

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 15 October 2020
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
Mohammed Ahmed	Homeserve
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Sinead Butters	Aspire Housing Ltd
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Emma Catterall	former Divisional Director of Alton Towers Resort
Prof Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Prof Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Cllr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Jeremy Oates	Portfolio Holder Heritage & Growth, Tamworth Borough Council
Prof Martin Jones	Alternate for Prof Liz Barnes, University of Staffordshire
Cllr Sybil Ralphs	(Alternate) Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Secretariat

Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP Accountable Body
Mark Parkinson	SSLEP Chief Executive
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Secretariat/Business Engagement Officer
Sam Hicks	SSLEP Strategy & Research/LIS Lead
Lucy Sefton	SSLEP Secretariat/Governance and Project

In Attendance

Andrea Whitworth	Assistant Director, Cities & Local Growth Unit
Cllr Philip White	Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Jon Rouse	City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Anthony Hodge	Assistant Director Business & Enterprise, SCC
Anthony Baines	Assistant Director Skills & Employability, SCC
Julie Obada	Strategic Manager Employment, Learning & Skills, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Nicola Kent	Head of Funding Business & Enterprise at Staffordshire County Council
Phil Creswell	Director of Place Growth and Prosperity, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Michelle Smith	Economic Growth & Strategic Projects Manager, Stafford Borough Council

Apologies

Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr George Allen	Deputy Leader, East Staffordshire Borough Council
Prof Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

SA (151 Officer) confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Apologies

These were noted.

3. Declarations of Interest

Declarations were raised by SW re: Peer Networks & Kickstart.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record. Minor amendments supplied by AW & JL.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

The Chair had attended meetings regarding:

- Energy Hub
- Spode site in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Etruria Valley Link Road, with the main contractor, Balfour Beatty.
- Naturalisation of the River Trent & improvements surrounding that area, including press with the BBC
- 5th Anniversary celebration of the Enterprise Zone
- Town Deals & Future High Street Funds issues, with Districts and Boroughs
- Board recruitment.
- Mid-Year Performance Review
- Local Authority Scrutiny of the LEP
- Board member review meetings
- Commonwealth Games. An invite will be extended to a later Board meeting.

New Board Member Emma Catterall was welcomed, as was new secretariat officer, Lucy Sefton

The CEO provided an update on activity since the last meeting and upcoming, in particular attendance at a variety of networking and consultation events at local, regional and national levels, including:

- LEP Network – with feedback being provided to Government on SMEs, Comprehensive Spending Review, Winter Economy Plan
- Ministerial Roundtables
- ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport), in particular in relation to the Planning White Paper.

Planned engagement in the Business Crime Strategy refresh, Peer Networks and the Countywide Redundancy Task Force was also covered.

The call for written evidence to the House of Commons enquiry: The Evolution of Devolution: English Devolution was discussed.

6. Emerging Implementation Plan incorporating Local Industrial Strategy, Covid-19 & International Trade.

AR thanked those involved for work so far. The LEP was preparing to submit LIS requests in late 2020/21. Given the delay to the devolution White Paper, changes in ministerial teams and the impact of COVID the LEP was preparing short, medium and long term asks to place it in a strong position regardless of change.

The LEP discussed the importance of and interest in ‘innovation’ at a national level and sought reassurance from the CLGU representative that Government work on productivity and industrial strategies was joined up.

CLGU emphasises their focus on aligning departmental thinking and commented that the LEP’s work on Innovation and its Innovation sub group were considered best practice.

7. Skills advisory Panel (SAP) Update:

(i) Institute of Technology

Anthony Baines updated the meeting on the Institute of Technology (IoT) as per the report, presentation slides are available. A key priority for the IoT would be the delivery of higher-level skills.

The portal opened for ‘Wave 2’ submissions on 9th October, with a deadline date of 14th December. Proposals are likely to be submitted from the Universities.

MJ and TM noted their interest given their involvement with bids.

