

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

18th January 2021 at 3.00 pm
Microsoft Teams

Present:

Tom Westley	Chair;
Cllr Adrian Andrew	Walsall MBC;
Cllr Ian Brookfield	City of Wolverhampton;
Kevin Davis	The Vine Trust;
Martin Dudley	Thomas Dudley Ltd.;
Rachel Eade MBE	Red;
Cherry Elliott	Higgs & Sons;
Maxine Espley	Accord Group;
Chris Handy	Accord Group;
Cllr. Patrick Harley	Dudley MBC;
Ninder Johal	Nachural Communications;
Prof Geoff Layer	University of Wolverhampton;
Cllr Danny Millard	Sandwell MBC;
Jatinder Sharma	Walsall College;
Amanda Tomlinson	Black Country Housing
Group;	

Other attendees

Sarah Middleton – BCC Ltd.
Kevin O’Keefe – Dudley MBC;
Tim Johnson – City of Wolverhampton;
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 Mike Bird, Maria Crompton and Brian Edwards and Paul Brown and Lindsey Flynn.

1/21 **Declarations of Interest and Gift Register**

Minute No. 5/21 - Local Growth Deal - Hub to Home Transport Innovation Centre and Test Track Project: Very Light Rail and Autonomous Technologies – National Innovation Centre project

(Tom Westley declared his non-pecuniary interest in, as a Governor of Dudley College, in Minute No. 5/21, and reserved his right to speak and vote on the matter should he decide to do so.)

Agreed

- 1) that the LEP Board note declarations of interest; and
- 2) that there were no declarations of any gifts made exceeding £50.00.

2/21 **Public Minutes of the LEP Board held on 14th December 2021**

Agreed that the Board confirm and approve the Minutes of the LEP Board held on 14th December 2021.

3/21 **Confirmation of New Members**

- **Maxine Espley, Executive Director Accord Group**
- **Martin Dudley, Managing Director, Thomas Dudley Ltd**

Ninder Johal referenced the Government diversity target based on a gender balance on LEP Boards and queried what was being done in respect of wider diversity, that is ethnicity, disability etc. Sarah Middleton confirmed that the mandated diversity target was a gender balance by April 2032, however, she advised that the Black Country LEP were committed to reflecting the region's community and the Board did reflect the ethnic diversity of the Black Country, in addition to moving towards the required gender balance.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Note that following formal interview by the Chair and Chief Executive, that the four Black Country Consortium Ltd Guarantee Members (the four local authority leaders) had approved the

- appointment of the applicants to be Non-Executive Directors of the Consortium and consequently, LEP Board Members;
- 2) Note and endorse the appointment of Maxine Espley, Executive Director, Accord Group, and Martin Dudley, Managing Director, Thomas Dudley Ltd.; and
 - 3) Note that the recruitment campaign was ongoing and that the requirement was to achieve a Board that had a 50/50 gender split by 31st March 2023.

4/21 **Annual General Meeting – arrangements – 22nd February 2021**

Sarah Middleton advised that following the December Board meeting, the LEP had sought legal advice on holding a virtual AGM and had been advised that the provisions of the relevant legislation, Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 had been extended through to 31st March 2021, thus enabling a virtual AGM to be held. She also advised Members that the format of the AGM would be similar to those in January 2020, albeit held virtually and the public would be allowed to attend and observe, as well as still submit written questions. In respect of written questions, the answers to these would be posted on-line.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Note the advice received from Higgs & Sons, in respect to the provisions of the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020, which allowed for AGMs to be held virtually, had been extended through to 31st March 2021, thus enabling a virtual AGM of the BCC Ltd to be held as advised on 22nd February 2021; and
- 2) Approve and confirm the arrangements for the AGM to include the agenda and arrangements for public questions.

5/21 **Local Growth Deal - Hub to Home Transport Innovation Centre and Test Track Project: Very Light Rail and Autonomous Technologies – National Innovation Centre project**

Simon Eastwood reminded Members that, as all Get Building Fund Projects had been asked to reduce their asks by 15% and the LEP had committed to fund this shortfall if alternative funding was identified. This had been done and the LEP Board was being asked to approve £650,000 for the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre project.

Councillor Patrick Harley thanked the LEP and local authority officers for their work in progressing the VLR project. He stated that the project was

progressing well and invited the Board Members to attend for a site visit to view the progress. The Chair welcomed the invitation.

