**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP BOARD MEETING**

**Subject: Chief Executive’s Report Agenda Item: 5**

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**Meeting Date: 21 March 2018**

Summary

1. From Royal visits to the halls of MIPIM, the LEP has continued to operate on the national and international stage. While domestically we have continued to respond to the Government’s governance and transparency requirements, including holding the first meeting of our Overview and Scrutiny Committee, we have also received our first assessment rating from Cities and Local Growth officials. The Government’s eagerly awaited response to the Crewe Hub consultation has issued too.

Cheshire and Warrington on the International Stage

1. Alongside the Lord Lieutenant we hosted the Commonwealth Day event at Chester racecourse in the presence of HRH, The Earl of Wessex KG GVCO. Despite the weather, we saw an excellent turn out, with a full hall and all 370 tickets being booked out well in advance. HRH read out a personal message of support from The Queen and a full and varied programme ensued. Speakers ranged from the Australian Trade Commissioner to local Cheshire and Warrington businesses already trading within the Commonwealth, and also included senior government contributions in the shape of the Director of Global Operations at the Department of International Trade. Feedback has been extremely positive and follow up, in terms of trade opportunities, is already underway.
2. The Commonwealth event was followed immediately by MIPIM. That was still in full swing when the Board papers were issued, and I will provide some initial oral feedback at the Board meeting.

Crewe Hub Consultation

1. The Government published its response to the HS2 Crewe Hub consultation on Friday 9 March. It has accepted the arguments we and are partners made about the regeneration and growth benefits of 5 – 7 trains per hour calling at Crewe on HS2, and 3 – 4 trains per hour on the regional lines that radiate out of Crewe. It will therefore be designing the station to deliver these service levels, though it also makes clear that it is still looking for a local contribution to the cost.
2. The Government’s response is clearly excellent news, but still leaves a lot of work to do. We still need to make the case for an HS2 junction North of Crewe. This is part of Phase 2B so it is not a surprise that the Government hasn’t made a decision at this time. However, without the junction, HS2 trains that stop at Crewe won’t be able to travel to Manchester. The Government also makes clear that although it is designing Crewe station to accommodate 3 – 4 trains per hour on the regional lines, running these services also requires changes to the infrastructure elsewhere on those routes. We and our partners will need to consider the changes that are needed, and how to fund them.
3. Alongside this we have issued invites to a number of stakeholders (including Esther McVey and Fiona Bruce) to join a group to oversee the work we have been asked to do by Chris Grayling on the case for re-opening the Middlewich railway line. We expect the first meeting of the Group to take place shortly after Easter.

European Structural Funds

1. We are making good progress with the work we are doing to commit our allocation of European Structural Funds by the Government’s deadline. We have identified the range of projects to draw down the remaining ERDF funding and have also made good progress in working up the shape of the skills projects we need to draw down the remaining £28m skills funding. We have scoped the various structures required and have opened conversations with prospective *Accountable Bodies* as well as Government. In addition, we expect very shortly to formally submit a bid for a £15 million Evergreen 2 property investment fund and have issued an ITT for an HR specialist to transfer the Growth Hub from Blue Orchid into the LEP. The Growth Hub will also drawdown around £½ million of ERDF.

Scrutiny Committee

1. The first meeting of the new Scrutiny Committee took place on 1st March. Ben Powell, was elected to the Chair. Ben is a CWaC Councillor and an assistant to Justin Madders, the MP for Ellesmere Port. Its role is to scrutinise the work of the LEP in a manner similar to the Public Accounts Committee. They will be supported by the audit team from Warrington Borough Council and will have full access to our files and staff.
2. The first meeting concentrated on familiarising them with their role, and we can expect them to begin to identify the areas they want to look at during their June meeting. In the meantime, they have asked if they can attend Board and committee meetings to understand how we work.

New Members of Staff

1. Liam Fisher joined us on 19th February to take up the “foreign owned company account manager” post that is being funded by DIT. He will be busy – we have a list of 90 companies for him to engage with!

**PHILIP COX**