



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**

Economic Growth Board

Wednesday 12 July 2023 at 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present

Councillor Adrian Andrew	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Paul Bradley	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor John Cotton	Birmingham City Council
Councillor Matthew Dormer	Non-Constituent Authorities
Councillor Ian Courts	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Stephen Simkins	City of Wolverhampton Council
Councillor Bob Sleigh (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Finance & Investments
Sarah Windrum	Business Representative
Corin Crane	West Midlands Chambers of Commerce
Matthew Hammond	West Midlands Growth Company
Mike Wright	West Midlands Innovation Board

Participating in the meeting via Teams

Andy Street	Mayor of the West Midlands
Rob Johnston	Midlands Trade Union Congress

Item Title No.

- 1. Appointment of Chair**
Following the very sad news of the passing of Councillor Brookfield, Chair of the Economic Growth Board, the board agreed that Councillor Bob Sleigh be appointed to chair this specific meeting.
- 2. Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were received from, Councillor Duggins (Coventry), Councillor Piper (Sandwell), Lee Barron (Midlands Trade Union Congress), Anita Bhalla (Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP) and Tom Westley (Business Representative).
- 3. Notification of Substitutes**
Rob Johnston (Midlands Trade Union Congress) was nominated as a substitute for Lee Barron.
- 4. Welcome & Introductions**
The chair welcomed the new Leader of Birmingham City Council, Councillor Cotton to his first meeting and introductions were made and duly noted.

5. Chair's Remarks

The Chair led the tributes to Councillor Brookfield following the very sad news of his passing on 2 July. The board expressed their condolences to Councillor Brookfield's family and acknowledged his work and achievements as Leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council and the WMCA's Portfolio Lead for Economy and Innovation.

6. Minutes - 15 February 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2023 be agreed as a true record.

7. Revised Terms of Reference

The board considered a report of the Executive Director, Strategy, Integration and Net Zero that put forward changes to the terms of reference to the board and sought confirmation of its membership following LEP integration and other changes to meeting structures.

The Senior Policy Officer, Joe Baconnet, outlined the reason for the change which would address the quoracy issues faced by the board throughout the year. In relation to membership, it was felt that as one of the current members represents an SME, a further representative was not currently required; a full business recruitment policy would be undertaken later in the year.

Councillor Courts (Solihull) reported that SMEs need to be better represented across the new structures, following LEP Integration (referred to in paragraph 2.9 of the report) and asked that SME representation be considered as part of the business recruitment policy review when this is undertaken.

In relation to enquiry from Councillor Simkins (Wolverhampton) regarding a change to the quorate numbers (from five constituent authority members to four voting members of Economic Growth Board), the Senior Policy Officer explained that the change would mean the board would more likely be quorate and able to fulfil its function as a decision-making body. He added that this would not affect voting on the board and whilst there are currently 19 members of the Board, voting would be limited to the Mayor, Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation and the nominees of Constituent Authorities.

The board would retain the ability to vary its membership such as adding business representatives as it sees fit. He advised that when complete, the governance review of the business recruitment policy would allow the board to recruit business members to the board in an open and transparent manner.

Resolved that:

1. The reasons for the proposed changes to the terms of reference, membership and scope of the Economic Growth Board be noted;
2. The revised terms of reference for the board at Appendix 1 be endorsed;

3. The WMCA Board be asked to approve these changes, specifically the change to the quorum and
4. The structures supporting the work of the Economic Growth Board be noted.

8. Economic Conditions in the West Midlands

The board considered a report of the Executive Director for Strategy, Integration and Net Zero that provided a summary of the latest quantitative economic and regional labour market intelligence and qualitative insight from West Midlands businesses via the Regional Business Council and the West Midlands Business Insight Forum.

Delma Dwight (Economist Intelligence Unit) highlighted key insights from the report.

Resolved that:

The current economic conditions for the West Midlands including the monthly dashboard (Appendix 1) and insight from the region's businesses via the Business Insight Forum be noted

9. West Midlands Growth Company - Business Plan

The board considered a report of the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Growth Company that proposed the West Midlands Growth Company's Business Plan, 'Global West Midlands' for discussion and approval.

Mathew Hammond, Chair of West Midlands Growth Company, (WMGC) introduced the report and conveyed a special thank you to Councillor Brookfield on behalf of WMGC for all his support and work behind the scenes on the WMGC review and on overseas trade missions.

