

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 20th October 2022
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
Mohammed Ahmed	Ice Telecommunications
Hannah Ault	Valentine Clays
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
Prof. Martin Jones	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Prof. Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr Paul Roberts	Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Cllr Mike Sutherland	Cannock Chase District Council
Cllr Philip White	Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Operational Team

Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP Accountable Body
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Business Engagement Officer

In Attendance

Mark Connell	Strategic and Partnerships Manager, Stoke-On-Trent City Council
Darryl Evers	Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, Staffordshire CC
Clare Hannah	Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Representative
Rebecca Parker	Head of Business Growth Hub

Apologies received

Cllr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Stafford County Council

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone.

SA advised 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

None.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

- Midlands Engine – AR has taken the West Midlands LEPs Representative seat on the ME Executive Board
- Various LEP transition working group meetings have been held, the Transition plan itself is covered separately in this agenda
- ICAEW events attended
- Spoke at the Staffordshire Leaders Board
- Involved with Burton-on-Trent Place Branding
- LEP Networks have working groups for; Coastal, Agri-food, Innovation, Rural, Integration of LEPs, Net Zero, International Trade & Digital.

ACTION POINT

Anyone wanting to get involved please let AR know.

SW advised that she is interested in International Trade.

6. Update on CEO/Interim Support

AR advised that he has worked with Simon Ablewhite & Darryl Eyers over this issue. He has spoken with Cheshire & Warrington LEP to arrange for Andy Devaney (who runs their GH & Inward Investment priorities) to come onboard for approx. 2.5 days p/w, to help lead our organisational team & support our transition. This will be until March. Post March, once our transition is in place, we can hire someone new. From a cost perspective it means that there is no immediate recruitment or agency cost to consider.

His CEO, Philip Cox, was previously involved in the setting up of LEPs & was a senior civil servant, as is the Deputy CEO, Joe Manning, so could give us access to government for insight.

Contracts are ready to go, but this is being brought to Board for input first.

MJ asked if this is an initial contract which is then renewable. **AR** responded that the contract would terminate in March, but we could possibly extend. **MJ** suggested 1 month notice either side of March. **SA** confirmed that the contract already agrees a month either side, with termination in March.

SW enquired whether there is something formal planned with Cheshire & Warrington & enquired about AD's CV (located his credentials on LinkedIn.)

AR advised that AD's role will be day to day support for the staff, running of the LEP, supporting our delivery plan & engagement with other LEPs. His CV has previously been seen by some of the Board when recruiting for the CEO post last year, as he made the shortlist.

DE further clarified that we are not hiring a new CEO, just bringing in support & management, with a wider reach into C&W LEP for support if needed. Stability is needed for the team – the Chair can't pick that role up; it needs to be a specific Officer.

HA stated that it is good for Board members to understand what we are committing to as a Board. She recalls, with positivity, interviewing AD with Cllr B.

AR appraised the Board of the cost for this role @ XXX p/m until March. There are no pension arrangements needed, so would seem to be the best position for now.

7. SSLEP Delivery Plan update: Transition Group

AR updated the Board that he had met with Staffordshire Leaders Board & then the Transition Group meetings had been held.

The 4 groups (Transition, Growth Hub, Marketing/Business Engagement & Insight) are starting to overlap.

He introduced Darryl Evers to provide more detail & present slides to the Board (as issued to the Board earlier).

DE advised that the Transition working group are looking for feedback today. Nothing is final. It is recognised that SSLEP's chosen 'Pathway 2' doesn't give us devolved government or how to lead into this. The Transition meeting was positive though.

There are some key questions to check with Board today. i.e., The Direction of travel. Does it feel right to do the 5 points on the relevant slide, or have we missed anything?

1. Voice of business
2. Facilitate business engagement
3. Support production of local economic policy and strategy
4. Delivery of some strategic programmes e.g., Growth Hub
5. Accountable to local democratically elected leaders

The new LEP role is to add value & shape the voice of business, so we need to make it heard. A suggestion for consideration here today is:-

Work with Local Authorities to identify a small number (3) of grand challenges where the voice of business can be captured to understand the barriers and opportunities and recommend the problems that Local & Central Government can help businesses to solve.

A slide on future Board composition led to conversation about how we might govern the transition with a leaner sized Board, considering business skillsets.

A review of the current governance model is needed & the question arose again of whether our Ltd Co. status is still needed.

