

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 20th July 2023
Final Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)	risual
Emma Catterall	The Belfry
Sara Williams	Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr Jane Ashworth	Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Cllr Simon Tagg	Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Cllr Philip White	Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Josh Newbury	Deputy Leader, Cannock Chase District Council

Advisory/Operational Team

Andy Devaney	Interim SSLEP CEO
Jo Kemp	SSLEP Business Engagement Officer
Peter Shakespear	SSLEP Accountable Body
Kit Hannah	Area Lead, Cities & Local Growth Representative

In Attendance

Martin Hamilton	CEO, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Darryl Evers	Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills, Staffordshire County Council
Angela Glithero	Asst Dir, Strategy, Economic Development & Communications, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Caroline Mairs	Strategic Manager, Economic Development, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Apologies

James Leavesley (Vice Chair)	Leavesley Group
Mohammed Ahmed	Ice Telecommunications
Prof. Martin Jones	Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Prof. Trevor McMillan	Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Cllr Alan White	Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Mike Gledhill	Leader, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

1. Introductions

AR welcomed all to the meeting & invited introductions from all to welcome some new faces.

The meeting was declared not quorate by AR.

2. Apologies

These were noted, as above.

3. Declarations of Interest

SW declared that Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce will be operating the Growth Hub helpline for 2 more months.

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Accepted.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

The Board were reminded that the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt's statement in the Spring Budget was that the government were minded not to fund LEPs beyond March 2024.

As a consequence of this there have been various LEP Network meetings to discuss the matter & gather data about how this would work.

Consultation deadlines were extended & then the deadline for the view from government was extended. This should already have been conveyed but is now expected tomorrow (21st July).

It is therefore hoped that at the September Board meeting we should be able to agree the issues which Andy Devaney will take us through next.

6. LEP Transition paper

AD deferred to Darryl Evers & Angela Glithero, who have been most active in producing the proposition between the two upper tier Local Authorities, with thanks also to Jon Rouse & John Henderson (outgoing Staffordshire County Council CEO). We have tried to be proactive to make a proposition which is acceptable to both authorities.

Governance & monitoring of LEP legacy work passed over to the County Council some months previous & were not as a result of the Chancellor's announcement. The new GBF contracts have been handled by Darryl's team from their outset in February 2023.

AG advised that it had been an in-depth process.

On 6th June, Jon Rouse, John Henderson, Mark Connell, Caroline Mairs, Darryl Evers & his Asst Directors plus herself met to attempt to air all areas which need taking forward in a sensible way. The upper tiers are democratically mandated to deal with the LEP functions. Where the city is accountable for an area it will not be accountable to the County, but otherwise working as a joint committee on overarching governance.

DE went on to explain that the paper which has been produced & issued is deliberately short & concise. There are still areas which require more work, but this is referred to as clarifying democratically mandated governance.

The reporting for LEP legacy funds already sits with the County & City Council as mentioned by AD.

These functions will continue collaboratively in the region between the LEP & these two LA's, many functions will continue beneficially for the whole sub-region. The hope is that the Board are supportive of this.

- In respect of the Growth Hub, this needs to be beneficial to business in the whole area. National guidance is still not available. A joined-up approach across the region about how it will look & the governance surrounding it is needed. Details need working out around UKSPF, but Staffordshire County Council will be the accountable body for it.
- Tourism, although not historically a LEP function, also needs consideration for the region's LVEP status. As a national model this will need to be a Staffordshire & Stoke joint approach. The lead body will be Staffordshire CC as the accountable body, but joint governance is needed, as with the GH.
- The Careers Hub accountable body is currently the City until Sept 2024, then this will move to the County. The governance around it needs strengthening.
- The Skills role should now be a LA responsibility & there is a question about whether the SAP still has a role. However, the SAP's past strengths need maintaining. This will need to link into the LSIP too.
- Local governance should remain for the life of Enterprise Zones.
- The creation of Business Boards needs consideration & the LEP core budget should pick up these functions where there is a cost.
- For this transition, contingency funds incurred around the changes should come from LEP reserves. It is then hoped to re-purpose whatever is left within the region to fund economic growth, rather than it go back to Whitehall.

