



In the Know

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This is the sixth edition of our quarterly electronic newsletter. Its purpose is simple, to keep you in the know about what is going on in the Government Office for the West Midlands and our sponsor Departments in Whitehall. We hope that you find it both informative and clear.

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Local Area Agreements

14 March was a key milestone in the development of the region's LAAs. The GOWM sent second drafts of 14 Agreements to CLG, with an assessment of progress on both indicators and targets.

On average, we have only five government designated priorities remaining to negotiate with each Partnership and Locality Teams are close to agreeing a balanced set of indicators with their Partnerships. Most Partnerships will agree to 35 indicators, with only a minority intending to focus on only fewer priorities.

As expected, all of the Agreements have prioritised worklessness, skills, education, housing, community safety and climate change, in line with the content of their Sustainable Community Strategies.

The next stage of the negotiations is already in progress – with Partnerships determining the 'stretch' targets for each of the agreed indicators. Several of the Partnerships have already shared

their initial thinking on targets with us – although the GOs are still awaiting final drafts of Target Negotiating Briefs (TNBs) on the full set of indicators from central Departments. In early March, representatives from some GOs met with Departmental leads for the indicators, to finalise the content of the final set of briefs and to discuss their minimum expectations of 'stretch' in each target.

During April and May, Locality Teams will finalise indicators with Partnerships and agree targets against each indicator. Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) for each Public Service Agreement (PSA) regard this as a critical phase – as the delivery of the PSAs critically depends on the content of the Agreements.

GOWM is due to submit a further report on 25 April – the content and format of which is still to be agreed. Ministerial sign off is scheduled for early June, with Partnerships immediately commencing work on their delivery plans.

Although there is still much to be finalised we are satisfied with the range of indicators emerging in the Agreements – these should not only deliver economic growth and social inclusion in each individual area, but will contribute to the region's priorities within the Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy, the Regional Housing Strategy and the Region's Health and Well Being Strategy.

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Local Area Agreements continued

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The new Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) will be used to target focused programmes of development and support within specific areas across the region by a broad range of public agencies.

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The Partnerships will focus on those neighbourhoods which have the highest levels of deprivation and those communities which are the most vulnerable to exclusion from the employment market, poor health, low skills and over representation in the criminal justice system. The new Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) will be used to target focused programmes of development and support within specific areas across the region by a broad range of public agencies. At the same time, communities will be encouraged to play a greater role in the development of their neighbourhoods and in shaping and managing public services. All of the Partnerships have included indicators in their Agreements which will increase the capacity of community and voluntary organisations and individuals, to engage in the shaping of future public services and their delivery.

Partnerships will not only be assessed on the level of change and improvement in their areas and the outcomes for local people – but on how local people are involved in and contribute to the achievement of these outcomes.

GOWM is confident that the region's Agreements will be completed to the Government's schedule and will effectively contribute to national, regional and local priorities and aspirations – but there remains a great deal of hard work and negotiation over the next few weeks.





Community Empowerment: The New Agenda

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Each Partnership will be funded over the next two years but the intention is for Government investment to prompt and release resources from other agencies in the region.

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Increasing the involvement of individual citizens in shaping their neighbourhoods has been part of public policy for many years. There has been a range of programmes and initiatives intended to build the skills and capacity of community groups to manage local services and projects tackling local problems – from the Urban Programme, through the Single Regeneration Budget to New Deal for Communities and Community Empowerment Networks. Across the region, there are numerous examples of community led organisations, from tenant management organisations (TMOs) to community fora – managing assets, such as local housing, organising and providing training and social care services for their communities.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (LGPIH) confirmed Government's commitment to empowering communities to take a central role in public service improvement and the recent introduction, in March, of the Community Empowerment White Paper indicates how this could be realised.

In 2007, CLG set up a number of regional community empowerment partnerships. Their purpose was to bring together empowerment 'champions' from across the regions and, working with the two empowerment Beacon councils, Birmingham and Wolverhampton, and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP), establish a programme to increase participation and influence in the region. Currently, GOWM is

working with the Partnership, to assess the level of engagement of the formal voluntary sector and community groups in the development of Local Area Agreements. This will provide us with an overview of the level of 'empowerment' in the region and what investment is being made in building opportunities for communities to get involved in local decision making. Each Partnership will be funded over the next two years but the intention is for Government investment to prompt and release resources from other agencies in the region.

Similar programmes, such as Participatory Budgets, Community Asset Transfer and, in the future, a small grants fund, available to 'front line' community organisations and activists, are intended to improve the sustainability of 'infrastructure' organisations which support individuals who want to get involved in their neighbourhood and provide opportunities for people to get more involved at a local level.

The LGPIH Act provides for new Community Charters – contracts between the local community and service providers which stipulate the range and quality of service to be provided and for which the providers will be held accountable by the community.

