**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP BOARD MEETING**

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

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**Meeting Date: 11 July 2018**

Summary

1. With further Ministerial attention, this time around the Industrial strategy, along with key external events and meetings, including the annual sub-regional conference and transport strategy consultations, the LEP has been out and about a good deal this month. In addition, good progress is being made with Growth Hub transfer plans and with the implementation of our skills strategy.

Ministerial Breakfast

1. With only 48 hours’ notice we successfully arranged a Business Breakfast for Richard Harrington, the Industrial Strategy Minister on 28 June in Chester. About 10 local business people were present, and we had a wide-ranging conversation covering skills, sector deals, cyber security and Brexit. The Minister also agreed to have a discussion with Special Advisers in No.10 about our proposed Energy Innovation Zone.

Private Sector Engagement

1. We recently tendered for an individual or a small team to oversee the transfer of the Growth Hub from Blue Orchid into the LEP and to develop and put in place a new private sector engagement strategy with the Growth Hub at its heart. I am delighted that we have been able to appoint Sandra Rothwell and Ian Gent to deliver this for us. Until recently Sandra was the Chief Executive of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LEP and set up and ran one of the best regarded Growth Hubs in the country, whilst Ian ran the Heart of the South West Growth Hub, but was also involved in setting up Connecting Cheshire, so knows the area well. I hope that they will be able to join us at the Board meeting.

Vauxhall

1. We held a senior level meeting with Vauxhall and BEIS on 25 June to discuss the proposals we had put to them about ways in which we could help them secure the long-term future of the plant. That has led directly to a request for a loan from Growing Places Fund of just under £1 million to cover the costs of unlocking around £680k pa of energy saving measures at the plant. We also had a further discussion about the local electricity network which initial studies suggest could halve the costs of electricity at the plant and more widely in Ellesmere Port. We are currently waiting for Vauxhall to indicate how thy ant to take this forward.

Bank of England Dinner

1. The Bank of England and ourselves jointly hosted a dinner at Willington Hall on 21 June. Around a dozen senior business people were present from across C&W and we allowed them to raise the issues that they felt were most important. As a result we had a long discussion about the constraints of the planning system, the need for improved infrastructure and the higher costs of building work in C&W as a result of transport congestion. Surprisingly, John Roberts, the Bank of England agent said that, despite many years covering the North West for the Bank, it was the first time he had understood that there can be opposition to development in parts of Cheshire.

Annual Sub-regional Conference

1. A number of Board members were present at the Sub-Regional Conference in Ellesmere Port on 15 June. The conference was themed around preparations for the Industrial Strategy and a significant number of private sector business representatives attended. Breakout sessions were arranged around industrial sectors and the Government’s Grand Challenges, and we received written feedback from them within the last couple of days. I will aim to provide a brief oral summary at the Board meeting of some of the key issues raised during the breakouts.

Transport Strategy

1. Consultation on our Transport Strategy closes on 6 August, and over the past couple of weeks we have conducted four public meetings to help explain the strategy and to gather feedback. So far comments have focussed on the need for more material on walking and cycling, car parking at stations, and improving bus journeys. A full assessment of all of the feedback will be presented to the Local Transport Board on 21 September.

Skills Strategy

1. Work continues apace with the implementation of our skills strategy ie bringing employers much closer to our learners and more closely aligning the local curriculum with the needs of the local economy. We are in the very first wave of LEPs publishing national calls inviting bids to secure European skills funding in order to deliver our priorities and conversations continue at a national and local level to deliver additional capacity in Cheshire and Warrington to help deliver this work.

**PHILIP COX**