Cllr PW commented that it is good that the two LAs have created this landing zone for LEP functions for business support etc. At the conclusion of **this** meeting, it will be helpful to know if the two councils will start the necessary work rather than spend the summer waiting to start.

SW added that as only other private sector member present after AR she agrees with democratically mandated responsibility & agrees that we do not yet know the national policy for business support, so there are big question marks remaining. On this basis her comments are:-

- LEP was founded to give the private sector a say in economic development for the area, so we need to understand how the aforementioned Business Boards will look - their structure, engagement, etc.
- Also, regarding money - how will this be managed? What do reserves look like? What do models look like for other LEPs across the UK? How might monies be used? The private sector has a key role here.

AD agreed with PW & SW's comments about interim work ahead of September, in particular that the position of the LEP staff/LEP reserves is decided. He advised SW that papers on LEP reserves were issued, but he will share again.

He leaves this interim role at the end of August but hopes to progress with some practicalities over the next few weeks. However, we are still awaiting Government decisions.

SW stressed that Board members all have Director responsibilities, so functions & responsibilities need discharging properly. Detail needs looking at - in particular for the staff's future, whatever that might be.

Cllr PW stated that staff are top of the list. The finances & business representation model is for the two LAs to determine as it moves out of the LEPs hands. If the LEP continues as a corporate identity, we need to ensure a timetable for conclusions & transfers.

DE suggested that this might be a question for Kit Hannah – a perspective on government plans & possible unexpected interventions?

KH advised that detail has not been finalised, but the DLUHC body recognise that LEPs have not simply sat still awaiting a government decision. They will not want to unpick work done but will supply some overarching principles.

However, this LEP has been forward thinking so they might not need all the detail which is being worked on. It is noted that SSLEP have done credible thinking & are sensible.

SW picked up on PW's point that LEPs nationwide need clarity by September. Most of us will probably vote for plans as is, but if other LEPs are working differently & are using reserves differently it could be bad governance if we only have detail around the areas discussed here.

AR summarised the discussion & issues:-

- The government clearly do not expect LEPs to simply disappear but will seemingly be replaced by Business Boards regionally. He agrees with SW that we need to decide where this will sit.
- The timeframe is difficult to commit to until the government statement is out, but it seems clear that LEPs may not be funded past April, so aim for this.
- Reserves should support the functions & liabilities during wind down. The expectation is that funds are legally allocated.
- Most other LEPs have sought independent legal advice to discharge the legal responsibility of Directors. This LEP has always been a little different.
- EZ funds should eventually come to LEPs, so some of our neighbours intend to continue & our Board needs to understand this.

These details will be worked on over the summer. When we meet again with colleagues in September, we can conclude these issues & agree more quickly moving forward.

Cllr PW sought clarification whether the report issued pre-Board is intended for decision or discussion.

AR confirmed the former but if the Board do not agree it will be the latter. However, we are not quorate today as many private Directors are not here. As Chair he does not want a situation where anything is done improperly.

Cllr PW queried if there should be a further report before September.

SW offered help in light of AD's departure, particularly around the creation of the Business Board.

AD thanked AR for the clarity & added that he will work with DE & AG to ensure support, resources & LEP budget to work with Officers behind this.

Cllr PW offered a significant resource from County to get this done in a timely fashion, confirming to DE that this is a priority & empowering him to please direct resources accordingly.

7. AOB

SW - At some point we need to report the LSIP to LEP board, to understand how it will work in the future. Also following on from the recent Chambers of Commerce Business Awards she will send all Board members a brochure, as they may wish to congratulate nominees & winner within their wards.

Thanks were expressed to AD for his interim support, which has meant him doing two jobs! SSLEP are grateful.

Meeting ended @ 16:40hrs.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 21st September 2023 @ 4pm, via MS Teams online.

Future Priorities
LEP Delivery & Transition plans - ongoing/further