

Federation of Small Businesses - West Midlands Policy Unit

Minutes of the West Midlands Policy Unit (WMPU) held on Monday, 19th October 2009, 11:30am at the Eaton Hotel, Birmingham

Present: David Caro – Chairman (DC) – left at 15:15
John Bates (JB)
Roger Culcheth (RC)
David Dunn (DD)
Jeff Hunt (JH)
Peter Silver (PS)
Bruce Undy (BU)
Carol Undy (CU) – Co-opted

Guests: Ash Farag (AF) – Chairman of the Banking and Financial Affairs Policy Unit
Priyen Patel (PP) – Policy Advisor for Banking & Financial Affairs, Local Government and Planning

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

11:43 Meeting commenced – the pre-arranged minute taker had not arrived, so the PM took the notes.

DC welcomed AF and PP to the meeting and introductions were made.

Ash Farag Presentation:

AF gave a presentation about his portfolio and informed the committee that the following were current issues:

- Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) Scheme and Banking Charges
- Small Business Finance Forum Paper
- Cheque Guarantee Scheme phase-out in 2018
- Pension Reforms in 2012 (Report Tabled)

Following his PowerPoint presentation the committee asked a range of questions on the following areas:

- Pension arrangements for employees with more than one job
- Protections for the employer
- National Insurance Contributions
- State pensions

Priyen Patel Presentation:

PP gave a round-up of his role and future work. The key areas he was working on included:

- EFG
- New ways of raising capital debt and equity
- Small business incubators
- Regional Stock Exchanges (and he highlighted the Birmingham InvestBX)
- Sub-National Review (SNR)

He then went on to respond to a range of questions covering the following areas:

- Warwickshire & Coventry motions for national conference on business bank
- Pre-packs
- Tax breaks and free training services
- JH also mentioned the Care Industry and PP agreed to ask Matt Jaffa to contact JH regarding his concerns

PP/Matt Jaffa/JH

Roger Culcheth Presentation:

RC tabled a paper covering the non-domestic property rates revaluation due to take place in 2010. RC went on to discuss the current situation regarding Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) and the situation in the devolved countries. He also responded to questions covering the following areas:

- Transitional Relief
- Empty Property Rates
- Collaboration with other business representative organisations, particularly in respect of empty property rates

13:07 Lunch

14:05 Meeting resumed

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Ken Wigfield (KW) and Bob Osbourne (BO).

There was a general discussion about speakers with concern that there was insufficient time left to discuss West Midlands' policy issues. DC asked the PM to find out if Sietske de Groot and Richard Hyslop (the speakers arranged for the next meeting) will be staying for the whole meeting and if they would only attend the meeting without giving a presentation. CU asked what the intention of their attendance was and the PM responded that they had asked to attend all the APU meetings across the country.

PM

2. Minutes of the October 09 Meeting

There were no amendments.

The Minutes were proposed by PS; Seconded by DD; all in favour.

It was agreed that the PM would send them to the Regional Secretaries and post them on the 'members-only' section of the WMPU WebPages.

PM

3. Matters arising**Page 2 – Item 2 – Minutes of the September 09 meeting**

The PM confirmed the minutes had been amended and circulated to the WMPU on 8th September 2009. She also confirmed that they had been posted on the relevant section of the WMPU WebPages.

Page 2 – Item 3 – Matters arising - Summary of figures from LDV, Austin Rover collapse, Peugeot, Massey Ferguson, GEC and Dyson and the effect of their closure and operation changes on small businesses

JB reported that this had not been done as he understood the figures were in the public domain.

Page 2 – Item 3 - Matters arising – Young Enterprise – FSB experience in other areas

The PM reported that there has been no opportunity to raise this issue at the recent Western Staff Team meeting. However, she had emailed all the ROs in that team about their connections with Young Enterprise and was able to report that there is no consistency of approach. Some parts were good and others poor.

Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising - General Election campaign

A 'General Election campaign' item has been added as a standing agenda item and would continue for future WMPU committee meetings until after the General Election.

Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising – Letter to BMW

The PM confirmed that a letter had been drafted praising BMW about their decision to build new engines at the Hams Hall plant. She confirmed that National Policy had

approved the letter and she read out the final version to the committee. Copies had been brought to the meeting and were then signed by DC to be posted out immediately.

PM

Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising – Small Business Fellowship campaign

The PM confirmed that she had contacted Richard Hyslop on 8th September if any MEPs had signed up to it and had been informed that Emma McClarkin, a Conservative MEP from the East Midlands was the only one who had done so, so far.

Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising – Apprentices case studies

CU asked for this matter to be carried forward as the requested information had not yet been received.

CU

Page 3 – Item 8c – Policy Priority Reports – Skills – Future interaction between Coventry and Worcester Universities and the FSB

CU reported that she was attending a meeting at Coventry University that evening and would report more at the next WMPU meeting.

CU

RC reported on a meeting with Worcester University and PS commented on a report from the Higher Education and Funding Council for England (HEFCE) presented at the recent Business Voice West Midlands (BVWM) Rural Economic Development Group meeting.

Page 3/4 - Item 8c – Policy Priority Reports – Skills – National Skills Academy Launch

The PM confirmed that she had contacted Beverley McGillicuddy to take up the offer of the free places at the launch dinner and with the assistance of the Regional Organisers (ROs) had been able to submit the names of seven members to Beverley on 12th October.

