

**REPORT TO: RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2007**

**SUBJECT: CENTRAL WALES – WEST MIDLANDS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

**SUMMARY:**

The Chief Fire Officer has received correspondence from the Welsh Assembly Government inviting the Authority to be a signatory to a newly developed Memorandum of Understanding aimed at improving collaboration between Central Wales and the West Midlands Region.

This paper gives background to this initiative and asks Members to consider if they wish to be a party to it.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

**OPERATIONAL RISK: NIL**

**COMMUNITY RISK: NIL**

**TRAINING: NIL**

**H.R: NIL**

**FINANCE: NIL**

**I.T/COMMS: NIL**

**WELSH LANGUAGE: NIL**

**LEGAL: NIL**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That Members consider the attached paper, letter from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Memorandum of Understanding and determine if they wish the Authority to become signatories to the document.
2. That Members consider if they wish to nominate a Powys Member to sit on the Memorandum of Understanding's Strategic Group.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

Letter from DR G L Duncan – Welsh Assembly Government

Central Wales-West Midlands Memorandum of Understanding

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## **CENTRAL WALES – WEST MIDLANDS**

### **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

The Chief Fire Officer has received correspondence from the Welsh Assembly Government inviting the Authority to be a signatory to a newly developed MOU aimed at improving collaboration across public bodies in Central Wales and the West Midlands Region.

The MOU is a high level strategic intent document which establishes a forum for Central Wales and English collaboration. The MOU is quite separate from arrangements that the Service already has in place in terms of inter-service operational interoperability and mutual assistance at large incidents.

The MOU is voluntary and non-legally binding and the intention is that it would apply to all public bodies in the regions covered.

Much of what the document details is done by the Authority in any case as part of its well established consultation and collaboration arrangements.

The implications of signing the MOU in terms of resourcing are not onerous. It is proposed that there will be an annual strategic group meeting and a number of core officer group meetings which it is proposed would be attended by the Powys County Commander and a nominated Powys Member, should that be the Authority's wish.

The potential collaborative opportunities presented by the MOU sit well with the Authority's overall objectives and are consistent with wider Welsh Assembly Government "Making the Connections" agenda.

The Welsh Assembly Government had asked for declarations of commitment to the Memorandum of Understanding by 26<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

A "holding" letter has been sent to the Welsh Assembly Government advising that Members would be considering this issue at their meeting today.

Subject to Members' agreement to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding further contact will be made with the Welsh Assembly Government.

**CENTRAL WALES - WEST MIDLANDS**

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON CROSS BORDER  
COLLABORATION**

The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding aim to achieve effective cross border collaboration between Central Wales and the West Midlands on both policy development and service delivery.

[Issued 05/03/2007]

## CONTEXT

1. The border between Central Wales and the West Midlands winds for over 150 miles through deeply rural "Marches" communities. While the boundary will have historic roots, in most places it is now an artificial line which bears little relationship to the patterns of life for communities in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.
2. Communities in these rural areas face similar challenges, opportunities and needs. There are strong social and economic links across the border and a shared reliance on the opportunities provided by urban centres such as Hereford and Shrewsbury. There is a complex pattern of inter-dependence by local communities on services sourced from one or other side of the border.
3. However, while the England / Wales border appears an artificial one for local communities it does define operational units for national, regional and local governments and for most other public sector organisations and partnerships. As those organisations have evolved they have developed their own strategies, plans and policies, their own funding streams and modes of service delivery. This can lead to differences in policy, funding and services between Central Wales and the West Midlands which can have a detrimental impact on border communities.
4. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding recognise this risk and are keen to build stronger cross border collaboration. The Welsh Assembly Government has committed in the Wales Spatial Plan to establishing collaboration with West Midlands organisations in order to address key issues of common concern. These same cross border issues have been

recognised by the West Midlands Regional Assembly and the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum. The Forum commissioned research in 2005 to explore these issues and since then a Central Wales-West Midlands officer group has been established to develop arrangements for more effective collaboration.

## **NATURE AND STATUS OF THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

5. This Memorandum of Understanding is a voluntary arrangement rather than a binding agreement or contract and so does not create any legally enforceable rights obligations or restrictions. It does not create any rights to be consulted or prevent consultation beyond that required by statute. Any failure to follow the terms of this Memorandum of Understanding is not be taken as invalidating decisions taken by any of the parties.

## **SCOPE**

6. It is intended that this Memorandum of Understanding should apply to all public sector organisations and public sector – led partnerships operating at the national, regional or local level in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.
7. Voluntary Sector and Private Sector organisations operating in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands (such as County Voluntary Councils, transport operators and utility providers) are also encouraged to follow the principles set out in this Memorandum of Understanding.

