

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 21st October 2021
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Mohammed Ahmed	Homeserve
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
Prof. Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Prof. Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr Philip White	(Alternate) Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Sybil Ralphs	(Alternate) Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District 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
Nicola Kent	SSLEP Growth Hub
Craig Jordan	Lichfield District Council

Apologies

Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Cllr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Doug Pullen	(Alternate) Leader, Lichfield District Council
Cllr Janine Bridges	(Alternate) Leader, Great Chell and Packmoor ward, S-o-T

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

None.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

AB commented that SW had made valid points regarding governance around LEP bids for external investment. AB had subsequently examined the Assurance Framework to establish that LEP hadn't breached any rules, as there weren't any detailed for this particular issue. However, the process will be factored into the new AF, depending on the national LEP review.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

- South Staffs DC's Leader, Cllr Brian Edwards, passed away on 13/08/21. The Chair paid tribute to Cllr Edwards's contributions and qualities and acknowledged that he will be sorely missed by all of us. Cllr Edwards was an alternate member for Cllr Patrick Farrington (the new Leader, Cllr Roger Lees, was appointed by SSDC on 14/09/21).
- LEP review – The Levelling-Up paper is still expected in November, with the LGA still advising the same to LA colleagues.
- CEOs/Leader 1-2-1's continue.
- Director recruitment – some suitable candidates have been known since summer. We are suspending recruitment until the national review results are known.
- WM & ME9 LEP Chairs continue to meet - Tim Pile (GBSLEP Chair) stepped down from his post recently. Leaving a vacancy within GBS LEP and the LEP Network Board rep for the Midlands. The Chair paid tribute to Tim's contributions and will be working with peers to identify a replacement.
- Midlands Connect – the integrated rail plan around supercharging the Midlands has been released & covers managing data around transport for this LEP region.
- S-o-T activity – Both Chair and CEO attended the Smithfield site & Spitfire opening ceremony occurred on 21st September and a roundtable meeting around Link Road, Powering-Up events & flexible workspace in city has also been held.
- The National Memorial Arboretum held its 20th anniversary celebration.

- ‘Pitch big’ was the message around development from UKREiif, with the impact of social values to drive inward investment.
- Following the cabinet reshuffle Michael Gove is the lead minister at MHCLG (now DLUHC). This feels favourable for LEPs. At a conference he discussed local decision making, which could be key.
- Both Chair and CEO are working closely with Growth Hub colleagues to Growth Hub colleagues to further develop their datasets and insights. We will be able to show a dashboard for impact soon. Titbits suggest significant change in business engagement since reopening of the economy. More than 50% of interaction is now digital, whereas it was previously by phone. Activity on geography is evenly split & represents distribution of our population too.

6. CEO’s update

- A letter of congratulations has been sent to Michael Gove from the LEP network.
- A CSR submission prepared by the LEP network was included in this Board pack. There are more positive noises being mooted by Government, with the suggestion that LEPs *could* be strategically linked to the Levelling-Up paper.
- We are now leaning on our LEP reserves, as the first 6 months funding passed @ 30/09/21. This is a cause for concern across the LEP network.

AR agreed that as core funding has expired, we are very lean & can offer little exposure. It is recommended we carry on as now, until the December Board meeting, using the sufficient reserves. Other LEPs are planning redundancies, but we recommend holding-off until the LEP review outcome is known & therefore not moving too fast.

- Meetings have been held over recent months with many stakeholders (inc. Made Smarter, SOT Health & Well-being Board, FE College Principals, LEP team site visits, Network of Networks, Private sector business leaders, DIT). We continue to be visible & vibrant, with our LEP project management actively continuing.
- Operational news – Sam Hicks is moving on to Staffordshire County Council & we wish to pay tribute to her for all the help & advice she has provided over her 3 years at SSLEP. We wish her well. JK’s role extension was confirmed, via electronic vote last month, to 2022. To free up her time & turn her remit to more engagement activity we wish to bring in an executive support person to support the CEO.

7. Delivery Plan

This has been formally signed off via the electronic vote requested last month. To provide a background though; there was a one-month turnaround for this plan, which was put to the T&F group before Board. Thanks were expressed to all involved.

This is our plan of action to reshape, whilst maintaining an eye on what we must continue to do in respect of core responsibilities including programme management, marketing & comms, the Hatch insight & any future reviews of the Assurance Framework.

Thanks were expressed to Hannah Ault & Claire Abbotts for the report & comms. There is a new collaboration with Midlands Engine comms & also a national thought piece to raise our profile.

The element of the plan from April to Sept has been delivered.

AB advised that she has sat in on national review for Growth Hubs with Nicola Kent. The job specification for our new GH manager is written and seeks approval from Board to appoint once the LEP Review is concluded (14, App 3 of pre-Board papers under T&F Group section refers). We are not actively recruiting at this moment.

Insight Commission – Growth Company Business were appointed in September & a telemarketing company is shortly to be recruited. An economic forum will converge from HE, FE & LA partners to add value to this insight/SITREP.

The Hatch review is taking stock of our assets to risk assess. This will help us going forward & will be brought to the November Board meeting.

8. National policy paper: Skills for jobs

LB provided an overview of this topic, which was originally submitted in the spring of 2021. It needs updating now & a revised report by late 2021/early 2022 is due. SAP will need this information to help look at where to invest & as a lever to maximise their influence.

It is expected to further provide information about skills strengths & skills gaps, then provide plans for upskilling, reskilling. These provisions will need to be matched through HE & FE establishments.

Regionally skills strengths are: Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, Energy, Logistics & Construction. Whereas training needs are Digital, STEM, Skilled construction (e.g. architects) & Health & Social Care. It could also look to advise the local labour market transition to net zero.

Action plan - Employers want to work more closely with schools, FE & HEs to ensure good practice & follow through to student careers by;

- Supporting the development of the wave 2 IoT applications.
- Supporting development of “pipeline” skills capital projects to improve the estates & infrastructure of education providers to enable delivery of priority skills provision (e.g. digital, construction, health & social care, transport & logistics, green energy).
- Further developing the CEC network to include all schools.
- Supporting apprenticeship growth programmes (inc. apprenticeship graduation ceremonies).
- Supporting the local delivery of plans for jobs/future lifetime skills guarantee schemes

This aligns well with the bill going through parliament, published in January 2021 – ‘Skills for Jobs White Paper’ focussing on employer led information for skills gaps, post age 16. It hopes to address identified challenges & investment for FE.

A further key focus is around business groups being at the heart of this in the development of different qualifications i.e. for apprenticeships & high technical qualifications.

Lifetime Skills Guarantee – hopes to allow people access to student finance to retrain/upskill through life. It may change the way HEs work.

Staffordshire University is one of 13 providers nationwide.

JL queried whether this would act as a kitemark for employers, like the former IIP award. **AR** suggested that we could offer a LEP kitemark.

LB clarified that it is more about recognising employers who understand how to place young people, offer placements & engage with education providers.

AB thanked **LB** & added that having previously acted as a commissioner at the Learning & Skills Council she has witnessed this being discussed for a long time, so how can we change?

LB suggested looking across the county & learning from each other. **LB** had confidence in the new approach which demonstrated strong collaboration with providers. Convening a group & ensuring diversity of provision.

SW added that Chambers are running pilots & will share with SAP once information has been reviewed.

LB reiterated that there has been an ongoing challenge with DWP to support this locally, as mentioned at previous Board meetings.

9. SAP

LB advised that SAP have responsibility for skills reports & overseeing funds. This is supported by Staffordshire County Council via Tony Baines, Darren Farmer & Dave Poole.

The Future Workforce Sub-Group has a common agenda & has provided a better representation of providers & expanded the skills group, thus effectively creating a larger SAP. The FW group can be merged with SAP.

LB steps down from her role as Staffordshire University VC & therefore SAP/FW Chair in Dec.

Martin Jones is stepping up to the VC role in January 2022, but there is still the vacancy for the SAP Chair

AR suggested that volunteers should put their names forward and a decision can be made at December's Board,

Nominations to **AR** or **AB** please.

NB - **AB** issued a missive to the Board on Friday 22nd October @ 09:02hrs (post Board meeting) asking that these nominations (& other voting issues) are sent **via JK** to collate.

10. SPMG update

JL expressed apologies for the late SPMG paper (which had been issued on 20/10 @ 17:50 & therefore not included in the original Board or mod.gov pack). However, since last night's paper more information had arrived this afternoon.

Endorsement of Andrew Barrett as the second public sector representative on SPMG was sought. - **Ratified.**

SPMG need a VC. EC has volunteered for the role. **Ratified.**

There have been issues around ensuring monies are spent in time & that outcomes are deliverable, for **GBF & City Deal** projects.

A potentially complicated issue for Shire Hall, when the main contractor went into administration, was avoided via the prompt appointment of another contractor. Outcomes will be delayed until June, but LEP monies will be used by the March deadline.

Cornhill - Moorlands DC have delivery issues. They still hope to deliver in time & have asked SPMG to accommodate them. A request has *just* come in, so an appeal was made that AR, JL & MA be given time to read the proposal & make delegated decisions.

LB queried whether clawback would occur if funds are not spent by 03/21.

JL & SA explained that SA as S151 Officer can commit to other projects (such as i54 previously), meaning that other projects can receive funds to ensure monies are spent, in sight of BEIS. All GBF is allocated & we have used some reserves on these, so if there are delays we can ensure that GBF funding is used first, by switching with these LEP reserves. If we need to reallocate it will be an SPMG decision which will be brought to the Board to agree.

- **AR** – reiterated JL's request that can the subset of people have delegated responsibility for decision? **No objections.**

JL - [REDACTED]. The A&F committee are aware of site problems. The developer only confirmed today that they are suggesting a new design, this had only previously been heard second hand. A traffic light system, not roundabout, is now proposed. The charge re: the roundabout was spread across the site, so this now causes issues. With existing grant and loan awards

Outputs & job creation is unlikely to be achieved by 03/22.

The request was made for the same subset of Board members (JL, AR & MA) to have delegated authority to decide. Plans are awaited, but further delays can occur attempting to convene SPMG & waiting for Board meetings.

LB whilst supportive of the suggestion was concerned that this scheme as already been substantially delayed & causes real concern in terms of when we draw a line. Should it be a full Board item if further delays are encountered?

JL agreed – [REDACTED] our help is needed. SPMG would like to see it proceed if possible. The plan has intensified. It is only 48 hrs ago that the developer officially advised of changed plans. Rest assured the developer has not received any LEP funds to date.

- Motion to allow the same subset to have delegated responsibility for the decision. **No objections.**

11. Mid-Year Review

AB advised that a formal summary would be circulated with these Board minutes. However, there were no surprises as regular meetings are held with Clare Hannah & her team.

There are three ongoing actions; two are in the domain of BEIS/CHGLU (now DLUHC), whilst the third is our issue of Board recruitment, which we are delaying until post-review (per Chairs comments at item 5).

CH informed the Board that she will supply **AB** with an updated version of the minutes, which have been shared with BEIS colleagues. They are aware Government owe the LEPs an answer but will continue to share when information is known.

City Deal carbon emissions reporting need refining, we currently do not have all details.

Thanks were expressed to **SA** too for help & advice throughout.

12. A&F Committee

MA talked the Board through aspects of the dashboard. (GBF, Shire Hall & Core Grant items had been discussed @Item 10 SPMG & Item 6 CEO's update). Skills Equipment fund has been fully utilised.

- The **diversity** perspective on the Board needs to be monitored, as **LB**'s departure takes the female percentage down from 40% to 33.3%. At present BEIS guidelines are to achieve 50:50 by 2023.
- **ESIF** reports has not been received over the past few months. Can we push for this information from Government as this has not been as visible as we would like?
LB & AR agreed we should ask for reports, as we need to make assurances, due to having responsibility for delivery.
AB added that ESIF Committee hasn't met for some time, so calling a meeting of that sub-group is timely. There is already an offer from Nigel Senior to attend November's A&F, so matters are in hand.
JL has a report from **NS**, which he will circulate. He is to chair an ESIF meeting as this hasn't happened since he took over. (This sub-group meeting was subsequently arranged for Friday 29th October).
AR requested ESIF information for the Board by November, to further helps strengthen our position by December.

MA reiterated that much depends on the LEP review to gain resolution.

- **MA** introduced the subject of the **Annual A/Cs** which will be covered by **SA** @ Item 13.
SA picked up on this & offered to bring this forward:-
A good discussion occurred at A&F. Thanks were expressed to **EC** for casting a scrutinous eye over them. The Finance Dashboard picks up the relevant matters.
There are a few minor amendments around the notes which the external Accountants (Deans) will action. The Accountant is on holiday until Monday 25th October, but they will be issued to the Board well ahead of the AGM though, where they will need to be ratified.

(these were subsequently issued by JK on behalf of SA on Tuesday 26th October 2021 @ 13:52)

AB pointed out that AGM is before the next Board meeting, so it is important that Board read & offer any comments on the Ann A/Cs ahead of this, as the Directors names need to go on them legally.

- For quoracy the **A&F Committee** requires 2 x private & 1 x public needed attendee. SA asked for another public volunteer, albeit this is not a governance problem.

AR asked for a public sector nominee to be given to AR & AB ahead of the next Board meeting, otherwise someone would be recommended & asked to take up this role.

MA – advised that some risks on the dashboard can be closed.

13. Annual Accounts

Brought forward to A&F section (Item 12) above.

14. T&F

AB advised that the T&F group had last met during the first week in Sept.

They had four recommendations:-

1. Revision to ToR
2. Delivery Plan - now approved
3. Job Description for the Growth Hub head - approval sought please. NK has helped contribute.
4. Extension of JK's contract to Jan 2022.

15. Forward Plan

Items (largely as shown on the Agenda) are:-

- LEP review
- Assurance Framework updates
- 5G update
- Future High Streets Fund & Towns Fund needed updates
- Transforming Cities Fund
- Midlands Engine/Midlands Connect updates

Please contact AR & AB to add any items.

16. AOB

- **AR** expressed his desire upon becoming LEP Chair in 2020 had been to build a strong team, but Covid happened & we have all been remote. As a team event, would we welcome festive drinks in December? Suggestions welcome.
- **AR** also suggested returning to F2F Board meetings – thoughts welcomed.
 - **JL** agreed it would be good to see people, but in a location where people can virtually attend too. This requires the right technology; therefore the Judges Rooms might not be that location.

- **TM** would prefer not to do hybrid as the technology doesn't always work. Keen on F2F but we need dates in diaries a.s.a.p.
- **LB** agrees with TM, it can be disruptive when some are online & some are present, but richer conversations happen when people come together. However sub-groups are better online.
- **SW** - 'Yes' to drinks & would prefer an 'in-person' Board w.e.f. the start of 2022. Perhaps alternate months online would work best.
- **AR** confirmed that from the beginning of 2022 we will look to meet F2F. Maybe F2F meetings quarterly, with these specific one being worthwhile attending (e.g. key topics, guest speakers).
- **EC** expressed thanks for this week's fantastic Carbon Literacy training, with specific thanks to TM for providing Zoe Robinson from Keele. It was hugely timely & she encourages Board colleagues to go to 9th November session (14:00 – 16:30).
- **JL** encouraged raising awareness of the Queen's Green Canopy. 'Plant a tree for the Jubilee'. Please advertise this on the website in due course.
- **SW** reminded the Board of the Chambers 'Let's Do Business' expo on 11th November at Uttoxeter Racecourse. Details are on the Chambers' website.
- **TM** confirmed he is looking forward to Carbon Literacy event. However, in terms of Board meeting housekeeping, whilst the quality of papers for this meeting has been better, we don't use them properly as step points in the ensuing meeting. Can we give thought to how we reference papers, in the conversations, i.e. which points on which papers are being discussed? It can be frustrating trying to find reference points in lengthy papers/dashboards.
- **AB** asked for thematic Chairs to do a headline summary please for the AGM. This was duly followed up by the issue of an e-mail on Friday 22nd October @ 09:02 hours.

"The Annual Report will be presented at the AGM. Should Chairs/Board members be available to reflect on successes/progress during last year as part of the presentation, please let Clare Abbotts know"
clare.abbotts@staffordshire.gov.uk
- **AB & AR** are invited to a meeting with four permanent secretaries, so maybe pick up this & discuss at the next Board meeting.

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