

## Federation of Small Businesses - West Midlands Policy Unit

**Minutes of the West Midlands Policy Unit (WMPU) held on  
Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009, 11:00am at the Eaton Hotel, Birmingham**

**Present:** David Caro – Chairman  
John Bates  
Roger Culcheth  
David Dunn  
Jeff Hunt  
Bob Osbourne  
Peter Silver  
Bruce Undy  
Carol Undy

**Observer:** Denise Craig – Policy Manager, West Midlands (PM)

**Guest:** Rosina Robson – Senior Policy Advisor, Project Manager & Home Affairs

11:36 am meeting commenced. The PM took the notes.

After introductions were made, RR gave a presentation on her Project Management role and her work for the Home Affairs committee.

The first part of her presentation covered the Survey Review. Key points were:

- Review running between November 2008 and March 2009
- Aim is to review FSB membership engagement through surveys at National, Regional, Area Policy Unit (APU) level and devolved level.
- Put forward recommendations to agree a planned and flexible survey programme
- Strengthen the FSB's evidence-based lobbying to provide access to timely data for influencing decision makers and key events
- Allow a Barriers-type programme supported by snap polls
- Internal and external consultations underway
- Base level data about membership will still be required
- Likely range of survey tools:
  - o General state of the nation – information on FSB membership
  - o Key policy surveys
  - o Snap polls for immediate results and to influence events
  - o Focus groups for more detailed information and case studies for press
  - o Sharing experience and best practice

*Comments from the WMPU:*

- Need to sort out communication mechanics before anything else is done
- Need to look at alternatives to post or email surveys. One region has used an agency to collect information by phone.
- Concerns about sample size
- Speak with authority and use regional samples
- Try not to be all things to everyone – do a few things well
- Suggestion for using regional focus groups. RR responded that there will be 3 levels of data: Focus groups, detailed surveys and higher level snap polls
- Need to break down into industry groups
- FSB software systems needs to improve
- Be innovative – but take care with tie-ins to YouGov and other research organisations. The FSB should speak with authority on our own and not lose sight of the strength of our membership.
- Few other organisations do specialist surveys –FSB is in a strong position to do this.

On the Crime/Home Affairs portfolio the main points given by RR were:

- Main publications in 2009 are:
  - o Keep Trade Local
  - o Putting the Economy Back on Track
  - o E-Crime and Fraud Survey report
- Key priorities:
  - o National Definition
  - o In the absence of a Key Performance Indicator (KPI), the FSB is looking for targets in Policing plans and Business Crime Strategy
  - o Making the Neighbourhood Policing Units more effective with more contact
  - o Better business representation on Police Authorities – Policing Green paper has scrapped plans for directly elected business representatives, which is what the FSB wanted
  - o More work on e-Crime and Fraud. This is being co-ordinated by the Metropolitan Police and the FSB survey provides very timely data.
- Several meetings arranged, including the Home Secretary and Chris Huhne (Lib-Dems)
- FSB seat on the Retail Crime Commission steering group

*Comments from the WMPU were:*

- Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are doing a good job
- The ability and attitude of the Local Police Inspector makes a big difference
- Local Inspectors set out operational benchmarks for the local area. Need to stress that targets and indicators are all very well but we can't impose solutions.
- A disproportionate amount of crime is done by a few notable families. Staff fear can be reduced if this is tackled properly, locally.
- KPIs should be set by local community, including business community and Police Authority.
- Crime trends likely to change with the recession and petty crime will rise significantly
- The fines system encourages the stealing of goods of greater value than the fine
- Shoplifting should be called Theft

### 1. Apologies

Jim O'Neil sent his apologies. He had previously asked to attend as an observer.

### 2. Minutes of the November Meeting

There were no amendments:

Minutes proposed by BO; Seconded by DD; all in favour.

The approved Minutes to be sent to Regional & Branch committees and posted on the 'members-only' section of the WMPU WebPages.

**PM**

12:45 Lunch

13:50 Meeting resumed

### 3. Matters arising

#### Page 1 – Minutes of the October Meeting circulation

The PM confirmed this had been done.

#### Page 1 – Matters arising – Meetings with Regions, Policy Unit Chairman and Policy Manager

DC reported that he and the PM had met with Staffs & W Mids the previous Thursday (8<sup>th</sup> January 2009), were due to meet Shropshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire that evening (12<sup>th</sup> January) and Warwickshire & Coventry on 19<sup>th</sup> January.

#### Page 2 – Matters arising - Current West Midlands' Economic Situation – Savings

The PM confirmed this had been done.

**Page 2 – Matters arising - WMPU Policy European Elections Dinner**

This is an Agenda Item

**Page 2 – Matters arising - Chairman’s Report – Smart metering**

DC reported that this matter had been taken on board and he will provide further information when available.

**Page 2/3 – Matters arising – Policy Reports – Others – RDA briefing note**

The PM reported that time had not allowed for work with RC on a briefing note about RDA’s for the WMPU to consider. It was agreed to carry this matter forward to the next meeting.

PM/RC

**Page 3 – Matters arising – AOB – Independent garage vehicle servicing restrictions**

DC reported that had forwarded this matter on to National Policy but had not yet received a response.

**Page 3 – Matters arising – AOB – WMPU Minute-taker**

The PM reported that she was still continuing to search.

**Page 3 – Item 4 – Current W Mids’ Economic Situation – collation in to a single document and circulation of all current FSB proposals**

The PM said she had not had time to do this and it was agreed this matter would be carried forward to the next meeting.

PM

**Page 3 – Item 4 – Current W Mids’ Economic Situation – Lord Adonis letter on A1 interchange**

The PM confirmed this had been done.

**Page 3 – Item 5 – Chairman’s Report – Information on good BIDs**

RC reported that this was not available yet and it was agreed this matter would be carried forward to the next meeting.

RC

**Page 4 – Item 7 – PM’s Report – Request for papers from European Strategy Board meeting in Brussels**

The PM confirmed this had been done.

**Page 5 – Item 8 – Policy Priority Reports – Crime – FSB WM Crime Representative**

It was agreed that this matter would be discussed at the February meeting when all regions have agreed their WMPU representatives.

All

**Page 5 – Item 9 – Regional Reports – SHW – Taxi License Issue**

PS reported that there were 2 issues of concern: that Taxi drivers have to have a registered site and the issue of 1 license per council. BU asked if PS could go back to his Taxi driver member to obtain more information which BU could take back to the FSB Transport committee.

PS/BU

**Page 6 – Item 9 – Regional Reports – W&C – Branch Newsletters and communications**

A discussion followed on the issue of Government changes, change of FSB culture and staff structure changes. It was confirmed by DC that some points had been pre-empted at National Policy, but not all and it was agreed that BU and RC would take APU concerns to National Policy and RC at the English Policy Unit Meeting. They should also

take back the issue of possible changes at APU level to align with the Regional Assembly abolition.

**BU/RC**

**Page 6 – Item 10 – AOB – APU attendance notification**

This is an agenda item.

**4. Current West Midlands' Economic Situation**

A discussion followed that covered the following points:

- Birmingham Post/Jaguar Land Rover campaign. It was agreed the FSB would support this matter.
- NI contributions
- Holiday legislation – not picked up and amounts to a pay rise of 5.8%
- Emphasise dividing line between loan and Government spending re public perception
- Morgan Cars celebrating their centenary. DC suggested that RC sends a letter of congratulations.

**RC**

- Requests for more case studies to be sent in to the PM.

**AII/PM**

- Energy costs – It was agreed that BU would also raise this matter at National Policy.

**BU**

**5. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman's report was tabled and the discussion on his report included:

- Lack of information on the MOTs issue. Concern at FSB having too much to do and the lack of response from the National Policy Unit/London Office is dividing Regions and Branches and leading to disaffected members. DC suggested this is raised again at National Policy.
- Small Batteries – confusion over disposal. RC suggested lobbying for the introduction of the French system where a bucket at Supermarkets is provided at the exits.
- Internal FSB communications. Current system causes problems for portfolio chairmen as officially the Policy Advisors should only speak to the PMs who then forward information requests on to ROs to forward to their Regions and Branches. The PM agreed to circulate the most recent FSB chart to the APU.

**PM**

- BL Scrutiny - reports coming in about a drive to shelve this investigation.

DC also reported that he had been asked to take over as the Chairman of the Energy Committee, which was likely to be in May.

**6. Treasurer's Report**

Period 2 accounts had been circulated previously. BO asked about the consultancy fees and DD confirmed that all the ones sent in have been paid.

The accounts were proposed by JH; seconded by JB; all in favour.

DD reminded members that parking fee claims must be accompanied by a receipt and shown separately on the claim form. He also mentioned the 3 month rule. DC made the comment that train tickets as well as the receipts for payment must be submitted with any expense claims.

**7. Attendance Numbers at WMPU committee meetings**

DD said that members must indicate whether or not they would be attending in time for the PM to notify the Eaton Hotel of final numbers. Notifications must be received by the Thursday before the Monday meeting either way. If this was not done, then the FSB could incur unnecessary costs regarding delegate numbers. DC reminded members that

this was to keep costs under control and to remind them that this is about taking care with members' money. BO asked if it was necessary to structure the meeting to include lunch and DC said it was a way of being fair to members who were volunteers and also helpful with visiting speakers.

**All/PM**

## 8. Policy Manager's Report

The PM's report had been circulated, but at very short notice, so additional copies were tabled.

Of the matters highlighted for attention:

**Birmingham Post/JLR campaign** – this had been dealt with earlier in the meeting.

**Small Business Engagement Accord** – the PM gave an outline of the campaign purpose and programme, providing copies of the draft documentation for illustration purposes. She stressed that the documents were all drafts and could be subject to change. A discussion followed and there was some concerns raised by RC about the involvement of the Local Government Committee with this campaign and also the last 3 principles in the draft Accord document. Despite his concerns, RC commented that he would be recommending this initiative. The WMPU agreed to support the campaign.

**WMPU MEPs Dinner** – it was felt that the list of suggested venues should be widened to include venues on the eastern side of the region. APU members were asked to send details of suitable venues to the PM.

**All**

It was agreed that the PM would investigate costs and availability and discuss with DC, Fridays would be avoided and the final decision on venue and date would be made by DC.

**PM/DC**

**W Mids Police Authority Business Consultation Conference** – Members were asked to email the PM if they wished to attend. If numbers were appropriate, then a pre-meeting could be considered.

**All**

## 9. Policy Priority Reports:

**Crime** – This had been covered earlier in the meeting.

**Manufacturing** – Nothing to report.

**Skills** – CU apologised that her report was not available for the meeting. However, she gave a verbal update and agreed to forward the written report in due course to the PM.

**CU**

She informed the committee that she had received an invitation from Ian Austin MP, the regional minister, to a presentation by Job Centre Plus. The bottom line is that Business Link wants to do so much for small businesses, but they do not know how to. She said that we need to look at how the FSB can engage Business Link with small businesses. It was agreed that further discussions on this issue should take place.

**SNR** – RC had tabled a report on the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) response to Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners Housing Report. Members were also directed to the relevant section in the PM's report. It was suggested that Cllr Ken Taylor should be invited to a future WMPU meeting. BU commented on concerns that the Chambers of Commerce may be trying to 'go it alone' and not working through the West Midlands Business Council. The APU agreed the PM should go on the Working Group to look at improving business representation. RC reported on a document that had been sent to Mike Cherry (as English Policy Chairman), which outlined a proposal that the FSB

should have something included in the legislation to ensure business has a place, as a statutory requirement, in all Government Regions.

**Transport** – Two reports from BU had been previously circulated. He commented that letters had gone from the Chairman of the Regional Transport Partnership to the Government on the issue of projects not being undertaken, even though funding was available. The Birmingham International Airport runway extension is looking positive. A railway station in Stone has reopened for journeys to London. The committee were also informed about the situation regarding the Manchester Congestion Charge referendum and how successful the personal actions of the North West PM – Paul Henley – had been in influencing the debate and highlighting the FSB position. The WMPU asked that congratulations should be forwarded to Paul.

**PM**

**Others:**

**Rural** – BU tabled a report. He highlighted the issue of RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) funding and the role the FSB is playing in this.

PS gave a verbal update on the WMBC Rural Group. He also referred to the RDPE funding, as well as social housing, broadband issues, home-grown food, void property rates and Housing Association buying rules. He passed a copy of the meeting papers to the PM.

**10. Regional Reports**

**a) Staffs & W Mids:**

Verbal update

- Good planning meeting chaired by the RO. This included a presentation by the PM on the Accord. All branches sent a representative and helped to bring Policy and the Region closer.

**b) Shrops, Herefordshire & Worcestershire:**

Report tabled.

**c) Warwickshire & Coventry**

No further report – matters covered earlier in the meeting.

**11. AOB**

BU asked if the working relationship of the FSB with the WMBC could be evaluated, now that it is funded almost 100% by Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and there are signs the Chambers are trying to re-establish themselves. The FSB is now stronger than it was before and now knows where and who to go to. It was agreed this would be an agenda item at the next meeting.

**DC**

DC notified the committee that John Walker had asked to attend the next WMPU meeting in February, therefore it was agreed that there would not be a requirement for an additional speaker.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Monday 23rd 2009 11:00am at the Eaton Hotel, 279 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

The meeting closed at 16:07pm