

MINUTES OF THE WEST LONDON ECONOMIC PROSPERITY BOARD
Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Tuesday 19 November 2024 at
11.00 am

PRESENT: Councillor Muhammed Butt (Brent Council - Chair), Councillor Shital Manro (Ealing Council) & Councillor Shantanu Rajawat (Hounslow Council).

Also present: Councillor Barry Rawlings (Barnet Council) & Councillor Paul Osborn (Harrow Council) - as online participants.

Other Attendees:

Sophie Beagles (Head of Regeneration, Investment & Jobs – Ealing Council)
Andrew Munk (Assistant Director Economic Development - Hammersmith & Fulham Council)

John Bryson (Head of Economy & Skills - Barnet Council) – as an online participant

David Francis (Director, West London Alliance)

Majeed Neki (Assistant Director Economy, West London Alliance)

James Kinsella (Governance & Scrutiny Manager, Brent Council)

Molly Strauss (Head of Infrastructure – Greater London Authority)

Rob Anderson (Research Director - Centre for London)

1. Apologies for Absence and Notification of any Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Cowan (Hammersmith & Fulham Council). It was also reported that Councillor Shital Manro would be formally substituting for Councillor Peter Mason (Ealing Council).

2. Appointment of Chair

The Board **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Muhammed Butt (Brent Council) as Chair for the upcoming year.

Having been appointed as Chair, Councillor Muhammed Butt took the opportunity to formally thank Councillor Peter Mason (Ealing Council) for his work as Chair of the Board during the previous year and to highlight his ambition to continue the ongoing collaborative work between member boroughs being led through the Board and West London Alliance.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

The Board **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Paul Osborn (Harrow Council) as Vice-Chair for 2024-25.

4. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made during the meeting.

5. **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting of the West London Economic Prosperity Board held on Thursday 18 January 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6. **West London energy constraints and energy planning**

The Chair welcomed Molly Strauss (Head of Infrastructure Greater London Authority) to the meeting and invited her to introduce a report updating the Board on the work being undertaken to understand and mitigate electrical supply constraints across the West London region, being led through the GLA in collaboration with West London Alliance boroughs.

The report was accompanied by a presentation at the meeting, with the following key issues highlighted:

- The background and context to the work being undertaken to address electricity capacity issues across the region, given the impact of a number of large scale developments on the electricity distribution network operated by local supply networks and the transmission network operated by National Grid. Whilst the transmission network was currently scheduled for upgrade in 2037, the GLA had already facilitated a range of short and medium-term solutions to alleviate constraints so that housing and decarbonisation technologies (e.g. electric vehicle charge points) could secure connections in the interim.
- As part of the approach identified, the Mayor had funded development of a subregional Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) in collaboration with West London Alliance (WLA) boroughs, working alongside two other boroughs and Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC). The LAEPs were designed to translate Net Zero targets into on-the-ground action and provide a key input into the design of electricity network planning and investment processes across the areas covered. The West London subregional LAEP had been the first rolled out in London and had led to the introduction of a number of other Mayoral funded subregional LAEPs across London (supported by London Councils).
- The LAEPs had been developed to provide a whole system approach in seeking to join up energy sources and consumers, break down silos and connect physical requirements with policy, market and digital systems. Boroughs were encouraged to adapt and take forward the key actions and outputs identified, based on the specific make up of their areas and supported by the GLA, including delivery of potential funding support through the Zero Carbon Accelerator (ZCA).
- Key outputs identified as needing to be addressed through the West London subregional LAEP had included the ongoing anticipated increase in electricity demand being driven through housing, commercial and also data centre

development across the region in addition to the roll out of low carbon technologies such as heat pumps and Electric Vehicle Charging points; the need to enhance performance in relation to the energy rating performance of domestic building stock including opportunities to retrofit and target new buildings through effective planning policy; the need to address electrical grid constraints; the need to consider the opportunities available to establish heat networks across the region based on areas of viable demand and also the need to consider the potential options to increase use of solar PV generation.

- Following completion of the first phase of the West London subregional LAEP seven work packages had been identified to progress at subregional level. These reflected key themes in terms of decarbonisation of major energy users; energy system flexibility and generation along with continued stakeholder engagement regarding electricity network reinforcement.

In terms of progress, the Board noted that in terms of the WLA, five boroughs had jointly secured ZCA funding to complete the LAEP process for their local geographies (Barnet, Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Hammersmith & Fulham) with Hounslow also undertaking work to complete their LAEP. WLA boroughs had also pooled funding so that the GLA could take forward additional, targeted subregional priority work packages on the back of the subregional LAEP, focused on major drivers of decarbonisation. WLA's Climate & Net Zero Lead was working closely with the GLA on this, with oversight from the West London Climate, Environment and Net Zero Directors' group.

From a WLA perspective, Majeed Neki took the opportunity to thank Molly Strauss and the GLA for the ongoing work being delivered in partnership with the WLA and its member boroughs to ensure the capacity issues and required infrastructure support continued to be progressed.

The Chair thanked Molly Strauss for the update provided and then sought comments and questions from the Board, with the following issues highlighted:

- The Board expressed support for the approach identified, recognising the need to ensure the capacity issues continued to be addressed and that West London continued to lobby for capacity upgrades to be accelerated in order to avoid adverse impact on the ability to bring forward housing and regeneration development across the region and wider focus on activity in relation to decarbonisation.
- Further details were sought on proposals identified in relation to the provision of potential "stretch" connections from other distribution areas to support data centre development, given their impact on the demand for electrical supply. In response, Molly Strauss advised whilst this type of provision (targeted on specific sites) would have the potential to relieve pressure on the local grid relating to those specific developments it would not be available to support supply to the surrounding area and would also be likely to involve substantial disruption to the adjoining road network during the construction phase as well as reducing capacity elsewhere on the grid.

- Members were keen to ensure that any approach identified to address longer term issues included the need to co-ordinate and manage the impact of utilities work on local highways infrastructure.
- In recognising the delivery of the short and medium-term solutions to alleviate constraints so that housing and decarbonisation technologies (e.g. electric vehicle charge points) could secure the necessary connections (involving the unblocking of 11,481 permitted housing units and wider ramping solutions) details were sought on the number of schemes likely to require capacity being unblocked over the coming years. In response, Molly Strauss advised that whilst unable to provide specific numbers work remained ongoing with electricity companies to assess and manage demand in relation to available capacity and supply across their local electricity distribution networks to enable development schemes to progress. This was also supported through ongoing engagement with Ofgem & Department for Energy Security and Net Zero regarding the need for connections reform.

Assurance was also provided regarding the continued support and commitment from the Mayor for London (working with the Government and the energy regulator) in taking action to ensure sufficient electrical capacity was available to support wider development objectives across London and within individual boroughs linked, to the GLA energy planning priorities, local plan priorities, the subregional LAEP and London's net zero objectives.

As a final contribution, the Chair then invited Andrew Dakers (West London Business - WLB) to comment on the update. Andrew Dakers highlighted the collaborative work being undertaken between WLB and WLA to raise the profile of these issues with Government, regulators and electricity supply companies. It was also pointed out that WLB were keen to encourage engagement with consultation on development of the National Grid Plan and also Strategic Development Plans being produced by Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) along with consideration of alternative sources of energy supply. Support was also expressed for a more joined up and collaborative approach on the co-ordination of utility works given the impact that the associated disruption to the local highway network had on local business, including support for the "dig once" approach and multi utility corridor option.

As no further issues were raised, the Chair thanked Andrew Dakers and Board members for their comments and it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note the progress in addressing the West London electricity capacity issues identified and in delivery of the sub regional Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) along with the outline of longer-term issues identified including the need to co-ordinate and manage the impact of utilities work on local highways infrastructure.
- (2) To continue supporting boroughs to undertake the final steps in delivery of the West London sub regional LAEP across their own areas, utilising the support on offer from the GLA.

