
Meeting of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee – 19th January 2022

Report of the Chief Executive of the Black Country Consortium Ltd

Black Country Consortium Limited – Current Business Activity

Purpose

1. This is the Annual Report to Dudley MBC's Scrutiny Committees of the Black Country Consortium Ltd. In former years the report has focussed solely on the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership's (BCLEP) work within and across the Borough, however this year the report will focus across the activity undertaken by the Consortium which is not solely related to the BCLEP but also hosts a number of other partnerships and activities, to include the Black Country Plan for Growth, BC Growth Hub, Economic Intelligence Unit, Active Black Country, the BC Skills Factory, Repowering the BC and the BC Economy of Together.

A PowerPoint slide deck is provided in support of this report.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended: -
 - That the Committee receive and note the contents of the report.
 - Provide views on any further activity within the Black Country and primarily Dudley Borough that the Consortium could assist the local authority with.

Background

4. Black Country Consortium Limited Overview

Black Country Consortium Ltd (BCC Ltd) was established in 2004 by the four Black Country local authorities and is a Company Limited by Guarantee, with each local authority assuming the role of Guarantee Member. It has a diverse, economic development, intelligence and strategic team working with partners from public and private sectors (locally, regionally and on a pan Midlands basis) to steer and support the delivery of the Black Country Strategy for Growth and Competitiveness in the sub region.

The Company provides strategic support, advice and capacity to local authorities across the interconnected key areas for growth within the Black Country by:

- Nurturing and articulating Black Country Development needs, opportunities and solutions;
- Provision and application of intelligence to inform, support and influence decision-making;
- Aiding the Black Country through the provision of strategic support including Programme Management and secretariat functions; and
- Promoting the Black Country by raising the profile and perception.

BCC Ltd has developed a unique enabling role, connecting, developing and brokering networks and collaborative approaches to economic development, drawing on its own knowledge of businesses – ranging from multi nationals to medium, small and micro businesses, the sectors and markets they operate within, the intermediary agents that support them, Government and its agencies, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local authorities across the UK where we have economic alliances.

The Company hosts a number of teams and partnerships that operate across the Black Country.

5. **Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership**

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is a 'triple helix' partnership of private, public and academia organisations with a focus on stimulating the drivers of economic development, education and skills development and infrastructure and environmental enhancements.

The Black Country LEP is one of 38 LEPS across England and aims to create the conditions for enterprise to flourish, resulting in greater economic prosperity across the Black Country area. Government require LEPs to be chaired by the private sector and the current chair is Tom Westley DL, who is Chairman of Westley Group.

The Black Country LEP has been a major conduit for receiving and recommending to the BC Joint Committee allocations of 'local growth funds' to projects and companies. A variety of funds have been made available over recent years. Major projects supported in Dudley include: -

£

- £2.3M - VLR Development
- £13M - VLR Innovation Centre
- £4.8M - VLR Test Track;
- £9M - BCLM
- £5.2M - Dudley Brownfield Land -
- £630K - Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Business Case development
- £1.5M – LCP – Pensnett Trading Estate
- £8M – Dudley Advance II – Dudley College
- £300k – Castle and Zoo car park
- £3.8M Pensnett High Street



- £200K – Dudley Interchange Business Case Development
- £5.9M – Halesowen College New Business and Construction centre
- £7.2M – Music Institute – Brierley Hill.

The Government is currently undertaking a review of Local Enterprise Partnerships and the future of LEPs, and/or their replacement body will be outlined in the Levelling Up White Paper, now deferred until January 2022. A verbal update can be made to the Committee if an announcement has happened.

However, there are a number of legacy funds that the Black Country LEP retains responsibility for into the future. and these include some unallocated Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF), a growing pot of funding linked to the creation of Enterprise Zones across the Black Country, anticipated to yield approximately £59M and gainshare from a BDUK programme linked to roll out of broadband infrastructure. The overview of the Legacy Funds is appended to the report at **Appendix 1**.

6. Black Country Plan for Growth

The Government issued their Plan for Growth ([Link](#)) in March 2021, setting out the Government’s view on how to recover from the pandemic through ‘building back better’ and ‘levelling up’ across the UK. It provides the government’s objectives to ‘support economic growth through investment in infrastructure, skills, and innovation’ and provides a new framework through which to deliver on the three priorities detailed:

- Levelling Up across the UK;
- Reaching net zero emissions by 2050;
- Seizing the opportunities of Global Britain in light of our departure from the EU.

The Black Country has been focussed on levelling up as an outcome for over 20 years. Our vision for 2033 remains for a growing population enjoying a high-quality environment with better incomes and higher skills. The Black Country Consortium coordinated the development of a Covid Recovery Prospectus in June 2020 and reviewed and has now developed a Plan for Growth – Seizing the Moment Plan in 2021 where we are taking the challenge of economic recovery as an opportunity to re-set our action to deliver the Black Country Vision in the light of the impact of the pandemic and the challenges of health inequalities and climate change.

