

A Report to:

City Region Shadow Executive Board

Metropolitan Urban Core Councils of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Telford, Walsall and Wolverhampton; Advantage West Midlands; West Midlands Regional Assembly; Learning & Skills Council; Business Representative

Research and identify options for the name of 'Our City Region'

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Introduction

The seven Metropolitan Councils (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton) have worked together on a collective basis for some twenty years through the West Midlands Joint Committee and joint Leaders meetings following the abolition of the West Midlands Metropolitan County Council in 1986.

In the last five years there has been a much higher degree of co-operative working on policy matters. This has been stimulated by the work undertaken by Birmingham as one of the eight English Core Cities; the increased emphasis on the creation of city regions (particularly in reports from Government, the Institute for Public Policy Research/Centre for Cities and a range of academic works); and by the high priority attached to transport investment across the metropolitan area.

City region means the functional economic city, defined by its Travel to Work Area (TTWA).

City region or functional economic city is the economic footprint of a city – the area over which key economic markets, such as labour markets as measured by travel to work areas, housing markets and retail markets, operate. City regions are the enlarged territories from which core urban areas draw people for work and services such as shopping, education, leisure and entertainment. The city regional scale also plays a significant role for business in organising supply chains and accessing producer services.

*Devolving decision making: 3 - Meeting the regional economic challenge:
The importance of cities to regional growth; HM Treasury, ODPM, DTI; March
2006.*

This co-operation has now been extended by a political agreement between the Metropolitan Councils and Telford and Wrekin Borough to form a 'metropolitan urban core' city region.

However, while this co-operative working is being extended and developed more strongly, there is an essential need for a name to be devised which would reflect this new City Region. The chief executives and Leaders of Councils therefore commissioned this research to identify the 'name' of the City Region and to make recommendations for consideration by the Shadow Executive Board of 'Our City Region.'

The IPPR/Centre for Cities Report on City Leadership stated: "...Birmingham is seen as overly dominant by other local authorities, some of whom would not recognise the 'Greater Birmingham' name for the wider city-region.....Council leaders are thought to be too parochial, and lacking the strategic perspective needed to drive forward the metropolitan economy...."

The research specification for this project specifically used the word 'name' with just one reference to 'brand.' This immediately raises questions about the audiences with which the City Region must relate, the lifetime of the 'name' and communication protocols.

It is clear that the City Region should not lead to confusion with present day or historic entities in the same or overlapping area. There is clearly sensitivity towards diluting the brands of City Region partners. Finding a solution to the name also raises questions about future proofing.

The Draft Outline of the City Region Development Plan lays out a compelling vision. However, it is not clear what approach will be taken to communicating that vision. Much of the vision and, in particular the key drivers, will have much in common with other city regions across the country. The extent, or lack, of communication responsibilities which fall under the named entity will have an impact on the process of identification and arriving at a distinctive title.

Experience demonstrates that to succeed any new brand or communication campaign needs to achieve resonance with their stakeholders and target audiences. In line with good marketing practice, the 'name' or brand must hold truth, honesty and integrity. Otherwise, it will simply fail. The focus of our work in this project has been, therefore, to identify viable 'name' options in the short term and point to the basis of a brand for the longer term. This must have minimal diluting impact on City Region partners, their brands and established terms and provide greatest opportunity for building a sense of ownership and understanding among stakeholders and target audiences.

Executive Summary

From the research, there is an overwhelming majority in favour of using a 'place locator', as opposed to a 'value definer,' in naming the City Region. As many participants highlighted, all international experience points to a 'geographic locator' being crucial.

The strengths, values and role of 'Birmingham' are more widely appreciated than might have been anticipated at the start of this research. There is broad consensus on the role of 'Birmingham' as the international locator and hub in the City Region, but timing and implementation are critical.

There are behavioural, brand, perception and size issues in relation to 'Birmingham.' The 'capital' of the City Region will need to identify steps to ensure and actively demonstrate it does not dominate in the same way as the UK's capital does on the country at large.

If 'Birmingham' were to be adopted, the brand must be constructed to carry a wider meaning, in values as well as the physical area it describes. In other words, it must clearly be '*Greater than Birmingham*', not '*Birmingham is Greater*'.

Communication and engagement currently represents a significant barrier to progress, both in terms of the city region model generally and this development in particular. Business and other stakeholders have not, thus far, been "engaged....not excited." A clear and compelling narrative for the City Region needs to be developed. There is a "huge sell job" to be done.

There is, we believe, a link between the problem being investigated by this report – in particular the “*apparent antipathy towards terms such as ‘Birmingham City Region’ and ‘Greater Birmingham’*” - and a pure economic interpretation of the City Region boundary. If economic and political cartographers draw different maps, it will affect the sense of place and identity. Academic contributors to this report and some existing research and policy papers locate Coventry differently in terms of city region economic geography.

Multiple identities are an increasingly common feature, not a new phenomenon. They are not necessarily incompatible or contradictory. Citizens can, for example, already wave the flags of St. George and the Union without facing in two different directions. The same principles can apply to city/borough, sub region and City Region. In a world of globalisation there will, as one contributor expressed it, be “dual, triple lines of activity everywhere.....We must be mature and accept linkages.”

Research highlighted in this report suggests city branding works best when there is a unified purpose and vision. City branding models are usually adopted to disregard negative images, but “a mass of identities and activities will cause difficulty, making it even more important for the brand to be rooted and achieve resonance with stakeholders.”

It is clear to us that further work on developing the City Region needs to be done before a total brand approach can be taken. In particular, communication and engagement need to be stepped up so stakeholders are more clearly aware of the background evidence; purpose; the means for achieving stated objectives and the relationships – in accountability and identity terms – between the City Region and cities/boroughs and sub-regions. Furthermore, the impact of using Birmingham in the brand needs detailed assessment and planning, both in respect of the brand relationship between the City of Birmingham and the City Region and addressing behavioral, perception and size issues.

The risks of not using the established international locator or “hub” in the brand should not be underestimated. Whitehall, large sections of the business community and some parts of the press will be bewildered, if not scathing in their assessment. However, it is also appreciated that other stakeholders - notably but not exclusively in Coventry – will have equally strong opinions if Birmingham was to appear immediately.

It should be appreciated that, regardless of the decision taken by the Shadow Executive Board, references including 'Birmingham' will be adopted through common usage to ascribe the City Region. It would be futile, not to say counterproductive, to attempt to stop use of such language.

It is possible to foresee the development of different, but related, brands in the work of the City Region, addressing different audiences across different workstreams. In addition, identifying an ideal matrix of current identities - such as the Black Country and Coventry and Warwickshire - and how they would be applied in the era of the City Region would be a positive step.

Having studied the evidence in the short time available and against the background set out in this report, we recommend a two-stage process to naming and branding.

First, we suggest the adoption of an *administrative title* for the City Region. It would be used on all official documentation and formal agreements. It would, in essence, be the equivalent of a holding company name, rather than a brand name. Diageo rather than Guinness; Carlson Inc. rather than Radisson Hotels.

Such a solution will allow time and space for reflection, further debate, detailed study and in depth, professional brand and communication work. In the meantime, however, we recommend that the Shadow Executive Board accepts the use of 'Birmingham' as the key brand proposition in terms of strategic, international business and investment activity.

We detail five shortlisted options for the name of 'Our City Region.'

| | |
|----|--|
| 1. | a) Greater Birmingham b) Birmingham City Region c) Birmingham and the City Region d) The City Region & Birmingham |
| 2. | Heart of England |
| 3. | Central England |
| 4. | Central City Region |
| 5. | New England |

Accountability and governance for the City Region cannot be developed in isolation from brand and identity considerations, as is currently the case. Reaching the right form of governance and decision making in the interests of economic growth for the City Region are at the heart of the challenge. Agreeing a name and investing in communication will be the first tests.

In making a decision on the name and future progress, we suggest the Shadow Executive Board also notes some of the following comments from contributors: "it's about the market, not the producers; [we need to be] outward rather than inward [focussed]." In successful city regions around the world, branding – as one leading academic highlighted - is best targeted towards investment markets and specialised labour markets, not consumers or local residents. As another participant in this research said: "There is nothing more damaging than a bad (or compromised) brand."

City Region Shadow Executive Board's Research Specification

Principles

There is currently no unanimity of view on what the name of the city region should be. There is an apparent antipathy towards terms such as 'Birmingham City Region' and 'Greater Birmingham.' Equally there is no enthusiasm towards the 're-creation' of a 'West Midlands City region' which bring connotations of the former West Midlands Metropolitan County Council.

Therefore some key principles are suggested in designing a "name" for our city-region. These principles are aimed at helping the process to define and gain acceptance of a 'name' or description for our city-region. These principles are:

- It should describe the future dynamic and Vision of this city-region.
- It should reflect the fact that the city-region will reflect social and economic realities and extend beyond the current boundaries of the Metropolitan urban core authorities
- It should be capable of global interpretation and [be capable] of [being] recognised internationally as well as nationally, regionally and locally
- It should be capable of being used as a 'vehicle' which complements the "brands" of the city-region partners in future activity.
- It should clarify and not confuse the difference between the West Midlands Region (as expressed by the GO admin boundaries) and the 'old' West Midlands County Council boundary.

Process

This exercise should draw on:

- The available documents which have already been prepared on our city-region
- The views of the Leaders of the [eight] Metropolitan Councils, neighbouring authorities, business stakeholders, Regional Assembly, other stakeholders, regional bodies such as AWM, MPs and MEPs, etc.

It is anticipated that an initial desk analysis in line with the principles set out above will be undertaken to provide a research base of understanding of the city-region in the various marketplaces – locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. This will draw on readily available research undertaken by Marketing Birmingham, other sub-regional marketing bodies, AWM Regional Marketing Strategy work, and national opinion work.

This will be followed by work to ascertain views of possible options for 'names' with key stakeholders identified above.

The final presentation will set down preferred 'name' options coupled with a rationale behind the recommendations as to choice.

Methodology

Data and evidence gathering was conducted using the following methodologies:

- extensive desk research;
- face-to-face and telephone interviews with Executive Board members or their alternates, some Programme Board members; other key partners and academic or other 'experts';
- a brief survey among a sample of other stakeholders (eg. business support groups, Shires representative).

A full list of Contributors can be found at Appendix IV; see Appendix V for Bibliography and References. Appendix I contains the Stakeholder Survey responses.

In total, we conducted nearly thirty interviews; received a variety of informal contributions via email and received four responses to the stakeholder survey. In addition to meetings and telephone consultations with the Project Director, Urban also attended meetings of Core Policy Officers and Heads of Communication.

Following consultation with the 'Our City Region' Project Director, we discarded our original plan to conduct research among both members of the public and MPs. In addition to time constraints, and as we highlight later in this report, plans are not sufficiently developed or communicated to have achieved a reasonable level of appreciation among the wider public. Meanwhile, there are issues in relation to support from MPs which need to be addressed before involving them at a detailed level in naming and branding issues.

Our approach was to conduct personal or telephone interviews on the basis of confidentiality. We therefore do not attribute quotes in this report, unless granted specific permission to do so or if the comments were made in public or in writing. This has ensured frank exchanges with contributors and access to latest developments and thinking.

This research project cannot claim to be a comprehensive brand process. There has been no discussion of a shared vision with a wide enough range of stakeholders or residents over a long enough period to qualify. However, we hope this report provides a good starting point for a continuing debate and ongoing work on important brand and communication considerations for 'Our City Region.'

Research Findings

This section is structured through a series of themes. They cover existing evidence drawn from research and policy papers; represent the main discussion topics and areas of comment during the research phase and those issues which – we believe – contribute most to the naming and branding debate.

The Case for 'Our City Region'

The economic and academic evidence for the city region model is compelling. A series of research papers and reports have been analysing the increasing importance of cities as the economic drivers and the interconnected role of their surrounding urban metropolitan areas.

If communicated properly, extensively and with passion, the city region model would be “persuasive” commented a key business representative. However, to date the debate has been limited to a small number of stakeholders and experts – Council Leaders, chief executives, policy officers and external policy ‘works’ and academic experts.

The starting point for identifying options for the name is the vision and purpose of the City Region in the West Midlands. As one local authority chief executive expressed it, the fundamental questions are “what do we want to achieve; what do we want to become; what are we about; what is our ambition.” So, what is it? What will it achieve? What does it want to say? What will be the competitive advantage?

There is a striking consensus on the objectives for ‘Our City Region.’ All international experience points to economic development, transport and housing as the key policy areas in the city region mix. As one academic put it, “other aspects don’t need to be covered.” One local authority chief executive outside of Birmingham said: “I buy the concept of Core Cities as economic drivers – our future growth is inextricably linked to the urban core.” The focus has to be, as one Policy Officer said: “increasing GVA [Gross Value Added].”

Among those we canvassed, the role of 'Our City Region' was seen to address:

- **Transport**, the unanimous choice among contributors who want the City Region to be given powers and resources to deal with redevelopment of New Street Station, expansion of Birmingham International Airport, address road pricing and the Metro. As one chief executive put it: "the TIF [Transport Innovation Fund] could radically alter the landscape."
- **Skills**, as one public official stated: "we could provide the solution to UK productivity..." and mark a "change from process to employability." Another sees the City Region leading to a "tighter integration between employment and skills" and will see the "skills issue move up the agenda".

Also seen by some as priorities for the City Region were:

- **Research & Development**
- **Science & Innovation**
- **Graduate Retention**

One business representative laid down the aspiration that, through the adoption of the City Region, the area would become the best in which to establish a business; business start ups (seen as a weakness by some contributors) would rise and business failures decrease.

Critical success factors quoted by many included the City Region's universities and its airport. Experience - as identified in previous research and by contributors to this study - show that universities are "fundamental to most successful knowledge based city regions." Modern, dynamic city regions have strong links between "advanced firms, city authorities and higher education and research institutes, especially those [city regions] outside capitals..." commented an academic contributor. The research capability at universities needs to be "closer to commercial exploitation" with "improved [access] to the research base" added another participant.

The name of 'Birmingham International Airport' was argued for strongly, said one contributor, when it was developed from Elmdon in preference to 'West Midlands Airport'. Anecdotal evidence highlights Rolls Royce international business visitors flying to Birmingham rather than, as it was simply then, 'East Midlands Airport' because Birmingham as a location was quickly identified on a map as being close to Derby. Airports are a primary driver for cities, with speed of access from touchdown to ultimate destination vital. As one contributor commented, this factor has been: "key to Blythe Valley [Business Park, Solihull]".

There is also an increasing priority being given to culture, which is seen to both enhance community cohesion and help develop and promote city region image and identity. As one academic commented, "culture is one of the main ways of expressing identity." One participant said: "all evidence shows cities/city-regions have a strong cultural offer...it stretches minds, [makes them an attractive] place to live ...and opens creativity." However, as another contributor added: "we need to package the cultural offer."

One Council Leader summed up the goal for many as simply: "to loosen [Whitehall's] fiscal controls." Another official described local and central government: "out of balance....a mess....with an overly powerful civil service."

However, an academic expressed disappointment with the quality and depth of City Region Development Plan (CRDP) to date, whilst one business representative asked if the City Region would pass the "8 into 1" test. On the CRDP, he felt business had not been "engaged; not excited."

Values and Assets

If developing a brand, identifying the values and assets is a key starting point. We also wanted to see whether any of the values ascribed to the City Region by contributors might, in themselves, lead to a name.

"Nobody can beat location" said one Council Leader with the ability to evidence such a claim. The most quoted values and assets were:

- Connectivity & Location (particularly when allied with facilities, becoming the meeting place; proximity to London and the South East seen as a positive to "take the heat" out of that region)
- Innovation
- Young and Diverse Population
- The UK's Economic powerhouse, with a strong story of reinvention now featuring hi-tech, high growth industries along with growing creative and professional services sectors
- Exciting and attractive Urban/Metropolitan area

AWM's 'Governing Idea' developed ahead of its Marketing the Region campaign, laid down three underlying values:

- Connected
- Centred
- Genius

Whilst, as one contributor pointed out, the demographics are different in the City Region compared to the RDA region, these values still hold true in 'Our City Region.' Indeed, one local authority official sees "connected" as the City Region's defining value.

As one communications professional put it, the City Region features “down to earth people, who make things, are creative and demonstrate ‘industry’ and are a willing and flexible workforce.” One contributor commented Birmingham’s founding value of being “non-conformist” and at the seat of “municipal” development and “manufacturing” continue to have places today in shaping the City Region.

Locator v Definer

The specification for this research stated that the name: *“should be capable of global interpretation and of [being] recognised internationally as well as nationally, regionally and locally.”* We wanted to ascertain views on whether the City Region needed to be named using a ‘geographic locator’ or a ‘value definer.’ There was an overwhelming majority in favour of using a place locator. As many participants highlighted, all international experience points to a geographic locator being critical. Silicon Valley is the exception which effectively proves the rule. “Got to be geographic location if global recognition is the aim” said one Leader, with another council executive commenting the name: “has to be capable of being internationally focused.” Meanwhile, one well placed public official suggested the name “must have punch in order to secure the financial resources being sought.”

In turn, most of these cited Birmingham as the obvious and only such ‘place locator’. “It is felt that value definers mean nothing and encourage the futile belief that brand names mean new perceptions” said the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce survey response. “Surely the issue of suspicion between some of the metropolitan districts needs to be resolved once and for all before we can achieve a successful, working City Region.” We return to the Birmingham ‘question’ later in this section.

Among the responses from several senior council officials, we heard: “couldn’t have a name that doesn’t reflect the place”; “people must connect to and resonate with City Region”; the “starting point has to be with a strong sense of place” and, said another: “a positive image.”

Jon Baldwin, Registrar of the University of Warwick, said in his submission:

"Although tempting, I think it unlikely that you will find an alternative single brand which satisfies all areas of the city region. In any case, 'Our City Region' is diverse, and might be better presented through a number of successful brands – Shakespeare's Stratford; Workshop of the World (Jewellery Quarter); City of Peace and Reconciliation (Coventry)... I can think of only 'Silicon Valley' which successfully uses a single brand to encompass its entire offer and this would be somewhat limiting – and wrong – for 'Our City Region.' I guess I'm somewhat surprised that the [Shadow Executive Board] is tackling branding so early in the process before reflecting fully on the dynamics of the City Region and how it will function. There is nothing more damaging than a bad (or compromised) brand. And even the discussion could turn out to be a massive distraction at this stage!"

According to a senior marketer in the region, a "sense of place" and "pride [in the entire RDA region] does not exist in same way as, say, Yorkshire.....People are not comfortable with the totality of the territory." The West Midlands 'brand' is seen as a problem by many. "Tarnished....not capable of reinvention" said one contributor; "artificial" said another. Indeed, one official described the difficulty even with branding the West Midlands Pension Fund, needing a map to accompany the logo. The West Midlands is "not a known brand", further highlighted in one story of Whitehall officials needing a map to be drawn for them ahead of the 'Our City Region' presentation to David Miliband. Awareness and perceptions of the West Midlands is covered further in Appendix II.

Communication and Engagement

Press coverage "demonstrates a failure, to date, to articulate the economic and social case for city region modelling and planning." Meanwhile, another contributor suggested: "Communication has been about structures, not outcomes." The lack of public debate, suggested one participant was: "a symptom of our lack of confidence." However, it is "populist" and "simplistic to look at putting everything in one pot" which, in the view of one senior public official, newspapers had done so far on the City Region debate.

A lack of communication and engagement is a significant obstacle, we found, to identifying and agreeing upon a name which chimes with the vision. As we touched on earlier, the debate so far has been limited to “the leadership, executive and policy circle.” The challenge is to widen the debate beyond Chief Executives, Leaders and policy ‘wonks.’

We need to be “better at telling the story” said a business representative. We need “compelling arguments for how the City Region is going to deliver the goods” commented a senior council officer. There has to be a “narrative...[on] transport, skills and housing.... Manchester has 20 years on us and has better political structures” contributed one well placed source. Another senior public official complained, “I’m fed up at people being surprised at how good Birmingham and the region is.”

A business representative added the City Region is “not being sold, so [the business community] doesn’t understand. Benefits would be seen if communicated.” Another council officer added: “if people felt positive, it would be good... [but] investors are the market.”

In the IPPR/CfC’s *City Leadership* report, which included a case study on the ‘Greater Birmingham’ City Region, it said: “stakeholders still have a hazy understanding of what [city regions] are; leading to disagreement about what they actually do....Voters do not currently identify with city-regions. That is a problem. Voter apathy presents a serious barrier to the development of accountable city regions. The benefits of city-regional governance need to be promoted: more investment, more jobs, transport improvements, and better service delivery.”

As more than one contributor commented, there is a “huge sell job” to be done.

Accountability and Leadership

In fundamental terms, city regions are emerging via partnerships between local authorities and other agencies alongside the devolution of finance and powers from central government. From our research, it is clear that the focus among those developing 'Our City Region' is primarily on the Whitehall end of the spectrum, with less attention being given to the practical consequences of 'shared sovereignty.'

The spectre of elected mayors being imposed by Government is concentrating local political minds. It is not within the remit of this report to comment on the attractiveness, or otherwise, of that model. As the *Our Cities are Back* report stated: "Experience elsewhere shows that national Government has a key role in incentivising the development of voluntary institution building across city regions – but in England the necessary in-depth understanding of the potential of city-regions has not yet been developed."

As one agency official put it: "the instinct is to get hold of money....there is a yawning gap between the rhetoric and political reality." The main aim, said one, is "devolved power from Whitehall" with one Leader summing up the view of most in seeking a loosening of "controls on funding." One official wanted the City Region partners to become "joined at the hip" like Job Centre Plus and the Learning and Skills Councils.

We have been strongly impressed by the consensus and shared purpose that exists among political leaders (of all colours), senior officers and other partners. As one local authority chief executive said: the "Leaders have always seen the bigger picture...they rub along together [regardless of party politics]." It is also clear the first presentation to David Miliband was well received and impressed, if not surprised, officials. It is understood that Whitehall likes the use of the Regional Economic Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Assembly in the City Region Development Plan. However, there is a perception that Government is not yet satisfied on governance.

That the hardest test for 'Our City Region' will be governance was stated by several contributors. As one business community figure put it: "we'll give it two years to prove itself [capable of making the hard decisions]." Developing trust among partners and reducing territorial tendencies within authorities and agencies are seen as the key challenges by many participants in our research. A number of contributors had doubts on whether such trust and collective decision making would prove possible.

As many participants concurred, accountability and identity are close cousins. One council official suggested: "identity works when [the] governance construct is clear." There is a danger of creating a "disconnect" between the governance structures and developing an identity for the City Region. As one local authority chief executive expressed it, there is a "strong anchor in local accountability" with a different Council Leader adding "we are the democratic owners."

Professor Crouch at the University of Warwick said: "Because leadership and governance models for city regions are different and rarely map onto the leadership and governance of local authority structures, agreed terms of reference and dynamic new partnerships between all stakeholders are essential."

As Sir Michael Lyons has indicated to the Select Committee looking into regional government, there is a lot to be gained from voluntary and virtual rather than formal structures. There is no perceived British appetite for multiple levels of governance whilst many believe local government needs to be more confident and flexible. The difficulty in such an approach, as seen by some, will be to avoid multiple levels of scrutiny and slower - rather than faster - decision making.

"Where strong leadership exists, it works" said one policy officer. Meanwhile, another senior council official commented on City Region developments that "too much [is happening] behind closed doors – [it] needs to be more transparent."

Political v Economic Geography

City region partnerships are essentially constructed to deal with the mismatch between political/administrative boundaries and 'functional economic areas.' Professor Crouch at Warwick, who advises the OECD on 'metro' regions, explains that they are "functional economic areas which overlap with different administrative or political areas..... They are large agglomerations with a minimum concentrated population of at least 1.5 million. They often cover an area featuring more than one local government body...are characterised by both economic dynamism and social problems. No one authority has a capacity to deal with all issues. They feature a self-contained commuting (travel to work) area and define themselves economically on the movement of people living and working within the city region area.

"As such, the 'Birmingham City Region of tomorrow might look very different to the 'Birmingham City Region' of today. Links between firms are dense in city regions. Maps for such areas cannot be perfect or static. It is impossible to match up political and economic realities. It is relatively unusual, but not unique, for more than one city to be in a metro/city region, referred to as multi-polar city regions." It is, suggested Professor Crouch, "a question of political feasibility." As described in *Competitive European Cities: Where do the Core Cities Stand?* "territory and geography are variable – so should be institutions."

There is, we believe, a link between the problem being investigated by this report – in particular the "*apparent antipathy towards terms such as 'Birmingham City-Region' and 'Greater Birmingham'*" - and a pure economic interpretation of the City Region boundary.

According to one academic, the City Region should be "conurbation plus" with the "sphere of influence" extending to Bromsgrove, Redditch, South Staffordshire and North Warwickshire....and does not include Coventry. Therefore, the same contributor added, 'Our City Region' "as drawn is a partial solution only... [with] the Meriden Gap having a [real] affect."

In the CfC/IPPR paper, it suggested that the "Birmingham City Region" should: "start with the existing metropolitan area and add areas with strong economic links, reflecting labour market flows and travel to work areas and create best fit with local authority boundaries. Birmingham City Region would include Bromsgrove, Redditch, Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Tamworth and North Warwickshire."

In the Budget 2006 paper on '*Devolving decision making*', it listed 56 Primary Urban Areas, three of which are included in the 'Our City Region' area. It stated: "...Cities, such as Birmingham, have 'evolved' where two or more cities have grown up from being smaller independent settlements to form one larger metropolitan area, and where no one council has administrative control over the whole area.....The fuzziness of city-region boundaries – as illustrated in [overleaf] – suggests the need for flexibility in approaches to delivery of regional economic strategies through the city region and collaboration across city-regions." Drawing on Office of National Statistics data, 'Our City Region' includes four travel to work areas.

Whilst there are different interpretations of the boundaries for the City Region in the West Midlands, other links, historical associations and political judgements must also be factored into boundary making. However, it would be a misjudgement to ignore economic functionality and the affect it is having on interpretations of identity.

Nottingham metropolitan city



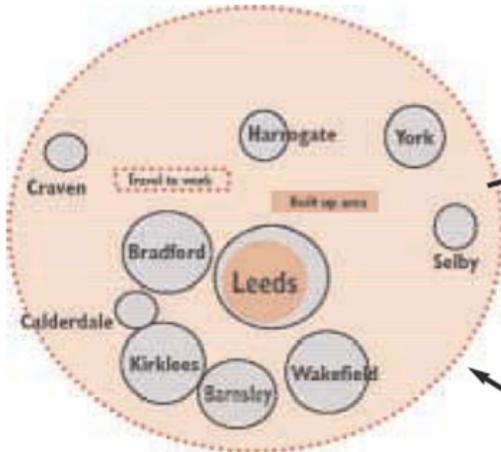
Nottingham is a classic example of under-bounding.

This means strategic decisions at the metropolitan level need to be taken across five District Councils and two County Councils

The footprint of the Nottingham economy overlaps with that of Derby and Leicester.

'The coincidence between administrative cities and city-regions varies'
Devolving decision making: 3 - Meeting the regional economic challenge; The importance of cities to regional growth; HMT/ODPM/DTI

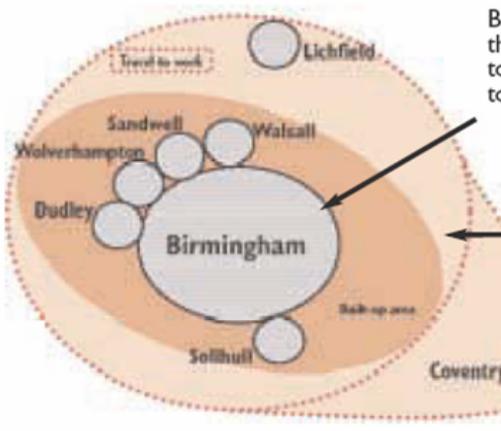
Leeds city-region



Leeds is a classic example of a well-bounded city. The City Council has a remit over the whole of the contiguous built up area of Leeds. This has advantages. For example, the Leeds Initiative has been a leading example of a strategic partnership operating across the city since the early 1990s.

Leeds has a relatively large and successful economy, with a significant economic footprint shown by its wide travel-to-work area. It is a major UK centre for finance, legal and business services. However, the long term success of the Leeds economy requires the capacity to capture the larger economic scale and the sharing of assets across the city-region.

Birmingham/West Midlands city-region



Birmingham is a classic example of where, through industrial development, existing towns and cities have grown and connected to form one large contiguous built-up area.

Birmingham has a large economic footprint illustrated by the travel-to-work area. Birmingham is also competing with the expanding London city-region and growth areas to the north (e.g. around Milton Keynes).

This is incentivising collaboration between cities in the metropolitan area and the travel-to-work area (e.g. the possible establishment of a city-regional executive board)

- This is the economic city-region, based on the travel-to-work area
- This is the municipal city boundary, an administrative and political definition
- This is the metropolitan city, a physical definition based on the contiguous built-up area

The Region, City Region and Sub-Regions

“The West Midlands is unusual in city region terms, having a number of cities and areas outside the capital city with strong public images” commented Professor Crouch. ‘Our City Region’ is certainly a multifaceted area with a collection of identities, cultures and allegiances. The question is whether these identities and senses of ownership are in conflict with, and mutually exclusive to, the evolution of a successful City Region model and brand.

The Black Country is a well established term, more understood with external audiences than the individual boroughs and recent developments with the Black Country Consortium and the Black Country Study have strengthened ties. However, different parts of the four boroughs clearly associate with the Black Country brand to various extents. Some areas are “effectively in Birmingham” said one council official, whilst some parts neither see themselves in the Black Country or are comfortable under the Birmingham umbrella. The Black Country term is used in some instances and with specific audiences. It would not be used, said one executive, to attract the upper socio-economic groups into the borough’s new housing. We have “got to operate on a bigger scale for the big things.” Sandwell, said one participant, has “always looked both ways.” The experience of this borough - and issues around its name - act as a microcosm case study for this project.

Sandwell – which incorporates six towns - was named in 1974 after a merger of the old West Bromwich and Warley Boroughs. Debate continued since then on whether Sandwell is the best name. The Borough's exact geographic location has seemed unclear to some within both the West Midlands region and nationally. From time to time, there have been discussions about a possible change of name. In 2002 a consultation exercise was commissioned by Council Leader Bill Thomas.

Although enjoying a good level of participation in the exercise, there was no mandate for change. Of those who voted for a change of name, 'West Bromwich' was the clear winner but there was not a sufficient number of votes to warrant a change. The exercise resulted in three key decisions: *to retain the name of Sandwell; give greater identity for the six towns and greater marketing effort to promote Sandwell and the individual towns.*

Different boundaries will be drawn for different things. We need to "work through what the City Region, the Black Country Consortium and individual boroughs will each do" said one official, whilst another politician suggested the Consortium would not exist in two years if the City Region model was successful. Another official thought the Black Country did not convey "enough ambition."

Meanwhile, recent years have seen the strategic partnership in Coventry and Warwickshire – built on economic geography – develop strongly. Coventry recognises it cannot "sell the city alone" without the tourist offers of Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick. Increasingly, the importance of the county of Warwickshire in the development of Coventry is growing with Milton Keynes and links into the South East an extended focus. The business community is, largely, "self sustainable" with sectors such as logistics particularly strong. It looks "locally for support" said one contributor, "has a narrow focus" added one participant, whilst another highlighted the fact that "40% of ICT businesses in the West Midlands are based in Warwickshire." One official described some attitudes locally as "parochial" and another highlighted the fact that businesses still look "toward Birmingham International Airport as their main airport."

Whilst complicated and sensitive, many contributors do not find such identities incompatible with the City Region model including, for a large number, carrying the Birmingham title. We have “got to overcome a sense of rivalry” said one contributor. In a world of globalisation, there will be “dual, triple lines of activity everywhere.We must be mature and accept linkages.”

As highlighted in Virgo and de Chernatony’s work on city branding, unified purpose and vision present the best chance of success. City branding models are usually adopted to disregard negative images, but a mass of identities and activities will cause difficulty, making it even more important for the brand to be rooted and achieve resonance with stakeholders.

The Birmingham Question

UK parliamentary politics may have its West Lothian question, but for ‘Our City Region’ the apparently intractable issue is the use – or otherwise - of the name ‘Birmingham’ in describing or titling the City Region.

We found overwhelming acceptance of the position of Birmingham and its place as the international locator. However, there are issues – not just in political, but in organisational and branding terms too.

