

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT

NOVEMBER 2022

Summary

1. Notwithstanding the extremely slow pace of Government decision making as we cycle through prime ministers (!) we have nevertheless been able to make significant progress over the past month on beginning to draw the LEP review to a conclusion, generating enough demand for our Skills Bootcamp programme to justify bidding for a further £300k to be spent by the end of March, submit a strong business case for the re-opening of the Middlewich rail line, and agree to provide support to the Stoke and Staffs LEP until the end of March. We've also been delighted to welcome Joe back from his paternity leave.

Ministerial Priorities

2. Last month it was the Queen's funeral that was causing inertia within central Government. This month it is another change of Prime Minister, the appointment of a new set of Cabinet Ministers and the forthcoming Autumn Statement. Experience from previous Autumn Statements suggests that it is likely to be well into the New Year before its detail is worked through and Ministers are able to take decisions that have spending implications.
3. At Secretary of State level, Michael Gove has returned to DLUHC and has told his staff that they should "think Levelling Up White Paper, but remember the cost of living". At BEIS, Grant Shapps has replaced Jacob Rees-Mogg as Secretary of State, and, given his previous role is already showing a particular interest in the impact of transport on business. He has also stressed to his officials that he will be looking closely at the impact on members of the public of decisions he is being asked to take.

LEP Review

4. The deadline for submission of our restructuring plans to the Government's Cities and local Growth Unit is 25 November. A first draft of the submission is on the agenda for discussion at this Board meeting.

Skills Bootcamps

5. After a difficult start, the Skills Bootcamps programme is proving increasingly successful. We expect to fully utilise our initial allocation from DfE of £1 million and have enough additional demand to have been able to respond to a very short notice invitation from DfE to bid for a further £300k which must be deployed by the end of March. As a result of the increasing pace of the programme we are also advertising for an additional member of staff.

Marketing Cheshire

6. Marketing Cheshire are working with John Adlen and other colleagues within the LEP on an enhanced marketing strategy for the Cheshire Science Corridor. The strategy would develop it into a wider place brand with which businesses across the area could engage to become part of the programme. The Growth Corridors Board will be formally engaged as the work progresses, but we will be keen to involve other Board members as well.
7. Our Destination Chester programme is evolving to be part of the new One City Plan structure in Chester, with further publicity to follow after the Chester by-election Purdah restrictions have been lifted. Notwithstanding these, we have launched Christmas in Chester activity previewed in my report last month as part of a big outdoor partnership with Transport for Wales. This has included them providing multiple digital 48 sheet and poster sites across Birmingham and Manchester, as well as a big online campaign.
8. Alongside our work in Chester, which enjoys significant funding from Cheshire West, Destination Cheshire will be looking at brand and story for Cheshire as a whole at a workshop on the 22nd Nov. Board members are very welcome to attend.

Middlewich Rail Line

9. Re-opening of passenger services on the rail line between Sandbach and Northwich is a long held aspiration of residents in Middlewich, which used to have a station on the line. When he was Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond asked us to begin the process of appraising the case for re-opening it. The appraisal process has a number of stages and has therefore taken several years, but it has culminated in a Strategic Outline Business Case being submitted to DfT at the end of October that shows that a shuttle service between Sandbach and Northwich, stopping at Middlewich and Gadbrook Park would offer good value for money, and excellent value for money if the service were extended to Crewe. The next stage is for DfT to consider whether it is prepared to fund work to produce a full business case (again taking a considerable amount of time as it requires detailed ground surveys, engineering designs and train planning).

Sustainable Business

10. Following an initial meeting that Clare and I had with the Chief Exec of Bentley Motors in the summer, Bentley hosted a meeting in late October that brought together a number of large businesses from across C&W, all of whom are committed to learning from each other how they can get to full zero carbon. We hope that this initial meeting will be the first stage in creating a network of businesses that will work together to set an example to business across the UK and the World, re-inforcing our reputation as the world leader in zero carbon business and industry.

Stoke and Staffordshire LEP

11. It is a tribute to the strength of our Executive Team that we have been asked by the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP if we can provide some cover whilst they recruit a permanent new Chief Executive. Andy Devaney will therefore be seconded to Stoke and Staffs for two days a

week between now and the end of March as their interim Chief Exec. The fee we are receiving to cover the cost of his time (£20k) is being recycled within the Growth Hub to provide a small business support grant fund.

Foreign Direct Investment

12. The Growth Hub's Key Account Management programme funded by DIT has recently completed its mid year review of the C&W programme. FDI targets continue to be achieved and in many cases exceeded, with DIT very happy with performance. Cheshire and Warrington was also given a strong endorsement in this area in a recent Northern Powerhouse Partnership report.

Local Authority Pay Settlement

13. Members of two of the three unions representing LA staff have accepted the Local Government employers offer of a flat increase of £1,925 per annum, backdated to 1 April, and an additional day's leave from 1 April 2023. The LEP's policy is to track LA pay settlements where possible and we will be convening a meeting of the Appointments and Remuneration Committee to discuss pay and terms and conditions now that we are clear on the LA settlement.

LEP Mid-Year Review with BEIS

14. The LEP has been invited to a mid-year progress review with BEIS Cities and Local Growth Unit. This will be a relatively light touch review which explores strategy, delivery and governance but which will focus on our delivery of the Getting Building Fund. However, compliance with the Local Assurance Framework remains a high profile quality check for the department, including ensuring we are meeting the requirement to publish minutes, details of contracts, and registers of gifts and hospitality. We will be updating the website with a nil return, on behalf of board members, for gifts and hospitality up to 30 September 2022, unless members inform us to the contrary (which should be done ASAP please).

PHILIP COX