



**West Midlands  
Combined Authority**

## **Economic Growth Board**

**Friday 13 May 2022 at 4.00 pm**

### **Minutes**

#### **Present**

Councillor Ian Brookfield (Chair)  
Tom Westley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Kerrie Carmichael  
Councillor Ian Courts  
Councillor Ian Kettle  
Andy Street  
Stuart Croft  
Anita Bhalla

Sarah Windrum

Corin Crane  
Matthew Hammond

Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation  
Black Country Local Enterprise  
Partnership  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council  
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Mayor of the West Midlands  
Higher Education Sector  
Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local  
Enterprise Partnership  
Coventry & Warwickshire Local  
Enterprise Partnership  
Black Country Chamber of Commerce  
West Midlands Growth Company

#### **Item Title No.**

#### **10. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Duggins, Dormer, Sleigh and Ward and Mike Wright.

#### **11. Chair's Remarks**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reported that this meeting would be the first opportunity to discuss the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

#### **12. Minutes - 2 February 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **13. Trailblazing Devolution Deal - Economic Positions**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Economy, Skills and Communities that sought comments and endorsement to the economic aspects of the devolution deal particularly relating to business support, trade and foreign direct investment, research and development innovation and West Midlands Smart City Region.

The Executive Director of Economy, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent introduced the report and advised that this work was part of the wider devolution work being led by the Executive Director of Strategy, Integration and Net Zero, Ed Cox.

It was noted that the economic positions presented follow development and testing with different groups of public and private partners for their thoughts and advice. The Head of Economy and Local Industrial Strategy, Jonathan Skinner reported on 3 key areas of focus these included the beneficiaries and impacts on business and entrepreneurs, attracting foreign investment and intense activity around research and development and innovation to double investment in the West Midlands.

The Chair asked members if they were happy with the proposals outlined in the report and invited the board to put forward any comments or questions.

Corin Crane (Black Country Chamber of Commerce) commented that it was a really good report and reported on the importance of delivery and ensuring inclusion and diversity underpins everything.

The Mayor reported that whilst the proposal was a good one it would not be easy to get 'over the line' with Government and commented on the need to give consideration to how business backs the economic positions and to look at the issue of freeports and tax advantages.

Councillor Courts considered the need to focus on measures of success and outcomes such as growth, job creation and foreign direct investment.

The Executive Director Economy, Skills and Communities reported that the proposals outlined were in draft form and these would be more precise following negotiations with Government.

Neil Rami (West Midlands Growth Company) reported that with regards to foreign direct investment, England was at a disadvantage compared to other parts of the UK and referred to the funds that had been made available to Wales for Aston Martin. He advised that the focus is how funds are administered and the importance of regional decisions, rather than new money.

The Chair reported that comments would be considered and incorporated into the overarching positions that would be put to the WMCA Board. Details of any specific initiatives or programmes would come back to the board.

Resolved:

1. The emerging positions in the report about the devolution of economic powers and resources be endorsed;
2. These positions be further considered by the Devolution Strategy Group and Mayor and Portfolio Holders Group ahead of formal decisions by the WMCA Board on 10 June be noted and

3. That further updates on the progress and implementation of the Trailblazer Devolution Deal be considered by the Economic Growth Board.

**14. Latest on Economic Taskgroup - Local Enterprise Partnership Integration**

The board considered a report that proposed an approach to integrating the West Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) into the WMCA through the appropriate pathways.

The Executive Director of Economy, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent introduced the report that outlined the three pathways for the integration of LEP functions into democratic institutions. It was noted that issues were being worked through for submission of the integration plan to Government by January 2023.

Anita Bhalla (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP) reported on the engagement being undertaken by the Greater Birmingham and LEP with business partners including taking forward existing work such as the work on clusters. Anita added that she would like this board to receive an update on LEP integration at its meeting in December ahead of sign-off of the integration plan by the WMCA Board in January.

Sarah Windrum (Coventry & Warwickshire LEP) supported the board endorsing the integration plan in December and advised that Coventry and Warwickshire LEP board would be seeking to approve its proposals at a meeting in September.

Dr Julie Nugent advised that the final integration plan would be shared with the board before it was submitted to the WMCA Board for approval.

Further to an enquiry from Tom Westley (Black Country LEP) regarding whether LEPs would retain and manage their significant legacy funds, the Mayor reported that local authorities/ LEPs would retain funds from enterprise zones and their defined income streams as the WMCA had no right to claim these.

The Mayor reported of the need for the Authority to give consideration to the non-constituent status of its members and what this means for economic integration.

Councillor Courts commented on the need to keep links across boundaries.

Paula Deas (Coventry & Warwickshire LEP) concurred it was important not to lose economic geography and that bespoke solutions would be discussed with Government.

The Executive Director of Economy, Skills and Communities, reported that businesses would be at the heart of the arrangements and all three LEP Chairs would be invited to join the Task and Finish Group.

Resolved:

1. The work ongoing in the region to respond to the Levelling Up White Paper and subsequent guidance from Government to oversee the integration of LEPs within Mayoral Combined Authorities be noted;
2. This is in line with the work overseen by the Economic Growth Board's Task and Finish Group, to review the economic functions undertaken by organisations across the West Midlands, with a particular focus on LEP integration be noted;
3. That given the subsequent implications for LEPs, all 3 LEP Chairs should be invited to join the Task and Finish Group (currently this is just the Black Country Chair) be agreed and
4. That a full integration plan be submitted to Government by January 2023 with a draft progress report to be submitted by the end of July 2022 be agreed.