7. **Polycentrism in West London**

Councillor Shital Manro was invited to briefly introduce the item outlining initial findings from the Centre for London on research they had been commissioned to undertake by the London Borough of Ealing (led by Councillor Peter Mason) on the changing economy of West London, supported by the WLA and Imperial College London.

The Chair welcomed Rob Anderson (Research Director – Centre for London) to the meeting, who had been invited to provide a brief presentation on the emerging findings from the research. The following key issues were highlighted as part of the update:

- The outline of the main project objectives, focussed on providing an analysis of the current and emerging economic landscape in West London (initially focussed on Ealing) and comparison with Central London and the Central Activities Zone (CAZ); identifying opportunities for high growth, sustainable economic development in West London; outlining key principles and a supporting narrative for a polycentric approach to growth in London and what would be needed for that to succeed in West London; and providing an outline of the economies and diseconomies of agglomeration in London with particular reference to the evolving role of the CAZ and its relationship with emerging growth corridors (including the West Tech Corridor) and the London Growth Plan.
- The research process undertaken, which the Board noted had included a review of existing economic policies, primary data analysis including metrics on business, economy, planning, transport and population, expert interviews and feedback from advisory group sessions including representatives from WLA and Imperial College.
- The outline of emerging findings, which included:
 - A working definition of polycentrism based on the concept of a city with multiple centres of growth and urban areas with distinct local characters, complemented by development to support those centres rather than as 'enclaves' to growth in the metropolitan centre. This would include on a physical basis multiple urban centres within a wider geographical framework or governing structure, and on a functional basis multiple self-sustaining economic centres of growth which were evenly distributed to support sub-regional development supported by an effective and evenly distributed transport network.
 - West London being identified as functional polycentrism “ready”, on the basis of it featuring multiple centres of economic activity with the ability to disperse growth and economic opportunity more evenly than the CAZ.
 - West London’s strong foundational economy providing resilience and in turn supporting self-sufficiency. This included a resilient construction and logistics base which had enabled the region to grow consistently despite recent challenges, which contrasted directly with the CAZ where footfall and consumer activity had heavily determined growth. Despite lower rates of business births and deaths, these were also more stable and consistent than Central London.
 - West London was already outperforming other parts of London in key sectors with signs of ongoing business strength and rising prosperity. This was reflected in the growth in professional, scientific and technical

businesses since 2010 and also in terms of the region experiencing increases in VAT receipts and faster growth in disposable household income than across the centre, indicating future potential for further investment and self-sufficiency.

- The opportunities to accelerate West London's economy towards functional polycentrism, which it was highlighted would require policy action in relation to skills and productivity; housing and population growth and transport.
- In terms of next steps, work continued to complete the deep dive analysis including comparisons with Central London on land value, investment, living standards and deprivation and interviews with sector experts to build a broader insight into West London's economy and opportunities, with the aim of the final report being produced and launched in the coming months.

Sophie Beagles (Head of Regeneration, Investment & Jobs – Ealing Council) highlighted the extent of the work undertaken (based on Ealing as a case study) in developing the research and approach towards the concept of polycentrism. In seeking views from the Board on the emerging findings, Rob Anderson ended by highlighting a number of areas for further consideration which included:

- The way in which West London could capitalise on its 'polycentrism-ready' economic geography including the role of the New Towns agenda and grey-belt development.
- How West London could seek to leverage opportunities such as the West Tech Corridor and large investment in R&D and Life Sciences announced in the Autumn Statement to continue to accelerate professional, scientific and technical business growth, and how the upcoming London Growth Plan may be able to further support this growth.
- The role of regional housing delivery in West London and the opportunities presented by wider proposed planning reform in enabling a more polycentric model for London's economy.
- The potential for additional or improved transport infrastructure within West London to drive growth.

