



Economic Growth Board

Friday 23 September 2022 at 11.00 am

Minutes

Present

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

Councillor Peter Hughes
Councillor Simon Phipps
Andy Street
Anita Bhalla

Corin Crane
Matthew Hammond
Mike Wright
Councillor Mike Bird
Councillor Karen Grinsell
Rob Johnston

Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Mayor of the West Midlands
Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local
Enterprise Partnership
Black Country Chamber of Commerce
West Midlands Growth Company
West Midlands Innovation Board
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Midlands Trade Union Congress

Item Title
No.

9. Virtual Meeting

The Chair reported that because this meeting was being held virtually on MS Teams, under the terms of the WMCA's Constitution the meeting was inquorate. The decisions subsequently taken would formally be recommended to the Chief Executive, who would then approve those recommendations using her delegated authority to do so under the provisions of the Constitution.

10. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Courts (Solihull), Councillor Dormer (Non-Constituent Authorities) Councillor Duggins (Coventry) Councillor Sleigh (Portfolio Lead for Finance and Investments) Councillor Ward (Birmingham) and Lee Barron (Midlands Trade Unions Congress), Stuart Croft (Higher Education) and Sarah Windrum (Coventry & Warwickshire LEP).

11. Notification of Substitutes

Councillor Karen Grinsell (Solihull) was nominated as the substitute for Councillor Courts and Rob Johnston (Midlands Trade Union Congress for Lee Barron).

12. Chair's Remarks

The Chair referred to the recent fiscal event with the announcement of Investment Zones in 3 potential areas in the West Midlands. Further details were awaited from Government and details would be reported to this board in due course.

13. Minutes - 4 July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

14. Economic Conditions in the West Midlands

The board considered a report of the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities summarising the long-term economic forecasts for the West Midlands, latest quantitative economic intelligence, recent feedback and insight from West Midlands businesses and from the Economic Impact Group.

Delma Dwight (Black Country Consortium) highlighted key insights from the report.

Resolved: That the current economic conditions, including insight from the region's businesses and long-term economic forecasts be noted.

15. Update on B ATP and Games-time impact

The board considered a report of the Chief Executive of West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) that provided an update on the impact of the Business & Tourism Programme (B ATP) activity to date, particularly during the Commonwealth Games and plans for the next 6 months.

Matt Hammond (WMGC) introduced the report.

The board also received a presentation from the Chief Executive of WMGC, Neil Rami, who highlighted performance to date, regional and local impacts of the Business & Tourism Programme and outlined the events that WMGC were involved in or leading during the next six months. He also conveyed his thanks to local authorities and partner organisations for their support and involvement in the programme.

Corin Crane (Black Country Chamber of Commerce) congratulated WMGC on their achievements and enquired as to how the profile of employment opportunities in the hospitality sector could be raised noting that these had not been well received.

Neil Rami advised that the West Midlands Tourism Board would support people in the leisure and tourism sectors including hospitality.

The Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent, reported that a Hospitality Taskforce has been set up to promote the sector through job fairs and other activities to encourage recruitment.

The Chair conveyed his thanks to Neil Rami and Matt Hammond on behalf of the board for the excellent work undertaken by WMGC.

Resolved: That progress to date be noted.

16. West Midlands Growth Company - Future Funding and Priorities

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that sought a comprehensive review of the future funding, focus and reporting framework for the West Midlands Growth Company.

The Chief Executive City of Wolverhampton Council, Tim Johnson, introduced the report and advised that the review would look to put in place a funding strategy for the sustainability of WMGC going forward and outlined the approach to the review as set out in paragraph 6.2 of the report.

The Chair reported that the Growth Company was vitally important for the West Midlands and if it didn't exist, it would need to be invented as it is the vehicle to bring investment into the region and he hoped everyone would be able to support the report's recommendations.

Matthew Hammond (WMGC) highlighted the importance of all partners working together and the scale of what can be achieved for the region.

Resolved:

1. The accompany paper (Annex A) that sets out the West Midlands Growth Company's summary of current activity, alongside proposed objectives for 2023- 24 be noted;
2. That funding has not yet been secured to deliver these objectives, where the Growth Company anticipates it needs to continue to deliver at the same scale as current activity (£6m finding from the WMCA/region plus £6m additional funding from government pursued through discussions about the Trailblazer Devolution and Commonwealth Games residual contingency) and to deliver any new activities that the region may require(£3m additional funding from UKSPF) be noted;
3. A detailed options review be initiated for the West Midlands Growth Company (WMGC) to identify and secure funding to deliver agreed priorities be agreed (in doing so, to take forward the recommendations of the West Midlands Business Support Review to ensure WMGC is fully embedded into the business support ecosystem, removing any duplication and ensuring activities are streamlined with appropriate governance and accountability)
4. The terms of reference for the review be delegated to the Portfolio Lead for the Economy, the Mayor and the Chair of WMGC;
5. That the review be led by the WMCA Chief Executive, Chief Executive of the City of Wolverhampton Council and the Chief Executive of the Growth Company (the leadership group will work closely with local authority chief executives and finance directors) be noted and

6. The key recommendations be submitted to the WMCA Board in November be noted.

17. LEP Integration Update - Progress Report

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that provided an update on progress towards LEP integration.