**15. Latest on Economic Taskforce - Role of West Midlands Growth Company**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Economy, Skills and Communities that sought agreement in principle to the 'business as usual' scope of the West Midlands Growth Company's role in the regional economic development system. This would enable input into the WMCA's budget setting, Trailblazer Devolution Deal and UK Share Prosperity Fund investment plan processes and also enable West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) to work to more precise objectives and key indicators to deliver both regional and place specific outcomes.

Matthew Hammond (WMGC) outlined the report and advised that the report was a 'Starter for 10', based on the initial thoughts from the Growth Company and how it envisaged it would take forward the region's ambitions from the Plan for Growth and build on the achievements of the Business and Tourism Programme (BATP) and the legacy from the Commonwealth Games

The Chair reported that he supported the need for the Growth Company and for it to continue to undertake its valued role in bringing investment into the region.

Anita Bhalla (Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP) reported that she would like a conversation with Matthew Hammond around the LEP functions transferring from the LEP to the Growth Company and key economic development priorities.

The Mayor reported that he concurred with the Chair and firmly supported the need for the Growth Company. He considered that growth would come from trade given the current economic climate and it was therefore critical to obtain the maximum funds from Government, accepting that the WMCA would be also needed to provide funding

Councillor Courts reported that he was supportive of the Growth Company and considered the need for a competitive strategy to promote the region as it was vital to get more investment into West Midlands.

Neil Rami (WMGC) advised that work has been undertaken in this area and undertook to share this work.

Resolved:

1. Agreement be given in principle that West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) should continue to deliver activity similar in scope and scale to the Business and Tourism Programme (BATP) and should continue to explore other opportunities to add value to delivering the region's economic strategy, recognising that appropriate funding streams will need to be secured and
2. That WMGC work with partners to establish a new suite of objectives and key indicators to better deliver the Plan for Growth, address the region's levelling-up challenges and to meet the specific needs of places in the region be noted.

#### **16. UK Shared Prosperity Fund Update**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that sought endorsement to the principles of an investment plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) that seeks to build pride in place and boost life chances across the Combined Authority area.

The Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent, introduced the report and reported on the work being undertaken with partners to respond to the 3 key investment priorities around community and place, supporting local business and, people and skills.

The Head of Skills Insight, Dr Fiona Aldridge, outlined the report including the approach and principles to developing and approving the investment plan, the proposed approach to allocations and next steps.

The Chair reported that he was supportive of the report but felt the new funding for local investment was not comparable to funding previously available through European Structural Funds. He noted that funding for 'people and skills' was not available until 2024/25 and similarly, no funding is available to support 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training and reported of the need for the WMCA to look at this as part of the devolution deal.

Councillor Courts commented that there was no relationship between the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and LEP funding and also noted that the previous funding arrangements supported employment and young people. He also enquired about the arrangements and timing of local authorities approving the investment plan.

The Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities reported that consultations would be undertaken with local authorities, MPs and stakeholders but the approval of the investment plan was a decision for the WMCA Board. This board would oversee the UK Shared Prosperity Fund strategy with further details submitted to the next meeting. Julie Nugent added that there was not enough money to do everything.

Resolved:

1. The proposed principles and approach set out in the report to underpin the development of the approach to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) be agreed;
2. The ongoing work to quantify demand and develop funding options for the investment plan be noted;
3. That these principles and the approach to UKSPF be further considered by the Mayor and Met Leaders, the Regional Economic Directors Group, West Midlands Local Authority Chief Executives and Finance Directors, ahead of formal decisions by the WMCA Board in July be noted;
4. That the commissioning and future performance management of UKSPF be considered by the Economic Growth Board be agreed; and
5. The UKSPF activity supports the Local Business theme, offering the potential to build upon the latest outputs from the West Midlands Business Support Review, led by LEPs in conjunction with partners be noted.

#### **17. West Midlands Plan for Growth Next Steps**

The board considered a report of the Director of Economy, Skills and Communities that outlined the next steps in taking forward the West Midlands Plan for Growth. It was noted that the Plan for Growth had been approved by the WMCA Board in February 2022 and described how cluster opportunities would be taken forward through more active integration of the six cross-cutting interventions, to drive above-average growth in high value areas, creating good jobs for local people.

The Director of Economy, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent reported that a stakeholder event in June would support the Plan for Growth and demonstrate how it is to be embedded into mainstream economic activity across the region.

Resolved: The proposed steps to take forward the aims of the West Midlands Plan for Growth including an update on how some of the Levelling Up White Paper announcements, including LEP integration, UK SPF and the Innovation Accelerator will be critical to taking forward Plan for Growth interventions and launching the plan at a stakeholder event, setting out the region's broad plans for economic recovery with the Plan for Growth at its heart be noted.

**18. Economic Growth Board Work Programme**

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economy, Skills and Communities that set out the board's work programme for the new municipal year taking account of activity linked to the Levelling-Up White Paper and timetables relating to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal, the UK Share Prosperity Fund and Innovation Deals.

Resolved: That the updated work programme attached to the report as Appendix 1 (a live document to be refined according to the economic situation, priorities and decisions required) be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.06 pm.