

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

**26<sup>th</sup> February 2015 at 9.00a.m.**  
**at Hadley Industries, Downing Street, Smethwick**

**Present:** Stewart Towe Chairman;  
Cllr Sean Coughlan Walsall MBC;  
Paul Brown Ernst & Young;  
Andy Cox Cox & Plant;  
Simon Eastwood Carillion plc;  
Chris Handy Accord Group;  
Ninder Johal Nachural Communications;  
Cllr Ian Jones Sandwell MBC;  
Cllr Khurshid Ahmed Dudley MBC.  
Cllr Roger Lawrence Wolverhampton CC;  
Tom Westley Westley Group

**In Attendance:** Sarah Middleton Black Country Consortium Ltd;  
Keith Ireland Wolverhampton CC;  
Colin Parker Black Country Consortium Ltd.

**Apologies:** Councillors Cooper and Lowe, Prof. Layer and Jat Sharma.

19/15 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015 were circulated.

With reference to Minute No. 15/15 (Regulation for Growth Project) – it was confirmed that Steve Parker, Federation of Small Businesses had expressed a willingness to act as Champion for the project.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015 be received and confirmed as a correct record;
- 2) that the appointment of Steve Parker as LEP champion for the Regulation for Growth project be confirmed.

20/15

### **Current Economic Overview – Apprenticeship Project**

Colin Parker gave a presentation on the initial results of work to support a joint project to increase the number of strategic companies taking apprenticeships. The initial results included:-

- 22 companies (of 47 approached) either: - put in contact with a provider or a suitable framework and provider identified.
- Expectation that circa fifteen companies would take apprentices during the next twelve months.
- Two apprentice breakfasts held in February aimed at companies without apprentices which 30 different businesses attended.
- Higher apprenticeship events to be held in April / May.
- High value manufacturing apprenticeships increased by 21% from 2013 - 2014 (369 - 446)
- Walsall Works had supported 450 Apprenticeships
- Skills Factory had supported 108 companies with engineering apprenticeships.

In discussing the findings and progress the Board:-

- Highlighted the need to find ways to encourage companies to invest in apprenticeships/training;
- Noted the continuing need for communications activity and publicity to encourage young people to take up and to raise the image of apprenticeships;
- Reiterated the view that apprenticeships and investment in skill was a crucial challenge for the Black Country and the Partnership.

**Agreed** that current range and future activity be supported and that further reports on the development of the activity to meet the challenges be submitted to future meetings.

21/15

### **Policy Update**

The Board received a report on recent policy documents received by the Secretariat including:-

- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) – ‘No Limits: From Getting By to Getting On’ - a report calling a new National Advancement Service, to support people in low paid work;
- Midlands ‘Engine for Growth’ - recent speeches by Prime Minister and Chancellor including proposals to “devolve skills spending to Combined Authorities in the Midlands”;
- Birmingham Development Plan Examination– Interim Findings - Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and Black Country Strategic Housing Study updating on the progress of the Birmingham Development Plan Inquiry and the Strategic Housing Needs Study;
- Strategic Planning Consultations from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) - setting out planning authorities’ responses to two consultations on housing for first time buyers and housing development on brownfield land and their possible impact on Black Country policies.

The Board was asked to consider supporting the representations by the planning authorities in respect of the DCLG proposals.

**Agreed** that the local authorities’ representations concerning the possible impact in the Black Country of Strategic Planning Consultations from DCLG relating to ‘Quality Starter Homes’ and ‘Housing on Brownfield Land’ be supported.

22/15

### **Black Country Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and Growth Deal Update**

Further to Minute No. 07/15, the Board received an update on the recruitment of the SEP Delivery Director and Programme Management Officer. It was reported that an Interim Director had been appointed and that a recruitment event for a permanent appointment would be held in early March. Recruitment to the Management Officer post had been completed and an appointment made. The Board was also updated on the development of a ‘dashboard’ for the Growth Deal to support the monitoring process.

**Agreed** that the progress of recruitment and the work underway to prepare a ‘dashboard’ as means to monitor projects be noted.

23/15 **Assurance Framework**

Further to Minute No. 08/15, the Board received the draft Black Country Assurance Framework and range of supporting appendices including:-

- a) Revised draft terms of reference for the Partnership Board.
- b) Draft terms of reference for the People Theme Advisory Group (former Employment and Skills Board)
- c) Draft terms of reference for the Business: Competitiveness and Enterprise Theme Advisory Group
- d) Draft terms of Reference for the Funding Applications Sub-Group (formerly RGF/Growing Places Sub-Group)
- e) Draft Access to Information Rules
- f) Proposed Members' Code of Conduct.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the Draft Black Country Quality Assurance Framework received;
- 2) that the revised terms of reference for the Partnership Board be approved;
- 3) that the draft terms of reference for the People and Business: Competitiveness and Enterprise Advisory Boards and Funding Sub-Groups be approved;
- 4) that the terms of reference for the Place Making and Land Theme Advisory Group be submitted to the next meeting;
- 5) that lead Board Members be consulted on the inclusion and terms of reference of other project steering groups and informal or time-limited working groups;
- 6) that the implications of the adoption of the Access to Information rules in the Framework for the conduct of Board meetings be noted;
- 7) that the adoption of the Accountable Body's declaration of interest rules be supported;
- 8) that the proposed procedures for project assessment and prioritisation and the action plan subject to the further consideration of a complaints procedure approved;
- 9) that, subject to the above:-
  - a) the Draft Framework be approved for further consultation with the Accountable Body officers;
  - b) the final Framework to be submitted for confirmation and adoption at the March meeting of the Board.

