by using the Joint Committees and Scrutiny structure to iron out difficulties prior to the delivery of any particular scheme. He felt that the agreements dealt with the areas that he had highlighted in a way that would enable the sub-region to deliver its business in a fully accountable way as well as giving confidence to partners and the business community.

Cllr Nigel Ashton stated that he did not agree with that summary. He was unhappy that as a Council Leader a Joint Committee could make a decision that he did not agree with and whilst the Scrutiny Committee could examine an issue

it would not have the power to change anything. He felt that there should be a mechanism within the agreements to allow a Leader to 'call back' a decision.

Terry Wagstaff responded by saying that he felt that such a situation was unlikely to arise as transport schemes had to be proposed by Executive Members from the sponsoring authority, so this should give comfort. Waste matters needed to be dealt with by the Partnership as a whole, as they would be bidding for large sums of money where economies of scale were important.

Cllr Ashton pointed out that there would be transport schemes that would cross boundaries and that at a Joint Committee three Executive Members could outvote the proposing authority.

Terry Wagstaff responded by saying that it was assumed that authorities developing schemes and working together from an early stage would avoid this. It was difficult to envisage a situation where one party might withdraw if the Partnership worked in this way. However, the law allowed (at any time) a Leader to withdraw their nominated Executive Members and Officers, so powers were there should an Authority wish to exercise them. The agreements had been drafted in such a way to give re-assurance to potential investors and central Government. To build in a mechanism in by which one authority could operate a veto would not be in the interests of the Partnership.

Cllr Elfan Ap Rees asked if it would be possible to have decisions be reached only by unanimous agreement. Terry Wagstaff said that legal guidance indicated that a decision could be made by simple majority.

The Chair stated that she supported working through simple majority, but that it was important to ensure that everyone felt comfortable with the decision-making process. She proposed that Leaders meetings be incorporated into the process as a statutory consultee prior to a decision being made by a Joint Committee. This would allow Leader input before a final decision was made. Terry Wagstaff said that such an arrangement could be put into the Executive Forward Plan if it was the wish of the Board.

The Chair said that the Authorities were delivering a shared vision under the umbrella of the Partnership and that it was important that they continued to prioritise and work together.

Cllr Dennis Brown felt that momentum for the Partnership could be built by sequencing schemes to sustain support. There would be wide ramifications for the Partnership if individual authorities were seen to have a power of veto.

Cllr Ashton responded by pointing out that different lawyers would have different interpretations. He said that he felt that power was being devolved down to committees. As authorities would be signing legal agreements, it would be important to get it right. He felt that there should be a mechanism by which a Leader could call a decision in and that fail-safe advice should be there and that this should not undermine the work of the Joint Committees.

Terry Wagstaff responded by saying that funding bodies would look at how the Partnership was constituted as there was a need to give certainty to potential

investors. However, he understood what was required having listened to the discussion and would work with legal officers to achieve what had been requested. He would then produce an abstract from the document for the next meeting to explain how this would be achieved.

Cllr Calway requested that the language used should avoid the use of terms such as “veto” or “call in” so as not to undermine the integrity of the Partnership.

James Durie said that he needed to be able to feedback the work of the Partnership board to the business community and asked how this might be achieved. Terry Wagstaff responded that it was vital to have the involvement of partner organisations, as this would contribute positively to RDA funding applications. Joint Scrutiny could make use of ‘expert’ witnesses but there needed to be a focus on how the Partnership worked with partners and that this could be incorporated within the Multi-Area Agreements.

Cllr Calway suggested that SEEPs be made statutory consultees.

ACTION: Terry Wagstaff to examine which partners should be included as statutory consultees.

Transport

Barbara Davies updated the board on transport issues, highlighting the Joint Local Transport Plan, major transport schemes, rail and congestion, and brought to members’ attention the Joint Transport Forum which would be held at the @t Bristol on 26 September.

Commenting on the allocation of new trains Cllr Helen Holland (Bristol) said that she had been briefed by First Great Western and it was likely that only eight new trains would be allocated to the Cardiff to Portsmouth service rather than the eleven that had been mentioned in the report. It was agreed by Board members that Cllr Holland send a letter on behalf of the Partnership supporting First Great Western’s bid.

The board discussed air quality in connection with transport matters. Barbara Davies will produce a report on this issue for consideration at a future Board meeting. Cllr Holland asked if the report could make reference to the JTLP targets that had not yet been met.

Amanda Deaks (South Gloucestershire) asked about the Emersons Green to Temple Meads rapid transit line. Barbara Davies explained that a range of alternative options are being explored, the outcome of which will be reported in the spring of 2009.

ACTION: Barbara Davies to –

- **draft letter to the Department for Transport**
- **report on air quality to a future meeting.**

Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

Terry Wagstaff explained that, whilst each local authority was preparing its own response to the RSS, there also a need for the sub-region to take a view and make a submission. He highlighted the targets that been set around housing, acknowledging the view held around the sub-region that they could not be met, and this needed to be reflected.

Cllr Helen Holland (Bristol) acknowledged the strong feelings of colleagues on this issue and said that it was important that the sub-region had worked well together and that they spoke with one voice.

Board members discussed and agreed that it was important to emphasise the need for the right infrastructure to support housing development and that this should not be compromised because of the implications for employment and sustainability

Resolved that:

The report be noted.

5. MULTI- AREA AGREEMENT (MAA)

Terry Wagstaff presented the report, which provided the timetable for concluding the MAA. Board members considered and discussed each appendix to the report in turn. It was stressed that these were briefing notes and not the document itself.

