

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 17 December 2020
Draft Confidential Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Prof. Martin Jones	Alternate for Prof. Liz Barnes, University of Staffordshire
Prof. Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Sybil Ralphs	(Alternate) Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Secretariat

Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP S151 Officer / Accountable Body
Mark Parkinson	SSLEP Chief Executive
Sam Hicks	SSLEP Strategy & Research/LIS Lead
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Secretariat/Business Engagement Officer
Lucy Sefton	SSLEP Secretariat/Governance and Project

In Attendance

Andrea Whitworth	Assistant Director, Cities & Local Growth Unit
Farah Ashkir	CLGU
Tim Clegg	CEO, Stafford Borough Council
Mark Connell	Strategic and Partnerships Manager, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Phil Creswell	Director of Place Growth and Prosperity, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Martin Hamilton	CEO, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Anthony Hodge	Assistant Director Business & Enterprise, Staffordshire County Council
Nicola Kent	Head of Funding Business & Enterprise, SSLEP Growth Hub
Robert Lawley	Head of International Trade, Staffordshire, DiT
Alex Parker	DiT
Simon Rainer	LEP/Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce DiT Export Advisor
Jon Rouse	City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Apologies

Mohammed Ahmed
Prof Liz Barnes
Sinéad Butters
Cllr George Allen
Cllr Jeremy Oates

Homeserve
Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Aspire Housing Ltd
Deputy Leader, East Staffordshire Borough Council
Portfolio Holder Heritage & Growth, Tamworth Borough Council

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

SA (151 Officer) confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Apologies

These were noted, above.

3. Declarations of Interest

SW declared the Chambers/DiT contract, Kickstart & Growth Hub Peer Networks.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

The Chair informed the Board of his activity with the following this month:

- Progressing with CEO recruitment agency; appointed advert being written
- Annual Conference completed successfully
- Scrutiny session – thank expressed to Stoke-on-Trent City Council for hosting
- Site visits: Environment Agency flood alleviation at Spode site & Eastgate in Stafford walkabout
- Recruitment panel for Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Met with various Council partners, CEOs, Leaders, etc.

The CEO provided an update on activity since the last meeting - attendance at a variety of networking and consultation events at local, regional and national levels, including:

- Regional Leads LEP Network
- Industrial Strategy Council roundtable
- BEIS/LEP Network Peer Networks programme
- MHCLG HS2 Places group
- River Trent Partnership – the Environment Agency & Natural England developed this to collate an approach to infrastructure.
- Rural Economic Strategy c/o SCC
- Countywide Redundancy task group

- Economy & Prosperity committees
- Town Deal for Kidsgrove
- Chatterley Whitfield thinking event.

6. Mid-Year Reflections: Thinking Back, Looking Forward

AR advised that it is his anniversary as Chair in January 2021. Reflections on the year are that it has been 'interesting', with lots to do:

- Gratitude for Board support was expressed, particularly through the Covid pandemic response and recovery, where stakeholders & partners pulled together for businesses & residents alike.
- Our LEP has seen significant changes. Our strategy is aspirational and a built on an improving APR in 2019/20. The next APR 2020/21 should occur before the next meeting. The mid-year review in September was also positive.
- Openness and transparency is practiced with partners & feedback is good across the area.
- Sub-groups are operational and there is good input - Challenges, solutions & approaches are testament to the work done by all.
- Moving forward we await the Devolution White Paper, but in the meantime, we continue to build on where we are now.
- Next year should be busy with various funding pots being announced - driving of investments should be continued.
- A permanent CEO should be in place by mid-year.

JL thanked AR for his collaborative chairmanship and this was mirrored by the Board.

7. Skills advisory Panel (SAP) Update:

SW provided a Kickstart update on behalf of LB, who was unable to attend. The issues identified last month about receiving feedback for SAP & Future Workforce sub-groups had been raised with MPs & the DWP.

There has been national delays in responding to the gateway & now that contracts are being issued the acceptance rate is approximately 2/3's. DWP are looking into this.

SAP needs to establish how we identify young people employed by bigger companies, e.g. Tesco, so that they can be identified & moved onto other programmes, after the 6-month Kickstart programme ends. DWP agreed to come back with information & SW has pushed this issue with MPs. Our Growth & Skills Hub want to use young people effectively. AR has Karen Gosden's details, to escalate this if needed. It's been 3 months; the architecture is not fully in place, so businesses are keen to get involved and support.

AW acknowledges that colleagues at DWP are learning, reflecting & will tweak the programmes, but we need to continue to press on at senior level, for data exchange. SW thanked AW for championing this issue.

