

Black Country Business Manifesto 2019/2020



Black Country
Chamber of
Commerce



BUSINESS IS DONE BETTER TOGETHER

We are the voice of the regional business and offer a range of services helping local companies grow, develop and prosper.

For more information or to join the Chamber, visit **blackcountrychamber.co.uk** or call **0330 024 0820**.



Black Country
Chamber of
Commerce

Is your voice being heard?

The quarterly economic survey provides a regular snapshot of the most relevant issues faced by businesses. Have your say, visit **blackcountrychamber.co.uk** for more information or email **policy@blackcountrychamber.co.uk**



Introduction	4 & 5
Black Country Economic Data	6
Making More	7
Effective Finance	8
Keeping Moving	9
Ahead of the Game	10
Business Essentials	11



Identifying and developing our policy priorities

The Consultative Forum meets regularly to highlight local business needs, support and monitor the Chamber's policy work. Current members include Abigail Holloway (Lloyds Bank), Andrew Thompson (One Stop Management Services), Colin Leighfield (B.E. Wedge Holdings Ltd), Devya Athwal (Athwal Resourcing), Jev Bhalla (Walsall Adult & Community College), Johnathan Dudley (Crowe Clarke Whitehill LLP), Martin Dudley (Thomas Dudley Ltd), Nigel Babb (University of Wolverhampton), Paul Kalinauckas (BCRS Business Loans), Paul Lewis (Forces Recruitment), Beverley Smith (George Green LLP), Wayne Barrat (W. Barratt Contractors)

Developed and delivered by the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Industry © 2019

For more information about the Manifesto or how we can support your business please contact Daniel Turner, Policy Officer or Neil Anderson, Interim Director of External Affairs
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Glaisher Drive, Wolverhampton, WV10 9TG
[0330 024 0820](tel:0330 024 0820) | policy@blackcountrychamber.co.uk

Data and further reading:

- 1 The Black Country Annual Economic Review (The Black Country Consortium, 2018)
- 2 Annual Population Survey, Business Register and Employment (Office for National Statistics, 2017)
- 3 Black Country Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey Returns (2018/2019)

Our Patrons:



WORKING HARD FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

The Chamber and its work is supported by a highly engaged community of forward-thinking business leaders and companies working together to promote and champion the local economy and business community.

Introduction

Foreword

The Manifesto sets out the region's policy priorities identified by the Black Country Chamber of Commerce's members and business community. Many of the issues outlined here include longstanding ones for companies across the UK as well as those unique to our geographical area. Throughout these pages you'll discover more about these topics and key themes along with the Chamber's responses. As somebody with a financial background, it will not be surprising to hear that one of the Manifesto areas I am particularly passionate about is Business Finance. For me, this goes beyond merely how businesses get access to finance and issues around late payments but strikes at the heart of our wider Black Country communities.

I am immensely proud of the work carried out by our local Credit Unions and am delighted that the Chamber is encouraging many businesses to sign up to be part of ethical finance saving schemes - meaning that more local people are able to access affordable borrowing and help the Black Country economy to keep moving at a very fundamental level. Our Manifesto's success will be to ensure that everybody living, working and doing business across the Black Country benefits from its outputs.

Julie Cunningham,
President, Black Country
Chamber of Commerce



“
ONE OF THE
MANIFESTO AREAS
I AM PARTICULARLY
PASSIONATE ABOUT IS
BUSINESS FINANCE
”

Black Country Business
2019/2020 Priority Areas:



There always has to be a first and this Manifesto, covering the 12 months from April 2019 until March 2020, is the Black Country's first ever Business Manifesto. The Manifesto is the culmination of many months of hard work by many people to understand the drivers of local business, their aspirations and objects and; ultimately, barriers and obstacles preventing them from delivering on these. I'm thrilled with all the hard work from our members, stakeholders, consultative forum, our sponsors and policy team which has got us to this point.

