



# WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY

## Strategic Economic Plan Board

Thursday 12 April 2018 at 10.00am

### Present:

Jonathan Browning (Chair)  
Councillor Ian Courts  
Stuart Croft  
Councillor Lee Jeavons  
Councillor Ian Kettle  
Chris Loughran  
Stewart Towe

Coventry & Warwickshire LEP  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
West Midlands Combined Universities  
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council  
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP  
Black Country LEP.

### In Attendance:

Paula Deas  
Paul Edwards  
Sarah Middleton  
Julie Nugent  
Hywel Ruddick  
Patrick White

Coventry & Warwickshire LEP  
Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP  
Black Country LEP  
West Midlands Combined Authority  
Black Country LEP  
West Midlands Combined Authority

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harvey and Moore and Paul Kehoe, Tim Pile and Graham Wynn.

#### 10/18 **Welcome**

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting.

#### 11/18 **Notes of the Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2017 and Matters Arising**

The notes of the meeting were received.

#### 12/18 **SEP Board Tracker Log**

**Agreed** that the SEP Board Tracker be noted.

#### 13/18 **Forward Plan**

The Chair noted that the Forward Plan needed to be aligned with the Local Industrial Strategy timelines.

**Agreed** that the contents of the Forward Plan be noted.

## 14/18 **Local Industrial Strategy**

The meeting received a presentation on the progress being made with the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) to include significant West Midlands engagement undertaken; first sector workshops held with emerging action plans for Business and Professional Services, Construction and Aerospace; integrating the Productivity and Skills recommendations into the LIS; development of an emerging evidence pack; and undertaking national engagement with Government; What Works Centre; and Greater Manchester CA, including meeting with Number 10 Special Advisers (SPADs).

The emerging sector deliverables across the sectors of Life Sciences, Automotive, Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Creative, Transport/Freight, Digital, Low Carbon, Skills, Youth Employment, Infrastructure and cross-cutting areas were highlighted.

Reference was made to “Royal” Brownfield Research Centre and whilst acknowledging that it was an aspiration, the meeting was advised that there should not be a reference to it until, and if, it was granted.

The Chair advised that there needed to be discipline to the number of projects and to consider and to look at those with significant scale and impact. If there were key, projects that companies could focus around, with a multiplier effect for the relevant supply chain(s) and region.

Patrick White confirmed that the actions to take forward in the first wave would be those that had the biggest impact and advised that the aim was to produce an initial West Midland LIS document before the pre-parliamentary recess.

Chris Loughran queried whether this timing was linked into the Treasury and Patrick White advised that it was hoped that it would enable an announcement during the party conference season and in the Autumn Statement. Thus, early summer would be the point to release the document with 5 or 6 actions.

Cllr. Ian Courts referenced environment and place making and stated that air quality had been omitted with clean air and carbon reduction being a key for the West Midlands. In regard to place he referenced the need to incorporate retail and town centres. He suggested that as well as Balfour Beatty, in relation to house building and skills discussions should take place with large volume builders such as Taylor Wimpey, who had the size and resource to undertake skills training.

Cllr. Lee Jeavons stated that whilst the ambitions highlighted were important they should also be audacious, as this was how Manchester had achieved the Media CityUK. The meeting welcomed the view to put forward audacious ambitions for the LIS.

Sarah Middleton advised that economy plus was incremental and that there would be local ambitions for the LIS, which would come through in later phases. She advised this was the first wave of the LIS ambitions but acknowledged that the retail, and health care sectors should be captured. She advised that Economy plus remained a priority but was not included in this first wave.

The Chair referenced the WMCA SEP, noted that the 3 LEPs had developed a family of SEPs and asked if the intention was for the WMCA LIS to be an overarching strategy with each of the 3 LEP geographies developing an IS or whether each LEP would have some specificity appended for their LEP area.

Stewart Towe commented that he viewed the WMCA LIS as a collaboration across the region, to include the three LEPs and that all should own the LIS.

Cllr. Ian Kettle highlighted that he represented a low paid region and there was a need to consider the geographical spread of projects in relation to the supply chain and his areas low take up of apprenticeships.

Patrick White advised of the proposed next steps, to include developing thinking on the grand challenges and the timescales for the approval and publishing of the pre-recess document. He advised that No. 10 viewed the LIS as a strategy for the West Midlands (WM) not the WMCA alone, as the WM represented an important region for the UK economy and would consider the next 15 years of development in the region.

Chris Loughran stated that there was a need for a balance of audacious ambitions with credible ambitions and noted the proposed strategic interventions over the forthcoming 15 years. However, he advised that there was a need to fix some things in the next five years, especially around the skills systems.

The Chair concurred with this view and stated that there was a need to target quick effective actions, as well as those of longer term and greater scale.

On a comment regarding taking note of people movements and the lack of parking facilities for the metro at Five Ways, Patrick advised that the WMCA could influence future developments, as they would know where homes were to be built.

The Chair concluded that there was a need to show how the LIS linked in with the National IS, the Grand Challenges and the five drivers of productivity to be referenced throughout the LIS. He highlighted Appendix 1 regarding “the SEP Board being invited to feed in comments and views and endorse its overall content” and advised that the SEP Board should be the Champions for the WMCA IS. Patrick White acknowledged the point and stated that the Board’s support and challenges were fundamental to the LIS.