AR suggested that key areas of interest for him is, such as with our Networks of Networks group, what information is coming from business organisations? What subject areas shall we look at? What should the Board look like? We are no longer managing capital, so our role is more about insight & supporting leaders with direction. We need to engage the right people, perhaps creating new sub-groups.

MJ interjected that slides do not mention HE establishments, these clearly fall outside of elected local government, but they do help boost productivity as per the notes on the slide regarding 'Supporting delivery of LU Missions'. LSIPs link in with HE's too.

AR confirmed that LSIP are the Chamber's remit but agrees that in terms of careers & employability on our plan for LUWP, HE/FE establishments should be included, we should be more specific. MJ's feedback was welcomed.

HA stated that as this is a very important subject so she would have appreciated the slides prior to their issue today. Since she doesn't sit on any of the 4 sub-groups, she would like to have been more prepared for this subject at tonight's meeting.

SW added that the overlap between the 4 sub-groups may become tricky, since at the Marketing/Business Engagement group other issues arose. What is the timeline & process via which our decisions will be made? Do we have a finite point?

AR advised that we need it done by March 2023, but we also need to know funding commitments from government. Once AD (interim CEO) is in place he can be at the centre of all these conversations & can pull the strings together, as all groups do feed into each other.

JL stated that he liked the direction, but asked if we are Voice of Business will there be an obligation for elected leaders to listen? When we had capital & power to grant money they listened, but now is different. Will there be a remit from BEIS about this intended relationship – that LA leaders must listen?

Cllr PW advised that the elected mandate for Leaders would make it unlikely that BEIS can 'make' elected bodies listen. However, we do have a good free-flow relationship at present.

DE confirmed that as one of our grand challenges we do not want our Voice of Business ignored, hence agreeing what economic challenges we want to hear about. They will be shared issues & should therefore avoid this problem. We are designing this together so we should gain comfort from this.

AR added that it would be good to have Memorandum of Understanding.

EC agreed that groups naturally overlap. Insight & Marketing groups need to come together to identify who we want to reach out to & how. e.g., Sectoral balances etc. - then build this into the structure. **AR** agreed.

SW warned that the risk of trying to be representative is that we might end up listening to sector groups which are not linked to grand challenges. Building up a strong representative base takes a long time, so moving at pace & being agile requires some balance too. The grand challenges are so important as these will shape much of what then goes on with the other groups.

Cllr PW added that the Voice of Business is important. It needs a representative body 'a Big Tent' & a one-stop shop, this will bring us leverage. We need to ensure that we speak to the right people about the right things.

(**TM** joined the meeting at 16:52 with apologies)

DE continued that once we are clear about our role over the next 12mths decisions will be needed about how to fund this. Leaders want a good Voice of Business, so it is a valuable need & will require paying for. Should we look to LEP reserves?

We have identified existing functional responsibilities & suggestion have been around each, (per slides 11 & 12).

e.g., Careers & Enterprise - we receive inconsistent advice from DfE. Currently LEP are held accountable, but the service sits with Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Enterprise Zones may transition to LA's IF BEIS are comfortable with that.

There are still historical projects which will need monitoring. These may transition to LA's. GPF projects may not, because as monies come back these can be future source of income to fund future LEP activity.

Legacy EU funds may perhaps return to Government.

In terms of timescale for this new 'business partnership', it would be good so start at the beginning of 2023 if possible.

AR confirmed that the Marketing group were looking at a hard launch by March 2023, so already there is a differing timescale.

SW felt that the Skills Hub never belonged to the LEP & always sat with the Chambers. It was thought that we had already agreed that City can keep CVEZ funds for the foreseeable future, to invest as rate rebates.

AR/EC confirmed the agreement about the investment of rates, but in the long term it comes back to LEPs. So, there is a long-term funding stream available.

TM interjected that having looked at the slides earlier, it might be a parochial issue, but the decision to ignore universities is not ideal. Although he & MJ can work around this, he felt that we shouldn't just look at businesses, since there are 3rd sector organisations which we had agreed in earlier meetings to include. The transition needs to be encompassing & engaging & he was uncertain that this works as is but is prepared to accept it.

In addition, he felt that reserves should not be used only for admin.

AR accepted this feedback again. Yesterday's meeting did reference HE/FE. Not mentioning these in the slides seems an oversight. We are assembling ingredients to create something. No decisions are being made today. This is for open discussion. All feedback is noted with thanks.

DE returned to a summary slide. Discussion not decisions are being asked for on the following:-

- confirm agreement with the direction of travel / future role
- support identification of the 3 grand challenges
- agree the principles of the new executive board composition and request the transition group develop membership criteria and ToR
- support a review of the current Governance Model (Limited Company)
- agree the development of a detailed budget plan, which includes the utilisation of reserves to fund the partnership
- confirm the proposed transfer of services and note the areas still to be agreed
- note the work being undertaken by the Transition group / sub-groups
- agree the launch date for the new business partnership

We do need to look to see if reserves can be used to fund activity.

More work needs doing around CVEZ & CEC.

Use of the new interim leadership will help bring all this together. Shall we look to the new year to reach decisions?

(**MC** joined the call at 17:12)

SW confirmed that the list of where activity is/should be/how they will be managed in the future, (per slides 11 &12) needs more discussion, including LSIP. There are important nuts & bolts required around the plan, to ensure the direction of travel is correct.

HA requested clarity on the timescale for next steps. What is the intention moving forward? i.e., will the Board make decisions at the next meeting in November?

AR confirmed that once AD is onboard, we will be able to start coordinating & then bringing issues in for bite-sized decisions. We were trying to bring the transition conversation here, but as other groups are having conversations it all needs an overarching body to view matters. There are some points in DE's slides which have now changed, after the marketing meeting yesterday. All is evolving.

MC advised that from the list DE has put together, the one not to miss is the Midlands Engine Investment funds. The fund currently forms part of the ERDF programme, however once it has been loaned out through this programme it will be available to re-invest across the Midlands via British Business Bank. The LEP need to have a voice as to where the funds will be invested moving forward. We need a new nominee, since Mo has stepped down, but SA is looking into this. It's quite large & we need to be engaged when the time comes.

AR thanked MC for raising this & suggested that AD should sit on that group.

SW asked if we should have a list of which groups we are represented on as the LEP or what we could be invited to e.g., Midlands Energy Hub did a presentation some time ago, but there has been no further advice on what is happening. This will help us to help look at future influence.

SA will ensure this happens.

ACTION POINT - SSLEP to produce & circulate a list to Directors of all Groups we are represented on as a LEP.

8. SPMG

JL advised that the SMG meeting was cancelled as there was little to discuss, but the sub-group paper was still issued.

- It is sad news about the Cleveland Future Skills Hub, in light of the proposed closure of XXXXX. They met with the parent company who also put funds in. The facilities for training purposes are suitable for the construction industry if a user can be found.
- Drakelow - £5m handed over to D2N2. The proposed job numbers do not match the original agreement, so legal teams are working on an addendum. The contractors will start work in January 2023.

9. A&F Committee

MA advised that:

- The new Risk register is in the Board paper appendices. We want to receive Risk Register feedback from the Board, so hope that this new look creates responses.
- A&F received a good presentation on Growth Hub future plans.
- Finance dashboard it is best to look at reds & assume that no questions will come about from amber & green. JL has just touched on Cleveland & Drakelow issues as above.

- Annual Accounts – there are no concern from the Auditors. They have been reviewed by A&F & from a going concern perspective the position is healthy, with sufficient reserves to be of no short-term risk. We are asking for Board approval please.
AR - asked if any objections.

Annual Accounts accepted.

10. Forward Plan

AR explained that these are mostly procedural updates which are due coming forward & then there will be more around the Transition Plan.

MJ advised that the SAP 'Skills for Growth' survey needs to go through Board & asked if we could invite Kevin Fenning, from Metro Dynamics who created the report, to the next meeting. This informs the LSIP & segues into skills planning.

SW agreed that this ties with LSIP & we can talk about this further. MJ needs to ensure SAP money from DfE is spent in support of the LSIP

ACTION

JK liaised with MJ post meeting & contacted Kevin Fenning 26/10.

11. AOB

HA advised the Board that she had attended a ministerial roundtable today, promoting Staffordshire, plus the ceramics industry in terms of energy issues.

There may be a new government scheme post March. In addition, there is a survey - link attached.

[Qualtrics Survey | Qualtrics Experience Management](#)

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 17th November 2022 @ 4pm, via MS Teams (post AGM)