

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023

Summary

1. Whilst work on the details of the LEP's transfer over to LA control has taken up a lot of senior executive time over the summer, the wider team has nevertheless continued to make progress with delivering the Board's vision that C&W should be the most sustainable, inclusive, healthy and growing economy in the country, with important progress being made in delivering the decarbonisation of C&W's industrial cluster, the development of the sub-region's wider sustainable and inclusive economic plan and new initiatives to strengthen the success of our visitor economy.

Transfer of LEP Functions to the LAs

2. The long delayed Government response to the consultation on the Chancellor's Budget announcement on LEPs was finally published on 4 August. The response runs to 14 pages and in very brief summary explained how, in transferring LEP functions to LAs the Government is seeking to ensure that they continue to be organised and delivered at a sub-regional level, with LA control being delivered through joint LA committees. It also states that it wants every sub-region to establish a business advisory board (or economic growth boards as it calls them) in each sub-region to provide business input into sub-regional LA decision making.
3. The good news for C&W is that the Government's paper is completely in line with the proposals that the Growth Directors put to the Leaders and Chief Executives (LaCE) at the beginning of June on which Steve Park briefed the Board at its meeting in June. These proposals are now being worked up in detail and due diligence being undertaken in advance of a further meeting of LaCE on 29 September.

Pledge Partnership

4. The European funding that has met a significant proportion of the costs of the Pledge careers programme comes to an end over the next couple of months. Youth Fed and ourselves have secured alternative sources of funding which will enable the programme to continue in its present form, but we have also taken the opportunity to make some organisational changes which will lead to the LEP will taking the lead on the Careers Hub part of the programme whilst Youth Fed take the lead on the rest (including rolling out the programme beyond the boundaries of C&W!). We have also re-affirmed our "one team" approach to the programme which we have set out in an MOU signed by Chris Hindley and myself.

Delivering Industrial De-carbonisation

5. We have appointed a consortium comprising Opergy (a leading energy consultancy) and Metro-Dynamics to undertake the work we are doing jointly with our major energy users and

providers to identify whether and what type of central co-ordination arrangements are required in order to successfully deliver the £30 billion NW industrial cluster decarbonisation plan. The work is being funded by us using money we receive from the North West Net Zero Hub and will include DESNZ and IDRIC (the national industrial decarbonisation research centre) on its steering group.

Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Plan

6. In its response to the LEP consultation, the Government said it wanted sub-regions to continue to produce strategic economic plans, providing a valuable endorsement of the work we already have underway to produce a new Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Plan for C&W. As part of this, over the summer we held three very well attended and very successful initial consultation events to hear from stakeholders about their priorities for that plan. The focus of the sessions, which between them involved around 150 people, has been on gaining an understanding of the priorities stakeholders think should be reflected in the plan. We have further consultation sessions coming up, including with members of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), Cheshire Young Professionals, along with some sessions with small groups from our key business sectors.
7. Once we have completed the next couple of sessions we'll be collating the early feedback so that we can bring it to the next Board meeting and discuss with Board members your views about priorities in light of that feedback and to have a first conversation about specific measures that should appear in the plan.

Marketing Cheshire

8. Especially given the small size of its team, Marketing Cheshire has been making excellent progress over the past couple of months. Proposals for a TBID (Tourism Business Improvement District) for Chester are now moving into detailed development stage, a review of visitor information in Chester (a condition of Marketing Cheshire's grant from Cheshire West) is in full swing and due to produce an initial report at the end of the month), and both quarterly Growth Plans and a Destination Management Plan are being produced under the auspices of Marketing Cheshire's LVEP status. Alongside this the team has also been organising the Science Corridor Symposium, the annual Economic Conference and agreeing partnerships with Transport for Wales and Avanti to market Chester and Cheshire & Warrington respectively as a great place to visit by train.

Economic Conference

9. Following the Science Symposium on 13 September, our annual economic conference is due to take place at Jodrell Bank on the morning of 18 October. The theme (which requires a snappier title!) is "Delivering Sustainable, Inclusive and Healthy Growth in Cheshire and Warrington", and we are planning a mix of key note speakers and panel discussions designed to showcase some of the opportunities we have in C&W to deliver really good growth.

Finance Systems

10. The finance team have completed an upgrade of our Sage accounting system from Sage 50 (server based) to Sage 200 (Cloud based) because support and resilience of the old version was limited. In addition to improved operation, we have used the opportunity to upgrade the chart of accounts, improve report consistency, and streamline report production with reduced reliance on spreadsheets.

Staffing

11. We have had several departures and arrivals amongst the executive team since the last Board meeting. Trevor Langston and Georgina Mills have TUPEed across to Youth Fed as part of our re-organisation of the Pledge team, with Ceri Morgan coming the other way. Crucially, although their employers have changed, all three will continue to work in the single LEP/ Youth Fed Pledge team that has operated so successfully over the past few years.
12. Rebecca Luck has moved to Liverpool City Council and Sarah Williams has returned to Cheshire South and West College, and they have been replaced in the Bootcamp team by Lara Smith, who joins us from the Birmingham LEP, and Fiona Exley, who is transferring on promotion from the Pledge team. Devon Haughton has also joined the LEP and the Bootcamp team.
13. In early September Tom Holmes will leave Marketing Cheshire to go to work for Manchester University, Kerry Hall will move to Warrington and Andy Devaney leaves us to become Assistant Director, Investment in the Liverpool City Region CA. Recruitment exercises to replace Tom and Kerry, and discussions are taking place about replacing Andy, potentially by re-shaping the role and merging it with some work that used to be undertaken by Joe Manning.

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