



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

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2012 at 2.00p.m.  
at Black Country University Technical College, Vernon Way,  
Walsall

**Present:**

Stewart Towe	Chairman;
Cllr Mike Bird	Walsall MBC;
Simon Eastwood	Carillion plc;
Tim Hair	Chamberlin plc;
Cllr Ian Jones	Sandwell MBC;
Cllr Tim Wright	Dudley MBC;
Cllr Roger Lawrence	Wolverhampton CC;
Peter Mathews	Black Country Metals;
Prof Ian Oakes	Wolverhampton Uni
Jason Wouhra	East End Foods.

**In Attendance:**

Sarah Middleton	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Paul Sheehan	Walsall MBC;
Kevin Postones	Dept for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS);
Nigel Easom	Black Country Consortium Ltd.

**Apologies:** Cllrs Cooper and Les Jones.

### 01/12 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011 were circulated.

**Agreed** that the minutes of the meeting of held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

**Growing Places Fund – Assessment Process**

Further to Minute No. 103/11, Members received a draft outline application form for funding from Growing Places. It was proposed that once the application was approved:-

- a low profile and targeted call for projects would be issued to Local Authorities with a 'heads up' to known developers who attended the Black Country Delivery Plan launch. The application and associated information would also be available on the website;
- projects would go through an initial assessment against the agreed criteria. Alignment opportunities to the Black Country Property Investment Programme and other funding sources would be identified;
- work would be undertaken to identify a fund manager who would be responsible for the formal evaluation of projects, the identification of suitable investments complying with the overall investment strategy of the LEP, the alignment of a wider portfolio of investment and providing advice on State Aid;
- the possibility of aligning the Growing Places Fund with the Jessica Fund would be explored;
- the establishment of an investment advisory group to provide expertise from both the public and private sectors on project development, delivery and financing would be taken forward.

Kevin Postones reported that following a recalculation of the allocations using more up-to-date data, the Black Country's allocation had been increased to £9.7m. The Board discussed the priorities for the fund and the relationship between the establishment of a revolving fund and the need for pump priming and action to deal with longer-term issues such as land remediation.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the draft outline application form be approved subject to any detailed comments by the officer steering group;
- 2) that the next steps as outlined above be supported;

- 3) that further consideration be given to the issues concerning pump priming and the establishment of a revolving fund when an indication is available of the projects to be considered for funding;
- 4) that the issues raised in relation to (3) above and the need for long term land remediation continue to be raised in discussion with Ministers and civil servants concerning the development of the Fund.

03/12 **Black Country Enterprise Zone – Update**

Further to Minute No. 102/11, it was reported that the Secretariat had now received comments from Government on the draft Implementation Plan and the board was updated on progress in addressing these issues and on further discussions with civil servants when they visited the Zone sites on 20<sup>th</sup> January. The Lead Member highlighted the need to make progress in marketing the EZ sites and referred to the possible scope for co-operation with Greater Birmingham. Discussion concerning the location of the Wholesale Market were noted.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that the response from Government on the Implementation Plan be welcomed and that further reports be submitted on the outstanding issues as work progresses;
- 2) that the issues around the location of the Wholesale Market be raised in discussions with the Chairman of the Greater Birmingham LEP.

04/12 **Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF)**

Further to Minute No. 98/11, Professor Ian Oakes reported on discussions with potential partners including City of Wolverhampton College, North East Wolverhampton Academy, SEMTA, Black Country UTC, aerospace and automotive companies concerning the submission of a GIF proposal with a focus on automotive and aerospace skills as part of the broader hi-value manufacturing sector.

The proposal would involve the establishment of a 'Skills Factory' at the heart of the i54 site, with the capability to produce sufficient numbers of

appropriately educated young people, at all levels, with the necessary skill set and expertise required to sustain the future workforce needs for both JLR and the broader high-value manufacturing sector in the Black Country. This would be achieved through sustained and sustainable learning and progression relationships between schools, colleges, universities and employers within the Black Country as a means of addressing the skills needs in strategic areas.

Sarah Middleton reported on the continuing discussions with JLR concerning the availability of appropriately skilled labour. Members discussed the gaps in supply, the role of apprenticeships, the need for the private sector to support and promote itself possible recruits and the capacity to promote skills development within the labour force particularly the semi-skilled.

**Agreed** that the proposed submission of an outline GOF proposal be supported.

05/12 **Capacity Fund – Update**

Further to Minute No. 62/11, the Board was informed that, in December 2011, BIS announced that all LEP Partnerships had been allocated £25,600 per year for the next three financial years for LEP capacity development. A proposed application for funding to support activity in the areas of business engagement and consultation, business intelligence, economic intelligence and financial model development was submitted for the Board's consideration.

