



**LEP Strategy Committee
MINUTES (DRAFT)**

Meeting Held: Friday 3rd April 2020
Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Robert Mee (Chair)
Graeme Bristow
John Downes

Nicola Dunbar
Robert Davis
Lisa Harris

Philip Cox
Steve Park
Andy Hulme

Apologies:

Frank Jordan

Peter Skates

Charlie Seward

Attending:

n/a

Agenda Item 1: Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Charlie Seward (represented by Lisa Harris), Frank Jordan and Peter Skates.

Agenda Item 2: Declarations of Interest

Robert Davis declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6. The Committee agreed that as no financial decisions were involved in relation to this Agenda Item, that it would be appropriate for Mr Davis to remain and contribute to the discussion.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 7th February 2020. All actions were completed. There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 4: Public Speaking Time

Due to the exceptional circumstances the public speaking / open session was not offered at this meeting. It was noted that public queries on the papers could be submitted for consideration in writing.

Agenda Item 5: Covid-19 Responding to the Crisis and Developing a Recovery Strategy

The Committee reflected on the current known impacts of Covid-19 / Coronavirus on the national and local economy. This meeting provided an opportunity for the Strategy Committee to respond to the Board invitation for sub-committees to discuss how the LEP might respond in minimising the impacts of the crisis and importantly start the process of planning for recovery. A summary of the ideas discussed, for consideration at the next Board are attached as an appendix to the minutes (**Appendix A**).

Updates on the current response were provided by Lisa Harris and Steve Park on behalf of Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council respectively. Philip Cox provided a further update on the work that the LEP's Growth Hub is undertaking to support businesses at this incredibly difficult time. It was confirmed that as part of the resilience and recovery activity the LEP was to lead a sub-regional 'Economic Resilience Cell' comprising initially the LEP, local authorities, business representation, BEIS, Job Centre Plus and Cheshire Constabulary (though final membership of the group is still currently being worked out).

Intelligence was also shared by the private sector members of the committee. Different sectors are being impacted to varying degrees, with the construction centre cited as one example that is trying to maintain a degree of business as usual through adopting a more flexible approach to contracting and project mobilisation. It was reported that disruption to supply chains was one constraint to continued operations including the ability to source spare parts for vehicles and machinery.

Committee members stressed the importance of getting reliable, easy to follow information to business so that they can understand and respond to the various support available to them. The LEP has funded a mailshot to every business on the local authority business rates database

The Committee discussed the paper circulated by the Head of Policy and Strategy. As well as highlighting some of the known impacts on the local economy and workforce, the paper provided a summary of known government and local support on offer to businesses at this time. It was highlighted that a significant proportion (around 25%) of the sub-regional workforce is employed in 'vulnerable' sectors.

In terms of how the strategy programme might flex to support the response, and thoughts on planning for recovery, the key points raised were as follows: -

- Consider how to position LEP support to 'phoenix' businesses, i.e. those who are forced to close a business down as a result of CV19 but who have viable ideas for new businesses. Could also link into provision of new or expanded incubator facilities with associated business support and networks. Example of the BioHub at Alderley Park was given in terms of targeted support in the right environment.
- Making use of existing LEP resources such as Growing Places Fund. Committee considers that one of the greater times of risk for business will be in exiting the current slow down at the start of the recovery phase. Recommending some options be developed as to how GPF might be deployed as either grant or loan to aid this recovery and to support business currently who have an opportunity to diversify.
- Consider whether a different or more flexible approach to rolling out the Accelerate programme could be adopted. Current situation is driving behaviour change in terms of adopting digital technologies so this would be an ideal time to be offering training in digital skills but recognise cash constraints might make a 60% employer contribution unviable.
- Review and re-frame the draft Local Industrial Strategy so that it contains action to support the recovery

- Consider a review of existing contracted programmes with a view to redeploying resources if activity deemed of lower strategic value than CV19-related support
- Likely greater focus on digital infrastructure moving forwards – need to make sure that the current work to develop a Digital Infrastructure Plan reflects the potential change in demand and behaviours.
- There is an opportunity for the LEP to review the investment pipeline to identify a small number of high-profile projects to seek government support so that they could be mobilised quickly and deliver benefits to business and workers. This could include key road or rail projects, Warrington’s Electric Bus network and further funding for CCUS (HyNet), smart energy systems (E-Port) and an expansion of the Medicines Discovery Catapult.
- Noted the related discussion at the Local Transport Board particularly in relation to provision of funding from the Business Case development fund to accelerate production of a Buses Strategy.

