



## Minutes from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Black Country

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| <b>Date &amp; Time:</b> | 3:00pm – 4:30pm 10th June 2020  |
| <b>Location:</b>        | Online (Zoom Meeting)   |
| <b>Speakers:</b>        | Business Support Organisations  |
| <b>Chair:</b>           | Mike Wood MP  |
| <b>Contact:</b>         | Matthew Lowe, Policy & Lobbying Manager, Black Country Chamber of Commerce / <a href="mailto:appg@blackcountrychamber.co.uk">appg@blackcountrychamber.co.uk</a> |

### In Attendance

#### Parliamentarians/Representatives:

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| Dan Horrocks (DH)                            | Senior Parliamentary Assistant for Mike Wood MP       |
| Terri Garratt (TG)                           | Parliamentary Researcher for Rt. Hon. Pat McFadden MP |
| Marco Longhi MP (MLon)                       | Member of Parliament for Dudley North                 |
| Mike Wood MP (Chair) (MW)                    | Member of Parliament for Dudley South                 |
| Rt. Hon. Pat McFadden MP (Deputy Chair) (PM) | Member of Parliament Wolverhampton South East         |
| Sarah Atherton MP (SA)                       | Member of Parliament for Wrexham                      |
| Shaun Bailey MP (SB)                         | Member of Parliament for West Bromwich West           |
| Stuart Anderson MP (SAn)                     | Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West     |
| Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP (JS)                | Member of Parliament for Warley                       |
| Suzanne Webb MP (SW)                         | Member of Parliament for Stourbridge                  |
| Jane Stevenson MP (JSt)                      | Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton North East     |
| Nicola Richards (NR)                         | Member of Parliament for West Bromwich East           |
| Richard Tasker (RT)                          | Office of Marco Longhi MP                             |

#### Invited Guests/Secretariat:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Charlotte Horobin (CH)                        | Region Director, MAKE UK  |
| Corin Crane (CC)                              | Chief Executive, Black Country Chamber of Commerce                  |
| Matthew Lowe (ML)                             | Policy & Lobbying Manager, Black Country Chamber of Commerce        |
| Sarah Middleton (SM)                          | Chief Executive, Black Country Chamber Consortium                   |
| Chris Ashley (Representing Simon Preist) (CA) | Head of Policy, Road Haulage Association                            |
| Paul Maubach (PMau)                           | Chief Executive, NHS Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group            |
| Jaspal Sohal (JSo)                            | Head of Black Country Growth Hub                                    |
| Neil Anderson (NA)                            | Director of External Affairs, Black Country Chamber                 |
| Karen Webb (KW)                               | Director of Membership & International Trade, Black Country Chamber |
| Dan Carins (DC)                               | Finance and Productivity Manager, Black Country Consortium          |
| Richard Butler (RB)                           | Director West Midlands & Oxfordshire, CBI                           |

#### Apologies:

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| James Morris MP         | Member of Parliament for Halesowen & Rowley Regis      |
| Rt. Hon. Valerie Vaz MP | Member of Parliament for Walsall South                 |
| Karen Woolley           | Development Manager Staffordshire & West Midlands, FSB |

| NO.  | KEY DISCUSSION POINTS/ ACTION POINTS/ DECISIONS  | By whom?     | By when? |
|------|--|--------------|----------|
|      | <b>Welcome and Apologies</b>   |              |          |
| 2.01 | <p><b>Mike Wood (MW)</b> opened the meeting by welcoming attendees to the second and first virtual meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Black Country.</p> <p><b>MW</b> handed over to <b>Paul Maubach (PMau)</b> to provide a verbal update on the current COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Key discussion points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total number of cases, the spread of the virus the steps taken to mitigate this.</li> <li>• Black Country region was the first region to test all care homes this showed that 20% of care home residents had the virus but showed no symptoms.</li> <li>• There are 3 types of testing being undertaken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Testing of people who present to NHS with symptoms</li> <li>○ Antibody testing (predominantly on NHS staff) which is dependent on the supply of testing products.</li> <li>○ Tracking and Tracing – development of the smartphone app to track the spread of infection and contact those who may have been exposed. This is still in development and needs a joining up of Local Government and NHS test and tracing services.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | MW           | Closed   |
|      | <b>Knowledge Sharing: The Impact of COVID-19 on Black Country Businesses</b>   |              |          |
| 2.02 | <p><b>MW</b> stated that the purpose of the meeting was for Parliamentarians to hear evidence from business organisations present on the call and operating across the region regarding the impact of COVID19 on their memberships/sector.</p> <p>Evidence submissions included:</p> <p><b>Corin Crane (Black Country Chamber of Commerce)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Chamber of Commerce has been focusing on bringing key stakeholders together including the provision of secretariat services to this APPG, establishing a multiagency group between business support organisations and local authorities and hosting a range of business support webinars, training sessions and updates.</li> <li>- The Chamber also provides the local DIT contract and has been supporting businesses to export and import goods from overseas.</li> <li>- Businesses are generally pleased to be moving back into activity, however most businesses are now discussing redundancies and mapping out the phased ending of furlough.</li> <li>- Key issue for the Chamber is that the region is impacted significantly when labour patterns change, and this has the potential to deepen regional inequalities.</li> <li>- Cashflow, the inability to plan, and a lack of childcare remain key issues for businesses</li> <li>- <b>CC</b> also called for greater collaboration in the planning and delivery stage for the economic recovery and for job creation schemes linked to large infrastructure projects.</li> </ul> | MW<br><br>CC | Closed   |



