

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

14th December 2020 at 12.00 pm
Microsoft Teams

Present:

Tom Westley	Chair;
Cllr Ian Brookfield	City of Wolverhampton;
Paul Brown	EY;
Kevin Davis	The Vine Trust;
Rachel Eade MBE	Red;
Cherry Elliott	Higgs & Sons;
Chris Handy	Accord Group;
Cllr. Patrick Harley	Dudley MBC;
Ninder Johal	Nachural Communications;
Prof Nazira Karodia	University of Wolverhampton;
Prof Geoff Layer	University of Wolverhampton;
Jatinder Sharma	Walsall College;
Amanda Tomlinson	Black Country Housing Group;

Other attendees

Cllr. Brian Edwards – Leader South Staffs
Sarah Middleton – BCC Ltd.
Kevin O’Keefe – Dudley MBC;
Michelle Nutt – BEIS;
Aaron Toussaint – BEIS;
Prof Delma Dwight – BCC Ltd.
Katherine Birch – BCC Ltd.
Jaspal Sohal – BCC Ltd.
Lara Smith – BCC Ltd.
Stuart Everton – BC Transport Team;
Kelly Valente – Walsall Accountable Body;
Richard Lawrence – City of Wolverhampton

Apologies: Councillors Adrian Andrew, Mike Bird, Maria Crompton and Danny Millard and Simon Eastwood and Lindsey Flynn.

197/20 **Declarations of Interest and Gift Register**

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

198/20 **Public Minutes of the LEP Board held on 23rd November 2020**

Agreed that the Board confirm and approve the Minutes of the LEP Board held on 23rd November 2020.

199/20 **Assurance Framework – Exemptions**

- **Board Membership**

The LEP Board were advised that in respect of the Exemptions reported through to the Board, no further clarification had been received from BEIS and thus the recommendation was to extend the tenures of the four Board Members – Paul Brown, Simon Eastwood, Chris Handy and Ninder Johal, from 31st January 2020, through to the 31st March 2021, subject to the final exemption provisions.

- **WMCA Strategic Economic Development (SED) Board**

The meeting was advised that, in respect of the private sector, as the Black Country has a lead role on the Construction Sector the BC LEP had been approached to nominate to this role. An individual had been identified from a successful, high value BC business operating from within the Black Country and they would be considered by the SED Board at their meeting on 17th December 2020.

In respect of the Further Education sector the Black Country Further Education Colleges Principals Group had been contacted and asked to submit a nomination to the SED Board.

- **Expression of Interest and Guarantee Member Approval**

Members were advised that two Expressions of Interest to join the BC LEP Board had been received and were being progressed.

One candidate had been interviewed by the Chair and Chief Executive and would be invited to join the Board, subject to confirmation by the Guarantee Members – the four local authority Leaders - that the individual, as a private sector Board Member be confirmed as a Non-Executive Director of Black Country Consortium Ltd.

The matter was being progressed with the Guarantee Members and subject to their approval, they would be invited to commence their membership and attend their first meeting in January.

In regard to the second candidate a date for interview needed to be identified.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) extend the Board tenures of Paul Brown, Simon Eastwood, Chris Handy and Ninder Johal, through to 31st March 2021, subject to the final Exemption provisions on the Assurance Framework.
- 2) note the nomination rights provided to the LEP Board in respect of the Construction Sector and Further Education Sector; and
- 3) note that approval for the appointment of the new Director was being consulted upon with the Black Country Consortium Ltd.

200/20

Policy Update

a) BC Delivery Plan

Members were reminded that they had received the draft Delivery Plan in August 2020, no comments had been received and the Delivery Plan was submitted for Members to confirm and approve the BC Delivery Plan for 2020/21.

b) Treasury Green Book – 3rd December Launch

Members were advised that the Government had heightened the importance of the business case requirement and the benefit cost ratio. Sarah Middleton advised that this reflected that approach that had been taken by the LEP.