“I can see the logic of Birmingham” said one Leader; we “appreciate the status of Birmingham as the international city” commented another chief executive. Many put it much stronger. “Crucial” said one; it was “inconceivable” said more than one interviewee for Birmingham not to appear in the name. Large sections of the business community and Whitehall would find it a sign of “immaturity” and demonstrate a lack of “confidence” and “leadership.” Not to have Birmingham would be “short sighted,” “non sensical.”

Birmingham, it was stated, is a “stronger... international brand...than we think.” “Got to be Birmingham...and I’m from the Black Country!” was the comment of one businessman. “Outside of local government, Birmingham has a wider umbrella.” “Birmingham is the key brand...a great international locator” said one Black Country council official. “Business hovers around Birmingham” said one regional postholder.

An academic described Birmingham as: “the identifier...the motor, no doubt about that; it has to be the anchor....the city centre and immediate surroundings are the motor with creative, professional and other high growth industries.” One Black Country official said “Birmingham is known internationally....I don’t have the same hang ups as others....we can’t do without Birmingham in [the name]. Another borough official said he was “not strongly against Birmingham....it is already common currency.....[It] doesn’t bode well if we don’t use our best asset” he added. The inevitability of common usage was further highlighted by questions at the Select Committee’s recent hearings on regional government persistently referring to “Birmingham” when addressing the ‘Our City Region’ delegation.

From the south of the City Region, it was recognised “Birmingham is the major brand.... way above West Midlands.... It would be sub-optimal not to include it in the name.” Another added: “we see Birmingham as a big brand...we’re comfortable with it if it brings business....But we can’t be subsumed; it can’t be city centric. ... I can see the conference side working together...with a closer relationship between Coventry and Birmingham...There [must be] mileage with Coventry just 10 miles from NEC.” However, CVOne commented they were “totally uncomfortable with Birmingham as it is unrepresentative of the strong local identities within the region and as such divisive.”

The University of Warwick, which traverses the Coventry and Warwickshire boundary, commented in its submission that it: “recognises the strategic importance of Birmingham as a political and geographic capital of the City Region but also believes the City Region, and the City of Birmingham in particular, needs to pay particular attention to recognising and engaging with centres of excellence located in other parts of the sub-region....With regards to branding, [we] think it inevitable that ‘Birmingham City Region’ will stick as the political and economic description of the area.”

However: “Birmingham has come off the boil [in strategic terms]...Government is less clear on its priorities” said one well placed source. “Birmingham needs to demonstrate generosity and humility” remarked one participant, whilst one contributor suggested Birmingham is “good at not playing big brother,” another commented it was “lousy at partnerships.”

“Birmingham, as a name, does not capture everything” said one council executive. “Birmingham should be told there is an image problem and not to make assumptions.....to assume [its] size gives it power is an intellectual leap too far.....some deferred gratification” through the City Region model would be welcome.

Whilst many of these comments might be targeted at the Council, much of it seems to stem from history and the sheer size of the authority in relation to other cities and boroughs rather than individual members or officers. However, it is clear there are ‘behavioural’ and ‘style’ issues to be addressed in order for the partnership to work with optimal trust and engagement.

Appendices to this report look at data in relation to awareness and perception of Birmingham as an international locator and comparisons with Manchester and Greater Manchester.

We asked a number of participants what we described as the 'Barbados' question. If lying on a Caribbean beach you were asked by your beach neighbour where you came from, how would you locate your home? In most cases, the answer included "Birmingham." As one contributor expressed it: "it's about the market, not the producers; [we need to be] outward rather than inward [focussed]."

City Regions: National and International Lessons and Best Practice

By the definition of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are some eighty recognised city (or metropolitan/metro) regions around the world. A number of cities have been analysed in recent papers, particularly those in the work of the Core Cities and for ODPM. Experience from **Helsinki, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich, Barcelona** and **Bilbao** are quoted most frequently due to the parallels that can be drawn to the UK.

The majority of city or metro regions - particularly in cases where they are a national capital – are dominated by just one city, but some are *multi-polar* featuring other cities as with the case of 'Our City Region.' According to Warwick's Professor Colin Crouch, they "struggle with [branding] all the time." Adjacent boroughs and municipal areas within city regions often have deep senses of identity, with their local authorities much closer to the people than a city region body ever could be.

The research led by Professor Michael Parkinson stated: "Smaller municipalities are reluctant to be overwhelmed by the larger city..... Despite the assumption that things work better on the continent, this did not prove to be the case. In fact there are a series of regional-urban difficulties that we find in the UK. These include, for example: local government fragmentation, economic competition between adjacent local authorities, worries about the environmental impact of residential and job decentralisation, fiscal exploitation of the central city by suburban service users, the segregation of excluded communities as municipalities contest to attract richer and repel poorer people and housing, failures to market the sub-region effectively, and concerns that the central city is too small to punch its weight in European and global markets..... **Barcelona** has only very recently succeeded in extending its spatial and economic planning from beyond the City of Barcelona to the wider metropolitan area, producing a new strategic plan for the metropolitan area. **Munich** has created a tri-area sub-regional organisation in an attempt to do area marketing."

“Territorial branding seems to be important” comments Professor Crouch, with links to the principal product or sector from the area one solution which emerges through common application, but which mainly works in smaller areas rather than entire city regions. Silicon Valley is the commonly cited exception of a city region not branded by location. Branding is best targeted towards investment markets and specialised labour markets, not consumers or local residents. For example, “promoting the area around Helsinki [as rich in hi tech industry] is not important to local people, but it is to global investment markets and skilled labour.”

It is not unusual for city regions to cross national borders, as is the case with **Vienna** (Austria) and **Bratislava** (Slovakia), together with **Copenhagen** (Denmark) and **Malmo** (Sweden). The Viennese are somewhat reluctant to recognise Bratislava whilst the Nordic city region is branded by Öresund, the bridge which now connects the Danish and Swedish cities.

Greater Manchester

The closest case in point outside of the capital is, of course, centred on the City of Manchester. It is worth examining why the north west city does not face the ‘name game’ to anywhere near the same extent covered by the subject of this report.

The relationship between the City and the ‘Greater’ area is not the same. Manchester does not take up the same size – geographically or in population terms – as Birmingham does in relation to the City Region. Meanwhile, the boundaries between the areas are less marked – particularly as the City of Manchester slides into the City of Salford and the Borough of Trafford. As one interviewee from this City Region, but outside of Birmingham, described it: “Birmingham is [in many ways] a self-contained city... it doesn’t need to work together as Manchester does.”

There is a longer history associated with Greater Manchester – as a term, an entity and a brand. Prior to 1974, the name SELNEC (South East Lancashire/North East Cheshire) had been used for the area. Whilst the Greater Manchester Country Council was dissolved in 1986, it has continued to exist as a ceremonial county and through a number of partnerships and jointly administered services (transport, police, fire & rescue etc.) operating under the banner, as well as jointly controlling the airport.

