

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (Working Plan – Revisted and revised in December 2021)

Organisational vision and context

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) has a single-minded focus on driving inclusive economic growth, creating jobs, and raising the quality of life for all our residents. GBSLEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) sets out our vision and strategy to deliver smarter, more sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

All GBSLEP communications and engagement activities should ultimately reinforce our shared mission and vision:

Mission

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) has a single-minded mission on driving inclusive economic growth, creating jobs, and raising the quality of life for all of our residents.

Vision

Our vision is for Greater Birmingham to be a leading global city region and major driver of the UK economy.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the region was undergoing a vibrant economic revival. GBSLEP has played its part in this success through its unique triple helix structure of bringing together the private, public and academic sectors - a role not fulfilled by other agencies.

Since 2010, more than 193,000 new private sector jobs have been created across Greater Birmingham and Solihull. More than 5,000 businesses have been supported by the GBSLEP Growth Hub since its inception in 2015. GBSLEP has a compelling story to tell, building on a strong track record for delivery, influence and impact. Significant progress has been made across all areas of activity, including both capital and revenue funding interventions.

In March 2020 Covid-19 dramatically changed the economic outlook of the region. GBSLEP responded swiftly to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on businesses. The communications and engagement plan has therefore been agile and flexible to reflect GBSLEP's pivot in activity. At the same time the communications and engagement plan has also continued to demonstrate the core activity that has been delivered during the pandemic.

A proactive approach to communications is now in place to demonstrate the 'add value' and impact of GBSLEP's work. This is even more important as the role of LEPs are being reviewed by Government. This strategy will therefore be revised and updated once the outcome of the LEP Review is known in early 2022 via the Levelling Up White Paper.

The distinctive role of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) depends on their continued ability to deliver, through the unique triple helix structure of public, private and academic partnerships which lead to interventions that bring about meaningful change for the local economy. GBSLEP's influence depends on demonstrating effective delivery and further increasing influence to ensure investment is made in the right places.

Therefore, GBSLEP is actively and constructively engaging with the private sector and public sector including national and local partners such as Government Departments, subnational bodies, Local Authorities, third sector representatives, community interest groups, universities and research institutions.

Communications and engagement activity ensures that there is ongoing local engagement with public and private sector stakeholders.

Strategic aims

This strategy outlines the communications and stakeholder engagement approach for GBSLEP for 2021/22.

It aims to align all communications and engagement. It covers the five key communications challenges faced by GBSLEP:

- **Demonstrating impact** – Not enough awareness of GBSLEP’s impact amongst key regional and national stakeholders.
- **Amplifying partnerships** – GBSLEP sometimes gets overseen by its partners and is often viewed as a ‘silent investor’.
- **Increasing credibility** – GBSLEP is not always recognised for strong delivery of key projects, for example the Growth Programme and Growth Hub, which in some cases can lead to lack of credibility within segments of the private sector.
- **Promoting distinctiveness** – GBSLEP’s role is not seen as distinctive vis-à-vis other organisations such as the WMCA and the Midlands Engine.
- **Communicating purpose** – GBSLEP’s purpose & strategy are not clearly understood by all its stakeholders.

The aims of the strategy are to:

- Continue to build brand awareness and brand credibility – this is crucial for building influence and trust and positioning GBSLEP as a leading delivery body driving better outcomes for the local economy.
- Increase the influence of GBSLEP by motivating internal and external stakeholders to engage on key issues and opportunities.
- Increase awareness of the impact of GBSLEP’s delivery at a local, regional and national government level through MPs, civil servants and relevant government departments.
- Build trust in GBSLEP by demonstrating the ability to deliver with impact, between the LEP, its partners and wider stakeholders.
- Provide more opportunities to benefit from the expertise and networks of GBSLEP Board Directors and Senior Executives, to increase credibility and influence of the LEP.
- Position the LEP as thought leaders in economic development.
- Improve the quality of storytelling to demonstrate GBSLEP’s impact.
- Make better use of LEP data to drive relationships and increase reputation. Ensure research and publications are shared.
- Seek opportunities to engage with BAME businesses to increase access to business help.

Objectives and key messages

Through all communications and stakeholder engagement activity, the following organisational key messages should be consistently communicated:

- GBSLEP exists to drive forward inclusive and sustainable economic growth, creating jobs, improving skills levels and raising the quality of life for residents.
- GBSLEP has a unique triple helix structure bringing together the public, private and academic sectors, to make informed decisions underpinned by local insight. This is not fulfilled by any other agency.
- GBSLEP uses locally based evidence to ensure meaningful interventions are created or enabled, to drive inclusive economic growth in the region.
- Strong delivery of GBSLEP's Growth Programme and sector delivery plans is helping local businesses and local people.
- Our region can recover from Covid-19 and GBSLEP has a critical role to play in delivering the government's Plan for Growth, Ten Point Plan for green recovery and levelling up ambitions.
- Our region was amid a vibrant economic revival prior to the pandemic, and we will continue to deliver on our vision.
- The LEP will play a critical role in supporting the growth and productivity of our key sectors. This will be done in the context of the original West Midlands Local Industrial Strategy (WMLIS) which has now merged into the Government's Plan for Growth.
- We work together with our partners to bring about meaningful change, ensuring Greater Birmingham becomes a leading global city region and major driver of the UK economy.

GBSLEP's commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic growth is rooted in green economic recovery, levelling up and creating skills opportunities for the existing workforce as well as young people who have been adversely affected by the global pandemic. Campaign and project specific messages will be developed as and when the requirement arises but should always aim to reinforce the principal messages set out above.

