

Federation of Small Businesses - West Midlands Policy Unit

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

- Present:** David Caro – Chairman (DC)
John Bates (JBa)
David Dunn (DD)
Jeff Hunt (JH)
Bob Osbourne (BO) – arrived 13.30
Bruce Undy (BU)
Carol Undy (CU) – Co-opted
Ken Wigfield (KW)
- Guests:** Mike Cherry, National Policy Vice-chairman and Chairman, Home Affairs Committee (MC)
Lynsey Brooks, Policy Advisor for Taxation, Pensions & Employment (LB)
- Observers:** Jo Burrows – Regional Secretary, Shropshire, Herefords & Worcs (JBU)
Denise Craig – Policy Manager, West Midlands (PM)

11:31 meeting commenced. The PM took the notes.

DC welcomed Mike Cherry, Lynsey Brooks and Jo Burrows to the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Roger Culcheth (RC), Peter Silver (PS) – whose business had suffered an arson attack the previous night and Bob Osbourne (BO) – whose business had suffered a break-in earlier that morning but had left a message that he would endeavour to attend the afternoon session.

Mike Cherry Presentation:

MC gave a PowerPoint presentation on Crime against Business. He offered to attend any of the Regions or Branches to give this presentation.

His presentation was followed by a range of questions on the following points:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)
- Uncertainty of prosecution
- Non-attendance at court of offenders and inability to claim attendance allowance when such situations arise
- Warwickshire & Coventry members' meetings with magistrates and senior Police Officers
- Fixed Penalty Notices
- Insurance issue
- West Midlands-wide analysis of crime data by Forensic Pathways
- Crime against Business definition – use of MPs for lobbying
- Previous campaigns
- Willingness at Police senior level not seen filtering down to local level
- Difference between issue of detection and sentencing i.e roles of Police & Magistrates

It was agreed that the PM would email the presentation to the WMPU.

PM

Lynsey Brooks Presentation:

LB gave a brief overview of the work she is currently engaged with covering:

- Work on the FSB Election Manifesto 'blue-print'
- Working against a backdrop of £3billion of frontline cuts from almost every Government Department

- Key areas for her work will be Employment, Tax and Pension issues
- Request for views to roll into the blue-print, particularly for:
 - o Employment
 - Family Leave
 - Holidays
 - Short-time working

Looking to paint a picture of small employers as good employers – in the past the FSB has gone for the financial angle only.
 - o Tax
 - Looking at changes for Holiday lettings and may run focus groups across the regions
 - Projects to tackle recession
 - Internships for Graduates
 - Small business view of Job Centre Plus
 - VAT – simplification of tax system
 - o Pensions
 - Issue of amount of data being required – FSB questioning how much is necessary
 - Consultation underway

JB commented that the figures speaks for themselves and referred to a treasure trove of figures from LDV, Austin Rover collapse, Peugeot, Massey Ferguson, GEC and Dyson and the effect on small suppliers. LB asked JB to feed these figures back to her.

JB

- Collection of statistical data by Government departments
- Long term sick leave and payments

LB asked for comments to be fed back to her on the areas covering unemployment, internships for graduates and VAT/tax regime simplification. The PM agreed to circulate the questions and WMPU members were asked to respond by 17th July 09.

PM/All

LB finished her session with an offer to attend any Region or Branch event if wished.

13:02 Lunch (BO arrived at 13:30)

14:02 Meeting resumed

2. Minutes of the May 09 Meeting

There were no amendments and the Minutes were proposed by DD; Seconded by JH; all in favour.

It was agreed that the Minutes would be sent to Regional & Branch committees and posted on the 'members-only' section of the WMPU WebPages.

PM

3. Matters arising

Page 1 – Item 2 - Minutes of the April 09 Meeting circulation

The PM confirmed this had been completed on 19th May 09.

Page 1/2 – Matters arising - Taxi License Issue

BU confirmed this has been done

Page 2 – Matters arising - Morgan Cars letter

KWi reported that planning at Morgan had been pulled forward which pre-empted the July event. Therefore the letter had not been sent.

Page 2 –Matters arising - Short-time working assistance information

The PM confirmed that the costings had been received and were included in her report.

