

**Paper for: The LEP Board**

**Title: LEP Response to Coronavirus (Covid-19) for businesses**

**Date: 18th March 2019**

**Strategic Purpose: Business Resilience**

**Board: For Information**

**Introduction**

As with the reaction to BREXIT and the transition of leaving the EU, LEPs have an important to play to be the main port of call for businesses to receive information and support. The Growth and Skills Hub is ideally placed to take the lead in keeping businesses informed and sharing intelligence with Government to ensure the focus of any response is suitable for real business need. This is an area where the LEP can add genuine value to the entire business eco system and have a positive impact on business resilience.

Business intelligence on Covid-19 has been added to all intelligence gathering apparatus and included in the wider business resilience agenda the Growth Hub is delivering, this will form a key part of all business discussions for the foreseeable future as well as giving the LEP a strong data stream to build potential support packages.

**Operational responses**

As with previous economic shocks a strong partnership has been developed between the LEP and the 3 Local Authorities. This has ensured that information is provided in a consistent way and getting across a consistent message, the focus is on business resilience but we are also able to act as a conduit to any and all other relevant parties in terms of public health, transport, emergency responses and the like. Intelligence is also gathered and shared through the Cheshire Resilience Forum which will inform a wider outreach programme which could be delivered at Northern Powerhouse level.

All guidance from available sources including Government, Banks & Financial Institutes is available on the Growth Hub website and has been shared with partners to demonstrate to businesses that a joined-up response is under way offering the most up to date information and support. This information will be updated whenever new information is made available, this is currently daily. Weekly calls have been scheduled with the LEP and LAs to further ensure a collaborative approach to intelligence and support.

The Growth and Skills hub are now proactively seeking intelligence from businesses to ensure that our responses are relevant to business needs, this information is also shared directly with BEIS to influence their thinking on any potential response packages, again the position of the LEP which is central to all responses provides an excellent opportunity for Cheshire and Warrington to be a real example of how to mitigate a situation such as this with genuine outreach and support.

The LEP have also developed a newsletter with the most up to date support and information, at this stage this is still relatively basic but the intent is to demonstrate to businesses that the Growth Hub and partners are available to them to support them through any shock. The first newsletter will be circulated to all businesses on Friday 13th March with the opportunity to follow this up when new information becomes available. The collaborative approach from the LEP and partners means information can reach the vast majority of businesses very quickly with the opportunity to utilise the Local Authority business rates system if a strong and clear message is required.

All Northern Powerhouse LEPs have been in discussion to share best practice in gathering information and supporting businesses, this approach ensures that a common approach in accordance with Government guidelines and also gives us the opportunity to share resources and information across a wider geography with NP11 and BEIS support.

Any and all data can be made available to partners in accordance with GDPR and intelligence from BEIS and other sources will also be circulated ensuring the Cheshire and Warrington response is timely and appropriate to the needs of residents and businesses alike.