

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

19th October 2020 at 3.00 pm
Microsoft Teams

Present:

Tom Westley	Chair;
Cllr. Ian Brookfield	City of Wolverhampton;
Paul Brown	EY;
Kevin Davis	The Vine Trust;
Rachel Eade	Red Limited;
Simon Eastwood	Eastwood Consulting;
Cherry Elliott	Higgs & Sons;
Lindsey Flynn	Well Associates;
Chris Handy	Accord Group;
Ninder Johal	Nachural Communications;
Prof Nazira Karodia	University of Wolverhampton;
Prof Geoff Layer	University of Wolverhampton;
Cllr. Danny Millard	Sandwell MBC;
Jatinder Sharma	Walsall College;
Amanda Tomlinson	Black Country Housing Group;
and	
Cllr. David Vickers	Dudley MBC.

In Attendance:

Cllr. Brian Edwards	South Staffordshire DC;
Sarah Middleton	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Kevin O'Keefe	Dudley MBC;
Deborah Hindson	Walsall MBC (Section 151);
Katherine Birch	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Chris Styche	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Prof Delma Dwight	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Lara Smithq	Black Country Consortium Ltd;
Alison Guerra	Walsall MBC;
Mark Lavender	Walsall MBC;
Kelly Valente	Walsall MBC;
Aaron Toussaint	BEIS; and
Hywel Ruddick	Black Country Consortium Ltd.

Apologies: Councillors Adrian Andrew, Mike Bird and Patrick Harley.

161/20 **Declarations of Interest and Gift Register**

Simon Eastwood – declared his non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 177/20 – Local Growth Fund – Birchley Island Site Assembly Project and reserved his right to speak vote thereon.

Agreed that the declaration be noted and that there were no gifts or hospitality over the value of £50 declared.

162/20 **Public Minutes of the LEP Board held on 21st September 2020**

Agreed that the Board confirm and approve the Minutes of the LEP Board held on 21st September 2020.

163/20 **LEP Board – Appointments**

- **Board Diversity Champion**
- **Town Boards – confirmation of LEP representation**

The meeting was advised that following the former Leader of Sandwell MBC stepping down from the Council, the role of the Board Diversity Champion had been vacant and there was a need for a Board Member to take up the mantle on behalf of the LEP. Ninder Johal advised that he would undertake the role.

In respect of the Towns Boards it was noted that currently Ninder Johal and Kevin Davis were Board Members of Wolverhampton and Walsall respectively. There was a need to identify Members for the Dudley and Sandwell Town Boards.

Prof Geoff Layer advised that he would be willing to take on the Sandwell role and Chris Handy advised that for the remainder of his tenure he would undertake the role for Dudley. Subsequently Amanda Tomlinson advised that she would take up the Dudley Town Board role when Chris Handy had to step down but it was agreed between them that it would be sensible for Amanda to take on the role from now.

Agreed that

- 1) appoint Ninder Johal as the Board Diversity Champion; and

2) confirm the following appointments to the following Towns Boards:

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Ninder Johal – City of Wolverhampton

Amanda Tomlinson – Dudley MBC

Prof Geoff Layer – Sandwell MBC

Kevin Davis – Walsall MBC

164/20

Policy Update

a) BEIS – Mid-Year Review

The Board were advised that informal feedback had been received and it was felt the discussion had gone well, focussing on Governance, Delivery and Strategy and it was hoped that there would be a positive outcome. Aaron Toussaint advised that the session had gone well and that BEIS officers had come away with more actions than the LEP.

b) Freeports – Outcome of Consultation

The meeting was advised that further granular detail was required but that the LEP would be looking to partners in respect of the main freight ports. The LEP Network whilst welcoming the Freeport programme was also still advocating on behalf of LEPs for the extension of the Enterprise Zone programme.

c) Assurance Framework Exemptions – extension of Board membership

The meeting was advised that as yet the clarifications on the Assurance Framework Exemptions were still awaited and it was noted that, following verbal confirmation, that the tenures of Paul Brown, Simon Eastwood, Chris Handy and Ninder Johal had been extended through to 31st October 2020 in anticipation of the clarification being received. As this was delayed the meeting was asked to confirm an extension to their respective tenures through to 31st December 2020, subject to the clarification in respect of the Exemptions to the Assurance Framework.

EIU

d) Economic Dashboard

The meeting was advised of the latest economic data to include: -

- The West Midlands PMI, which remained in the top four regions in the Country;
- The Claimant Count was at 214,000 or 6.4%, which was above the national average of 5%;
- The Youth Claimant (16-24 yrs.) count was a particular issue being 34,000 or 8.9% which was the highest in the region

Ninder Johal commented that because the BC was had a large proportion of Advanced Manufacturing, he was surprised the PMI remained above the national average. He was advised that the sector risk analysis showed that in Advanced Manufacturing 52% of employees were currently furloughed, thus the sector was impacted more heavily and also it was felt that the Brexit impact would be on the production side. The Chair commented that he was aware there was a reluctance to recruit in the sector.

