



West Midlands
Regional
Observatory



**Real lives
Real Issues**

A STATE OF THE **REGION** REPORT 2004



1 Foreword



Richard Hyde
Chairman
West Midlands Regional
Observatory Partnership Board

It is my pleasure to be able to introduce **Real Lives, Real Issues**, a State of the Region Report for the West Midlands. This is the first review of the region, its research needs and its challenges to be published by the West Midlands Regional Observatory. The Observatory is a young organisation which was established to promote the development and collaborative use of a robust evidence base upon which to develop the key strategies for regional development. **Real Lives, Real Issues** represents the first significant building block towards achieving this. Although it has been produced by the Observatory, it has not been produced in isolation. It has been created through consultation with key stakeholders who have an interest in the main regional strategies and with the help of the broad partnership of organisations represented on the Observatory's Board.

The report focuses on the key issues that confront the region. It should not be inferred from this that the region has not achieved some remarkable successes. In fact, the region is making great strides towards its goal of becoming a world-class region in which to invest, work, learn, visit and live. A few highly publicised examples showcase our success, but there are many other, less well-known, but no less important examples across the region.

We also recognise that there is still more to do and we make no apologies for focusing on our challenges. Our purpose is not to criticise. The challenges are complex and deep-seated and require a collaborative approach to resolve them. Instead, we hope to draw attention to areas of overlap between regional strategies, to areas where there are gaps in our understanding, and to areas where these things may combine to produce unintended consequences. We aim to promote a discussion on priorities for the research that is needed to better inform the policy agenda so that, our strategies can be even more successful in delivering the regional vision.

This report represents a positive contribution to the collaborative work of the Observatory's partners. We hope it will be used as the basis for further debate on the research priorities for the region and that it will stimulate ideas about how the Observatory can continue to support regional partners to develop collaborative, evidence-based policies to address our remaining challenges.

We look forward to working with you.