

Report to Cabinet –12th December 2007

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region – Progress Report, and Company Limited by Guarantee

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this Report is to:
 - provide a brief up-date on the progress of the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region (BCBCCR)
 - seek approval from the Cabinet that Dudley MBC becomes a member of the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region Limited.

Background

Background to proposal

2. Dudley Council has been a member of the BCBC City Region since June 2006. Throughout this time, the BCBC City Region has operated on a voluntary basis. Dudley Council is represented on the City Region's Growth & Prosperity Board by the Leader, Cllr. Caunt, and is also represented on the Chief Executives' Steering Group by Andrew Sparke. Both of these bodies meet on a monthly basis.
3. The BCBC City Region comprises the eight local authorities in the 'urban core' of the West Midlands: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Telford, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The Growth & Prosperity Board comprises, in addition to the Leaders of these local authorities, senior representatives from the Regional Learning & Skills Council, Advantage West Midlands, West Midlands Regional Assembly, and a representative from business.
4. At the City Region (shadow) Growth and Prosperity Board AGM on 6 June 2007, Cllr Mike Whitby was elected Chairman and Cllr David Smith (Chairman of the West Midlands Regional Assembly) was elected as Vice-Chairman.
5. The Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region Strategic Framework for Action was adopted by the (shadow) Growth and Prosperity Board at its meeting on 24th January 2007. This document has now been reviewed following a re-assessment of its evidence and statistical base. The Framework details the pursuit of four key strategic objectives for the City Region:

- Creating Employment and Prosperity
- Connecting People with Opportunities
- Connecting the City Region
- Creating a Better Quality of Life

6. The Framework describes why the City Region partnership has come together, how it will work, its outcomes, and how it will create strategic added value. It explains that the partnership will seek to align policy and funding behind agreed City Region priorities.

Proposal to form a company limited by guarantee

7. The shadow Growth & Prosperity Board agreed in principle on 6th June 2007 to the establishment of a formal company structure (limited by guarantee) for the City Region, and authorised the Chief Legal Officer of Birmingham City Council, working with the support of the West Midlands District Secretaries' Group and the City Region Project Director, to take all necessary action to implement the decision. Dudley's Director of Law & Property has been involved in the work leading to the proposal to establish a company limited by guarantee.
8. At its meeting on 19 September 2007, the shadow Board endorsed the proposal to formally adopt the Memorandum and Articles of Association, and to individually instigate the relevant approval processes within their own organisations. The shadow Board also agreed to remove the descriptor "shadow", and agreed to the official name as the 'Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region'.
9. In terms of the proposal to form a company limited by guarantee, it should be noted that BCBCCR does not seek to take delegated authority or spending from any of its member organisations. To ensure transparency, Board meetings will be held in public. Decisions of major importance for member organisations will continue to need to be taken back to their respective Cabinets, Councils or Boards for agreement as appropriate.
10. In terms of both governance and commitment, the formation of a company would make a strong statement on behalf of the partnership to commit to joint working and create the possibility of the City Region being able to bid for, hold, and influence the spending of, funds.
11. Approval of the resolutions will confirm the Borough's wish to participate in future debates on regional and sub-regional policy and the development of both the Borough and the Region, and enable the Borough to position itself accordingly. Approval of the recommendations will also allow officers to complete and finalise the formation of the company.
12. The alternative option is to "do nothing". This could see Dudley lose some of its ability to influence the debate on regional and sub-regional issues and potentially also its ability to lobby government for future developments linked to regional or sub-regional funding.

Strategic context for City Region working and 'added value'

13. Central Government has encouraged major cities, and their surrounding areas, to work more closely together (including on a 'City Region' basis) in order to 'raise

their game' in maximising long-term economic prosperity. The '*Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration*', published by Government in July 2007, confirmed the Government's continuing support for the development of City Regions. The Review is positive about City Regions and other sub-regional partnerships, with the Birmingham Coventry and Black Country City Region singled out for mention.

14. City Region Growth & Prosperity Board members have met with Secretaries of State and Government Ministers to advance and discuss the City Region case. Officers have held a number of discussions with Whitehall officials on the development of the City Region Partnership and on issues common across the City Region. The most recent of these meetings occurred on 29th October 2007, when the Growth & Prosperity Board met Liam Byrne, Minister for the West Midlands.
15. At recent 'Away Days' for, respectively, Leaders and Chief Executives, there has been general agreement that the BCBC City Region has the opportunity to provide co-ordination, and exercise leadership and influence in the areas of housing growth, spatial planning, transport and employment and skills. The City Region is also in a position to lobby and promote the sub-region more effectively than would otherwise be the case. The Away Days also recognised the interdependence between Birmingham and the Region and vice versa, and the influence the collective whole can exert.
16. For example, the City Strategy Pathfinder initiative to tackle worklessness and economic inactivity has continued to develop as a City Region initiative with all eight local authorities, and the Learning & Skills Council, working with JobCentre Plus. As a de facto Multi Area Agreement the Pathfinder has attracted Government attention not just for the impact that it will have on reducing worklessness across the City Region, but also what lessons can be learnt for the interaction of local and sub-regional targets.
17. The Skills and Employment Joint Investment Plan (JIP) for the City Region was adopted as a first year plan by the shadow Board at its meeting on 18th April 2007. Apart from the work on the City Strategy Pathfinder, the JIP also addresses the development of workforce skills and higher level skills, as well as the retention of graduates. Building on the work of the Learning and Skills Council for Birmingham and Solihull, all eight City Region local authorities are now members of a Public Sector Employment Compact. This will use the local authorities' employment policies to influence the recruitment of employees from target groups. Partners from BCBCCR authorities, including Dudley, are involved in developing a number of other Joint Investment Plans, including Housing Renewal, Economic Development and investment, Transport, and Quality of Life.

Finance

18. Dudley Council is budgeting to make a financial contribution to the City Region of £23,000 in 2007/08. All other seven local authorities will contribute a similar amount. These funds pay for three members of staff and any specialist pieces of work that are undertaken. It is likely that further financial contributions will be needed in future years.

Law

19. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of its area.

Equality Impact

20. The BCBC City Region is primarily concerned with optimizing the future prosperity and quality of life of its citizens – notably, including young people. A number of consultation events have been held specifically for young people from across the City Region, to ascertain their views on the future shape and direction of the sub-region.
21. The BCBC City Region is committed to improving the life chances of residents, and many policies adopted will be aimed at improving the skills and employment prospects of disadvantaged groups and areas. An example of this is the City Strategy initiative, which is designed to impact positively on wards, and specific groups of residents (e.g. black and minority ethnic groups, lone parents and people with disabilities) who experience disadvantage.

Recommendation

22. It is recommended that Cabinet
 - i) Note the contents of this report.
 - ii) Authorise that Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council becomes a member of the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region Ltd.



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List of Background Papers – Available in the Members Library

City Region Strategic Framework for Action

Cambridge Econometrics Research Report on BCBC City Region

Proposed Memorandum and Articles of Association for Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country City Region Lt