Kevin Davis asked if analysis had been done to see where the hardest hits were for young people. He was advised that whilst this had not been undertaken yet proportionately the service sector had received one of the biggest hits along with the visitor and retail sectors, which provided routes for first jobs.

Ninder Johal referenced the rumours in respect of a vaccine being available soon and asked if it was possible to measure the impact on recovery. Chris Handy advised that if a vaccine was viable then the first recipients were likely to be health and care workers.

Lindsey Flynn asked if colleges had seen demand increase, given the number of young people out of work and added if there were any measures the LEP could undertake to encourage young people to become better skilled and equipped for the employment market.

Jatinder Sharma advised that Government support was focussed at Level 3 and above qualifications. He advised that demand was buoyant in construction and health sectors but expressed concern that the forthcoming end of the furlough scheme would trigger higher levels of unemployment.

Sarah Middleton advised that work was being done with WMCA colleagues to lobby for greater support. She advised that there was need to build the narrative and develop approaches that could work or be developed further.

Jatinder Sharma advised of a scheme for laptops and dongles for students but advised that there were huge issues around procurement. With a lack of clarity coming from Government, colleges were funding these themselves.

Prof Nazira Karodia advised there were a large number of university and college leavers who did not currently have work and would be contributing to an increase in NEETs.

Prof Geoff Layer stated that there was a need for action around the digital deficit and that the LEP could work with the universities and colleges to bring the matters to the Government's attention.

Agreed

- 1) That the LEP Board note the and comments on the BEIS Mid-Year Review and Freeports outcome of consultation; and
- 2) That the LEP Board confirm the extension of Board tenures for the following four Board Members, Paul Brown, Simon Eastwood, Chris Handy and Ninder Johal through to 31st December 2020, subject to the clarification in respect of the Exemptions to the Assurance Framework.
- 3) That the Economic Dashboard data and discussion be noted, to include the action to take up the issues in relation to digital provision with Government, as outlined above.

165/20 **Growth Hub Dashboard**

The dashboard was presented and the meeting was advised that enquires had been 4 to 5 times for the same period last year, to include:

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- 1100 had required medium or intensive support;
- The data was split between the 4 local authorities and whilst Walsall companies were at the lower end of support, but Walsall MBC did have a proactive business team.

- Manufacturing companies were at the top of businesses seeking support.

Ninder Johal welcomed the statistics and asked if the destinations of the companies who had sought support were tracked. He was advised that there was a follow up after 4 weeks and 3 months and in March 2021 there would be a greater input into the statistics.

Amanda Tomlinson asked for the top five sectors supported and was advised that the information was only the enquiries through the Growth Hub as there were other areas where companies could seek support and there was a need for the local authorities to share their data.

Rachel Eade advised the meeting that two Business Voice meetings had been held with local businesses and that they had been asked to challenge the Growth Hub with two questions at each meeting. Issues raised thus far had included training, capital support and requirements for new machinery. Jaspal Sohal added that there was an additional resource through the Growth Hub to provide for professional services for businesses so that they did not incur an initial cost.

Agreed

That the LEP Board: -

- 1) Note the proliferation of new business support schemes into an already congested marketplace;
- 2) Note the pressure local authority teams were under regarding the small business rate relief, discretionary grants and local lockdown grants;
- 3) Recommend to the Black Country local authorities' marketing, skills and economic development teams to direct their business enquiries to the Black Country Growth Hub.

166/20

Black Country Strategic Economic Plan Supplemental Deed of Variation to BCJC Collaboration Agreement Approval

Kelly Valente advised that the Collaboration agreement was the culmination of the EZ work undertaken and previously reported through to the LEP Board and the Funding Sub-Group. The detail of the provisions were contained in Appendices A and B to the report and the agreement was scheduled to go to each local authority Cabinet meeting,

as well as the LEP Board for confirmation and approval, prior to adoption by the BC Executive Joint Committee in December.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) approves the Supplemental Deed of Variation Relating to the Collaboration Agreement in Relation to the Black Country Executive Joint Committee City Deal and Growth Deal dated the 7 May 2014, at Appendix A to this report and in doing so, approves the Governance Principles: Enterprise Zones (at Appendix B).
- 2) approves the Black Country Consortium Limited (BCC) to enter into the Supplemental Deed of Variation.

167/20 **LEP Funding Report 2020/21**

The meeting was advised that this represented Quarter 2 monitoring, as well as including a specific request for an appointment of Shared Intelligence who would be assisting on the review of BCC Ltd, requested by ABCA Chief Executives.