The report provided an overview of the key changes and it was noted that there was funding for training and, as well as LEP officers, through the BC Pipeline Group the aim was to ensure that each BC LA's had at least one resident expert on the provisions.

c) LEP Away Day

The meeting was advised that the January LEP Board would be used for an Away Day session in order to consider in greater depth and for future policy formation, the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. It is proposed that the meeting would commence at 3.00pm but would run through to approximately 5.30pm – Chiefs and Heads of Regeneration, or their equivalent, would be invited to attend.

In respect of the Away Day session members had the following suggestions to make: -

- Chris Handy advised that it would be good to receive the presentation submitted to the Gard City meeting on Digital Innovation Vision.
- Prof Geoff Layer advised that it would be beneficial to have an Update on work undertaken and what had made an impact.
- Jat Sharma advised that the Away Day should also include “horizon scanning”, that is look at prioritising projects across the region where there was greatest need i.e., youth unemployment.
- Ninder Johal advised that if there was a “No Deal” Brexit then it would be good to have a representative from the Automotive sector who could advise on impact to the sector
- Rachel Eade suggested that a discussion around the Growth Hub to include volumes dealt with; how the Growth Hub engaged with partners; how resources were positioned and aligned with others.
- Prof Geoff Layer stated that there should be a “Reset”, that is to consider what there was a need to invest in to ensure the BC remained ahead of the game and to consider how to create wealth going forward, i.e., Life Sciences. How BC shapes economic response.

The Chair and Sarah Middleton welcomed the comments to inform the agenda for the Away Day.

d) Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2019/20

It was proposed to have the AGM on 22nd February 2021, if Members agreement. Whilst the AGM would be need to be virtual the overall Agenda would follow the format of the previous AGM and Members of the public would be invited to pre-submit questions to the Board, with their questions being answered on-line.

Amanda Tomlinson advised that there would be a need to check the validity of holding a virtual AGM, as her organisation – the Black Country Housing Group had received legal advice that potentially would suggest that a virtual AGM could not be held linked to legalisation and dependent on the Black Country Consortium Ltd.'s Articles of Association.

EIU

e) Retail Sector Intelligence

Prof Delma Dwight provided an overview of the Retail sector which was a key component of the Black Country economy - employing 83,500 people across 6,730 businesses and generating £3.2bn GVA. She highlighted a key risk to the sector due to the impact of Covid19 with over 43% of the sector eligible for furlough. It was critical to understand the sub components of the sector and the activity required to support the sector as the sector diversified in the forthcoming years.

Covid-19 had had various impacts depending on the type of retail with wholesale retail e.g., Blakemore's performing well but the high street stores e.g., Boots, Debenhams, the Arcadia group facing closures due to change in consumer spending patterns and the impact of Covid-19. This had impacted on the direct employees of these stores and the Black Country labour market but also the associated supply chains which had been severely impacted.

She advised that the paper provided the headline statistics in relation to the sector and stated that there would be an opportunity to look into this sector in more detail at the away day.

f) ONS Health Index

The meeting was advised that as the EIU were working on understanding what 'levelling up' meant for the Black Country they had started to look at a range of measures. Released recently was the ONS Health index which provided one facet of this and provided an overall headline measure of health and 3 domains:

1. Healthy People – focused on health outcomes such as life expectancy, health conditions and personal well-being.
2. Healthy Lives – health-related behaviours and personal circumstances such as smoking, alcohol misuse, unemployment and working conditions.
3. Healthy Places – wider determinants of health, environmental factors including access to green space, air pollution and access to amenities (such as housing, GP surgeries).

Beyond these domains, there were 17 subdomains and 58 indicators, which were reported in greater detail in the report.