8. This Memorandum of Understanding is intended to embrace all aspects of policy development and service delivery which impacts on social, economic and environmental well-being and sustainability in Central Wales and the rural West Midlands.

## **COLLABORATION ARRANGEMENTS**

9. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding will so far as is reasonable and practical and within the resource capacity of their respective organisations:-
  - (a) share non-confidential information relevant to the development of policies and services which will impact on border communities in Herefordshire, Powys and Shropshire;
  - (b) "border proof" all proposals for change in policy, funding or service delivery which would apply to border communities, in order to ensure that any detrimental consequences for those communities are identified and mitigating action taken;
  - (c) consult each other in good time on proposals for change in policy, funding or service delivery that could impact on communities on the opposite side of the border;
  - (d) seek out opportunities for collaboration on policy development and service delivery wherever this could provide efficiencies and / or added value;
  - (e) share experience of good practice in rural policy development and service delivery across Central Wales and the West Midlands.

10. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding will establish a Central Wales – West Midlands Strategic Forum to oversee the implementation of this Memorandum of Understanding, to address strategic policy issues and opportunities for collaboration. That Strategic Forum will meet at least once a year. It will report to the Welsh Assembly Government through the Central Wales Spatial Plan Ministerial Group. In the West Midlands it will report to the Government Office, the Regional Assembly and Advantage West Midlands...
11. The Strategic Forum will be supported by a Core Officer Group drawn from the parties` respective organisations. Specialist task and finish groups will be established to address specific issues of cross border concern, reporting to the Strategic Forum.
12. A sub-group of the Strategic Forum will be established to monitor and annually review the effectiveness of the arrangements set out in this Memorandum of Understanding

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

13. Each party to this Memorandum of Understanding accepts that it can expect to receive information in confidence only if that information is treated with appropriate discretion. The party providing the information will state what, if any, restrictions there should be upon its usage and each party will treat information it receives in accordance with any such restrictions. Disclosure of information will be subject to the requirements of any relevant legislation, such as that relating to data protection, freedom of information , disclosure of environmental information, and any relevant code of practice relating to access to information.

LAUNCH SIGNATORIES

For the Welsh Assembly Government\*

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Carwyn Jones AM

Minister for Environment, Planning and the Countryside

\* Until the Government of Wales Act 2006 is fully implemented, the Welsh Assembly Government is simply the executive arm of the National Assembly for Wales, constituted under the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the Minister signs this Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of that Assembly. When section 45 of the 2006 Act takes effect, references in this Memorandum of Understanding to the Welsh Assembly Government will be construed in accordance with that section. ,

For the West Midlands Regional Assembly

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Cllr David Smith

Chair – West Midlands Regional Assembly

Date:



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Mr Douglas Mackay  
Chief Fire Officer  
Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Authority  
Headquarters  
Lime Grove Avenue  
Carmarthen  
SA31 1SP



29 March 2007

Dear Mr Mackay

### Central Wales – West Midlands Memorandum of Understanding

At a Cross Border Event held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2007 in Ludlow, a Memorandum of Understanding was launched and signed by Carwyn Jones, AM, Minister for the Environment, Planning and Countryside, on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government and Councillor David Smith, Chairman of the West Midlands Regional Assembly. It outlines their commitment towards promoting better cross border collaboration on policy development and service delivery.

This event was very successful: there was a genuine commitment and willingness amongst partners to drive this work forward. It allowed us to explore the cross border issues in a lot more detail, looking in particular at how they can be addressed and identify areas of best practice. We want to work together to achieve better, more "joined up" service for communities dependent on cross border access to services. The Memorandum of Understanding promotes the further development of this work.

Your organisation has an important role to play in taking forward this initiative: we want to work together to help embed the process of joint working firmly at the heart of decision making. We are therefore inviting you and other key partners and organisations within the public, private and voluntary sectors to also sign up to the principles set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

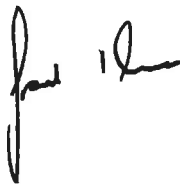
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alwena.watkins@wales.gsi.gov.uk  
GTN: 2846 3104

I enclose a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding. In the first instance can I ask you reply to Alwena Watkins at [alwena.watkins@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alwena.watkins@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or at the postal address below, by 26 April 2007 indicating whether your organisation wishes to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding. If you wish to discuss this in more detail, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Alwena on 01686 613104.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant L. Duncan', written in a cursive style.

**Dr Grant L. Duncan**  
**Head of Sustainable Futures Division**  
**Welsh Assembly Government**