



BOARD MEETING

Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board Meeting held 17th March 2021 at 4.30pm by video conference call

Present:

Clare Hayward	Trevor Brocklebank	Cllr Craig Browne	Cllr Russ Bowden
Cllr Louise Gittins	Robert Mee	Peter Broxton	Nicola Dunbar
Chris Hindley	Nichola Newton	Stephen Kinsey	John Downes
Stephen Kinsey (from item 6)	John Downes	Eunice Simmons	

In attendance:

Philip Cox	Ian Brooks	Joe Manning	Gemma Davies (CWaC)
Joe Toward	Maggie Chen	Alex Thompson (CEC) (until item 8)	Catherine Walker (for Charlie Seward)

Apologies

Charlie Seward	Steve Park	Frank Jordan	
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Member of the Public (for Part A)

Tracey O'Keefe			
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Agenda Item 1: Apologies and Introductions

1.1 Clare Hayward welcomed Board Members. Apologies were received as above.

Agenda Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

2.1 Conflicts of interests were declared by John Downes in relation to Langtree's involvement in Warrington Bus Depot, a project mentioned during discussions.

Agenda Item 3: Public Presentation

3.1 The Chair welcomed an observer from the public. There were no public presentations.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th January 2021.

4.1 The minutes of 20th January 2021 were agreed with the following clarification in regard of Item 7, investment into a second Life Sciences Fund.

4.2 The board agreed, in principle, to the LEP investing in a second Life Sciences Fund, but raised concerns regarding the risks associated with committing £10M to the fund, when the returns from the first fund could not be guaranteed. Officials were tasked to explore alternative arrangements with the partner investors including a commitment of £5M, with options to increase later. Ian Brooks said that those discussions are underway and being considered by Bruntwood (including L&G) and Greater Manchester.

Agenda Item 5: Chief Executive's report

5.1 Philip Cox provided a written update to the Board.

5.2 PC remarked on just how much had happened in the meantime and focussed his update on new information beginning with the Review of LEPs announced as part of the Budget statement. While no formal Terms of Reference have been issued, they are expected in the coming days. We understand the review is not about the existence, or otherwise, of LEPs but their future role. LEPs have evolved over the past few years around a central function of allocating and administering capital funds. This role is effectively being removed (not just from LEPs, but also Mayoral Combined Authorities and the devolved administrations) and will return to central departments. In its place, LEPs are expecting to take on a stronger role to support businesses, including possibly export opportunities and innovation. While the announcement also referenced possible amendments to geographic boundaries, we feel this is unlikely for C&W, and that the current approach to collaborate where it makes sense will continue.

5.3 The review is likely to propose a loosening of the link between LEPs and the local authorities and place a greater emphasis on the role of LEPs in providing direct support to business. Over the past ten years, the LEP has become an integral part of the sub-region's economic development activity, and in discussion with the LAs, it has been proposed that the LEPs and the LAs work together to identify what continuing role the LAs would like to see the LEP play in the sub-region. The board agreed that as a sub-region, we should set out what we want to see from the review and provide solutions that work across the Local Authorities. It was suggested that the LAs and the LEP should engage local MPs to encourage them to influence of the review. In addition, we should engage with other LEPs; a dialogue with NP11 is already underway. Finally, we should not lose sight of our vision to maximise the opportunities for business and residents of C&W.

5.4 Clare Hayward and Philip Cox, had led a team on 16th March that participated in the annual LEP peer review with the Enterprise M3 (EM3) LEP facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The presentations and discussions focussed on comparing and contrasting the two organisations' approach to the post-Covid economic recovery. A valuable insight was the observation that Enterprise M3 LEP had achieved success by focusing on some niche sectors, . Philip will circulate the meeting notes to the board once available.

ACTION: PC

5.5 Government has announced £72M of funding to HyNet in support of developing the world's first low carbon industrial cluster. We must continue to make the business case for investment to build on the North West capability.

5.6 Government also announced £3Bn of additional funding towards Bus Strategies and implementation. This gives Warrington another opportunity to press its All-Electric Bus vision, building on the already on-going work to relocate the bus depot funded by the Getting Building Fund. Local Authorities have until June to sign up agreements with local bus service providers including addressing issues such as decarbonisation and passenger safety. Roy Newton has already commenced discussions with Local Authorities regarding an updated bus strategy.