Significant progress has been made in reversed population decline, with the original growth target already achieved; our skills levels are improving; our manufacturing business base is resilient and improvements are on-going to our blue and green infrastructure. The BC has a track record of delivering innovative projects including: the Skills Factory, the National Brownfield Institute, the Very Light Rail Innovation Centre, the Repowering the Black Country project, action on the Circular Economy and our Garden City principles.

However major challenges remain, most notably quicker skills improvements translating into earnings, poor healthy life expectancy, a continuing output gap and productivity challenge and the need to ensure that our residents and businesses are



best placed to take advantage of digital technologies. The pandemic has accelerated trends in the retail and hospitality sectors that are having a major impact on our towns and city of Wolverhampton. Young people are now more at risk of unemployment and under-employment. We also face the challenge of responding to climate change and contributing to net zero ambitions. The impact of the EU exit is also having structural impacts for sectors traditionally strong in Dudley and the Black Country such as advanced engineering. A Black Country Digital Strategy is drafted and in the process of being finalised.

The Black Country Plan for Growth and its priorities ([The Black Country Plan for Green Growth \(blackcountrylep.co.uk\)](https://blackcountrylep.co.uk)) is provided as supporting material. Black Country Consortium is collaborating across various geographies to seek alignment to priorities. This includes across the WMCA 3 LEP geography being the sector development lead for Aerospace, Metals and Materials, Construction and Rail.

7. BC Growth Hub

Black Country Growth Hub provides free and impartial support to businesses and entrepreneurs of any size, sector or status across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The dedicated business development team can help businesses with a wide range of enquiries such as:

- Wanting to grow your business
- Starting a new business
- Recruiting apprentices or graduates
- Finding business property
- Support with procurement processes
- Implementing new innovative procedures
- Finding networking opportunities

Over 1,500 enquiries have been triaged and referred to business support over the last 12 months along with a focus on Peer-to-Peer leadership facilitation to support business development and expansion of exports along with adoption of technology.

The Consortium and its Growth Hub team are part of a WMCA geography approach to implementing an enhanced West Midlands Business Support approach. There have always been high levels of collaboration across the Wider West Midlands region and now 4 priority pillars have been identified to strengthen the support to all businesses in light of post covid economic recovery requirements specific to the 3 LEP/ WMCA geography. The 4 pillars are: -

- Improving on an integrated Customer Journey across the business support landscape;
- Development of a consistent West Midlands Business Support Offer;
- Development of Targeted Premium Products which work at scale / specialisms; and
- A campaign to drive take up of business support as evidence shows engaged businesses are more resilient.



8. **Economic Intelligence Unit**

BCC Ltd offers a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic challenges and opportunities in the Black Country and the wider West Midlands area. The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) provides rigorous, “best in class”, economic analysis across the three key Strategic Economic Plans themes of people, businesses and place.

This intelligence is used to inform different stages of the policy-making cycle driving Impact Services, including: critical assessment of the socioeconomic challenges across the local authorities and for the Black Country; evidence-based strategy and policy development; project and programme design and feasibility; programme management; and monitoring and evaluation.

Black Country Consortium Ltd. provides access to a flexible resource to enable and support the development of the ‘place-based narrative’ which following the update of the Treasury Green Book is even more critical than ever before. Critically as well as quantitative data we provide the latest qualitative insights and the most up to date labour market intelligence – for sectors and for localities which is provided to all Partners. Utilising of spatial insight and GIS intelligence to understand role and activity in places and transformation required, all in context of Green and Digital Growth. We provide the Evidence Base to Support Investment Propositions: Working together on the compelling narrative regarding Sector profiles and sector intelligence – barriers and future growth opportunities – linked to skills opportunities and investment opportunities. The team provides access to our regular business and labour market insight reports and analysis along with local analysis if required.

9. **Active Black Country**

BCC Ltd hosts the Active Black Country Partnership which is the strategic lead for Sport and Physical Activity across the Black Country; funded by Sport England as part of the national network of Active Partnerships. The partnership focuses on the power of physical activity and sport to change people’s lives. The vision is to create an active, healthy and prosperous Black Country and get the regions 323,000 inactive residents active, to cut health and adult social care costs alongside contributing to carbon zero ambitions and Black Country Plan for Growth.

As an ‘enabling’ partnership, the team facilitate collaboration across the four local authorities, communities and other identified stakeholders. We co-ordinate joint working where it adds most value, seeking to influence policy, facility development, attract investment, and commission programmes and campaigns.

