

**LEP Company Executive Board Meeting
via MS Teams conference call
Thursday 21st September 2023
Draft Minutes**

Board Directors

Alun Rogers (Chair)
Mohammed Ahmed
Kevin Hetherington
Cllr Jane Ashworth
Cllr Alan White
Cllr Simon Tagg

Visual
Ice Telecommunications
University of Staffordshire
Leader, Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Leader, Staffordshire County Council
Leader, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Advisory/Operational Team

Jo Kemp
Peter Shakespear
Jon Gray

SSLEP Business Engagement Officer
SSLEP Accountable Body
Cities & Local Growth Representative

In Attendance

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

Apologies

James Leavesley (Vice Chair) Leavesley Group
Emma Catterall The Belfry
Prof. Martin Jones Vice-Chancellor, University of Staffordshire
Prof. Trevor McMillan Vice-Chancellor, University of Keele
Sara Williams Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
Cllr Aidan Godfrey Leader, Stafford Borough Council
Cllr Doug Pullen Leader, Lichfield District Council

1. Introductions

AR opened the meeting & welcomed all to introduce themselves to the group.

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Declarations of Interest

N/A

4. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Accepted.

5. Chair's Update and Delegated Decisions

AR confirmed that the meeting was not quorate, so an electronic vote will be required for decisions needed.

6. LEP Future update

DE provided an overview of the LEP position, as per the pre-Board paper issued on 18th September. Government guidance was that LEP functions should transition into Upper Tier Authorities within the Stoke-on-Trent/Staffordshire region, this area not falling under a Combined Authority.

This paper looks for agreement to close our LEP by 31st March 2024.

A reminder of LEP work achievements over the past 10 years in terms of economy & infrastructure was given. A celebration & thanks should be considered for the future for those involved.

- At July's Board meeting recommendations were made for Staffordshire County Council to continue as the Accountable Body, with key areas for transfer being:- Growth Hub; Careers Hub; GPF, legacy fund; Enterprise Zones & what the new business voice arrangement might look like. Work is ongoing with the two Upper Tier councils & LEP Board members around these subjects.
- The LEP interim CEO left at the end of August.
- Day to day line management of legacy staff has been taken on by Staffordshire County Council. Decisions regarding staff futures must be made alongside the LEP Chair & in consultation with Stoke-on-Trent City Council.
- LEP reserves are a significant asset & the Government expect that these are used to:- Fund any necessary work on the dissolution of the SSLEP & integration of functions into the LA's, Fund economic growth activities across Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire, with any remaining funds; Fund the establishment & running of the future business voice function. Subject to legal advice & feedback on future arrangements, Board members might wish to consider how best to capture the business voice - Further guidance is to come in January 2024 but views are sought now.
- The County Council has commissioned external legal advice, from Bevan Brittan, to look at risks & liabilities around this process, to then share at future LEP Board meetings.

AG added that their two Authorities had worked closely & whilst they might not always agree, a positive approach has been taken to ensure smooth transitions. She expressed thanks to DE & his colleagues, as the Accountable Body had provided the bulk of the planning.

AR invited JG to confirm that we have understood the remit. **JG** confirmed 'yes'.

AR added that having been on national LEP Network calls he felt happy that SSLEP are currently things properly. However, there is a need to protect private sector board members as they don't carry any indemnities, thus carrying risks around personal assets. He has an idea from other LEPs about how this can be treated but we need our own legal advice & his principal concern is to protect private board members.

He added that **EC** had provided comments in her apologies e-mail reminding that Enterprise Zones are LEP future revenue streams, but she is otherwise broadly in agreement with the paper.

AW pointed out that some public sector members who are 288 Directors may also have private sector business interests & are equally keen not to 'red flag' at Companies House (now or in the future), so the orderly & legal close of functions will be appreciated by all.

AR reiterated that issues in the paper need an electronic vote & we do still have enough engaged Directors to do this. However, the LEP Board should think about delegating authority for future decisions, since meetings are increasingly not quorate, plus further Directors might leave. Do we need to reconstitute Board or delegate authority to help this process?

AW suggested that **PS** provide an amendment to the Memorandum of Articles to allow the close with reduced number of Directors. Therefore, if the broader group agree electronically, it simply becomes a smaller company directorship with an authority to complete the orderly wind down. The other 288 (Public) Directors could resign & the remaining 2 Directors (all that's needed) can complete the job. He invited other views.

DE confirmed that this has formed part of the questions to the external legal team & it has been done elsewhere.

AW & JA confirmed that they are both happy to remain as public sector Directors to ensure balance.

AR confirmed that Coventry & Warwickshire LEP have provided this advice, so if Directors resign before the eventual wind-up, they become less liable. He added that we want to be respectful of everybody's time, instead of calling meetings which are not well attended & thus wasting the time of those present.

JG suggested looking at the Integration Plan, which should be due soon to see if further guidance is offered.

AR advised that he is happy to do that, but government bodies have been disrespectful thus far, in expecting people who have given freely of their time not to have been given due consideration. The matter was raised on a LEP Network call & it had not been thought of at that point by DBT. DBT needs to step up & give more guidance. Private sector members have not been treated respectfully.

Many LEPs are only Ltd companies because BEIS (as was) put them there & now they are in this position due to unclear government decisions or guidance. He advised that this is not directed at JG personally. **JG** acknowledged this.

MA conveyed his agreement that matters have not been handled well to date, adding that LEP's just need to close properly & move forward positively.

ST commented on the considerable amount of work put into LEPs over the years since the outset, sometimes with government changing their minds. LEPs have done the best they can over the years. He agreed that AW & JA should be the 2 x Local Authority representatives remaining on the revised Board structure to wind it down & thanked them for their offer to do so. He offered thanks too to AR for his work done as Chair.

AW expressed thanks to the private sector representatives on the Board on behalf of Staffordshire County Council. He was a founding member of Worcestershire LEP on the private side; they were given a remit to design it, but then told by government that it wasn't acceptable, thus a redesign was needed. What LEP's have achieved is a tribute to Private sector representatives who get no recompense for their time (public sector arguably should accept the time they give to make the area better). He specifically included those private members who also chaired internal committees within the LEP. AR has been very active promoting Stoke/Staffordshire all over the region. He requested that his thanks to all go on record, lest this was the last time we all meet as a Board.

AR reiterated on behalf of MA & KH that he would like it on record that there has been lack of support for private Directors & this is unfair.

- An electronic vote is needed for a smaller Board of Directors to delegate decisions to, otherwise it will be a slow, painful process at non-quorate meetings.

He is away next week (w/c 25/09), so give people time to work things out in background, then issue a paper for the decision needed w/c 3rd October & close it that week too.

7. AOB

None.

Meeting ended 16:26hrs.

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

Future Priorities
LEP Delivery & Transition plans - ongoing/further