

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

Summary

1. The letter from Ministers on 31 March setting out the future role of LEPs seems to have unblocked a series of decisions for which we had been waiting. We are therefore now able to move forward with confidence on delivering a number of key aspects of our programme for 2022/3.

LEP Funding and Long-Term Role

2. The main item of business for this month's Board meeting is the budget for 2022/3. As we have suggested at previous Board meetings, Ian's paper proposes a budget that maintains the LEP's capacity and capability whilst we conduct the review of our longer term role, which we are required to conclude by 25 November. Along with the budget, Rebecca Luck has prepared a revised draft of our delivery plan for this year for the Board to consider which reflects Ian's proposed budget. Comments on the delivery plan from the Board will be reflected in a final version which we will submit to the June Board for approval to publish.

Queens Speech and Levelling Up Bill

3. The Government published its Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill on 11 May. It will take a little while to fully digest its implications, but in his round of media interviews Michael Gove was highlighting a number of measures including:
 - Putting the 12 Levelling Up Missions onto a statutory footing.
 - Creating "County Deals" for devolution, allowing counties to have a County Combined Authority with a directly elected leader rather than a Mayor.
 - Some changes to planning legislation including measures on high street vacancies, greater community involvement in planning, and reform to s.106 developer contributions.
 - Other Bills brought forward that could impact the delivery of the LEP's vision for Cheshire and Warrington include one to create a UK infrastructure bank to "support regional and local economic growth and deliver net zero" and an energy security bill. There will also a number of Brexit bills that will have an impact on the wider business environment and trading conditions.

Skills Bootcamps

4. We received a formal offer from DfE on 6 May of £1.04 million to deliver 15 skills bootcamps by March 2023, providing training for a minimum of 264 adults. DfE's budget contains money for bootcamps for the next three years, so assuming we successfully deliver the first round, we have a good opportunity to make bootcamps a key part of our programme for the next few years.

SAPs and LSIPs

5. DfE have also confirmed that they will be paying us £55k in 2022/3 to run C&W's Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) for a final year. Alongside this they have issued an invitation to business representative organisations (BROs) (eg Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Business etc) to take responsibility for producing and maintaining local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) which will take over from SAPs from next year. We are in conversation with the members of the Cheshire Business Group (which brings together all of C&W's BROs) about submitting a single bid for C&W that encompasses all the BROs and engages our own Employers' Skills Board.

The Pledge

6. We received a formal grant offer from the Careers and Enterprise Company (a DfE agency) on 29 April of £331,000 to cover its share of the costs of 8 Enterprise Co-ordinator staff who sit within the Pledge programme which we operate jointly with Youth Federation. This is one more than our current complement so we have started a recruitment process for the additional post. The grant covers the period from September 2022 – August 2023.

Digital Skills Partnership

7. Informal indications from DCMS are that they will also shortly be sending us a formal grant offer to continue the funding of our Digital Skills Partnership. I am hoping that we will have received the offer before the Board meeting.

UKSPF

8. The Government has also announced the allocations for the next three years of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Between them, our three LAs will be receiving £28 million and LA officers and are consulting widely on how the funds should be deployed. As part of this, they have asked the LEP for its views on the priorities drawing on our analysis of our economic evidence base. Not surprisingly UKSPF projects must meet a number of Government criteria and Andy Devaney is therefore preparing a paper for the June meeting of the Board with some thoughts for it to consider which take account of those constraints.

Life Sciences Fund 2

9. Life Sciences Fund 2, the life sciences investment fund jointly created by the LEP, Greater Manchester and Bruntwood will be launched at an event in Manchester on 24 May. It will be jointly hosted by Clare, Andy Burnham and Kath McKay (wearing her Bruntwood hat!).

Middlewich Line

10. We are in the final stages of appointing consultants to produce the Strategic Outline Business Case for the re-opening to passengers of the rail line between Northwich and

Sandbach, including a new station at Gadbrook Park and the re-opening of a station at Middlewich, which was closed in 1962. The line will also offer direct connections into HS2 at Crewe from stations such as Knutsford, Mobberley and Altrincham. Half the funding for the work is coming from DfT, with the remainder being shared between ourselves and Cheshires East and West.

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