

Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25 November 2009
Report of: Head of Regeneration, Places
Title: The New Sub-regional Architecture

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the approach being adopted in developing a new sub-regional architecture for Cheshire and Warrington. It describes the process to date, the nature of the new structures being proposed and the timetable for further developments.

2. Background

- 2.1 The establishment of two new authorities in Cheshire on 1 April 2009 has provided the opportunity for a review of sub-regional working. Discussions between the Leaders of the two new authorities, with Warrington and Halton, took place on the most desirable form and function of new structures. Supported by Government Office for the North West (GONW) and by the North West Development Agency (NWDA), the new mechanism being put in place should provide a more effective and focused approach to decisions on issues that affect the whole sub-region.
- 2.2 The creation of the new Council coincided with a renewed focus from Government on the role of Local Government in the delivery of economic development. The Government published the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill on 5 December 2008. The Bill is due to receive Royal Assent in November. This wide-ranging legislation promotes regional strategies and a focus on sub-regions as key drivers of the economy. There is therefore a premium on sub-regions presenting a united voice at the regional level on a range of policy issues, and developing a more formal, coordinated approach to the development and presentation of that policy.
- 2.3 Cheshire East therefore needs to play a prominent role in the region on economic development and regeneration issues in partnership with Warrington and Cheshire West and Chester.

3. The New Architecture

- 3.1 In summary, the new structure will allow for:
- a more effective and focused sub-regional approach
 - a more effective and targeted use of local authority financial and staffing resources
 - potential savings

- more effective sub-regional leadership, management and coordination
- more effective interaction with and scrutiny of key agencies such as NWDA, the Homes and Communities Agency, GONW, the regional and sub-regional improvement and efficiency partnerships
- more effective involvement with 4NW, the Regional Leaders Board.

3.2 The key to leading the sub-region is the establishment of a Leadership Board. This comprises:

- Leaders of Warrington, Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils
- Leader of Halton Council as an associate member
- Chairs of the Police and Fire Authority
- The Chair of the Prosperity Commission (see below).

The Board has now met 3 times, supported by the local authority Chief Executives. A sub-regional management team has also been set up comprising the four Chief Executives together with representatives of the Police and Fire and Rescue Service. A stakeholder forum is intended to meet twice a year to act as a sounding board.

3.3 Beneath this decision-making structure, seven Commissions are being set up. The range of sub-regional groups currently operating in Cheshire and Warrington is being restructured into each of these Commissions. The membership, terms of reference and operation of each of the Commissions is to be determined by nominated lead organisations. Progress on developing each Commission is summarised below:

Prosperity (led by Warrington Borough Council)

The role of this Commission is to coordinate and integrate economic development, transport and housing. The Prosperity Commission will replace the existing Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance which will undergo a review of its board and structure. There will be a new private sector chairman (who will attend the Leaders Board), and a new Managing Director will be appointed. Recruitment to both positions is being facilitated by external consultants. It is proposed that the Vice Chair is a local authority member from either Cheshire East or Cheshire West and Chester.

Improvement and Efficiency (led by Warrington Borough Council)

This Commission will effectively be introduced by renaming the existing Cheshire and Warrington Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. A new manager has been appointed. The role is to coordinate and help to drive public sector improvement and efficiency activity through work programmes, collaborative working and shared services.

Learning and Skills (led by Cheshire West and Chester)

This Commission will coordinate and integrate skills, learning and schools activity, including the 14-19 years agenda. The aim is to create a standalone partnership, and consultants have been commissioned to consider current best practice models and to propose the most appropriate way forward.

Climate Change and Environment (led by Cheshire East)

This Commission will coordinate sub-regional activity especially on climate change. Work is ongoing to establish a structure, membership and term of reference. An early task will be to scope existing activity and partnerships across the sub-region to remove duplication and better focus efforts on minimising our climate change impacts.

Tourism and Culture (led by Cheshire West and Chester)

The role of this Commission is to coordinate and lead arts, sports and the visitor economy, with Visit Cheshire and Chester working alongside the local authorities and cultural partners. Detailed terms of reference are still being developed. Consultants have been appointed to help formulate a vision and structure, and the aim is to secure a high profile Chair.

Health and Wellbeing (led by Cheshire East and Fire and Rescue)

The aim is to secure a new partnership by February 2010 which will coordinate health and wellbeing activity, including that of the primary care trusts and health providers.

Community Safety and Justice (led by Halton Council and the Police)

This Commission will coordinate community safety, emergency planning and resilience and justice matters. It will bring together several existing groups.

- 3.4 Each Commission is obviously at a different stage in its development, with some more advanced than others. However, the aim is for all of them to have had their inaugural meetings by February.

4. Launch event at Tatton Park

- 4.1 The new architecture was formally launched on 8 October at an event hosted by Cheshire East Council at Tatton Park. An invited audience received presentations on the new proposals and was able to discuss a range of issues.
- 4.2 The launch was well attended and there was agreement that the new arrangements should provide leadership and achieve more streamlined working across the sub-region.

For discussion

Members are asked to consider and support the approach being adopted in setting up the new sub-regional architecture.