

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting**

**via MS Teams conference call**

**Thursday 14 May 2020**

**Final 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 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

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

**Advisory/Secretariat**

Simon Ablewhite SSLEP Accountable Body

Jacqui Casey Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP Interim Manger

Jo Kemp SSLEP Secretariat/Business Engagement Officer

Sam Hicks SSLEP Strategy & Research/LIS Lead Officer

Emma Wilson SSLEP Project 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

John Henderson CEO Staffordshire County Council

**Apologies**

Paul Farmer Wade Ceramics

Sara Williams Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

**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**

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

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

AR explained to the Board that Paul Farmer is has an issue that would prevent his participation for the next few meetings. Board Members agreed to his absence in line with Clause 21.3.1 of the SSLEP Articles of Association.

AR activities had included:

* Contact with prospective Board Members, with one or two applications pending. Interview panel is in place.
* Emma Catterall of Merlin Entertainments/Alton Towers had provided feedback to AR for the SSLEP Covid-19 questionnaire & for the Covid-19 Taskforce to share plans for reopening using social distancing.
* Participation in webinars hosted by Keele University & Chambers of Commerce (Policy Hour) promoting the SSLEP activity to businesses.
* A meeting with Wolverhampton University who are keen to build relationships with partners and West Midlands LEP Chair’s Meetings which currently have a focus on Covid-19 support and included feeding into 7 papers on working safely, being developed by govt for sharing with reopening businesses.
* The West Midlands Interchange has received approval & now sits in a 6-week Judicial Review period.

AR has spoken to Peter Frost (Director, Kilbride Holdings Limited) & encouraged building a relationship with SSLEP to encourage building advanced skills & logistics into their agenda.

**6. LIS Sub-Group Updates**

**Item 6i** - AR advised that a Roll of Covid-related notes and activity had been provided for review & highlighted the following:-

* LEP Network is raising its profile in terms of adding value to Covid-19 work. PM & Minsters discussions had included access to funds, flexible LGF grant & support Issues – i.e. campaigning for improved access to grants & government schemes
* Difficulties for High Street Law firms & professional services. Cllr PF – advised that solicitors are excluded under legislation (for reliefs, grants etc) Accountants too. So the firms in these sectors are struggling - small & large. Estate Agents locally have lots of viewings lined up hopefully the market will open up here.
* Agri-Food production - prices are down.

**The LEP Covid-19 Taskforce** is now running, with AR as chair & including Cllr AB & JR, Cllr PA, JH, JL & AW (BEIS). Weekly orienting around LIS, but prioritising where LEP support is needed.

Sam Hicks provided data on LEP survey, provided in slide decks. LIS priority sectors & high impact business were selected. The first 20 interviews were included in the slide deck. Most were optimistic for the 12-18 month future period, with furloughing having provided comfort. Those in the tourism & leisure industry individual registered a much lower optimism rating. Some individual anonymised, comments were added to the slide deck to show discussion points raised by businesses.

JC added that since Sam’s analysis, 14 more interviews had been notified by SoT colleagues and a further 5 undertaken in the secretariat. Post Sunday announcement it had been more difficult to get calls booked, with businesses were gearing up towards returning to work.

In addition a City Council-led website survey had been developed and was live on the Growth Hub Website. 200 responses to date. Covid Impact showed a mixed picture. Highest take up for Government help were VAT deferral & rates rebates. Predominantly Stoke company responses to date and efforts being made to extend responses in other districts, to give a more rounded view.

JR raised of moving people back to work for the benefit of the economy. As with previous crisis, needing to stimulate recovery at pace & shift resources to retraining/upskilling to get people back into the labour market quickly.

CB raised Taskforce focus on protecting jobs - how can we support diversification. Suggested retraining people into a wider variety of roles, which had not been done in past recessions.

HA advised that a Covid-19 comms team has been devised with Emma Wilson of the SSLEP secretariat, plus an extra days support from a comms person from Staffs CC. Activity starts next week with a brief for Board Members to get onboard - more will be seen in the coming weeks.

**Action: PR & Comms Advocacy Brief to be shared weekly.**

**Action: Board Members to use social media channels to share and re-tweet messages across their networks**

AR advised that the ONS produced a report (13/03/20) on previous economic unemployment levels which hasn’t moved into productivity. If businesses can prosper with fewer staff now, will they gradually reduce their workforce?

