

Federation of Small Businesses - West Midlands Policy Unit

Minutes of the West Midlands Policy Unit (WMPU) held on Monday, 6th April 2009, 11:00am at the Eaton Hotel, Birmingham

- Present:** David Caro – Chairman
John Bates
David Dunn
Jeff Hunt (left at 14:00)
Bruce Undy
Carol Undy
Ken Wigfield (KW)
- Guests:** Lyndsey Bunn – Policy Manager, East Midlands
Karen Woolley – Regional Organiser, Staffs & W Mids (KWo)
- Observer:** Denise Craig – Policy Manager, West Midlands (PM)

11:28 am meeting commenced. The PM took the notes.

DC welcomed Lyndsey Bunn and Karen Woolley to the meeting, explaining that Lyndsey was the newly appointed Policy Manager for the East Midlands and was attending as part of her induction.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Roger Culcheth, Bob Osbourne, Peter Silver and Anthea McIntyre.

JH said that he would be leaving after lunch to attend a funeral.

2. Minutes of the February 09 Meeting

There were 2 amendments:

- Page 4 – Item 8 – Treasurer’s Report – 3rd para – should read ‘DD said the Black Country branch had not been happy with the attitude of local representative of Young Enterprise to the branch **and did not wish** to carry on with branch sponsorship’.
- Page 5 – Item 10e – Policy Priority Reports – remove action point for PM.

Subject to the above amendments, the Minutes were proposed by DD; Seconded by JH; all in favour.

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

PM

3. Matters arising

Page 1 – Minutes of the January 09 Meeting circulation

The PM confirmed this had been done.

Page 1 – Matters arising - Minutes of the October 08 Meeting circulation

The PM confirmed this has been done.

Page 1 – Matters arising – Policy Reports – Others – RDA briefing note

The PM requested that this matter was carried forward, which was agreed.

PM/RC

Page 2 – Matters arising - Item 5 – Chairman’s Report – Information on good BIDs

As RC was not in attendance it was agreed this matter would be carried forward to the next meeting.

RC

Page 2 – Matters arising - Item 9 – Regional Reports – SHW – Taxi License Issue

As PS was not in attendance it was agreed this matter would be carried forward.

PS/BU

Page 2 – Matters arising - Item 4 – Current West Midlands’ Economic Situation – Morgan Cars letter

KWi acknowledged this matter was with RC, but pressure of work for him with the Local Government Committee may have resulted in a slippage. KWi agreed to drive this forward.

KWi

Page 3 – Item 4 – Current West Midlands’ Economic Situation – Short-time working assistance information

The PM confirmed that the information had been forwarded to the London office and a paper was produced shortly after by Lynsey Brooks covering this issue. The paper had been circulated to the WMPU committee on 3rd March 2009. A discussion on this issue followed. It was suggested that it would be helpful to work out the difference in costs between keeping someone in a job and on benefits. The PM agreed to speak to Lynsey Brooks.

PM

Page 4 – Item 8 – Treasurer’s Report – Roller Banners

This matter had not been undertaken due to uncertainty over which ones should be ordered. The PM agreed to liaise with DD.

DD/PM

Page 4 – Item 8 – Treasurer’s Report – Young Enterprise Invoice

DD reported the invoice had not yet been received, but would be paid when it is.

Page 4 – Item 8 – Treasurer’s Report – West Midlands Business Council (WMBC) Invoice

Again, DD reported that the invoice had not yet been received, but would be paid when it is.

Page 5 – Item 10a – Crime against Business – Reports from West Midlands Fraud Forum

DC confirmed that he had spoken to Mike Cherry about sending in reports when appropriate.

Page 5 – Item 10c – Skills – Acronym list

The PM confirmed this had been updated and circulated to the WMPU.

Page 6 – Item 11c – Warwickshire & Coventry Regional Report – Conservative Party Meeting experience

BU said there was nothing to add to this matter.

Page 6 – Item 12 – AOB – Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) – Coventry-wide BID

The PM confirmed that the agreed initial statement had been circulated and she and Linsey Hunter had worked on the follow-up statements. The wording of all the statements was detailed in the PM’s report. BU reported that he intended to table a paper following problems with the FSB Legal Advice Line advice to members in respect of County Court actions. His paper included a proposal for a one-off payment to a

Solicitor. DC suggested BU highlights sections in the small print and provides RC with a copy.

BU/RC

BU then went on to outline further details of the proposal. It was agreed that the PM would draft a proposal for a research project on BIDs to support Priyen Patel as well as helping West Midlands' members. The proposal would be subject to the agreement of Sue Bridel and RC. CU expressed concern about the PM's workload and KWi asked about other priorities and how long the research would go on for. The PM reassured the WMPU that this was manageable with her current workload and that it should be a project with a defined timescale. JB felt it should go forward as an Area Project. All were in favour.

PM

4. Current West Midlands' Economic Situation

A discussion followed that covered:

- Weekly Brief
- Enterprise Finance Guarantee scheme
 - o KWi commented that the Banks have only just received the guidelines from Government and the terminology was confusing.
 - o Many caveats being imposed
 - o Lack of understanding of regional structures
- KWi reported on a local Meet the Buyer event, which was better value than similar Advantage West Midlands (AWM) events. His Region was using the Accord to speak to Local Authorities about purchasing contracts.
- Rover Inquiry
- Automotive industry in the region and grants
- KWi suggesting using the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) and to ask AWM what steps they are taking to protect the strategy.

PM

- Car Scrappage scheme
- Birmingham Municipal Bank

Members were asked to email any information or issues to the PM or DC for discussion at future meetings.

AII/DC/PM

5. Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report had been circulated previously. He also tabled papers on the meeting with George Osbourne and the Taste of Birmingham event and asked for any comments on the Taste of Birmingham event to be fed back to him.

AII/DC

A discussion followed on the following points within the Chairman's Report:

- Young Enterprise
 - o Problems with the changeover across most parts of the West Midlands
 - o KWo commented that the relationship has now been re-established and the FSB are setting the agenda
 - o DC agreed to send information about the issue to National Policy so that a consistent FSB approach can be agreed.
- o DC agreed to send CU a copy of the brochure for the Young Enterprise Company Programme
- o CU suggested that given the problems experienced this year, very little could be done until next September

DC

DC/CU

- George Osborne Report
 - o The issue of the bank bailout stance was highlighted.
 - o BU commented that he also highlighted the Empty Property Rate Relief issue and comments at the George Osborne meeting contradicted one held with Mark Prisk MP

DC also tabled a copy of the FSB European Manifesto and the Engineering Employers Federation report.

12:50 At this point the staff (the PM, LB & KWo) left the room as the members wished to discuss matters concerning the FSB National AGM.

13:10 Lunch

14:05 Meeting resumed and the PM, LB & KWo rejoined the group

6. Treasurer's Report

The Accounts for periods 5 had been circulated previously. There were no questions. The accounts were proposed by BU and seconded by JB; all in favour.

Draft expenses guidelines had also been circulated, which were proposed by BU and seconded by JB; all were in favour and it was agreed these would be adopted.

BU suggested that new APU representatives should be invited to meet with other representatives of other APUs. DC commented that there was a space issue at London and another venue was being sought for National Policy meetings.

7. Policy Manager's Report

The Policy Manager's report had been previously circulated. She updated the WMPU on the progress with the arrangements for the WMPU Policy Dinner on 12th May.

She also commented that this report had not included details of media coverage due to the time-consuming nature of this activity. It was agreed that she would not need to present statistics about media coverage in future reports or produce print outs of all press cuttings.

8. West Midlands Policy Unit Elections

DC confirmed that the nomination forms had been circulated to the WMPU with the other papers by email on the 6th March. Forms should be returned to him by close of business on Thursday 24th April (the postal address was included in the nomination form).

DC also confirmed that John Hardwick had agreed to attend the election meeting of the WMPU on 18th May to count the votes and ensure appropriate protocols were observed.

9. Policy Priority Reports

a. Crime – A report from KWi had been circulated previously. He expressed the view at the last meeting of the West Midlands Regional Business Crime Forum (WMRBCF) meeting that crime will increase due to the recession, but the Police do not agree. The WMRBCF have agreed to form a group to investigate this issue. BU commented that the Rugby area was experiencing about one armed raid per week. KWi confirmed that Cash in Transit problems are recognised by the Police.

b. Manufacturing – See Chairman's Report. It was agreed DC and the PM would discuss the EEF/WMBC paper.

DC/PM

c. Skills – CU verbally reported on information from the recent WMBC Skills Group meeting which covered:

- Schools scheme - Careers Academies UK
- Apprenticeships Conference at the ICC on 18th March
 - o Ed Balls, John Denham and Sir Alan Sugar were the keynote speakers
 - o 100+ attendees from all over the UK - mix of public and private sector
 - o Open session contained many pertinent small business questions, but there was a very poor response from Sir Alan
 - o CU was able to speak to John Denham at the FSB conference about the poor response
- The next meeting is on the 1st June

The PM commented on a recent Regional Skills Partnership (RSP) Data Group meeting she had attended where she had spoken with Pat Jackson. It was agreed that a meeting would be arranged between Pat Jackson, CU and the PM to discuss the involvement of the FSB on the RSP.

PM/CU

d. Sub-National Review – See PM's Report. DC reported on the One Voice Group merger with the WMBC and that various letters had also been exchanged between the two groups and AWM regarding the issue of business representation on the Joint Strategic and Investment Board (JSIB).

e. Transport – BU tabled a report on the West Midlands Business Transport Group (WMBTG) highlighting the issue of the Metro extensions and the Quick Wins campaign.

He also reported verbally on his attendance at the recent FSB National Transport Policy Committee which had discussed the High Speed 2 (HS2) proposals. He pointed out that there were different routes on the table and that even in France the SNCF does not do High Speed all the way. He felt the UK should opt for similar so that trains could do both High Speed and normal.

(BU also drew members' attention to the section in his tabled report on his attendance the Business Link One Meeting).

DD reported that he understood the Merry Hill and Walsall Metro extensions were unlikely to go ahead, although the small extension at Wolverhampton would.

DD also reported that further Red Routes are planned between the Burnt Tree Island and Great Bridge. DD agreed to provide further information to the PM and KWo.

DD/PM/KWo

KWi highlighted a note circulated by James Watkins about the forthcoming transport plans.

A discussion followed about Birmingham International and the airport strategy.

f. Others:

Rural – BU tabled a report and also gave a verbal report on his 31st March meeting. He commented that the Taylor Report had been released.

KWi reported that he had been asked to sit on the FSB's Rural Affairs committee.

DC commented on reports that the Royal Agricultural Show this year will be the last.

10. Regional Reports:

a. Staffs & W Mids Report – KWo gave a verbal report covering the various Branch and Regional activities in Staffs & W Mids, including the progress of the Accord

campaign. She highlighted the press coverage of the Keep Trade Local campaign in the 8 page special in the Express & Star, which had an Advertising Value Equivalent of around £5,500.

She also gave information about the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit Pilot on which she is one of two leads. The FSB is registered as a Category 2 responder, with the Utility companies. Local Authorities are Category 1. She is currently working on the register and any registered Members will get paid for assistance they provided in the event of an Emergency. She felt it was a good profile raising exercise for the FSB. If the pilot is considered successful it may be opened up more widely.

b. Shropshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire – KWi was not at the last Regional committee meeting, but he had attended a sub-committee meeting regarding the 3 Counties Show, where the FSB may be linking with Business Link.

A sub-committee has been set up to work on the Accord campaign and he outlined the agreed strategy plan. The PM agreed to email KWi with the template letter document.

PM/KWi

A discussion followed on the Accord, with concern being expressed that the FSB does not have a mechanism agreed for ensuring that promises made are kept.

c. Warwickshire & Coventry – BU gave a verbal report. He commented that the Accord had been received well by most of the Local Authorities in his Region. They were now taking it a stage further and arranging a dinner to invite each Local Authority and Branch representatives to meet for a follow up. Funding for this had been requested from John Walker.

The 'Meet the Banks' event was very successful – it was over-subscribed. There was no aggressiveness and the Banks' representatives stayed on afterwards. Linsey Hunter had received emails from members asking for the event to be repeated. He felt the success had been down to ensuring that the Banks' Corporate Managers had attended.

11. AOB

Chamber of Commerce Convention – DC highlighted this event on 27th April at the ICC and asked if there was likely to be an FSB representative attending. BU said he was interested.

Regional Development Agencies – BU said he felt that following the various meetings with the Conservative Party a discussion about the FSB position on RDAs and the committees was required. It was agreed this would be an Agenda item at the next meeting. BU agreed to produce a paper, liaising with the PM.

BU/PM

Business Waste Recycling – JB said he had tabled a question at his Regional meeting to take this issue to National Policy. Many businesses produce no more waste than normal domestic household and yet are charged extra. He would like to know what the FSB Policy is on this issue. DC agreed to take this matter forward. The PM agreed to send JB the FSB policy on this issue.

DC/PM/JB

The meeting closed at 16:02pm

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday 18th 2009 11:00am at the Eaton Hotel, 279 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, at which the WMPU elections will take place.