

4NW is the new Regional Leaders Forum for England's Northwest.

It's a new organisation and its aim is to ensure that things that are important to the Northwest are defined and agreed by people in the Northwest.

A group of leaders drawn from public, private and third sector bodies in the Northwest works together as a Board. It's a powerful approach because it works through gaining agreement and consensus amongst the key regional leaders in the Northwest. This Northwest consensus then shapes government thinking and spending decisions that affect the future of the Northwest, its people and places.

4NW will operate with a board structure, with council leaders from each of the five sub-regions, Cumbria, Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside and Manchester, along with seven representatives from the private, non-governmental sector such as Manchester Airport Group, North West Universities Association and the North West Trades Union Congress.

You might already know that we currently have two different strategies (the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy) but these will soon be replaced with a single regional strategy or SRS. Produced in partnership with the NWDA, the SRS sets out how investment will be made in vital areas such as housing, transport, the economy and skills. 4NW helps formulate this strategy and is the only organisation with responsibility to approve or reject this important document on behalf of the region.

4NW is therefore the body which ensures that the regional strategy is democratically accountable and wholly relevant to us as a region.

How it works

The 4NW Board is made up of people who represent the leadership of Northwest organisations that will deliver the regional strategy on the ground. Working as a Board these people are selected to represent the leadership of the different sectors of the Northwest economy or of a sub-region. Members of 4NW typically include council leaders, business leaders and other opinion formers in the Northwest.

The 23 strong Board meets at least six times a year to discuss and agree priorities for the region; taking the tough decisions that will shape future regional investment. These decisions are informed by the recommendations from working groups consisting of other local authority and stakeholder members.

The Board is supported by a small team based in Wigan. This team includes leading thinkers on housing, transport, planning and sustainable development whose job will be to provide professional advice and support.

The Single Regional Strategy

In partnership with 4NW, the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) produces a Single Regional Strategy. This sets out what the region needs in terms of transport, skills training, economic development, housing, spatial planning and other improvements, effectively tying together economic development and spatial planning priorities.

Representing the region's leaders, 4NW will then work alongside the NWDA to develop the content of the strategy. 4NW then has responsibility to sign off this important document on behalf of the region.

The process

Having agreed on a strategy, the region's leaders can then ensure that their own organisations - the local authorities, business organisations and stakeholder groups in the region - work to achieve the same goals. The SRS will show the organisations responsible for delivering the stated actions and projects, and the timescale required. This contrasts with the historical approach which involved applying a 'one size fits all' set of national guidelines.

Once the strategy is agreed between 4NW and the NWDA, Government Office North West acts as the Government's representative to formally accept the SRS as an officially recognised government strategy.

At the heart of all this lies agreement and consensus amongst the region's leaders and this is where it gains its strength and relevance.

Scrutiny

As a body working openly in the public arena, proper scrutiny of our work is essential. A separate group will be established to carry out this function. The same group will also scrutinise the work of the NWDA.

Other responsibilities

As 4NW has an integral role in representing and supporting local councils at the regional level, it makes sense for 4NW to provide services that complement this function. For example, 4NW will pursue opportunities to help local authorities improve their performance and deliver better and more effective services. It will be a natural focus for regional activity in areas such as promoting the equalities agenda, tackling worklessness, climate

change, improving neighbourhoods and health, particularly in relation to the quality of housing in the region.

The national perspective

Here in the Northwest we are ahead of the game. The Government has proposed implementing changes to existing legislation so that each region has its own new arrangements and single regional strategy by around 2010.

In the Northwest we already agree with these proposals and we don't see the point in waiting. The cooperation and enthusiasm of stakeholders in the region means we are in a position to be pioneers for the new arrangements. We want to adopt them straight away, giving a lead to other regions rather than waiting until 2010. We believe this will give local authorities, businesses and other public-sector organisations as much time as possible to plan and adjust.

For further information, please contact us using the details on the back of this publication.

A guide to 4NW

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