**Agreed:**

- 1) That the SEP Board note the progress made to date on the development of the WMCA LIS;

- 2) That officers incorporate the comments of the Board into the proposed pre-recess document, to include the SEP Board as champions of the WMCA LIS.

## 15/18 **Regional Skills Strategy Development**

The meeting was advised that the Regional Skills Plan (RSP) was taking forward the vision of the SEP and setting immediate 3-year priorities as progress to deliver its wider ambition. The RSP was building on evidence collated as part of the Productivity and Skills Commission and would serve the “People” element of the LIS and would fulfil a statutory requirement of the DfE in setting out the approach to the Adult Education Budget, to be devolved from August 2019.

The RSP would deliver: -

- More people into employment;
- More people in higher skilled jobs;
- More skilled employees to support business growth and productivity;
- All communities benefitting from the region’s economic growth;
- An agile and responsive skills system, more aligned to the needs of business and individuals.

Stewart Towe referenced the recent LEP Chairs meeting in London, attended by the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Education, and highlighted that he had not been aware of the previous work of EBPs. He commented that the DWP were similar and that the people at the top needed to understand more about the detail and history of education and welfare delivery. He suggested that the WM was in a good place to offer solutions. Julie Nugent agreed that devolution offered a good opportunity to join up the work of government depts, especially DfE and DWP, to improve impact and efficiency – an outcome Treasury were interested in.

Chris Loughran asked what engagement had been undertaken with OFSTED to ensure that careers advice/experience became a focus for Head Teachers. It was noted that there was a better dialogue emerging with OFSTED. The Chair commented that there remained a misalignment with schools’ objectives and the needs of employers which need to be continually highlighted.

Cllr. Lee Jeavons provided some anecdotal evidence of the poor take up by schools of careers fairs in Walsall and Julie Nugent advised that there was an increasing requirement for schools to offer good careers information, but this needed to be ‘enforced.’ Julie Nugent highlighted that careers was now a focus of OFSTED and this provided an opportunity.

Cllr. Ian Courts referenced a two day programme run by Solihull MBC for Year 7 pupils, which would stop because of the loss of ERDF funding.

Julie Nugent advised that the FE sector colleges were now working together across the region looking at the training/courses each offered with a view to avoiding duplication. She advised that companies needed to provide the specifics of the training they required to meet their skills shortages.

Cllr. Ian Kettle suggested that students should be required to use the time between the completion of their exams and the commencement of the statutory holiday period to undertake careers training/experience and it was noted that colleges did provide this.

Stuart Croft advised of the opportunity with review of post-18 education, of apprenticeships linking in with FE colleges, which could deliver inclusive growth.

The discussion ensued with the following points noted: -

- Utilise social media to highlight successes peers had already had;
- Need to have parents on board;
- Issues of worklessness through generations and the need to improve the soft skills, such as CV writing, appearance etc.
- The need for OFSTED to change how they measured schools, so that careers became an important focus for Head Teachers;
- LA's had good initiatives in place and there needed to be a "Tapas" menu of good practice which could be scaled up;
- The three LEPs each had an Employment and Skills Board and they needed to continue to collaborate, share KPIs and dashboards to highlight where to focus initiatives.

The Chair concluded that there was a need to know the current base information and then identify a short list of actions to progress skills in the region. He welcomed the continued collaboration of LEPs, LAs, employers, Universities and FE colleges.

#### **Agreed**

- 1) Note the progress made to date on the development of the Regional Skills Plan; and
- 2) that the comments and suggested actions on the emerging RSP be incorporated into the Plan.

#### **16/18 Investment Programme – Business Cases**

- a) Coventry North Package - £22,700,000 (SOC)**
- b) Digital Programme - £900,000 (SOC)**

The Chair commented that he had requested the WMCA Programme Management Office to be contacted as currently the information as provided required the SEP Board to note the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC). He recalled that originally the SEP Board had more than a "rubber stamping role", in that they were asked to ensure that the investment projects aligned with the SEP priorities. Currently there was no added to value to reporting the Investment Programme Business Case to the SEP Board.

## **Agreed**

- 1) That the SEP Board note the two Investment Programme Business Cases: -
  - a) Coventry North Package - £22,700,000 (SOC)
  - b) Digital Programme - £900,000 (SOC).
  
- 2) That the WMCA Programme Management Office be requested to report on their requirements of the SEP Board and produce the Investment Programme Business Cases information for consideration in a suitable format.

## **17/18 Any Other Business**

### **Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) Board**

The Chair advised that he viewed the Boards' title to be wrong as the purpose of the Board was focussed on delivery. He asked for officers to consider in consultation with the WMCA Governance Team a suitable title for the Board going forward into the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

## **18/18 Date of Future Meetings**

It was noted that the remaining date for the 2017/18 Municipal Year was 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018, as this pre-dated the WMCA Board AGM.

The Chair advised that there would be a need to set a schedule for the 2018/19 Municipal Year.

Meeting ended at 11.30am