

Report to the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

14th July 2022

Subject:	Black Country Consortium Limited – Activity 2021/23
Contact Officer:	Sarah Middleton Chief Executive, Black Country Consortium

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the presentation on the business activities of the Black Country Consortium.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The report focussed on the activity undertaken by the Black Country Consortium, as well as the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BC LEP), to inform the Board about the number of partnerships and initiatives hosted by the Consortium which included the Economic Intelligence Unit, Active Black Country, Repowering the BC, amongst others as detailed in the accompanying presentation (Appendix 1).



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people	The Black Country objectives cover a range of economic, environmental and social benefits that intended to improve and regenerate Sandwell and the other local authorities under the Black Country.
	People live well and age well	
	Strong resilient communities	
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods	
	A strong and inclusive economy	
	A connected and accessible Sandwell	

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Evidence Led Vision and Economic Intelligence

To support the range of plans and projects envisioned for the Black Country, it was identified that the strategy into delivery required an evidence-based approach. This involved using a variety of sources to inform decisions and set objectives including, using the Black Country Performance Management Framework to set key measures of success; strategic programmes covering three themes of people, place and business; adopting a thematic and sectoral approach with the Black Country Propositions; a detailed programme dashboard; and sites details.

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.

4.2 **Developing our Green Infrastructure**

The main focus was on forming the Tree Strategy within the Black Country, the Black Country Canal Strategy and Repowering the Black Country to ensure that the environment was put at the heart of defining the future urban form of the Black Country.

4.3 **Black Country Partnership Support**

The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) aims to create the conditions for enterprise to flourish, resulting in greater economic prosperity across the Black Country area and is a partnership of private, public and voluntary sector organisations with a focus on stimulating the drivers of economic development, education and skills development, and infrastructure and environmental enhancements.

In 2021 the Government commenced the LEP Review of the 38 LEPs across England. In respect of LEPs within a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) area, the outcome was that these were to be merged, "folded", into the existing MCA. For the Black Country, Coventry & Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEPs, 2022/23 is the transition year into these new arrangements and work is being led by the WMCA with engagement from the three LEPs, the three Growth Hubs and the WM Growth Company. It is anticipated that the new arrangements will be in place for the new financial year 2023/24.

4.4 **Capital Investments**



There were a number of capital investments through the LEP, these included the Growing Places Fund, Growth Deal, Land and Property Investment Fund and Enterprise Zones Fund, which were all informed through the Black Country Project Pipeline. Whilst the majority of these funds have now ceased, the Enterprise Zones Fund of business rates receipts will continue through to 2038; there remains some LPIF funds to be allocated and there will be some overage payments from funded projects, where the delivery of the project was within the funds allocated. These “Legacy Funds” will require allocating through democratic decision making and the other funds referenced, that is Growth Deal etc., remain subject to output monitoring through to 2025. At present discussions are ongoing with the four Black Country local authorities via ABCA of how these Legacy Funds will continue to be managed when the LEP is folded into the WMCA in March 2023.

4.5 **Black Country Partnership Support – Active Black Country**

The Active Black Country Partnership 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. Co-ordinate joint working is encouraged 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 launched the Gen22 programme with DWP. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Active Communities project secured £1.9m funding focused on getting people active, activation of parks and open spaces and connectivity through transport infrastructure.

Other initiatives included the ‘We can Swim’ campaign, Small Grants programme and Cycling for Everyone programme.



5 Implications

Resources:	No direct implications for Sandwell MBC. The presentation details the funding allocated and secured for Sandwell projects through the Black Country Consortium
Legal and Governance:	No direct implications for Sandwell 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:	No direct implications for Sandwell 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:	No direct implications for Sandwell MBC. Whilst the BC LEP does not undertake Equality Impact Needs Assessments, projects do undergo Due Diligence assessment by an Independent firm.
Health and Wellbeing:	The projects discussed in the report are intended to create a place of healthy, resilient, safe communities with high aspirations and the ability to shape their own future by investing in education/skills, infrastructure, health and wellbeing campaigns, etc.
Social Value	The report outlines a number of environmental, social and economic benefits for Sandwell through the proposed projects and initiatives funded by the Black Country LEP.

6 Appendix

Appendix 1 - Presentation from the Black Country Consortium