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|      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approximately 11million (both employed and self-employed) people currently furloughed and a reasonable proportion of these people will not return to their jobs post COVID.</li> <li>- CBI are calling for a range of initiatives and funding for the rebuild stage to support businesses and employment.</li> <li>- CBI members have provided positive feedback regarding the job retention amendments to allow the return of employees on a part time basis.</li> <li>- On Test and Trace – CBI has concerns around unintended consequences for manufacturers and distributors who could lose workers overnight if contacted by tracing officials.</li> </ul> <p><b>Chris Ashley (Representing Simon Priest Road Haulage Association)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Echoed points around haulage and distribution sector appreciation growing in the UK.</li> <li>- The haulage sector is fragile due to decreasing cashflow levels and there is a need to avoid cliff edge on furlough,</li> <li>- Key issue for many haulage and distributors is the re-allocation of road space for social distancing measures (cycling etc) – this needs to be balanced with need to support local economies – reports starting to emerge around disruption to deliveries for goods to retailers – measure could be counterproductive for economic recovery.</li> </ul>   | CA  |         |
|      | <b>Discussion: Economic Recovery Plan for the Region</b>  |     |         |
| 2.03 | <p><b>MV</b> thanked the business organisations for their contributions and opened the meeting up for wider discussion on economic rebuild, focusing on supporting businesses and making sure the region protects and retains its labour force.</p> <p>Key discussion points included:</p> <p><b>Pat McFadden (PM):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult for the region to rebuild</li> <li>- Furlough has frozen the economy at a set period, and we are not going to emerge from this pandemic with the same consumer behaviour.</li> <li>- Difficult for many sectors when government support is reduced</li> <li>- Region will be facing more unemployment, more company insolvencies</li> <li>- Difficult for many young people leaving school or graduating into a difficult employment environment.</li> <li>- APPG should look at past initiatives to support employment e.g. job subsidies for employers to take on new employees where the government contributes a proportion of wages for a set time.</li> <li>- Many constituencies in the Black Country entered lockdown with a high rate of unemployment and COVID19 could cause this to increase.</li> <li>- Need to be fiscal support from the Government/Treasury for job retention/protection schemes.</li> </ul> <p><b>John Spellar (JS):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence from the business organisations on the call reflects the situation around the UK.</li> <li>- The Country is facing the biggest downturn akin to what was seen during the 1980s and possibly as worse as the 1930’s recession.</li> <li>- Levels of redundancies are rising as companies anticipate a reduction in furlough over the coming months.</li> <li>- The focus for economic recovery should be on measures that will restore consumer demand.</li> </ul> | ALL | Ongoing |

- Current quarantine measures are impacting significantly on the aviation sector which is damaging the country and impacting certain regions.
- The automotive – hearing proposals on transitioning to electric vehicles however if industry is not ramped up there will be no production lines for EV.
- Economic recovery is also about better procurement to support supply chains, how we work and support those looking to purchase to bring this spending forward.
- How can public spending be used to restart the economy through housebuilding and construction?
- How can we encourage the purchasing of locally sourced products, making more goods and focusing purchases on UK supplied goods?
- Previous recessions and economic downturns have shown that impacts are not just economic but also on health, on society, and on family cohesion.
- There needs to be a change in focus/mindset of Whitehall to think beyond London, the South East and M4 corridor– to stimulate economic growth across the country.