**Item 6ii** –

**Future Workforce**

LB gave an overview of a SSLEP Skills Paper that the SAP, Covid Taskforce & Future Workforce Sub-Group had all discussed. Questions arising from the latter were:-

* Workshops - what has worked in the past?
* There was insufficient information on the paper, as it doesn't tell us what has worked in the past - only numbers through workshops.
* The Sub-Group is asking how do businesses & schools work together better?
* Skills Advisory Panel - how do we assure kids are studying the right skills at school.
* Main discussions were how do we recover? 2008 saw work done across SMEs to support them with shared staff, working collectively.
* Now – do we consider upskilling/rotation of people - so people who need work can be rotated into work for experience?
* Multi skilled people in smaller sized pool now?
* Youngsters <16 – should virtual placements be considered? It could be productive for industry & kids.
* Talking to chamber - about diagnostics for digital skills

Overall LB reported a useful meeting.

**Growing Businesses**

HA reported key issues arising from the 2nd Growing Business Sub-Group:-

* Flexible space at high value sites.
* Caroline Mairs (Make It Team) supplying support on the demand for space in Staffordshire.
* The new normal is working from home, so how much business space is needed?
* SME grow-on units are lacking. Start-up space is largely taken & the new massive units don’t service the SME sector.
* SW’s input from the Inward Investment Campaign will be needed.
* Martin Coates & Nicola Kent (Growth Hub) had been using a useful Growth Tracker tool, adapted for recovery.
* Network & Leadership groups; B2B networks; - input is needed from these. Staffs University is undertaking work with certain research sectors.
* LEP support is needed to help create more Enterprise Centres for medium sized businesses. Good places to provided wrap around business support.

**Item 6iii**

**Approach to ‘Place’**

AR considered that ‘Place’ requires a 2-tier approach, ensuring varied themes, diverse localities, political & geographical issues can be considered. The Theme Sub Group would include all 4 Sub-Group Chairs ensuring output of those groups would feed through. A separate Localities Group would provide vital impact & granular knowledge at District & sub-district level, detailed knowledge of existing Place Plans and local opportunities. City, county and all Districts would support this work.

Cllr AB expressed concern that the Localities Group would be supported by CEO participation. Councillors are democratically elected & deliver policy. SSLEP Public sector Directors appeared to have been by-passedf. Other Board Directors should consider this. AR advised that he had spoken about this issue this week, was respectful of people’s time and noted that Board Members can participate in any sub-groups. AB explained that the ToR didn't reflect this. MH asked whether existing Officer structures were like the proposed Localities Group - is another group really needed? Can we plug into existing frameworks? CllR PA – County Council identified 3 areas; Digital, Place & Tech Data and experts are in place & doing this work, so there would appear to be loads of duplication.

Prof TM – advised that if Place based agenda is important for the Government, for levelling up, surely the role of the LEP is at a higher level, rather than drilling down into Districts - consider a more global view. JL considered that the ToR are ours so could be altered if it was the view of the Board. SB queried the need for further groups. AR agreed to reflect on discussion and bring details back.

**Action: AR to review arrangements for Place and bring detail back to Board.**

Representation on the Taskforce did not include any District Leaders/CEO representation. Cllr PF would be happy to be part of it. He runs a business in centre of the County town, as need ears on the ground as opposed to high level thinking. Cllr ST – added a District voice could be used & be useful he’ll support PF. They can bring information on frontline towns too.

**Action: Cllr PF to join Covid Taskforce Group.**

**CVEZ**

Cllr AB was invited to update the Board on CVEZ and noted having written to MPs and BEIS & MHCLG Ministers noting opportunity for extension of CVEZ & Enterprise Zones and their role in recovery. Response has been disappointing to date. Cllr AB will continue to pursue & feels it would be good for LEP Board too & should be incorporated into LIS.

AR - Board needs to think about the Autumn budget. LEP co-ordination is needed to put in good submission & lobbying ideas. Need to think in June & July meetings about getting ready to campaign hard for Autumn budget.

**7. SSLEP Communications Strategy**

HA – Updated the Board regarding the new LEP comms strategy. In preparing the report, much work had taken place on: stripping back to basics; developing the Business plan – What needs to be achieved? Strategy has been built from there. SWOT analysis was undertaken. Target audience considered. Aims examined. Proposals set out focus on website & branding. The LEP can strengthen its brand & market itself far better. Timescale & budget had been considered. HA considered it was best to outsource to get more for money, rather than employ an individual. A Visions & Values exercise had been undertaken.

