



**LEP Strategy Committee
MINUTES (DRAFT)**

Meeting Held: Friday 12th June 2020
Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Robert Mee (Chair)	Nicola Dunbar	Philip Cox
Graeme Bristow	Steve Park	John Downes
Peter Skates	Andy Hulme	

Apologies:

Frank Jordan	Robert Davis	Charlie Seward
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Attending:

Steve Smith* (FarrPoint Ltd)	Jan Miszalowski* (FarrPoint Ltd)
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*To AI 3 only

Agenda Item 1: Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Charlie Seward, Frank Jordan (represented by Peter Skates) and Robert Davis.

Agenda Item 2: Declarations of Interest

Peter Skates declared a non-Pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8. The Committee agreed that as no financial decisions were involved in relation to this Agenda Item, that it would be appropriate for Mr Skates to remain and contribute to the discussion.

Agenda Item 3: Presentation – Digital Infrastructure Plan

The Chair welcomed Jan Miszelowski and Steve Smith of FarrPoint Limited to the meeting. FarrPoint, in conjunction with Hatch Regeneris is leading on the production of a Digital Infrastructure Plan for Cheshire and Warrington.

Jan and Steve gave a short presentation setting out the key objectives and work packages within their commission, and updated on progress to date. An interim report is due for submission to the LEP w/c 15th June and this would be shared with the Strategy Committee once available.

The majority of work to date has focussed on mapping existing fixed broadband and mobile data infrastructure provision. It was noted that in terms of access to superfast broadband the sub-region is

ahead of the UK average, reflecting the work done by the Connecting Cheshire programme, whilst in relation to full fibre (i.e. fibre to the premises) the area is significantly below average (see attached slides). A number of conversations had been held with key businesses, neighbouring LEPs, North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Cheshire and Warrington Growth Hub to inform the understanding of current and future digital infrastructure plans and requirements.

The final report and Infrastructure Plan is due in September 2020.

Following the presentation there was an opportunity for questions from members of the Committee. A key question was whether in benchmarking our provision the sub-region is being ambitious enough by only looking at UK comparators. Agreed that there was merit to this argument although comparisons with places such as Singapore were probably not helpful, and it was equally important to understand the levels of connectivity that businesses and residents in Cheshire and Warrington actually need.

The Committee discussed the challenges associated with encouraging businesses to embrace digital and take up the fibre connectivity that is available (recognising that in many places uptake is poor, despite good coverage). It was suggested that the LEP could lead a programme to raise the awareness of the business benefits of good digital connectivity.

The ability to support digital activity on the move was also discussed, especially given the likely reduction in reliance on fixed office space for business activity in the future. This would also be important for ambitions around transport.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 3rd April 2020. All actions were completed. There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 5: Public Speaking Time

No members of the meeting were present at the meeting.

Agenda Item 6: Covid-19 Restart and Recovery Activity

Philip Cox updated on progress with restart and recovery activity now that government has announced the start of easing of restrictions put in place to control the spread of Coronavirus. 15th June was the next key date as a number of non-essential shops begin to reopen.

The Growth Hub has continued to offer a range of online webinars and events aimed at supporting businesses to become 'Covid-secure' and to help them prepare for reopening, including signposting to PPE.

A paper is to be considered at the LEP Discussion Forum on 17th June around the use of £1m of Growing Places Fund for small capital grants to support businesses who need to invest in premises and equipment to enable them to reopen to the public. This is on top of £600,000 of LEP resource that has been directed to the Accelerate programme to increase the availability of free digital and STEM training.

Board and the Sub Regional Leaders Board are discussing a post-Covid vision for the sub-region to be the most sustainable, inclusive, fast growing and healthy economy in the country, and work continues to review the Local Industrial Strategy to take account of changes induced by the current crisis.

It was noted that there are concerns over a possible significant rise in unemployment once the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme starts to be withdrawn in August. The LEP and local authorities are working on developing systems and support that can respond quickly to help people being made redundant so that they can return to the workplace as quickly as possible.

As part of a possible economic stimulus package the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, has written to all LEPs and Mayoral Combined Authorities requesting suggestions for where existing government capital programmes could be accelerated (such as Future High Streets Fund) and asking areas to identify a small number of 'shovel ready' projects that could be supported and delivered quickly. Work is underway to respond to this and proposals will be discussed by the LEP Board in advance of the 18th June deadline.

Agenda Item 7: Strategy Update

The contents of the report were noted.

Andy Hulme updated on the status of the Strategy work programme and Delivery Plan. A number of activities on the Strategy Delivery Plan have been completed since the previous meeting including the soft launch of the Accelerate Programme. No activities are currently flagged as red (high risk) although the ongoing delays around confirmation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund could cause this to be reviewed.

Key highlights in the work programme include the appointment of consultants to develop a Natural Capital Audit and Investment Plan for the sub-region. It was agreed that the consultants be invited to present to the August Strategy Committee meeting.

Action: Natural Capital Audit and Investment Plan presentation to be included on Agenda for 7th August meeting.

Progress is also being made on stage 1 of the UKRI-funded Industrial Decarbonisation Roadmap for the north west. Cheshire and Warrington is leading on development of the business case framework for the stage 2 bid, which is expected in July. It was highlighted that a challenge for the stage 2 project would be securing sufficient private sector match to reach the minimum project threshold for the funding competition (projects have to be between £300k - £1.5m in total, including up to 70% UKRI grant).

The Committee noted that the LEP may have the option to contribute via membership of a new corporate body being established by a number of local energy sector businesses to lead on the stage 2 activity.

Part B Agenda Items (Non-Public Items)

Agenda Item 8 – Non-Public Items - Low Carbon Energy Innovation Fund.

The Committee re-confirmed the decisions taken by correspondence in relation to the firm redeployment of £1.2m of Low Carbon Energy Innovation Fund and provisional reallocation of a further £700k.

It was agreed that the Committee Chair be given delegated authority to sign off the provisional project allocations once the funding position has been clarified.

The paper circulated for approval is attached to the minutes for information.

Agenda Item 9 – any Other Business

John Downes shared details of research undertaken recently that suggests that there could be significant opportunities for our logistics sector as a result from the shift to online retail, partly driven by Covid-19. The research suggests that every 1% growth in online shopping requires 6 million ft sq. of logistics space, and online retail is forecast to double in size in the next ten years.

It was agreed that these opportunities could be considered as part of the review and reframe of the Local Industrial Strategy to support recovery.

Peter Skates confirmed that Cheshire East is working with Cushman and Wakefield to develop recovery plans for nine key town centres in the Borough, building on work started earlier in the year prior to the Coronavirus outbreak.

Agenda Item 10 – Date and Time of Next Meeting

Next meeting: Friday 7th August 2020, 9:00am, location TBC