

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 15 April 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 Brian Edwards	(Alternate) Leader, South Staffordshire District 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
Anne Boyd	SSLEP Chief Executive
Mark Parkinson	Former interim SSLEP Chief Executive
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Secretariat/Business Engagement Officer

In Attendance

Clare Hannah	Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Representative
Phil Creswell	Director of Place Growth and Prosperity, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Tim Clegg	CEO, Stafford Borough Council
Simon McEneny	Director, Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council
Craig Jordan	Lichfield District Council
Mark Connell	Strategic and Partnerships Manager, Stoke-On-Trent City Council

Apologies

Cllr George Allen

Cllr Abi Brown

Cllr Patrick Farrington

Cllr Simon Tagg

Deputy Leader, East Staffordshire Borough Council

Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Leader, Stafford Borough Council

Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

JK confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Apologies

These were noted, as above.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record, with the following comments:

- JK advised that she would add Tim Clegg's name to these as he had been 'in attendance'.
- With reference to the Build Back Better presentation Sam Hicks gave at the March board - to clarify, the Growth Deals referred to are for 3 nations, excluding England.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

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

- One to Ones with Districts & Boroughs
- West Midlands LEP chairs & ME9
- EVLR support
- Getting Building Fund publicity
- LIS/LEP sub-group continued activity
- An onboarding meeting with Anne Boyd, new LEP CEO, at Victoria Park
- HS2 supply chain discussions

6. Introduction to new LEP CEO

AR introduced Anne Boyd to the Board & advised that she has been busy making an impact already, with a fresh perspective, objective viewpoint, passion & energy for the role.

AB thanked the Board for the opportunity & shared her first few weeks in the role. She had met with the Growth Hub, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, colleagues & some Directors amongst others and attended a Wellbeing workshop, HS2, BEIS & a great range of partnership meetings. We may see some changes surrounding the complexity of these relationships with contracts & reporting lines.

It is an important time to serve the economy, based on the past 12 months' journey. We are here to help build on robust foundations.

She wishes to get 30 days 'under the bonnet' & then by the next Board have carried out a SWOT analysis. Within 90 days a clearer picture of the role, moving forward, should have emerged. AB thanked MP for handing over a good baton.

7. LEP Review c/o MHCLG

AR reminded the Board that last month Sam Hicks appraised them of the move from LIS to Building Back Better - in time this will link into the LEP review.

AB provided perspective from her previous involvement with Growth Hubs & having worked with MHCLG & BEIS. There is limited insight at present, but the message is about evolution & refocus. There may be geographical changes, so we need to consider where can we focus our efforts & be included. The business support reform agenda will affect us as we don't do well on the international stage. Peer learning & digital access needs to improve, but LEPs & GH have contributed well during the pandemic. A clear focus is needed to see how we fit & interplay locally. She is keen to gather the Board's thoughts & views about where we as a group can add value. July is the expected date for review outcomes, so there will hopefully be something to report by the July Board meeting (15th).

AR added that the LEPs are holding the line with Government & setting their revised ToR. Sign-off with Robert Jenrick was this week in the context of the Autumn spending review. We remain clear about wanting to be bold & ambitious for the area.

AR & AB will keep the Board appraised of the review. If exceptional meetings are needed these will happen. We will be proactive.

SW thanked AB for being open so we can maintain our work, particularly around business support. Hopefully we can show how we work as an integrated partnership with a light touch executive.

JL agreed with SW's comments but asked when the implementation might be & is a political leadership change anticipated to change any approach (e.g. PM change)?

AB advised that contractually there is a 12-month funding round. The LEP reform agenda puts it into a wider context, with a key deadline around the Spending Review. She would guess implementation to be possible from April 2022. The Secretary of State gives LEPs his blessing; lots of work has been done, so it is unlikely to derail, but nobody knows for sure.

AR added that he will treat the issue with openness & transparency, so the Board will be kept in the loop.

8. Town Deal

Simon McEneny introduced the subject of Newcastle-Under-Lyme's (NuL) economic agenda, which has seen much activity under lockdown in terms of a number of funding streams.

Under the **Future High Street Fund** (FHSF) NuL applied for £16m & was allocated £11m in Jan 2021.

Overview diagrams were shown to the Board, albeit he understands that not all are au fait with NuL's geography. The old civic buildings on NuL's Ryecroft site is vacant & ready for demolition. Funding was centred around this site, but this focus will be extended to link through to the actual High St & 'Ironmarket'. The reimagined town centre is not just about shopping, it's leisure etc. too.

Demolition work can now begin & the empty site will become Aspire Housing's HQ, with town centre apartments & cafés. Next to this will be a new multi-storey car park, on the former Sainsburys site, which is co-owned by the Borough & County Council. The old 'Midway' multi-storey is no longer fit for purpose. This leaves scope for the further development of the site which that will leave empty on the ring road, into 2-3 bed apartments, thus altering the tenure of the town centre.

The town has the Roebuck Centre & York Place (small shopping centres), which are both struggling, with very few tenants. Plans look to create some breakthrough/link in plazas to walk people through, creating an aspirational sense of public space & greenery. This should remove the concrete 1970's vibe of the town viewed from the ring road.

The second successful funding scheme is the **Town Deal** (not bid - selected to be involved). In terms of process this had been a speedy one. In September 2019 they were selected to participate; by October 2020 all business cases were submitted; March 2021 saw the confirmation of £16.9m of a £25m ask. The treasury stepped back from rigid Green Book BCR & the money is to be spent within the next 4 years.

This funding was allocated to Kidsgrove & it's scale will be exponential. Kidsgrove is to the north of the Borough. Some schemes had to be taken out rather than reduce all of them, to ensure the complete delivery of most outputs. Key outputs will be:

- Chatterley Valley - infrastructure improvements
- Kidsgrove station - this is the next station on the line from Crewe, could be important with HS2. There is therefore the need to enhance access & it's focus in the town, with nearby canal enhancement too.
- Kidsgrove Sports centre – this has been closed for several years. The community fought hard for it, so these plans stood behind them to get it re-opened. Sports England & the County are also contributing. It sits beside the Kings Academy (school), so there will be the linking of a sports pitch & to a new health centre for sports rehabilitation etc.
- Fitness tracks, equipment & improved drainage in the parks to improve leisure space.

Newcastle's own Town Deal includes the link from NuL town centre up to Keele. These bids ran in parallel but Future High Street was priority, so the Town Deal was kept back. A £25m bid has since been submitted (Jan) & they hope to hear soon. This addressed disadvantaged communities, with 3 areas of focus around Knutton, Chesterton & NuL town centre.

Plans for NuL include:-

- a centre for performing arts (circus skills, a research & visitor centre, due to Philip Astley, who developed the circus ring as we know it, having been born there in the 18th century) The aforementioned plazas will follow this design.
- Aspire Housing have acquired the former 'Zanzibar' nightclub site, with plans for apartments & workspaces there.
- Tracks to allow cycling & walking from Hanley to Keele will be created.
- 'Smart NuL' will extend a high-speed internet connection ring around the town centre, to ensure speeds expected in a big city.
- A Digital Society teaching facility, working alongside Keele University.
- EV charging points around the town.

£1.75m was received in Autumn 2020 as an advanced Town Deal funding, to kick start the asks. This had to be spent by 31/03, so was used at Kidsgrove Sports Centre; 3G in Kidsgrove; on the updating

of NuL's subways; renovation of a former retail unit in Lancaster Buildings (NuL) to become a skills hub/meeting space & helping Aspire with the demolition of Zanzibar. So, whilst assessing the bids the Government knew they were serious about delivery.

AR advised that 100kw EV's are needed, otherwise they are no use for rapid charging, even if EVs give 'dwell time' in the town, 3 - 7 hours is excessive!

Is there any advice which NuL could offer other districts & boroughs seeking FHS & Town Deal funds?

SE advised that they had engaged with Andrea Whitworth (formerly of BEIS) at every stage & took all advice/support packages offered. Monthly check & challenge peer reviews were used, as they had never done anything on this scale. They kept the relevant MPs on the funding Boards informed, ensuring there had good advocates at Whitehall. They also had 2 separate Boards (one for each bid), who oversaw intentions & plans in order to check them at each stage.

9. Skills Advisory Panel:

(i) Local Skills Report publication

LB advised the Board that all LEPs were asked to submit a new Local Skills Report, respond to pandemic recovery & look at longer term plans. Our report looks across Staffordshire. The finished document, circulated last week in the pre-Board papers, has now been submitted. Within it are our LEP skill strengths of engineering and advanced manufacturing, energy, logistics & construction, but there are also skills gaps in Digital, STEM, Construction & Health & Social Care. Digital & STEM skills are needed at all levels, but there is also a gap around logistics in terms of HGV drivers.

Allocation of funds may refer to this submission, working in partnership with employers & skills providers. Starting with 16+ & then increasing numbers into HE & higher skills in regions. Supporting employers Kickstart, Restart & Apprenticeships is a big focus for SAP this year.

Action plan – is to ask what the best employers look like in terms of CPD, then how do skill providers ensure that the incoming workforce are well enough equipped. We are building up a picture of how to support this. We are awaiting Technology Institute reports & skills capital projects via GBF, particularly via supporting start-up through colleges. It was proposed that the awaited data can be brought to the next Board meeting.

Career support requires development beyond schools. i.e. into job centres too. Numbers of apprentices in the region needs to grow & to ensure lifelong learning to fill ongoing skills gaps.

DWP have followed up on identified gaps now so progress can be made at granular level.

SW added that the DWP are amenable to changes via Kickstart, but suggested SAP looks at lessons learned for the future. DWP weren't prepared, so there was more we could have done with receiving data earlier, as mentioned at previous Board meetings

(ii) Revised ToR

These (dated 17/03/21) were circulated with pre-Board papers. No comments or issues were raised by Board.

10. A&F Committee: LEP Draft Budget 2021/22

MA updated the Board that the proposed budget will be brought back to Board for approval after sign-off by the A&F Committee (next meeting 12/05/21).

JL observed that no value is shown for private Board member time, yet public match funding is reflected.

SA concurred that this was a good point. The reason they are presented in this way is to demonstrate to BEIS that the public sector match £250k, but we can maybe look at this.

AR suggested this could simply be recorded as hours spent on LEP activity.

JL added that LEP work takes time & adds value, whilst not working for your own business. This notion was supported by SW, who added that Chambers put money in though too.

SA confirmed that we can ask Board Directors to estimate time spent on LEP & report back later.

ACTION POINT

Private sector Board members to estimate hours spent on LEP work p/a & report back to the secretariat.

11. LEP Executive Board Recruitment

AR appraised the Board that we have 2 vacant seats on the Board, which we were reminded to fill during the APR. This was slightly delayed as we awaited where the LEP review might take us.

A preparatory meeting for the interview panel is set up for Monday 19/4/21, with interviews being held on 21/4, 27/4 & 28/4.

LB added that it would be great if we could recruit around the skills agenda.

12. Forward Plan

MP informed the Board that we are spoilt for choice, but stand-out items are:

- Transforming Cities Fund (Phil Cresswell for Stoke-on-Trent City Council)
- Social Value Policy
- Governance around our Annual Report & Delivery Plan
- East Staffordshire, Stafford & Tamworth could provide an overview of their Future High Street bids/projects etc.

13. AOB

AR started an expression of thanks to MP at his last Board meeting as interim CEO – his support & tech advice has been fantastic. Further praise & thanks was supplied verbally & via the online chat facility by Board members.

MP gave a run through of where the past 11 months have taken him, beginning with Covid Taskforces, GBF, Marcomms, AGM, Annual Conference, Peer Networks. EU transition, back into a recovery phase etc. He mirrored thanks to AR for help & preparatory support around governance & Board meetings & in engagement building. He has seen first-hand how much work AR & the Board members put in. He hopes that BEIS see this & don't lose commitment to the area.

"Over 'n' out!"

HA provided a quick update of LEP Comms now that Social have been embedded for a few months. A quarterly report will be provided. Thanks to those who have supported the comms agenda, particularly to CB for her recent video work. The comms strategy will go to the sub-group Chairs & then to Board. This will be a short term one until we know what's happening with LEPs, at which point comms will be crucial.

Please continue with advocacy briefs. There is a LEP Comms Steering Group if anybody would like to suggest a group or partner who may not yet be represented.

Finally, the LEP is supporting Sentinel Business by sponsoring an award.

Cllr JO will share FHS plans for Tamworth. Tim Clegg will share Stafford's

Cllr AW reminded the Board that there are elections on 6th May, so 'my future presence depends on the electorate!'

MP added that the SPMG needs to replace Tony McGovern, to ensure it is quorate again. This needs addressing promptly.

ACTION POINT

A District or Borough nominee is required for SMPG a.s.a.p.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 19th May 2021 @ 4pm.

Location: Via MS Teams.

(Minutes will be taken by Lucy Sefton due to JK being on A/L).