With the coming of the Commonwealth Games in 2022, Consortium has contributed to the successful Commonwealth Active Communities bid, resulting in an initial £1.5m investment into the area. The funding aims to get local people active using the Commonwealth Games as a catalyst. The Consortium is supporting the council on securing maximum opportunities from the Games for the borough.



We have received national recognition from Sport England and Activity Alliance, Lawn Tennis Association and the Sport and Recreation Alliance for the work across the 'Get Out Get Active' (GOGA) programme that sees faith leaders activating local communities, recently launching the 'Faith & Health Toolkit'.

Sport England are in the final stages of agreeing capacity funding for the Black Country partnership over a 5-year period, this is a change from their previous investment approach of awarding on an annual basis.

There has been strong progress made on activity strategy development with the 'Creating an Active Black Country' and the development of a supporting skills strategy enabling £250k of investment for the Black Country to lead the Gen22 volunteering programme for the Commonwealth Games across the West Midlands.

The Consortium are working with health partners, overseeing the Black Country Social Prescribing implementation which has brought investment and profile to the region.

10. **BC Careers Hub & Enterprise Adviser Network**

Black Country Consortium Ltd manage the Enterprise Adviser Network, the Careers Hubs and the Cornerstone Employer Group on behalf of the Careers & Enterprise Company.

The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) is funded by the Department for Education to facilitate the delivery of world class careers education for all young people and was inaugurated in 2015.

The Black Country Skills Factory (BCC Ltd) responded to the call-to-action from CEC and the Black Country programme started in December 2015. The CEC receive grant funds from DfE with specific targets for the Enterprise Adviser Network and Careers Hubs, they also receive additional funds from DfE, via the CEC, to support additional work such as the Primary Fund, the Investment Funds, Careers Leader Training & Bursaries, the Alternative Provision Project (HIPS) and the Transition Fund. The Black Country have directly benefited from the grant funding and the additional funds by submitted bids via the Skills Factory at BCC Ltd.

Currently there are 93 Enterprise Advisers matched to Schools and Colleges across the Black Country with vacancies mainly in SEND and AP Schools. In Dudley, 18 from the 23 Secondary Schools/Colleges in the Network and Careers Hub are matched with an Enterprise Adviser Volunteer with the vacant schools being the SEND schools. There remains one school, The Wordsley School in Dudley who are not engaged in the Network or the Careers Hub.

On average our Schools are fully achieving 5.4 benchmarks, whilst our CEC target for the year is 5 and the national average is currently 4.2 The Black Country are outperforming the national average in all 8 Gatsby Benchmarks.

11. **Black Country Environment**



Black Country iTree Eco Survey

The Black Country Consortium have won £175,000 from the Woodland Trusts Emergency Tree Fund. We have commissioned a tree survey of the Black Country, so that we have an accurate idea of our tree cover and condition. This is supported by the 4 LAs who sit on the project Working Group. The results will help us to better plan where to plant trees and understand the benefits they bring. The fieldwork has begun and the survey work has just been completed. Analysis and findings are to be reported during 2022.

Black Country Canal Strategy

The Consortium is supporting BC LAs and the Canal and River Trust on the development of a canal strategy which aims to develop a shared vision across BC partners for the canal network, through identifying opportunities for how the network can contribute to wider outcomes across economic, transport, health spatial agendas. In particular how the canal as an asset can underpin and support further the regeneration of Black Country towns and the ongoing development of housing and employment areas where they are in proximity to the 177km of canals across the Black Country. A supporting action plan will be developed to attract investment. Drafts will be available early in 2022.

12. **Repowering the BC**

Repowering the Black Country is one of six areas across mainland UK developing practical and implementable co-investment plans to enable industrial decarbonisation projects. The Innovate UK programme is funded by BEIS and UKRI. The Black Country Industrial Cluster consists of more than 3000 energy-intense manufacturing businesses. The project is supporting the national industrial decarbonisation strategy by developing approaches which work in the Black Country and can then be applied more widely. The Black Country is the national lead for SME intensive energy users net zero challenge and so far, has secured £2M to support companies on the development of integrated solutions to provide competitive energy with a net zero outcome.

The project is about providing cost-efficient energy infrastructure across the Black Country; helping companies benefit from new supply chain opportunities in the circular economy; and supporting resource efficiency initiatives in manufacturing operations.

The Black Country Industrial Decarbonisation programme will deliver, via Repowering the Black Country, a programme of initiatives supporting Black Country businesses to take advantage of global clean growth opportunities and to make the transition to a net zero industrial future.

The project will initially develop four pilot zero carbon industrial hubs in the Black Country. Within the next 10 years, the programme aims to reduce industrial carbon emissions by around 1.3M tCO₂ while keeping Black Country energy costs competitive and attracting high quality manufacturing jobs to the region.

The Black Country LEP and West Midlands Mayor Andy Street launched the Black Country Industrial Decarbonisation Programme at a manufacturing facility, Servosteel, in Dudley, one of the leading industrial companies on the programme and was timed to coincide with the end of COP26, on the 12th November 2021.



13. BC Economy of Together

The Consortium has launched the Economy of Together (EOT) Action Plan which is a critical endeavour for the LEP, requiring strong collaborative working with partners and key local stakeholders. EOT 2030 is an integral part of our recovery and growth plans, influencing every facet of our economy and society. This reflects the diversity of our four pillars of focus for EOT 2030, the themes by which this action plan brings together actions we and key partners are undertaking:

1. Equalities: Enabling equality of opportunity and local institutions that all reflect the diversity of our population.
2. Education: Integrating diversity, fairness and equal opportunities into the LEP's educational involvement, including outcomes from local educational institutions.
3. Enterprise: Investing responsibly and locally, enabling the growth and success of social enterprises and entrepreneurs.
4. The Environment: Creating a healthier, active Black Country that delivers on net-zero ambitions.

Our EOT 2030 action plan is built around the 4 E's, building on existing work and new ideas across the sub-region. Outlined actions will help tackle the structural issues highlighted by Covid-19 and enable positive change for all communities. The pillars suggested reflect the areas the LEP is able to add most value given its resources and expertise. Importantly, delivery is already underway by the LEP and partners. The Action Plan is an opportunity to reflect on the leading areas we and partners are taking action on, while understanding future measures of success for supporting an EOT 2030.

14. This is an information report from the Black Country Consortium Ltd on activity being undertaken in Dudley MBC and the wider Black Country. In respect of the Local Enterprise Partnership activity this focus is on improving the economic outcomes for businesses and residents throughout Dudley and it is expected and assumed that projects put forward for support have gone through the relevant local authority requirements to include: -

- *Any consultation and any representations made;*
- *Consideration of any alternative options considered and rejected;*
- *Any known conflicts of interests declared by any Member or Officer who is involved in the decision;*
- *Clarification of the improvement and outcomes that the project submitted was seeking to achieve.*

Finance

15. No direct implications for Dudley MBC. Paragraph 5 details the funding allocated and secured for Dudley projects through the BC LEP.



Law

16. No direct implications for Dudley MBC. The BC LEP operates within an Assurance Framework, set by national Government and includes a requirement for an Accountable Body for the funds allocated. In the BC the Accountable Body role is undertaken by a team based at Walsall MBC. The BC LEP is subject to annual performance reviews undertaken by the Government's Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and has regularly achieved the requisite performance in relation to Governance, Delivery and Strategy.

Risk Management

17. No direct implications for Dudley MBC. The BC LEP undertakes Risk Monitoring in relation to supported projects not only in terms of spend profiles but also monitors the achievement of the contracted outputs, which could impact on projects being required to repay a proportion of the allocated funding.

Equality Impact

18. No direct implications for Dudley MBC. Whilst the BC LEP does not undertake Equality Impact Needs Assessments, projects do undergo Due Diligence assessment by an independent firm. It is expected and assumed that the Dudley MBC project management officer and support team ensures that projects put forward will have been subject to the internal reviews required by the local authority.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

21. No direct implications for Dudley MBC.

Commercial/Procurement

22. No direct implications for Dudley MBC. Any project related procurement will be dealt with by the consultants who deal with Due Diligence – Thomas Lister – and the Dudley MBC appointed project management officer directly.

Council Priorities

23. No direct implications for Dudley MBC.

However, the projects detailed at paragraph 5 cover Innovation, the Visitor Economy, Skills and Transport which link in with the seven Council aspirations for 2030, developed with Dudley's key partners and stakeholders: -

1. An affordable and attractive place to live with a green network of high-quality parks, waterways and nature reserves that are valued by local people and visitors.
2. A place where everybody has the education and skills they need, and where outstanding local schools, colleges and universities secure excellent results for their learners.



3. A place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future.
4. Better connected with high quality and affordable transport, combining road, tram, rail, and new cycling and walking infrastructure.
5. Renowned as home to a host of innovative and prosperous businesses, operating in high quality locations with space to grow, sustainable energy supplies and investing in their workforce.
6. A place to visit and enjoy that drives opportunity, contributing to its ambitious future while celebrating its pioneering past.
7. Full of vibrant towns and neighbourhoods offering a new mix of leisure, faith, cultural, residential and shopping uses.

Sarah Middleton
Chief Executive
Black Country Consortium Ltd.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Black Country Legacy Funds
Presentation slide deck

List of Background Documents