The meeting discussed the role of the LEP in relation to this process, in particular whether the LEP should review the bids with a view to supporting a single application. Only 1 application from each LEP area will go through to stage 2, although this would be discussed between the LEP Network and the DfE IoT team.

RESOLVED – The Chair tasked the Secretariat and Skills Advisory Panel technical officers to clarify the process with DfE and updates to be brought back to the Board.

(ii) Careers Enterprise Company (CEC)

Julie Obada (Employment, Learning & Skills and Careers Hub Network Team at Stoke-on-Trent City Council) presented a report to the meeting.

The report particularly emphasised the role of 'Cornerstone Employers' (employers who have signed up to a LEP wide action plan to support schools achieves specific benchmarks) in providing support. This collaboration is key to addressing skills gaps and can improve academic attainment.

The meeting discussed whether employers were generally willing to support individual employees who were interested in supporting the scheme, particularly in relation to allowing time out in schools, and whether there was anything the LEP could do to encourage this.

RESOLVED – Members of the LEP to notify JO of any businesses wishing to get involved with the Careers Hub.

Separately, JO informed the meeting that Commonwealth Games ESF call for skills training had been successful with £4m worth of funds and she would keep the LEP updated regarding this.

(iii) Kickstart

Antony Baines delivered an update on this.

Kickstart is a 6 month work placement for 16 -24 yr olds, to help improve employability and work skills, aiding progression into permanent employment or apprenticeships.

Employers need to offer 30 placements, or else work with intermediary representatives.

A good quality Kickstart programme is needed in our area, ensuring expectations are clear for employers and intermediary representatives. Local partnerships mean we are well placed to deliver this scheme. We need to promote it to priority sectors to target high youth unemployment areas. The campaign is going live next week.

RESOLVED - Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) to report progress to the Board before the end of 2020.

8. Growth Hub Steering Group – Peer Network Programme

Hannah Ault (HA) introduced an overview of the Peer Network, which forms an important part of BEIS Industrial Strategy.

This is a national initiative to give business leaders the tools to address challenges. The idea is to improve the resilience of Staffordshire SMEs to adapt their business model in response to the pandemic.

Given technical issues regarding the allocation of the grant monies and the timescales for spending the report proposed that the Board endorse the operational commissioning of the Peer Network Programme in line with the Accountable Body requirements associated with Direct Award, with the LEP by:

- (i) entering into a contract with the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce who will be able to draw down on the SSLEPs grant allocation of up to £189K; and
- (ii) progressing an open tender process with the ambition to appoint a supplementary service provider that can draw down on the remaining £216K of grant.

Sara Williams (SW) declared an interest and stepped out of the meeting.

- The Board discussed various options; what are other LEPs doing; and whether there was a risk that the remaining £216k might not be able to spent due to the timescales.

The Board was informed that whilst the LEP has been awarded more funding than a number of LEP, some had split the allocation into lots, while others had awarded all to one supplier.

The Board was assured that that the timescales justified the approach, as well as the Chamber of Commerce experience in running peer networks / business support initiates. The LEP CEO assured the Board that the approach was in line with Accountable Body rules.

RESOLVED - The Board agreed the proposal as set out in the report.

9. Social Value in procurement

Sam Hicks (SH) introduced the concept of Social Values, as per her report.

Board members asked/commented:

- could supply chain analysis be added;
- the need for ambitious targets; and
- utilising an employment charter.

SW advised that the Government Social Value agenda is moving fast, so a minimum will be expected, the Chamber would be keen to support this work moving forwards.

RESOLVED – A further iteration will be written adding supply chains, targets & employment issues and brought back to the Board for discussion.

10. Audit & Finance Committee:

MA detailed items for discussion within the Finance dashboard.

