



Minutes of a Meeting of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership

5th March 2012 at 2.00p.m.
at the University of Wolverhampton, Central Campus,
Wolverhampton

Present: Stewart Towe Chairman;
Cllr Darren Cooper Sandwell MBC;
Simon Eastwood Carillion plc;
Tim Hair Chamberlin plc;
Cllr Tim Wright Dudley MBC;
Cllr Roger Lawrence Wolverhampton CC;
Peter Mathews Black Country Metals;
Prof Ian Oakes Wolverhampton Uni.

In Attendance: Sarah Middleton Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Kevin Postones Dept for Business, Innovation
& Skills (BIS);
Paul Doherty Wolverhampton CC;
Nigel Easom Black Country Consortium Ltd.

Apologies: Cllrs Mike Bird and Les Jones and Jason Wouhra.

13/12 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2012 were circulated.

With reference to Minute No. 03/12 (Black Country Enterprise Zone – Update), the chairman reported that he had raised the issue of the Wholesale Market in discussions with Greater Birmingham LEP.

Pursuant to Minute No. 06/12 (Pathfinder Project to Support Medium Sized Businesses), issue concerning export credit insurance were raised as a current barrier to business development

Agreed:-

- 1) that the minutes of the meeting of held on 23rd January 2012 be received and confirmed as a correct record;
- 2) that issues around export credit be noted for further investigation within the Pathfinder project.

14/12 **Report of the Education and Skills Task and Finish Group**

Further to Minute No. 104/11, Professor Oakes presented the findings of the task and finish group established to develop an action plan to take forward the education and skills priority including recommendations covering:-

Work experience;
Work experience brokerage;
Soft skills;
Skills shortages;
Work based learning;
Information, advice & guidance;
Skills for the unemployed.

Members discussed the next steps to be taken, particularly in relation to work experience and career development and guidance. The development of specific actions and SMART objectives was highlighted as the next stage and the complexities around these issues were discussed.

Agreed:-

- 1) that the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish group be accepted as a basis for further development of work around this priority and discussion with partners and stakeholders;
- 2) that the Group be asked to consider the next steps in taking forward the report particularly the development of immediate, specific SMART actions and objectives to feed into the Operational Plan process;

- 3) that the report be referred to the Employment and Skills board for consideration and support in developing the actions at (2) above.

15/12 **Draft Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Strategic Transport Board – 1st March 2012**

Further to Minute No. 51/11, the Board received the draft minutes of the first meeting of the Black Country Strategic Transport Board.

Members discussed the work being undertaken around capacity and the proposals to support representations to Government supporting the development of Birmingham Airport to deal with issue relating to capacity in the Southeast. The development of the British waterways Charity and proposals to develop the canals around Darlaston to support the Enterprise Zone were noted.

Agreed that minutes of the Strategic Transport Board be received and the decisions set out confirmed.

16/12 **Business Engagement – Revised Operational Plan 2012/13 – Business Consultation Events**

Further to Minute No. 07/12, the Board received details of the suggestions on proposals to remove barriers to growth submitted at the Annual Stakeholders event on 24th February 2012 and that would inform the development of the Operational Plan. Sarah Middleton reported on proposals for two workshops to focus on the skills and business support areas.

Agreed:-

- 1) that the suggestions submitted be given further consideration as the revised Operational Plan is developed;
- 2) that the proposed workshops be supported.

17/12 **Regional Growth Fund (RGF) – Round Three**

Further to Minute No. 11/12, the Board received an update on the progress of projects from RGF Round 2, details of the Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain Initiative and the announcement of round 3 of bidding for the Fund.

In relation to Round Two it was reported successful Black Country applicants had been assigned a case officer with the majority of projects currently undertaking due diligence reviews. Applicants would contract with BIS by March 2012 and begin to draw down funds by April 2012. Round Three had been launched on 23rd February and would close at noon on 13th June 2012. £1 billion had been allocated in the round and it was open to projects and programmes. Members discussed the minimum amounts that could be applied for and the impact of state aid provisions.

The Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain Initiative had now been given a much wider remit in terms of geographical and sectoral coverage. A mixture of grants and loans will be available to support the purchase of capital equipment, R&D activity that improved manufacturing equipment, systems or processes, and specific training and skill development. Birmingham City Council and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) would administer the fund, of up to £125m, £25 million had been ringfenced for the original four LEP area applicants – Black Country, Coventry and Warwicks, Greater Birmingham and Liverpool.

Agreed that the actions being taken in respect of RGF Round Two and the Advanced Supply Chain be noted and that Members support the promotion of Round Three through their networks.

18/12 **Growing Places Fund – Update**

Further to Minute No. 02/12, the Board was informed that the allocation for the Fund had now been received by Sandwell MBC and that applications for funding had been invited by 9th March. The final appraisal process was circulated and it was reported that the Homes and Communities Agency had a property appraisal panel of consultants that could be utilised to support the appraisal of applications. It was estimated that appraisals would cost approximately £3,500 per appraisal and that a budget of approximately £50,000 would be necessary for the work. An initial sift would be undertaken to ensure

that only projects that met the criteria and private sector applicants meeting the financial requirements for funding would be appraised.

Members discussed the Government's advice that the Fund should be a revolving fund and the appropriate rates of interest and other terms that should be sought from applicants.

Agreed:-

- 1) that the Homes and Community Agency's Property Appraisal Panel be used to select consultants to appraise applications for Growing Places funding;
- 2) that a commercial rate of interest should be the starting point for the consideration of interest levels and other conditions to be applied to be sought from applicants for Growing Places funding.

(Councillor Cooper declared a non-pecuniary interest in this matter.)

19/12 **Black Country Enterprise Zone – Update**

The Board was informed that the Government had announced the launch of an Enterprise Zones Skills Fund available to the 15 Enterprise Zones outside the City Regions. The Fund was worth £1.5m, with each partnership receiving a grant of up to £100k from the Skills Funding Agency to collaborate and address skills priorities for the Enterprise Zone area and integrate these with the skills needs of the broader LEP area. The Fund would support the creation and publication of a skills plan in each of the Enterprise Zone areas. The plans would set out the agreed skills priorities for each Zone and integrate these with broader skills plans and strategies in the LEP area. The final output would be a jointly agreed set of skill priorities and plans which would be published by no later than end of March 2013. Wolverhampton City Council had agreed to act as the accountable body for the fund.

Further to Minute No. 03/12, Members were updated on the development of the investment offer, the publication of the Local development Order for the Darlaston sites and the timetable for their remediation and development. A formal launch of the Zone was being planned for May 2012.

Agreed:-

- 1) that the proposals to apply for Enterprise Zone Skills funding be supported;
- 2) that the proposals for a formal launch of the Zone in May 2012 be supported.

20/12 **European Funding Issues**

The Board received a report on a number of European issues including:-

- a) discussions at the Black Country Consortium on Increasing the Use and Take Up of European Funds. Consortium Directors had requested that ABCA Chief Executives report on the scope for developing a team to improve the Black Country's capacity to develop projects and secure and utilise European and other strategic funding streams;
- b) a request from West Midlands' Councils for a letter of support for a European Funding application for the European Service and discussions concerning a review and future funding of the Service's Brussels office;
- c) the appointment of a named alternate for Councillor Lawrence on the Local Management Committee.

In respect of (a) above it was noted that the report would also relate to discussions concerning transport schemes referred to at Minute No. 5/12 above (Draft Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Strategic Transport Board – 1st March 2012).

In respect of (b) above, the progress of local authorities' discussions concerning the funding of the European Service were noted.

Agreed:-

- 1) that the consideration of proposals to improve the Black Country's capacity to develop projects and secure strategic funding streams be supported;
- 2) that the West Midlands Councils' application for ERDF funding for the European Service be supported;
- 3) that the position concerning the review of the Brussels' office be noted and that a further report be submitted when concrete proposals have been put forward;
- 4) that a suitable representative be sought to act as a named alternate on the Local Management Committee.

21/12 **Black Country Consortium Business Plan 2012/13**

The Board received the Consortium's approved Business Plan for 2012/13 and noted that Guarantee Members had request that any new demands for Consortium support creating additional pressure on resources and impacting on the ability to deliver the Plan be reported to them.

22/12 **Nominations for Appointment of Black Country Consortium Vice-Chairman**

The Board was informed that the Consortium Guarantee Members had asked the private sector Members of the Partnership to put forward nominations) for the position of Vice-Chairman of Black Country Consortium Ltd.

Agreed that the Board review process be utilised to bring forward a nomination.

23/12 **Review of Board Structure – Update**

Further to Minute No. 08/12, received an update on the progress of the he selection process to bring forward Board Members for the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership for the 2012/13 financial year. Expressions of interest had been sought through advertising in the Express and Star and via the Black Country Local Enterprise

Partnership website. The Nomination Panel met on 20th February to consider the expressions and selected candidates had been invited to submit a full application form and provide a copy of their CV.

A further meeting of the Nomination Panel would take place after this meeting to invite candidates to a final selection process to take place on 18th April 2012. It was proposed that an independent company, Worthy Associates, be used to support the process. The Company had been used by the Secretariat for senior appointments in the past.

Agreed that the process for selection and the decisions of the Nomination Panel be noted and that a report and recommendations on the outcome of the process be submitted to the next meeting.

24/12 **PR and Communications Update**

Members received the update on communications activity for January 2012. Sarah Middleton reported that arrangements had been made for the Press Officer to continue in post for a further six months.

Members placed on record their appreciation of the officer's work.

25/12 **AoB – Monitoring/Target Statistics**

Kevin Postones enquired whether the data presented at the Stakeholders event could be used as the basis for a smaller regular monitoring bulletin.

Agreed that the Secretariat be asked to produce a simple bulletin tracking some key targets and indicators to enable the board to monitor progress against some targets.

26/12 **Date of Next Meeting**

23rd April 2012.

(The meeting closed at 3.30 p.m.)