Appendix A - Strategic Context for the MAA

Hilary Neale (Government Office of South West) explained that there had been a positive meeting with Communities and Local Government (CLG) department. It was clear that CLG had confidence in the way the MAA was being developed. However there remained the need to be realistic and specific about what the Partnership wanted to achieve.

Amanda Deakes (South Gloucestershire) said there were a couple of matters that needed exploration. Firstly, the Partnership would need to consider how it could work through any disagreements around the RSS and, secondly, a review of the very tight timetable might be required before submission to the Secretary of State. She wanted the final drafts to go through cabinets prior to submission to the Secretary of State.

It was later clarified that the sign-off by the Secretary of State was at the end of November not October as indicated in the report.

Appendix B - Economic Strengths and Challenges

Cllr Brown (Bristol) noted that there were no challenges against the bullet point recording the airport and seaport. The issues of noise and pollution were seen as challenges by people living close to the airport and the potential of a barrage would be a challenge for the seaport. David Turner (North Somerset) added that it could be seen as a challenge to continue to encourage aviation and use of the

port and there was a need to emphasise the dynamic contribution that both made to the sub-region.

Terry Wagstaff replied that the Economic Assessment for the sub-region looked at the air and seaports. It was apparent that in the light of the comments that had been made there was a need to give this section further consideration.

Martina Peattie, (Change Up Consortia) suggested that a strength of the sub-region was its highly skilled work force who were employed by the Health Service. There was no mention of the economic impact of having this level of professional and academic expertise in the area.

ACTION: Terry Wagstaff to take account of comments and suggestions

Appendix C - Managing Successfully Projected High Levels of Growth in Jobs and Homes, and Securing Timely Involvement in Infrastructure

This section looked at the high level planning required for housing and employment by identifying suitable sites. Board members expressed concern around the fact that there were no numbers given and so it was hard to know how the aspirations could be managed. The need for developing infrastructure to support existing developments was also highlighted, as was the need to be more specific. Terry Wagstaff reported that Colin Molton (SWRDA) wished to meet leaders and Chief Executives to discuss these issues further.

Cllr Holland (Bristol) summarised the discussion by saying that all points of view needed to be taken into account but that it was important not to undermine the work that had already been completed.

ACTION: Terry Wagstaff to arrange meeting

Appendix D - Transport

Amanda Deakes (South Gloucestershire) stated that the third and fourth bullet points under 'Opportunities' on page 10 were not acceptable to South Gloucestershire. Cllr Roger Hutchinson (South Gloucestershire) suggested that a mechanism be found to deliver a similar result to an Integrated Transport Authority but that the way suggested was not the right way to achieve the objective.

Appendix E - Economic Growth and Competitiveness

Anne O'Driscoll (SWRDA) highlighted Opportunity 4, explaining that further work was being done to refine the statement and make it more specific. Cllr Elfan Ap Rees (North Somerset) suggested that Opportunity 4 should refer to the site at Locking, Weston-super-Mare. Ann O'Driscoll agreed to look at this again.

Appendix F - Employment and Skills

Terry Wagstaff highlighted the need to reduce the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS). It was important to continue to engage with employers, as well organisation such as Connexions, and the

relationship between the latter and the sub-region needed to be refined. Within the sub-region there were deep pockets of disadvantaged NEETS and it was important to identify what actions were needed and by whom.

Cllr Paul Crossley (Bath and North East Somerset) asked if there was to be a specific reference to people with learning disabilities. Terry Wagstaff responded by saying that part of the work around 'worklessness' would take in this issue. This was discussed further, with Board members acknowledging that colleges had a vital role to play in upskilling people so that they were better able to contribute to the community. Section 106 agreements could be used to encourage employment. David Turner asked Board members to consider what the likely outcomes of this particular strand of work would be. Would the Partnership get sufficient commitment from Government to match its aspirations? Terry Wagstaff felt that the challenge was to ensure the involvement of other partners. This would create a coherent way forward and create momentum. Hilary Neale added that the response from Government would depend on what was put to them, with a balance being found between what was bold and what was realistic. It was important to expose these ideas on an informal basis. It would therefore be useful to have the agreement of the Board to be able to do this with her colleagues in other Government departments.

Terry Wagstaff said that CLG requests for information on Growth Points had highlighted the need to show that we were planning to deal with these matters and that there was a requirement to involve a variety of partners. There was then a discussion about how this would be taken forward. There would be a Workshop in October (highlighted in the timetable) and Cllr Holland asked who would be attending. Hilary Neale responded by saying that it was a matter for the Board to decide, but it was agreed that she would liaise with Terry Wagstaff to identify whom and at what level should attend. Input would be required from RDA and Homes and Communities Agency colleagues.

Terry Wagstaff explained that David Edwards and Colin Molton had also been involved in these discussions and there maybe a need for further meetings. It was his view that the Joint Committees could further discuss some of these issues.

ACTION: Terry Wagstaff and Hilary Neale to liaise around Workshop participants and report findings to Chair.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6. JOINT WASTE MANAGEMENT & CORE STRATEGIES: IMPLEMENTATION

Terry Wagstaff outlined the current position.

Resolved:

That the board note the progress made and further developments planned.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

Cllr Helen Holland (Bristol) asked officers to review the programme to ensure that the Board would be able to cover the subjects in sufficient depth at subsequent meetings.

ACTION: Terry Wagstaff to review the programme.

8. UPDATE ON CORE CITIES ACTIVITY

Jenny Ford (Bristol) presented the report and explained that the group was currently examining the impact of the credit crunch, new proposals for financial major infrastructure and current work stream groups. Events would be run at the party conferences entitled "Urban Hub". Board Members and partners were invited to attend if visiting the conferences.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 24 October at the Council House, Bristol.