

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting**

**risual, 12 Parker Court, Stafford, ST18 0WP**

**& via video conference call**

**Thursday 19 March 2020**

**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

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

Sara Williams Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Paul Farmer Wade Ceramics

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

**Advisory/Secretariat**

Simon Ablewhite SSLEP Accountable Body

Jacqui Casey Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP

Jo Kemp SSLEP Secretariat

**In Attendance**

Mark Winnington Stafford, County Council for Cllr Atkins

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

Jon Rouse General Manager, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Andrea Whitworth BEIS

Phil Creswell Project Manager, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Ann Pittard Associate Director for Engagement and Partnerships, Keele University

**Apologies**

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 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**

JL – Item 11 re: Strategic Programme Mgt Board, minute should note agreed voting representation as 4 private sector + 2 public sector members (not 3+2). Subject to this change, the minutes of the 27 February 2020 meeting were agreed to be a fair and accurate record of the meeting.

Under Matters Arising:

* AR – Requested members advise of any pre-board meeting seminar items that they would find useful. This would build on the Induction session, associated induction Pack and improve Board Director knowledge/resilience.
* AB – Nominated Jon Rouse as public sector non-exec representative on SMPG.
* AR noted that two local Expressions of Interest had been submitted to Dept for Education in respect of the Wave 2 Call on Institutes of Technology. DfE was gauging level of interest through the EoI and has indicated to the LEP secretariat that encouraging a single bid might prove the most competitive option for the SSLEP area. Formal guidance has yet to be issued.

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

* AR had attended the SCC-hosted meeting of Staffordshire MPs attended by Theo Clarke, Aaron Bell, Jonathan Gullis, Kate Griffiths & Jo Gideon. MPs left with good understanding of city, LIS & an update on geography issues surrounding the LEP, on which they were keen to support SSLEP. It was hoped that this relationship & understanding would develop.
* Preparation for a COP 26 Climate Event to include the LEP, Keele & Engie, was now cancelled. Hope to come back to it in September.
* Constellation partnership meeting had been held with work underway to restate the partnership aims & benefits of HS2. Cllrs Atkins & Farrington, JC and AR had attended.
* Wendy Dean’s intention to resign from the Board has been received and would be formalise following notification to the Board. Recruitment is already underway, in view of need to fill AR’s place. Enquiries had been received. The Recruitment Panel would include AR & JL. A 3rd volunteer was requested.

**Action: volunteer via e-mail to JC or JK please.**

* LB reminded the Board of the opportunity to increase NHS involvement, although only private sector Director positions were currently available. It was noted that up to 5 specialists can be invited on to the Board, for up to 12 months, in order to support policy development and delivery considerations. A Sub Group position was felt to offer the best option for NHS involvement. MW considered another potential gap to be the leisure & tourism sector, advising that the National Memorial Arboretum had a new Chief Executive Officer in post.

**Action: All to continue to provide their thoughts on potential Board Directors and sub group partners.**

**6. Budget Discussion & Covid -19**

* LEPs had received budget briefing from Stephen Jones of CLGU. Four key areas were noted:
* A levelling up budget, sets out headline numbers on national infrastructure investment, laying foundations for future announcements. Priorities are: transport/strategic road investment incl. Transforming Cities Fund; digital; and housing funding.
* Coronavirus global response changed much of the budget, with funds diverted to emergency health & business support. LEP Network letter, shared with the Board on 17/03/2020, noted an offer by LEPs to redirect some locally allocated monies with the consent of government to meet local issues that were not covered by government support package. Discussions were ongoing with government on this and detail would be brought to Board.
* Announcement of £387m additional Local Growth Funding, as a ‘down payment’ on full future funding details still to be announced. The £387m is assumed to be for use during 201/22 financial year. No govt decision yet on how this would be allocated but noted that there would be a requirement to prioritise what is essential work now rather than things that can wait for the further funding announcements to be made later in the year. Also, allocation of £10m to support Growth Hub reporting work. Weekly Covid-19 returns are being made.
* Devolution remains a govt priority. Announced Yorkshire Deal. The PM’s Rotherham speech remains relevant.
* SA referred to additional Local Growth Deal money and need for quick projects & ideas. Need clarification on whether this was additional funding or not, following some DfT thoughts which were at odds with the CLGU update. AW considered funding to be additional and was seeking clarity. LB asked how this related to LIS potential project scoping returns. JC noted the scoping work had been undertaken to help the LIS sub groups gain an understanding of developing and ongoing work across the area. Thoughts and ideas had been pursued with key partners only however, following consultation with BEIS, because at this point there was no funding available. Sub groups would consider thoughts and ideas and would develop their own ideas around appropriate interventions to meet the LIS priorities and desired outcomes. Once funding detail was known, the LEP would be in a position to go out for a call for projects, in line with SSLEP Assurance Framework. Funding announced at Budget was likely to be very limited and, once BEIS had determined the process for allocation, the Board may consider it more appropriate to pursue an open call based around a specific priority?
* SW updated the Board regarding Chambers response to Covid-19: A hotline has been set up, as has a support service for grants. Chambers are lobbying the Government hard to ensure any implementation plan matches relevant announcements as they are made. Growth Hub & HR advisers are exceptionally busy. Daily updates are being made to the Growth Hub website.

