

## **THE ALLIANCE – MIDLANDS AND SOUTHERN REGION**

Minutes of a meeting of The Alliance – Midlands and Southern Region, which took place on Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2008, at 10.00 a.m., in the Council Chamber, North East Derbyshire District Council, Saltergate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor E. Watts	-	Bolsover District Council (Chair)
Councillor A. Tomlinson	-	Bolsover District Council
Ms. N. Rodgers	-	Bolsover District Council
Councillor P. Ansell	-	Cannock Chase District Council
Mr. G. Watson	-	Cannock Chase District Council
Mr. M. Southgate	-	Chesterfield Borough Council
Mr. D. Skinner	-	Derbyshire County Council
Councillor W. Pickford	-	Derbyshire County Council
Councillor C. Cutting	-	Derbyshire County Council
Councillor G. Carlile	-	Derbyshire County Council
Councillor S. Manion	-	Dover District Council
Mr. P. Baguley	-	Gedling Borough Council
Mrs. A. Westray-Chapman	-	North East Derbyshire District Council
Mr. S. Hopkins	-	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor E. M. Boden	-	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor R. Booth	-	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Mr. C. F. Hunton	-	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Mr. P. O'Mara	-	National Secretariat
Mrs. J. Dixon	-	National Secretariat

### **Councillor E. Watts in the Chair**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **07/07 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of:

Councillor J. McGhee	-	Corby Borough Council
Councillor S. Carroll	-	Nottinghamshire County Council
Councillor A. Haynes	-	Nottinghamshire County Council
Councillor J. Baird	-	Ashfield District Council
Councillor E. Blake	-	Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Councillor C. Hibberd	-	Kent County Council
Councillor E. Rowbotham	-	Kent County Council
Councillor J. Butler	-	North East Derbyshire District Council
Councillor R. Russell	-	Chesterfield Borough Council
Mr. B. Hill	-	Dover District Council

08/07 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2007

**AGREED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2007, be accepted as a true and correct record.**

09/07 MATTERS ARISING

Frequency of Meetings

The Chair explained that the Officer Group had met on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2007, and following discussion at the meeting, Mr. Watson had prepared the report for consideration.

Mr. Watson briefly explained the report.

Councillor Carlile asked that consideration be given as to whether there was any value to the regional meetings as a lot of time was spent discussing Executive items. An occasional meeting to discuss specific issues relative to the Midlands and Southern area, inviting the Regional Development Agencies would be more beneficial. A Regional pre-meeting before the Executive would provide the opportunity to discuss any items on the agenda which needed a decision. Councillor Boden suggested that a Special Meeting be arranged should any items need to be discussed in-between the scheduled Regional meetings. Councillor Carlile requested that Regional meetings be held at a venue in the "middle" of the Midlands and Southern region.

Mr. Skinner commented that he felt the Midlands and Southern Region meeting should be held on a more regular basis and raised his concerns that quangos interested in derelict sites needed to be more closely monitored.

The Chair raised his concerns at the lack of involvement with The Alliance of some member local authorities and also the need to recruit new members. A meeting had recently taken place with the National Secretariat to discuss the subscriptions for the next financial year; the suggested increases could result in some local authorities withdrawing their support.

The Chair declared an interest at this point of the meeting.

The Chair queried whether the Officer Group and the Executive should meet on a regular basis. Mrs. Dixon commented that The Alliance had good links into organisations such as the Regional Development Agencies and the National Secretariat could see the impact being made, however, it was recognised that enthusiasm and support from member authorities had dwindled. Councillor Carlile stated that the problems experienced 20 years ago due to the decline of the mining industry had diminished. Councillor Manion agreed that other more complex issues were being experienced with education and health and more emphasis should now be placed on these.

Mr. Southgate stated that it would prove difficult to agree a common agenda for the Region, due to the size and nature of problems experienced. The

Region included four different Regional Development Agencies and any issues could be considered to be of a national nature owing to the size of the area.

**AGREED** that (1) the Midlands and Southern Region meet twice a year,

(2) Regional Development Agencies and Regional Ministers be invited to the Midlands and Southern Region meetings,

(3) the Officer Group/Executive meet on a regular basis,

(4) the Midlands and Southern Region meet at a venue considered to be the “middle” of the region, and

(5) the above takes place for a trial period of 12 months.

#### 09/07 UPDATE FROM VICE CHAIRS

##### *Midlands Region*

Nothing to report.

##### *Southern Region*

Councillor Manion reported that the first phase of Post Office closures had taken place this week. Liaison was currently taking place with Councillor Hibberd, Kent County Council, to look at the traditional areas in Kent that could benefit from The Alliance. He also referred to the IT infrastructure and the problems being experienced with lack of access to Broadband due to the rural nature of the area. The Alliance was asked for assistance with this problem.

Mr. Hopkins referred to the Post Office closure programme and as it became more apparent that the closures would take place, the realistic approach would now be to consider the support required following these closures. Councillor Boden requested that this matter be considered by the Officer Group/Executive.

**AGREED** that (1) The Alliance assist with the lack of Broadband access being experienced in Dover/Kent, and

(2) the Officer Group/Executive discuss ways of alleviating problems caused by the Post Office closure programme.

10/07 BROWNFIELD LAND AND ENGLISH PARTNERSHIPS

Mrs. Westray-Chapman referred to an English Partnerships Annual Open meeting held during November 2007, and raised her confusion in relation to the Coalfield Action Zones. She queried whether there was funding available for brownfield sites. Mrs. Dixon confirmed that two separate streams of funding were available, these were being delivered via the Brownfields Team and Coalfields Team at English Partnerships.

**AGREED that the comments be noted.**

11/07 REGIONAL ISSUES FOR EXECUTIVE

*Agenda Item 16 – Alliance budget and subscriptions*

The Chair reported that he had attended a meeting recently with the National Secretariat to discuss the level of subscriptions to be requested for the forthcoming financial year.

Councillor Ansell raised her concern that the District Councils were subsidising the County Councils, she felt that a concerted effort should be made to try and increase membership. Another way forward would be to phase the increase over a period of two/three years.

The Chair stated that in order to keep the organisation's staffing arrangements at its current level, it would be necessary to implement the subscriptions as listed. Councillor Carlile queried the formula utilised to set the subscriptions. Mrs. Dixon explained that the formula was based on population, one/two tier authorities plus an element of collieries. Councillor Carlile raised his concern at the level of subscription set for Derbyshire County Council.

After a lengthy discussion which considered service provision by the National Secretariat, recruitment of new members and retaining existing members, it was suggested that subscriptions be phased in over a two year period.

The Chair commented that he would discuss the benefits of being involved in The Alliance with representatives of local authorities considering withdrawing their support. Contact details, as appropriate, to be provided to the Chair.

**AGREED that (1) the increased subscriptions be supported, and  
(2) the increases be phased in over a two year period.**

*Agenda Item 8 – Incapacity Benefit*

Mrs. Westray-Chapman raised concern that the work recently addressed through the Department of Work and Pensions/Jobcentre Plus was focusing on a number of wards in Derbyshire that were considered to be the top 12

most deprived, however, there were other comparable wards that were not in receipt of additional support.

*Agenda Item 11 – Coalfields Regeneration Trust*

Mrs. Dixon reported that the Coalfields Regeneration Trust would administer £52 million over the next three years.

The meeting concluded at 11.25 a.m.