

## **Brussels Office**

### **1. Current and future activities and benefits to the city**

- 1.1 The Brussels Office, sitting under the direct management of the Head of European and International Affairs, continues to support the wider priorities for the Council in terms of its European engagement. It directly supports its engagement with Eurocities and often hosts key Eurocities meetings and events with the European institutions. It also continues to provide early support, advice and intelligence on important funding opportunities as well as provide up to date and emerging policy and legislative intelligence relevant to the Council and its priorities. It also provides the perfect base to broker project and partnership meetings, events, workshops and wider engagement with other cities and key stakeholders from around Europe. A more comprehensive presentation of benefits are detailed at para 1.7
- 1.2 The region's leading universities are, equally, heavily involved in the European science and technology exchange. All universities undertake teaching of foreign students in the UK, while a number are also establishing overseas-based teaching faculties. Overseas alumni networks also exist in many countries.
- 1.3 The office manages Service Level Agreements delivering activities on behalf of the universities at the European level. The office provides services derived from its presence in Brussels where that presence provides a clear added value for activities that the universities are not able to carry out themselves from abroad. This includes the provision of privileged intelligence on EU policy, programmes and funding opportunities; capacity building and profile raising with European institutions and other Brussels-based organisations; liaison with European institutions and key stakeholders; assistance with the development of strategic partnerships and the use of the Brussels conference and office facilities.
- 1.4 In the 2018/19 financial year the Brussels Office delivered:
- 140 events
  - Welcoming 2300 people

In 2018 and 2019 combined the office hosted more than 140 profile-raising events. Ranging from meetings for successful EU-funded projects and targeted workshops to big conferences involving our extensive network of European policymakers, representatives of big corporates and other key Brussels-based stakeholders. Over the course of this period, over 2300 people from both the UK and Europe have participated, thus raising the visibility of all our partners with the European Union Institutions and business community based in the European capital (note figures for 2019/20 are not yet published).

### **Post Brexit Environment**

- 1.5 When the United Kingdom becomes a third country in its relations with the EU, it will become more vital to have a strong regional presence in Brussels, in order to ensure that the interests of businesses, universities, local authorities and other stakeholders from the West Midlands continue to be represented. The prominent representation of Norway and Switzerland in Brussels show that it is essential as a third country to be on the spot to facilitate fruitful cooperation with EU Member States. To be regarded as a key player and sought-after partner

on the international stage, a physical presence in Brussels is simply a prerequisite and leaving European collaboration would cause substantial reputational damage.

1.6 Moreover, Brussels is more than just the home of the European Union. It is also:

- Home to key international organisations, such as NATO, World Customs Organisation (WCO), ...
- Strategic base for numerous trade associations and representative bodies of the United Nations, UNESCO, UNHCR, WHO, ILO, Red Cross, ...
- Home to European headquarters for many international companies, including major players like Google, Microsoft, Toyota, ...
- A principal financial centre: the worldwide Headquarters of SWIFT, EIB, IMF and World Bank representative offices
- Jaguar Land Rover also has a base in Brussels and was co-located in our Brussels Office.

1.7 The future role of the office in Brussels will therefore focus on acting as the key support base in Europe for the City Council and West Midlands' stakeholders providing:

- Early intelligence on EU legislation impacting UK organisations, spanning a wide range of policy areas (automotive, energy, health and safety, environment, trade, financial services, etc.)
- Research & Development
  - International collaboration (Horizon Europe, partnership-building)
  - Student recruitment and exchange possibilities through European University Networks
  - Intellectual property and patent commercialisation
  - Academic support programmes and dissemination of research output
  - Alumni networking
  - Bilateral research development
- Trade development
  - Intelligence on EU markets, lead generation
  - Participation in trade fairs and hosting of trade delegations
  - European and NATO trade associations in Brussels o Meeting and conference space ☐  
Promotion & marketing
  - Sponsoring opportunities and specific promotions (food & drinks)
  - Representative office in Brussels
  - Marketing of products and services from the region
- Access to funding opportunities
  - Early intelligence on relevant opportunities Targeted information on calls for proposals
  - Advice and guidance on eligibility
- Region to region partnerships and agreements
  - The West Midlands region is larger than 10 EU member states and comparable to many other regions in Europe. To date the regions cities have developed a number of formal partner city agreements and currently participate in a large number of EU level projects,

partnership and networks such as Eurocities, the largest network of European cities. Through both the formal partnerships and the EU networks the response from European partners in terms of sustaining UK engagement in pro-active and collaborative projects, programmes and other strategic opportunities has been overwhelming. Brussels is home to over 200 European regions and the opportunity to capitalise in this market-place and foster these opportunities is significant, particularly in forging relationships for the purpose of transferring knowledge and best practice.

- Influencing Policy and Legislative decision making affecting the City
  - Birmingham and the West Midlands' presence in Brussels both through a dedicated office and through the City's aligned Executive position in Eurocities provides crucial access to decision making not available to the UK Government. Whilst the UK government loses its seat at the European Council, through our direct engagement in Eurocities in particular, we are able to directly influence EU policy and legislation. Similarly, our other city to city partnerships, networks and projects can also enable influence to key policy and legislative decisions taken by the EU, such as those in environmental, manufacturing, transport, employment etc standards that will impact our daily life and ability to trade with Europe. This is a significant benefit not widely understood.