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Community Empowerment: The New Agenda continued

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The intended outcome of this opportunity and investment is to revive civic society and rebuild local democracy through unlocking the skills, knowledge and experience within our communities.

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Community Calls for Action – also included in the Act – continue the focus on accountability and community empowerment – by providing opportunities for the community to demand responses from their local authority/elected members when they feel appropriate action has not been taken. The intended outcome of this opportunity and investment is to revive civic society and rebuild local democracy through unlocking the skills, knowledge and experience within our communities.

The new Community Empowerment White Paper, *Unlocking the Talent of our Communities*, will build further on the agenda. In April, the region will host one of a series of five regional events, where an invited audience will work with CLG policy officers to develop the White Paper – with the intention of new legislation in November 2008.

Each chapter will deal with a specific aspect of an empowered civic society:

- regeneration
- planning
- housing
- cohesion

Details of the White Paper can be found on CLG's website at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/unlockingtalent





Saving Lives, Reducing Harm, Protecting the Public

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The prioritisation of serious violence in the new PSAs is key to achieving the Government's vision to save lives, reduce harm and protect the public.

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Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour has been one of the major public service achievements of the past ten years. Over the last decade, overall crime has fallen and there have also been reductions in fear of crime, adult re-offending rates and perceptions of anti-social behaviour.

The Government's Public Service Agreements (PSAs) for 2008-11, particularly PSA 23 - Making Communities Safer - includes commitments to prioritise action to tackle the most serious violent and sexual offences. These serious violent crimes are extremely rare; together they account for only about 1% of all crime. Yet when they do occur they cause significant harm, both to individual victims and their families. The prioritisation of serious violence in the new PSAs is key to achieving the Government's vision to save lives, reduce harm and protect the public.

The Violent Crime Action Plan, published on 18th February, is the first of its kind to focus on serious violence. The plan sets out a range of actions that the Government will be driving forward to reduce priority crime types, including gun and gang-related crime, knife crime, and sexual and domestic violence. It explores good practice and guides frontline practitioners as to how they can deliver the new PSA targets.

The plan focuses on two main cross-cutting themes:

Firstly, ensuring that agencies are able to work together to manage violent offenders, as well as those who are most at risk of involvement in serious violence, in order to prevent violence from occurring in the first place or escalating in seriousness.

Secondly, providing care and support for victims of serious violence in order to reduce the impact of and harm caused by these offences, to reduce future risk and vulnerability, and to work with the victims to secure convictions.

The Action Plan can be accessed from the Home Office website at:
www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/violentstreet/violentstreet008.htm





Taking forward the sustainability agenda in West Midlands schools

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We are keen to ensure that schools can make a full contribution towards delivering the West Midlands' sustainability strategy, whilst working towards sustainable schools standards.

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GOWM has recently appointed Mary Burton, seconded from Herefordshire Council for two days a week, to take forward work within the region to support the Sustainable Schools agenda.

She will be reporting to a steering group made up of representatives from EEAA (Environmental Education Advisers Association), Sustainability West Midlands, TIDE (Teachers in Development Education) and colleagues from the Sustainable Futures and Children & Learners Directorates of GOWM. We are keen to ensure that schools can make a full contribution towards delivering the West Midlands' sustainability strategy, whilst working towards sustainable schools standards.

Mary will be working with people in Local Authorities who are supporting their schools to work on sustainability, and also offering a strategic input at regional level. Over the summer she will be undertaking an audit of current activity in schools and Local Authorities across the region. This will feed into the development of an action plan for 2008/9.





The National Drug Strategy 2008-2018

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This is a far reaching and innovative theme that extends the scope of the strategy beyond the UK.

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In 1998 the Government launched the first national ten-year drug strategy. It concentrated on four themes:

- Young People
- Treatment
- Communities
- Availability (reducing supply)

The strategy was reviewed and updated in 2002 with a stronger focus on criminal justice interventions.

On 27 February 2008 the second ten-year strategy was launched. This modified the original themes slightly and provides greater focus on the harms drugs cause to families. The new themes are:

- Reducing supply and protecting communities
- Families and young people
- More effective treatment
- Raising awareness and changing behaviour through media and publicity.

The intention of the **first theme** is to involve communities and agencies in the planning and execution of law enforcement activity. At the same time this activity is intended to tackle drug supply and bring to bear a range of criminal sanctions, whilst reassuring the public and helping to establish drug resilient communities by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. It puts emphasis on neighbourhood policing and feedback to communities, suggests

using collective intelligence within the community to identify problems and individuals and proposes actions to prevent the emergence of drug markets.

The theme also addresses supply at source, building on existing agreements with other national States to deal with drug supplies in their country of origin; intercepting trafficked drugs in transit; reinforcing the UK border interventions; seizing assets in the UK and other States and seizing criminal assets at point of arrest. This is a far reaching and innovative theme that extends the scope of the strategy beyond the UK.

