

# Birmingham Anchor Network response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Update report for the Birmingham Anchor Network Leadership Group – May 2020



# Summary

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This paper sets out:

- The background to the Birmingham Anchor Network
- How the Covid-19 pandemic and unprecedented economic shutdown has affected the economic context in Birmingham
- The role the Anchor Network and its members will play in responding to the crisis
- A summary of the Network's action plan to early 2021

## Background

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The Birmingham Anchor Network was established in January 2018, following an eighteen-month project led by CLES and funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, to understand the role anchor institutions play in the Birmingham economy.

The Anchor Network works to support the seven participating organisations to maximise the benefit they bring to the Birmingham economy both individually and collectively. With combined budgets of over £5bn and a workforce of over 50,000, these anchor institutions are major economic agents. By collaborating on work in key areas of procurement, employment and management of land and assets, they have the potential to play a powerful role in shaping the city economy.

The Anchor Institution Network:

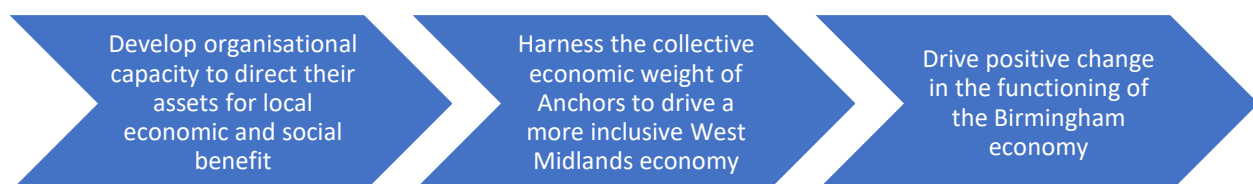
- Provides advice, technical support and training to anchor institutions to build their capacity to harness their spending power, role as employers and asset owners to stimulate equitable local economic development
- Brings anchor institutions together to collaborate on shared priorities, amplifying the impact of their individual activity
- Extends take-up of '[Community Wealth Building](#)' approaches among anchor institutions in Birmingham and West Midlands through advocacy activities

The Anchor Network seeks to deliver change at three levels:

Individual Anchors

Network

Birmingham



# How the Covid-19 crisis has affected the economic context in Birmingham

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Following a decade of growth, the city (and wider global economy) is entering what is widely predicted to be its deepest recession for decades with spiralling unemployment, loss of businesses, considerable downwards pressure on wages and rising poverty. In this context, the anchor institutions represent an immensely valuable source of demand, liquidity, job opportunities and assets. The case for ensuring every bit of this anchor wealth contributes directly to the economic and social wellbeing of the city and its citizens has never been stronger. With whole sectors of the economy at risk, a predicted generational high in unemployment and inequality already exacerbated by the crisis, the reasons the Anchor Network was set up have been hugely amplified creating the necessity to expand the pace and scale of activity.

As a city, Birmingham has weathered economic shocks and come together to address them. In 2005 the MG Rover factory in Longbridge closed, leading to the loss of 6,300 jobs and a threat to the 161 companies who depended on MG Rover for their business. In response local organisations set up the Longbridge Task Force as a co-ordinated, inter-agency response to help re-deploy MG Rover staff and diversify businesses previously dependent on MG Rover contracts. The results of the taskforce's work are encouraging with 58% of the former MG Rover employees finding alternative employment within 9 months and only 10 of the 161 dependent companies going out of business.<sup>1</sup>

This example gives an indication of the intervention, collective action and commitment that was needed to respond to the loss of a single, large business. To replicate this approach in the context of the economic shock of Covid-19 would require action of this type at an unprecedented scale. However, the Anchor Network recognises that the task before us is not to recover what we had before but to make the rebuilding of the city economy a pivot point in the long-term nature of the economy. It gives us an opportunity not just to recover but to reform, addressing long term challenges of:

- The breadth and depth of deprivation in the city, driven by low employment rates, low wages and high housing costs
- The prevalence of low pay and insecure work which has contributed to rising in work and child poverty
- Widening wealth inequality

The Anchor Network has much to contribute to this city-wide challenge. Individually and collectively, they represent a stable and locally rooted source of wealth which, through the work of the Network, can play a critical role in refloating and ultimately rebuilding a more secure, equitable and resilient city economy. Nationally, the Birmingham Anchor Network is unparalleled in scale; in the city this scale makes it uniquely placed to have a defining impact on the economy and livelihoods. This action plan is intended to quickly build a programme whose ambition is commensurate to this scale.