The Director of Policy & Partnerships WMGC, Katie Trout reported that the draft Business Plan (attached as Appendix 1) has been developed to deliver the outcomes of the WMGC Review which was approved by the WMCA Board in March 2023. This board would oversee WMGC's four strategic objectives and key results and hold the company to account against key indicators for the strategic objectives.

It was noted a further review of the full Business Plan would be required to take account of the West Midlands International Strategy when published in autumn 2023 and therefore would remain a 'live' document with any proposed substantive changes brought to the Economic Growth Board for agreement.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Dormer as to whether WMGC would serve non-constituent authorities going forward, The Director of Policy & Partnerships advised that this issue was not resolved as part of the Growth Company review and a full discussion was required by the WMCA Board as to what geography it would cover.

The Mayor commented that he was very pleased to see the Business Plan and especially closer working with Government to follow-up on the Deeper Devolution Deal and hold them to account.

Councillor Courts considered that a strong narrative is needed for the promotion of the wider region which included non-constituent authorities such as Stratford Upon Avon.

Councillor Simkins expressed concerns on the equity of delivery and the need for this to be fair and proportionate, especially if Warwickshire joins the WMCA as a constituent authority.

The Chair reported that the document had been prepared with a clear steer from local authorities and the need to promote key assets across the West Midlands geography.

Resolved that:

1. West Midlands Growth Company's draft Business Plan, 'Global West Midlands' for July 2023 to March 2025 be approved;
2. The Economic Growth Board receive quarterly reports on progress against the delivery of the Business Plan be noted and
3. The delivery of the Plan is predicated on a Full Business Case for the remaining unsecured regional funding being approved by the Investment Board in October 2023 be noted.

10. West Midlands Growth Company - Major Events Fund and West Midlands International Strategy Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Integration and Net Zero that provided an update on the development of the West Midlands International Strategy and Major Events Fund.

The Director of Policy and Partnerships (WMGC), Katie Trout, reported on progress in developing an International Strategy for the West Midlands with local and national stakeholders that would be aligned with the Regional Strategy and would seek to exploit the strengths of the West Midlands. The draft strategy would be submitted to the WMGC Board and to this board in September for consideration.

In relation to the Major Events Fund, the report outlined the headline activities that would be undertaken if the Programme Business Case, to be submitted the Investment Board on 24 July is approved. This includes establishing a Regional Advisory Group that would prioritise the pipeline of major events in accordance with the West Midlands Major Event Evaluation Framework.

Resolved that:

1. Progress with the West Midlands International Strategy be noted;

2. Progress with the Major Events Fund be noted;
3. The establishment of the Regional Advisory Group for the Major Events Fund that reports to the Economic Growth Board be noted and
4. The International Strategy and the Major Events Fund be substantive items at the September meeting of the Economic Growth Board be noted.

11. Business Growth West Midlands

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Integration and Net Zero that reported on progress in delivering a Business Growth West Midlands Service.

The Head of Economic Development and Delivery, Paul Edwards presented the report and expressed his thanks and appreciation to local authority and Growth Hub colleagues for collaborative working on the service that will deliver regionally commissioned programmes for West Midlands businesses. It was noted that following a 'soft launch' of the Business Growth West Midlands Service in April, work was underway to expand the service with a first phase due for completion in July and a further phase for September.

In relation to funding offered by the Department for Business and Trade to support regional programmes (referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report), it was proposed that a Regional Operations Group be established to recommend options to the Economic Growth Board on the best use of this funding.

In relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund funding to local authorities which has now been resolved, Councillor Cotton reported of the need to put pressure on Government regarding yearly funding arrangements which need to change.

Resolved that:

1. Progress in delivery of the pan-region Business Growth West Midlands service, with day-to day delivery led by local authority partners be noted and
2. The creation of a Regional Operations Group to oversee day-to-day delivery of the service be noted.

12. West Midlands Plan for Growth: Mobilisation & Delivery

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Integrations and Net Zero that provided an update on progress in delivering the West Midlands Plan for Growth.

The Head of Economic Development and Delivery, Paul Edwards, presented the report and advised that a lot of activity has commenced since the last meeting of the board in February. He added that there is a need for cohesiveness of the programmes and work was underway to bring these together.

Councillor Courts commented there was no mention in the report of digital support, noting barriers to SME investment and that retail businesses often find it difficult to invest. He added that he hoped help could be offered in this area.

