

West Midlands Futures – Project Summary

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“The future is already here - it's just unevenly distributed.” William Gibson,
Author.

“Government over estimates the difference it can make in the short term – and under estimates the difference it can make in the long-term” Geoff Mulgan,
Director of Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office.

1. Introduction

This project is to run for the next 12 months to deliver part of Advantage West Midlands (AWM) Sustainable Development Policy on “Future proofing – using longer term thinking to prepare for the future and drive innovation”. Specific goals are:

“By 2010 the region’s top 100 business and public sector organisations will be incorporating ‘user-friendly’ tools to help build in long-term thinking within their policy making and investment decisions to address the key future drivers and uncertainties of climate change, resource use, energy, demographic change, and global economic and technology changes. The result will be robust and adaptable policy, resilient organisations, innovative goods and services, and improved competitiveness.”

“By 2008 AWM will lead by example by ensuring ‘future proofing’ is built into the review of the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy (WMRES), our sustainability appraisal systems, training, and we have a Board champion for future generations.”

‘Futures’ is also a good way of bringing key issues into the mainstream debate, such as sustainable development (e.g. climate & energy) and demographic changes (e.g. ethnic business needs), because these will be even more important in the future, but require us to respond now.

Stage 1 of the WMRES review involved initial evidence gathering included work to examine future drivers and issues for the regional economy. This project seeks to build on this work, address the gaps identified, and apply the findings to ‘future proof’ the WMRES and other AWM activities.

2. Project Objectives / Outcomes

Main Focus is on WMRES

- Provide key ‘future proof’ questions to be feed into the development of the Sustainability Appraisal criteria, and provide separate ‘future proofing’ of the WMRES options and draft. This will provide recommendations for the revision of the WMRES to ensure that it is more robust against future trends and uncertainties, and able to deliver its vision.

Application to other processes

- To develop greater understanding amongst AWM staff of questions/process to be used to build in 'future proofing' through our appraisal systems to improve the long-term impact of our projects and policies.
- Trained and supported AWM Board Champion for Future Generations to ensure long-term issues are championed at our corporate decision-making level.
- Futures toolkit developed – that can be drawn on and adapted for different purposes e.g. WM foresight, business support, capacity building.
- Greater understanding amongst the regions key stakeholders of how to incorporate futures issues within their business processes to improve the long-term impact of their projects and policies

3. The Approach

Forum for the Future have been commissioned to conduct this work, drawing on previous work on practical future proofing in the North West and South East regions, business, and input into WMRES future economic drivers project.

Stage 1: Build up evidence of future drivers / uncertainties relevant for region (August-September 2006)

1 a Literature Review

Conduct horizon scanning and identifying assumptions in current WMRES. This will include identifying STEEP (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political) drivers and uncertainties from the literature that will influence the WMRES and the economy in the West Midlands in general, and existing assumptions made about the future within the current WMRES.

The review will build on current WMRES future drivers report, climate change reports, and previous work done in NW/SE and SHINE project in NE, and WM Foresight.

1 b Expert Interviews

Conduct expert interviews to verify assumptions and identify drivers/uncertainties from a variety of issues that affect the WMRES and the economy in the West Midlands.

1c Stage 1 Output

- List of drivers / issues considered
- Key drivers / uncertainties for region.

Stage 2: Develop future drivers into checklist to test for WMRES options (End of September 2006)

2 a Workshop to develop checklist/scenarios (28th September 2006)

Workshop with stakeholders to build knowledge of futures issues, confirm identified drivers/uncertainties, and develop three versions of a checklist (scenarios) to test assumed path of WMRES and two variations. Further develop scenarios.

2 b Informing development of WMRES policy options

Make recommendations to WMRES policy team on any missing issues within drafting of policy options. Potential input into WMRES related workshops on AWM staff away day on 16th October.

2 c Applications of Future Proofing to other AWM activity

Identify how future proofing work can be built into AWM existing project appraisal system, staff training and Board champion support.

2 d Stage 2 Report

- Results from workshop
- Scenarios/checklist to be used for testing RES options
- Input into development of policy options
- Recommendations on key questions to be built into AWM appraisal process, SEA/SA, and Board Champion role, and other support materials / toolkit required.

Stage 3: Testing of WMRES Options (October/November 2006)

3 a Workshop to test policy options (25th October)

Workshop with stakeholders to test WMRES options against developed scenarios/checklist.

3 b Additional assessment

Additional analysis and challenge from Forum for Future based on their assessment of WMRES options. Overall Recommendations based on workshop findings and Forum's assessment.

3 c Stage 3 Report (November 6th 2006)

- Results of workshop and additional analysis
- Recommendations for changes/choices to policy options to help WMRES deliver vision
- Recommendations for future monitoring to ensure future assumptions are correct.

This will also be presented to SEA/SA team, WMRES project board/external reference group, and put on WMRES website, and potential input into AWM annual conference on 10th November.

Stage 4: Testing Draft WMRES (March 2007)

4 a Workshop to test draft WMRES

Workshop with stakeholders to test draft WMRES against scenarios/checklist

4 b Additional assessment

Additional analysis and challenge from Forum for Future based on their assessment of WMRES options. Overall Recommendations based on workshop findings and Forum's assessment.

4 c Stage 4 Report

- Results of workshop and additional analysis
- Recommendations for changes/choices to policy options to help WMRES deliver vision
- Recommendations for future monitoring to ensure future assumptions are correct.

This will also be presented to SEA/SA team, RES project board/external reference group, and put on WMRES website.

Stage 5: Further development of futures toolkit (April – August 2007)

Stage 2 identified key questions and support required for AWM appraisal process & Board Champion. Now with the WMRES work completed, this can be developed further into a toolkit and support package over the remaining 5 months for:

- AWM staff linked to particular activities e.g. policy & project development
- Wider role out/training for business and public sector leaders.

For more information contact

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If you register for the WMRES process electronic newsletter via the website (<http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/wmesreview.html>) you will be automatically updated when new stages of this project and others become available.