

Consultation and Call for Evidence Consultation Report

Purpose of this Report

In July and August of 2008, the Manchester Independent Economic Review (MIER) held a Consultation and Call for Evidence exercise. The responses to the Call for Evidence are incorporated in the Literature Review published in November 2009. This report provides an assessment of the main issues in response to the consultation. It is structured as follows:

- **a description of the consultation exercise and the expectations of the process;**
- **the number of responses**
- **an analysis of the responses; and**
- **issues arising from the consultation.**

Consultation and Call for Evidence

Formal consultation on the Manchester Independent Economic Review (MIER) and its processes took place in July 2008 and August 2008. Stakeholders, partners and interested parties were invited to submit responses on the website, as well as being personally approached by the Secretariat and other members of Manchester Enterprises staff. The sub-region's Team Manchester Economic development Leads were extremely useful in ensuring responses were received from around the sub-region and beyond. The feedback forms were freely available to download from the MIER website, and could be returned electronically or in hard copy.

The feedback form was designed to gather the views of respondents as to their knowledge and expectations of the MIER, their views on the processes by which the MIER is being run and views on how the MIER can most effectively report its findings. It was also designed to provide an opportunity for respondents to provide any research or any specific work begun carried out in the region and beyond which should be a part of the evidence base that underpins the MIER's research. These submissions were welcomed as part of a process of collating a comprehensive Literature Review for the MIER.

Number of Responses

Overall, the consultation exercise saw sixteen responses from stakeholders, partners and interested parties, and the consultation process was welcomed by those that responded.

Responses were received from nine out of the ten Greater Manchester Local Authorities, as well as from sub-regional and regional public sector and private sector bodies. Almost all organisations represented on the Policy Advisory Group (PAG) of the MIER responded, including funders and partner organisations.

Analysis of the Responses

The feedback form invited responses on:

- details of programmes or projects being currently undertaken that are relevant to the MIER's work;
- expectations of the Review;
- how the Review will impact on existing work being carried out;
- what the term "Manchester is ambitious" means;
- what the key short and medium-term challenges and opportunities are to achieving Manchester's sustainable long-term growth;
- what does the City Region have to do to meet its challenges and opportunities; and
- opinion on whether the Review has been a success or not.

This report will now give a brief summary of each of the responses received in relation to the above questions. This will be followed by an overview of the responses in relation to the questions above, with an assessment of the main themes and issues raised in the process.

1. Please provide details of programmes or projects that you are currently undertaking or planning to undertake in the next year which are relevant to the MIER's work?

Most of those who responded were either already undertaking, or planning to undertake, pieces of research or work that have relevance to the MIER. These include pieces of research centred around skills, worklessness, housing, land provision, as well as local and regional economic development strategies.

Most responses state that there is an intention to draw on the findings of the Review' and it's research studies. This would serve to add to their research and analysis, or at least to help frame the context for their work (examples of which are provided under Question 3).

It is also clear that there are many pieces of work already produced or already underway, that have relevance and cross-over with the Review's work. These have all been brought to the attention of the Review.

2. What are your expectations of the Review?

All of the respondents welcomed the work of the Review, and it's relevance as a comprehensive, independent and rigorous piece of research to create a shared-evidence base in the region. It was widely commented that the Review is important in stimulating thinking in terms of the economic issues facing the sub-region, and will be welcomed as a new body of research to inform policy makers and strategic decisions.

Responses from the private sector, or those working closely with the private sector, stated that the Review would be very helpful in identifying changes which may influence future business conditions, as well as helping them to better understand current and future local business needs.

Many of those who responded, particularly from the local authorities, highlighted their desire for the Review to inform policy making and strategy decisions in the short and medium-term, as well as informing investment decisions for the public and private sectors. However, the majority of these responses highlighted the need for the Review to provide practical and well-defined strategic messages and to be easily accessible, in order to be relevant to policy makers.

Effective communication of the Reviews findings was another consistent theme amongst responses, in the context of the Review being able to properly inform effective policy and strategy decisions and to capture commercial and public interest. In this regard, it was noted that the relevance of the Review for opinion formers depends not only on the quality of the Review's research work, but also on how the findings are clearly articulated and how key stakeholders are involved from an early stage in the results coming out of the Review. Certain stakeholders requested presentations and internal meetings with the Review team whilst the results were being released, in order to encourage full 'buy-in' to the MIER programme.

