

The 2010 Civil Service Award for Equality in Procurement has been won by the West Midlands Economic Inclusion Panel, set up and supported by regional development agency Advantage West Midlands.

Sir Gus O'Donnell, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service, presented the award to the Economic Inclusion Panel at last week's Civil Service Diversity and Equality Awards ceremony at St Luke, London, the home of the BBC Live Music Sessions.

The Panel, alongside the five other category winners, will now form the shortlist for the overall Diversity and Equality Award to be announced at the National Civil Service Awards to be held at Buckingham Palace on 11th November.

Economic inclusion is a process aimed at overcoming the barriers that prevent people from participating in the workplace or excludes them from other elements of the economy such as access to financial services.

Trudi Elliot, Chair of the West Midlands Economic Inclusion Panel and regional director of Government Office West Midlands, said:

"This is a tremendous result for the Economic Inclusion Panel. Everyone who has helped to develop and champion the Procurement Framework can rightly feel proud of their contribution. At a time when the region is facing such immense organisational change the Panel has sent a powerful message about the value of working inclusively across sectoral boundaries to provide a single voice on worklessness issues.

"This accolade - the first of many , I hope - will undoubtedly provide further impetus to our aim this year to secure widespread commitment across the region and across Government to increasing access to jobs and skills via public and voluntary sector procurement exercises."

Mark Pearce, Corporate Director for Economic Regeneration, said:

"This is tremendous news for the region. AWM and our partners within the Panel worked hard to develop the Procurement Framework – the first to be delivered for any English region. It is already proving to be of real value to the West Midlands, with many examples of public sector organisations using the Framework's Tools and guidance to help local unemployed people gain access to jobs. Equally, by involving the business sector in the development of the Framework, we are facilitating more opportunities for local companies to win contracts.

"The Framework offers not only another major step towards improving the lives of people suffering the effects of economic exclusion but is also helping to boost the competitiveness of the West Midlands region."

"20 per cent of the region's £15bn productivity gap is attributable to the failure to use the talent and potential of all the people in the region.

"Success can only be achieved if we work together in partnership and the Economic Inclusion Panel plays an important role in aligning strategy, vision, action and funding to ensure that far more of our citizens have the chance to participate in economic success."

Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service Sir Gus O'Donnell said:

"Diversity remains the key to enabling the Civil Service to provide important public services to an increasingly diverse range of people. To be effective we need to continue to attract talented people from the widest range of backgrounds, encourage them to aspire and fulfil their potential and empower them to develop innovative ways of implementing policies and delivering services.

"I am proud of what we have already achieved across Government in promoting diversity and equality. These awards help us to identify and celebrate some of the excellent achievements that are being made across the Civil Service and show how our traditional values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality guide all our work."

The West Midlands Economic Inclusion Panel was officially launched in Birmingham in 2008 when 23 leading figures from the region's private, public and voluntary sector met for the first time.

Economic inclusion is one of five key challenges identified in the West Midlands Economic Strategy as priority areas for action to boost economic performance and add over £2,000 in wealth for every man and woman in the region.

The new panel was established as a result of feedback received by Advantage West Midlands at its annual conferences in 2006 and 2007 and an extensive public consultation.