SB agreed this was needed & very helpful to look for private sector expertise. Where can we get innovation into marketing? Can we look at other LEPs for ideas? We need to innovative. HA advised that this is the strategy, with the what, when, who & how to be included in a detailed Communications Plan in due course. Some essential work had started. Lots going on behind the scenes (YouTube channel is in creation). HA had looked at other LEPs to see what comms channels have been utilised that we’ve not yet used. Next 12 months need to improve & keep reviewing - Perhaps be even more innovative, consider big branding improvement, which is why an agency is proposed.

SB felt that the Vision & Values needed further consideration. All should work on it as a Board for better tone and to own its values. Some felt like objectives rather than values? AR proposed separate session with SB volunteering to support HA and others.

**Action: Board Members wishing to be involved to approach JC or the team.**

**Action: Paper to be brought back to next meeting.**

Cllr ST happy to be involved in marketing chat.

Cllr PA - writing out in next day or so to 50 or 60 businesses/districts/cities/LEP - to inform the marketing we need consistent brand, so it all fits together.

**8. Midlands Engine Investment Fund Update**

MA outlined the MEIF, a loan fund which LEP has £10m interest in. Partnership between East & West Midlands & British Business Bank focusing on loans for business. Take up remains slow. British Business Bank has been pushed to provide further support in our area. Improvement over past 6 months, since then BBB have attended events, so investment & loans piece (pre-Covid) was up to 8%. Situation has changed now & planned events have not occurred. BBB concentrating on CBILS, not MEIF. Follow up session next week. Used £2.7m to date out of £10m.

AR has written to Ryan Cartwright at BBB and a follow up session will take place in coming weeks. Cllr PA queried level of bureaucracy and lack technical assistance to access European funding.

**9. LEP Review Delivery Update: 2019/20 Financial Outturn & Outputs**

MA had of the 8 outstanding Local Growth Deal contracts to agree at end of March. A further 3 had been signed off recently, with 5 remaining all nearing completion. Progress on Etruria Valley project was sought. JC advised that spend profiles and other details had been received so contracting was underway with Programme Manager confirming all was on track. PC noted scheme would be on side by end of September. Complexity in stakeholder management but benefits are of significant scale. Working closely with Dept for Transport, Network Rail, Staffs CC, Highways England, Severn Trent, all in an open and transparent way and Balfour Beatty will be delivery partner.

Prof TM expressed some concerns about timing and risk of having to give back £8m when it could be used for economic recovery right now. JC noted Board over-programming to accommodate some slippage. PC had supplied the above assurances. JL noted need to stick to dates & timeframe or consider re-advertising money.

MA noted programme would hit job outputs but miss Housing target by March 2021. Forecast housing would significantly over-achieve by 2025 expected.

JC noted letter from Stephen Jones (CLGU) - conveyed to some partners already (@ Taskforce). A formal communication at CLGU. ⅔ of final year allocation will be rec’d this month. The final ⅓ is will be later in the year & is dependent on our spend & the need for it ‘in year’. SPMG will report in June.

**Action: SPMG to report back to June Board on Final Year 202/21 Programme Expenditure Profiles**

**10. LEP Full Risk Register**

MA noted that strategic risks are owned by the Board. A comprehensive review was required. He had organised a risk review meeting with all who had volunteered to undertake a deep dive. Meeting would be on 15/06 (14:30 - 16:30). All should consider Risk Register for their sub group in advance of the meeting.

**Action: All to consider Risk Register for the Sub-Groups they chair in advance of the meeting.**

**11. SSLEP Assurance Framework v.7**

JC noted all updates agreed by Board since Sept 2019 were included in the revised document and sought Board endorsement to version 7 of the Assurance Framework.

**Decision: Board endorsement was given to version 7 of the Assurance Framework.**

**12. Forward Plan**

JC noted Forward Plan refresh was needed. Feedback from Sub-Groups is on there for the next few meetings, but if Board members would like to see other items thereon, please forward to JC. AR – Visions & values can be added.

**Action: All to consider future Board Items.**

**13. AOB**

*Poll to Board re: meeting times*

JK advised that she had received 13/16 replies to the SurveyMonkey she issued. 53% said 4pm; 30% said 6pm. Cllr PF noted due to travel time, getting there @ 4pm would be more onerous. AR reminded everyone of dial in for those who can’t travel. A compromise of 5pm was suggested. It was agreed that a start time of 4pm be implemented. Cllr PF requested that non-compromise of 5pm be minuted.

**Agreed: Future Board Meeting start time of 4pm.**

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

**Location: Via MS Teams.**