The **second theme** provides a strengthened focus on young people and families, suggesting that when addressing substance misuse the whole family circumstances are taken into consideration. It suggests that kin carers (members of the family who care for the children of drug users) should receive financial and other support from Local Authorities; that children caring for parents should receive additional support; that drug services should provide stronger continuity between prison and community, especially in relation to accommodation, training and employment; that a package of support be introduced including parental education and support; and that guidance is provided in relation to drugs education in schools and around prompt access to treatment for parents who use drugs, in a way that doesn't break up the family.

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The National Drug Strategy 2008-2018 continued

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One proposal in the treatment theme received considerable publicity at the launch, namely, the use of the benefit system to encourage drug users in receipt of benefits to engage and remain in treatment.

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The **third or Treatment theme** suggests that the currently successful initiatives aimed at encouraging people into treatment should be supplemented with efforts to determine and improve outcomes of treatment. It suggests novel funding arrangements including more use of pooled budgets; providing drug workers with individual client budgets (as in other areas of social care); and improved end-to-end case management, including support to reintegrate users into the community.

One proposal in the treatment theme received considerable publicity at the launch, namely, the use of the benefit system to encourage drug users in receipt of benefits to engage and remain in treatment. The ultimate sanction for those who don't respond in a positive way would, of course, be the removal of benefits, but the strategy suggests a range of other interventions that might be put in place before that situation is reached.

The **final theme** considers how public behaviour towards drugs might be modified by the use of publicity material and media campaigns, including the existing 'Frank' campaign. This theme, it is suggested, will approach the use of illicit drugs in a similar way to the methods used for drink driving and tobacco use.

The strategy is clearly a 'drug' strategy and one criticism might be that it doesn't address the issues of alcohol misuse. However, the strategy offers some interesting opportunities, some of which are in a sense experimental and will evolve over the life of the

strategy. It provides a comprehensive framework for tackling drug misuse over the next ten years in a way that seeks to address the harms to families, individuals and communities.

Further details can be found at www.drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk





Let's Get Cooking in the West Midlands!

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The Let's Get Cooking programme has been successfully trialled and is designed to support Healthy Schools.

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Let's Get Cooking is a 5-year, £20 million programme, supported by the BIG Lottery Fund, to set up a network of 5,000 cooking clubs across England. The programme is part of the School Food Trust and partners include Business

in the Community and the Prince's Trust.

Each new cooking club will receive funding for cooking equipment and club running costs, training for adult helpers and a range of resources. Existing cooking clubs can also come on board as associate clubs and receive resources, support and a limited amount of funding.

The Let's Get Cooking programme has been successfully trialled and is designed to support Healthy Schools. Currently a timetable is being developed for rolling out across all the Local Authorities in the West Midlands area, starting with Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell.



Two regional staff have been appointed to take the work forward in the West Midlands – Laura Needham and Deborah Robb, who are based in GOWM and working closely with the regional Healthy Schools co-ordinator.

Laura and Deborah are keen to hear about any people, cookery groups, healthy eating programmes and schools that they should contact when they come into Local Authority areas. They want to avoid duplication, develop new opportunities and add value to what is already happening.

More information can be found on the website www.letsgetcooking.org.uk

The regional staff contact details are below.

Laura Needham

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Deborah Robb

Regional Training Officer, West Midlands
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The Home Office Strategy 2008-2011: Working Together to Protect the Public

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This new strategy will steer the work within GOWM on the HO agenda over the next three years.

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The Home Office has recently produced its strategy, setting out its objectives over the next three years. Underpinning the new guiding principle of working together to protect the public, the Home Office sets out seven key objectives:

- Help people feel secure in their homes and local communities
- Cut crime, especially violent, drug and alcohol-related crime
- Lead visible, responsive and accountable policing
- Support the efficient and effective delivery of justice
- Protect the public from terrorism
- Secure our borders and control migration for the benefit of the country
- Safeguard peoples' identity and the privileges of citizenship

This new strategy will steer the work within GOWM on the HO agenda over the next three years. The lead contact in the GO for this area of work is Katie Marsh, Crime Team, Community Safety Directorate.

A copy of the Home Office Strategy can be accessed from the Home Office website at:
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/strategy-2008





Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the West Midlands

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The Sub National Review demonstrated that if every English region performed to the level of the best, our country would be £80 billion richer – and to us in the Midlands that's worth £2k per person.

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2008 has continued to be a busy year for Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the West Midlands. Liam started the new year by recognising the unique position the West Midlands were in, having launched our Regional Economic Strategy and our draft Regional Spatial Strategy together – the first region to do so. But he also reminded us that there was much to do. The Sub National Review demonstrated that if every English region performed to the level of the best, our country would be £80 billion richer – and to us in the Midlands that's worth £2k per person.