24/15 **EU Structural and Investment Fund Strategy**

Further to Minute No. 09/15, the Board received an update on discussions on Intermediate Body status and that the Government was now proposing, “to proceed with a model in which LEPs and partners have a key advisory role while decisions remain with the Managing Authorities”. Councillor Lawrence updated on the impact of these changes on the development of the Programme and highlighted the need for the Black Country to be considered as a Core City for the purposes of the Programme and for continuing work to develop co-operation and cross-LEP working.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the Government proposals be noted;
- 2) that proposals for the Black Country to be considered as a ‘Core City’ for purposes of the Programme be supported;
- 3) that officers continue to explore scope for co-operation/sharing capacity/joint schemes;
- 4) that officers to seek to clarify use of Growth Deal funding as match.

25/15 **Elite Centre Feasibility Study**

Further to Minute No. 98/14, the Board received the minutes of the first meeting of the Feasibility Study Steering Group. The minutes set out recommendations to confirm the Group’ terms of reference, provisional budget allocation and appointment of consultants.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the notes of the meeting of the Feasibility Study Steering Group were received;
- 2) that the Steering Group terms of reference be confirmed;
- 3) that the outline budget and action plan for the project approved;
- 4) that the arrangements for the appointment of Shared Intelligence and Inspired Leadership as consultants to prepare the Centre business case approved.

26/15 **Midlands Connect – Next Steps**

The Board received a report on work to develop the Midlands Connect proposals around joint transport working. A presentation to the meeting

of West Midlands' LEP Chairmen on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015 had highlighted the following key principles:-

- a) 45 Minutes are key...(to people & to business)
- b) Growth led Capacity - Creating headroom on our most crowded networks for growth.
- c) Midlands Becoming HS2 Ready - "A Real Benefit for ALL" –
  - i) HS2 Connectivity Packages (Growth Strategies)
  - ii) Maximise benefits to the wider Network: By freeing up & enabling new connections
  - iii) Short/Medium Term Interventions required to get our network ready Pre-HS2
- d) Intensive Growth Corridors (with specific Need for transformational E-W Connections...)
- e) The need for Pan-Midlands Co-ordination"

The Chairmen agreed:-

- 1) that the work to develop the Midlands Connect priorities and proposals be supported;
- 2) that proposals to provide business leadership and work to identify top priority sectors be supported
- 3) that arrangements be made for a meeting with East Midlands LEP Chairmen and then with Government, if possible before the start of 'purdah';
- 4) that consideration of funding support for the development work be taken back by Chairmen and officers for consideration with respective Boards.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the decision of West Midlands Chairmen to support the work to develop the Midlands Connect proposals welcomed;
- 2) that the proposal to contribute to the funding of the work in supported in principle subject to further discussions with ITA to clarify the details and level of the funding requested and with the Working Group (Heads of Regeneration) concerning the use of Development Funding.

## 27/15 **JESSICA Urban Development Fund Proposal**

The Board considered a likely request from Birmingham City Council for a financial contribution towards commissioning an Ex-Ante

assessment to determine if there was a need for an ERDF-backed bid to create an urban development (JESSICA-type) fund in the West Midlands. Birmingham's paper suggested that there was sufficient change to how the JESSICA fund operated to merit re-exploring its suitability. Land value/project spend could now be used as match funding and provided at 'project level' for a JESSICA. Evaluations had shown that less restricted funds (in terms of geography and theme) could deliver better results.

**Agreed** that the possible submission of the JESSICA proposal be noted and that a further report be submitted when contributions have been confirmed.

28/15 **PR and Communications Update**

The Board received the regular update on PR activity since the last meeting. The report set out feedback on ministerial visits and proposals to hold an event in late March / early April to bring together previous Queens Award for Enterprise (QAE) winners with potential applicants from targeted businesses in the Black Country to elicit new applications for 2015. Ninder Johal also reported on discussions that were taking place concerning the development of the role of creative industries within the LEP.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the Queen's Award event be supported;
- 2) that discussions concerning the profile of creative industries within LEP activity be noted,

29/15 **Meeting of the West Midlands LEP Chairmen – 5th February 2015**

The Board received the draft notes of a meeting of the West Midlands LEP Chairman held on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

30/15 **Future Role of the LEP Network**

The Board noted the contents of a 'think piece' circulated by the LEP Network intended to be used as the basis for LEPs to have a discussion with policy thinkers across political parties to influence their future thinking, and with an incoming government post the general election.

31/15 **Date of Next Meeting**

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015,

(The meeting closed at 10.40 a.m.)