

**Public Minutes of a Meeting of the Black Country Local
Enterprise Partnership**

23rd November 2020 at 3.00 pm
Microsoft Teams

Present:

Tom Westley
Cllr. Adrian Andrew
Cllr. Ian Brookfield
Paul Brown
Kevin Davis
Rachel Eade
Simon Eastwood
Cherry Elliott
Lindsey Flynn
Chris Handy
Cllr. Patrick Harley
Ninder Johal
Prof Nazira Karodia
Prof Geoff Layer
Cllr. Danny Millard
Jatinder Sharma
Amanda Tomlinson

Chair;
Walsall MBC;
City of Wolverhampton;
EY;
The Vine Trust;
Red Limited;
Eastwood Consulting;
Higgs & Sons;
Well Associates;
Accord Group;
Dudley MBC;
Nachural Communications;
University of Wolverhampton;
University of Wolverhampton;
Sandwell MBC;
Walsall College; and
Black Country Housing Group.

In Attendance:

Cllr. Brian Edwards
Sarah Middleton
Aarron Toussaint
Katherine Birch
Ian Carey
Prof Delma Dwight
Jaspal Sohal
Lara Smith
Stuart Everton
Kevin O'Keefe
Helen Martin
Alison Knight
Kelly Valente

South Staffordshire DC;
Black Country Consortium Ltd;
BEIS;
Black Country Consortium Ltd;
BC Transport Team;
Dudley MBC;
Dudley MBC;
Sandwell MBC;
Walsall MBC;

Alison Guerra	Walsall MBC;
Mark Lavender	Walsall MBC;
Richard Lawrence	City of Wolverhampton; and
Hywel Ruddick	Black Country Consortium Ltd.

Apologies: Councillor Mike Bird and Maria Crompton.

179/20 **Declarations of Interest and Gift Register**

Agreed that the LEP Board note that there were no declarations of interest or gifts made.

180/20 **Public Minutes of the LEP Board held on 19th October 2020**

Agreed that the Board confirm and approve the Minutes of the LEP Board held on 19th October 2020.

181/20 **LEP Board – Appointments**

- **Midland Engine Investment Fund – Strategic Oversight Board**

Sarah Middleton advised that the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) were seeking a refresh of their Membership and advised that the LEP's current representative was Paul Brown, who was an original member from when the Strategic Oversight Board was established in 2016. She stated that his role had been very much appreciated in a complex area and that the MEIF had provided in excess of £10m in funding to the Black Country, equating to over 45 deals, which ranked the BC in the top quartile of performers.

She stated that MEIF had approached the WM LEP Chairs to nominate Members and advised that Paul Brown had indicated his willingness to continue to represent the Black Country on the MEIF SOB, but that having served 4 and half years as a SOB Member, the expectation from MEIF was that Paul would stand down at May 2022 when his 6 years tenure ended. To this regard the recommendation not only sought confirmation from the Board for the continuation of Paul Brown as the BC LEP representative on the MEIF SOB, but also sought a substitute Member for the role.

Agreed that the LEP Board

- 1) Confirm to the West Midland LEP Chairs, that the Black Country representative continue to be Paul Brown, until the end of his MEIF Term of office – March 2022; and
- 2) That a substitute Member for the MEIF Strategic Oversight Board (SOB) be identified from the current LEP Board Membership, to be agreed after the meeting.

182/20

Policy Update

a) Chancellor Statement

It was noted that the Chancellor's statement included the extension of the Furlough.

b) Peer to Peer Review

Members were reminded that for the national Peer to Peer Review the Black Country were paired with Cheshire & Warrington LEP. It was proposed to have another round of Peer-to-Peer reviews based around the following themes: -

- A specific focus on the pandemic (in particular, taking stock on the experience)
- A focus on economic recovery and long-term economic prioritisation

Members were advised that the pairing this time would be with a LEP in a combined authority area.

c) LEP Network – Week in Politics – 9th – 13th November

Noted that a couple of updates would be of potential interest to Members in relation to the consultation on the next steps for more environmentally friendly haulage and the announcement of the first wave of winners for government funding in relation to ground-breaking aviation projects.

d) LEP Network – Spending Review Submission

It was noted that Ministers had responded positively to the LEP Network's proposed 'Recovery and Rebuild Deal' ahead of the Spending Review (SR), due to be announced on Wednesday, 25th November 2020.

e) LEP Network LEP Network - Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee - RII0-2: Energy network price controls/

UK Emissions Trading System Common Framework – 12th November 2020

The Chair advised that a meeting had been held with Minister Kwasi Kwarteng and the Black Country energy proposition had been well received.

f) LEP Network – Grant Funding

Members were advised that small businesses in England would receive a significant £2.2 billion in 2 grant funding schemes from the government to help them through the current period of national restrictions: one for businesses that have had to close, and another scheme for further business support as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, helping support people's jobs and livelihoods and protect communities. The funding would flow through the local authorities.

g) LEP Internal Markets Bill

It was noted that the Government had published some policy statements for the Internal Market Bill that explained the intention behind the provisions of the UK Internal Market Bill and that officers would review and report back to a subsequent meeting.

