

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board  
**DATE:** 24<sup>th</sup> January 2008  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director Corporate and Policy  
**SUBJECT:** North West Development Agency (NWDA)  
Corporate Plan 2008  
**WARDS:** All

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The NWDA is consulting regional partners on its draft Corporate Plan and the purpose of this report is to present a response to this consultation. A response is required by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2008.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

**Subject to additional comments raised, Members approve the proposed response to the Consultation.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The NWDA is required by Government to produce a new Corporate Plan to cover the period 2008/09 – 2010/11. Government determines the format of the Corporate Plan. In summary, the Corporate Plan should set out how the NWDA will –

- Continue to deliver the Regional Economic Strategy
- Contribute to the delivery of the regional growth objective and Regional Economic performance Public Service Agreement
- Implement new responsibilities and duties arising from the Comprehensive Spending review Settlement and Sub National Economic Development Review, (SNR).

Members will recall that the SNR set out to identify how existing sub-national structures could be further improved. It also considered the most appropriate levels of governance and decision-making for activities directly linked to successful economic development and regeneration of deprived areas.

It is within this context that this year's NWDA Corporate Plan is being prepared.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

There are a number of policy implications that Members will need to take into account.

The NWDA's single pot is being reduced by 5% per annum. This is a reduction from £399 million per annum now, to £338m by 2010/11.

In responding to the SNR, the NWDA's Corporate Plan makes reference to Government's intention that decisions and delivery of economic development activity should take place at the most appropriate level. Regional Development Agencies, nationally, should be moving to a programme rather than a project based approach and decision-making on funding should be delegated to Local Authorities or sub-regions.

The SNR also proposes the integration of regional strategies, for example, the Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Housing Strategy and the NWDA's Corporate Plan begins to give consideration to how this work might be developed.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

There is now a greater focus on how the NWDA will contribute to achieving the minimum regional growth target. This target is between 1.9% and 2.3% per annum increase in GVA per head of population, the lower end being consistent with the Agency's Regional Economic Performance PSA target. In addition, targets are also presented at a sub-regional level.

The Corporate Plan has been presented to the North West Regional Assembly's Review and Scrutiny Group (RSG) where Members are considering whether the Plan clearly reflects a clear change of direction for the NWDA, i.e. an ongoing management of the RES, whilst delegating project decisions.

The RSG also considered the following questions –

- How should we, as a region, consider the minimum GVA/head target of 1.9% - does it represent too low an expectation given that the region, and NWDA, had agreed a higher target in the RES (2006-2009)? Can the region in any way reject this low aspiration?
- The Corporate Plan includes a forecast of sub-regional contribution to GVA growth: how important is it to identify the sub-regional contribution to GVA growth and how reliable are the figures provided?

- Can you provide more evidence for your changing spending priorities, including who so far has supported the shifts proposed? Was an Equality Impact Assessment undertaken on the draft Corporate Plan and, if so, is it a publicly available document?
- There are now 11 corporate objectives whilst the RES has 25 “factors” and 45 transformational actions. Which, if any, of the latter have been downgraded in importance? Have any particular RES actions been upgraded?
- The 11 Corporate Objectives each have financial allocation for the period 2008 – 2011: to what extent does this represent a change from previous spending and can further tables be given so comparisons with current allocations by RES factor can be made?
- Is the NWDA right to maintain its support for the regional programme of Business Link given SNR and the wishes of sub-regions? What percentage of other regional programmes will be delegated, do you envisage, by 2011?
- Can you provide any advance thinking on how NWDA intends to work in close partnership with local authorities, SRPs and the successor body to the NWRA when drafting the single Regional Strategy?

It is suggested that these questions should be reflected in Halton’s response. However, there are also other points, which have been raised by respective Council directorates and departments, set out below.

### **General comments**

General comments relate to the format and style. The document could be user-friendly and could be broken down further into sub-sections, for example, ‘Key Messages’ ‘Key Achievements’ . Whilst the document covers the key points the reader needs to plough through surplus narrative to get to the key headlines.

The order of the document could be presented in a more sequential way, because at times sections appear to be disparate and do not hang together well.

It is also suggested that the Executive Summary could be more hard-hitting, as there is a lot of narrative before the purpose of the Plan is presented. In fact, the purpose of the Corporate Plan often appears to be ‘lost’ and there appears to be a slight variation in its function. For example, on the one hand, the Executive Summary proposes that the Plan is the NWDA’s response to changes announced by Government

in the CSR and SNR, but later in the document the purpose of the plan suggests (appropriately), that its focus is on:

- How the agency will use its funds and provide support over the next 3 years?
- How the RES will be delivered?
- How outputs/targets will be met?

Similar issues relate to the vision and mission again “lost” in the main body of the text and could be articulated more simply by “*what is it we want to achieve and by when?*”

### **Other Comments**

The reference to External Factors (driving changes) particularly the legislative and political context is useful, but perhaps this section could be set out more clearly using a SWOT analysis and or PESTLE.

Following on from this, what sets us apart from other regions (our distinctive characteristics) is not clear from the document.

It is also difficult to work out what is presented as new activity, what has already been allocated to ‘new’ initiatives. How much headroom exists?

The document also refers to changes that have been announced but gives little detail on how these changes will be implemented, for example, proposed governance and reporting structures.

The document presents an ambitious Change Programme but this change in culture is inconsistent across the NWDA, and there are still examples of strategy being developed top down – the development of the governance and reporting arrangements for the New European Programme is an example of this.

The document also makes reference to the role of the NWDA in contributing to the scrutiny role. It is suggested that in light of the SNR the wording needs to be changed to demonstrate that the NWDA has a supporting role and not a driving/leading role in this respect.

Colleagues have also made comments concerning target setting and performance management specifically Page 10 – 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph – can targets be aspirational? Should not targets and objectives be set within a context of SMART?

There appears to be a considerable lack of measurable outcome indicators, which could be monitored against a set timescale. Even

where there is an attempt to set a meaningful target, some of the actual target figures are missing.

Other specific comments relate to the allocation of resources, i.e.

- Not enough NWDA resource being made available for enterprise priority areas i.e. Halton.
- No real explanation of the need for the NWDA to support cultural change programmes in these areas.
- No mention of any Halton projects as a priority for employment sites. What is the rationale for those that have been identified? A specific example is Ditton/3MG, which is a regionally important site but is not mentioned. Daresbury is mentioned but not within the context of “Higher Level Skills” and appropriate reference should be made to discussions regarding the Science Training Facility.
- Too little resource identified to tackle worklessness in the next year.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES**

In recent years, the Council has been proactive in ensuring that there is a close alignment of regional and sub-regional priorities with local priorities and vice-versa. We have worked with the NWDA to ensure that Halton’s priorities are included within regional strategy documents.

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

No direct implications.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The Council has received resources from the NWDA to support our Employment Learning and Skills priority. The proposed reduction in resources outlined in section 4 of the report is likely to impact on future funding being made available to the Borough.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

No direct implications.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

No direct implications.

### **6.5 Halton’s Urban Renewal**

The Council has received resources from the NWDA to support our Urban Renewal priority. The proposed reduction in resources outlined in section 4 of the report is likely to impact on future funding being made available to the Borough.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

None.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The NWDA's Corporate Plan identifies equality and diversity as a cross-cutting theme; i.e. any initiative or project supported by the NWDA must adhere to the principle of equality of access for all. Emphasis is placed on wider social inclusion issues and on this basis, the NWDA's Corporate Plan refers to improving low skills and qualifications levels in the region, as well as tackling low economic activity/high worklessness rates.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.