**7. LIS –** verbal update

* AR pointed out that the LIS was based on the economy as it was 2 weeks ago & whilst the themes and the focus on creation of high value jobs to promote future economic growth are still entirely valid, there will be a drive on maximising employment now.
* The creation of a 4th sub-group as an ‘Economic Recovery Taskforce’ was suggested. LB proposed that this will be best serviced as an item across all the existing groups, since it covers place, people, growing business & innovation without exception. AR advised that longer term economic recovery needs consideration from the outset, with a ‘Task & Finish’ mentality & all Board members engaged.

**Action: Each sub group to consider covid-19 recovery planning and feed actions into LIS Implementation Planning work to be reported to LEP Board.**

* MH advised that Rate Relief info had gone out very promptly from N-U-L Council & that the scheme was to be expanded to include nurseries.
* SW reiterated everybody’s awareness that the recovery will be long & difficult & the knock-on effect similar to/worse than the 2008 banking crisis. She asked that all plans & are fed through the LEP Board to keep everybody in the loop, as things happen.
* Timetable for publication of the LIS was discussed and agreed.

**Decision: LIS to be published now as a glossy Executive Summary with larger document, evidence base and logic chains provided as supplementary products sitting behind and available on the website.**

**8. Exporting & International Trade across the Midlands**

* SW outlined the West Midlands campaign to encourage exports, on which the Board had previously requested information. The current climate had led to suspension of activity and made it very challenging. Chambers of Commerce personnel are working at home, meaning no face-to-face meetings are possible. Exporting needs to form part of the recovery plan. Post Brexit, the export plans may yet change. New DiT contracts were in the process of being re-procured too.

**9. City Deal Project Update: Presentations on Keele SEND & District Heat Network**

* AP updated the LEP Board on the Keele Smart Energy Network project and outlined details of a number of other significant projects and programmes currently underway at Keele including: HyDeploy, POLKA and SEND+. A query was raised as to whether the LEP Board had previously been sighted on the SEND+ scheme. *It was subsequently clarified that this extension scheme has been agreed at outline application as a Priority 4 project (low carbon call) on 15 November 2019 by the ESIF Committee. A full application has been submitted to Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and is currently under appraisal.*
* The presentation on the District Heat Network scheme was deferred to the next Board meeting. SW felt that the District Heat Network report was rather vague. JR agreed & advised that they would come back with more detail at next meeting.

**10. Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone Strategic Implementation Plan**

* AB advised that the CVEZ investment cycle is in its 5th year now and is proving to be one of the more successful Enterprise Zones. Sites that had been derelict for 40 years have been remediated. Floor space & 2,000 jobs have been created. The ‘Tunstall Arrow’ site has received the Insider West Midlands Property Award.
* AR noted the Strategic Implementation Plan sign off requirement and highlighted the governance aspects with future reporting going to SPMG. JL (SPMG Chair) had some queries concerning practical arrangements that, due to time constraints, would be followed up by email.

