

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 16th December 2021
Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
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 Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Jeremy Oates	Portfolio Holder Heritage & Growth, Tamworth 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
Susan Nutter	SSLEP P.A. to AB

In Attendance

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

Apologies

Mohammed Ahmed	Ice Telecommunications
Cllr Patrick Farrington	Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme 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

- Mandy Thorn, of the Marches LEP, has been appointed as Chair of West Midlands LEP. AR is Vice Chair.
- The Midlands Connect conference was successful & also a good opportunity to build our brand & relationships within the region. AR chaired a round table panel session on EVs & met Sir John Peace.
- SAP Chair appointment is confirmed as Martin Jones.
- LEP Scrutiny preparation is done. The session is in January & will be hosted by Staffordshire County Council.
- The Stafford Western Access Route (SWAR) official opening occurred last month. It is a fantastic route which should ease traffic & help Stafford. Hopefully the EVLR is close to finishing soon.
- Au revoir Liz Barnes - There was a great event last month to celebrate LB leaving the University & thus she is leaving us now. Her contribution to the area & LEP/SAP has been great & the Chair gave a 'massive thank you'. LB added how much our LEP has moved forward under AR's leadership & added that it had been 'a delight' to lead on SAP, Future Workforce & Growing Business. Thanks to all were expressed & for the flowers from LEP. Various messages from Board members were posted up in the online chat. JL verbally thanked LB for her time & education when he joined Board. Her advice will be missed.

6. CEO's update

AB advised that the CEO report was submitted to the Board, as a pre-Board paper, but added the following narrative;

- Thanks were expressed to LB.
- The SITREP survey questionnaire is underway, thanks to the feed in from LEP board members & other personnel within the LAs. Road testing is underway with approx. 50 completed in the past week. The results will inform an adaptation of this to roll out in Jan/Feb 2022. The aim is for 400-500 responses per month, for 2 months, thus providing a holistic view for the eventual SITREP.
- Capital investment projects continue, with some challenges over rising costs & viability of suppliers. Particular thanks were expressed to Sharon Palphreyman & SA for their efforts in keeping contracts moving.

- We continue to champion Stoke & Staffordshire through strategic engagement with Midlands Engine/LEP Network/Peers/ Government.
- DIT have launched new strategy and decided to take any associated staff in-house to ensure that end-to-end provision is managed. Growth businesses tend to be exporters, so we need to work closely to ensure such businesses receive adequate support and seamless referrals. This is a national strategy, but we should consider one at local level to contribute into national thinking. This can be developed for discussion in detail in the New Year.
- Thanks to our partners who have continued to engage & support over the past few months.
- Tribute was paid to our LEP team who remain committed in uncertain times

Questions or comments were invited. None were forthcoming.

7. LEP Review

AB updated the Board that the national review is still awaited. The Levelling-Up paper, due today, has been delayed until January 2022, so there is still no written certainty, whilst media comments abound. Yesterday the LEP Network met with Kwasi Kwarteng & the note from the networks chair following this meeting was read out to the Board as follows.

Subject: LEP Network Meeting: Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP & Neil O'Brien MP 15th December 2021

Dear Chairs/CEOs

*We wanted to circulate a short note to report back on our meeting with **Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP and Neil O'Brien MP** this morning. In short, it was a very positive conversation with Ministers recognising the value we are adding and the **'fantastic things'** LEPs have made happen by bringing the business perspectives. While greater detail and confirmation will follow in the Levelling Up White Paper, the Secretary of State confirmed that LEPs **will have a role going forward**. They both stressed their respect and appreciation for our work and that this view was also shared by SoS DLUHC who is equally committed to LEPs having a future role in Levelling Up.*

*Ministers and officials pointed to the detail that had come out of the LEP Review, which had led to a **far greater understanding and appreciation** of the role we play, and wanted to extend their thanks to those who had given so much time to that work, while also recognising the challenges the extended period of uncertainty had brought. Once the White Paper is out, we will work quickly and closely together on moving to the next phase. Officials highlighted the comments of the DLUHC SoS around **strengthening the democratic institutions** and would want to work with us post White Paper on what that looks like, again building on the work of the LEP Review. In discussion, it was also clarified that given the variety of existing local governance structures **"it is not a one size fits all approach"**, which again points to the need for far greater collaborative working going forward. SoS BEIS made a commitment for greater engagement with Ministers alongside that. We await the publication of the White Paper and stand ready to work with officials on the **next phase for LEPs**.*

We will also be revisiting the material from the review working groups and determining what our preparatory steps should be so that we are ready to continue to shape our future agenda.




Mark Bretton

Chair

Mark Livesey

Chief Executive

There is a further LEP Network meeting on Monday, to reflect on continuing comms for LEPs, as we need to understand what our future role might be.

AR added that we will act promptly on January's paper & re-architect our LEP swiftly then.

8. SPMG

JL updated:

The group needs another LA authority to ensure quoracy. Please nominate to **JL** & **AB**.

Also, approval of the decision for Chatterley Valley for enterprise is needed. **SA** confirmed that this is a governance piece. SPMG has approved it, but it requires ratification by the Board today. This aims to re-invest monies & rates to enable developments to happen.

TMc stated that it is a good paper & the site is important but asked for clarification about whether something had previously been agreed & therefore that the money isn't being double counted. **SA** confirmed that it has been previously approved for the Ceramic Valley, but that this is site specific for Chatterley Valley.

No challenge, therefore **approved**.

9. Delegated Project sub-group update

JL advised that risks have not changed, however there is progress thanks to allowing the agility of this delegated sub-group of himself, **AR** & **MA**.

Drakelow bridge is needed & desired. He & **SP** attended a good meeting with **D2N2** in which he emphasised that we don't have the flexibility to keep this GBF money in the pot. Agreement & documentation is required swiftly, as previously agreed. A January deadline has prompted approx. 95% of the outstanding information, so we should be in position to transfer the £5m contribution soon.

There is an additional SPMG meeting scheduled for 21/12 to discuss Blythe Park, which is still a red on the RAG rating. Principally the LEP wanted to provide sufficient funds for housing & commercial enterprise at this site, which has not changed. The issue was over a change in scheme design from roundabouts to traffic light junction. A new design has been suggested & sent to Hatch for appraisal, which we hope will happen quickly so funds can be confirmed in line with the amended design.

10. A&F Committee

EC provided an update in **MA**'s absence. The last meeting was on 8th December. **JL** has already raised some of the issues discussed from an SPMG point of view.

- One strategic risk is closed, being the LEP core fund (Oct-Mar) which has now been received.
- ESIF risk - the latest position is for the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) to take over from ESIF, but it is uncertain if there is enough time to enable a smooth transition. The A&F Committee do not feel sufficiently sighted on ESIF project progress, so are suggesting that the ESIF committee should meet. **AB** advised that MC has chased ESIF/BEIS & reported that there have been no meetings since Spring. We have pushed back stating that we need to understand where our spending is at. Nigel Senior is presenting at the next A&F meeting, in the meantime we will get a local meeting called with NS & JL who sit on our own ESIF Committee.
- **JK** was asked to leave the call whilst a discussion was held about A&F's suggestion regarding extension of her contract. **EC** confirmed that A&F Committee supported the proposal by the CEO to extend the contract of JK for a further six months to ensure continuity and sought ratification from Board. This was unanimously supported and therefore **approved**.

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
- Kickstart update.

AB added that following a meeting today with Cannock Chase District Council, Dean Piper is keen to attend & update on their plans.

12. AOB

AR looks forward to meeting up more in person next year & also to sharing LEP review news.

General Christmas wishes were conveyed by Board members to each other.

Meeting ended @ 17:42 hours

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 17th February 2022 @ 4pm.

Location: Via MS Teams.