

**Notes of the LEP Partnership Meeting
Executive Suite, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent
Thursday 21st March 2019
Draft Website Minutes**

Members

David Frost (Chairman)	
Alun Rogers (Vice Chair)	risual
James Leavesley	The Leavesley Group
Cllr Philip Atkins	Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Wendy Dean	Strategi Solutions
Mohammed Ahmed	Homeserve
Sarah Montgomery	National Memorial Arboretum
Liz Barnes	Staffordshire University
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers

Advisory/Secretariat

Jacqui Casey	Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP
Alison Thomas	Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP

In Attendance

Andrea Whitworth	BEIS
Anthony Hodge	Staffordshire County Council

Apologies

Adrian MacLaughlin	Dunston Business Village
David Sidaway	City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Abi Brown	Deputy Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
John Henderson	Chief Executive, Staffordshire County Council
Paul Farmer	Wade Ceramics
Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Brian Edwards	Leader, South Staffordshire Council
Cllr Michael Wilcox	Leader, Lichfield District Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Judith Kirkland	Business Enterprise Support
Cllr Anthony Munday	Stoke-on-Trent City Council

1. Introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

These were noted.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Chairman's Update

The chairman reported that SSLEP's annual conference in January had been the most successful and well-attended to date, with a large increase in business attendance, particularly SMEs. He thanked the LEP team which organised the conference and said a larger venue would be required next year.

The chairman reported that SSLEP had attended MIPIM as part of the Midlands UK Pavilion. It had been a successful event, with visitor numbers to the pavilion up 20 per cent on the previous year. Business sentiment was very positive and events organised by the LEP and its partners were well-attended. Presentations by the local authorities were very effective. The LEP dinner was attended by 30 people and featured a useful discussion on rebuilding town centres. Despite Brexit uncertainty, investors saw clear opportunities to continue investing in the UK and in our area. There was good engagement between the LEP and local co-sponsors of the West Midlands presence at MIPIM.

5. Notes of the previous meeting and any matters arising

The notes were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting.

6. LEP review

The chairman reported that a key part of the LEP Review was changing the nature of LEPs, with the requirement of an incorporated structure and demonstrable capacity to meet future work programme demands. Resolving geographical overlaps continues to be a significant issue for SSLEP. SSLEP and GBSLEP had been unable to reach agreement over boundaries and the issue was now in the hands of central government. A response was awaited.

Despite this, the LEP board had agreed to press ahead in order to meet the government deadline and form a company limited by guarantee. There would be 18 board members: 12 private sector and six public sector.

This decision had been relayed to Local Growth Minister Jake Berry MP. His reply did not address the boundary issue. The chairman reported that until the issue was settled the LEP would be severely restricted in its ability to plan ahead, recruit new directors and identify funding. Ministers had been alerted to this.

7. Local Industrial Strategy

Deputy chair Alun Rogers introduced a discussion on developing a Local Industrial Strategy, which he said would focus on long-term strategic leadership, grand challenges and local strengths, among them AI and data, and clean growth. The discussion highlighted a range of comments on what government is seeking from a LIS, the development process and areas of opportunity.

Government expectations:

- A distinctive, place-related approach for each LIS.
- A robust document for the whole of the local economy, building on existing strengths.
- As a co-designed document, the understanding is that, as the LIS develops, government will commit to it and provide funding and backing.

The development process and areas of opportunity

- It would be helpful to have more information about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the help that might be available in future in areas such as de-risking innovation and commercialising IP.
- Information would also be useful on other future government funding pots and potential future rounds of the Local Growth Fund.
- The LIS should not solely be driven by access to government funding, but should be about creating the right environment for business growth.

- The LIS development process should also engage with businesses outside our area. An aim should be to attract new supply chain into the area, not just focus on the firms we have already.
- The LEP should seek feedback from the DIT on our inward investment propositions to research our unsuccessful pitches and the reasons firms decided to go elsewhere. This could be achieved by engaging with government departments and our LEP champion in government during the LIS development.
- The LEP can make use of existing Agritech West research and documents to inform that part of the LIS.
- LIS development should examine the impact of the planning system on business growth and the extent to which planning policies and planning application delays are a barrier. We need to engage with businesses on the issues that are concerning them now in order to get their interest in developing strategy for the future.
- By August/September the LEP steering group will have a feel for how the LIS is developing and will be sharing the developing drafts with our partners for debate and challenge and using critical friends in an iterative process to finalise the ideas and opportunities.
- This should include the arts, reflecting the growing recognition that STEM subjects should actually become STEAM subjects. There are opportunities to promote this area as an artistic area with the creativity that allows people to think differently and be challenged.
- The LIS should identify the areas outside our own geography that we might want to collaborate with due to complementary strengths or interests. This should avoid silo thinking purely on sectors and include cross-cutting themes, such as energy.
- Should we look at creative and digital as a sector in its own right, or something that we embed into everything?
- The same approach applies to broadband and connectivity – the strategy should not talk about having it but address what we can do with it.
- Use the LIS process to engage primarily with local businesses with a stake in the area.
- Highlight importance of leisure and place in the SSLEP LIS – promoting the area as attractive to live in and to enjoy leisure activities. Stress the tourism and quality of life strengths of our area in external marketing.
- Stress the importance of craft-driven enterprises as well as high tech, and attract people with skills in high-end, high quality crafts.
- The area has a spectrum, for example in ceramics, from the traditional to the high tech and innovative ceramics, and this spectrum is a strength for our area and our LIS.
- We have a tight LIS budget, so the LEP cannot engage directly with everybody. We have to be selective and efficient. Wider discussion is welcome, but we can't commit any of our core budget to it.
- Use LEP board members and other wider partners as LIS champions who can cascade messages out, spread the word about the LIS and feed data and opinion back in.
- Use existing forums to host discussions and test ideas, for example the Stoke Diaspora.
- Support from our wider partners needs to be structured, not broad generalities.

8. Any other business

There was no other business.

Date and time of next meeting:

LEP Board:

Thursday 17th April

6pm-8pm

Drawing Room, County Buildings, Stafford

LEP Partnership:

Thursday 21st November

6pm-8pm

Executive Suite, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent