

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

MARCH 2024

Summary

1. This is the final Chief Exec's report to the Board of the LEP so as well as reporting on activity over the past month I've also included some reflections on what the LEP has achieved over the past thirteen years and some thoughts on what we will be able to achieve as Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington.

LEP Transition

2. The formal transfer of the LEP to full LA ownership will take place in w/b 8 April, with all three LAs now having approved the transfer along with the creation of a Joint Committee to oversee Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington and a Business Advisory Board to ensure continued strong private sector input to sub-regional economic development. Ian will take the Board through the full choreography of the transfer later in the meeting.
3. I wanted to take the opportunity of this report to thank all of private sector members of the LEP's Board and sub-committees over the years for the time and effort you have put into your roles and for the support you have provided myself and the whole of the executive team. Particular thanks must go to Clare, whose husband Simon has been heard to complain that I saw more of her than he did (!), to Trevor for the dual role that he played as both (a very active) deputy chair of the LEP and Chair of Marketing Cheshire, and, before them, to Christine Gaskell, who Chaired the Board for its first nine years.
4. The LEP achieved a huge amount over its lifetime and we will have some pictures of many of the projects we helped fund running on a screen after the end of formal business. The platform that we have created as a LEP means that I am also very excited about what we will be able to achieve as Enterprise Cheshire & Warrington (ECW). Bringing the three LAs together in a Joint Committee with full ownership of ECW creates a powerful single team that has the potential to have an even bigger impact on the economic development of C&W than we have been able to achieve as a LEP, especially given the key influencing role that the LAs are proposing to give to the Business Advisory Board.
5. Some of the things we are planning to deliver over the next twelve months include:
 - 600 training places in areas of skills shortage using £2.5 million from DfE;
 - Creation of a new industry body to oversee the successful delivery of the £30 billion industrial decarbonisation programme and to make C&W the first place in the world to have a major net zero industrial cluster;
 - Completion of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Plan setting out how C&W will become the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing place in the country;
 - Production of a strategic transport plan setting out C&W's sub-regional transport network needs to deliver in the absence of HS2;

- Strengthened promotion of C&W as a great place to visit, live, work and invest, helped by the creation of a new Accommodation BID in Chester;
 - Use of our £260 million suite of investment funds to support new development and new businesses in C&W;
 - Delivery of more of the recommendations of the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission;
 - Engaging with more and more teachers in all 85 of C&W's secondary schools so that they can enthuse their pupils about the huge opportunities open to them in the workplace in C&W
6. This is a large agenda and underlines that the transfer of the LEP to the LAs is simply a new chapter in a powerful story. It also puts C&W in a strong position to persuade whoever forms the next Government to provide us with the investment and powers we need to play a major part in growing the North's economy and tackling climate change.

LEP Annual Performance Review

7. DLUHC undertook its final performance review of us as a LEP on 26 February. It was a very positive meeting which reinforced the strong relationships between the LEP and MC with our Local Authorities and with the government officials. The review concluded by DLUHC officials asking us to congratulate the board and team on the tremendous contribution we've made to Cheshire and Warrington over the past thirteen years.

Marketing Cheshire Awards

8. Final preparations are taking place ahead of the annual awards ceremony at Chester Cathedral on Thursday 21 March. This year we received 87 entries across 16 categories, a 42% increase in entries on last year, and the highest number of submissions since 2018-19. More than 250 attendees are expected on the night, again a significant increase on 2023. We have also secured a headline sponsor for the event, McPhillips, the building and civil engineering firm currently working at Chester Zoo.

Au Revoirs and Thank Yous

9. The sub-region is due to lose three people over the next couple of months who have been really important to the LEP. The first is Charlie Seward who is due to retire from Cheshire West in early-mid April. Charlie was one of the Growth Directors that established the LEP in the very early days of the David Cameron coalition government, and has been a hugely valuable colleague and supporter of the LEP ever since. He will be sorely missed.
10. Ian Brooks leaves us on 30 April. Ian joined us in May 2019 as the LEP's first ever finance director as we grew from an organisation of less than 10 staff and a budget of £750k to the complex organisation that we are today. His contribution to the LEP's achievements are immeasurable and we all wish him a very happy retirement. Gatenby Sanderson have been appointed to help find an interim successor to Ian, with interviews scheduled for late March in order to have someone in post in time to allow for a little overlap before Ian's departure.

11. I am sure the Board will also join me in congratulating Alex Thompson on his move on promotion to Sandwell and Dudley Council in the West Midlands which is due to take place on 7 May, a week after Ian's departure. As our s.151 officer since Alex has been a key member of the team over the past few years and the whole LEP owes him a huge debt of gratitude for the role he has played in helping us achieve so much over that period. He has challenged us when necessary but has always been supportive and we wish him very well in his new role.

Convention of the North

12. Thank you to those Board members and other colleagues who were able to join us at the Convention of the North in Leeds on 29 February and 1 March. The event was co-chaired by Clare and by Tracy Brabin, the Mayor of West Yorkshire and hosted by Clive Myrie from the BBC. Its objective was to engage stakeholders from across the North on the contents of a Manifesto for the North to be presented to the main parties around the time of the General Election. Michael Gove and Angela Rayner were also both present at the Convention to present their competing visions for how the North can be levelled up. Initial feedback about the event was very positive, and we will now be working with colleagues from across the North to complete the Manifesto and take the first steps in delivering it.

PHILIP COX