Dr Julie Nugent, Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities outlined the proposals for the 3 LEPs and reported that the WMCA was working through the details of the functions which each LEP.

Anita Bhalla (Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP) provided an update on issues from the GBSLEP following their board meeting held the previous day. Anita reported on the importance of ensuring the business community's needs are heard moving forward in particular SMEs, and the need to consider equality implications. Concern was also expressed regarding staffing/TUPE matters and for these be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Tom Westley (Black Country LEP) echoed Anita's concern regarding SMEs and the need for proper representation of business owners. He added that innovation was crucial for small businesses and would want to see this work well in the future.

Paula Deas (Coventry and Warwickshire LEP) reported on the timeline for the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP that is to close in March 2023 and the remodelling of the Coventry & Warwickshire Growth Hub.

In relation to comments regarding the representation of small businesses, the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities, Dr Julie Nugent referred to the section in the report entitled, 'Business Voice in Decision Making' and in particular 3.10 where it is recommended that LEP nominated private sector members of existing WMCA groups, excluding the WMCA Board have terms of service extended by a further year to support transition. Additionally, it is also recommended that this board will open up a place for an SME representative and will formalise the link between the Economic Growth Board and the Regional Business Council as outlined and, will review private sector representation post LEP integration in Autumn 2023.

The Chair confirmed he was comfortable with these proposals.

In relation to an enquiry from Councillor Peter Hughes as to how a SME nomination for the board would be sought, Dr Julie Nugent advised that the WMCA would look at the process that the LEPs use, utilising their network, ensuring this process is open/ transparent and would circulate this to board members in due course.

Resolved:

1. That progress to date be noted;

2. The status of the LEP integration plan be noted and
3. The next steps including key recommendations as set out to inform the final report submitted to WMCA Board be agreed.

18. UK Shared Prosperity Investment Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that provided an update on progress towards developing the WMCA's more detailed UKSPF Investment Plan for approval by the WMCA Board on 28 October 2022. The report set out the WMCA's approach, funding methodology, the focus on business support and next steps.

The Head of Insight & Intelligence, Dr Fiona Aldridge outlined the report and advised that following the submission of the outline Investment Plan to Government on 1 August, the WMCA was working with local authorities and strategic partners on developing a detailed Plan that would be submitted to the next meeting of the WMCA Board. The proposals would be focused on needs and local allocations to rebalance investment.

Paul Kitson (Birmingham City Council) reported of the need to ensure the proposals support SMEs and considered the need to do more from a Birmingham perspective around business support. He added that he would like the opportunity to shape the proposals for business as he was not in agreement with the allocation of funds as currently set out.

Dr Fiona Aldridge reported that she would work on the suggestions proposed to ensure the model was right but added that the full details were not included in the plan.

Dr Julie Nugent advised that funding was embedded in local areas but would ensure the language was more explicit in future to show delivery through local channels and undertook to speak to Paul Kitson with regards to his concerns.

Stephen Weir (Coventry City Council) considered that more work was needed in the SME area and that he would also like to see how the local support structure was maintained for Coventry.

Councillor Peter Hughes (Sandwell) echoed the support required for SMEs and that he would like to continue the conversation with Directors and Officers outside of the meeting.

Corin Crane (Black Country Chamber of Commerce) commented that he wanted to be able to see the balance between regional and local business support.

The Chair asked that Julie Nugent and Fiona Aldridge address any issues of concern with colleagues within the next week to enable an agreed report to be submitted to the WMCA Board on 28 October.

Resolved;

1. The contents of the report be noted and
2. The report be updated accordingly following discussions with local authority officers and partners for submission to the WMCA Board.

19. West Midlands Innovation Accelerator

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that outlined progress and the process for the development of the Innovation Accelerator and sought endorsement for the regional strategic prioritisation criteria developed by the Innovation Board on 7 September.

The Chair of West Midlands Innovation Board, Mike Wright highlighted key areas in the report that included the scope and prioritisation of the Innovation Accelerator referred to in Annex A of the report.

The Head of Economic Partnerships & Policy, Jonathan Skinner advised the board that an update on the decision-making process for developing and selecting the project would be reported to the next meeting.

Resolved:

1. That progress and the process for the development of the Innovation Accelerator be noted and
2. The regional strategic prioritisation criteria developed by the Innovation Board on 7 September be endorsed.

20. Economic Growth Board Work Programme

The board considered a report of the Executive Director Economic Delivery, Skills and Communities that provided an update on its work programme and decisions that would support the region's overall vision to build a healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous West Midlands.

The Head of Economic Policy and Partnerships, Jonathan Skinner advised that the work programme would be updated to include Investment Zones following the recent Government announcement.

Rob Johnston (Midlands Trades Union Congress) reported of the need for a strategy on what good jobs/work looks like in the light of Investment Zones which could take account of the work of a regional expert in this field such as Mike Lewis.

The Chair agreed with Rob Johnston's proposal noting that the topic has been raised at previous WMCA meetings.

Resolved: That the updated work programme attached to the report as Appendix 1 be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.