Liam challenged the region to achieve 7 magic numbers: Getting **44,000** extra people into a job; Creating **1,900** new businesses each and every year; Putting **110,000** more employees through training; Lifting **75,000** more people up to level 2+ qualifications; Creating **70,000** more graduate jobs; Boosting business expenditure on Research and Development by **£420 million**; And reducing carbon emissions by **23 million** tonnes by 2050. He also updated the region on his five priority areas and has continued to drive these forward in the first few months of the year.

Skills

On 3 March Liam launched the West Midlands' first Skills Action Plan. *The Skills Action Plan*, published jointly by the Learning and Skills Council and Advantage West Midlands (AWM), was commissioned in response to Liam's challenge to develop an integrated skills strategy to sit within the broad framework of the

Regional Economic Strategy. Together, they form the West Midlands' response to the challenges set out in the Government's Leitch Review of Skills published in December 2006. Key partners in its conception included the Confederation of British Industry, Chambers of Commerce, Engineering Employers Federation (EEF), and the West Midlands Local Government Association (LGA).

Trade

In February Liam travelled to India promoting the region in face to face meetings with Indian Ministers in the Punjab, Delhi and Mumbai. Key meetings included one with Tata, which is actively working to establish a presence in the West Midlands and ICICI Bank which has opened two branches in the region over the last 12 months and is seeking to open a third shortly. The Minister also explored the creation of new partnerships with universities and a joint centre to research climate change and green engineering.

Transport

On 10th March Liam held a regional transport challenge conference to examine the region's first list of regional transport priorities. At the summit Liam said the region had to match the UK's best bidders if it was to put the benefit of the region's ambitious plans for new jobs and new homes within reach of every family.

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Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the West Midlands continued

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Liam has continued to drive forward the outcomes of the event he held in November with the then Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, James Purnell MP

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The summit reflected the priority Liam had given to addressing transport in the West Midlands since his appointment and set out how a transformed transport infrastructure could ease the burdens in people's lives whilst responding to the opportunities and challenges of the region such as delivering sustainable homes and growth, improving the region's skills base and closing the wealth gap.

Science

In January Liam and Ian Pearson MP, Minister for Science and Innovation met Vice Chancellors from Universities across the region to explore how universities and businesses can work closer together to develop the science and innovation in our universities into jobs and wealth for the whole region. Key to developing these strong links is the attraction and retention of graduates; and the Ministers and Vice Chancellors also explored how the region could raise its game to become the UK's number one student destination.

Reputation

Liam has continued to drive forward the outcomes of the event he held in November with the then Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, James Purnell MP. In the first months of 2008 Liam has met key players including Tessa Jowell MP, Olympics Minister and Sport England, to ensure that the West Midlands takes full advantage of the opportunities of the 2012 Olympic Games.





Towards a Sustainable Transport System

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Eddington argued that the key first point for any potential investment is to be brutally clear on the goal and outcome that was being sought.

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Although issued a few months back, this Department for Transport (DfT) document is now the subject of dialogue with transport users and other stakeholders in the West Midlands. Seminars in March and April are being held at GOWM and West Midlands Regional Assembly to ensure key players understand the new thinking emerging from DfT.

The document itself set out how Government sees transport contributing to combating climate change and delivering economic growth. It summarises policy and investment plans through to 2014 and goes on to propose a new approach to strategic planning after that date. The new approach is very much based on the recommendations of the Eddington study which reported last year.

Eddington argued that the key first point for any potential investment is to be brutally clear on the goal and outcome that was being sought. Frequently the issue to be addressed is much wider than transport and requires a comprehensive set of interventions including (for example) urban renaissance measures, education initiatives and support for business development. Once clear about what is to be achieved the next step is to map the challenges in transport terms and consider whether interventions impact on urban/regional/local networks, impact on national networks or impact on international gateways.

Only then, argues the DfT document, should we begin to

think about option generation: thinking cross modally across a wide range of options. For example examination of alternative options could lead project proposers to conclude that a public transport option would best deliver the broader objectives of the intervention and offer better value for money.

After this more detailed project appraisal will follow evaluating different options on productivity, climate change, safety, quality of life and equality of opportunity leading to selection of the best option on value for money grounds against the economic benefits. Within this, proposers are being encouraged to consider a range of funding mechanisms which the Government is making available (e.g. the Planning Bill provides for implementation of a Community Infrastructure Levy as a means of raising funding from developers to help provide supporting infrastructure, particularly transport, to unlock development).

Details are available in *DfT's Towards a Sustainable Transport System: supporting economic growth in a Low Carbon World* - published October 2007. It can be found on the Departments web site, at: www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/transportstrategy/pdfsustaintranssystem.pdf





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Nominated for several national awards it can be found at: www.go-wm.gov.uk

