

On the 23rd June 2016 UK voters will go to the polls to vote on whether the UK should remain in the European Union, or leave. It will be the first time UK citizens have been able to vote directly on the UK's involvement with the EU since 1975, when just over 67% of voters voted to stay in, what was then called, the European Economic Community.

How will the EU Referendum affect local businesses?

The extent to which the EU Referendum will affect businesses in the Greater Birmingham area remains to be seen. If the UK votes to Remain and stay part of the EU on the 23rd June, there will be little direct change for businesses. However, if the UK votes to Leave the EU, the impact could be substantial. Both the Remain and Leave campaign groups recognise that there would, in the short to medium term at least, be some disruption and uncertainty while they disagree on the long term costs or benefits of leaving the EU.

Through membership of the EU, the UK has access to the European Single Market and a significant number of trade agreements with nations across the world. It also provides the right to 'free movement of people', allowing EU nationals to live and work in the UK and UK residents to live and work in the EU.

If the UK votes to leave the EU, new trade agreements will need to be negotiated. The immigration status of individuals from EU nations living and working in the UK, and UK citizens living and working in the EU would also need to be resolved. Both of these aspects (and a number of other areas) would take time to negotiate and implement. As a result, those firms who employ EU nationals, trade with nations in the European Single Market area or with nations that the EU has trade agreements with would be particularly affected if the UK voted to leave the EU. Some institutions and business bodies are also predicting a reduction in Foreign Direct Investment and inward investment as the referendum date draws closer due to the uncertainty of the UK's membership of the EU. However, there is disagreement over the longer term benefits and impact.

The EU remains the West Midlands region's biggest trading partner: in 2015, the region exported £12million worth of goods and services to the EU and imported £20million worth (Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC). Any reduction in demand for UK goods from the EU or increase in the cost of importing EU products could have a negative impact on a large number of businesses in the region.

What are our Members Saying?

In February 2016 over 250 West Midlands based businesses took part in a British Chambers of Commerce survey on the EU Referendum. The results showed: **65%** of West Midlands based businesses rated the EU referendum as quite or very important to their business. **7%** respondents thought leaving the EU would have a negative impact on their company's profitability. **21%** thought it would have a positive impact on their company's profitability. If the referendum were held tomorrow, **50%** of respondents would vote for Britain to stay in the EU and **38%** would vote for Britain to leave the EU. **83%** of respondents were either completely or very committed to their voting position.

What is the GBCC Position on the EU Referendum?

Based on the survey above, the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce will not be campaigning for either Remain or Leave, given the very real divisions that exist in the local business community. In the months leading up to the referendum, we will actively survey business opinion and inform the debate without fear or favour. Additionally, we will be demanding clear information and facts from both the Remain and Leave campaigns so that businesspeople can make an informed choice at the ballot box.

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How Can the GBCC Help?

The GBCC are offering a selection of events, briefings and think-pieces in the run up to the European Union referendum to give businesses the information they need to make an informed choice on the 23rd June. We will also be researching members' views through surveys and focus groups.

EU Referendum Survey

Together with Chambers of Commerce across the country, we will be delivering a British Chambers of Commerce survey aimed at understanding members' views on the EU referendum. The survey will begin on the 4th April and conclude on the 15th April. All members of the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce will be invited to participate. We will also be undertaking a focus group with a carefully selected, representative group of members. Once complete, we will publicise the results widely to inform the debate and use the information to inform our future briefings and events. Chamber members can view our reports and briefings and register for events via the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce website.

What Would Brexit Mean for your Business?

Date: 4th May 2016

Time: 12:30pm (for 1:00pm) to 2:30pm

Venue: Pinsent Masons, 3 Colmore Circus Queensway, Birmingham B4 6BH

Content:

This lunch-time seminar will provide non-biased information from representatives of leading business and professional services sector firms on their assessment of what Brexit or the Prime Minister's new EU-UK deal could mean for businesses.

Global Perspectives on the EU Referendum

Date: 8th June 2016

Time: 7:30am (for 8:00am) to 10:00am

Venue: Squire Patton Boggs, 148 Edmund St, Birmingham B3 2JR

Content:

The West Midlands has a strong track record on exporting and attracting Foreign Direct Investment. But how do businesses and investors in countries outside the EU view this game-changing debate? This panel discussion will widen the debate on the EU referendum by inviting leading individuals with close links to nations such as China and USA to give their views on how Brexit and the EU referendum debate so far may impact on those nations relationship with the West Midlands

Encouraging Businesses to Vote

Throughout the month of June we will be giving a selection of business leaders opportunities to express their views on the EU Referendum via a Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce blog. We will be focusing on shining a spotlight on the impact on particular industries and sectors as well as ensuring a representative mix of views on the overall debate. We will also hold a social media "count down" to the referendum encouraging members to turnout and vote on the 23rd June.

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