Agenda Item 6: Board Sub-Committee Reports

6.1 The board heard various updates from the sub-board chairs.

6.2 Robert Mee reported strategy performance board had received a second presentation on the natural capital audit and recommended a presentation be made to the full board. IB to identify an agenda slot.

ACTION: IB

6.3 He also advised that the sub-board had approved funding towards the development of three business cases; Middlewich rail (£20k), Beeston Station feasibility study (£5.5k) and Warrington bank Quay Housing pathfinder (£50k). Robert was keen for the LEP to secure more funding, if possible, in order to support additional requests for business case funding.

6.4 Lastly the sub-board had discussed energy priorities including low carbon hydrogen, new and advanced nuclear, carbon capture and storage and protecting the natural environment.

6.5 The discussion which followed referred to the Levelling Up fund, the tiering system for local areas and the opportunities it presented. Tiering, as presented, would appear to leave C&W bids less likely to be successful. Eunice Simmons thought we should explore previous policy on "Forgotten Towns" as a means to secure Levelling Up investment for our most deprived areas.

6.6 Clare Hayward presented the key items discussed by the Employers Skills Board, including good progress on the delivery of LGF funded skills projects. The sub-board had also heard a progress report on the C&W Opportunities Portal, the current contract for which (via NP11) finishes in April 2021, with a view to possible extension. PC said any investment decision would require a business case. The Pledge has held several very well attended virtual events, with good feedback from employers and schools. The next virtual jobs fair is later this month.

6.7 Nicola Dunbar informed the board that we had received confirmation of funding, for a third year, for the Digital Skills Partnership. Government had appointed Amion to audit and evaluate the effectiveness of DSPs which would inform the developing vision for DSPs in their third year of operation.

6.8 The Local Transport Board is due to meet on Friday 20th March.

6.9 Trevor Brocklebank summarised the balancing act adopted by Marketing Cheshire's campaigns to prepare for the re-opening of the visitor economy. It is a "looking forward to seeing you soon" message coupled with targeting local residents with "on your doorstep" leisure opportunities. MC is working with Destination Cheshire and Destination Chester to promote the area and get the tone of the marketing on point.

6.10 The revised LEP/MC website is due to be launched shortly. Work continues to develop the branding and Trevor suggested a presentation was made at the next discussion forum.

ACTION: IB/JM

6.11 The MC board is planning an away-day event on 23rd April to pave the way for re-opening in the summer.

6.12 Stephen Kinsey updated on the work of the Business Growth Board, which had been reflecting on the past 12 months. The Growth Hub had moved on from a sign posting service to one with more active delivery. The close co-operation with Chambers has helped Chambers to better understand the Growth Hub offer and the Peer to Peer networks had involved 68 SME with a high satisfaction rating. Traffic over the Growth Hub website has been significant; 45,000 users and 215,000 views, leading to over 2,400 businesses engaged, more than double the BEIS target.

6.13 Chris Hindley reported that P&I had met on 24th February and was continuing the final push to ensure LGF was fully spent by the end of March. The committee had approved the Warrington Bus Depot business case, completing the approvals of projects associated with the Getting Building Fund allocation.

6.14 Looking ahead, he envisaged that monitoring the projects beyond March 2021 might prove more challenging because applicants would, by then, be in receipt of all funding. However, we are also

conscious that as projects progress to completion, many of the benefits are more visible to the public. We need to use these opportunities to showcase what LGF has achieved.

Agenda Item 7: Recovery Plan and Delivery Plan 2021-22

7.1 Philip Cox introduced the board to a consultation draft of the Recovery Plan which is now also available on the LEP website. It sets out the LEP and MC role in delivering economy recovery and towards achieving the LEP vision. The board were invited to make any initial comments and provide further thoughts once they have had the opportunity to consider the document in more detail.

7.2 He also explained that a series of private consultations, including an opportunity for each sub-board to discuss the plan, will take place during the purdah period, before the plan is finalised and published after the local elections. PC also would be guided by Local Authorities on how best to engage elected members in the consultation on the plan during the purdah period,

7.3 Louise Gittins suggested that some work was done to cross reference the plan to the Marmot Review, which seeks to improve inclusivity and “build back fairer”. She also counselled that the plan linked into the recovery and renewal plans of each Local Authority, and other plans e.g. Sustainable Travel plans, or Bus strategies.

