



BOARD MEETING

Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board Meeting held 14th July 2021 at 4.30pm by video conference call

Present:

Clare Hayward	Trevor Brocklebank	Cllr Russ Bowden	Cllr Russ Bowden
Loren Jones (from 5pm)	Annette McDonald	Peter Broxton	Nicola Newton
Chris Hindley	Nichola Newton	Alice Choi	Kath Mackay
Stephen Kinsey	John Downes	Eunice Simmons	

In attendance:

Philip Cox	Ian Brooks	Joe Manning	Frank Jordan
Charlie Seward	Alex Thompson	Steve Park	

Apologies

Nicola Dunbar	Cllr Craig Browne	Joe Toward	Maggie Chen
Rupert Collis	Cllr Louise Gittins		

Members of the Public (for Part A)

Mr Lee Peters (email submission)			
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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 No conflicts of interests were declared.

Agenda Item 3: Public Presentation

3.1 Mr Lee Peters had contacted Cllr Louise Gittins by email to raise concerns regarding progress towards the establishment of the LEP Digital Connectivity Sub-Board and progress towards delivery of the Digital Infrastructure Plan.

3.2 The LEP Board discussed the issues and agreed a written response would be sent to Mr Peters. The text has been added as an appendix to these minutes.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th May 2021.

4.1 The minutes of 19th May 2021 were agreed.

4.2 There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 5: Board Away Day Feedback

5.1 Reports of the three small group discussions on 8th July were provided by NN, SK, and PB/AM.

5.2 Several common themes are emerging with regards to the role of the LEP, its capacity and priority issues. The board acknowledged the LEP has an important influencing role but can only be effective if its engagement and messaging is focussed on a few key priorities, and each group had identified several possibilities. The board acknowledged a challenge to access a fully representative range of views of businesses and residents.

5.3 The executive was tasked to consolidate the points raised and to draw together some draft conclusions which can be further refined alongside the ongoing LEP review.

ACTION PC

Agenda Item 6: Board Sub-Committee Reports

6.1 The board heard updates from the sub-board chairs by exception.

6.2 Strategy Programme Board. JD reported that the board had approved eight applications for funding contributions towards the development of business cases and feasibility studies. The successful applications, which were evaluated on criteria including strategic fit, impact, timescale, match funding and availability of future funding for delivery, would receive between £20k and £50k towards the overall costs of the projects. The combined awards committed £295k of the available £300k funding. In addition, grant was also approved for two other schemes, the funding coming from underspend in the prior year and the release of additional LEP funds. Full details of the schemes are available in the papers for the Strategy Programme Board.

6.3 In response to a question from CH, PC confirmed that decisions to support the preparation of business cases did not require a review at P&I.

6.4 AM informed the board that the Bollin Valley project had been awarded £100k by Mersey Forest. PC confirmed that should there be any future availability of LEP funds, additional projects could be considered.

6.5 Marketing Cheshire Board. Trevor Brocklebank announced that the new LEP website had been launched and invited board members to look at <https://cheshireandwarrington.com>. Initial responses have been very positive, and the board thanked the team. With new logos and a colour palette, branding guidelines will follow.

6.6 Performance and Investment Committee. CH and LJ congratulated Rachel Laver on her new appointment and emphasised the importance of an orderly handover of programme management activity. The discussion widened into a request for the role of P&I to be clarified given the expected reduction in the level of investment activity by the LEP through local growth funds, and the shift towards performance management.

ACTION PC/ IB

Agenda Item 7: Chief Executive's report

7.1 Philip Cox provided a written update to the Board, and provided additional detail as follows:

7.2 There have been numerous reports that some sectors, e.g. hospitality and social care, are struggling to recruit and we are working with stakeholders to join up job seekers with the hard to fill vacancies.

However, concern has been expressed that some employers are offering relatively unattractive packages or placing demands on prospective employees.

7.3 There are several government announcements expected before the summer recess, including the Prime Minister setting out a little more on Levelling Up, the innovation white paper, and a statement regarding the LEP review. The last of these will not be the final recommendations.

