

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

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Mohammed Ahmed	Ice Telecommunications
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Caroline Brown	Caja Group
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
Martin Jones	Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Philip White	(Alternate) Deputy 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

Tim Clegg	CEO, Stafford Borough Council
Mark Connell	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Clare Hannah	Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Representative
Martin Hamilton	Chief Executive, Newcastle -under-Lyme Borough Council
Nicola Kent	SSLEP Growth Hub

Apologies

Prof. Liz Barnes	Vice-Chancellor, 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 Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Janine Bridges	(Alternate) Leader, Great Chell and Packmoor ward, S-o-T
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr George Allen	Deputy Leader, East Staffordshire Borough Council

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.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

- Tim Pile has stepped down as GBSLEP Chair & his replacement starts soon. Tim was also the West Midlands LEP Chairs Chair. A new WMLEP Chair will be agreed, by Chairs, not CEOs, at the next meeting.
- Thanks were expressed to Trevor & Keele for Zoe Robinson's Carbon Literacy event. It was a motivational way of encouraging businesses to keep global warming down to 1.5 degrees.
- ASOS have invested heavily in Lichfield. Chair & CEO attended the official opening event in early November. Investment is approx. £30m, with a ROI expected in 2 years.
- Staffordshire University Innovation EZ Expo was attended, which highlighted partners creating incubation space; this one in the middle of the campus.
- The Growth Hub Steering Group is making good progress, providing data driven metrics.
- Paul Farmer (former Board member) has leveraged post-Covid capital for Wade Ceramics from MEIF. An interesting factory tour was received.

6. CEO's update

AB advised that she her first CEO report was submitted to the Board, as a pre-Board paper.

- Susan Nutter has been employed on a temporary basis to offer flexibility to the team as an administrative resource.
- A risk needs adding about the agility of LEP support staff to leave, as all are on short term contracts.

Questions or comments were invited. None were forthcoming.

7. Cannock Regeneration

Tim Clegg supplied the excellent news, that since the last Board meeting, Cannock DC have received £20m under Levelling-Up.

The focus is to regenerate Cannock town centre by demolishing the concrete carpark, enhancing The Prince of Wales theatre & the creation of a two-screen cinema.

They are engaging with the public to establish what they wish to see in respect of leisure, culture & accessibility. i.e. what to keep; what to remove. Their website has an interactive set up with artists impressions – the hope is that local people will own it & make decisions for their own town centre.

Cannock DC are also contacting partners in the County Council & NHS to suggest to co-location of services to create an even better offer for the town.

Once paperwork goes back to Government next week, they will have formal plans, with tight timescales. Thereafter they can further advise the LEP Board on specifics.

AR added that he had visited recently. The McArthur Glen outlet village is a good development & is hoping to spread its reach.

TC expressed thanks to LEP Board personnel who have supported the DC with this bid.

8. SITREP & Busines Survey

AR welcomed **Richard Jeffrey** of the Growth Company, who have considerable SITREP experience in the Greater Manchester area.

RJ shared slides & advised that they are excited to be working with SSLEP. They are a social enterprise who help businesses deliver potential. The project purpose was laid out.

- To identify local needs/barriers/challenges to consequently inform investment and service/support provision
- Strategy and policy
- As an evidence base to secure investment
- As an opportunity to develop closer relationships with business so that they feel heard
- To add value to the wider local partnership by the provision of regular, local contextualised insight that reflects the voice of business in the context of government stats

To include:

- Add-value to existing sources
- Combine business voice with stats to provide 'complete' SITREP
- Demonstrate engagement across entire patch
- Fit strategically with SCC new observatory
- Be a medium-term commitment (not a one-off)

From experience this will inform on strategy & help decisions to be made quickly thus providing a common understanding of the locality. They have worked with Government departments, discovering that real time data helps with key drivers & bringing in additional investment.

An overview of their approach was supplied;

- to supply economic research,
- labour market intelligence,
- engage with stakeholders.
- challenges, resilience, confidence, looking forward, investments are all to be agreed & finalised, but these are broad areas.

- accessing advice, identifying skills gap, redundancy risks, the global economy, future support, then to keep in touch.
- dissemination is key we need to show that we're listening, that we care & will act on input.
- this should have national traction as not many places are looking into such depth of detail. Promotion is also important, so publishing dates require consideration.

A good first session was held with stakeholders identified by us earlier this week. They are now developing a set of survey questions & ask for input. Dissemination of information as gathered & ongoing will be reported to our partners.

MJ confirmed that he had been part of the conversations earlier in the week. The link between supply chain dynamics around Brexit & skills specific to supply chains will be interesting. He is eager to see this data.

AR added that this work will give us a much better insight into the current economy, as the last information was obtained for the LIS development & is approx. 4 years old.

9. Delegated Project sub-group update

JL advised that there are two red flag projects - [REDACTED] & [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has seen a proposed change of access from a roundabout to traffic lights, which will then allow the development of a commercial & housing site. A commitment had been made to the S278 agreement, but costs have risen, hence the proposed change.

The delegated sub-group met & gave the developer additional time to finalise the proposal & they came back quickly; this has now been handed to Hatch for assessment. The change of plans has caused serious delays, but the area needs both housing & jobs, therefore we would still like to fund it. Once recommendations are received back from Hatch the sub-group will reconvene.

[REDACTED] - time has slipped, but the fundamental principles of intention remains the same. Outcomes won't be delivered by 03/22, but the project should be capable of delivering. Hopefully SA can manage the expenditure requirements to enable funding to happen under government terms.

AR expressed his support to achieve the outcomes on this project.

10. A&F Committee

MA confirmed that there is no significant change to the risk register since last month. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] are being looked at closely, per the delegated sub-groups report.

DHN – the Board need to see the scheme, so we have asked for a Board visit & he will ensure we are updated on this request.

ESIF Committee - **AB** has chased personnel with a view to reports being produced & supplied. MA will send these to Board once received.

A GPF loan securities decision is needed. Previously the parent company had been used to guarantee security. There is a problem with the [REDACTED] development if the company cannot repay the loan. A few suggestions have been received from Staffordshire CC's legal Officer, Sophie McFie-Hyland; one is a security bond, but this slows the process down & may be off-putting. Therefore, the

alternative suggestion of a Legal Mortgage Charge as the security option is the preferred method. Moving forward all contracts under GPF should have this. This is our ask.

JL provided the history that this is the second loan for this company. The first was paid back & then they moved onto build this student accommodation. However, repayments failed & we may have to wait as the chain of creditors gets paid off.

AR asked for the vote or objections. Carried.

AR invited **AB** to update on the LEP budget - Government has announced that we have funding to the FYE. A letter from Government was received thanking LEPs for their cooperation. Match funding is needed from Staffordshire CC & Staffordshire Chambers, but it gives us security until the FYE.

AR asked **CH** if there's any news on Levelling up/LEP review. **CH** advised that they have been told that information should be available by the end of 2021, but she suspects it may slip into the New Year.

11. Forward Plan

Items as shown on the Agenda are:-

- DHN update
- Assurance Framework updates
- Emerging plans incorporating Covid Recovery; International Trade; Future Workforce; Growing Businesses; Innovation; Place - post LEP review.
- Future High Streets Fund & Towns Fund needed updates
- Transforming Cities Fund
- Midlands Engine/Midlands Connect updates

AB requested that Board members supply anything which they want to add as specifics, albeit things may change by the first meeting of 2022. Any ideas or thoughts for future agendas are welcomed.

12. AOB

JL – asked for a consideration from public sector colleague's re: pre-application planning. This has been shelved & this could cause a backlog. Can this be investigated please? It will slow down applications & ones with minor issues would benefit from pre-application.

TC agreed that this is an issue across all LAs but is a temporary measure. There has been an increase in Stafford by ⅓ for home extensions, often poorly put together & this has slowed the system. Plus, there is a shortage of planning officers. However, things are improving & once the backlog is cleared, we will look to reintroduce pre-application planning.

PC - agreed with **TC**'s points, but from the City, PPA (Planning Performance Agreement) helps progress applications. Record levels of applications are coming forward. The health service & private sector are employing people with pay rises, so the public sector is losing staff to these areas.

CH added that if this matter has not been raised externally already, please pass to her & she will ensure it reaches the people who can help & support.

PW added that property development lawyers are difficult to find.

MA asked that as the Kickstart scheme was struggling to onboard people, has anyone else had success & can advise how? **AR** suggested we obtain an update on Kickstart from our partners.

AB asked JK to add this to Forward Plan.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 16th December 2021 @ 4pm.

Location: Via MS Teams.