In one instance it was noted that, in light of tensions surrounding the current economic climate, the Review must be especially mindful to communicate its results in an objective and careful way, ensuring constructive discussion and ensuring business and consumer confidence is maintained.

In terms of more specific concerns, one response asked how the different studies might be pulled together to provide a thorough review of the sub-regional economy.

3. How do you expect the results of the Review, due at the end of 2008, to impact on the work of your organisation? Do you expect it to be behaviour changing?

The results of the Review were widely identified as being important to ensuring greater sharing of knowledge, research and analysis across the region. In most cases, the Review was described as potentially behaviour changing, and nearly all respondents anticipated direct implications to their work arising from the Review.

The Review and the findings of the Review were highlighted as being most relevant to respondents in terms of creating a truly shared, comprehensive, independent and authoritative body of research to inform decisions, perceptions and strategies. In many cases, it was stated that the research work produced by the Review will be drawn upon regularly, and will provide a resource that can be accessed on a day-to-day basis for many of those who responded. Indeed it was stated in more than one instance that the MIER Economic Baseline is already proving a very useful resource for partners.

Apart from the creation of this shared evidence-base for Manchester partners and the wider region, most respondents also stated that the findings of the Review will directly feed in to the production of a variety of policy documents and sub-regional strategies, as well as informing private sector strategy and investment.

The Review was specifically mentioned as being relevant to local authorities and regional and sub-regional public sector organisations, with regard to:

- the shaping of the new Regional Strategy;
- informing the agenda for the new Economic Development Employment and Skills (EDES) Commission and the AGMA Executive Board;
- the production and implementation of Core Strategies at local authority level;
- the production of local authority economic development plans;
- the production of local authority economic assessments, as proposed in the Sub National Review; and
- helping with the identification of Local Area Agreements (LAA's) priorities and Multi-Area Agreements (MAA's) priorities.

It was also stated that the Review should be used as a tool to lobby government and to inform bidding for external resources.

Respondents, especially the local authorities, expect to be able to develop clear policy implications from the work of the Review. This will to a greater degree depend on whether the research identifies any applied applications which can be taken up by local or sub-regional partners.

For other organisations, including those in the private sector, representing the private sector, or representing the voluntary / third sector, the Review was specifically mentioned as being relevant to:

- the identification of current and future business needs, challenges and opportunities;
- resource allocation to activities most likely to benefit growth and prosperity; and
- investment in new potential markets.

However, the majority of responses again highlighted the fact that, once the research work has been completed, there is still a large amount of work to be done to articulate the findings of the Review coherently, and produce clearly defined, spatial conclusions from the research.

4. What does “Manchester is ambitious” mean to your organisation?

5. In your opinion, what does Manchester need to do to meet the ambitions you have set out to address the challenges and opportunities you have identified?

6. In your opinion, what are the key short and medium-term challenges and opportunities to achieving Manchester’s sustainable long-term economic growth?

There is a broad level of cross-over between Questions 4, 5 and 6, and this is reflected in the responses, which generally sought to define stated targets (“ambitions”) and broader strategic goals, before describing how these could be achieved, as well as any specific challenges that may exist to meeting these targets.

Many of the responses to these questions referred to the same set of specific targets that should be met in order to meet Manchester’s “ambitions”. Those organisations in the public sector referred to particular targets drawn from strategies such as the CRDP, GM Sub Regional Action Plan, the LAA’s and the MAA, as well as more specific strategies at the district level. These include targets on addressing skills problems, worklessness, improving enterprise, innovation and business growth, as well as tackling climate change and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

A number of responses specifically highlighted improved GVA growth as the key ambition for Manchester’s future growth, and other ambitions were stated in terms of improving transport, reducing economic inequalities, and considering traditionally “non-economic” factors such as reducing mortality rates.

In terms of the greater strategic ambitions of Manchester, many responses (and especially those from the private sector) made particular reference to their ambitions for Manchester in terms of making the City-Region truly-world class, and an international brand for business and tourism. An “outward looking” approach was described, in order to encourage further investment, exports and visitors.

Many responses described much more specific targets and goals – however, these generally fell within the broader themes that were described in other responses. The themes that appeared most consistently throughout responses were ones of GVA growth, worklessness, skills, inequality, transport and the promotion of Manchester as a “world-class” city.