Agenda Item 8: Approval of the Annual Accounts 2021-22

8.1 IB presented a summary of the annual accounts. SK referred to his report of the activities of the Finance and Audit committee over the past year and the assurance provided by the work of internal and external auditors, who attend all the F&A meetings. They have had opportunities to review and comment on cash flow items, policy regarding reserves and the risk register. JD asked what, if any recommendations, the auditors had raised in their management letter. This is a non-public document, which IB agreed to share with directors. However, it contained only two matters, both of which have either been or are being addressed.

8.2 Reference was made to the ongoing delay of payment to LEPs of core funding by government. PC explained that there is an ongoing dialogue with HM Treasury and some political nuances behind current decision making. He believes a solution will emerge for the current financial year. Even, if not, LEP resources and reserves are sufficient not to raise solvency or liquidity concerns. PC also described a possible funding model for the medium term, more reliant on retained business rates, should the core funding arrangements not continue beyond 2021-22.

8.3 Directors unanimously supported the recommendation to approve the annual accounts for signature by the Chair and Chair of F&A. This will be arranged by digital sign off.

Agenda Item 9: Review of the Corporate Risk Register

9.1 IB presented a paper and summary of the corporate risk register inviting the board to comment. TB indicated that the register had an operational focus and did not fully address the strategic risks of the LEP. He proposed a that the executive review the register, overlay the major challenges we face and from which risks can be identified. IB agreed to hold some individual discussion with board directors including TB and LJ to develop the register further.

ACTION: IB

Agenda Item 10: Any Other Business

10.1 The conclusion of a deal at Vauxhall for the production of electric vans was welcomed as very positive news by the board, and thanks extended to John Adlen who had been heavily involved in negotiations.

10.2 The Board acknowledged the recent positive comments by the Business Secretary on the HyNet project. The Board also discussed the importance of HyNet being included in the first wave of Government funding for major Hydrogen / CCUS investment.

10.3 JM was thanked for sharing invitations to a couple of recent events where CH was a speaker. Board members welcomed being made aware of similar webinars etc, in future, and were happy to promote to their networks as well as attending where possible.

Agenda Item 11: Date and Time of Next Meetings:

Board Meeting: 15th September 2021, 4:30pm– 6:30pm (Virtual – MS Teams)

Board Discussion Forum: 20th October 2021, 4:30pm– 6:30pm (Virtual – MS Teams)

Dear Mr Peters

Thank you for your email and interest in Digital across Cheshire. The LEP Board discussed your concerns and would like to re-assure you that developing digital infrastructure and connectivity in Cheshire is recognised as an important issue. Digital and digital skills cut across the sub-region's capability to deliver on the overall ambitions for our economic recovery. We are working to establish the LEP Digital Connectivity Sub-board and acknowledge our progress hasn't been as quick as we would have liked. The LEP is, at the end of the day, quite a small organisation and officers are balancing large portfolios of work. That said, some additional resource has recently been identified and we are canvassing sub-board members for dates to hold the inaugural meeting before the end of August.

We share your concerns that Cheshire isn't one of the priority areas to receive funding from Project Gigabit. However, within the same announcement a further £210M is being made available for a "top-up" voucher scheme. Nevertheless, Connecting Cheshire are running a programme called "Digital Cheshire" that include new broadband infrastructure as its key element. The project is 50% funded via ERDF (MHCLG managed). This infrastructure will provide connections to over 4,000 premises that have very poor and sub superfast speeds, roughly one third of all such properties in the sub-region, and the new connections will be Gigabit (1000mbs) Fibre solutions. We estimate that in the Cheshire region this will still leave over 9,000 premises with Sub Superfast (0-30mbs).

The Connecting Cheshire Partnership is looking at a number of solutions to address this:

- Utilising national Building Digital UK (BDUK) vouchers but with a local "top up" to increase value
- Investigating 'local' BDUK procurements which are smaller in scale than the regional 'tiered' programme (and not subject to the Cheshire 'back of queue' issue)
- Investigating Other initiatives connecting publicly owned buildings (previously termed 'outside in')
- Informing BDUK that we may have scope to utilise the last remaining Superfast funding on our current contract

Of these the vouchers has received particular focus and is seen as likely to go forward (possibly with other supporting initiatives later).

More information will be made available at <http://www.connectingcheshire.org.uk/>

Thanks again for your interest and the LEP will publish the dates of the upcoming meetings on its website once they are confirmed.