History, relative size and scale and an established brand all make Greater Manchester's route to establishing a city region under the title somewhat easier than in the West Midlands. Arguably, the period since the 1974 local government re-organisation and since 1999 with the introduction of RDAs has not seen the 'West Midlands' improve as a place/area name attaining sufficient resonance or significant success. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that other Boroughs in Greater Manchester (for example Salford with its Quay development, Trafford with major sporting and retail venues, Bolton described as the 'Coventry' of Greater Manchester by one contributor and Wigan with its football club now established in the Premiership alongside its Rugby League heritage) have managed to maintain proud identities whilst seemingly comfortable under the Greater Manchester umbrella.

Grand Lyon

Featuring one of Birmingham twin cities, Grand Lyon aims to be one of the top 15 metropolitan areas of Europe and works closely with business and employer organisations in a '*Business Spirit*.' The Greater Lyon Urban Community, representing 55 towns including Lyon was created in 1966. It is administered by a board composed of town delegates. The executive branch of Grand Lyon is under the authority of the President, Gérard Collomb, also Senator and Mayor of Lyon.

The legislation of July 1999, known as the "Chevènement Law", was designed to reinforce and simplify inter-municipal cooperation. It modifies the financial context by fixing a single business tax and creates new possibilities for transfers of responsibility between the urban community and the municipalities with the principle of subsidiarity at its core.

New England and Greater Boston

This USA region and one of its city regions provide some interesting comparisons and contrasts to 'Our City Region' and its heritage. New England is America's oldest clearly defined region, covering the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. Boston is its most populous city and historically its business and cultural centre. The region was home to a number of the first English settlers, became a source of some of the first examples of American literature and philosophy and showed the first signs of the effects of the Industrial Revolution in North America. The 'Old' World's influence over New England is evident in the architecture of Boston College, originally dubbed Oxford in America, as well as the adoption of a variety of English place names prefixed with 'New.'

In a number of the region's factory towns, skilled workers have been left without jobs. Largely around Boston in the ring of Route 128, the gap has been partly filled by high technology industries, in particular software and biotech. Education, high technology, financial services, tourism, and medicine continue to drive the local economy. In the southwestern Connecticut counties of Fairfield and New Haven, the economy is more closely associated with New York City, and the economy is more often viewed as an extension of the New York Metropolitan Area. For years many residents of southwestern Connecticut have crossed the state line each day to work in Manhattan. More recently, New Yorkers have begun to travel into Connecticut as part of a reverse commute to many of the job centers developed in the suburbs.

Greater Los Angeles

The Greater Los Angeles Area is the agglomeration of the urbanised area around the city of Los Angeles, California – the second largest city in the USA. It is sprawled over five counties in the southern part of California (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and Ventura). It is referred to locally as "Southern California", "SoCal" or "The Southland". It is also referred to simply as L.A. particularly by the residents of Los Angeles County and by outsiders. Residents often refer to broad, general sub-regions with people outside of Southern California commonly referring to the entire region as L.A., even though there are five counties, more than 100 distinct municipalities, hundreds of neighbourhoods and districts, and more people than any individual state except for Texas, New York, Florida, and, of course, California.

Many of the metro and city regions we have studied display their links to universities and research institutions very prominently in their corporate and background information materials. This is particularly true in the Scandinavian, Californian and Munich examples. It is clear that, with the exception of Silicon Valley, most successful city regions derive their brands from the core city. Branding and nomenclatures should, according to Warwick's Professor Crouch, "be left until the last moment. The more difficult matter is the sharing of fiscal responsibilities."

Conclusions

In forming name options and recommendations, we note the following conclusions from our research:

Communication and engagement currently represents a significant barrier to progress, both in terms of the city region model generally and this development in particular.

A clear and compelling narrative for the City Region needs to be developed. There is a “huge sell job” to be done.

The real challenge is to achieve more distinctiveness within a brand model and communications strategy for the City Region. In describing cities and city regions, language can be very similar, listing and expressing many of the same characteristics as others. Much place marketing is bland and indistinctive, making it hard to spot the differences between one city/city region and another.

The debate needs to be widened beyond the small circle. Open and healthy debate during the development phase should not be seen as a sign of weakness.

The City Region presents an opportunity to engage the area’s MPs better than has been achieved to date. We understand consideration is being given to involving MPs through a scrutiny or annual reporting function. We would encourage the Shadow Executive Board to identify an appropriate role for MPs in the City Region model – they are an important group in communication terms.

The vision for the City Region needs to demonstrate wider objectives than obtaining funds, achieving looser fiscal controls and gaining powers from central Government. Whilst appreciating and accepting the rationale behind these goals, acceptance and engagement by stakeholders in the City Region will also require more detailed understanding of the model and the relationship between neighbourhoods, communities, localities, sub-regions, the City Region and the government planning region. As one Council Leader commented, it is open to debate as to whether a City Region model would have developed so far if not for pressure from Government. This will be transparent to stakeholders.

Accountability and governance for the City Region cannot be developed in isolation from brand and identity considerations, as is currently the case.

If the economic and political cartographers draw different maps, it will affect the sense of place and identity. Multiple identities are an increasingly common feature, not a new phenomenon. They are not necessarily incompatible or contradictory. Citizens can, for example, already wave the flags of St George and the Union without facing in two different directions. The same principles can apply to city/borough, sub region and City Region.

Greater Manchester demonstrates the UK potential to have parallel local and city region identities. However, specific factors have a bearing on this situation, notably the use of the 'Greater Manchester' term over a period of time and the size of the City of Manchester in relation to its wider city region.

The strengths, values and role of 'Birmingham' are more widely appreciated than might have been anticipated at the start of this research. There is broad consensus on the role of 'Birmingham' in the city region brand, but timing and implementation are critical.

There are behavioural and size issues in relation to Birmingham, if only in perception rather than actual terms to some contributors. The 'capital' of the City Region will need to identify steps to ensure and actively demonstrate it does not dominate in the same way as the UK's capital does on the country at large.

If 'Greater Birmingham', 'Birmingham City Region', 'Birmingham and the City Region' or the 'The City Region and Birmingham' were to be adopted at any stage, the brand model must be developed in such a way as the City Region brand and the Birmingham brand are not completely transposable. They will, of course, be complementary to a very large degree and will increasingly drive interpretation of the other over time. However, 'Greater Birmingham' or its equivalent must be constructed to carry a wider meaning, in values as well as the physical area it describes. In other words, it must clearly be '*Greater than Birmingham*', not '*Birmingham is Greater*'.

The highly connected entities of the City of Birmingham; Birmingham City Council and 'brand' Birmingham (projected and perceived) must be separated out in defining a brand model.