The Chair thanked Rob Anderson for the presentation and then sought comments and questions from the Board on the issues highlighted and prompts for discussion, with the following issues highlighted:

- The need identified by Councillor Paul Osborn (Harrow Council) to recognise transport infrastructure as a key driver in terms of developing growth and integration across specific clusters and concern, as a result, at the associated impact of more limited connectivity currently experienced across parts of West London when compared to Central London.
- The need identified to take account of the challenges in driving growth within specific types of areas and clusters when compared with the centre and to address wider structural inequalities.

In welcoming the update provided the Board **RESOLVED** as a way forward and in recognising the ongoing work being undertaken:

- (1) To note the update provided on the emerging findings and key themes in relation to the research commissioned from the Centre for London.
- (2) To consider the final research findings once available along with the implications for the role of the West London Alliance, collaboration with individual boroughs, impacts on transport infrastructure and specific clusters and how the approach could be made to work across West London as a whole.

8. **West London Orbital**

Prior to the provision of a verbal update on progress in developing and promoting the West London Orbital Rail (WLO) scheme the Chair welcomed Mr John Cox (as a local resident) to the meeting who had requested to speak on the item.

In thanking the Chair for the opportunity to address the meeting, Mr Cox noted the previous update in January 2024. At that stage, members had been informed of the progress being made in completion of the GRIP 2 Stage of work which it had been anticipated would confirm technical feasibility of the scheme and include an updated cost estimate enabling a decision to be taken on the next stage of work involving detailed design and public consultation in order to move to the GRIP 3 stage. Mr Cox expressed a desire for more concrete details on the subsequent progress made.

Mr Cox also raised the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation's (OPDC) approach towards development on Old Oak West and the implications he felt this may have on the benefits of WLO across other parts of West London and Park Royal. Concerns were also highlighted in relation to the impact on the surrounding area of the proposed removal of a footbridge at North Acton station.

As a final comment, clarification was also sought on the membership & quorum arrangements for the Board, which the Chair advised would be addressed outside of the meeting.

In thanking Mr Cox for his attendance, ongoing interest and representations made in relation to progress on West London Orbital Rail the Chair then invited David Francis (Director - West London Alliance) to provide a brief update on progress in development of the scheme, with the following issues highlighted:

- Confirmation was provided that the GRIP Stage 2 process had been completed with work now underway to move to Stage 3 and the project advancing toward the Transport and Works Act phase.
- Subject to completion of the necessary stages and confirmation of the required funding, the aim was to have completed delivery of the scheme to coincide with the opening of HS2. The complex nature of the process was noted given the various partners and stakeholders involved including TfL, GLA, London Boroughs and the new Government. Whilst the strategic case

for WLO included a focus on enhanced connectivity, reduced congestion, and the creation of new homes and jobs it was noted delivery would also be contingent upon the necessary funding allocations being made available as part of the Business Case, which would need to include consideration of TfL's financial settlement.

Given the limited time available for the remainder of the meeting, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Chair) in acknowledging the points raised by Mr Cox confirmed the Board's commitment to delivery of WLO given its strategic importance for West London. This included support for the ongoing collaboration between the WLA, GLA and TfL to develop the business cases and maximize the associated housing, business, and leisure opportunities.

On this basis, the Board noted the update provided at the meeting on the progress made with the design and development of the Business Case and funding plan to support delivery of West London Orbital. Having noting the representations made by John Cox at the meeting it was also **RESOLVED** that regular progress updates continue to be provided at future meetings.

9. **Any Other Business**

Prior to closing the meeting, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Chair) took the opportunity to congratulate Councillor Steve Cowan (Hammersmith & Fulham) on his appointment as the new Chair of the West London Skills and Employment Board, succeeding Councillor Barry Rawlings in the role.

10. **Dates of Future Meetings**

The Board **RESOLVED** to confirm the following programme of dates for meetings during 2025:

- Tuesday 25 February 25 – 11am Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre
- Tuesday 3 June 25 – 11am Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre
- Tuesday 16 Sept 25 – 11am Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm

COUNCILLOR MUHAMMED BUTT (Brent Council)
Chair