



Economic Growth Board

Thursday 16 November 2023 at 1.30 pm

Minutes

Present

Councillor Stephen Simkins (Chair)	Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation
Councillor Adrian Andrew	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Paul Bradley	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Matthew Dormer	Non-Constituent Authorities
Councillor Ian Courts	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Bob Piper	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Bob Sleigh	Portfolio Lead for Finance & Investments
Sarah Windrum	Business Representative

In Attendance via MS Teams

Katie Trout	West Midlands Growth Company
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**Item Title
No.**

31. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Cotton (Birmingham), Councillor George Duggins (Coventry) and Corin Crane (West Midlands Chambers of Commerce).

32. Minutes - 22 September 2023

Agreed as a correct record, subject to an amended to minute no. 22 to better reflect the comments made by Councillor Ian Courts.

33. Economic Conditions in the West Midlands & WISE Newsletter

The committee considered a report outlining the latest data relating to the wider performance of the West Midlands economy as reported in the WMCA's new West Midlands Insights on Society and Economy (WISE) newsletter, as well as qualitative insights from the West Midlands Business Insight Forum.

The Chair commented that from the information provided, good progress was being made in respect of economic growth. He did however highlight the issues impacting youth unemployment, but noted the positive news detailed within the report relating to NEATs. Councillor Stephen Simpkins highlighted that the WMCA needed to add value to the economic conditions in the West Midlands to fulfil the skills deficit.

Resolved:

The current economic conditions for the West Midlands be noted.

34. Tacking Rising Youth Unemployment in the WMCA Area

The committee considered a report from the Interim Director for Employment following a request at the last meeting to undertake a deep dive on how to tackle youth unemployment in the region.

Members of the committee thanked officers for responding quickly to their request to undertake a deep dive on this concerning issue for the region. The Chair highlighted that report indicated a lack of funding to support tackling this issue and considered it necessary to identify where further funding could be sought from. He considered that any strategy or programme implemented needed to be achievable and that engagement with employers would be beneficial. He also commented that in the past apprenticeship work shops had been positive. Councillor Bob Sleight welcomed the report and felt that it identified the key obstacles to youth employment and wanted to further understand how the WMCA would tackle these. Sarah Windrum highlighted the need to engage with businesses to help amplify tackling youth unemployment within the region. Katie Trout commented that the West Midlands Growth Company was developing a Strategic Relationship Management Programme working closely with local authorities to engage with strategic employers across the region, providing an opportunity to address skills needs feeding into tackling youth unemployment.

Resolved:

- (1) The contents of the report, following a deep dive into what worked in tackling youth unemployment, be noted.
- (2) The comments made by members of the board be noted
- (3) A future report on tackling youth unemployment in the WMCA area be submitted to a future meeting of the board.

35. Towards a Sustainable Economy

The committee considered a report on the regional level activities that achieved the dual ambitions of driving economic productivity and enhancing environmental sustainability in the West Midlands. A presentation was also provided on the Plan for Growth modern and low carbon utilities cluster, the industrial energy taskforce looking to address the current energy demand and, the different ways the WMCA supported and worked with partners across the region to drive productivity and address net zero targets.

The Chair noted that hydrogen opportunities needed to be further explored, ensuring that the region was not left behind, and suggested that a presentation be shared with the board in the future. He also commented on the local issues in relation to transport materials and the need to promote and encourage local businesses first.

Resolved:

- (1) The presentation delivered to board be noted.
- (2) The contents of the report be noted.
- (3) An item on hydrogen opportunities be submitted to a future meeting of the board.

36. Presentation : Tech WM Feedback on Digital Economy/Birmingham Tech Week

The committee received a presentation providing an update on the tech sector, Tech West Midlands, data relating to the strengths related to the start-up of the organisation and highlights from the 2023 Tech Sector Strategy.

Resolved:

The presentation be noted.

37. WM Growth Company Q1 & Q2 Performance Report against the 'Global West Midlands' Business Plan

The board considered a report providing oversight of the performance of the West Midlands Growth Company's 2023-25 business plan. The report also outlined narrative and commentary on key issues, challenges and opportunities for quarters 1 and 2 of the 2023/24 financial year.

Resolved:

The contents of the performance report from the West Midlands Growth Company against its adopted Business Plan be noted.

38. Work Programme

The board received a report updating it on its work programme.

Resolved:

The updated work programme be approved.

39. Exclusion of the Public and Press

Resolved:

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 were likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraphs of the Act.

40. West Midlands International Strategy Green Paper & Consultation Approach

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero and the Director of Policy & Partnerships, West Midlands Growth Company on the West Midlands International Strategy Green Paper and consultation approach, as well the geographic frame of reference for the final strategy which would be implemented via the delegation to the Executive Director for Strategy, Economy & Net Zero.

The West Midlands Growth Company had been commissioned to lead the development of the West Midlands International Strategy on behalf of the region by this board. It had been agreed that the purpose of the strategy would be to shape the region's collective international effort and resources to elevate the region's presence and impact on the global stage. It also agreed that its focus should be to internationalise the Plan for Growth, which had been a significant input in the process to date. The Deeper Devolution Deal includes a commitment from the Department for Business & Trade to co-develop the West Midlands International Strategy with the region, and to share accountability for its delivery.

Resolved:

- (1) The West Midlands International Strategy Green Paper and consultation approach be noted.
- (2) The Executive Director for Strategy, Economy & Net Zero be given delegated authority to finalise the Green Paper.
- (3) The geographical focus of work to date on the seven metropolitan authorities be noted.
- (4) The consultation period be for a period of no fewer than 10 weeks.
- (5) The final strategy, through consultation, reflecting the wider West Midlands geography be submitted to a future meeting of the board for approval in March 2024.

41. Major Events Fund Update

The board considered a report of the Executive Director for Strategy, Economy & Net Zero providing an update on the Major Events Fund and a proposal from the Major Events Advisory Group of how to award the remaining £3m based on the ranking of the results. The report also noted the Major Events Advisory Group's desire for partners to consider the possibility of seeking funds through other channels to fund events that passed selection thresholds but were not prioritised.

Resolved:

- (1) The £6m Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund approved for the Major Events Fund by the Investment Board in July 2023, and the £3m that had been allocated to Sport Accord, be noted.

- (2) It be noted that, at its meeting on 24 July 2023, Investment Board had agreed to delegate authority to the Interim Director of Employment, Skills, Health & Communities, in consultation with the Executive Director for Strategy, Economy & Net Zero, the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer, to award onward funding in line with the Economic Growth Board's approach on the shortlisted major events opportunities.
- (3) The allocation of the remaining £3m in the Major Events Fund to the events recommended by the Major Events Advisory Group be approved, noting that the list of events was based on the highest scoring applications evaluated through the framework agreed by the Economic Growth Board at its meeting in September 2023.
- (4) It be agreed that the proposal for alternative opportunities to fund unsuccessful applications should be explored by all partners, including local authorities, the WMCA, West Midlands Growth Company and Government agencies to realise the economic and regional impact of the event.
- (5) The proposal for the Major Events Advisory Group to meet quarterly to monitor and evaluate progress on successful events funded to ensure the outcomes and economic impact for the region was achieved, and that monitoring reports be provided to the Economic Growth Board on quarterly bases, be agreed.
- (6) The planned approach for communication to all parties and next steps be noted.
- (7) Further clarification be sought to confirm that, where potential funding within the programme that could be reallocated was identified, the Economic Growth Board would determine its reallocation, based on the recommendations made to it by the Major Events Advisory Group.

42. Date of Next Meeting
Thursday 25 January 2024 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at 3.10 pm.