8. DiT Export and Investment Policy

AR welcomed Alex Parker from DiT (Karen Ball was unable to attend).

AP provided an interesting overview of DiT policy with a slide-deck, covering; Covid 19 responses; Changing investment modes; Global supply chains & onshoring; Increased competition & the need to keep the UK in the top category at this crucial time.

He explained the organisation of DiT (5 pillars), including:- Short term action (resilience & structures for the immediate Covid-19 crisis); Indefinite priority opportunities identified from data by analytical teams, based on economic shocks & global trends - Looking at sectors to maintain strengths (e.g. clean energy advanced manufacturing); Enhancing business by looking at policies across the UK. Over the summer this included work on skills, planning, incentives & visas, as areas for long term policy development focus.

The plan for the next few years includes; digital enabling for small & high value investors; rooting out barriers to investment; identifying investors; developing a new CRM system to manage it all effectively.

DiT endeavour to push these ideas through Whitehall in order to engage devolved administrations.

The new 'Office for Investment', announced on 09/11/20, works closely with No.10. This will hunt & seek priority investment missions e.g. Climate change, Levelling up.

TM asked if there are preferential regions in levelling up. AP was unable to say - areas are reviewed on a case by case basis. The Office for Investment will be ensuring strategic investments are driven across the whole of the UK.

SW commented that the issue here is inward investment & how this will be offered on a national level. A devolved system has meant we understand, but does DiT understand this at a National level, since the original algorithm didn't seem to pick up on some details? Feedback was requesting regarding why we have not won DiT sponsored investors in the past. It is difficult to work out what we should have done better without this helpful feedback. AR agreed that sight of the lead process would be useful, so we can see what is needed.

MC asked about Freeports. AP advised about Freeport bidding going live recently; duty deferrals, tax reliefs, flexible customer model; lighter admin burden for trade & investment support from DiT. The detail is on the bidding prospective, with an open window until Feb 2021. They are urging bidders to form a coalition. BEIS clarification is open until Mon 21st December. It should remain fair & open. Freeports-MHCLG@communities.gov.uk

9. Growth Hub DiT Export Advisor

HA introduced Robert Lawley, Head of Head of International Trade Staffordshire DIT, who introduced Simon Rainer - employed at Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce. The reporting line is with our LEP & West Midlands DIT, c/o the Chambers.

Simon will provide Export Advisor Service in our region. DiT objectives are to work alongside companies to produce outcomes for export potential, plus organise webinars & produce case studies. Josie Morris (Woolcool) will host the first webinar on green & sustainable trade.

He is looking at businesses with a unique selling point and those wanting to move forward with quality, innovative design & manufacturing.

As per the pre-Board papers, SR talked through which sectors had been considered for potential. Thus far in the 'Export Curious' category he has identified 150 companies, e-mailed them & received good responses to date. Just this morning one company had declared an interesting in developing in Australia.

Businesses are not always fully aware of the help available to them. SR's role, will be to work alongside them, matching to partners who can help them on this journey, by considering the individual requirements of companies.

The role is live until 31/03/21. The timeline of activity is detailed in the pre-Board papers.

10. Export Advisor Services

SW invited Robert Lawley - Head of International Trade to update the Board on what support is on offer.

A slide-deck was shown which included details on DiT objectives; Recent free-trade agreements have been negotiated with Israel, Mexico & Japan. There is a 25% export rate over the EU. The UK has 20% so there is growth room. The DiT Export Advisors consist of 8 members of staff delivered centrally from London, negotiating types of support and can provide access to consulates, global Chambers & embassies. Staffordshire Chamber also provide support to complement the DiT support & offer accredited training via the British Chambers of Commerce.

Global colleagues feed information to DiT - There are currently 18,344 export opportunities available for UK companies overseas. When these are drilled down, they can be very specific e.g. 5 for beer worldwide. RL expects to be extremely busy over the next 3-months. This will include work with the Peer to Peer Network & Kickstart mentoring too.

In respect of ESIF our LEP has given the largest contribution of £1m over next few years. Thanks were expressed.

11. Growth Hub Steering Committee

HA - introduced Nicola Kent from the Staffordshire Growth Hub.

A slide-deck was shown detailing delivery under Covid -19; Comms & engagement have been impressive with approximately 43,000 views of the website; 87 newsletters have been produced with information for businesses on services & support; Social media engagement has worked well too; Funding & investment has been delivered in 6-months, whereas this is usually done over 3 years. A grant scheme had to be shut after 4 days as the Growth Hub were inundated, but they now working through applications & hope to re-open the process soon: 3 new advisors are in place, helping to deliver recovery help in the form of the programmes:- Start-Up, GROWTHmapper & SUSTAINABILITYmapper

NK advised that the EU transition has created many queries. Comms have been created around this subject. BEIS funding has paid for an additional body and for information to go out promptly. Between them, Growth Hub, Staffordshire Chambers & DiT are covering the Christmas period in terms of enquiries & comms running up to the end of the EU exit period.

12. Marketing & Communications

HA updated the Board on how well the virtual Conference worked & expressed thanks to all who helped with the delivery, including AR's visual team & Clare Abbotts/Tom Hobbins as the LEP comms.

Links will be issued imminently, as a flavour of what took place – these will feature on LinkedIn & the LEP website. This social media will be pushed on bitesize films from Friday 18th December. There were 485 attendees over the 2 days, with good engagement - lots of Tweets. Feedback suggested that those who attended had a better outgoing opinion of the LEP. Carol Shanahan proved to be popular. HA asked the Board to complete the post conference survey.

The Comms agency has now been employed. 'Social'. Their staff already have experience of LEPs &/or Combined Authorities. HA & AR have met & discussed LEP branding, press releases etc. HA would like to bring them to next meeting. A link to their website can be found here: [SOCIAL | An Integrated Agency](#)

13. Equality & diversity Champion: Update

SW provided the Board with its first Annual Equality & Diversity report. The paper was issued as a pre-Board paper & details that further work is needed to ensure that the LEP can show E&D links into their sub-groups etc. Action points from the report are:

1. To develop an Action Plan including, but not exclusively, these topics:
 - a. Understanding how to review equality and diversity issues in LEP decision making
 - b. Recognition of equality and diversity in the LEP strategy documents, including the Local Industrial Strategy
 - c. Expectations and targets on equality and diversity to be applied consistently through programmes and projects and investments (e.g. around apprenticeships in the delivery of funded initiatives, education on equality, diversity and inclusion in all business support)
 - d. Championing best practice, especially in the private sector, and recognition in business awards
 - e. Establishment of any equality advisory panels to look at ideas such as a good employment charter, educational outcomes and support for increasing diversity across all decision-making bodies (e.g. local council, school governors, board appointments).
 - f. A Social Value framework regarding procurement and links with the government's approach to social value for public spending
2. To receive regular reports on these areas of work as well as an annual report and reporting at the LEP Conference.

14. Resourcing the LEP Secretariat

MP updated the Board that there remained an unfilled post within the LEP Secretariat, as agreed by the Board at the beginning of 2020. Rather than restrict any potential new CEO with staff employed for them; given Brexit, Covid & the servicing of sub-groups, it might be sensible to bring in additional resource from the Local Authority partners. The pre-Board paper was sent out for consideration and set out how it will involve oversight from the LEPs A & F Committee.

MP asked the Board for permission to agree the proposal. No comments were offered, and the decision was accepted.

15. Forward Plan

AR asked for people to feed into future agendas & suggested consideration will be given to rebalancing online meeting with 'in person' Board meetings as the pandemic situation hopefully improves by mid 2021. However, it was acknowledged that as the first half of 2021 may continue with various national or regional restrictions, and there would be no prospect of returning to face to face imminently. AR invited thoughts to raise or share from the Board:

TM observed that we need to be fast & flexible. Planning might be difficult if the LEP have a different role moving forward. Tactics around strategy need to be adaptable. Cllr AW agreed that the longer-term role of LEPs will hopefully be given more of a steer in the new year. However there remains much on the LEP agenda including delivery of GBF, Enterprise Zones & the Growth Hub, all being key policies for delivering. Does the LEP see a convening & influencing role for the Board in the coming year? AR added that we need details about Levelling Up & the precursor to UKSPF.

January

No meeting

February & March

Potential items include, Emerging LIS Implementation Plan, 5G, CVEZ, Transforming Cities Fund, Future High Streets Fund; Getting Building Fund, Annual Performance Review, CEO Recruitment, Annual Report, A&F Committee, Midlands Engine/Connects, Assurance Framework v.9 - So future meetings will continue to be have full agendas.

16. AOB

SW – returned focus to the E&D report, in terms of next steps for an action plan on the points highlighted above. She will discuss this with MP and pull together a small working party. CB offered her availability.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 18th February 2021 @ 4pm
Location: Via MS Teams.