

West Midlands Strategic Productivity Partnership

Terms of Reference

1. Background

The Levelling Up White Paper sets a target to boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in places where they are lagging. However, UK productivity growth, which is the bedrock of higher living standards, has slowed since the global financial crisis and lags behind comparative economies.

At the firm-level, the uptake of business support is one of the key determinants of productivity, and businesses that seek external advice are more likely to experience high growth. The proportion of businesses in the UK accessing support and particularly for growth, however, is low compared to other countries, which evidence suggests is partly due to the complexity and fragmentation of the business support landscape.

2. Purpose

The West Midlands Strategic Productivity Partnership (SPP) is established to provide coherence, coordination and complementarity among business support and advisory services commissioned locally and nationally, and to maximise value for money. The SPP will comprise officers from Department for Business and Trade (DBT), Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

3. Objectives

The objectives of the SPP are to:

- Help facilitate the WMCA's new, empowered role in integrating, promoting and overseeing business support and advisory services, small and medium-sized enterprise finance and the broader commitments agreed as part of the West Midlands Deeper Devolution Deal.
- Allow sharing of information and intelligence on live and upcoming business support and advisory services, to bring coherence between national and local activities and maximise value for money.
- WMCA will raise local priorities for future business support and advisory services to inform and influence government's future commissioning priorities.
- Establish how the West Midlands can become a test bed for what works in business support.

- Create a pathway for a submission to the next Spending Review regarding business support and advisory services.
- Government will work proactively with WMCA to put in place structures and mechanisms for the devolution or co-commissioning of future business support where it makes sense to do so. Business support may form part of the WMCA's simplified funding settlement in the future.
- Seek alignment between national support providers and products (e.g. Help to Grow, Made Smarter, Innovate UK EDGE, Export Academy) including data sharing agreements to facilitate cross referrals and analysis.
- Seek alignment between local government statutory functions (eg. business rates, planning, trading standards) and wider business support services and engagement.
- Coordinate activity with the Strategic Innovation Partnership and Strategic Place Partnership

4. **Membership**

The SPP will comprise:

- Deputy Director for Small Business, DBT
- Deputy Director for Investment, DBT
- Director, UK & Regional Funds, British Business Bank
- Deputy Director for Cities & Local Growth (tbc), DLUHC
- Deputy Director, tbc, DCMS
- Director of Strategy, Integration and Net Zero, WMCA

Officers from relevant departmental agencies as and when required.

4. **Meetings**

The SPP will meet at least twice a year. Meetings will be virtual, with the option of face-to-face meetings. The SPP will be chaired by WMCA.

5. **Procedures**

The SPP will establish its own procedures for conducting its business. The SPP will be guided by the following principles:

- Openness and transparency: actively seeking and listening to stakeholders' views and feedback
- Accountability: regularly reporting to stakeholders
- Efficiency: keeping agendas streamlined
- Effectiveness: working with purpose towards the agreed objectives
- Ambition: aiming at the Levelling Up Missions

The agenda will be prepared in collaboration with members prior to each meeting and shared by WMCA at least one week in advance.

6. Reporting

Following each meeting of the SPP, WMCA will provide notes to be agreed by participants as an accurate record.

The SPP will report to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the WMCA's Economic Growth Board at least once a year and will include a review its objectives, membership, procedures and performance.

7. Variation

These Terms of Reference may be varied only by a written agreement signed by both parties.

24 April 2023