

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting**

**via MS Teams conference call**

**Thursday 16 April 2020**

**Confidential Minutes**

**Board Directors**

Alun Rogers (Chair) risual

Mohammed Ahmed Homeserve

Hannah Ault Valentine Clays

Prof Liz Barnes Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire

Caroline Brown Caja Group

Sinead Butters Aspire Housing Ltd

James Leavesley (Vice Chair) Leavesley Group

Prof Trevor McMillan Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele

Sara Williams Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Cllr Abi Brown Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Cllr Patrick Farrington Leader, Stafford Borough Council

Cllr Philip Atkins Leader, Stafford County Council

Cllr Jeremy Oates Portfolio Holder Heritage & Growth, Tamworth Borough Council

Cllr Simon Tagg Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

**Advisory/Secretariat**

Simon Ablewhite SSLEP Accountable Body

Jacqui Casey Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP

Jo Kemp SSLEP Secretariat

Sam Hicks SSLEP Strategy & Research/LIS Lead Officer

**In Attendance**

Martin Hamilton Chief Executive, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Jon Rouse City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Andrea Whitworth Assistant Director, Cities & Local Growth Unit

Phil Creswell Director of Place Growth and Prosperity

**Apologies**

Paul Farmer Wade Ceramics

Cllr George Allen Deputy Leader Regen & Planning, East Staffs Borough Council

**1. Introductions**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. AR noted that the meeting was quorate.

**2. Apologies**

These were noted.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were raised.

**4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising**

* Para 11 should read Growth Deal, not City Deal. Subject to this change, the minutes of the 19 March 2020 meeting were agreed to be a fair and accurate record of the meeting.

Under Matters Arising:

* AR noted that he had deferred the District Heat Network presentation to allow for a full discussion on Item 6: Covid-19 Impacts.

**5. Chair’s Update and Delegated Decisions**

* AR advised that 2 conversations had been held with prospective Board Members. 1 is making an application; 1 is asking their own corporation’s Board for permission.

**AGREED: SB to be the 3rd panel member for Board Recruitment interviews.**

* Cllr PA chaired a meeting of ‘North Midlands Manufacturing Corridor’ (which included representation from Midlands Connect). The A500 corridor spans 3 LEPs, many universities, large businesses & includes EMA, which is the UK’s only 24/7 freight airport. There is a similar plan for an East/West A5 corridor stretching from Leicestershire to Shrewsbury, which should benefit South Staffs.

**6. LIS & Covid -19**

* There has been a significant amount of preparation surrounding the LIS, SSLEP Covid-19 plans & Sub-Group implementation since last the Board Meeting. AR thanked all EB Members & partners for responding well thus far. He mapped SSLEP partner response phases in terms of:

1. Immediate Response

2. Recovery

3. Renewal & Resilience

* AR provided an update on West Midlands LEPs Chairs bi-weekly meetings which covers range of topics from local economic impacts and business access to funds to Government support for certain sectors. These meetings include preparation/messaging for the LEP Network bi-weekly meetings with Ministers. Tim Pile of GBSLEP provides WM LEP. WM LEP CEOs meet weekly and feed into LEP Network civil servant sessions which take place weekly with LEP Network.
* Portal for Furlough payments opens 20th April, with payments starting from 26th April. SW advises that HMRC feel ready to cope.
* As well as a re-purposing of existing LEP funding pots, the LEP Network is pursuing discussions on extension to the LEP Enterprise Zone policy, including lobbying to extend Business Rate Relief to 31/03/22 or 2024.
* JL & PA reflected on emergency work in Staffordshire which had benefitted from the County Council CEO’s understanding of strategy & logistics to help organise PPE & food supplies from a central command point. The Incident Management Team has work on these areas for the past 5 weeks in conjunction with their very different day jobs.
* SW advised that a call out from Royal Stoke hospital for PPE eqpt led to responses from 74 companies in 24 hours. As a result, some surplus can be passed to Care Homes.
* SW - A Growth Hub grant is available, via County Council Authorities, for recovery planning & to help apply for CBILS applications. Chambers & partnerships in Staffordshire had been stunning in their ability to support. She praised Nicola Kent & her team for the Growth Hub’s response at this extremely hectic time.
* Cllr PF advised that central Govt Grants had been received and 38% of applications from 2294 eligible businesses in Stafford Borough had been paid out by 15th April.
* Cllr JO advised that previous SSLEP work helped fund Tamworth Enterprise Centre, which in turn allowed a network of business contacts to be made & contacted very quickly. 42% of their grant has been released to eligible businesses in Tamworth.
* ST advised that whilst they are awaiting approx. 500 business grant applications, 800 have already been processed.
* MA advised that Cheshire East Business Rates have been repaid without application, if they have been paid via DD. No forms to fill in. JL received payment within 7 days of application from his Authority. HA advises S-O-T website was easy & payment was within 7 days. SW confirmed that Authorities are all working differently. AW praised local authorities for acting quickly – main issues arising are where applicants have perhaps not kept Local Authorities up to date on some details, so manual checks are then needed. AB added there’s a high proportions of SMEs in the area, who pay cash or online payments, so DD details are not necessarily held & this slows things down.
* MA asked how the LEP can help where banks cannot. Some banks are not helping smaller businesses. Rishi Sunak commented a week ago, so awareness is there. JL confirmed mixed responses from various banks received. AW confirmed it’s known, but other than anecdotal stories, she would welcome specific examples which can be fed into BEIS.
* PA advised that Staffordshire County Council’s £500,000 Grant Fund will be allocated now. Designed to catch businesses that are falling between the gaps, the ethos being that money can be recovered later by saving businesses now. Longer term - How do we get people to use initiative, aspirational, entrepreneurial, take risks? These ideas can then carry forward into the Recovery & Renewal stages.
* AR invited ideas for Recovery & Renewal. It has cost £1/4 trillion to freeze the economy – how do we defrost it? Points raised included:
* Schools returning is key, releasing workforce from childcare commitments
* kicks start travel, use of public transport
* Basis upon which PPE & testing be needed?
* Re-opening recycling centres,
* Re-opening large manufactures and the knock effect on supply chain & logistics.
* JL suggests progressing with 5G, repositioning & renewing applications so we’re at the front of the line & prepared when restrictions are lifted. Pick up new businesses & nurture these.
* TM – problem or opportunity with future workforce, with youngsters finishing school & HEs having no jobs to go to. Can we utilise this readily available workforce? A 2nd wave of Covid-19 is expected from Public Health England later in the year (Autumn), so economy may need pausing again. AR noted learning organisations can help Furloughed people to attend training courses 5-6 weeks still available if furlough is lifted at end of May.
* AB stated that Stoke CC’s recovery plan is in formation: Economy; Social Care & Health and Re-operationalising. DFT have stopped all but the Transforming Cities Fund, so as a LEP we need clarity on what will be considered, to avoid spending time on issues which won’t be carried forward.
* SB asked where economic strain is & link this back to underspent funds to address these areas. What lobbying should we be making nationally to support our businesses? AR advised that LEP are working with County & City to obtain data.
* SW – A good questionnaire has its uses, but timing needs to be right. Presently responses might be angry, or data from businesses which are working might not be forthcoming, due to feeling guilty. Once furlough & self-employed payments have begun the timing may be better.
* Cllr PF pointed out that loss of income into Local Authorities now could mean a weakened ability to help businesses later. Figures have been submitted to Govt.
* Cllr ST noted LEP support is needed to realign proposals for Town Deals, as supported by MHCLG. Now is not the time to necessarily look at growth, but recovery of existing town centre & other small businesses. Can LEP realign thinking towards match-fund proposals? £25m is potentially available for each Town Deal & to match fund this amount could provide opportunities for Newcastle & Kidsgrove.
* Cllr PA noted extension of Town Deals across Staffordshire is key. Digital thread seam runs through; meeting travel time has been removed & online learning, will things which have stopped need to be revised? Might people continue to support small independent shops & move away from supermarkets?
* AR moved conversations onto Renewal consideration.
* LB & HA gave updates on Future Workforce & Growing Business Sub-Groups which met on 15th & 16th April. Introductions with the groups were made ToR & Specifications had been supplied.
* On the former LB gave overview as: ‘T’ Levels & quality of placements had been discussed. Could LEP broker the placements? Apprenticeships have suffered under covid-19 – Guidance & solutions are missing; Could the LEP bring together/support qualifications, standards & skills gap? What courses might now be introduced? Crisis has shown the lack of Oxygen engineers; Tracy Bullock from UHNS is a useful addition to the Group; Armed Forces have brilliant logistics; Digital skills within schools are still dated; Can careers advice be improved? How do we engage Parents? CPD for teachers; Next meeting will cover Covid-19 & how the LEP can help; A representative from the Armed Forces would be a useful group member.
* On the latter HA gave her overview: There is a lack of flexible small business space locally; the term High Value User Employment Sites need to be more clearly defined if demand is to be evidenced; an Inward Investment campaign was discussed; Growth Hub Manager, Nicola Kent can provide useful data to the group; Networking groups via Chambers of Commerce were mentioned; a representative from the Chambers would be welcome.
* AR invited TM to comment on the Innovation sub-Group. This group had not yet met and will draw on the knowledge of some different stakeholders & expertise. Covid-19 recovery phase should now prompt innovative thinking, rather than simply rebuilding all old businesses, so these conversations have helped focus thinking; By next week the Sub-Group membership should be agreed;
* AR concluded with discussion on Recovery stage. Help needed from all the Board. Working patterns might undergo significant change. Will people return to office space? Might councils need to consider homeworker business rates? Will commuter patterns change? Improvements to digital conferencing skills. Shall we continue LEP strategic planning within this forward- thinking way? A new reality?
* AR invited PC to talk about a potential Covid19 Taskforce. Taskforce to share insights, data & & subject matter expertise across the economic area, in the County & it’s districts. Set this at LEP level & meet in between Board meetings & also communicate to BEIS via this group. AR keen to pursue this coordinating group.

