



# Policy Manifesto

2022/23



## About Us

The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has been in business, for business since 1813. Representing 2,500 members over six geographic areas and four themed divisions across Greater Birmingham, the Chamber is here to connect, support and grow local businesses.

## About the Policy Team

The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce's Policy team undertakes research on emerging trends and businesses' views on key issues, informs members about economic developments and policy changes, and engages with local, regional and national stakeholders on behalf of members.

## Foreword

The last few years have been some of the most eventful in recent history for businesses across Greater Birmingham. As well as battling through post-Brexit headwinds and an unprecedented pandemic, firms have been left reeling from levels of inflation not seen since the 1980s.

As we emerge from this period of uncertainty, Greater Birmingham – and indeed the country – finds itself on the precipice of change. New leadership in Government will mean different answers to the biggest issues we face both at home and abroad.

Tackling the current economic crisis, as well as long-standing problems relating to recruitment and skills shortages, cannot be done without business at the heart of the agenda. Equally, commitments to local growth and net zero will only be fulfilled with the support of our expert business community.

Abroad, a new Government will look to navigate the international trading landscape whilst simultaneously playing its part in supporting our allies in Europe's largest war since 1945. It is crucial that investment and innovation remain at the forefront of every outward-facing decision to propel the United Kingdom forward on its journey to economic recovery.

For Birmingham, 2022 has already proved a promising year of progress in a myriad of areas: more than one billion people tuned in to see our city in the spotlight during the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and already exciting advancements have been made in the delivery of HS2, the largest investment in infrastructure in the region in a generation.

The advances must not end there. The challenges facing our business community require forward-thinking and decisive action, which is why I am proud to launch our 2022 Policy Manifesto, providing a solutions-based approach at a time of critical need.

At the Chamber, we love local and we go global. We help businesses find partners, grow their profile and learn from best practice locally as well as trade internationally.

I am excited about what lies ahead for our region, and confident that 2022/23 Policy Manifesto can be our best year yet. Let us work together to make Birmingham the best place to start, grow and move a business.

**Henrietta Brealey**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce**



## Cost of Doing Business

Businesses have been sounding the alarm over mounting cost pressures, including rising raw material prices, soaring energy bills, and increasing labour costs. Given how rapidly the situation is evolving, the cost of doing business crisis must be urgently addressed on a national level to alleviate the difficulties firms are facing.

### Action for stakeholders:

- Reverse raised National Insurance Contributions implemented in April 2022, given that firms are reporting increased price pressures and labour costs
- Urgent fiscal intervention to tackle inflation and keep businesses afloat – 41% of businesses are concerned about inflation, the highest number since GBCC records began in 1997
- Meaningful reform of the business rates system, including reducing the level of the multiplier, removing plant and machinery from the ratings system and simplifying the appeals process
- Remove VAT from energy bills and introduce an emergency energy grant for SMEs to help those experiencing extreme difficulties with skyrocketing prices
- Extend VAT relief for hospitality businesses and non-essential retailers

### GBCC's actions on behalf of members:

- Gathering data from local firms to provide a snapshot of the Greater Birmingham business community's economic performance in the [Quarterly Business Report](#)
- Raising businesses' concerns and views in the [Mayor's Economic Impact Group](#)
- Hosting quarterly [Bank of England roundtables](#) to provide members with the opportunity to directly share their experiences with the Bank's representatives
- Lobbying [Government](#) alongside the Chamber network on key policy announcements, including the Spring Statement and the Queen's Speech
- Supporting our members in managing costs by providing a [free legal and HR helpline, discounts on training, translations and international trade documentation services, and member to member offers](#)





## People

Issues relating to skills and productivity have long persisted at all levels of the workforce in the West Midlands' labour market, with Brexit and Covid-19 only serving to exacerbate these problems. Firms have had difficulty recruiting the skilled talent they need to fill vacancies, limiting their operational capacity and constricting their growth potential.

### Action for stakeholders:

- Promote greater collaboration between education providers, local authorities and the business community to identify and tackle regional skills gaps
- Share clear information on initiatives and support mechanisms available at a local and regional level to help firms with recruitment and upskilling local talent
- Provide additional funding for modular, accredited short courses to ensure workforce skills can rapidly adapt to evolving industry needs
- Expand and reform the Shortage Occupations List criteria to include more jobs at more skill levels

### GBCC's actions on behalf of members:

- Improving leadership and people management skills via the **Growth Through People** campaign to help boost regional productivity and share best practice approaches to attracting talent from a diverse range of backgrounds
- Working with **education providers** across Greater Birmingham to connect the business community with careers education
- Communicating the views of the business community in **local media interviews**, including discussing the need for a collaborative approach to address local skills gaps
- Highlighting businesses' concerns in local **Employment and Skills Boards**
- Encouraging development of future leaders through the **Future Faces Chamber of Commerce**



## Enabling Local Growth

Landmark opportunities such as HS2 and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games have propelled the West Midlands forward on its growth trajectory. Businesses across all sectors have innumerable opportunities to help boost local growth and make their mark on the region.

