

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 15th December 2022
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
Emma Catterall	Camping & Caravanning Club
James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Prof. Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
CLlr Abi Brown	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
CLlr Mike Sutherland	Cannock Chase District Council
CLlr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
CLlr Philip White	Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council

Advisory/Operational Team

Andy Devaney	Interim SSLEP CEO
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Business Engagement Officer
Simon Ablewhite	SSLEP Accountable Body
Bev Dajani	SSLEP Programme Manager

In Attendance

Mark Connell	Strategic and Partnerships Manager, Stoke-On-Trent City Council
Martin Hamilton	CEO, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
CLlr Paul Roberts	Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Alex Collins	Cities and Local Growth Representative

Apologies

Mohammed Ahmed	Ice Telecommunications
Prof. Martin Jones	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Kevin Hetherington	Alternate for MJ, University of Staffordshire
Clare Hannah	Area Lead, Cities and Local Growth Representative

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone.

SA declared the meeting quorate.

2. Apologies

These were noted, as above.

3. Declarations of Interest

None.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Actions

- LEP Organisational Team to provide list of all groups in which LEP staff are involved to Board. JK updated that this is a w.i.p., as the list is growing & the team need to drill into more detail behind the meetings.
- AR & SW to get together re: international trade.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

- West Midlands LEP Chairs will appoint a new Chair soon, who will then represent at the next LEP Network Board.
- LEP Network Chair & Midlands Engine Chair positions are also coming up.
- Talking to the usual CEO's & Leaders around the region.
- Midlands Connect meetings.
- New Midlands Rail Hub programme launch.
- Numerous conversations with our new interim CEO.
- HA has resigned from this Board, due to full time commitments within her family business. AR expressed thanks for her input over the past 3 years, observing that she had been an asset, particularly in terms of marketing help. She is still on the 'We Are Staffordshire' Board, so no doubt paths will still cross.

6. CEO's update: Growth Hub/Insight; Board evolution; Legacy funds

AD advised that as per the pre-Board papers there are three significant items to be discussed—Growth Hub/Insight, Evolution of Board & Legacy deals.

Apologies were made for the late papers as he had been on A/L last Friday & all of this week too.

1. Growth Hub - no decisions are needed yet, this is just an update.

The BEIS budget is still not known for next year.

(Alex Collins confirmed there is no news, as no decisions have been made yet & we are unlikely to know before the y/e. Apologies were conveyed for the delay.)

AD continued that earlier in the year the Board had decided on the principle to change & embed a regional business voice/engage with purpose. Thanks were conveyed to Rebecca Parker & the Chambers for GH work done to date.

Assumptions are based on the concept that BEIS funding *will* be the same next year. ERDF ends but UKSPF is now released. Chambers are contracted until June 2023, with the end of ERDF funding. At a recent meeting held with SW, the need for F2F business support/engagement & the reduction of complexity was agreed. Referral mechanisms are likely to change, possibly becoming more commercial, with better informed businesses. The helpline currently sits within Chambers & it is possible this could continue in some capacity depending on budget and model. He had enjoyed the

conversation last week & hopes this could be the first of many. The helpline needs to be accessible to all businesses across the region.

In terms of digitisation, we intend to make it easier for businesses to access online support, but F2F support will not stop. No reason to stop the seminars as currently run.

RP met with the D&B's in the summer, with further conversations to come, consultations on budget & a proposed service model over the next month. There has been steady progress to date.

A proposal had been drawn up for a staffing budget, but this has been pulled back as further consultation is needed; this may be based on LEP reserves, UKSPF (in partnership with D&B's) & a continued BEIS budget.

Anything done will be alongside the bigger picture of Board Grand Challenges, once these are decided by Board. The aim is to support businesses & gather insight to then engage on building further structure for these grand challenges.

It was stressed again this needs to be a partnership. There is confidence that we have a strong model, but the LEP can't do it alone. GH's nationwide are more successful when built on partnerships. We need to be more aware of commercial support from members, but for us to test that these provide value too.

We want to be *pro* not *reactive* - discover our strengths & carry out data driven targeting. BEIS targets used to be number based, but we are now moving towards real purpose & hope for this approach (per pre-Board slides)

2. Moving onto Insight AD feels that this not separate. The GH & Insight should be one thing. GH will bring information in & insight can be sent out

The existing 'Network of Networks' model may well work with some development, perhaps use Beauhurst or Red Flag for data to further add value. So next steps will be to evaluate the NofN - this group is essential to source information from business representative organisations. SW has given access to understand what this means & we hope to make this group more powerful, with revised ToR.

So, there will be more to come in January, especially with budget & team structure for GH. He stressed that he would be delighted to speak to any Board members either now or on a 1-2-1 basis between now & then.

SW expressed thanks to AD for a productive meeting & understanding of how we can work together for GH & business support.

3. Board Evolution

The goal is for approx. 10 Board members, with AR to remain as Chair. Fewer Board members makes us more agile. This should allow the Board to be as strategic as it wants to be.

The National Assurance Framework needs 66% private & 50:50 gender balance, so 11 members might be needed to ensure this.

It is suggested that Staffordshire CC & Stoke-on-Trent CC leaders, plus a third District or Borough leader remain on the Board. We then need to draw from the private sector, ensuring geographical, gender & business size considerations are key.

Diversity is an issue, as the National AF needs adherence - changes may need to be made.

The question was posed as to whether Further & Higher Education count as private. **This will be confirmed during the process**

ACTION

Existing members please express an interest to remain on the Board. Depending on the outcome of this it is possible some members may be asked to step down in order to adhere to the National Assurance Framework. Conversations will start any time after this meeting.

Some of this may be naturally met via the Board Director term framework. 3 years in post are allowed before standing down, or potential re-election.

By the next Board meeting in February, we may be looking to recruit. Revised ToRs will be drafted & circulated.

AD's pre-Board paper refers to more detail. He invited questions regarding this paper/matter.

ACTION

The recommendations in the paper were accepted by the board and will now be actioned.

TMc added that he strongly encourages a FE representative, so we may need more like 11/12 on the Board. It would be a mistake not to include them, bearing in mind the government thinking on the skills agenda. He asked if the Board would remain as a Ltd. Co. & therefore members as Dirs.

AR agreed regarding the FE suggestion but indicated that SA has a better grasp of legalities behind company status.

SA explained that a separate legal status was needed under the National AF, but we would need to change our Articles of Association. We don't HAVE to comply, but future funding might be affected. He had previously pushed back to BEIS about this, offering to be part of a working party before now.

AR added that similar conversations are happening across the LEP Network, so this will be discussed again before March. **AD** confirmed that many LEPs are in a similar position, so we can speak to these & go to BEIS with a stronger voice.

AR asked all to keep eyes open please for e-mail correspondence between now & February regarding all of this, otherwise the LEP administration team may need to chase.

4. Legacy funds – AD had asked BD to join us as she has significant work on this.

AD In broad terms our capital programmes will revert to LA control. There was a list in the pre-Board confidential paper. The DHN, Blythe & Drakelow are the only programmes with issues. These are routinely covered by SPMG and A&F. The Delegated Authority group need to decide which LA the projects go to. Detailed work needs doing with LA's about where/how the monitoring work will be done.

TMc asked if it was fair for LA's to take any risk on these, but also wondered if conflict of interest needs consideration, as fundamental governance issues. These are not trivial exercises & clawback is not wanted, but we need appropriate resources behind this.

AD explained that the concept is out of our hands, but we do need to manage risk. Resource is still needed to look at legalities within the LA, so we need to ensure this is managed correctly at the handover stage.

JL wondered if the LEP can receive a % management charge when these are handed over, in respect of future rates etc.

SA explained that there was no management charge on Growth Deal 1, but there was on rounds 2 & 3, plus certain schemes & Enterprise Zones did. We can put this as a proposal for when rates do start to come back, certainly EZ responsibilities need looking at. He is awaiting a meeting with Clare Hannah & others at BEIS, as it is an outstanding area for consideration.

AR added his understanding that in other areas, which are not MCA's, LEPs will see a funding stream from EZ's. Government may consider that our future funding is received from these. i54 isn't ours, but we have a rates collaboration. CVEZ is ours, but it will be after 2030 when rates flow from there.

AD confirmed that delegated conversations with LAs will continue, with a view to formal sign off at February board. We are looking at whether LAs want continued support on existing projects, because there is a need to ensure governance & monitoring is done just as well. JL & TMc have raised some good points.

The ask is for permission for the Delegated Authority group to continue their work which was granted by the board

AR confirmed that Board silence was accepted as consent, as there was no opposition from the Directors present.

AD finalised this section with a mention that the branding update is not to discuss here in detail, but that Aspa has spoken to Social & there are recommendations - hence pre-Board paper as shared. Aspa will perhaps come to February Board to share developments then.

7. SPMG: update

JL updated the Board as follows:

THE REMAINDER OF THIS SECTION HAS BEEN REDACTED DUE TO SENSITIVIES SURROUNDING THIS PROJECT.

8. A&F Committee: update

EC advised that there had been no A&F meeting this month, so nothing to update this time. The next one in early January will be important though for Q3 reporting.

9. Forward Plan

The ESIF update will come in February & the Delivery/Transition plan will be further on by then.

AD As there is no board meeting in January there may be significant pieces of work need board consideration and approval via correspondence in January to ensure tight timescales are met.

Apologies were conveyed in advance for all the correspondence which will follow this meeting.

SW advised that the LSIP report to the Secretary of State will be submitted in May, so she will probably report on this ahead of then.

ESIF – to be carried forward to February’s Board
LEP Delivery & Transition plans -ongoing/further
Staffordshire County Deal collaboration
Strategic priorities: Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect (SW request)
An International Trade strategy for Staffordshire (DIT) (SW request)
Local transformation: programme updates: District Heat Network, FHSF, Town Deals etc
E&D update

10. AOB

Christmas wishes were conveyed to all.

Meeting ended @ 17:18.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 16th February 2023 @ 4pm, via MS Teams online.