

## Federation of Small Businesses - West Midlands Policy Unit

**Minutes of the West Midlands Policy Unit (WMPU) held on  
Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009, 11:30am at the Eaton Hotel, Birmingham**

**Present:** David Caro – Chairman (DC)  
John Bates (JB)  
Roger Culcheth (RC)  
David Dunn (DD)  
Jeff Hunt (JH)  
Peter Silver (PS) – arrived 11:39  
Bruce Undy (BU)

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

11:33 Meeting commenced – the PM took the notes.

DC notified the WMPU that two AOB items had been notified:

- RC – Survey by Herefordshire & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce
- PM – Skills consultation request

DC also suggested that as his report and the PMs had only been tabled that morning, the agenda should be amended so that these items were considered after the lunch break, to give members time to read them. The committee agreed.

### 1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Ken Wigfield (KW), Bob Osbourne (BO) and Carol Undy (CU). PS had notified the Eaton Hotel that he would a little late arriving.

### 2. Minutes of the October 09 Meeting

There was one amendment – the reference to the month at the foot of each page should read 'Draft Minutes of the **October** 09 meeting'.

Subject to the above amendment, the minutes were proposed by DD; Seconded by BU; all in favour.

It was agreed that the PM would make the agreed amendments, then forward them to the Regional Secretaries and post them on the 'members-only' section of the WMPU WebPages.

**PM**

11:39 – PS arrived

### 3. Matters arising

#### Page 1 – Ash Farag presentations

Members expressed concern about the substance of his presentation. A general discussion about speakers and their presentations followed.

#### Page 1 – Priyen Patel presentation – Care Home contact

JH confirmed that Matt Jaffa had not contacted him. The PM agreed to chase up.

**PM**

#### Page 2 – Item 1 – Apologies – Time required by speakers arranged for November meeting

The PM confirmed that she had contacted Sietske de Groot and she had confirmed that an hour would be required. Therefore, it was agreed that Sietske would produce a paper covering the key elements of her future work plans prior to her attendance at a future WMPU committee meeting. The PM also confirmed that she had consulted with DC and it had been agreed that Sietske and Richard Hyslop would attend the April meeting. A

discussion followed covering European matters. It was agreed that the PM would circulate the most recent ESBA bulletins to the committee and all future ones as a matter of course.

PM

**Page 2 – Item 2 – Minutes of the previous meeting**

The PM confirmed the minutes had been amended and circulated to the WMPU on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2009. She also confirmed that they had been posted on the relevant section of the WMPU WebPages.

**Page 2/3 – Item 3 – Matters arising – Letter to BMW**

The PM confirmed that the letters had been mailed immediately after the meeting, but to date no responses had been received.

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

This matter was carried forward as CU was not in attendance.

CU

BU commented that there was confusion regarding various graduate schemes and he asked if the PM could research this. This request was declined as it was felt it would not currently be the best use of her time given that Skills provisions is undergoing significant changes, a situation that is likely to continue after the General Election. However, it was agreed that the matter would be diarised for her work schedule in autumn 2010. In the meantime, members were asked to forward any individual queries about various schemes to the PM for information.

PM

**Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising – Future interaction between Coventry and Worcester Universities and the FSB**

This matter was carried forward as CU was not in attendance.

CU

**Page 3 – Item 3 – Matters arising - WMPU Meetings Minute Taker**

The PM asked for this to be carried forward as she had not had time to engage a minute taker for this meeting. The committee agreed.

PM

**Page 4 – Item 4 – Chairman’s Report – Local FSB representation at Party Conferences**

DC reported that he had not yet taken this information forward and apologised to the WMPU. He agreed to do so at the next opportunity.

DC

**Page 4 – Item 6 – Treasurer’s Report – Future WMPU spending**

This is an agenda item.

**Page 4 – Item 6 – Treasurer’s Report – Copy of Budget**

DD confirmed that he had tabled copies of this year’s and last year’s budgets to assist the discussions on Future WMPU spending.

**Page 4 – Item 7 – Policy Manager’s Report – Skills consultation comments to Business Voice West Midlands (BVWM)**

The PM confirmed this had been done.

**Page 5 – Item 9 – Policy Priority Reports – Others – Serco**

The PM reported that she had not produced a discussion paper as she had been confused about what was required. BU explained that he had raised this matter for her to

make contact with Serco and report back to the WMPU about the New Deal scheme. It was agreed this matter would be carried forward.