Chris Handy referenced the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and asked if any more information had been received. Sarah Middleton advised that it had been trailed that there may be an announcement in the CSR on Wednesday.

In respect of the future role of the LEPs, there was a need to work consider roles and responsibilities and it was noted that the CA Mayor had the role in the economic agenda. The Chair added that the cooperation of LEPs on the WM region had never been better, as they were working with a concerted voice.

Jat Sharma advised that through conversations with Departmental officials, there was an expectation that there should be greater co-operation between partners. He noted that the current devolution paper had been parked and that Wednesday would be key for the prosperity piece in relation to future funding.

h) Towns Fund – Public Accounts Committee

Members were advised that the Public Accounts Committee had reviewed the allocation of the Towns Fund and their conclusions and recommendations were contained in the linked report.

In respect of the Black Country, it was noted that seven towns had received funding which was important for the area.

Ninder Johal advised that he chaired the City of Wolverhampton Towns Board and that they were awaiting to hear on their submission to the Board.

i) WMCA– Kickstart

Prof Nazira Karodia advised that whilst the scheme was capturing a lot of young people, it fell short of providing suitable opportunities for graduates, especially the class of 2020 and thus there was a need for a more tailored graduate scheme.

It was agreed that a letter be sent to the LEP Network to highlight the gap and the Chair advised that support should be sought from the WM LEP Chairs to the approach.

j) Intellectual Property (IP) – Alok Sharma MP

It was noted that the extract and links detailed key information for customers and users of IP about how the IP system and the Intellectual Property Office would operate after the end of the transition period.

k) Local Government Bulletin – 13th November 2020

The two updates on Funding for Small Businesses in England and Providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus outbreak were noted.

EIU

l) Economic Dashboard

The meeting was advised of the latest economic data, to include: -

- 1st quarter had shown negative growth of – 3.5%;
- The announcement of the vaccine had seen an uplift in business confidence;
- Claimant data had seen a slight decrease of 495 claimants, potentially linked to the extension of the furlough scheme;
- Youth claimants – 14,000 were claiming, which represented the highest number across any LEP region; and

- The HR1 data showing redundancies by sector was shared with Members.

Ninder Johal referenced the green agenda announcement and asked how the BC were positioned. The Chair advised that the energy work being undertaken in the BC and wider CA would be enormously helpful. Sarah Middleton added that the December Board meeting would receive the BC view on the ten-point green plan.

Kevin Davis referenced the impact on BAME communities in respect of furlough and claimant data and stated that this data was needed in order to provide for the necessary support for these communities. Prof Delma Dwight advised that the next submission of the economic dashboard would include a breakdown of the data by ethnicity.

Rachel Eade advised that through the Business Voice Group, members were asking how to find new business and new opportunities, especially linked to the green agenda.

Lindsey Flynn noted that demand in colleges was holding up well with numbers more than doubled, however in respect of Kickstart the numbers were really low. She stated that there was an immediate need for young people and asked how the region was geared up.

The Chair advised that Dudley Institute of Technology was pushing up levels of qualifications for young people.

Sarah Middleton stated a key aspect was to know how many opportunities for young people and the need to develop networking across public, private and the voluntary sector providers. She added that there was a need for the announcement on the UKSPF soon, so that opportunities could be provided for young people.

Chris Handy advised that in construction companies were using off-site manufacturing and using low carbon materials. He advised that the Construction supply chain companies were increasing energy efficiency which provided a strong case for the BC. The Chair added that he believed Advanced Manufacturing companies were adjusting their labour forces for what would be the new normal.

Agreed

- 1) that the LEP Board receive and note the following Policy Updates:
 - a) Chancellor Statement

- b) Peer to Peer Review
 - c) LEP Network – Week in Politics – 9th – 13th November
 - d) LEP Network – Spending Review Submission
 - e) LEP Network LEP Network - Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee - RIIO-2: Energy network price controls/ UK Emissions Trading System Common Framework – 12th November 2020
 - f) LEP Network – Grant Funding
 - g) LEP Internal Markets Bill
 - h) Towns Fund – Public Accounts Committee
 - i) WMCA– Kickstart
 - j) Intellectual Property – Alok Sharma MP
 - k) Local Government Bulletin – 13th November 2020; and
 - l) Economic Dashboard – to include the requirement for a further breakdown of the data in the next reporting cycle.
- 2) That, in respect of the Kickstart scheme a letter be sent to the LEP Network to highlight the need for tailored support for graduates, with support to be sought from the WM LEP Chairs.

