

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 18 February 2021
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Mohammed Ahmed	Homeserve
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Prof Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Sinéad Butters	Aspire Housing Ltd
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
Prof Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr George Allen	Deputy Leader, East Staffordshire Borough Council
Cllr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Jeremy Oates	Portfolio Holder Heritage & Growth, Tamworth Borough Council
Cllr Sybil Ralphs	(Alternate) Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Secretariat

Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP Accountable Body
Mark Parkinson	SSLEP Chief Executive
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Secretariat/Business Engagement Officer
Lucy Sefton	SSLEP Secretariat/Governance and Project

In Attendance

Andrea Whitworth	Assistant Director, Cities & Local Growth Unit
Craig Jordan	Head of Economic Growth, Lichfield District Council
Tim Clegg	CEO, Stafford Borough Council
Jon Rouse	City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Phil Creswell	Director of Place Growth and Prosperity, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Philip White	Staffordshire County Council Deputy Leader

Apologies

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

PM Training re: GBF contingency Sinéad Butters

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:

- Business Crime Strategy
- A one to one with LEP Network Chair, Mark Bretton
- CEO & Leaders continued 1-2-1's
- LEP Chairs West Midlands & ME9
- The APR with CLGU went well
- LEP core budget 2021/22 % CLGU
- This year's LEP Peer Review partners us with Cumbria LEP. Meeting date March 9th

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:

- LEP Network with the Treasury, to ensure investment into the area.
- HMT dialogue
- National Leadership Centre
- HM Government & HM Cabinet Office
- Peer Networks
- BEIS - funding 2021/22 confirmed. Undergone competitive tender process
- One Powerhouse
- RSA - Towards spatial blue blueprint

Also, internal networks of:

- Business Crime Strategy
- Countywide Redundancy Task Force
- Economy & Prosperity Recovery Meeting
- Growth Deal & Economic Growth Districts Directors

6. Covid Taskforce

AR appraised the Board of the weekly basis of this Taskforce with other stakeholders as a partnership. The LEP is in a good position to respond once the economic future is discussed. Changes

to the economy have been interesting, some negative, but positives have occurred too, such as ASOS creating new jobs in Lichfield. With ASOS's recent takeover of Topshop too, the region can take advantage of job opportunities.

There has been learning about the Covid testing process for people to return to work, with a County event, plus LEP engagement with the Mental Health process to support businesses.

Over the New Year period teams were on standby by at the Growth Hub & DIT (c/o Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce), to deal with urgent customer queries on Brexit.

Slides were shown to the Board showing covering issues of National & regional comparisons including:- insolvencies/job support/claimant count (lower in this area than region & nation)/young claimants/national furlough level decreasing.

7. Skills advisory Panel (SAP) Update:

LB updated the Board regarding the local skills report. The document is now signed off for tender, with the aim of a deep dive with employers & education providers. This should serve to improve pathways into work from education & the provision of placements. It is hoped to produce a Kitemark standard.

(i) Kickstart scheme

The news is positive, although delivery thus far has been frustrating. The LEP has managed the communications plan for engagement; there have been 1,921 interactions; 2,000+ visitors & 45 employer organisations through this channel.

A letter was sent to DWP for shared data & support, resulting in SW & LB securing a meeting, but DWP advised that only central, not granular level, data could be supplied, so there is no local detail. We continue to offer support with 6 approved gateway representatives (North Staffordshire Chambers, Inspirations, Centric, Acacia Training, Acorn Training & Training Initiative Group) & 300+ live placements so far, since September 2020.

SW endorsed this & thanked the LEP for support. Local MP Jack Brereton has also been supportive, resulting in a forthcoming Roundtable meeting due with Mims Davies, in March. Credit was expressed to employers in managing expectations. The Chambers have 100 placements available for young people.

8. Local Industrial Strategy: Proposal for Seedcorn Fund

AR – explained that as per the pre-Board paper, a small pot of funding to support sub-group Chairs to develop programmes is sought. A budget was allocated for the LIS last Autumn, but work was done in house, so there is spare budget. An amount of £50k, is proposed. This allows the allocation of smaller pots to sub-groups, with the management given to SPMG. AR sought approval to implement this. LB stressed that as sub-group Chair, there has been a couple of proposals for which a £5-£10k pot would really help.

SB – was supportive, but with the suggestion to reduce red tape for SPMG by considering a deminimis level. This also allows agility. AR thanked SB and advised that he will consider and revert to Board to ratify any changes to the original proposal.

Item agreed with endorsement to amend via Executive Board if simplification is required

9. Growing Places Fund

MA appraised the Board of a loan of £450k allocated to a company for work being done to a North Staffordshire property. Repayment was due by September 2018, interest has been charged & paid, but neither it, nor its guarantor are in a position to repay the loan at present. Options for recovery were offered in a confidential pre-Board paper. Option 4 is suggested, as it provides the easiest way to move forward, without taking the company to court.

JL & SA (LEP 151 Officer) had been consulted. JL explained that the other 3 options might not give the outcome required. The company's track record was good & the LEP had previously received money back. Option 4 is the least expensive recovery option.

Overall agreement was provided by the Board – Motion carried.

10. Marketing & Communications

HA introduced Victoria Starkey from 'Social' [SOCIAL | An Integrated Agency](#)

VS provided an overview of the team members & Social's remit, to cover the LEP's, stakeholder engagements, media & social media. Social have experience with LEPs - The Northern Powerhouse consortium of 11 LEPs, is a current client & her colleague Racheal Johnson has come from Leeds City Region LEP.

