

BOARD MEETING

Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board Meeting held 19th January 2022 at 5.00pm by video conference call

Present:

Clare Hayward (CH)	Trevor Brocklebank	Cllr Louise Gittins	Eunice Simmons
Stephen Kinsey	Annette McDonald	Peter Broxton	Loren Jones
Chris Hindley (CHi)	Nicola Dunbar	Alice Choi	Kath Mackay
Nicola Newton	Cllr Craig Browne		

In attendance:

Philip Cox	Ian Brooks	Joe Manning	Joe Toward
Charlie Seward (CWaC)	Alex Thompson (CEC, s151)	Steve Park	Jane Traverse (CEC)
Melissa Crellin	John Adlen		

Apologies

Rupert Collis	Cllr Russ Bowden		

Members of the Public (for Part A)

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Agenda Item 1: Apologies and Introductions

1.1 Clare Hayward welcomed Board Members. Apologies were received as above. As it was the first meeting of the year, Clare reflected on current economic and geo-political uncertainties and opportunities.

Agenda Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

2.1 Louise Gittins noted a conflict in respect of item 6 (Vortex Investment) because Cheshire West and Chester is the current landowner.

Agenda Item 3: Public Presentation

3.1 There were no public items.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th November 2021.

4.1 The minutes of 17th November 2021 were agreed.

4.2 Actions had been completed.

Agenda Item 5: Board Sub-committee Reports

5.1 Business Growth Board. A focussed slot was provided to AC, who reflected on the high level of Growth Hub activity in 2021. Over 1000 businesses had been contacted directly by the Growth Hub and over 500 businesses were supported by LEP grants. The strengthening of relationships with businesses is providing significant intelligence for policy makers to address ongoing economic challenges. The close co-operation with Marketing Cheshire has particularly assisted gathering data about the leisure and hospitality sectors. Disappointment was expressed that the Peer Networks programme will not be extended into 2022-23, and the committee will discuss with the Growth Hub whether some form of sharing and networking can be developed as a legacy. The Covid trading restrictions impacted on business but is not the only challenge. Labour shortages, absenteeism, rising prices especially energy, and the additional administrative burden following Brexit are all having to be addressed.

5.2 AC outlined the strategic aims and priorities for the Growth Hub and agreed to share the presentation with the board. Board members suggested creating resource packs for businesses e.g., for sustainability, continuing to develop intelligence in respect of inward investment opportunities, and assisting find opportunities for greater inclusivity.

ACTION: AC

5.2 Employers Skills Board. KM reported on the successful bid for an Institute of Technology led by Cheshire College South and West, but which reflected a strong collaborative effort across the sub-region. In addition, the Skills report is being refreshed and the sub-region is putting together a bid for DfE for training “Boot Camp” funding.

5.3 Growth Corridors Board. PB said that investment opportunities are coming forward to the sub-board, beginning with the Vortex proposal to be discussed later. It is expected that the sub-board will assess two further business cases in the coming months.

5.4 Performance and Investment Committee. CHI said that P&I will be reviewing the Vortex business case and taking update presentations from the Medicines Discovery Catapult and Smartgrid (Pure Leapfrog) at its next meeting.

5.5 Finance and Audit Committee. CHI reported that F&A had made detailed review of the LEP financial position at its meeting in December and provided the board with assurances regarding solvency ahead of the budget paper to be discussed later in the meeting.

5.6 Local Transport Board. AM updated the board on several critical projects for the sub-region including HS2 and TfN and the perceived limitations for the sub-region of the Integrated Rail Plan. The withdrawal of funding from the East West high-speed projects will cause a bottleneck at Huddersfield diminishing the potential benefits of the scheme. CH proposed that AM share a list of current projects.

ACTION: AM

Agenda Item 6: EZ Growth Corridor – Vortex Investment Proposal

6.1 JA presented the key elements of an investment proposal, Vortex Business Park at Ellesmere Port. This had been brought to the full board, following recommendation by the Growth Corridors Board, because of the investment grant value, but still required a review by P&I committee, which would happen next week.

6.2 In summary a grant has been requested up to £3.8M was towards an investment of ca £25M and expected to yield additional business rates of £382k p.a. to repay the loan. The remaining funding is being raised either from the Evergreen Fund or the private company developer. Assessment and evaluation to date supports the transaction with some conditions, which were set out by JA. JA was

requested to challenge the expected yield for the developer which board members felt was high in current market conditions. If this could be achieved, the payback, estimated at 18 years, which was at the “long” end of our acceptable range would shorten, thereby reducing risks associated with the project.

6.3 ND asked how grant proposals were taking into account and embedding social value. CS offered to discuss CWaC’s approach with JA to ensure consideration was given to social value.

ACTION CS/JA

6.4 Subject to no material issues being raised at P&I, the board approved the project and delegated authority to the chair of the Growth Corridors Board to execute investment documentation.

Agenda Item 7: Chief Executive’s Report

7.1. Report was taken as read. Much of the report had been covered by earlier items. However, PC mentioned the Convention of the North conference on 8th February, at which Michael Gove is expected as a keynote speaker. There is optimism he may discuss the anticipated publication of the Levelling Up White Paper. Stakeholders are currently planning the programme of events. Places at the event will be very limited.

7.2 PC also highlighted the annual review due to be held on 4th February between the Cities and Local Growth Unit and the LEP. Ratings for Governance, Strategy and Delivery have been simplified to either “Met” or “Unmet” and base on submissions already provided, we have been told we have “Met” the criteria. We are, however, providing a supplementary note to express how much further we feel C&W has achieved.

Agenda Item 8: Discussion Forum

8.1 IB presented a paper with a list of possible topics for the board discussion meetings during 2022. The proposals were accepted with an understanding that they might need to be amended depending on priorities. As the first subject is the SIGC plan, it was proposed to invite the joint chairs, Sam Corcoran and Robert Davis.

ACTION: PC to extend invitation

8.2 The board also supported the idea of resurrecting a board “Away-day” in September.

ACTION: IB to progress

Agenda Item 9: A.o.B.

9.1 None.

Agenda Item 11: Date and Time of Next Meetings:

Board Discussion Forum: 16th February 2022, 5:00pm– 7:00pm (Virtual – MS Teams)

Board Meeting: 16th March 2022, 4:30pm– 6:30pm in person (details to follow)

Part B Continued on separate page.

Part B

Agenda Item 10: Approach to Budgeting

10.1 Budget planning for 2022-23 for the LEP and Marketing Cheshire has been made more challenging this year dependent as it is on many variables including the Levelling UP White Paper, LEP and DMO reviews and the completion by HM Government departments of their financial planning after the Spending Review. The Executive proposed, and the board approved, a short delay to completing the financial plans for the LEP and MC until more clarity was available from Government.

10.2 In the meantime teams would continue to plan assuming the same level of budget as 2021-22, unless we specifically know otherwise, with those deliverables included in the first draft of the Annual Delivery Plan.

10.3 IB provide the Board with re-assurance that the LEP and MC have sufficient reserves to maintain existing staff levels to “cover” the delay and for the organisation to review its resources, as needed, considering final allocations. The Board approved the use of reserves to support the conducting of a review. There is no question over the LEP or MC’s going-concern status.

10.4 Delivery and Financial Plans will therefore be presented to the budget in May 2022.

10.5 IB was requested to provide an “induction” session to LEP/MC finances for Board members in advance of finalising the budget.

ACTION: IB