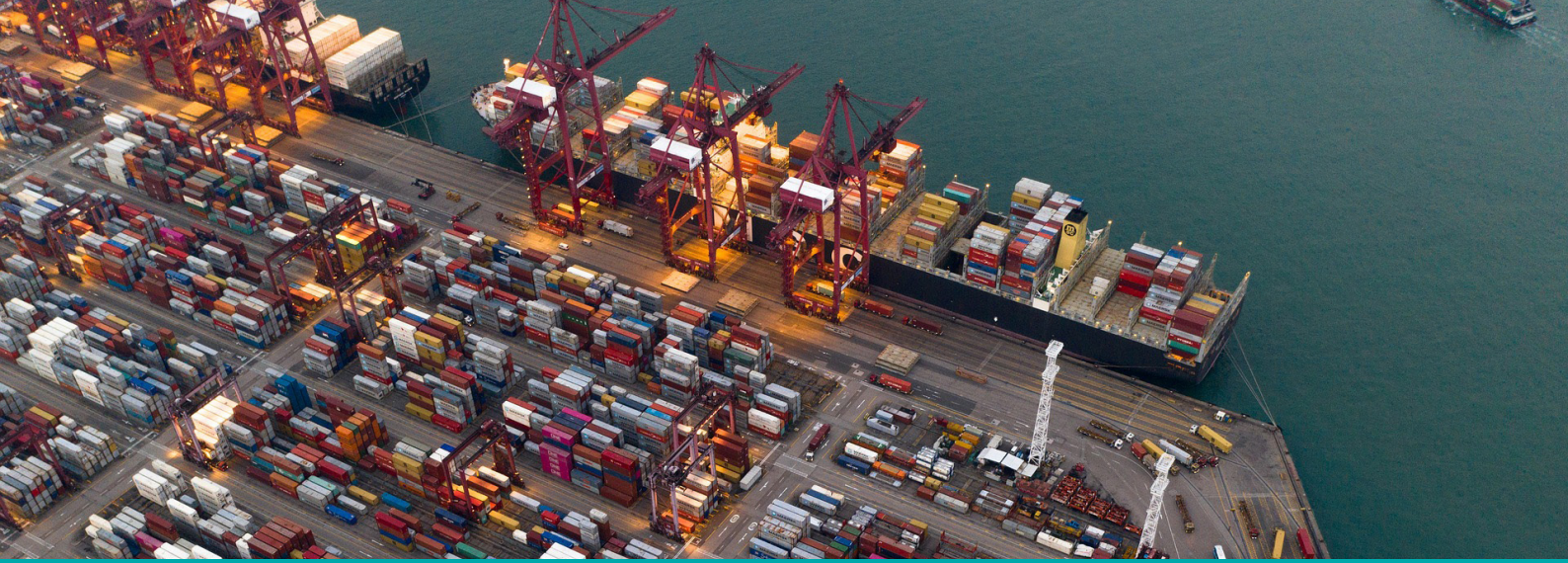
### Action for stakeholders:

- Work with businesses to deliver on the promises of the Levelling Up Agenda, including unlocking the potential of key regional sectors such as life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and digital and creative technologies
- Harness the collaborative spirit of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games to identify new opportunities for the region which champion success and put the West Midlands in the national and global spotlight
- Simplify public sector procurement processes, including publishing clearer pipelines and ensuring tender timeframes are realistic to enable greater collaboration between businesses and local authorities
- Replicate the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme in urban areas where businesses experience slow broadband

### GBCC's actions on behalf of members:

- Coordinating and participating in **events and roundtables** with national, regional and Chamber network stakeholders to champion businesses' views on the Levelling Up Agenda
- Connecting members to opportunities relating to **once-in-a-generation projects**, such as HS2 and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games
- Collaborating with **local authorities** on local issues, such as with Birmingham City Council to simplify and modernise procurement and contract rules
- Helping members to expand their networks, grow their profile, and gain intel on local opportunities and best practice through our comprehensive **events programme, news and media platforms and account management support**





## Global Trade

The global trading landscape has been increasingly volatile in recent years, as businesses battle post-Brexit headwinds and Covid-related supply chain disruption. Despite this, as the world emerges from the pandemic, businesses are increasingly interested about expanding their horizons beyond the United Kingdom's borders.