**Decision: Board Directors endorsed the SIP 2020/21 and the detail contained in the Board report.**

**Action: JL & AB to pick up any queries on practical arrangements outside of meeting and report back.**

**11. City Deal**

* Contracting update included: Spode Works contract signed by SoTCC earlier in the day. This scheme has a £0.5m LGF commitment. Stoke Flood Alleviation also now signed has a £1.2m LGF funding commitment. Project promoters and all staff were thanks for their attention in concluding contracting.
* TMcM gave an overview on Keele SMART Innovation Hub. The ‘Denise Coates Building’ is complete, has won architectural awards and is filling up quickly. Job creation figures were now filtering through the monitoring system.

**12. LEP Risk Register**

* MA stated that Covid-19 economic impact has been added & considered that this was the most significant risk.
* It was agreed that Strategic Risks 5 & 6 had now been addressed or the issue had passed. These should be closed. These related to the positive impact of improvements made on governance (Strategic Risk 5: the restructure of the Board) and the LEP Review Implementation Grant which was no longer available (Strategic Risk 6: the geographies issue, which the LEP had no direct ability to resolve).
* It was agreed that, notwithstanding these closures, the risk position through Covid-19 would be significantly increased for the work of the partnership in delivering a positive impact on the economic future of the area. The Taskforce within the sub-groups would be included as a first mitigation action.

**Decision: JC to make appropriate updates to the Strategic Risk Register as directed by the Board.**

**13. LEP Review Delivery Update: Improvement Plan update & Peer to Peer Review.**

* AB advised the Board that the full business case for Etruria Valley Link Road had been agreed by DfT.
* Only 3 outstanding items on SSLEP Governance now:-

1. Communications Strategy, which was being completed now with the full involvement of HA and would come to subsequent Board meeting.
2. Recruitment of the CEO post, currently undergoing job evaluation.
3. Implementation of SSLEP emails for the team.

* SA & JC are discussing the new Implementation Plan for 2020/21 with AW of BEIS, following February’s Annual Performance Review.
* AR, JC & SA had attended a Peer to Peer review group meeting with Buckinghamshire & Thames Valley on Monday 16th March. This was facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and observed by the LEP Network and formed part of the LEP review activity. AR’s impression was that all LEPs appeared to have similar issues & challenges. It was felt that SSLEPs progress in the past 12 months has moved the partnership forward well and, while there is still a long way to go in implementing the change partners would like to see, there had been some reassurance in this Peer to Peer visit.

**14. Forward Plan (Pre-Covid)**

* LIS implementation Sub-group activity is due to appear on forthcoming Board Agendas, e.g. Growing Business & one other due on 16/04/2020. SA suggested that this may be delayed until the May meeting to give Groups time to facilitate meetings/conference calls.
* LB felt that Covid -19 will feature as a standing item. A discussion took place on this area which included reference to:
* stats/evidence that would be useful in detailing what is happening & then promote a search for solutions. Aspire are in the process of ringing 2500 customers asking what support will be needed – ‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’ is coming into play at present.
* SW raised awareness of the social difficulties & knock on effect within the education sector & for young people.
* Mental health impacts & the potential suicide risk. Ability to predict figures & target support based on information regarding redundancies, reduction to earnings, student vulnerability on isolation. Noted that middle aged men in start up businesses are amongst the highest current suicide concern.
* JC advised that the Secretariat Team had made a business continuity outline/plan to prepare for home-working while remaining available to the Board, sub-groups, public etc*. Operational since lockdown, circulated with minutes.*
* LB suggested a WhatsApp group for the Board Directors. This could potentially be extended beyond the Board if members felt it appropriate later. Staffs University have set up something similar for staff.
* AW will share what other LEPs are doing with JC.
* PF advised that already the US crisis has led to a shortage of products which Wade are supplying. China is also bouncing back now.
* HA advised that clay sales were taking off too. Panic buying of product.
* It was noted that encouraging public compliance with government advice was essential. Over time more positive news stories & feedback could support business in pursuing their own resilience and planning for the future*.*

**15. Any Other Business**

* MA requested an Actions Log be provided after each meeting. AR advised that this would be pursued on MS Teams. He would hope to open up MS ‘Teams’ for use by the Board quicker than scheduled. In light of the crisis, enforced modern working practices should lead to good behavioural changes nationally if not globally.

**Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 16 April 2020**

**Location: Via MS Teams.**