The Mayor concurred with Councillor Courts that this was a very important issue noting there was a lot of data on the subject and asked that Yiannis Maos submit a report on the matter to a future meeting.

Resolved that:

Progress against a broad range of activity in mobilising Plan for Growth be noted.

13. Local Skills Improvement Plan

The board considered a report of the Interim Director for Employment and Skills, and Health and Communities that sought approval of the findings of the employer representative bodies (ERB) research to support the Local Skills Improvement plan (LSIP), the supporting statement to the Department for Education and support of the Implementation of the Local Skills Plan.

The Head of Employer Services, David Gaughan, outlined the background to Local Skills Improvement Plans that are produced on annual basis by the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Chamber of Commerce for the West Midlands and Warwickshire. It was noted that Solihull and University College would be the lead provider for the region that would hold the local skills improvement funding to develop up to 6 projects and respond to the findings of the ERB report.

Corin Crane (West Midlands Chambers of Commerce) reported that over 1,000 businesses were interviewed as part of the report which found 75% of businesses had not engaged in the system but had skills needs. He reported of the need to utilise devolution powers to ensure the LSIP reflects what is needed by employers.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Dormer as to whether assistance would be provided to non-constituent members in developing their LSIP bid, Corin Crane advised that he was working with local authorities across the West Midlands and wider region and undertook to provide the data needed for the authority's bid.

Resolved:

1. The findings of the Employer Representative Body to support the Local Skills Improvement Plan and the supporting statement made by the WMCA (Annex A of the report) to the Department for Education in consultation with the portfolio lead, on how it views were considered in the process be approved and

2. The WMCA's support of the implementation of the Local Skills Improvement Plan as part of the organisation's deeper devolution powers, including the expression of interest from Solihull College and University Centre to be the lead Local Skills Improvement Fund holder for WMCA areas in consultation with the portfolio lead be approved.

14. Understanding and addressing labour market challenges

The board considered a report of the Head of Intelligence and Insight that reported on progress on the jobs workstream in understanding and tackling labour market challenges across the WMCA and at local level and the next steps.

The Head of Insight and Intelligence, Dr Fiona Aldridge outlined the main highlights from the report and advised of the board of the work being undertaken with Economic Intelligence Unit colleagues to focus on 2-3 key challenges facing the region and local areas, drawing on evidence of what works in tackling these labour market challenges to inform subsequent deep dive activity.

Resolved that:

Progress on the jobs workstream, including its overview of regional and labour market challenges emerging from the data and the organisation's plans for further work as part of deep dive activities be noted.

15. Skills Investment

The board considered a report of the Interim Director of Employment, Skills, Health and Communities that provided a summary of the WMCA's skills and investment for a 12-month period to June 2023 in comparison with recent years.

The interim Director of Employment, Skills, Health and Communities, Clare Hatton outlined the key highlights from the report.

Resolved that:

The level and profile of skills investment for the 12-month period to June 2023 compared with previous years be noted.

16. Economic Growth Board Work Programme

The board considered a report of the Senior Policy Officer that provided an update on the work programme for the board for the current municipal year.

Resolved that:

The updated work programme attached as appendix 1 to the report be noted.

17. Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved:

That in accordance with s100 (a) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they are likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as specified in the paragraphs of the Act.

18. Innovation Board Priorities

The board considered a report of the Policy Manager (Innovation) that provided a six-month update on work of the West Midlands Innovation Board.

The Chair of the West Midlands Innovation Board, Mike Wright, outlined the work of the board including its five key priorities and next steps.

The Mayor conveyed his thanks to Mike Wright on the significant achievements realised by the Innovation Board so far for the region.

Resolved that:

1. The updates made to the membership of the West Midlands Innovation Board (WMIB) to reflect integration of Local Enterprise Partnerships functions to the Combined Authority be endorsed;
2. That the appointments of Sarah Windrum and Charlie Blakemore (business representatives) to the position of deputy chairs, to provide additional capacity and capability to the work of the Innovation Board be noted;
3. The priorities and work programme of the West Midlands Innovation Board, including its role in delivering aspects of the Deeper Devolution Deal that boost R & D, innovation and productivity across the region be noted and
4. The draft Innovate UK- West Midlands action plan (attached as appendix 1) be endorsed.

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm.