

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 15th July 2021
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Mohammed Ahmed	Homeserve
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
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 Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Operational Team

Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP Accountable Body
Anne Boyd	SSLEP Chief Executive
Jo Kemp	SSLEP 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
Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive, Newcastle -under-Lyme Borough Council
Nicola Kent	SSLEP Growth Hub
Mark Kent	Principal, City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College
Mike Sutherland	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Philip White	(Alternate) Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Sybil Ralphs	(Alternate) Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Apologies

Prof. Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
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1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

SA confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Apologies

These were noted, as above.

3. Declarations of Interest

SW regarding any discussion relating to Growth Hub activity, which is contractually delivered by Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce.

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:

- LEP Review
- Growth Hub Network
- Continued CEO & Leaders 1-2-1s
- LEP Chairs, west Midlands & ME9

CEO update on LEP review:

- Geography
- Delay-related risks
 - Core funding awaited
 - Future strategy development
 - Workforce capacity. August will see a reduced staff due to school holidays/leave commitments
- Interim priorities
 - Deliver existing programmes
 - Understand business needs
 - Assess assets and liabilities in the context of change
 - Recruit Growth Hub lead
 - Review strategy and governance
 - October AGM - to celebrate the past & hopefully have a clearer view on the future
 - LEPs have been allocated 6 months funding

6. School of Digital & Creative Design

Guest speaker **Mark Kent** Principal, City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College, shared slides & an overview of intentions, with the Board, to develop a new school with a focus on digital technologies and design.

Vision - The creation of something unique for the area. Demographically this is needed – particularly at top end of the age range in proposals (11-18). Children need the skills to think & problem solve.

Silicone Stoke is an existing set of initiatives. Stoke-on-Trent College has been accepted from September as a Digital Schoolhouse.

The overview is for:-

- Education focused on helping children and young people to be confident and creative problem-solvers
- Enhanced curriculum
- Open access
- Located on or close to the University Quarter
- Catchment area of North Staffordshire – a transport plan will be produced
- A strong emphasis on wellbeing and mental health
- All teachers would be involved in interactive activities for schools
- Feed into T Level delivery at the SFC
- Clear line of sight for progression and employability

Current supportive parties are:-

- Staffordshire University
- Employers and Business
- The Wider Region
- Chamber of Commerce
- Potteries Educational
- Local schools, the local authority, and MPs

UTC = University Technical Colleges across the country are considering changing their starting point from age 11. So, with permission, we will be one of first of its kind.

The proposed curricula were shared via slide-deck detailing primary & secondary age level options. In addition, proposals of entry level ages to school including primary, middle, secondary & college age children were shown. Plus, intended student numbers.

If unsuccessful with the UTC it will be 'Free School', which will end at age 16 & students will then move to college, where the concentration would be on 'T' levels should they wish to continue with this model of education.

A letter of support would be welcome & a template is held by JK (LEP Business Engagement Officer) - copies were sent to EC & CB upon request during the meeting.

MK added that **SW** has helped with local business support & also Toshiba have offered it.

In addition, student help was offered to produce presentations & video, as this gives them valuable insight into the business world, whilst providing the chance to hone their skills.

JL queried skills around creative writing (niece won BBC young writers award) - she sought help with writing scripts but struggled to find this. Script & screenwriter help would be interesting.

MK responded that we want to use this school as a catalyst, to encourage all these kinds of innovation, problem solving & creativity.

AR asked the Board if they have any issues with SSLEP submitting a letter of support. No.

7. Returning to the Workplace Post-Covid-19

NK provided a SSLEP Growth Hub update on returning to work.

BEIS/Government information was received throughout last year & GH turned it round through their networks to help the business network in Staffordshire. Today information has been received from BEIS, which will be circulated via the GH website & social media very soon.

- Manufacturing companies, in particular want admin staff back, but their main concern is Covid cases arising & causing lockdown/staff absences.
- Immediately into lockdown businesses were enquiring about getting out of leases, but this appears to have eased off.
- GH are offering information on agile working. We can refer businesses to other sources of help such as the Information Technology Business Enhancement Programme (**ITBEP**). The #Dodigital campaign helped.
- Webinars are planned for if the situation worsens again.

Questions were invited.

AB expressed thanks for the GH support throughout this pandemic.

TM asked if there is information to be shared amongst organisations. Public transport is a real concern for workers.

NK confirmed that GH gathers intelligence weekly, so they can ask them about this & pass to BEIS in their weekly report.

PC suggested that liaison with bus companies would be needed via the upper tier LAs.

AR advised that risual is inviting people back to the workplace w.e.f. 15/08 (subject to the double vaccination rule).

JL wondered with the surge of interest from businesses how we can use that to our advantage in the future. **NK** advised that most had been signed up for the GH newsletter. Once contact is made 40% retain contact, as they then find the information useful.

AB added that GH traditionally focussed their activity on targeted interventions with businesses with growth potential. However, over the past year the team has broadened their original remit to support all local businesses through the pandemic. The team has therefore witnessed a sharp uptake in volumes of activity. For their hard work and efforts during this challenging time.

8. SPMG update

JL advised the Board that EC had been invited onto the SPMG Board following Sinéad Butters' resignation. She had attended several meetings previously as an observer. Are there any objections?

No objections. Appointment ratified.

Drakelow was allocated £5m of SSLEP GBF to match funding invested by D2N2 LEP, subject to a full business case review in Summer 2021. The complexity of the scheme, time constraints and funding rules have resulted in the need to simplify contractual arrangements. At the request of BEIS, SSLEP will decommit funds and return them to BEIS, who will reallocate funds directly to D2N2. SSLEP will continue to be recognised as a major investor, maintain oversight of developments, and maintain the ability for clawback should the project not go ahead as agreed. JL thanked AB & the SPMG team for the serious negotiations which took place, including liaison with BEIS to confirm acceptance of this handover for delivery. We will still attend D2N2 SPMG meetings to ensure that criteria are being met. There is the option to clawback any unspent money pro-rata if necessary, with a formula devised.

HA asked if SSLEP still have the right to advertise the project as ours, since the Comms team have just produced video to promote it. JL confirmed that it is still our project & GBF money.

No objections were heard from the Board on this issue, therefore JL asked AB to prepare documents for signing & for BEIS/MHCLG approval.

We are awaiting details on the success of the bid made with Zellar in respect of a £300k 'green grant'. 1 has been submitted to Government for approval, another is in the pipeline. At the Zellar meeting answers heard to posed questions seemed impressive, in respect of helping with the carbon footprint of businesses. They also work with GBSLEP & Greater Manchester LEP & hope to work with us & Leicester for the Midlands for a standardised approach. They are a co-investor in our bid.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Redacted.

AB [REDACTED]. The business is working with various other LEPs, the LEP Network and with Government. The partnership built the digital platform developed by them, which is unique, and is a pilot over a six-month period. They are also co-investing in the project. The bid was developed and submitted within a very tight window given CRF timetable, and discussions had taken place to ensure that it builds upon local provision by SBEN and

other partners. There was a very short window of opportunity & our Chair was fully aware & attended meetings throughout the development and submission of the bid. It was later presented at both Board (17th June) and SPMG meetings (28th June).

AR added that he & **AB** can raise & issue a brief to show the Board the facts & then liaise on how we progress the matter.

Cllr AW asked if there any issues re: financial commitments for the S151 Officer & **SA** confirmed there were not.

[Zellar | Home](#)

9. A&F Committee

MA advised the Board that the Appendix 9 attachments in pre-board papers refer to the risk addressed here.

Due to a GBF Scheme's funds remaining unallocated £0.5m has been reallocated to 4 other schemes.

- Cornhill Small Business Units, Leek £0.291m
- Church Street Gaming Hub, Stoke £0.097m
- SEF G JCB Automation & Robotics Suite, Rochester £0.086m
- Cleveland Future Skills Suite £0.065m

Growing Places Funds loans. Risks – the A&F committee asked for more details about where the delay is, as the money could be used elsewhere.

Core fund grant for 2021/22 is now urgent - as **AB** mentioned in the CEO briefing.

Lack of visibility for responsibility of funds and services for which the LEP is accountable (eg Growth Hub) – A mapping exercises to highlight all funding streams is being done, to understand accountabilities, assess risk, take credit, take control & push where we need to. This is at phase 1 stage of the LEP plan.

Late paper for SAP funding – voting is needed for this. Budget from the government was £75k for 2020/21, with a £55k LEP funds rollover allocated in this paper - are the Board happy to allow this spend?

JL requested 24hrs to read & vote electronically due to the late nature of receipt of the papers (yesterday).

MJ advised that this is the same as in the previous contract & is a roll forward of DfE for SAP work

AR offered to move to an e-vote by Friday 16th.

SA advised that a majority vote tonight will suffice, since this is the 3rd year of a roll forward as **MJ** stated. **AR** therefore asked for any objections & majority vote will be accepted.

No issues from majority - therefore carried.

New risks -

- Change of key personnel expected - Growth Hub manager.

- CE Hub - lack of future funding. Working with LAs to look at match funding resources to keep it going in the interim.
- Core fund offer letter awaited from BEIS, but the hope is that this is imminent.
- Risk of strategic changes in relation to existing contracts and services delivered by SSLEP, i.e. impact on governance arrangements, contracts, and delivery. Hatch have been commissioned to carry out a contract mapping exercise. Results will be taken to Audit & Finance in September
- 21-22 LEP Core Budget has yet to be finalised

SA advised that we expect a settlement for 6 months & we do have sufficient reserves not to cause immediate cashflow issues. There is sufficient funding to support what we need to do, with only the loss of some interest. The bigger risk is future funding beyond that.

AR added that the reality is we are looking into all our funding to ensure it is known what we are committed to. e.g. CEC ask was unexpected.

10. T&F

AB advised that the T&F group had met to talk through the ToR & future change timetable. The group doesn't seek powers to approve change, but will forward-plan strategic changes, timing, process & risks. The group confirmed that operational changes should be managed between Chair/CEO and/or routed via existing subgroups. This group would focus on strategic changes ahead. A revised ToR paper was produced this week - apologies were expressed for it only being issued yesterday.

The group are asking for ratification of the ToR by the Board. The focus is on strategic NOT operational. Operational issues for Board approval will go to SPMG & A&F.

We are anticipating a pause on recruitment nationally. Therefore, nothing locally is planned until the changes coming from national LEP review are known & have been reflected upon.

The group will meet again in September, ahead of the Board meeting.

JL enquired whether the T&F group require any budget?

AR confirmed that this is only needed for the Hatch, mapping exercise commitment.

No objections to the revised ToR were raised. **Therefore carried.**

11. Forward Plan

The LEP review will continue.

Delivery plan will be started

Assurance Framework re-write v.09

Skills National policy paper: Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth, c/o DfE

12. AOB

SW advised that Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce Business Awards 2021 open on 19th July for applications. She asked the Board to please encourage relevant businesses to apply. The closing date is September, with the awards ceremony on 18th November 2021.

TM advised the Board that Keele university had won UK Sustainable University of the Year, then were shortlisted for the Global Sustainability Institution of The Year, which they won at the International Green Gown Awards 2021 on 7th July.

Congratulations were conveyed by the Board.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 9th September 2021 @ 4pm.

Location: Via MS Teams.