### Action for stakeholders:

- Ease barriers to trading with the EU, particularly relating to the Northern Ireland Protocol
- Commit to involving businesses in upcoming trade negotiations, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
- Raise awareness of and promote opportunities relating to Birmingham City Council's Brussels-based office to ensure continued business engagement with the European Union
- Provide cash grants for SMEs to take advantage of export opportunities, particularly in new international markets and join overseas delegations with the Department for International Trade

### GBCC's actions on behalf of members:

- Welcoming **delegations and representatives from overseas** High Commissions, Embassies, and international Chambers of Commerce
- Holding **international events** with the **Greater Birmingham Transatlantic Chamber of Commerce** and the **Greater Birmingham Commonwealth Chamber of Commerce** to help local firms expand into and understand new markets
- Informing members of key international trade developments, including through **articles** on trade negotiations and **briefing papers** on recently signed Free Trade Agreements
- Assisting with and providing members with discounts on **export documentation**, including more than 12,000 documents issued in the first half of 2022
- Providing businesses with **expert training courses** on a range of customs-related topics



## Net Zero

National and regional bodies have placed sustainability firmly at the forefront of their agendas, with both the UK Government and West Midlands Combined Authority setting ambitious targets for carbon emissions. Businesses have started factoring sustainability and net zero targets into their plans, identifying significant opportunities that this will bring in the coming years.

### Action for stakeholders:

- Improve signposting to information, resources and support mechanisms so businesses are better able to make informed decisions and find cost effective options on their net zero journeys
- Reduce the cost of low carbon technology adoption, implementation and retrofitting to encourage more business investment, including through financial relief and favourable finance options
- Improve procurement processes and supply chains to ensure net zero and ESG are prioritised at all stages
- Accelerate the delivery of housing and employment land to meet regional requirements and explore expanding the 3 Cities Retrofit programme to include business properties
- Address delivery of 'green skills' to strengthen supply chains and ensure a steady flow of skilled workers able to support sectors in the transition to net zero
- Increase investment in low carbon energy storage to minimise reliance on fossil fuels and drive down energy prices for businesses and households alike

### GBCC's actions on behalf of members:

- Informing businesses about sustainability and net zero targets via the [Sustainable Business Series](#), a four-week campaign focused on energy, low carbon business opportunities, decarbonising, and climate resilience
- Sharing the latest support measures available for businesses on their net zero journey via the [Low Carbon Support Grid](#)
- Hosting sustainability specialists at the [Net Zero Network](#) to discuss the latest environmental developments and provide members with expert insights
- Exploring how businesses are tackling Environmental and Social Governance, and the benefits of doing so, in the [Good Business Forum](#)





## About GBCC

### **GBCC membership helps businesses to:**

- Grow their profile and find customers and partners locally
- Trade and build connections internationally
- Keep informed about the latest local business opportunities, news and trends
- Develop their workforces and future leaders
- Be heard by representing their interests locally and nationally

### **GBCC's services include:**

- Expert international trade support, including more than 50 years' of export documentation experience and member discounts on international services
- More than 250 networking and events per year
- Over 50 training courses each year
- On average, more than 3,000 hours of phone support for members
- News and media support, including the ChamberLink Daily newsletter delivered to 15,000 business contacts
- Research and campaigning, including tailored insight and intelligence services offerings

### **Actions for businesses:**

- Get in touch with our New Business team to discuss what membership could look like for you
- Contact your Relationship Manager to find out how to make the most of your membership
- Reach out to our Policy team to find out more about our research and campaigning activity



# About GBCC

## **About the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce**

The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce (GBCC) is a membership-led, business support organisation that has acted as the voice of local businesses since 1813. Today, we continue to connect, support and grow local businesses.

We are one of the largest Chambers in the country, with 2,000 member companies covering six geographic areas across the region (Birmingham, Burton, Chase, Lichfield and Tamworth, Solihull and Sutton Coldfield) and four themed divisions (Asian Business Chamber of Commerce, Future Faces, the Transatlantic Chamber of Commerce and the Commonwealth Chamber of Commerce).

Members range from young professionals to SMEs and large, high profile organisations, including 38 Chamber Patrons comprising companies such as Mondelez International, HS2 and The NEC.



**Greater Birmingham**  
**Chambers**  
of Commerce

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