Page 4 – Item 5 – Chairman’s Report – Acronym list update

The PM confirmed she had updated the Acronym list.

Page 5 – Item 7 – Policy Manager’s Report – Regional Minister’s Meeting

The PM confirmed that as BU was unable to attend, she had attended the meeting and details were given about the meeting in her report.

Page 5 – Item 7 – Policy Manager’s Report – High Speed 2 (HS2) Survey

The PM confirmed that a mass email had been sent to over 8,000 members on 8th September.

Page 5 – Item 7 – Policy Manager’s Report – West Midlands Regional Observatory (WMRO) conference

The PM confirmed that the invitation had been declined on the grounds of cost and subsequently a free place was offered, which she had accepted.

Page 5 – Item 7 – Policy Manager’s Report – WMPU Meetings Minute Taker

The PM confirmed that she had engaged Office Angels and a minute taker should have turned up. The PM had made calls to find out what had happened, but had been told they did not know and they had no alternative minute taker available. There was a discussion about next steps and it was agreed that the PM could try the other agency recommended.

PM

Page 5 – Item 8 – Policy Priority Reports – Transport – De-trunked road details

BU reported that no information had been received.

Page 5 – Item 8 – Policy Priority Reports – Environment – Views of forthcoming Plastic Bag legislation

DC reported that no information had been received.

4. Chairman's Report

The Chairman's report had been circulated previously and additional copies were also available. BU asked how successful the Party Conferences had been for the FSB especially in the light of the high level of business representatives from the Chambers attending the Labour Party conference in Manchester. DC reported that the FSB stand had been complimented and he said that Andrew Cave had stated that no local FSB members should attend because of the high cost of attendance. A discussion followed. DC agreed to take back members comments about this to John Walker. BU said that all the Regions could be asked to make a small contribution from their budgets so that the local members could attend. He also suggested that portfolio chairman could attend on different days.

DC

5. Chairman's Status

DD said that he felt DC should become an independent Chairman so that Staffs & West Midlands Region could have three voting representatives. A discussion followed.

JB proposed that the Chairman should be an independent Chairman rather than a fully voting one. DD seconded the proposal. The voting was: For – 4; Against – 1; Abstained – 1. The proposal was carried.

DC suggested this should be brought in at the new Policy Year i.e. changes to commence in May.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Accounts for Periods 11 and 12 had been circulated on the 10th September 09 and the 15th October 09 respectively.

Period 11 Accounts – Proposed by PS; seconded by JB – All in favour

Period 12 Accounts – Proposed by PS; seconded by JB – All in favour

Members were asked to bring thoughts about future WMPU spending to benefit members to the next meeting and for this matter to be put on the agenda.

All

RC asked DD to bring a report on under-spend for comparison and to assist the discussions.

DD

The agreed budget had been circulated previously and BU commented that any additional requests for funding could be applied for from the National Policy budget.

7. Policy Manager's Report

The PM's report was circulated on 13th October 09. There was a discussion about the General Election and the workload involved in effective lobbying. There was agreement that the PM could assist the ROs with this activity, where requested.

15:15 David Caro left the meeting.
BU assumed the Chairman's role.

The PM highlighted the request to feed in comments for the BVWM submission to the skills consultation on business needs with the skills agenda and the transition from the Learning and Skills Council to other providers. Comments from members were noted and it was agreed the PM would forward them on to James Watkins.

PM

8. Policy Priority Reports

a. Crime – A report from KW had been circulated previously and matters on crime were also included in BU's Regional report. The PM highlighted the newsletter from Warwickshire Police featuring the signing of the Crime campaign to the APU.

b. Manufacturing – No meetings had been held since the last WMPU meeting.

c. Skills – The PM reported on the forthcoming meeting with Jackie Wellings at AWM and John Rider of the IoD which she and CU would be attending to discuss the progress of the West Midlands Graduate Internship pilot scheme.

d. Sub-National Review/Spatial Strategy/Planning – RC gave an update on the SNR and commented that it was not certain how much would be enacted. Royal Assent was expected soon. He said he was hoping to work on a précis of the Conservative Green papers.

e. Transport – This matter was covered in the reports from BU and the PM.

f. Others:

Serco - BU highlighted an email he had forwarded on to the PM about a new deal managed on behalf of the Dept for Work and Pensions (DWP). He asked the PM to request a discussion paper.

PM

9. Regional Reports:

a. Staffs & W Mids – DD gave a verbal report commenting that the Region had attended a Business Growth Show at the Edgbaston County Cricket ground on 10th September. It was very good and they had taken a stand. 250 copies of FSB literature had been well received by delegates with all copies gone by lunchtime.

b. Shrops, Hfds & Worcs – RC had tabled a report and commented that acknowledgement should be given to Ann Johnson who had been made the FSB disability representative. The PM drew members' attention to the 'accessability' footnotes on all the circulated papers, which had been an instruction from Blackpool.

c. Warks & Coventry – BU tabled a report and commented that he will provide more information about Linsey Luke's activities in the next report. JB commented that he had been asked to give a radio interview on rail issues.

10. AOB

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 15:59

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