**7. Skills Advisory Panel**

* LB indicated that the SAP would benefit from a closer working relationship with, and direction from, the LEP Board. There were some concerns that the outcomes of recent survey work didn’t give a true representation of sectors or marry up with LIS evidence bases. The SAP was there to help & support the LEP with data but the LEP Board needed to feed priorities to the SAP too. LB asked that, in undertaking LIS sub group and other work for the Board, Board Members give strong consideration to the work that should be commissioned this year using its SAP funding. A Skills survey post Covid-19 crisis could be helpful? The LEP & SAP are a good team, which should be utilised fully. Darren Farmer, the SAP analyst had done an excellent job over the last 12 months.

**Decision: Board Members endorsed the allocation of £20k against the funding of the Skills Analyst and purchase of the labour force analysis tool.**

* AR clarified that the SAP isn’t the same as Future Workforce Sub-Group – there are different constitution of members, Sub-group is determining how the future workforce might look and setting strategy. SAP is a data feed into LEP mandated by BEIS, data needed voice of employers & trainers to feed into the LEP.
* JC advised that a stronger working link between the Secretariat and SAP Group has been developed and closer work with LEP Board is welcomed. Agreed we need a robust evidence base. Information on survey was presented to SAP. It was noted that this should feed through to Board to help them appreciate LB’s comments.
* AR - A follow up session is planned for next week & could identify where data will be discussed.

**DECISION: The board agreed allocation of £20k for 2 projects - £5k match contribution for data licence for analysis software & £15k to fund Economy & Skills Analyst post for 2021.**

**8. Item 8 was deferred to May meeting due to time.**

**9. Risk Register**

* MA Risk Register required comprehensive review in light of Covid-19 risk. He has sent an e-mail out to all Programme leads for improved risk analysis.

**10. Item 10 was deferred to May meeting due to time.**

**11. Final Improvement Plan 2019/20 Update**

* JL thanked AR for his outstanding work & enthusiasm as Chair in the past 6 months, in helping to transform LEP areas of under-performance over the LEP review year to a position where all areas are scored as ‘Good’ in the 2019/20 Annual Performance Review. AR pointed out that a number of others had undertaken the work & achieved the turnaround of Governance scores. Thanks were given to the accountable body and to the whole Board for their additional input over the year.

**13. AOB**

* Cllr PF asked whether others had received the Companies House notification of submission of the Confirmation Statement for LEP Ltd Co. Are there any changes? All was in order. SA noted that there is still some Director information required.

**ACTION: JC to pursue any outstanding details from Directors & Alternates.**

**Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 14th May 2020**

**Location: Via MS Teams.**