183/20 **Local Growth Fund - Project Change Request – Fab Kit – PTP Ltd**

Simon Eastwood presented the report in respect of the Fab Kit PTP Ltd, Change Request in relation to the removal of the match funding requirement and, it was

Agreed that the LEP Board approves the Accountable Body for the Growth Deal (Walsall Council) to proceed to amending the Grant Agreement with Performance Through People (PTP) Ltd in respect of the match funding requirement element, to deliver the Local Growth Deal Fund (LGF) funded elements of the Fab Kit – PTP Ltd project with delivery to continue up to the 2023/24 financial year.

184/20 **Draft Competitiveness Theme Advisory Board held on 4th November 2020**

The minutes were submitted and the Chair highlighted that the second meeting of the Business Advisory Group had been held and that the Competitiveness meeting had considered representations from this Group and other representative bodies to include the Federation of Small Businesses, MakeUK and the BC Chamber of Commerce.

The meeting had been made aware of the following three key issues:

- Frustration of the rapid changes, with the need for more information and funding to be made available;
- Skills was a big issue in relation to apprenticeships and the need to replace the skills of an aging workforce;
- The need for new businesses and diversification.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the draft minutes of the Competitiveness Theme Advisory Board held on 4th November 2020.

185/20 **Draft Employment & Skills Theme Advisory Board held on 12th November 2020**

The minutes were submitted and the Chair highlighted that the Advisory Board had received the Draft BC LEP Skills Plan, which had been circulated to ESB Members for comment and input. The Plan would be submitted to the December LEP Board meeting for consideration.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the draft minutes of the Employment & Skills Theme Advisory Board held on 12th November 2020.

186/20 **Draft Place Making & Land Theme Advisory Board held on 17th November 2020**

The minutes were submitted and the Chair highlighted that the EIU team had undertaken work on the impact of Covid on BC towns; and updates had been received on: -

- the Environment Agency work on the water supply;
- ULEV charging points;
- BC Local Plan; and
- Repowering the BC.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the draft minutes of the Place Making & Land Theme Advisory Board held on 17th November 2020.

187/20 **PR and Communications Report (Information)**

Ninder Johal and Katherine Birch provided the PR and Communications update, to include: -

- Promoting the Covid-19 business grants;

- Support for ABC initiatives to include the BC Walking Festival; the Rainbow Hour – which had received regional tv coverage;
- Promotion of Skills Factory and Careers and Enterprise Company;
- Regional campaigns – Wolverhampton Shop Local and Walsall Public Health.

Agreed that the LEP Board note the PR and Communications Report.

188/20 **Exclusion of the Press and Public: -**

Agreed that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 for the reasons stated on the agenda.

Exempt Information

Paragraph 3
Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

189/20 **Minutes**

Agreed that the LEP Board confirm and approve the private minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2020.

190/20 **Private Minutes of Funding Sub-Group held on 4th October 2020**

Agreed that the LEP Board confirm and approve the minutes of the Funding Sub-Group held on 4th November 2020, to include all recommendations contained therein.

191/20 **Policy Update**

a) WMCA – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review

Noted that the Chief Executive and Chair had been invited to attend a meeting called by the Chair of the WMCA O&S Committee, Councillor Lisa Trickett to discuss investments made via the CA into the area.

b) West Midlands Regional Roundtable: Border Operating Model

Jaspal Sohal advised that the Roundtable session provided an

explanation of the new border processes, with a Q&A session on general preparations, which had included questions on tariffs, VAT and food labelling. There were also optional breakout sessions on exporting manufactured goods and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements for animal products, plants and fish.

In respect of DIT he flagged that the BC had an additional resource in respect of appointees to exploit overseas opportunities and to assist larger companies with green growth.

c) Meeting with Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth – 16th November 2020

It was noted that the Chair had earlier advised of the meeting with the Minister.

d) HMT Freeports -bidding prospectus

Sarah Middleton advised the Government had launched the bidding process and that Freeport bidding coalitions must submit their proposals to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by 12.00 noon on Friday 5 February 2021, 12 weeks from the date of publication of the Bidding Prospectus. She advised that work was being done to identify strategic ports for the BC and that broader work was being done with the CA and LEP partners in identifying inland sites

e) WMCA Comprehensive Spending Review

Members were reminded of the “Asks” submitted through the joint submission with the CA. It was noted that the announcements on Wednesday would be key to see how these Asks had landed, although it was noted that this would be a one-year settlement.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the following updates: -

- a) WMCA – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review
- b) West Midlands Regional Roundtable: Border Operating Model
- c) Meeting with Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth – 16th November 2020
- d) HMT Freeports -bidding prospectus
- e) WMCA Comprehensive Spending Review

The Recovery Prospectus detailed the following 5 themes of how the Black Country LEP could support the region's recovery: -

- Back Black Country Businesses
- Deliver Skills for today and for the Future
- Nurture Green Growth
- Create Vibrant, Safe and Healthy Spaces
- Mobilise Devolution and Public Service Reform

Prof Delma Dwight advised that supporting work on sectors was continuing and the LEP were engaged with the national HM Treasury green book working group. She advised that the slide pack provided a detailed overview of the work being undertaken at a BC regional level and the role of the LEP in assisting with the development of the regional recovery plan – to include the issues and rationale for the proposed interventions, the outcomes the intervention was seeking to achieve and the interventions, which include Black Country Recovery Priorities with currently funded activity.

Sarah Middleton advised that the Black Country had identified a range of priority investments totalling £577m required to support Black Country business and people and enable the transformation of place requirements in light of the pandemic and the potential impact of Brexit. Funding for these would need to be identified, working with Government and partners.

She advised that work was ongoing to develop a Productivity Factory approach, similar to the BC Skills Factory, to assist. She referenced the Growing Priority Sectors programme which had been a reasonably successful programme, costing £6m, which could be an area to develop.

The Chair welcomed the proposal for a digital aerospace research centre of excellence. He stated that the size of the problem was huge with no production at the moment and the spares sector working at only 10% capacity, thus impacting on the BC supply chain companies. He noted that countries to include Germany and the USA were ensuring they preserved the sector and that there was a need for the Government to do the same.

In respect for delivering skills for today and the future it was important to work with partners to identify funding that could have a significant impact.

Transport asks were important to vibrant, safe and healthy places and it was noted that the Birchley Island proposal were well developed.

Nurturing green growth and innovation required further development.

In respect of the next steps the BC Members of Parliament had been supportive.

Amanda Tomlinson referenced Healthy Places and the work of Active Black Country with funding from Sport England. Ian Carey advised that ABC were looking at healthier economy funding with the remit to get people active through revenue and capital funding. He stated the ABC Board would be revisiting the priority programmes referenced in the summary slide pack.

Lindsey Flynn referenced the nurture green growth narrative and commented whether it should be reinforced throughout the plan and cross referenced, as it needed to be delivered across all areas. She stated this provided an opportunity strengthen and build into all areas of the plan. She advised that Covid had highlighted some opportunities with certain markets more open and more accessible because they were undertaking their activity digitally.

Prof Nazira Karodia referenced life sciences in the context of green growth and innovation and commented that the narrative around the circular economy be included.

Chris Handy stated that from his view point the areas were right but the issue was scale. He noted the big-ticket items of Portersfield and the Interchange and stated there was need to link the opportunities with such large-scale projects i.e., linking in the opportunities through to BAME communities.

Agreed that the LEP Board

- 1) Confirm and approve the interventions detailed in the Black Country Recovery Prospectus;
- 2) That the officers work with Government and partners to identify additional funding for these required interventions; and
- 3) Monitor and review the outcomes achieved through these agreed interventions.

193/20 **Risk Register – Covid19 Programme Risk update**

The meeting was advised that it was important to finalise the “back-to-back” agreement in relation to the Get Building Fund with the CA and BEIS colleagues had been supportive in progressing this.

Agreed that the Risk Register be noted.

194/20 **Black Country Local Programme Dashboards**

The new indexed suite of Dashboards was presented: -

- Growth Deal In Flight Current Financial Year
- Growth Deal Future Years
- Black Country Pipeline
- Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF)
- Growing Places
- Enterprise Zones

It was noted that the Local Growth Fund was entering the last 4 months and that the PMO were working some change request in relation to the Outputs, which have until March 2025 to deliver.

In respect of the Pipeline the interactive PowerBi had been developed and would be demonstrated to the Board at the next meeting.

Agreed that the update be noted.

195/20 **Local Growth Fund – Growing Places Fund Dudley Canal Trust**

Simon Eastwood presented the report and advised that this was a project impacted by Covid, hence the change request to the repayments, with a request for a repayment holiday.

Agreed that the LEP Board:

- 1) Approves Sandwell Council to proceed to amending the funding repayment schedule with the Dudley Canal Trust (Trips) Limited, funded from within the Growing Places Fund (GPF), with delivery to continue in the 2020/21 financial year.

- 2) Confirms the change request for a repayment holiday of 31st March 2022 and the change to the current loan repayment arrangements due to the impact that Covid19 has had on the organisation, as detailed in Option 4 in the private report.

196/20 **Date of Next meeting**

Agreed that the Board note the next meeting be held on Monday 14th December 2020, commencing at 12.00pm.

(The meeting closed at 4.30pm)