Agreed that the LEP Board: -

- 1) approve the LEP Core & Strategic funding expenditure, and the LEP Review and LIS Implementation funding expenditure as at 30th June 2020; and
- 2) approve the appointment of Shared Intelligence to act as a consultant to lead on the BCC Limited review.

168/20 **Draft Employment & Skills Theme Advisory Board – 1st September 2020**

The minutes were submitted and the Chair of the Advisory Board advised that an outcome of the meeting had been to have a greater insight into NEETs.

Agreed that the LEP Board receive and note the draft minutes of the Employment & Skills Board held on 1st September 2020.

169/20 **PR and Communications Report (Information)**

Ninder Johal provided the PR and Communications update.

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

170/20 **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).

171/20 **Minutes**

Agreed that the private minutes of the meeting held on 21st September 2020 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

172/20 **Private Minutes of Funding Sub-Group held on 7th October 2020**

Agreed that the LEP Board confirm and approve the minutes of the Funding Sub-Group held on 7th October 2020, to include all recommendations and conditions contained therein.

173/20 **Policy Update**

a) BCC Ltd Review

The meeting was advised that Shared Intelligence had been approved to undertake the review work with officers of BCC Ltd. The review amongst other matters would consider the impact of the EU exit, the change in policy around the Government's devolution agenda. Sarah Middleton advised that it was not a performance issue per se but a timely pause to take stock of the company in a changing environment.

The Chair advised that there would be an opportunity for all Members to have an input.

b) UK Atomic Energy

The meeting was reminded that one of the sector leads for the BC was the Metals and Material supply chain and the UK Atomic Energy Fusion Plant funding represented an opportunity for the BC. Whilst a site of

200ha was not available, such a facility whilst requiring a water supply did not need to be located by the sea. It represented an opportunity for the BC Supply Chain.

The Chair advised that this was a long-term project and highlighted that in Europe the fusion reactor was to be built in France.

c) Midland Engine (ME) LEP Chairs meeting

The meeting was advised that a meeting had been held between ME LEP Chairs and Sir John Peace. The outcome was for the LEP Executives to identify the pan regional opportunities where the Midlands Engine could add value. The current thinking was Midlands Connect and Internationalisation.

The Chair advised that the objective was to identify three areas with Midlands Connect being an exemplar and the ME9 LEP Chairs needed to put the challenge through to Sir John Peace and the ME Team.

Agreed that the LEP Board note the three Policy updates.

174/20

Black Country Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Places

The meeting was advised that Exports by Sectors had reduced across the West Midlands by 14.4%, the BC had £3.1BN of exports and the EIU had identified 250 BC companies that contributed £2BN. In respect of sectors Advanced Manufacturing accounted for 62% of these figures.

Prof Delma Dwight advised that they were aware companies were looking at bases outside of the UK and it was agreed that it would be good to have that intelligence.

Sarah Middleton advised that Field Force, a Cabinet Office team, were working to understand some of thinking of businesses and where possible the aim was to provide string counter offer.

In general, the detail of the data was welcomed and the ability to drill down into specifics was a useful tool. Further work was being done to map other sub-indices which could include crime figures if that was requested.

The meeting was advised that further progress would be reported through to the Board.

Agreed that the LEP Board note the spatial insight and emerging actions to support the Black Country and that the challenge and suggestions about the emerging proposals coming forward detailed above be actioned.

175/20 **Risk Register – Covid19 Programme Risk update**

The meeting was advised that the current focus was on the Get Britain Building Fund supported projects as there was a requirement to enter into a “back to back” agreement in respect of the fund for the VLR and NBI projects.

It was noted that the Risk Register was also tracking Project outputs and the risks to these affected by the pandemic.

Agreed that the Risk Register be noted.

176/20 **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.

177/20 **Local Growth Fund – Birchley Island Site Assembly Project**

Simon Eastwood presented the report. Councillor Danny Millard welcomed the work of officers in getting the project to this point.

It was

Agreed That the LEP Board approves the Accountable Body for the Growth Deal (Walsall Council) to proceed to a Grant Agreement with Sandwell Council to deliver the Local Growth Fund (LGF) funded elements of the Birchley Island Site Assembly project up to the value detailed in the private report, with delivery to commence and be fully

spent in the 2020/21 financial year, subject to the following conditions, as a result of the Growth Deal programme ending on 31st March 2021: -

- (1) Sandwell Council must enter a grant agreement with the Accountable body within 3 months of a Black Country Joint Committee approval; and
- (2) Costs must be expended by 31st March 2021, and claims submitted for expenditure incurred up to 31st March 2021 submitted no later than 30th June 2021.

(NB Simon Eastwood – declared his non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 177/20 – Local Growth Fund – Birchley Island Site Assembly Project and reserved his right to speak vote thereon.

178/20 **Date of Next meeting**

Agreed that the LEP Board note the next meeting would take place on 23rd November 2020.

(The meeting closed at 4.40pm)