Page 2 – Matters arising - Roller Banners

The PM confirmed that both roller banners had now been received but following contact from Blackpool the offer of a 'free' banner had been withdrawn some time before the information was sent to the WMPU. Consequently, there would be a charge made on the WMPU budget.

Page 2 – Matters arising – Invitation to Mike Cherry to attend WMPU meeting

DC confirmed this had been done and Mike had given a presentation earlier.

Page 2 – Matters arising – W Mids' Economic Situation - West Midlands Police Survey

The PM confirmed that the information had been received on 3rd July and she had brought a copy to the meeting.

Page 3 – Matters arising – Young Enterprise – consistency of approach

DC apologised that he had not raised this matter with National Policy and agreed to do so at the next meeting.

DC

Page 3 – Matters arising – Pat Jackson Meeting

The PM confirmed that the meeting had taken place on 15th June and details were included in her report.

Page 3 – Item 4 – Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

The PM confirmed this item had been included in the Agenda for the meeting and the paper re-circulated with the other reports.

Page 3/4 – Item 5 – European Elections – Follow up events

The PM confirmed a discussion had taken place with DC. So far only the Conservatives have responded to the request for future contact.

Page 4 – Item 7 – Treasurer's Report – Joint East & West Midlands' activities

DC reported that this had been discussed informally and consideration was being given to invite the EEF Midlands' representative to the meeting. The meeting date was still to be finalised.

DC/PM

Page 4 – Item 7 – Treasurer's Report – Suggestions for MEPs meetings

The PM reported that no suggestions had been received.

Page 5 – Item 10 – Policy Priority Reports – Crime – Terrorist Definition

The PM confirmed she had received a response and read out the response to the committee.

Page 5 – Item 10 – Policy Priority Reports – Manufacturing – HMRC approach

The PM confirmed she had forwarded the information to the London office.

Page 5 – Item 10 – Policy Priority Reports – Skills – Survey link mass email

The PM reported that it had been agreed with DC not to send out the mass email after further investigations about the survey deadlines.

Page 5/6 – Item 10 – Policy Priority Reports – SNR/Spatial Strategy/Planning – Housing Construction Standards

RC was to ask National Policy and the WMBC to consider whether standards should be considered, but it was not known if this had been done. As he was not in attendance at the meeting it was agreed this matter would be carried forward.

RC

4. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)

The papers previously circulated for the May meeting had been re-circulated to the WMPU. A discussion followed that included:

- Quangos are a current 'hot-topic'
- Rural Affairs Forum are looking at transport and housing, among other issues, and at these meetings, representatives from the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) always attend as they control the money
- Progress of the Sub National Review/ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill
- Unique role of WMBC and ability to nominate business representatives to various bodies
- Tacit agreement for a business sector representative to be put on the Joint Strategic and Investment Board (JSIB) which reports into the Leaders' Forum
- Improving response from Advantage West Midlands (AWM)
- WMBC funding from AWM
- Strength and activity of GOWM
- Capability issues
- Effectiveness of regional bodies in West Midlands compared with the rest of the country
- Lack of joined up working by Local Authorities in the West Midlands compared with those in other parts such as the North West – AWM provides a vehicle to encourage conformity
- AWM does not have a clear strategy and there is a lack of leadership, but in other areas they are not too bad

It was agreed that DC would feed this information to National Policy

DC

5. European Elections Report and Follow-up

This matter was covered in the PM's report and DD also tabled an interim breakdown of costs. Thanks were extended to Richard Hyslop for his assistance with the presentation and DC offered thanks to all the APU members for their input.

6. Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report was tabled. BU asked about the WMBC/One Voice situation and involvement of Jerry Blackett. DC gave an explanation.

7. Treasurer's Report

The Accounts for Period 8 had been circulated on 12th June 09.

Period 8 Accounts – Proposed by JB; Seconded by BU – All in favour

DD reminded members about claiming within three months. He also reported on a meeting held with DC and the PM to discuss next year's budget. This was for a reduced budget from the current year and it had been forwarded for approval. It was anticipated approval would be forthcoming after the September National Council meeting. DD was asked what the budget amount was and he informed the committee that it had been submitted at £46,542. He did not have figures available for last year's budget.

BO asked why the budget was such an aggressive one and DD responded that the budget had been set to take into consideration increased Policy activities, especially those related to the forthcoming General Election. However, he did point out that they had kept costs as tight as possible.

