***The following is a draft plan for some key delivery actions for the forthcoming year considering the wider economic recovery plan.***

***Views are sought from the committee on how this can be delivered and input on any gaps and potential opportunities. Further work will be required with LAs, BEIS and other partners to secure the funding and remit to deliver.***

**2021/22 Summary proposition**

Cheshire and Warrington LEP has the opportunity to strengthen its business support activity in 2021/22. This will allow the LEP to build on the work undertaken by the Growth Hub in response to the Covid19 pandemic and EU Exit. It will also allow the Business Growth Directorate to take a more pro-active and strategic approach to engaging SMEs and delivering our vision for recovery. This could include, for example, investment, peer-to-peer networks, or scale-up advice.

Importantly this activity will also help to position the LEP in a good light with Government during the LEP review. It will also demonstrate value added from the LEP and Growth Hub with local authorities and local business networks.

**2021/22 Business Growth activities**

The traditional Growth Hub model has been built around a simple diagnostic and referral process of predominantly incoming enquiries from SMEs. The last 12 months have demonstrated that there remains a strong demand for this service.

The pandemic required some creative solutions to allow the Growth Hub to respond effectively to the increased demand and the decision to second staff resource from Marketing Cheshire has proven to be an astute one as the team is now well integrated and able to handle complex enquiries. With the addition of the new website which has a much fuller user interface and data collection capability the diagnostic and referral element of the Growth Hub has never been stronger.

Full KPIs for 21/22 are yet to be agreed with BEIS but the team is now robust enough to deliver a high volume of ‘low intensity’ engagements and high quality business intelligence into the LEP and back into Government.

A fully functioning Growth Hub however needs a much wider offer to fully deliver the economic growth to lead the recovery. Prior to the pandemic the Growth Hub had ambitious plans to embark on a more proactive account management function to identify and support businesses with growth potential to realise that growth. With the agreement of the budget for 2021/22 we are now able to roll out this service without losing the ability to respond to business need or economic shock. We are currently in the process of recruiting 2 additional members of the team who will focus on identifying those companies with growth potential. This element of the of team will also be the avenue to determine gaps in local and national provision and form the evidence base for new support options.

Historically the LEP in C&W has not delivered programmes directly nor had much capacity to commission support offers. In order to make the required impact an opportunity now exists to go beyond the current model. Through conversations with BEIS and other LEPs there is an opportunity to develop one or more pilot programmes which will also help to emphasise the importance of the Growth Hub network with Government and national partners.

We are already delivering:

* Peer to Peer Network. Plan for 21/22 is to deliver in-house and focus on building quality relationships with business…

Current intelligence both locally and from working with the North West GH cluster indicates there is real opportunity to stimulate growth in the following areas:

* **Scale up support –** Tailored support for a small number of growing businesses who fit a strict criteria. This would include wrap around support for export, recruitment, procurement, supply chain, investment and any other relevant issues.
* **Access to Finance** – In depth support for SMEs looking to become investment ready. This should include a strong commercial network of trusted financial services providers who can be utilised to offer expert tailored advice.
* **High Growth Start up –** Start up provision is delivered in Cheshire and Warrington but the pandemic has laid bare the need to support experienced skilled individuals to start up in key sectors and grow quickly utilising support from sector specialists. Start up numbers have been healthy for a long time but Cheshire and Warrington lag behind in quickly growing these businesses, this should be a priority for the coming year.
* **Innovation –** Through an account management process the Growth Hub should be the conduit to ensure Cheshire and Warrington businesses are more than punching their weight in accessing innovation support and funding. Advancing the work of provision such as the North West Space Cluster, Cheshire and Warrington 4.0 and bringing UKRI programmes more in line with business needs will allow Cheshire and Warrington to take a leading role in business innovation
* **Investment support –** Started work on virtual team, but lack of resource to bring together. Have identified some funding internally. This is set out in more detail below.

**Investment support**

In order for the LEP to at the forefront of recovery further integration is required around the Cheshire and Warrington Investment offer. Much work has been done to develop the collateral to respond to enquiries however it has become apparent that there is insufficient resource across the sub region to fully take pursue the available opportunities. Currently the LEP employs an FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) account manager which is funded through DIT, we are able to use this post in interesting ways however one post with a fairly narrow focus is not able to cover the full breadth of investment activities.

Cheshire & Warrington is surrounded by several proactive location which already have a very strong online presence (Manchester, Liverpool, Stoke and Wales) and other UK locations which are implementing new innovations that can be held up as best practice. Cheshire & Warringtonhas not had a functioning inward investment dedicated team nor a web & social media presence which makes it hard for potential investors and their agents to readily conclude the area is open for business.

An inward investment function should:

* Establish integrated online resource base to harmonise messaging
* Develop a social media presence to create a strong sales pipeline
* Promote Cheshire’s lifestyle and education to attract talent
* Incentivise priority individuals to relocate
* Commit to an aftercare and account management service that maintain relationships, generates local intelligence and maximises local opportunities for re-investment.
* Funding initiative via LEP

The proposal is to recruit and fund a new position through available budget within the GH. This post would lead on the above and also have the capacity to attend the regular DIT investment meetings that Cheshire and Warrington only sparsely attend.

Ideally a secondment from one of the Local Authorities would be possible, this would allow the position to not only hit the ground running but manage any potential political or local issues that could arise.

5th April 2021