**Shaun Bailey (SB):**

- Economic recovery needs to be generated from the WMCA, but that economic recovery must be sub regional
- There needs to be an understanding and clear communication, raised within Whitehall and Treasury, that as a socio-economic area the Black Country is very different to Birmingham.

**Suzanne Webb (SW):**

- This APPG is crucial for evidence gathering to drive economic recovery and business support.
- Localism is the new globalism – as a region we need to buy local, supply local and procure local. Recovery plan must not be Birmingham centric.
- Supply chain resilience needs to be built up in the UK and greater support provided to grow domestic markets to begin exporting the region out of COVID.
- The Commonwealth Games can be a great economic stimulus and the region can reap the rewards – these games will be a window on the region and we must start to develop this image now and it offers a fiscal legacy longer than the games themselves.

**Stuart Anderson (SAn):**

- We need a unified mindset on economic recovery, we know that the region will face mass redundancies and unemployment but at this time the best innovation can come out of this crisis.
- The region should begin to look at innovative ways in the light of COVID to reach a better place in our economy
- There need to be a variety of methods employed to kick start the economy but there is a question we need to ask ourselves that is ‘what are we wanting the economy to look like long term?’ – ‘how do we become leaders in innovation?’ – ‘what is our long-term focus/ end game?’

**Sarah Middleton (SM):** The region needs to try to find a way to get revenue support to facilitate the job brokerage system – a key challenge with funding is that it is often capital based, we need to find a mechanism to support revenue hungry initiatives.

**SM:** We also need investment in business leadership – business knows that it has to innovate however many of the set products of innovation are not

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|  | <p>necessarily fit for purpose – how do we support supply chain diversification and how do we support sector growth and collaboration for new innovative sectors for example light rail?</p> <p><b>SM:</b> Digital skills are also key to strengthening the SME base and working within vertical supply chains. Making sure that the primes do not leave behind their supply chains in places like the Black Country.</p> <p><b>CH:</b> There is a growing awareness of digital skills within organisations but more needs to be done in reaching out to more businesses. COVID has offered an opportunity for businesses to become resilient and invest in technology and digital skills. A key focus for this is around collaboration. Praise to Chamber of Commerce in its actions in bringing different stakeholders. We need to provide practical support that is not intimidating for SMES to access.</p> <p><b>SA:</b> It is also important to address the discontinuity in business networks across the region as to reach those businesses who do not traditionally associate or work with the existing business organisations, in particular, those within Asian business networks. Greater collaboration between networks and business is needed to showcase exemplary businesses who have innovated to address the current crisis.</p> <p><b>Nicola Richards (NR):</b> Not all businesses have been able to access business support on offer. There are a range of businesses who are not connected to the local authorities and work needs to be done to connect these businesses to organisations and support groups</p> <p><b>NR:</b> There is a need to ensure that health inequalities are addressed when discussing levelling up the region. Currently working with Wolverhampton University on their proposal for a Public Health organisation for the Black Country to focus on health inequalities.</p> <p><b>AP: ML to facilitate Wolverhampton University to be a speaker at the next APPG meeting.</b></p> <p><b>PMau:</b> The NHS is working with Wolverhampton University to support this proposal to address health inequalities. The Black Country has been one of the hardest hit places (after London) – the regions higher levels of deprivation mean that we are likely to be hit harder from the pandemic. Long term healthy life expectancy is worse for those unemployed. Should we call for greater support into the region’s economy to mitigate?</p> <p><b>NR:</b> Will be pushing on this agenda to focus on health inequalities through the Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee which is looking into impact of COVID on BAME communities</p> <p><b>Marco Longhi (MLon):</b> The region’s economic recovery should also focus on our sector strengths including heritage-based industry such as leather goods and metal working. There is a need to ensure that the region does not lose trades and expertise from a lack of championing and underinvestment.</p> <p><b>MW</b> thanked all for their contributions to the discussion.</p> |                     |              |
|  | <p><b>Next steps: APPG Asks for Government</b></p>  |                     |              |
|  | <p><b>MW</b> proposed that the Secretariat write out to all business organisations on the call with a pro forma of business support asks. This will then be formulated into a single regional briefing paper and distributed to all Parliamentarians for discussion at the next meeting.</p> <p><b>AP: ML to write out to business organisations a proforma of business support asks and collate this into a single policy briefing paper.</b></p>  | <p>MW</p> <p>ML</p> | <p>10/07</p> |

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|  | <b>Any other business</b>   |     |       |
|  | None                        |     |       |
|  | <b>Date of next Meeting</b> |     |       |
|  | 10.07.20                    | All | 10/07 |