The elected business representative on the Shadow Executive Board could help to apply commercial marketing, branding and communication best practice to this issue.

Reaching the right form of governance and decision making in the interests of economic growth for the city region are at the heart of the challenge. Agreeing a name and investing in communication will be the first tests.

Birmingham can claim to have been instrumental in founding a form of municipal government. The City and its partners now have a chance to lead the way in the development of UK city region models.

The Options

This list represents most of the names and terms which have been highlighted during the course of the research. Many were helpfully covered in the pages of *Birmingham Post*, but we have omitted some of the more adventurous suggestions. Many of the names below will also have close variations.

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| Greater Birmingham |
| Birmingham City Region |
| Birmingham and the City Region |
| The City Region and Birmingham |
| Birminghamshire |
| Birmingham West Midlands |
| Heart of England |
| Mercia |
| Middle England |
| Middle Earth |
| Mid West |
| Central England |
| Central City Region |
| English West Midlands |
| City WM |
| Urban WM |
| Urban Central |
| Metropolitan West Midlands |
| Metro Birmingham |
| The City Region |
| Shakespeare City Region |
| "Thursday", "Eric" ..and many others.... |

There are several approaches to identifying new place or area names which have been adopted elsewhere. These include:

- Famous people associated with the area, what might be termed the Robin Hood or John Lennon approach (eg. Shakespeare, Boulton, Godiva, Tolkein etc).
- Geographic or industrial feature (Thames Gateway, Thames Valley, Silicon Valley)
- Old or new language (eg. adopting a Latin phrase or inventing a new word through futurology/invention or word conjunction).
- Acronym or abbreviation (using the letters of the participating Cities and Boroughs)

We do not recommend any of these routes, not least since the cost of developing a new brand would be extremely high and carry significant risks. Moreover, as pointed out by many contributors, we already have places and terms fit for purpose.

Furthermore, we do not propose adopting a 'value definer' as the vast majority of those we canvassed and most available research strongly suggests a 'place locator' is crucial. Finally, we have omitted any option using 'West Midlands' as this was widely seen to have negative or confusing properties with little awareness (see Appendix II).

Recommendations

It is clear to us that further work on developing the City Region needs to be done before a total brand approach can be taken to the project. In particular, communication and engagement need to be stepped up so stakeholders are more clearly aware of the background evidence; purpose; the means for achieving stated objectives and the relationships – in accountability and identity terms – between the City Region and cities/boroughs and sub regions. Furthermore, the impact of using Birmingham in the brand needs detailed assessment and planning, both in respect of the brand relationship between the City of Birmingham and the City Region and addressing behavioral, perception and size issues.

The risks of not using the established international locator or “hub” in the brand should not be underestimated. Whitehall, large sections of the business community and some parts of the press will be bewildered, if not scathing in their assessment. However, it is also appreciated that other stakeholders - notably but not exclusively in Coventry – will have equally strong opinions if Birmingham was to appear immediately.

It should be appreciated that, regardless of the decision taken by the Shadow Executive Board, references including 'Birmingham' will be adopted through common usage to describe the City Region. It would be futile, not to say counterproductive, to attempt to stop use of such language.

It is possible to foresee the development of different, but related, brands in the work of the City Region, addressing different audiences across different workstreams. In addition, identifying an ideal matrix of current identities - such as the Black Country and Coventry and Warwickshire - and how they would be applied in the era of the City Region would be a good step.

Furthermore, variations of the same name might apply using locations, descriptors and taglines in communication collateral. For example, if 'Heart of England' were to be adopted as the City Region administrative title, it might be presented in print as:

Heart of England

The City Region incorporating Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Telford, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Having studied the evidence in the short time available and against the background set out in this report, we recommend a two-stage process to naming and branding.

First, we suggest the adoption of an *administrative title* for the City Region. It would be used on all official documentation and formal agreements. It would, in essence, be the equivalent of a holding company name, rather than a brand name. Diageo rather than Guinness; Carlson Inc. rather than Radisson Hotels.

Such a solution will allow time and space for reflection, further debate, detailed study and in depth, professional brand and communications work. In the meantime, however, we recommend that the Shadow Executive Board accepts the use of 'Birmingham' as the key brand proposition in terms of strategic, international business and investment activity. The vast majority of contributors agreed Birmingham provides the international locator and hub for inward investment programmes which can then be taken forward by dedicated sub-regional departments and agencies.

We detail overleaf five shortlisted options for the name of 'Our City Region.' In order to be comprehensive and inclusive, this includes 'Birmingham' (with variations) as well as other terms which might be adopted for the 'administrative' City Region name at this stage.

In determining the answer, we would strongly advise the Shadow Executive Board to consider the *market* above local considerations.

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| <p>1. a) Greater Birmingham b) Birmingham City Region c) Birmingham and the City Region d) The City Region & Birmingham</p> | <p>It would be “inconceivable” “short sighted” “non sensical”....represent a lack of “maturity” and “confidence” were just a few of the comments on not including Birmingham in the name. However, it attracts political problems, notably in the south of the City Region. There are also issues related to interpretations of Birmingham and the dominance of the city and its local authority.</p> |
| <p>2. Heart of England</p> | <p>Already in use and suggested by a number of participants. The Heart can be taken to describe the role of the City Region in the UK economy and at the centre of the transport network. Not specific enough for many and – as one respondent commented – it has rural connotations and generates an image of “apple trees” rather than a thriving, diverse urban metropolis. Generally, it neither attracts great excitement or passionate disagreement but is a strong contender for an administrative title.</p> |
| <p>3. Central England</p> | <p>Has been used, most often to describe operating regions for some organisations rather than as an overall title. It is slightly vague and might be assumed to include the East Midlands and even East Anglia. A number of participants felt inclusion of ‘England’ in the title could be important; whilst a counterbalance to north/ern and south east was also needed. This option could work as an administrative title.</p> |
| <p>4. Central City Region</p> | <p>Has a certain ‘trip off the tongue’ attraction and less anodyne than ‘middle.’ It would not, however, be appropriate in international branding terms. Broadly relates to geography, but not specifically enough in place marketing terms.</p> |
| <p>5. New England</p> | <p>Term already in use to describe an area in the US, principally for tourism purposes. It does not contain a specific place locator and has the potential to attract ridicule if not executed properly. If developed in brand terms, it would represent the role of the City Region as the UK’s economic powerhouse; the centre of production which in itself has been re-invented from industrial roots and regenerated with a modern, dynamic economy. It would reflect the socio-economic and demographic reality of an area which closely maps the profile of the country as a whole. It would be a bold approach and requires confident support, but has possibilities particularly as an administrative title.</p> |