Agenda Item 6: Strategy Update

The contents of the report were noted.

Part B Agenda Items (Non-Public Items)

Agenda Item 7 – Non-Public Items

There were no items considered under Part B of the agenda.

Agenda Item 8 – any Other Business

The Committee was updated on progress of one of the projects approved as part of the Energy Innovation Fund programme. The project in question (Network Visibility Project) was seeking agreement to a number of variations from the original proposal resulting from the need to adapt to stay within State Aid requirements. The Committee agreed to consider the proposed changes via correspondence.

Action: Andy Hulme to circulate a paper for approval on proposed variations to the Network Visibility Project.

Agenda Item 9 – Date and Time of Next Meeting

Next meeting: Friday 12th June 2020, 9:00am, location TBC

APPENDIX A - NOTE TO LEP BOARD ON STRATEGY COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO COVID-19 CRISIS

Background

- The Strategy Committee met virtually on Friday 3rd April 2020. The principle item for discussion on the agenda was the invitation by the LEP Board for sub-committees to meet to discuss how their programmes could be adjusted to respond to the immediate impact of the crisis, including re-prioritising or re-directing funding, and to begin debating and planning for recovery;
- This note summarises the key points of the Strategy Committee discussion.

Key areas of discussion

- Communication – importance of ongoing, clear communication with business
- economic resilience cell – noted that one has been established, led by the LEP
- options re support for businesses that fall between current national support programmes
- impact of changing behaviours on future economic activity and investment
- importance of improving access to skills and training – up to 1/3 of under-25s at risk of unemployment
- Logistics remaining critical sector but might accelerate adoption of digitisation
- Implications for public transport – effect of reduced car travel and link to better air quality
- LIS – fundamentals are still right; some sectors could emerge stronger (e.g. energy & clean growth and life sciences)

Suggested response actions

- Consider how to position LEP support to ‘phoenix’ businesses, i.e. those who are forced to close a business down as a result of CV19 but who have viable ideas for new businesses. Could also link into provision of new or expanded incubator facilities with associated business support and networks. Example of the BioHub at Alderley Park was given in terms of targeted support in the right environment.
- Making use of existing LEP resources such as Growing Places Fund. Committee considers that one of the greater times of risk for business will be in exiting the current slow down at the start of the recovery phase. Recommending some options be developed as to how GPF might be deployed as either grant or loan to aid this recovery and to support business currently who have an opportunity to diversify.
- Consider whether a different or more flexible approach to rolling out the Accelerate programme could be adopted. Current situation is driving behaviour change in terms of adopting digital technologies so this would be an ideal time to be offering training in digital skills but recognise cash constraints might make a 60% employer contribution unviable.
- Review and re-frame the draft Local Industrial Strategy so that it contains action to support the recovery
- Consider a review of existing contracted programmes with a view to redeploying resources if activity deemed of lower strategic value than CV19-related support
- Likely greater focus on digital infrastructure moving forwards – need to make sure that the current work to develop a Digital Infrastructure Plan reflects the potential change in demand and behaviours.

- There is an opportunity for the LEP to review the investment pipeline to identify a small number of high-profile projects to seek government support so that they could be mobilised quickly and deliver benefits to business and workers. This could include key road or rail projects, Warrington's Electric Bus network and further funding for CCUS (HyNet), smart energy systems (E-Port) and an expansion of the Medicines Discovery Catapult.
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RJ Mee, Chair, 3rd April 2020

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