**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP**

**CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT FEBRUARY 2020**

Summary

1. The LEP’s development continues at pace with several new starters from the board to recruiting skills brokers and for Accelerate.
2. The Cabinet Reshuffle has resulted in new Ministers at BEIS and for NP11.

New Appointments

1. Following the announcement of Clare Hayward as our new chair, we have now confirmed Trevor Brocklebank as the deputy chair. Both of them have been holding introductory meetings with staff of the LEP.
2. Trevor co-founded Warrington headquartered Home Instead Senior Care, now a £100m company recognised as the UK’s leading home care specialists.  Trevor also co-founded Mezenet, an IT Business Intelligence Consultancy, servicing clients such as Unilever, the BBC and Novartis.
3. Eunice Simmonds has accepted our invitation to join the Board and we have begun her familiarisation with the LEP.
4. After receiving clearance from the Business Appointments “team” we have been able to announce that Joe Manning will be joining us in April as Deputy Chief Executive of the LEP and Chief Executive of Marketing Cheshire. Joe’s most recent position is Deputy Director, Science Research and Innovation at BEIS. Joe and his wife will be moving from London to the North West.

Cabinet Reshuffle

1. The surprise resignation of the Chancellor, Sajid Javid, signals perhaps that HM Treasury policy and the priorities and scale of Government spending announced in the budget will take a different direction. Several announcements have already been made re-iterating Government’s plans for levelling up and devolution, as well as confirmation of the HS2 project. The budget is scheduled for 11th March, following which we hope to receive greater clarity regarding funding for 2020-21, including funds to support further capital investment.

1. The cabinet reshuffle also saw Jake Berry stepping down as Northern Powerhouse minister, to be replaced by Simon Clarke (MP for Middlesborough South). Initial conversations have been held between the NP11 team and Mr Clarke, who is keen to embed himself into the existing networks.
2. At the department level Robert Jenrick remains as the Secretary of State for MHCLG, but Andrea Leadsom was replaced by Alok Sharma at BEIS respectively. Mr Sharma is also the minister responsible for COP26 in Glasgow, which suggests an increasing emphasis on sustainability in policy making at BEIS.

HS2

1. The review has been completed and announcements made that HS2 will go ahead, albeit facing challenges over the costs and from environmental groups. The announcement confirms the importance of Crewe as a HS2 station. We continue our discussions in respect of enhancing the plans for Crewe Station and the surrounding area as one of our priority growth corridors. The announcement also refers to Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and establishing a new body, High Speed North, with will progress and coordinate the HS2 proposals north of Crewe and NPR.

Hydrogen Network

1. On 18th February BEIS announced a £13M injection of funds (as part of a £90M package) to support two projects in the North West. The first (£7.5M) is a low carbon hydrogen plant at Essar Oil’s refinery. When operational it will capture 600,000 tonnes of CO2 per annum. Hynet received £5.2M to fund trials of hydrogen fuelling at Unilever’s Port Sunlight site and Pilkington’s Greengate works in St Helens.

Towns Funds

1. In w/c 10th February 2020, Warrington (13th) and Crewe (10th) Town’s Fund Boards met to discuss the proposals for investment in the town centres.
2. Government Funds for High Street rejuvenation and Town Centre Regeneration include:
   1. Future High Street Fund (Crewe / Winsford)
   2. High Street Task Force (Ellesmere Port)
   3. High Streets Heritage Action Zone (Chester)
   4. Towns Fund (Crewe / Warrington)

Business Growth

1. Funding has now been secured for 2020/21 which will allow the Skills and Growth Hub to continue to work with businesses to remove barriers to growth and increase productivity. Further emphasis has been placed on business intelligence with additional resource out into ensuring the LEP is fully utilising the data and intelligence received through the Growth Hub
2. An additional Growth Hub broker has recruited who will take up post on 2nd March, this is largely due to demand from business and to ensure the Growth Hub can deliver across all required priorities. The Growth Hub has led the BREXIT resilience campaign which has now evolved into a wider resilience offer which is being delivered through multiple partners.

Accelerate

16. The Project Initiation Visit with DWP and the University of Chester has been held, passing successfully, but requiring a rescheduling of deliverables because of a delayed start date. The University has recruited the majority of the 14 staff who will be involved in delivering the project and the LEP has now recruited 2 independent brokers to support the delivery. A third broker is still to be recruited.

17. The University and the LEP have signed a service level agreement setting out how both organisations will work together to ensure the effective delivery of Accelerate. The Service Level Agreement contains details of the governance arrangements and how these will be linked to the LEP Board and the University Council.

18. The University is using a dynamic procurement system to identify potential deliverers of Accelerate training and the first round of procurement should be completed over the next week. Once there is an initial list of eligible training providers, the University will be able to start working with employers to identify training needs and the training will then be procured via open competition between the eligible trainers.

Youth Board

19. A recruitment campaign has been launched to recruit members of our Youth Board, with a short campaign video that we can share on social media sites, targeted to our area and age group. The video directs people to a microsite where they can obtain more information and apply. Closing date is 13th March. Selection processes will be designed depending on the level of response. We are also considering how best to operationalise the Youth Board with the appropriate level of support.

Marketing Cheshire

20. Proposals to enhance the capacity and skills within Marketing Cheshire are now well underway to:

* Strengthen its role as the nationally recognised Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for the subregion
* Establishing its ‘Business’ team - gearing up its capability to deliver the LEP’s agenda – Inward Investment and Place Marketing and the single coherent and employer centred ‘Communications Hub’ (Cheshire & Warrington Education and Skills Plan) - bringing together communications and marketing for the Growth Hub, Accelerate, Pledge Network, Digital Skills, etc, as well as business tourism.
* Strengthening its Marketing team.

1. A Chester Visitor Economy Network has been established in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council – this will lead and coordinate the cluster of major attractions and destinations in and around Chester – one of the largest visitor destination clusters in the UK outside of London. The first meeting of this network is scheduled for the 3rd March 2020.

Cheshire Visitor Economy Lunch

1. Most of the major attractions and destinations gathered for the LEP’s Visitor economy Lunch at Chester Zoo on the 7th February 2020. This enabled discussion and input into the subregions Destination Management Plan. Following a very productive discussion, it was agreed that further meetings of a smaller group would work with Marketing Cheshire to further develop the Plan ensuring that it has the industry at its heart and that it has widespread ownership.

Place Marketing and Inward Investment Research

1. Two key pieces of work are now being progressed to form the basis of our Place Marketing and Inward Investment approach:

* A Perceptions Study - research to gain insight about how people (particularly younger people) see Cheshire and their perceptions of the place.
* Inward Investment – research to the inward investment market and how best to focus our approach on an intelligent Inward Investment promotion.

Both pieces of work have been commissioned and are programmed for completion at the end of April 2020.

ANDY FARRALL / PHILIP COX