Emphasis on the Strategy & Delivery plan is needed for SSLEP & the initial focus is our 'Strategy Sprint'. The model is a quickfire exercise for a refreshed & renewed comms plan, plus the route for LEP engagement activity; positioning of the LEP locally regionally, nationally & for the future. The process has started through research, experience & talks with the secretariat. The next stage is Board member participation via a workshop; meeting dates will be issued soon.

HA introduced Clare Abbotts, the Comms representative to the LEP, who confirmed that Social have been a great addition to the team thus far. Governance of strategy will provide partners with transparency & oversight. The inaugural session will be next week. The Strategy Plan will be a living document moving forward. Growing Business PR will be a topic so please keep them informed if you are involved in any key projects. A Lockdown Exit campaign is being considered. Talking Head videos from Board Members to speak of experiences, will be sought too.

The Board was invited to get in touch with CA or VS for any more information. (JK provided their e-mail addresses on 19/02/21).

11. SPMG

JL raised the progress of the Getting Building Fund (GBF), as per pre-Board papers.

The Drakelow Park project provides for a new bridge crossing over the River Trent which will directly unlock significant development but more importantly will form a major part of the Local Transport Strategy published by the Local Highway Authority (Staffordshire County Council) that underpins the Local Plan for East Staffordshire, to drive significant efficiencies in the transport & connectivity network and associated economic GVA uplift for the whole of Burton upon Trent. We are supplying £5m, but it is not under our Governance. The CEO advised that [Countryside Properties](#) now own the Drakelow site & the issue will go via the D2N2 Board scheduled in April, with a close dialogue

ongoing to ensure we are sighted on this. It is intended that Countryside Properties and D2N2 attend SPMG in the near future. There was a discussion surrounding whether this project would be done timeously per the GBF grant conditions & it was assured that a tight watch is being kept.

Slides were shown of other GBF projects geographically & the Project List Progression Status.

Reallocation of £190k, which was not needed for another GBF project, is being considered by SPMG. When the funding is agreed in principle by SPMG, CLGU approval is required through a formal process.

12. Audit & Finance Committee

MA & SA updated the Board, as per Item 12i of pre-board papers. SPMG have assured A&F that money will be spent by 31/03/21. The CEO advised that in respect of Blythe Park there is a meeting ongoing, including legal teams, so this on target to get completed before the year end. Otherwise money will be reallocated, not lost.

The ongoing issue under Item 12ii of the Risk Register of the LEP geography was raised – should this be kept as a red flag?

AR stated that ONS had represented some of our areas in 2 LEP regions, which has since been corrected. We are engaged well with districts in the South, so this remains a sticking point, perhaps for separate debate with Board members.

Other issues were that the LEP Board was classed as ‘moderate’, which seems to have now evolved in with the natural passage of time. The Board is stable & newer members, most of whom have been members for 12+ months, are now fully inducted and actively shaping and influencing the various decision making and advisory groups. AR felt that on this basis the risk can be downgraded. JL agreed– the gravitas should be downgraded from amber to green.

MA checked that the move from amber to green is agreed by the Board. Confirmed.

MA updated on the Local Growth Deal. Only delivered 39% of houses & 50% of jobs, but this should be looked at more positively than numbers only in context to the past year. We are on target to achieve targets, based on the latest projections, by 2022/3. There should be no surprises thanks to focus & insights provided by the project sponsor.

AB sought help from the LEP in respect of action needed from the Environment Agency at the Cliff Vale site in the Enterprise Zone, which relies on EA help. The project is at risk due to the resources within the EA being stretched due to seasonal flooding and other issues.

ACTION POINT

AR and Project Sponsors to agree action

13. Executive Board Recruitment

AR & MP updated the Board that we are in receipt of applications from a number of viable candidates. The proposed panel for interview needs 2 further members; 1 must be public. Offers are to be passed to Jo Kemp a.s.a.p.

14. LEP CEO Recruitment

The incumbent CEO dutifully stepped out of the meeting at this point.

SA updated the Board with the information that the post had been advertised in the Guardian & Municipal Journal. 29 applicants were reduced to 9, who underwent technical interviews on 09 & 11/02/21. There was a shortlisting session on 16/02/21, resulting in 4 candidates selected for a Stakeholder panel (structured conversation around a theme) & then final traditional Interview panel.

Short notice volunteers were sought for the Stakeholder panels early next week, chaired by AB on Monday, with SW. Another Board member is needed at short notice for Tuesday, then more for the final interviews.

Offers received from CB & HA in the online chat. JL has already offered his time.

AR invited any comments & availability offers, by Friday 19/02/21

15. Forward Plan

The LEP CEO was invited back into the meeting.

April's Board meeting clashes with half term Easter holidays - Do Board members wish to cancel or change this?

No requests were received therefore the date of 15th April will remain.

The CEO advised that there are lots of items to feed into future meetings, some will require decisions. The Forward Plan needs to remain agile. Please advise him of any further papers to bring to the Board.

16. AOB

JL praised HA as the Staffordshire Ambassador event host; other Board members echoed this.

The LEP APR was diligently chaired by Andrea Whitworth - who will take retirement after the March Board. Clare Hannah will attend that meeting with her & take over thereafter.

AB informed that the 'Powering-Up prospectus' is forthcoming regarding investment in Stoke-on-Trent, with some exciting announcements to follow.

TM announced that the Marriot Hotel at Keele is now open. He queried whether any thought had been given to the LEP's positioning around COP26, as a 'Staffordshire Story'? Innovation group projects could be offered.

Cllr AW informed that Staffordshire County Council met with Engie last week, discussed COP 26 & Keele's name was mentioned. The County Council would be happy to work with Keele. SW confirmed that the Chambers would also be happy to be involved.

Meeting ended at a spritely 17:45 hours and AR thanked the Board for their contributions in moving through its business at pace.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 18th March 2021 @ 4pm

Location: Via MS Teams.