**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP BOARD MEETING**

**Subject: Chief Executive’s Report Agenda Item: 5**

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**Meeting Date: 23 January 2018**

Summary

1. The highlight of the past month was undoubtedly the CBE that Christine was awarded in the New Year’s Honours for her work with the LEP. As a result, Christine is now entitled to a Coat of Arms!
2. In addition to Christine’s CBE, this report also describes the pace at which the LEP is expanding its capacity, courtesy of grants from a variety of sources in Central Government; the strides we are taking in developing our engagement on the skills agenda; and the progress we are making with developing our Local Industrial Strategy.

Building Our Capacity

1. The extra £200k for LEP running costs that was promised by the Government as part of the LEP review arrived in our bank account during December. In addition, we were told last month that we will be getting a further £75k from the Department for Education (DfE) for our Employers’ Skills and Education Board, and another £75k from DCMS to establish a Digital Skills Partnership.
2. We will also be building our staffing capacity during January. Catherine Walker joined us as our Communications and Marketing Director on 14 January, Paul Chapman and Rachel Zaidellhub join the Growth and Skills Hub on 23 January; Andy Devaney joins us from the Liverpool LEP on 28 January as the Business and Innovation Director to lead the Growth and Skills Hub and Roy Newton formally joins our payroll as the Transport and Investment Programme Director on 1 February. In addition we have a good field of candidates for the Finance Director who we will be interviewing on 21 January.
3. We will also be shortly launching an exercise to recruit two new Board members to replace Meredydd David, who has reached the end of his term, and Gary Steen, who stood down from the Board in November. As part of the same exercise we will be looking to recruit an additional member to our Scrutiny Committee and for up to 15 private sector members to join the LEP’s sub-committees. Many of the candidates for the sub-committee roles are likely to come from existing members, but now that they have delegated authority to make spending decisions, it is important that members are appointed in an open and transparent way. A copy of the draft job description /advert is attached. It will be supplemented with a short note providing some more detail about the work of each of the committees.

Improving the Sub-region’s Skills

1. The Employers’ Skills and Education Board has achieved a huge amount during 2018. Attached to this report is a note that Pat Jackson has produced for the Board that summarises last year’s achievements and looks forward to 2019. Pat’s report includes more detail on some changes that will need to be made to the Skills and Education Board in order for it to operate as a DfE approved Skills Advisory Panel and thereby attract the £75k DfE is offering to LEPs referred to above.
2. Pat’s report also refers briefly to a forthcoming announcement that we will be one of three LEPs to which DCMS have awarded Digital Skills Partnership status. We will be getting £75k to employ a member of staff to further strengthen the work we are doing through the Virtual Institute of Technology to build digital skills in Cheshire and Warrington.

National Assurance Framework

1. When the LEP Review was published last summer, MHCLG said they would produce a new National Assurance Framework. This was formally approved by James Brokenshire last week and is also attached. We will need to amend our assurance framework to reflect MHCLG’s document, but the changes look as if they are relatively minor. We’ll get formal approval for them at the March Board.

Local Industrial Strategy

1. We are making excellent progress with our Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), with BEIS suggesting that our evidence base is at least as strong as those that have been produced by the trailblazer LEPs – Manchester, Birmingham and the Camkox (Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford) corridor. The Expert Panel we have formed to review and test our Strategy had an initial phone call just before Christmas and will have its first full meeting on 31 January.
2. Local consultation is an important element of LISs, and we are currently drafting a position statement which we are aiming to publish by the end of the month. The objective of the statement is to summarise the evidence we have collected about the strengths and weaknesses of the C&W economy and to suggest ways in which, through the LIS, the sub-region should address them. The position statement will then form the centre-piece of a series of consultation events we are proposing to hold over the next couple of months. These will include events that are open to all in locations such as Crewe Alexander Stadium, and a number of more targeted events, such as Chairs’ dinners, where we aim to engage senior people from the sub-region’s private sector businesses in a conversation about the area’s economic objectives.

Future High Streets Fund

1. Between Christmas and New Year, Jake Berry announced the £675 million Future High Streets. The Government is inviting Local Authorities to bid for funding to help with the costs of making changes to High Streets to reflect the increasing trend towards shopping on the internet. Bids from the LAs have to show that they are consistent with the Local Industrial Strategy, and we are therefore proposing to include an item on the agenda for February’s discussion forum to allow the LAs to brief the Board on how the LEP can best support their bids.

Marketing Cheshire

1. Following the Board’s agreement, in principle, to the merger, Mark has taken over as Chief Executive of Marketing Cheshire, and the lawyers and accountants have been undertaking due diligence. On the basis of that, a later agenda item invites the Board to formally agree to the merger. Marketing Cheshire meets on 14 February to consider the same question.