Agreed that the LEP Board approve the Accountable Body for the Growth Deal (Walsall Council) to proceed to enter into a Grant Agreement to the value of £650,000 with Dudley Council to deliver the Local Growth Deal Fund (LGF) funded elements of the Hub to Home Transport Innovation Centre and Test Track Project: Very Light Rail and Autonomous Technologies – National Innovation Centre project with delivery to commence in the 2020/21 financial year.

(NB - Tom Westley declared his non-pecuniary interest in, as a Governor of Dudley College, in Minute No. 5/21, and reserved his right to speak and vote on the matter should he decide to do so.)

6/21

Get Building Fund Programme Approval - Capital and Revenue Funding

Simon Eastwood advised that the “Back-to-Back” agreement had been agreed with the West Midlands Combined Authority, which had provided for a share of revenue and capital contingency funding, which if approved would provide the Accountable Body to carry out its role for the programme; Black Country Consortium Ltd management and administration of the programme; and Walsall Council to cover external legal and technical fees to support the programme.

Prof Geoff Layer referenced the University of Wolverhampton, National Building Institute programme, which had received GBF funding and thanked LEP and local authority officers for their work in expediting the process.

Councillor Danny Millard asked if the funded projects had commenced and it was noted that both projects were ongoing.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Approves the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) to use the revenue funding of £25,000, and capital contingency funding of £12,625, for:
 - a) Walsall Council to carry out its role as Accountable Body to the Getting Building Fund programme;
 - b) the Black Country Consortium Ltd for the Management and Administration functions of the Getting Building Fund, and;

- c) Walsall Council to cover the costs of the external legal and technical fees in support of managing the programme.
- 2) Approves the reprofile of project funding allocation for 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years

7/21

Growing Places Fund Wolverhampton Canalside

Simon Eastwood advised that the application had sought a reduction in contracted outputs as the scope of the project had changed over the life of the project with other elements going to be delivered.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Approve for Sandwell Council to proceed to amending the Grant Agreement with Wolverhampton City Council, to deliver the Growing Places Fund (GPF) funded elements of the Wolverhampton Canalside project with delivery to conclude in the 2020/21 financial year; and
- 2) Note that the change request related to the removal of outputs, as the scope of the original project had changed significantly.

8/21

Land and Property Investment Fund - Programme Change Request Approval recommendation: LPIF Programme Extension

Simon Eastwood advised that the original LPIF programme had required the delivery of all outputs by March 2021. However, during the delivery of the projects supported by the programme there had been a number of derogations allowing for an extended time to deliver outputs on individual projects. If the LPIF Programme Extension was approved this would mean that all supported projects would have until March 2025 in which to deliver the agreed project outputs.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Approve that the Black Country Land and Property Investment Fund programme, be reprofiled to allow expenditure and outputs to be claimed up to March 2025.
- 2) Approves that programme management costs, within this fund be reprofiled for an additional year to March 2026, to ensure that the expenditure and outputs are audited in line with the Black Country Assurance Framework.

9/21 **Land and Property Investment Fund - Sandwell Housing Gap Funding**

Simon Eastwood advised that the request was for a reprofile of the scheme's outputs.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) Approves the Accountable Body for the Land and Property Investment Fund (Walsall Council) to proceed to amending the Grant Agreement with Sandwell Council to deliver the Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF) funded elements of the Sandwell Housing Gap Funding - Phase 1 project with delivery to commence in the 2020/21 financial year; and
- 2) Notes that the financial forecast for the grant award has changed, and differs to what is scheduled in the contract with the Accountable Body.

10/21 **Growth Hub EU Transition Business Readiness Programme Approval**

The meeting was advised that the Black Country Growth Hub had been allocated an additional £136,000 in order to deliver the EU transition Business Readiness Programme for local businesses. In order to satisfy legal requirements, the BC Growth Hub, under the Black Country Consortium Ltd, was required to enter into a grant agreement with the Accountable Body.

Agreed that the LEP board confirm approval for the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) to enter into a Grant Agreement with the Black Country Consortium Ltd for the additional award of EU Transition Business Readiness Growth Hub Grant Funding with delivery to commence in the 2020/21 financial year.

11/21 **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.

Private Policy Session

12/21 **Policy Away Day Agenda**

Agreed that the LEP move into a private policy session.

13/20 **Date of Next meeting**

Agreed that the LEP Board note that the next meeting would be held on 22nd February 2021.

(The meeting closed at 3.20pm)

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