



Economic Growth Board

Thursday 25 January 2024 at 9.30 am

Minutes

Present

Councillor Bob Sleigh (Chair)
Tom Westley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Adrian Andrew
Councillor Paul Bradley
Councillor Bob Piper
Councillor Bob Sleigh (Chair)
Corin Crane
Mike Wright

Portfolio Lead for Finance & Investments
Business Representative
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Portfolio Lead for Finance & Investments
West Midlands Chambers of Commerce
West Midlands Innovation Board

**Item Title
No.**

43. Inquorate Meeting

The Governance Services Officer reported that the meeting was inquorate, and the decisions taken at this meeting would therefore need to be ratified at the next meeting of the board on 6 March 2023.

44. Appointment of Chair

In the absence of the Chair, the board agreed that Councillor Bob Sleigh be appointed to chair this specific meeting.

45. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Cotton (Birmingham), Councillor Matthew Dormer (Non-Constituent Authorities), Councillor George Duggins (Coventry) and Councillor Stephen Simpkins (Chair, Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation),

46. Minutes - 16 November 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on the 16 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

47. West Midlands Economic Conditions

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero on 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 and the West Midlands Regional Business Council.

Recommended:

That the current economic conditions for the West Midlands be noted.

48. Tackling Rising Youth Unemployment in the WMCA Area Together

The board considered a report of the Interim Director of Employment, Skills, Health & Communities following a previous report outlining the findings of a deep dive exercise undertaken into what worked in tackling youth unemployment. The report outlined a costed action plan with recommendations for tackling youth unemployment, exploring what future could be done building on the significant work undertaken by local authorities.

Councillor Ian Courts welcomed the contents of the report and the initial start in tackling youth unemployment. However, he commented that future thought was required around the mechanism in place to measure the results of the activities undertaken to tackle youth employment. He also commented that alongside the work already being undertaken by local authorities, the WMCA needed to add value, whilst also recognising that each local authority area had different context and needs and therefore the response needed to be tailored accordingly. It was also highlighted that previous apprenticeship shows were a success and required little funds to support and encouraged that these be further explored. Councillor Ian Courts also expressed the need of the WMCA to have continued engagement with other departments, employers and local authorities. A request was also made to provide him with information on apprenticeship bursaries and the evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of that investment.

Corin Crane commented that recent data showed that apprenticeship numbers had fallen. He welcomed the pre-apprenticeship work and boot camps previously held, but noted that there was a deterrent for young people to explore apprenticeships due to the apprenticeship wage being lower than the national minimum wage.

The Chair suggested that further work be undertaken to explore the obstacles and barriers transport posted to employment.

Recommended:

- (1) The update on youth unemployment in the WMCA area be noted.
- (2) Proposals to tackle rising youth unemployment, and that these would be shaped in context by each local authority for their local areas, be noted.
- (3) The recommended actions in the Action Plan be approved.

49. Business Growth West Midlands - Service Update & Future Funding

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero updating it on the progress of the Business Growth West Midlands service in its first nine months of operation and pointing out future priorities for forecast underspend.

Corin Crane sought to further understand what analysis would be undertaken on the diagnostic work, as this would help to understand what businesses were asking for, the support required and any potential commercial gaps. He felt that more could be done on driving better collaboration between the business support and agencies across the West Midlands. He also spoke about the importance of job fairs, tourism and the hospitality sector addressing net zero with limited funds to support programmes.

Councillor Ian Courts commented on the need to ensure that youth unemployment was being embedded into this programme.

Recommended:

- (1) The progress against delivery of the Business Growth West Midlands service be noted.
- (2) The proposed commitment of forecast regional underspend from Core Hub and Strategic Relationship Management activity be supported.
- (3) The future funding models for business growth and productivity support post-March 2025 be noted.

50. West Midlands Innovation Board - Six-Monthly Report

The board considered a six-monthly update report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero setting out West Midlands Innovation achievements during 2023 and the recommended priorities for 2024.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Innovation Board for his leadership. Councillor Ian Courts raised a query in relation to the ambition of the scale of regional investment funds required, and how further the region could demonstrate this ambition. Mike Write reported that not only was there further ambition for the fund but for there for be more ability to address where research funds were deployed.

Corin Crane suggested that the board receive a future item on Investment Zones to enable a greater understanding on the timetable, different zones and the skills and investment issues.

Recommended:

- (1) The 2023 activities and achievements of the West Midlands Innovation Board be endorsed.
- (2) The proposed 2024 priorities of the West Midlands Innovation Board be agreed.

50a West Midlands Plan for Growth: Aerospace (Including Manufacturing Alternative Fuels)

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero and presentation providing an overview of the activity surrounding the aerospace cluster identified within the West Midlands Plan for Growth.

Councillor Ian Courts commented that both the report and presentation showed the importance of the aviation sector in the West Midlands, along with the way climate change and decarbonisation agenda was being addressed.

Recommended:

The progress in support of the aerospace cluster for the West Midlands Plan for Growth be noted.

50b West Midlands Growth Company Q3 Performance Report against the 'Global West Midlands' Business Plan

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero updating it on the progress against the four strategy objectives and the headline targets set out in the West Midlands Growth Company's 2023-25 Business Plan – Global West Midlands.

Recommended:

The issues in relation to the West Midlands Growth Company's performance against its 'Global West Midlands' business plan for the period 1 October - 30 December 2023 be noted.

50c Single Settlement: Local Growth & Place Functional Strategy

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Strategy, Economy & Net Zero providing information on the initial development of the Local Growth and Place Functional Strategy of the Single Settlement.

Recommended:

The work being undertaken by WMCA officers and constituent authorities to develop place-based strategies be noted.

51. Economic Growth Board Work Programme

The board received a report on its future work programme.

Recommended:

The updated work agenda for March 2024 be approved.

52. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 6 March 2024 at 2.00pm.

The meeting ended at 10.40am.