Business done better together is a core principle of the Chamber's work and for every member we help make new connections - enabling them to reach new markets or raise their profile; there are many more who share common challenges or hurdles which prevent or limit their growth potential. This is where the Black Country Chamber of Commerce can add further value. We are part of a national network of Chambers and a

powerful movement for the business community. Our views and opinions are sought after by policy-makers, decision-makers, politicians and economists locally and nationally.

Over the last 12 months, we met with various ministerial departments including the Department for Education, Department of Transport, Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Exiting the European Union; local council leaders and cabinet members along with other agencies and stakeholders such as HS2, the Migration Advisory Committee and Innovate UK, Midlands Connect and Highways England. Our diary for the next 12 months is already filling up with meetings and supporting events and activities where the detail in this Manifesto will be brought to life - shaping the agenda as we work hard to deliver on our commitments and ensure that the Black Country prospers.

At the time of writing, we are unsure when and on what terms we will leave the European Union let alone what the future relationships with our largest trading partner will be. Whilst Brexit looms large and its legacy will continue to dominate our business agenda for years to come, the detail outlined in these pages - ones specifically identified by local businesses - will feel some level of impact by Brexit. Beyond Brexit though, these five key areas dominate how our local economy works and how we do business with each other. I've no doubt that through our focussed determination the Chamber, our existing campaigns and sector support as well as the outputs of this Manifesto will make an important contribution in delivering a positive step change.

Corin Crane,
CEO, Black Country
Chamber of Commerce



“ WE ARE PART OF A NATIONAL NETWORK OF CHAMBERS AND A POWERFUL MOVEMENT FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY ”

Making More:
Manufacturing for
Modern Markets

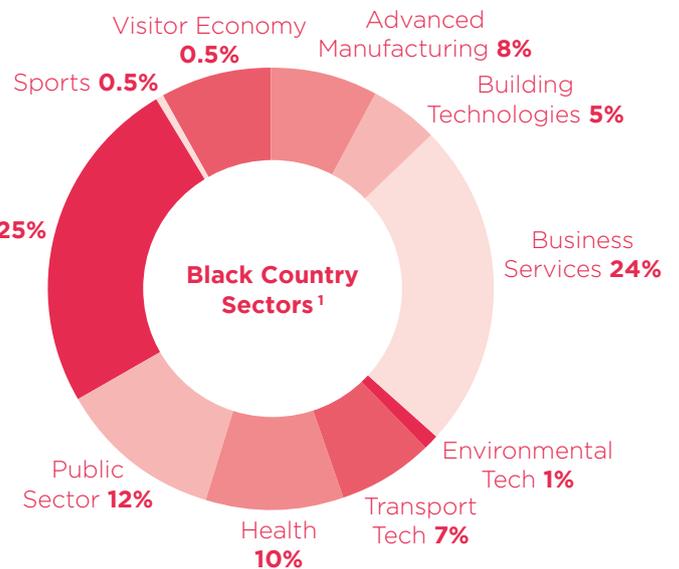
Effective Finance:
Funding, Cashflow
& Taxation

Keeping Moving:
Transport Into &
Beyond the Region

Ahead of the Game:
Recruitment, Skills &
the Next Generation

Business Essentials:
Developing the
Basics

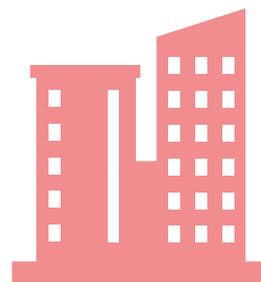
The Black Country - Headline Economic & Business Data



The Region's biggest export markets:
EU, UAE, US, Australia, India



Export Wins: 1st April 2018 -
31st March 2019 **£66m**



37,490 businesses
across the Black Country



MAKING MORE: MANUFACTURING FOR MODERN MARKETS

THOUGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGN CHAMPION

“FBC Manby Bowdler have been providing legal advice to the region’s manufacturers for nearly 200 years. The most common areas where we are asked to assist is General Company Law, HR & Employment, Commercial Property and Litigation. Like the Chamber we understand that the success of the manufacturing sector plays a massive part in the success of the region and so we’re proud to champion this area of the Business Manifesto. Throughout the year we will work on and tackle areas that are important to manufacturers such as Skills, Power, Access to Funding and of course how we thrive and survive in a post-Brexit world and to that end, we’d encourage every one of the regions manufacturers to get involved and have their say.”