PM

#### 4. Format of future WMPU committee meetings

DC informed the committee that it is part of the briefs of Policy Advisors to visit APUs with their Chairmen from time to time. A discussion followed on the merits of internal and external speakers at WMPU committee meetings. RC suggested that it would be useful to have a document from the speaker covering the topic being presented, prior to the meeting and this suggestion was well received. BU said that if a speaker is to attend, then the WMPU should decide on the questions to be asked before the speaker attends. It was suggested that the PM should remind the APU to discuss this at the meeting before.

The point was made by DD that WMPU meetings should not be a London Office 'talking shop' and he would prefer the number of speakers to be limited to at least one in two meetings, ideally one in three. DC commented that it is useful to hear a more balanced view to counter reports in the media. A discussion followed. It was agreed that:

- The WMPU would invite a speaker to every other meeting (unless there was an emergency)
- A paper would be requested for consideration at the WMPU meeting before the one being attended by the speaker and to discuss questions to be asked.
- If an external speaker was invited, then consideration should be given to inviting the relevant Policy Advisor if available or their Chairman if they were unavailable.
- Speakers would not be invited to the January or February 2010 meetings
- The FSB pre-election manifesto and biennial survey results would be the main feature of the January 2010 meeting and DC will invite Andrew Cave to attend

DC

#### 6. Treasurer's Report

The Accounts for Period 1 had been circulated by DD on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 09.

PS asked if the cost of meetings will be a problem over the full budget year and DD assured him it would not. DC asked members to be more diligent about notifying DD, the PM or himself if unable to attend the WMPU meetings so that the FSB is not charged for non-attending members.

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

#### 7. Future WMPU Spending

A discussion followed about whether to continue supporting Young Enterprise. All were in favour of continuing WMPU support at the Regional Finals for a further year and the PM was asked to contact the organisers to inform them. However, given the concerns she was asked to make it clear that it is expected that the promised improvements in the delivery at all levels will be evident. She was also asked to emphasise how much FSB support is given at all levels and to push for higher recognition at the National Finals.

PM

BU asked whether additional funds for Regional and Branch hustings events would be available from the Policy budget as had been the case in previous elections. DC agreed to ask at National Policy and report back.

DC

DC asked the committee about ideas for an event to run alongside the General Election. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting in January and made an agenda item.

DD also mentioned a requirement for a Survey event and a joint East and West Midlands' event. It was agreed that a joint Midlands Policy event was a good idea and members were asked to feed in cross-border issues to the PM.

**AII/PM**

13:09 Lunch

14:05 Meeting resumed

### **5. Chairman's Report**

DC had tabled his report and provided copies for the committee at the start of the meeting. It was also agreed that BU's report on the National Policy meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November would be included in this item.

There was a discussion about harmonising tax frameworks across EU.

### **8. Policy Manager's Report**

The PM had tabled her report and provided copies for the committee at the start of the meeting. She had also tabled additional papers covering the West Midlands' results from the latest Snap Poll and highlighted the Business Improvement District research report, which was just awaiting final comments from Priyen Patel and a decision on next steps. A copy was passed around the committee.

BU commented on the section on the Banks' meetings and DC asked for the APU committee members to be invited to any future 'Meet the Banks' events.

### **9. Policy Reports:**

DC suggested that the General Election item should be discussed at the end of this section. The committee agreed.

**a. Crime** – A report from KW had been tabled at the start of the meeting. There was a discussion on Police Authority consultation meetings. RC commented that West Mercia Police Authority is holding a pre-consultation meeting with the FSB. DC commented that the West Midlands Police Authority have arranged a dedicated business consultation meeting in January. The situation with Staffordshire and Warwickshire Police Authorities is not known. JB expressed concern about the lack of West Midlands Regional Business Crime Forum (WMRBCF) meetings. The WMPU were informed that the next meeting of the WMRBCF was to be held on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December and Ken Wigfield and the PM would be attending.

**b. Manufacturing** – No meetings had been held since the last WMPU meeting, due to the changes at the EEF who lead on this group. JH asked how many manufacturing businesses were coming into the UK and the West Midlands.

**d. Skills** – The PM referred to the section on Skills in her report about the West Midlands Graduate Internships schemes and lobbying efforts regarding the recently announced graduate scheme due to be rolled out in January. A discussion followed.