8. Policy Manager's Report

The Policy Manager's report had been circulated on 2nd July 09. The PM highlighted sections requesting consideration from the WMPU.

On the range of consultations it was agreed:

West Midlands Spatial Strategy (WMSS) Phase 3 Consultation - An FSB West Midlands response would be submitted to the WMSS Phase 3 consultation. Members were provided with a hard copy of the consultation document and a smaller summary document. They were asked to send in comments to the PM by 17th July.

AII/PM

Northamptonshire Employment Land consultation - The WMPU would not submit an FSB response, but would allow WMBC to lead on the Northamptonshire Employment Land consultation. However, the documents would be forwarded to the East Midlands Policy Unit for any additional comment and comments were also requested on the WMBC papers from the WMPU members by 17th July.

PM/AII

West Midlands Regional Select Committee Inquiry (People) - The WMPU would not forward an FSB response to the next W Mids Regional Select Committee consultation aimed at the people of the West Midlands as we had already submitted a comprehensive response to the first inquiry.

Review of Growth Capital consultation - MC reported on another consultation covering a review of Growth Capital notified by Mike Watts at AWM. It was agreed that the PM would circulate the email to the APU and comments were requested by 17th July.

AII/PM

On the range of proposed FSB campaigns it was agreed:

Prompt Payment campaign – members to feed in concerns but this campaign would be supported in the West Midlands and it was noted this was one of the PM's objectives.

All

General Election campaign – this would be supported and it was noted this was one of the PM's objectives.

PM

Crime campaign – KW would lead on this and the PM would forward all relevant documentation and support materials to him as this campaign was rolled out.

KW

Stop the Blockade campaign – BU would lead on this and the PM would forward all relevant documentation and support materials to him as this campaign developed.

BU

Small Business Fellowship campaign – this would be would be considered later in the year.

The PM would forward notice of the WMPU's decisions to relevant colleagues.

PM

9. Policy Priority Reports

a. Crime – A report from KW was tabled. He highlighted the following points:

- Bilking
- Activities businesses can undertake to help themselves
- Truck Crime
- Forensic Pathways research
- West Midlands Regional Business Crime plan

The PM also provided information on the South East Crime against Business Plan and a request for a West Midlands representative to attend a Home Office Regional Business Crime seminar in Birmingham on 25th September. KW asked for details about the Home Office event with a provisional agreement to attend, subject to availability.

PM/KW

b. Manufacturing – This was covered in the Policy Chairman's report.

c. Skills – CU tabled a report from the meetings she had recently attended. She highlighted a request for case studies on apprentices, particularly where an apprentice had been made redundant and then taken on by another company. It was agreed that CU would contact the three ROs (BO and BU, as present Regional Chairman, agreed verbally on behalf of their Regions). It was suggested that the ROLOs should be copied

into the email request and the PM agreed to supply the relevant email details.

PM/CU

d. Sub-National Review/Spatial Strategy/Planning – Covered earlier in the meeting.

e. Transport – BU tabled two reports from meetings with Network Rail and the Air Operators Association that he had attended recently. He gave a verbal report on developments with High Speed 2 (HS2). Arup are proposing a link from Heathrow to Birmingham New Street or Birmingham International. The information was received with scepticism by the assembled audience. He reported that he was unable to attend a meeting of the Regional Transport Partnership arranged for the same time as today's WMPU meeting.

f. Others:

Rural – A report from BU on the Rural Affairs Forum was circulated on 2nd July and one from PS on the WMBC Rural Policy Group meeting was circulated on 3rd July. The PS report had been submitted in plenty of time but had been missed by the PM, and she apologised for the oversight.

10. Regional Reports:

a. Staffs & W Mids – DD gave a verbal report highlighting the decision to cancel their Golf Day due to lack of support and future plans for the Regional AGM.

b. Shrops, Hfds & Worcs – A report from RC had been circulated on 5th July and copies were also brought to the meeting.

c. Warks & Coventry – BU tabled a report from his Region.

11. AOB

Quantitative Easing event – The PM reported on an invitation received from Bham Chamber of Commerce about a free seminar with a presentation by the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, Charlie Bean on Quantitative Easing.

The meeting closed at 16:05