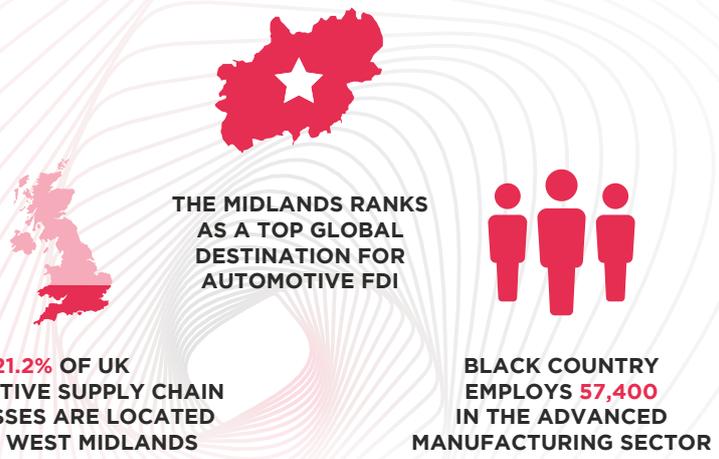


Neil Lloyd

Sales Director at FBC Manby Bowdler



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MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Highlight policy decisions and issues affecting the automotive supply chain
- Raise awareness of Research & Development Tax Credits and how they can benefit our businesses
- Enhance communications between manufacturers and the wider business communities to drive efficiency and savings

EFFECTIVE FINANCE: FUNDING, CASHFLOW AND TAXATION

THOUGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGN CHAMPION

“Since the credit crunch there has been an explosion in alternative finance options available to small businesses, alongside the work of the commercial banks in this area. However, this greater choice has not always brought greater clarity – meaning it is often difficult for businesses to know where to get the best funding they need to grow and prosper, without incurring onerous lending conditions.

The increased use of technology means that you can now access finance through the internet, but the plethora of options and the actual costs involved are confusing, without any APR to compare costs. It is crucial for smaller businesses that they are paid on time for the work they do. During the Carillion liquidation, the Chamber spoke to businesses who were awaiting payment from 90-days to 6-months. We know that Black Country businesses are resilient, but more must be done to ensure that these suppliers do not suffer crippling cashflow issues when their payment terms are manipulated.”



Paul Kalinauckas

Chief Executive at BCRS Business Loans



MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Challenge poor payment practices - calling for widespread changes to overdue payment processes
- Help businesses access and better understand local and regional funding opportunities
- Advocate for changes to the business rates system



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AT 50% (PER EVERY 10,000 PEOPLE), THE BLACK COUNTRY LAGS BEHIND THE ENGLAND AVERAGE (68%) FOR NEW BUSINESS BIRTHS ²



RESEARCH FROM DUN & BRADSHEET SHOWS THE AVERAGE BRITISH SME IS OWED MORE THAN **£63,800 IN LATE PAYMENTS, WITH 11 PERCENT OWED **£100,000** OR MORE**



KEEPING MOVING: TRANSPORT INTO & BEYOND THE REGION

THOUGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGN CHAMPION

“The Black Country’s transport strategy must practically interpret the balanced prioritisation of road improvement to minimise traffic congestion with the alignment of effective contribution of public transport provisions - universally integrated access to bus, rail and tram is fundamental to this. The benefits accruing from encouraging cycling and walking where advantageous must also be emphasised, as well as their limitations recognised.

There must be a balanced review around future planning which takes into account intelligent system design to respond to these parallel priorities. Rapid completion of the strategic improvements to M6 Junction 10 and M5 Junctions 1 and 2 are a key priority. It’s also crucial that Black Country transport and infrastructure is considered in the wider regional context and integrated with the assistance of key agencies - joint action with regional business representations and the Black Country Chamber of Commerce is essential to this process.”



Colin Leighfield

Director at B.E. Wedge Holdings Ltd



**ROAD CONGESTION
RESTRICTS MOVEMENTS
AND COSTS OUR
ECONOMY £600M**



**ROAD FREIGHT
ACCOUNTS FOR 6%
OF ALL ROAD TRIPS**

**OUR ROADS ARE
SOME OF THE
MOST CONGESTED
IN THE COUNTRY:
DRIVERS SPEND
32 HOURS A YEAR
SITTING IN TRAFFIC
ON DUDLEY PORT
IN TIPTON AND
30 HOURS
A YEAR ON THE
BIRMINGHAM ROAD,
WEST BROMWICH**

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Bridging the communication gap between businesses and infrastructure projects
- Engage in long-term policy priorities to keep goods and services moving into, out of and around the region
- Ensure regional transport bodies and agencies fully embrace their role in helping local businesses

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AHEAD OF THE GAME: RECRUITMENT, SKILLS AND THE NEXT GENERATION

THOUGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGN CHAMPION

“Whilst there are many different factors at work; ultimately there is a huge skills shortage in the Black Country and lots of opportunities to improve where we are.

Many businesses do not see the value in working with the education system to help put it right, and those that do get frustrated by the lack of progress. This is because the state education system is too focussed on qualifications and not enough on outcomes. Curriculums are not business focussed, either regarding making current qualifications relevant to business or by providing business skills to the students. Government targets and the level of scrutiny do not allow for innovation in the education system and waste a great deal of energy in compliance.”



Martin Dudley

Managing Director of Thomas Dudley Ltd



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TD Thomas Dudley Ltd.
Manufacturing in the UK since 1920



IN Q4 2018, 78% OF MANUFACTURERS REPORTING DIFFICULTIES IN FINDING SUITABLE STAFF



THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE IN THE BLACK COUNTRY IS 52



PERCENTAGE WITH NVQ4+ (BLACK COUNTRY 23%, ENGLAND 38%)



BLACK COUNTRY'S EMPLOYMENT IS 65.1%, ENGLAND AVERAGE IS 74.2%

MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Drive greater understanding of the Apprenticeship Level
- Increase awareness of T Levels and what they mean for regional businesses
- Bridge the gap between businesses and the next generation



BUSINESS ESSENTIALS: DEVELOPING THE BASICS

THOUGHTS FROM OUR CAMPAIGN CHAMPION

“2018 was a challenging year for Black Country businesses. From the Carillion liquidation in early 2018 to challenges posed by Brexit, businesses are crying out for support and assistance just to ensure that they are getting the basics right.

Across every sector and with businesses of all sizes, we have had hundreds of conversations to discover their primary concerns and explore what can be done to mitigate these. We know that there is no one size fits all approach to solve the productivity puzzle in the UK and that’s why we will continue to work hard, holding the events, hosting the right speakers and compiling the best data possible to help our members.”



Daniel Turner

Policy Officer at the Black Country Chamber of Commerce



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MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

- Help businesses navigate through Brexit
- Raise the profile of the Black Country as a place to work and do business in
- Drive greater diversity in the workplace and a balanced boardroom

BLACK COUNTRY BUSINESS MANIFESTO

2019/2020



BUSINESS IS DONE BETTER TOGETHER

The Chamber network sits at the heart of local business communities in every part of our amazing region, helping businesses of every size and sector to thrive.

Working together, we help firms of all sizes across Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton to achieve more. We believe it's our relationships with others that lead us to achieve goals beyond those any single business could ever achieve alone; and we're the only organisation that helps Black Country businesses to build relationships on every level.

Across our network, we connect business with business, with decision-makers and with opportunities. We are also a respected voice for business in the region and our opinions are regularly sought by policymakers and politicians as we've helped to shape the region's business agenda for more than 50 years.



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BECOME INVOLVED

To discover more about our policy, lobbying and representation work visit blackcountrychamber.co.uk or contact our dedicate policy team on 0330 024 0820 or email policy@blackcountrychamber.co.uk

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