**e. Sub-National Review/Spatial Strategy/Planning** – RC tabled a report covering the West Midlands Regional Assembly meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. He advised that DC should try to attend the next meeting, which will be the last one before the WMRA is disbanded. RC highlighted the Examination in Public housing figures and agreed to circulate the full figures to the WMPU.

**RC**

RC also referred to a letter from Caroline Spelman MP, Shadow Minister for Local Government, which had been sent to all Local Authorities about Conservative plans regarding Local Government. A discussion on housing standards and infrastructure followed.

**f. Transport** – BU had tabled a report covering the West Midlands Business Transport Group meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> November. He highlighted the section on LTP3 development. A discussion followed on the need for road infrastructure. DD commented on rail links between Stourbridge and Walsall. DC commented on reports that Virgin are stating that further improvements on the West Coast Main Line must be paid for by private business.

**g. Others:**

**Rural** – PS tabled a report covering the BVWM Rural Group meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> November. He also passed a copy of the Welsh-English border strategic regeneration programme summary to the PM.

**b. General Election** – it was agreed that this matter would be discussed in January

**10. Regional Reports:**

**a. Staffs & W Mids** – DD gave a verbal report covering their recent events and AGMs. He also reported on a meeting with Dudley College that he had attended with Lynne Tennant, their Regional Vice-Chairman and the Prince's Trust Awards at Aston Villa. He asked the WMPU to note they had a new Chairman – Jenny Cartwright – who had replaced Bob Osborne. Bob had stepped down due to business commitments. The new WMPU representatives would be agreed at a Regional meeting next Wednesday.

**b. Shrops, Hfds & Worcs** – RC had tabled a report. He also reported that the annual FSB lecture will be taking place in the New Year in Worcester and the Best Student award would be going ahead again this year, with the prize being a visit to the FSB's London office. He highlighted the regional/branch sponsorship of the Rural Enterprise Pavilion at next year's Three Counties Agricultural Show and pointed out that this is the only agricultural show left in the West Midlands. RC reported that the Region had a new Secretary and would ask Angela Smith to forward the contact details to the PM.

RC

**c. Warks & Coventry** – BU gave a verbal report and commented on the Coventry Branch AGM held at Coventry University. All branch AGMs were constitutional. He also reported that the Coventry and Warwickshire Economic Partnership had been about to disband but was now continuing in response to the recent announcement from Eriksson at Ansty Park.

BU and JB had attended an open radio debate with BBC Coventry & Warwickshire that morning but had not been given an opportunity to speak. When they complained about the small business voice not being heard, they were offered a personal slot on the programme tomorrow.

All the councils in the Warwickshire and Coventry Region will hopefully be signed up to the Accord by the end of the year and were starting to use the Accord signing as a springboard to discuss other things. DC asked for a paper on how it has helped to be produced and BU said this was already being done. A discussion followed and the PM was asked to include a table showing those councils which have signed and those that are still to do so in her future reports.

PM

**11. AOB**

**Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber Survey on Infrastructure** – RC raised this item as he felt it was presented in a good format and he liked the way it covered areas outside Herefordshire and Worcestershire. He had tabled the survey for the interest of members.

**Shropshire Branch Event** – PS reported on comments and questions made at a recent Shropshire Branch event (he was not at the meeting when AOB items were called for).

He had been asked what the APUs do and about the plethora of National Portfolio Chairmen. The branch had asked if it was possible for two or three punchy campaigns to come down to branches every year. A discussion followed and the PM was asked to include an information sheet in her report showing the current national Policy briefing notes available.

**PM**

RC commented that this matter had been raised two or three years ago and referred to the Local Government manifesto which had included a few bullet points for each relevant portfolio on their current policy positions. He suggested this concern should be fed up to National Policy by DC.

**DC**

**City Region Multi-Area Agreement (MAA) for Adult Employment and Skills** – the PM reported that she had been contacted that morning by Simon Murphy. He wanted to arrange a meeting in January for the FSB to feed into a consultation currently underway considering the evidence base for the MAA, to ensure that the findings are in line with the skills needs of business and that the plan is genuinely demand led. It was agreed that the PM would arrange for CU and herself to meet with Simon Hughes to discuss this consultation.

**PM/CU**

The meeting closed at 15:50

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