

27th September

The Rt Hon Jake Berry MP
Minister of State Northern Powerhouse & Local Government
Cabinet Office & Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
Communities and Local Government
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Jake

RE: Resolution of LEP Geographies

I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with you on 25 June 2019, to discuss the LEP geographic overlaps between Stoke & Staffordshire LEP and Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP. During that session you advised Tim Pile and I that, in the event that Boris Johnson became Party Leader and PM, we should expect a swift resolution on this issue.

On 25 June, you were good enough to provide Tim and I with time to make our respective cases on the geographies issue. For Stoke & Staffordshire businesses, our view has not altered on the benefits of continuing to follow a county boundary. It meets existing business and service delivery arrangements and enables our delivery partners to readily progress opportunities that maximise private investment in our area. While we continue to work positively and proactively with our GBSLEP neighbours, their own position on retention of overlaps also remains unchanged. Unlike us, they are very content with a position whereby the overlap issue is never resolved.

I am writing to you today because the lack of any resolution on geographies is now a significant and escalating problem for Stoke & Staffordshire LEP. It is now seriously limiting our ability to undertake the required work on our Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) and on the LEP Review. This problem is caused by the withholding of £300k LEP Review Implementation Grant from our LEP. This funding would have paid for our LIS, the additional costs of the move to a company structure and our other Review-related work. Without it, we are exhausting our limited Core Funding and being forced to reduce other areas of our work programme at a point where our local activity needs to dramatically increase to meet the current local and national challenges, to continue to deliver job-creating projects & programmes and to prepare for the new delivery arrangements in promoting economic & productivity growth.

SSLEP Board Directors have taken the LEP Review very seriously indeed. We have been at pains to use the production of our Local Industrial Strategy and our detailed work programme for the LEP Review as a positive mechanism for driving fundamental change in the way we do business in future to deliver on the government's priorities for economic growth.

We aim to be a best practice model in governance, strategy and delivery. We have undertaken a detailed governance review this year, re-writing our Assurance Framework with a special emphasis on improving transparency and accountability to our business base and the communities we serve. We are currently restructuring our LEP Secretariat, ensuring not only its independence but also concentrating on how we use our limited resources to work more effectively with our partners and stakeholders, while also improving the quality of our ongoing communication with our business base. We are engaging across the whole of our SSLEP geography including holding board meetings across the area hosted by businesses on their premises most recently in Burton on Trent and we will be in Lichfield before the end of this year. We have reviewed our Board of Directors and are currently completing recruitment of four new LEP Board Directors and six further business leaders to support our Skills Advisory Panel. We are about to recruit our new Chair.

We are truly a business-led Board. We are working hard to become the strong convener of Stoke & Staffordshire business and civic partners, that is fully equipped to deliver a transformational LIS through a commissioning model which encourages business innovation and fosters new ways of delivering productivity growth.

As the new Acting Chairman of the partnership, I am asking for your support firstly in ensuring we have the same resources as every other LEP in meeting the requirements of the Review and developing an ambitious LIS that will deliver on your economic growth agenda; and secondly to help us close the geography issue by backing our position so that we can continue free from distraction, with our renewed purpose and passion to continue to transform the businesses and lives of the citizens in our area.

I would be happy to meet again to discuss or provide any clarification as needed, either in Westminster or next when you may be in our area. I am sure you will be pleased to see the progress we are making in advancing the performance of our LEP.

Yours sincerely,

Alun Rogers
Chair Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire LEP

cc: Stephen Jones, Director, Cities & Local Growth; Tony Bray, Area Director WM & SW CLGU; Nathan Philips, Director, DExEU.