**Business Growth Committee**

**Minutes**

**Tuesday 8th December 2020, 10am**

**Venue:**

**Microsoft Teams**

* Introduction from Chair – 5 minutes

Stephen welcomed members of the main LEP board to the meeting who had been invited to take part in a wide ranging conversation on EU transition and the role of the LEP and Growth Hub in supporting businesses through the uncertainty.

* EU Transition with input from LEP board

A very useful discussion providing real insight into how value can be added to businesses through the transition period and beyond.

It is clear that despite some reports many businesses are thriving and seeing opportunity, this should not be ignored and more could be done to capture this and demonstrate the strength of Cheshire and Warrington businesses.

Although EU transition is a unique issue, this along with COVID response should not be treated in isolation but rather as part of a wider Economic Development focus and joining up resource focused on recovery rather than specific issues.

The reality is that there is a lack of staff resource across the sub region despite this, requirements are being met and a good service is being provided to businesses. Further resource has been made available by BEIS which will be rolled out over the coming weeks.

Timing is critical, businesses have projects that are time critical. COVID and BREXIT have delayed many of these, but more certainty is now needed to support them. The support infrastructure needs to be able to move quickly to ensure best possible support for these.

Many digital and gaming companies appear to be thriving through both the pandemic and EU uncertainty. This sector has in the past been overlooked; an opportunity exists to build on this success.

Some smaller commercial premises owners have seen a large increase in enquiries and deals and businesses look to downsize their footprint.

* Growth Hub update:

Andy gave an update on the work of the Growth Hub over the last month including recovery grants, Peer to Peer and EU transition.

* Investment programme

A new paper on presenting a possible way forward to improve the investment offer and infrastructure for Cheshire and Warrington was presented. This took into account the suggestions from the November meeting as well as Local Authority Growth Directors.

The new paper was discussed and broadly endorsed. There are some further questions to be answered particularly on potential sector focus and specific opportunities such as the nuclear potential of Warrington

There was a recognition that specific enquiries are not the focus of this work but rather the infrastructure and approach to ensure an efficient and workable way to support business expansion and inward investment. The paper will next be presented to LA Growth Directors to implement the first recommendations in order to be in a much more collaborative place in early 2021.

* Round table on issues raised by committee members

**Becky Stuttard** - focussed on recruitment at a senior level at the moment. The current economic situation makes this challenging though the opportunity to develop existing talent and bring talent into Cheshire and Warrington is an exciting one.

**John Downes** – Demand outstripping supply in industrial sites and logistics. Multi let premises doing very well. Issues with delays in planning and Warrington plan potentially causing issues

**Denise Proctor** – Parts of digital sector doing well, would like to see more focussed start up support for people made redundant as a result of COVID

**Iain Paton** – been concentrating on issuing COVDI grants but this has taken away capacity to support in other areas. Intention now to take stock of where the funding has gone and look strategically on what to do next. Gap on high level start up support which looking to fill

**Stephen Fitzsimons** – Very reactive at the moment to get grants out. Real concerns on high street as a result of Arcadia and Debenhams which will leave huge gaps in Warrington town centre. Potentially staffing issues in distribution as many workers in this sector are not UK nationals and BREXIT causing issues there.