Agreed

That the LEP Board: -

- 1) Confirm and approve the BC LEP Delivery Plan for 2020/21;
- 2) Receive and note the updates on the following: -
 - a) BC LEP Delivery Plan
 - b) HM Treasury Green Book
 - c) LEP Board Away Day – 18th January 2021, with an updated programme informed by the comments of Board Members; and
 - d) the Economic Intelligence Unit's updates on the Retail Sector and ONS Health index; and
- 3) Annual General Meeting Arrangements 2020/21 to be held on 22nd February 2021, subject to confirmation that a virtual format met the requirements of legislation and the BC Consortium Limited's Articles of Association.

201/20 **Black Country Local Skills Plan**

Members were advised that the purpose of Local Skills Reports was to provide a clear and consistent view of local skills needs across areas.

The reports would be a key source of local skills information that better enable cross-area comparison and helped feed local intelligence to central government and the national-level Skills and Productivity Board (SPB).

Whilst LEPs that were part of an MCA were not required by government to produce a Local Skills Report, at the November 2020 Black Country Employment and Skills Board (ESB) it was agreed that a 'local' report for the Black Country would be a useful tool to convey the skills needs of the Black Country, and provide a way of leveraging support and unlocking much needed resources.

The Black Country Local Skills Reports will help to maximise influence both locally and nationally by:

- Acting as an engagement tool – a vehicle through which the Black Country could directly engage, influence and rally employers and providers in their areas to support the local skills agenda.
- Be a 'go-to' document for everything local-skills related – which would bring together existing and new skills information into a consistent format common to all areas.
- Clearly set out the key skills needs – ensuring local skills needs were visible to local partners who could then engage with them.
- Offered valuable insight and evaluation – detailing the progress made on current local skills initiatives and outlining future skills plans to plug key skills gaps.
- Feeding intelligence to the national SPB and central government – to provide a consistent output common to all areas that the SPB could be used to understand the needs and priorities.

Kevin Davis asked if the Local Skills Plan addressed his comments raised at the last meeting in regard to “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.” That is did it include the necessary support for the BAME communities. He was advised that the gender and ethnicity data had been included where it was available in order to understand the needs of all communities across the Black Country.

Agreed that the LEP Board endorse the work being done to develop a Black Country Local Skills Plan and the development of propositions identified to support Black Country businesses and residents.

202/20 Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution

The Ten Point Plan was submitted and the following areas were noted: - Greener Buildings; Green public transport, cycling and walking; accelerating the shift to zero emission vehicles; investing in carbon capture usage and storage; Protecting the natural environment; Green finance and Innovation; Driving the growth of low carbon hydrogen; delivering new and advanced nuclear power; advanced off shore wind; and Jet zero and green ships.

It was noted that key observations needed to be considered in more detail moving forward from a Black Country perspective. Of the ten further policy announcements listed, all would benefit from greater recognition of the potential role of 'Place' and regions in cost effective, efficient delivery of national policy objectives, and therefore the BC needs to consider how our place-based implications were recognised in emerging government responses from this Plan. It was noted that such considerations were clearly beginning to gain traction in Whitehall (e.g., in mentions of Place in transport and Super Places in CCUS)² but they need to go further. In particular:

- a. Should the BC LEP seek to influence The Energy White Paper to recognise that the most cost-effective zero carbon energy system for the UK needed to draw on a greater variety and more context-sensitive range of technologies than the existing system and places like the BC would need investment to support supply chain diversification.
- b. The need to gain an understanding of the affordability factors driven by innovation and implications for the levelling up agenda, businesses and communities.

There were risks from assuming a one-size fits all solutions if this emerged and the implications in a BC context and regional disparities.

Other considerations included: How the Black Country could influence the Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy to create opportunities and a sustainable future for the 295,000 companies for whom contribute towards 55% of industrial carbon emissions; how best for the BC / WM

to make the case that the Net Zero, Heat and Buildings and National Infrastructure Strategies must recognise the value of allocating a clear role to regions and places in delivering these policies cost-effectively and in a suitably targeted way, also aligned to local opportunities and needs; Work with BC Planning colleagues in understanding land use implications re the BC Plan (2021 – 2038); and explore and gain an understanding of the role of institutionalised funding re HMT Net Zero Review.