Many of the responses stated that the Review would help in clearly defining some of the economic issues in Manchester, and thus help in the setting of and achieving of goals going forward.

7. Has the launch of the Review been a success?

The above question was defined differently by those who responded, with the majority of responses commenting on the success of the MIER launch event on June 2nd, but with many others commenting on the overall start of the Review, and some responses commenting on the forthcoming release of the Review’s findings.

In terms of the MIER launch event, the majority of respondents congratulated the Review on a successful launch event. Many made reference to the high profile of the event, the attendance of both the Chancellor and Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, as well as figures from partner agencies and the private sector. The event was given credit for being well run and attracting good media coverage, at a regional and national level.

However, it was also noted that the momentum gained at the launch has not been sufficiently built upon since, in terms of media coverage. Another concern raised was that the Review launch event could have perhaps been improved by having the start of the MIER 2008 Workshop Series closer to the launch event. I

Those responses referring to the overall beginning of the Review were more mixed. Although there were comments suggesting satisfaction at the Review’s overall start, a number of respondents commented that the Review is not as high profile as it perhaps could be, particularly amongst wider stakeholders in the sub-region (other than local authorities and partners) and specifically the private sector. It was suggested that there is a danger that some organisations will miss the opportunity to contribute.

Furthermore, in a few responses there was also an expressed concern over the lack of detail over methodology provided so far throughout the promotion of the Review. One response suggested the need for greater engagement with the research teams throughout the process, in order to help with and understand the specifics of the research being carried out.

Of those commenting on the release of the Reviews findings, it was noted that it will be imperative to also deliver a Review of the quality of some of the expectations generated. Again, comments were made about the importance of clear and policy relevant communication and effective engagement.

Issues arising from the Consultation

The analysis of the submissions has raised various key points, themes and concerns, many of which were consistent through many responses. Before addressing some of the queries and concerns raised in the Consultation, it is worth saying that all the responses welcomed the Review and the research work being carried out, and all of those who responded were generally very positive about the MIER and looking forward to being engaged in the Reviews forthcoming findings. When issues were raised, it was generally in a very constructive manner.

Although some responses did contain individual questions and issues that were specific to the organisation providing the feedback, across all the responses the main themes or concerns can be summarised as:

Content of the Review. The majority of responses articulated the need for the Review to produce not only a comprehensive economic evidence-base for those in the City Region and beyond, but to also define clear and practical messages to aid policy making, strategic thinking and investment plans. It was stated in many cases that the Review should be accessible and steer away from being overly academic, in order for its research to have behaviour-changing implications.

Communication of the Review's findings. Effective communication of the Reviews findings to stakeholders and interested parties, in order for the Review to properly inform effective policy and strategy decisions and to capture commercial and public interest, was perhaps the most consistent theme to be taken from the feedback. This was an issue raised by most respondents, from local authorities through to the private sector.

Engagement. It was often noted that the relevance of the Review for opinion formers depends not only on the quality of the Review's research work, but also on how key stakeholders are involved from an early stage as soon as the results emerge from the Review. This issue ties-in directly to the issue of communication stated above. Certain stakeholders requested presentations and internal meetings with the Review team whilst the results were being released, in order to facilitate 'buy-in' in this process. Other responses raised concerns that they were not as fully-engaged as they would like to be, especially with regards to the specific methodologies of the research projects, and contact with the individual research teams.

Media coverage. It was noted that media coverage of the Review should be wide-spread but also carefully managed. For instance, it was suggested that the Reviews findings should be carefully managed in light of tensions surrounding the current economic climate. It was also suggested that media coverage could have been better following the initial June 2nd launch event. Although some responses suggested good knowledge of the MIER and the Review process, others noted that it was not as widely known as it could be, especially amongst wider interested parties, the general public and the private sector.

Next Steps

The responses given are greatly valued, and the process of Consultation is seen as essential in ensuring the success of the Review. As such, all concerns raised or issues that require following-up will be taken on board, and the Review will seek to engage in further dialogue with those parties who raised particular issues, wherever appropriate.

The Secretariat would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who took time to respond.

If you have any further queries, please don't hesitate to contact us (details overleaf).

Contact Details

Rupert Greenhalgh
Head of Secretariat
Telephone: +44 (0)161 237 4408
Fax: +44 (0)161 237 9458
Email: info@manchester-review.org.uk