



Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 11 September 2018

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Sohail Khan
Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Paul Singh

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sweetman, Cllr Bateman and Cllr Photay.

Cllr Bolshaw attended as a substitute for Cllr Sweetman and Cllr Singh attended as a substitute for Cllr Photay.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved:

That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Black Country LEP Brexit Group Outline and Update

The Chair welcomed Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium to the meeting.

Mrs Middleton outlined the history of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the fact that they had been created in 2011 and had undergone gradual change over the last 6 years to place more focus on developing economic priorities in order for the Black Country to enhance its influence on decision makers in the Cabinet.

In August 2017 a Black Country LEP had been set up with the ambition to understand the threats and opportunities of Brexit from a Black Country business perspective. The Group was currently in listening mode and sought to garner concerns from local businesses in order to pass them back to central government.

In Wolverhampton there was a high density of manufacturing businesses and there were concerns from those in the supply chain who were trying to understand the rules of the game before the Brexit trigger.

The report summarised the areas where businesses were seeking further clarification in areas such as tariffs and tariff arrangements.

The Black Country produced a lot of component parts for machines and supply chains for automotive and aerospace technologies could go around the world so there was a need to understand the implications for trade.

It was thought that the area really needed to be producing more originating equipment for manufacturers. The problems were further down the supply chain and it would be better to have design and control over the products being produced. There was a need to understand how we could have a tier one operating system in the City of Wolverhampton or the Black Country as this would certainly help with resilience.

There were also differences in pressures on automotive and aerospace industries and component part value could be very different for each. It was emphasised that it was important to understand the rules of trade and the tariffs along with skills and the movement of labour in order for the Black Country to support the ongoing development of its businesses.

LEPs in general were currently undergoing a review with a series of questions now having to be answered by LEPs regarding geographical coverage and working with the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The Board queried recent media discussions which appeared to suggest that organisations were holding back from key investment decisions pending Brexit, clarification was sought as to what the evidence was showing regarding this.

It was stated that this was often due to the ownership of the company. There were a high percentage of foreign owned businesses in the area and decisions were often being made in the European boardrooms regarding investment and there did appear to be a slowdown in decisions where this was the case which was leading to some anxiety. This was however only a slowing down rather than a full stop and as the country got closer to March 19 this pattern of decision making could change again with pragmatism being the best way forward and each investment being dealt with on a case by case basis.

The Board queried how this related to the British owned businesses. It was stated that they were all coming at it from their own locality decision points rather than a global stance.

The question was raised as to whether in relation to manufacturing any businesses had stopped investing here and decided to invest abroad. It was thought that this might be hard to judge as investment could not always be directly linked to Brexit.

The Board queried what the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Council's role should be in relation to levering in investment and bolstering certain sectors.

It was thought that in terms of being prepared and deciding on priorities that Wolverhampton and the Black Country were developing a pipeline of where investment was needed. Having a very clear set of priorities and set of skills was important and there was a need to understand what investment was required to help get people back into work. There was ongoing development of workforce skills and bitesize courses had worked well and been invested in by companies who were clear about the occupations on offer. A little bit of investment could also help in relation to business competitiveness provided that any business case could demonstrate returns.

The Board commended the work being done to get people back into work and queried whether there were any facts or numbers about how many people had been assisted so far.

It was confirmed that these figures could be provided and that the LEP could come back with some further information on outcomes. Work had been done on improving rates of qualification but there was still a need for about 12000 people across Wolverhampton alone to get a qualification to meet the national average and 15000 more people that needed to find work in the City. It was though that the level of wages had been improving but perhaps not at the level of the national average.

The Board considered that it would also be interesting to know where investment was currently coming from and where we were tapping into new markets and investments.

The Board considered that there was a shortage in knowledge as to where skills were missing, and it was stated that we could not train people for roles when we didn't know what was required and what the buy in from companies would be. It was vital to make sure that our youth were being trained in the City.

It was however also noted that it would be very hard to do much now as times were so uncertain and that many youngsters trained in Wolverhampton then left the country to go where the jobs and money were which was to be expected.

The Board thanked Mrs Middleton for her work and the work being carried out by the LEP and the Brexit Group.

Resolved: (1) That the report be received.

(2) That representatives of the Black Country LEP be invited to attend a future meeting of the Board to update councillors regarding rates of people returning to work, the skills gap, ongoing investment concerns and the continued effect of Brexit.

6 **Work programme and update on items from the Annual Scrutiny Planning Event**

The Board received an update on the Work Programme and the items that had been suggested for inclusion at the Annual Planning Event.

The Chair confirmed that a review group would be set up to look at violent youth crime in the City and that Cllr Obaida Ahmed would chair the group.

Resolved: That the updates be noted.

7 **Annual Corporate, Social Care and Public Health Complaints Report**

A report was presented to provide a summary of the complaints, compliments, Local Government Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman enquiries received by the Council during the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.

The Head of Customer Services provided the Board with an update on the Customer Services structure and confirmed that she would soon be leaving the Authority. The Board thanked the Head of Customer Services for all her hard work over the years.

The Customer Engagement Manager presented the report and confirmed that benchmarking would be included in the October report.

The Board noted that the report did not include complaints that came in through Councillors and that people often used Councillors to escalate a complaint.

It was stated that the Council was doing a piece of work around a central point of contact for councillor enquiries and that Customer Services had helped with this but needed some additional resource to move forward and were working with other departments in the Council to facilitate this and to produce a protocol with timescales.

Resolved: That the report be received.

8 **Annual Scrutiny Report**

The Board considered the Annual Scrutiny Report which this year had been done as a film for the first time.

Resolved: (1) That captions and names be added to the film;
(2) That the video be presented to the next meeting of the Full Council.