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<sup>1</sup> For more background to this case study please read the following by Ifor Jones, current Head of Partnerships for the Pioneer Group and former Head of the Rover Taskforce 2005/07.

<https://www.pioneergroup.org.uk/news/learning-from-longbridge/>

# The role of the Anchor Network and its members in responding to Covid-19.

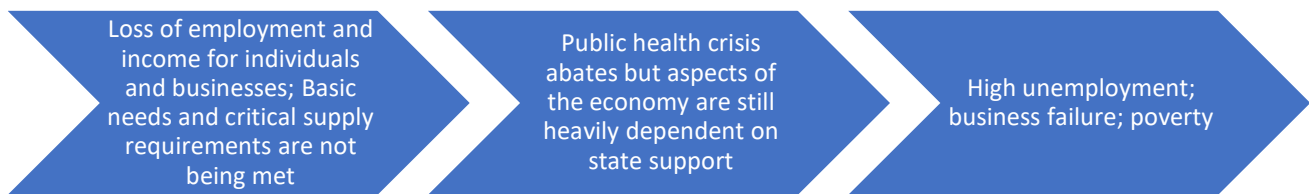
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This role of anchor institutions in responding to the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic can be understood in three phases, each with distinct economic challenges:

RESCUE

RECOVERY

REFORM



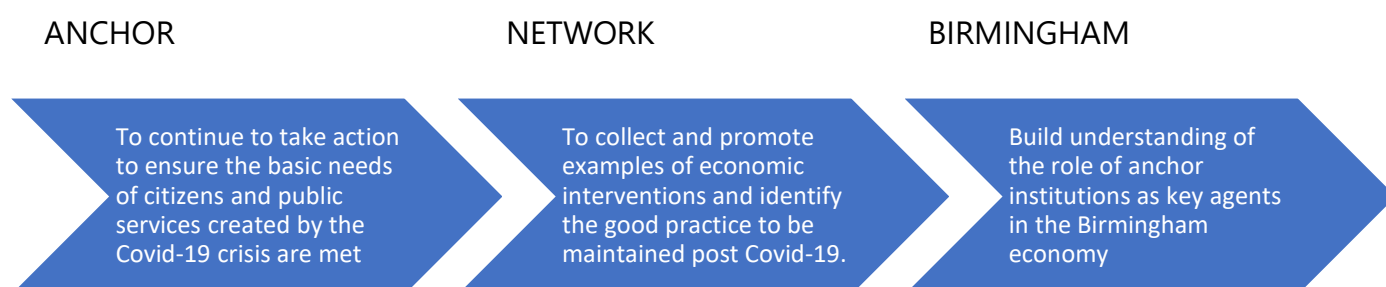
# Summary of Network activity for rescue, recovery and reform of the Birmingham economy, 2020-2021

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The Anchor Network was formed with the intention of collaborating to shape a more inclusive and equitable city economy. 'Rescue' has demonstrated the capacity of the anchor institutions to intervene at pace and scale in the city economy to ensure basic needs are met and critical public services safeguarded.

## STEP 1 - RESCUE ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES:

Members of the Birmingham Anchor Network have been active in the Rescue phase in ways that can underpin the Network's approach to Recovery and then Reform. Examples of these are set out in Appendix One.



## Activity:

- Co-ordinator to maintain regular contact with designated representatives from each Network partner
- Co-ordination Group to prepare a report, documenting the contribution of all members to economic rescue goals

## STEP 2 - RECOVERY ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES:

The Recovery action plan will focus on two of the pillars of Community Wealth Building (CWB) - procurement and employment.



Detailed briefs for the first two projects can be found in Appendix 2 and 3.

As well as delivering direct support to neighbourhoods in recovery these projects are intended to support the development of new practice by Network members, including:

- Develop shared tools, processes and policies to direct spending power and employment to support recovery and reform of the economy
- Contribute to the adoption of similar approaches in other key community wealth building projects, such as the East Birmingham Inclusive Growth Strategy and the Commonwealth Games.

### STEP 3 - REFORM ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES:

The Reform action will look to turn the positive lessons from Recovery into sustainable change in procurement and employment practice and also connect the progress of the Anchor Network with the broader Birmingham and West Midland Community Wealth Building agenda.

#### ANCHOR

To apply the good practice developed during 'Recovery' and embed across the Network organisations

#### NETWORK

To make the Network a key contributor to the partnerships shaping the recovery of Birmingham's economy post Covid-19.

#### BIRMINGHAM

Anchor institutions play a prominent role in rebuilding a city economy which is more equal and secure

# Appendix 1: Examples of Rescue actions

The following list is far from comprehensive but demonstrates the capacity of participating Anchors to intervene at pace and scale to ensure basic needs are met, correct market failure and critical public services safeguarded.

Meeting basic needs, especially for the vulnerable:

- Pioneer Group and BVT supporting the setup and co-ordination of community support activity in multiple neighbourhoods.
- BVT co-ordinating food parcel delivery
- WMPCC producing an emergency action plan including redeployment of staff to:
  - Respond to crimes escalating due to Covid-19
  - Protect essential workers
  - Prevent the spread of disease.
- BCC repurposing Ladywood Community Centre for food distribution
- Aston University redistributing catering supplies to homeless charities.
- BCC repurposing hotels to rehouse the homeless
- Pioneer Group re-deploying staff to meet needs of newly identified vulnerable groups.
- UoB medical student volunteers.

Addressing critical supply needs

- BCC sourcing vital PPE, in collaboration with other West Midlands Local Authorities, enabling support to the regional care sector
- UoB and Aston University using lab space to make hand sanitiser for care staff
- Aston University redeploying PPE to Birmingham Children's Hospital
- Pioneer Group distributing hot meals to the vulnerable from local restaurants.
- UoB re-purposing laboratory facilities to support hospital activity (testing, clinical trials)

Providing Emergency advice and support to businesses and workers

- Aston University creating podcasts for SME's to guide them through the financial support on offer.
- University Hospital Trust continuing to recruit staff.
- West Midlands Police continuing to recruit.
- BCC offering Business rates support.
- Aston University re-purposing conference facilities to support key workers needing to self-isolate.
- Pioneer Group using their expertise to pursue funding for front line charities and groups.
- UoB repurposing the University Hotel for NHS staff.
- BVT supporting commercial sector through management of over 100 shop unit leases.



# Appendix 2: Employment Project brief

## Birmingham Anchor Network – Recovery Employment Project Brief

### Introduction

The Birmingham Anchor Network is a partnership of seven institutions that are looking to find ways to use the assets they have available (procurement budgets, employment opportunities, underutilised assets) to help create a fairer, more just and sustainable economy for the residents of Birmingham. To help progress this work the Network is looking to launch a pilot Community Wealth Building (CWB) employment project and, in the light of Covid-19, the ambition is to link this project with the attempts that will come to re-launch the Birmingham economy once the lockdown ends.

### Method

- To identify a lead partner from the Network to deliver the project.
- To identify Network partners with employment opportunities ready to be advertised post pandemic lockdown.
- To establish a working group of employment leads from the other six Network partners.
- The working group will have the joint role of both supporting the lead partner develop and deliver the project while, at the same time, learning from the project with aim of identifying a further six employment projects to be launched in relatively quick order.
- Project developed for launch the moment the timing is appropriate.
- Project delivered.
- Evidence of impact and lessons learned collected by working group and disseminated to Network Co-ordination Group/Institution senior management.

### Opportunity

WMPCC and UHT both have current employment campaigns. Pioneer Group support a community (Castle Vale plus other possible neighbourhoods) that has been hit hard by the economic shutdown. Pioneer Group also has an experienced employment advice team. This will be an opportunity to link a specific neighbourhood with city wide employment opportunities. Not only will this help Pioneer Group get their community back to work it will also help WMPCC and UHT learn how to engage disadvantaged neighbourhoods in their recruitment campaigns.

### Outcomes

- Shared good practice by the working group in helping to set up the project.
- Methodology developed for setting up targeted employment pathways in neighbourhoods particularly disadvantaged by Covid-19.
- Case study of "what works" and impact.
- Pioneer Group with a proven methodology to connect to other city-wide employment opportunities.
- Pilot projects developed with the six other network partners.

## Proposed Timeline/Milestones

### May

- Work with WMPCC and UHT to fully understand the employment opportunities on offer, the candidates they are looking for and their recruitment process
- Pioneer Group map out their employment support process and test potential take-up.

### June

- Work with WMPCC and UHT to identify potential pitfalls.
- Pioneer Group identify potential barriers for their community.

### July

- Employment pathway and process that will address pitfalls/barriers agreed by all partners.
- Training course developed for potential candidates (CV writing, interview technique etc.)
- Training course starts.

### August

- Training course for potential candidates completed.
- Alternative pathway developed for those interested but not likely to be eligible this time around (work experience, PCSO's, social care, college courses?).

### September

- Recruitment campaigns launched.

# Appendix 3: Procurement Project brief

## Birmingham Anchor Network – Recovery Procurement Project Brief

### Introduction

The Birmingham Anchor Network is a partnership of seven institutions that are looking to find ways to use the assets they have available (procurement budgets, employment opportunities, underutilised assets) to help create a fairer, more just and sustainable economy for the residents of Birmingham. To help progress this work the Network is looking to launch a pilot Community Wealth Building (CWB) procurement project and, in the light of Covid-19, the ambition is to link this project with the attempts that will come to re-launch the Birmingham Economy once the lockdown ends.

### Method

- To identify a lead partner from the Network with a procurement opportunity created by the pandemic lockdown.
- To establish a working group of procurement leads from the other six Network partners.
- The working group will have the joint role of both supporting the lead partner develop and deliver the project while, at the same time, learning from the project with aim of identifying a further six procurement projects to be launched in relatively quick order.
- Working group will also identify a sector for spend where the combined purchasing/commissioning power of the Network may be able to shape a high social value local supply chain, with initial scoping work focusing on PPE
- Project developed for launch the moment the timing is appropriate
- Project delivered
- Evidence of impact and lessons learned collected by working group and disseminated to Network Co-ordination Group/Institution senior management.

### Opportunity

Bournville Village Trust (BVT) is already looking planning how the organisation is going to move out of 'rescue' into 'recovery'. Due to the lockdown the organisation has had to stop the procurement/delivery of certain services. This has created the opportunity to use a sector of spend for the network to develop good practice in how to contract with high social value businesses once the lockdown is lifted. Not only could this help BVT localise the spend of a particular budget but could also provide a lifeline to small, local firms hit by the slow down to the economy.

### Outcomes

- Procurement project(s) launched by BVT.
- Shared good practice by the working group in helping to set up the project(s).
- Methodology developed for contracting with high CWB value SME's.
- Case study of "what works" and impact.
- BVT with the opportunity to roll out the approach to other procurement opportunities.
- Pilot projects developed with the six other network partners.
- Identification of a shared sector of spend by the Working Group where market shaping (i.e. to encourage/support growth of high social value businesses) may be possible – for example, the new market for PPE.

## Proposed Timeline/Milestones

### May

- BVT identifies a particular budget/sector for the pilot.
- BVT calculates scale of the opportunity.

### June

- Work with BVT procurement team to identify potential pitfalls.
- High social value firms in the pilot sector are identified, contacted and feedback on potential barriers collated.

### July

- Social Value Procurement Framework developed with BVT procurement team.
- Training course developed for firms (in partnership with BSLEP/Commonwealth games model?) to address identified pitfalls and barriers.
- Training course starts.

### August

- Social Value Procurement Framework developed approved by BVT Board.
- Training course for construction firms completed.

### September

- Procurement opportunities advertised.