**Agreed** that the application for the further round of capacity funding be supported.

06/12 **Pathfinder Project to Support Medium Sized Businesses**

Further to Minute No. 100/11, the Board was informed BIS had written to all the Partnerships involved in the proposed Pathfinder Project to Support Medium Sized Businesses (MSB) setting out its views on the approach to the development of the Project. It suggested that the core elements of the projects should be:

- peer-to-peer business seminars over the twelve months on issues such as exporting to new markets and succession

planning and providing expert speakers on significant issues for MSBs;

- Promoting mid-sized businesses;
- Building networks of mid-sized businesses
- Programme evaluation
- Establishing mentoring networks

In the light of these comments BIS had asked Partnerships to submit a high level and short project plan and discussions are also taking place with BIS concerning the shape of the programme. Work had commenced to prepare a programme of workshops based around work with emerging priority sectors and the refresh of the LEP Operational Plan. Discussions had also taken place with CBI to share with them work on the analysis of Black Country companies and the possibility of an export related event for medium sized businesses. Reference was also made to work being undertaken by the CBI and the need for a vehicle for the promotion small and medium sized companies' achievements and progress.

The Board was also informed that the industry working group to examine structural and behavioural barriers to the development of alternative debt markets in the UK established by the Government had circulated a call for evidence inviting the submission of wide ranging views and clear recommendations as to what Government and the industry could do to improve the non-bank lending landscape.

**Agreed:-**

- 1) that an outline project plan be prepared for consideration at the including proposals for a programme of workshops to engage with medium sized businesses;
- 2) that a response be prepared for submission to the Non-Bank Lending Task Force in conjunction with the Access to Finance Group.

07/12 **Revised Operational Plan 2012/13**

The Board received an initial draft of a revised operational plan reviewing the priorities and targets set out in the original plan in the light of the rapidly changing policy and economic environment in which the Partnership was operating. The revised plan set out details of the changes in the business and economic environment, the developments in Government policy and

the progress made towards the original priorities. The plan also included a framework for developing and refreshing priorities, targets and objectives for the pending financial year 2012/13 in the context of the emerging work on the development of transformational economic sectors and understanding of the barriers to growth in these areas.

**Agreed** that the revised operation plan including the revised framework and themes and priorities be supported for continuing discussion and engagement with intermediary business organisations.

## 08/12 Review of Board Structure – Update

Further to Minute No. 80/11, the Board received proposed forms and an information pack to take forward the process to recruit possible candidates for non-local authority appointments to the Partnership. It was proposed to commence the review process by advertising in the Express and Star accompanied by a press release and e-bulletin. A three week period would be allowed for the submission of expressions of interest. These would be considered by a Nomination Panel comprising the Chairman, two local authority leaders (politically balanced) supported by the Consortium Chief Executive and Human Resources Manager and a Local Authority Chief Executive.

Members considered the level of vacancies and the need to find appropriate private sector members to take forward the Partnership priorities balanced against the need to ensure that the Partnership Board remained of a size to allow flexible and efficient decision making.

### **Agreed:-**

- 1) that the nomination process for persons interested in joining the LEP including the information pack and other documents be approved;
- 2) that the advertising arrangements be approved to start no sooner than the week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012;
- 3) that the arrangements for the establishment of a Nomination Panel be approved and that the Panels recommendations concerning any appointment and amendments to the structure of the partnership Board be submitted to the Board for consideration.

09/12 **Major Planning Applications**

The Board received an update on the submission and status of major planning applications within each of the four Black Country Local Planning Authorities as at December 2011. Members discussed additional information to support the data provided to give a fuller picture of developments.

**Agreed** that the Secretariat continue discussions with Walsall MBC to develop the information provided in the report.

10/12 **PR and Communications Update**

Members received the update on communications activity for December 2011. Members welcomed the increasing level of activity and discussed how it could be developed further.

11/12 **AoB – Regional Growth Fund (RGF)**

Members referred to the continuing delays in despatching offer letters to successful applicants in Round Two of the RGF bidding. Sarah Middleton reported on discussions taking place with BIS and Kevin Postones updated on the steps taken to deal with the backlog.

**Agreed** that the steps taken to ensure letters have been despatched be noted and that the process continue to be monitored to ensure that the process continues to be expedited.

12/12 **Date of Next Meeting**

5<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

(The meeting closed at 3.30 p.m.)