- Growth Deal- Amber. Audit & Finance Committee last week have discussed the specific query in relation to i54 being funded by GBF and will develop a plan. This would be added to SPMG agenda. The Environment Agency and other schemes have been asked why the spend is less than forecast. This was raised as a potential issue only and will be escalated back to Board only if needed after the next SPMG meeting.
- Getting Building Fund projects will land at different times, so until all signed off these remain at Amber. Partners will need to apply pressure as appropriate to keep the momentum up through the process and into finalising contracts.
- The Board was remained that there are 7 contingency projects under GBF already, with business cases scheduled for consideration by SPMG. After December a timeline of expected spend under GBF would be developed. The LEP has been awarded £80k to help manage the programme, supported by additional technical advice/resource to assess business cases and legal agreements, and the secretariat regarding ongoing monitoring of schemes. GBF delivery timelines also feature in the Risk & Issue register.

There have been 3 internal reviews via Audit & Finance committee and all identified issues have been addressed. The LEP Board noted that the Risk & Issue Register was not an easy document to navigate and asked that the red, amber, green parts be presented better.

The Board was advised that funds for the Peer Network were on the way.

11. Mid-year Performance Review

The Board noted the significant work required to continually update the LEP's governance in line with national guidance and the significant improvements that have been made in this area. The mid-year review resulted in a number of additional actions, all of which were in hand.

The next Annual Performance Review is likely to be in January 2021.

12. SME Champion(s)

Emma Catterall (EC) has been invited to fulfil the role to work alongside HA.

13. Scrutiny Committee Arrangements

The LEP is required to be scrutinised by Local Authority Scrutiny Committees annually, as per the LEP Assurance Framework. The next meeting is being hosted by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and will be held on the 23rd November (papers issued 13th November). The Secretariat are putting together supporting papers.

Thanks to Cllr Jeremy Oates for prompting this to ensure broader involvement were designed in from conception.

14. Assurance Framework: V8

The LEP CEO presented a report setting a number of amendments to the LEP's Assurance Framework to ensure it is up to date with current guidance.

RESOLVED - The Board agreed for version 8 to be published with all amendments agreed (this was subsequently published on 20th October).

15. SSLEP CEO Recruitment Committee: Update

MP stepped out of the room for this item.

The Board was updated on progress. Given the delay to the Devolution White Paper, the recruitment committee had reconvened for the second time to agree the process and start the external advertising.

16. Forward Plan

MP appraised the Board of key items intended for future Board meetings, including:-

November

- Innovate UK to hopefully attend. TM to liaise with the Secretariat over this.
- City Deals DHN will provide an update - CEO to liaise with Phil Creswell at S-o-T CC.
- ESIF updates due.
- Growing Places updates due.

December

- Scrutiny Committee will have met, so outcomes will be reported
- 5G proposal update due.
- Celebrating Success updates.
- Equality & Diversity Champion to provide an annual report.

January

No meeting

February

- Chatterley Valley Enterprise Zone update.
- Annual Performance Review details.
- Midlands Engine Connects a timely update due.

The Board are asked to advise the Secretariat of any issues they would like to bring to future meetings.

SW asked for HS2 updates from the DfT, including an update on what is happening and how it affects Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and. JR advised that he, John Henderson & Darryl Eyers met with HS2 team recently, with no mention of any fundamental changes to plans, but partners would double check.

17. AOB

- HA advised that the LEP Annual Conference is proposed for Tuesday 1st & Wednesday 2nd December 12-2.30pm both days. Thus far Jenny Campbell (former 'Dragon') & Carol Shanahan (Port Vale) had been secured to speak and it was intended to secure an appropriate Minister from BEIS.
- 'Business Heroes' a digital publication joint venture between the LEP and Chambers had received 1,000 unique visitors, which have driven visitors to the Growth Hub and Chambers sites. Board Members were asked to promote further.
- Cllr AB detailed that both herself and AR had appeared on Midlands Today regarding the fifth anniversary of the Enterprise Zone and that there had been television coverage of : the new Hilton hotel opening in Hanley. This provided good promotion for the City and thanks were given to the LEP.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 19th November 2020 @ 4pm

Location: Via MS Teams.