7.4 Russ Bowden highlighted how inequalities have contributed to the more severe levels of impact Covid has had on certain sections of our communities. Chris Hindley gave the example of the impacts on young people and how the work of the Pledge had provided a channel for support on employment and careers issues. He explained that the Pledge was currently seeking further funding and while the programme targets set out by the funders might be considered quite modest, we should set ourselves far more ambitious and aspirational goals to maximise the outcomes achieved. Clare Hayward suggested the board receive a presentation of the Pledge activities and future aims.

ACTION: IB/JM

7.5 Eunice Simmons said that applications to the University were up by 40% and the University had received extremely positive feedback from the GMC about its plans to offer health and social care courses. However, that the limiting factor was the number of placements that are being made available. Trevor Brocklebank offered to assist finding additional placement opportunities.

7.6 Joe Toward supported previous observations of the impact of Covid on young people, and the need for targeted interventions as part of recovery. He also highlighted the growing impact of mental health issues. .

Agenda Item 8: Budget 2021-22

8.1 Ian Brooks re-visited the the LEP and MC budget for 2021-22, following the previous discussion by the board in January. That meeting established the principle for the LEP and MC to retain organisational capacity pending the outcome of the LEP review. With lower income expected within the LEP, this approach means operating to a deficit, and the use of reserves in 2021-22, estimated at £173k. However, when taken in the round with a forecast surplus of £295k in the current year, the approach is affordable.

8.2 For Marketing Cheshire, the proposed budget out turn for 2021-22 had improved from a substantial deficit to a balanced position. The key change to assumptions is to include approximately 25% of the pre-covid commercial and subscription income. This amendment followed discussion with stakeholders regarding their likely engagement as they prepare for re-opening the visitor economy in the summer, and before a stronger upturn expected in 2022-23. Because the previous assumptions retained the staff necessary to support these activities, the additional planned income contributes disproportionately to an improved out turn.

8.3 Discussion of programme funds centred on retained business rates. In the next year or two, before we see the returns from recent developments, there is a need to be cautious toward allocating the use of EZ funds beyond the existing operational and loan commitments. In 2022-23 receipts should increase significantly and offer the opportunity to support more projects. Robert Mee reminded the board that March 2021 represented the 5th anniversary of the formation of the Enterprise Zone and proposed a review of its impact at the next board meeting. IB will add it to the agenda.

ACTION IB

8.4 The board approved the budget for 2021-22.

Agenda Item 9: Any Other Business

9.1 The board congratulated Robert Mee on his appointment as High Sheriff of Cheshire. Robert hopes that as many board members as possible will be able to attend his virtual event on 9th April.

Agenda Item 10: Closed meeting: Appointment of Board Members and Sub Board Members

10.1 Clare Hayward presented a paper with recommended appointments for the LEP Board, MC Board and LEP sub-committees. She thanked all those who had participated in the interviewing.

10.2 The board approved the nominations as follows:

LEP Board

Alice Choi, Rupert Collis, Loren Jones, Kath Mackay, Annette McDonald

MC Board

Jamie Christon, Rob McKay, Peter Mearns, Tracey O'Keefe

LEP Sub-Boards

Richard Bailey, Julian Copley, Kate Cousens, Kathryn Eade, Steven Gleave, Helen Gopsill, Nicola Heron, Linda Hilton, Calum Lewis, Lucy Liang, Nigel Schofield, Anna Tiplady, Ian Traynor

10.3 Proposals were also presented with regard to chairs, vice chairs and memberships of sub-boards. Craig Browne raised the matter of chair of the Local Transport Board. Discussions are expected to be finalised over the coming days.

ACTION CH/PC

10.4 An induction plan is being drawn up which includes "buddying" new appointees with existing members and setting up a virtual board "AwayDay" event, possibly in May.

ACTION PC/IB

Agenda Item 11: Date and Time of Next Meetings:

Board Discussion Forum: 21st April 2021, 4:30pm– 6:30pm (Virtual – MS Teams)

Board Meeting: 19th May 2021, 4:30pm– 6:30pm (Virtual – MS Teams)

