**LEP Strategy Committee**

**MINUTES**

Friday 11th March 2016, 9.00am, LEP Office, Richmond House

**Present:**

Robert Davis (Chair) Pete Waterman Philip Cox

Louise Morrissey Andy Hulme Robert Mee

Nigel Schofield Andy Farrall Martin Forbes\*

**Apologies:**

Caroline Simpson Charlie Seward

**Presenting:**

Matt O’Neill (CEC) – Agenda Item 3 only

\*Agenda Item 7 only

**Agenda Item 1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

Robert Davis welcomed members to the meeting along with Matt O’Neill of Cheshire East Council. Apologies were received from Caroline Simpson and Charlie Seward.

**Agenda Item 2: Declarations of Interest**

None.

**Agenda Item 3: Presentation – Connecting Cheshire Update**

Matt O’Neill, Major projects Manager (Cheshire East Council) provided an update on the current Connecting Cheshire Superfast Broadband project. Matt confirmed that coverage of fibre broadband had now reached 96% across Cheshire and Warrington and that a further £6m has been allocated to raise this to 98%.

Feasibility work is currently underway to establish the scope for provision of Wi-Fi within key town centres (including Warrington, Crewe and Chester), possibly through privately funded networks utilising local authority-owned lighting and street furniture.

The Committee acknowledged the progress that has been made to date in delivering high speed broadband across the sub-region, but expressed some frustration at the pace of change in relation to Wi-Fi networks in town centres. It was noted that this was partly due to the increase in free provision in retail outlets which was undermining the commercial case for wider provision.

**Action: Matt O’Neill to be invited back to present an update once the Feasibility work is completed**

**Action: Andy Hulme to invite private sector Wi-Fi provider to attend a future meeting to give a view on market issues**

**Agenda Item 4: Minutes, Actions and Matters Arising.**

The Chair asked for the minutes to note the discussion that took place regarding the risks of urbanisation following the KPMG presentation on Quality of Place on 5th February 2016. It was suggested that this issue form part of the forward work programme.

Minutes of the meeting held on 5th February 2016, as amended were approved. All actions were either completed or covered by the Agenda.

**Matters Arising:**

Quality of Place Study – Nigel Schofield queried progress on the report. It was confirmed that there was a delay as KPMG has been asked to re-run the survey element of the study following queries over the methodology employed. It was also noted that the consultants were continuing to experience some issues in engaging business in the survey process.

**Agenda Item 5: Transport and Infrastructure**

Andy Hulme presented a paper which highlighted the potential lack of strategic coordination nationally around key transport and infrastructure activity. This issue had originally been highlighted by Pete Waterman as a risk for Cheshire and Warrington particularly in relation to the work programmes being pursued by Network rail, Transport for the North and HS2 Limited – if there is no strategic oversight projects may not align to achieve best effect.

The committee agreed on the importance of the LEP working with these key stakeholders and as far as possible push for effective engagement and cross-organisational working.

It was confirmed that a single narrative on transport was being developed for the sub-region to ensure that there is a consistent message being presented on key priorities, especially in relation to HS2 as well as recognising the importance of the cumulative transformational impact of smaller local transport investments (principle of marginal gains).

**Agenda Item 6: Strategy Work Programme**

The Committee discussed potential areas of focus for the 2016-17 Strategy Work programme. Andy Hulme proposed a number of possible pieces of consultancy work aimed at supporting the planned refresh of the SEP.

It was agreed that at this time the priority should be on developing the narrative and key messages related to the three spatial propositions as well as the Cheshire Science Corridor, and ensuring that the SEP properly reflects the key interventions and priorities set out in the Devolution proposals.

**Agenda Item 7: Growing Places Fund**

Martin Forbes (Local Partnerships) joined the meeting to present this item.

It was confirmed that Tenders for the ex-Ante evaluation for **Evergreen II** were due back on 18th March 2016.

**North West Business Finance** has been asked to provide additional information as to why LEP support is needed for their current proposal and to offer greater detail on the investment options available to the LEP.

DCLG has raised some technical issues in relation to the proposed **low carbon innovation fund**. These are being worked through but may impact on the planned timescales.

Philip Cox confirmed that the application for GPF from Warrington Collegiate will not be proceeding. In terms of the Cheshire Green application re-assurances were being sought over GVA’s ability to put proper controls in place as they would potentially be representing both sides in the negotiation (albeit out of different offices).

Louise Morrissey suggested that an independent party could be appointed to oversee the process and ensure probity. She stressed the importance of working to deploy GPF to best effect.

Philip Cox advised of a potential project bring promoted which would involve up to £4m of equity being provided for development of small scale ‘nuclear batteries’.

**Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business**

**Devolution**

Andy Farrall provided a brief update on the recent discussions with the Commercial Secretary to the treasury on our devolution proposals. It was noted that an earlier meeting with officials about our proposals had been very positive and that a further meeting with the Secretary of State was in the pipeline. It was noted that a number of local MPs had requested a briefing note outlining the current position on devolution and the Northern Powerhouse.

**Action: Andy Farrall to draft a briefing note.**

**Agenda Item 9: Date, Time and Venue of next meeting.**

Thursday 7th April 2016, 2pm – 4pm, LEP Offices, Richmond House.