

**GREATER BIRMINGHAM & SOLIHULL LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP
JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22 September 2015**

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs R Cox (Lichfield), N Knowles (Wyre Forest), M Fitzpatrick (East Staffordshire)(Sub for Cllr J Mott), M Oates (Tamworth), V Quinn (Birmingham) and P Witherspoon (Redditch)

Witnesses: Katie Trout, Executive Manager, Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP)
Michael Carr, Programme Delivery Director, GBSLEP

Support Officer: Roy Eaton, Senior Scrutiny Officer
Also in attendance: Benita Wishart (Birmingham)

Apologies: Cllrs B Gamble (Cannock Chase), J Mott (East Staffordshire)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

No appointment made as the meeting was inquorate.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

No appointment made as the meeting was inquorate.

3. ATTENDANCE

The Senior Scrutiny Officer advised that the Solihull Representative, Cllr C O’Kane was not in attendance and, as such, in accordance with the Joint Committee’s Terms of Reference, the meeting was inquorate.

The Members present expressed concern at this situation as it rendered the Joint Committee powerless in exercise of its Scrutiny role. Members asked that the Senior Scrutiny Officer write to Solihull’s Chief Executive to express Members’ disappointment and concern over this situation.

Added to this was the fact that Solihull had not appointed an Alternate Member, as requested by the Joint Committee last year. Members asked that Solihull resolve this as soon as practical.

Whilst accepting that the meeting was inquorate, Members decided to continue and deal with the business informally.

It was agreed that Cllr N Knowles act as chairman of this meeting.

4. DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None submitted.

5. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

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None submitted.

6. MINUTES

The Joint Committee received the minutes of the last meeting held on 29th October 2014.

The Minutes were noted.

7. THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CALL-IN PROCEDURES

Principally for the benefit of the new Members, the Senior Scrutiny Officer highlighted the Joint Committee's Terms of Reference and Call-In Procedures.

8. GBSLEP UPDATE REPORT

The JSC received a report from the Executive Manager to the GBSLEP intended to provide an update to the JSC on progress of the GBSLEP in delivering its Strategy for Growth. The report provided some background information; highlighted performance against Key Performance Indicators; progress with a number of strategic issues and the three pillars of Business, People and Place and certain governance matters.

The following issues were raised: -

- Spatial Planning – impact of the Combined Authority – Witnesses advised that no decision had been taken over the need to create a Spatial Plan across the three LEP areas. Work was continuing on this in respect of the GBSLEP area.
- Land Commission – under the auspices of the Shadow Combined Authority, the Land Commission would map public assets, including those held by Government Departments across the area and how best these sites should be brought forward. Making the use of redundant sites was mentioned a number of times during the meeting and the importance of good communication and connections as things progressed was highlighted.
- Communication – How much understanding is there in communities as to the role of the LEP and what is being achieved? What the LEP is doing and its achievements need to be robustly communicated to partner organisations and within the affected communities. Witnesses explained some of the mechanisms in use but agreed that good practice could be extended more widely, both locally and nationally. The LEP is in the process of recruiting a Communications Manager who will provide oversight of this. Witnesses invited suggestions from local authorities as to potential improvements to providing information.
- European Funding – Noting the JEREMIE Fund, a Member referred to a new Fund, titled JEMIMA, intended to help with supporting social housing needs. Witnesses were not familiar with this fund and agreed to report back on this at the next meeting.

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- HS2 Growth Strategy – In response to a question on this, witnesses explained the intent behind the HS2 Growth Strategy to improve connectivity to the Curzon and Interchange Stations and between them as well as to deliver the potential for further economic development that HS2 brought. The LEP was conscious of the impact of HS2 on some areas and the need to mitigate these as far as possible.
- Perception of LEP and accountability – Witnesses advised that whilst the LEP had been allocated funding and had an executive role in managing this; its delivery was based on a true partnership between the private/ public sector, with its deliverables being achieved through project sponsors.
- Midland Mainline electrification – A Member expressed concern over recent announcements that Network Rail had paused the programme of electrification on parts of the Midland Mainline and asked whether the LEP had a view on this. Witnesses agreed that this was disappointing but the Midlands Connect project, spanning the East and West Midlands and focusing road and rail investment priorities, could be well placed to lobby for any reinstatement of work that may be dropped by Network Rail.
- M6 Toll – A Member suggested that pressures on the M6 and the detrimental impact to business and health/ environment could be relieved by making better use of the M6 Toll. Witnesses acknowledged the real challenges around this and that it was a “live debate” through Midlands Connect and as part of the Combined Authority proposals.
- Jobs and Skills – In response to a question, witnesses explained some of the activities in train to increase job opportunities and skills through the Growth Fund, particularly towards matching skills needs. Witnesses referred to the discussions taking place under the auspices of the Combined Authority Devolution Deal to introduce a better managed skills system across the area and ensuring that skills providers work more seamlessly.

In the absence of formal powers the Joint Committee AGREED: -

- i) That the report be received and the detail noted,
- ii) That LEP Officers report to the next meeting on JEMIMA Funding, and
- iii) That the LEP consider further how the role of the LEP and its activities can be better communicated to local communities.

9. GROWTH DEAL UPDATE

The JSC received a report from the Programme Delivery Director to the GBSLEP updating on the progress being made in the delivery of the Growth Deal. The report gave some background information to the Growth Deal; details of delivery against the Local Growth Fund element of the Deal; delivering the Growth Hub and information on a planned audit.

The following issues were raised: -

- Audit of the LEP – A Member enquired whether Birmingham City Council was “doing a good job” in acting as auditors to the LEP. The witnesses

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advised that Birmingham City Council was the accountable body for the LEP and whilst there were some issues initially the Council generally was responsive and the audit was now being worked through in a proactive way. In response to a further question, witnesses advised that there had been some issues with the Council's Legal Team, which had improved recently, and the procurement processes required to be adopted.

- The Growth Hub – In response to a question, witnesses confirmed that that the Bromsgrove MP had been supportive of the Growth Hub proposal. An invitation was extended to Committee Members to attend the launch of the Growth Hub on 7th October at the Birmingham Hippodrome at 8 am. Further detail to be supplied through the Senior Scrutiny Officer.
- Birmingham Cycle Revolution Phase 2 – A Member questioned the continued support for this scheme given that Government funding had been withdrawn. Witnesses confirmed that that Phase 1 was nearly complete and seen as a success and, as such, there was significant local ambition to see the delivery of Phase 2.
- Midland Metro Birmingham: Eastside Extension – A Member referred to the embarrassment that would be caused if this project was not to be delivered. Witnesses advised that although the overall Metro programme was being realised in a project by project manner, the project was progressing satisfactory and there was confidence that the Project Sponsor would deliver this.
- Friarsgate, Lichfield – The local Member was pleased to note that the Growth Team had provisionally allocated funding to this scheme although full business case approval was still required.

The Joint Committee received and noted the report.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The JSC noted that a further meeting had been scheduled for 10th March 2016.

Before closing the meeting the Chairman congratulated the LEP Executive Manager on her performance in front of the Public Accounts Select Committee.

The meeting finished at 3.15 pm.