Councillor Ian Brookfield stated that the ten-point plan needed to be incorporated into the BC Plan. He stated that whilst there remained a lot of questions there was a lot of capacity across stakeholders. He stated that further thinking should form part of the horizon gap when the LEP Board held their Away Day in January. He added that he would be 100% committed to any plan that moved the region forward and that the ten-point plan provided an engine for change across the green agenda, to include the “retrofit” of homes which would deliver not only clean homes but also skills. With an appropriate level of resource and willingness this is something that could be moved forward quickly. He highlighted that the University of Wolverhampton Brownfield Research Institute whose research would not only deliver jobs but also change the physical environment.

Chris Handy advised that he had a similar point regarding the retrofit of properties and observed that there would be challenges across the social and private sectors, referencing modern methods of construction and thermal wraps. He stated that the approaches could be developed through a centre of excellence with the University of Wolverhampton. He concluded that it provided a great opportunity and significant challenge and should be built into the Away Day, as there was a need to develop a tangible plan that linked into the circular economy and work towards net zero.

The Chair referenced work being undertaken to decarbonise SMEs and he acknowledged the role of companies such as Rolls Royce, highlighting that the Midlands had potential to be at the forefront

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Note the Government’s approach to the 10 Point Plan; and
- 2) Note the challenges and suggestions about the emerging proposals coming forward and make the 10 Point Plan topic a central part to the January 2021 LEP Policy session.

203/20 **PR and Communications Report (Information)**

Ninder Johal and Katherine Birch provided an update on the latest PR and Communications Plan, to include: -

- BBC had expressed interest in the decarbonising work of Repowering the Black Country.
- Skills Factory had held a “world of work week” with 7584 students and teachers attending across the week;
- Active Black Country had launched the “Love Exploring” app;
- A new edition of the Rainbow Book had been released;
- The Growth Hub had launched Round 2 of the small business employment grants; and
- The Black Country Living Museum was in the top 100 accounts within the UK.

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

204/20 **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).

205/20 **Minutes**

Agreed that the LEP Board confirm and approve the private minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2020.

206/20 **Private Minutes of Funding Sub-Group held on 2nd December 2020**

Agreed that the LEP Board confirm and approve the minutes of the Funding Sub-Group held on 2nd December 2020, to include all recommendations contained therein.

207/20 **Policy Update**

a) Freeports Update

There was a flexing of the interpretation of the Prospectus with thinking that a port could provide a potential partner, albeit that the WM region was outside the 45km boundary of any port. The LEP Network were still promoting the EZ model, which provided similar flexibilities and Members were advised that they could either submit questions now or outside of the meeting

b) Levelling Up Fund

The prospectus remained in draft – early stages but proposed to be made available early in the new year. In respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund details of the pilot were still awaited, however the fund was looking relatively small in comparison to the EU funds it was to replace.

c) Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)

Details of the CSR were shared with the Board.

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

- a) Freeports update
- b) Levelling Up Fund
- c) Comprehensive Spending Review

208/20

Black Country – Pipeline Development Presentation

Lara Smith provided a presentation of the PowerBi tool for the Black Country Pipeline of projects, highlighting the ability to drill down into data via, Constituency, Ward, project type etc.

The Chair welcomed the development of the tool and advised that it would prove very useful in identifying project prioritisation.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the Black Country Pipeline Development Presentation.

209/20

Risk Register – Covid19 Programme Risk update

The meeting was advised that the “back-to-back” agreement had been resolved with the WMCA.

Agreed that the Risk Register be noted.

210/20 **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

Agreed that the update be noted.

211/20 **Date of Next meeting**

Agreed that the LEP Board note and confirm the following schedule of meetings for 2021: -

18th January; 22nd February; 22nd March; 19th April; 17th May; 14th June*; 19th July; 16th August; 20th September; 18th October; 22nd November; and 13th December*.

* Policy Away Days

(The meeting closed at 13.05pm)