The following communications objectives will help to guide activity and provide measurable targets:

Objective	Impact
Grow amount of GBSLEP stories covered by media publications – achieve a minimum of 4 articles a quarter.	Ensuring that the full scope of GBSLEP's role is recognised and more widely communicated via the projects it has supported.
Create at least 2 pieces of GBSLEP owned content per week (<i>could be a press release, a direct mail, a video, a thought leadership piece, an infographic etc.</i>).	Increase the volume of direct communications and storytelling, having greater control over our narrative whilst allowing other voices to tell our stories, will have greater clarity and impact

<p>Secure references to GBSLEP by project partners in <i>all</i> promotional activity.</p>	<p>Increasing GBSLEP's brand visibility and recognition of role in economic development, helping to positively impact reputation</p> <p>Stronger guidelines to make partners more aware of publicity requirements related to funding</p>
<p>Secure a minimum of 8 speaking slots at stakeholder events forums through to March 2022.</p>	<p>Increasing GBSLEP's brand visibility and opportunity to provide clarity on our unique role and impact.</p> <p>Increase visibility of Board Directors and senior members of the Executive.</p>
<p>Engage with regional MPs and their offices at least once a quarter.</p>	<p>Raise awareness of the unique role GBSLEP plays in regional economic development and to demonstrate the impact of delivery work.</p>
<p>Support engagement of 100+ local businesses in GBSLEP's implementation of delivery plans and/or WMLIS sector action plans by March 2022.</p>	<p>Motivating stakeholders to engage on key issues and opportunities, building trust and reputation for delivery and impact through steering groups and advisory forums.</p>
<p>Increase engagement rates across social media channels and newsletters by March 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Social media content per day which may include interactions with tweets and LinkedIn posts (<i>current engagement rates are already above industry average</i>) • Maintain open rate and click rate of newsletter at industry average rate of 23% (Mailchimp stat). • Look at new social media channels to engage with wider audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively highlighting our key messages and achievements, whilst also interacting with partners and relevant influencers to spread our reach. • Subscribers are more engaged with our content and therefore we're building relationships and reputation. • Engage with young people and young entrepreneurs in the region.

Successful delivery of these objectives will result in raising the profile GBSLEP's interventions and the impact they make. This will help increase the LEP's credibility amongst key stakeholders. Progress against objectives will reviewed and reflected upon regularly.

Audience

GBSLEP's key stakeholders span the private, public and education sectors.

- Private sector stakeholders include high growth potential SMEs; Mid-scale businesses (250 to 2,000 employees) that are locally based, large-scale national

or international organisations with substantial local or regional presence, business representative organisations and Business Improvement Districts.

- Public sector stakeholders include local authorities, WMCA, Government Ministers, MPs and civil servants.
- Third sector and social enterprises and community led organisations.
- Education sector stakeholders include universities, further education colleagues and training providers.

Activities

GBSLEP will utilise a variety of tactics to deliver the aims and objectives of the communications and engagement strategy.

The activities and channels used in the communications and engagement plan include;

- **Direct email communications**– Targetted awareness of LEP related activity.
- **Content Creation** – storytelling and information sharing to demonstrate the impact of GBSLEP’s work using varied methods as per below:
 - Social media
 - Video case studies
 - Blogs
 - Thought leadership
 - Press releases
 - Events
 - Marketing collateral
 - Presentations
- **Speaking engagements** – Facilitate representation of Board directors and senior Executive at key forums and events to ensure GBSLEP’s role in growing the economy is widely communicated and that brand awareness is increased.
- **GBSLEP hosted topical events** - particularly business engagement events on regional growth opportunities/challenges to amplify the unique and important role that GBSLEP plays.
- **The Annual Conference and AGM** - key stakeholder engagement opportunity to communicate GBSLEP’s vision, raise profile and reputation and to promote business support.
- **Partner Events and Openings** – Ensure there is GBSLEP representation at partner events.

Strengthening media relationships and engagement

- Working more closely with media contacts ahead of key releases to improve opportunities for coverage.
- Securing more feature opportunities to communicate LEPs priorities and amplify LEP’s role in economic development.
- Using GBSLEP’s media list to engage with journalists and identifying new journalists to engage with.

- Going beyond the traditional media and strengthening connections with community media.

Increasing the visibility of the GBSLEP brand – ensuring partners include GBSLEP in promotional materials for LEP-funded projects.

Publishing reports and data

- The Annual Report and Annual Delivery Plan are key opportunities to communicate vision and impact.
- Publishing reports relating to GBSLEP funded initiatives demonstrating leadership in economic development.

Website – Continue to refresh content on the existing website. The aim is to improve user experience and transparency, and to better communicate purpose and impact.

Increasing visibility of GBSLEP Board Directors and Senior Exec - Identify opportunities for Directors and Senior Exec members to amplify GBSLEP messages through their networks and beyond, for example feature opportunities, speaking slots or meeting with key organisations/individuals.

Developing focused strands of activity

- **Public affairs** - activities to cultivate stronger relationships with key politicians, government officials and other decision-makers, as well as the media
- **Sector Plans** - a specific strand of communications activity around implementation of the Local Industrial Strategy for the West Midlands, where GBSLEP is leading on sector activity.
- **Growth Hub** – working closely with the Growth Hub team to increase integration and alignment of GBSLEP and the Growth Hub communications to enhance the reputation of the LEP as a credible delivery partner within the business community.
- **Internal communications** - to solidify GBSLEP culture and identity and increasing employee engagement in GBSLEP's vision and mission.