

West of England LEP Board

Wednesday 19 January, 9:30am
Meeting held “virtually” via Zoom

Present:

Richard Bonner, Arcadis (Chair)
Katharine Finn, PwC (Vice Chair)
Prof Sue Rigby, Bath Spa University (Vice Chair)
Christopher Grier, Airbus
Joanne Rumley, Foot Anstey
Margot Day, Arup
Natasha Swinscoe, WEAHSN
David Brown, The Bristol Port Company

Neil Douglas, Viper Innovations
Zoe Metcalfe, Atkins
Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City Council
Cllr Don Davies, North Somerset Council
Cllr Toby Savage, South Gloucestershire Council
Mayor Dan Norris, West of England Combined Authority

Officers in Attendance:

Patricia Greer, West of England Combined Authority
Jess Lee, West of England Combined Authority
Stephen Bashford, West of England Combined Authority
Mike Jackson, Bristol City Council

Dave Perry, South Gloucestershire Council
Ben Mosely, Bristol City Council
Jo Walker, North Somerset Council
Melissa Houston, West of England Combined Authority
Malcolm Coe, West of England Combined Authority

Also Present:

Cllr Winston Duguid, Chair of Scrutiny Committee
George Margesson, West of England Combined Authority (item 4 only)
Rebecca di Corpo, West of England Combined Authority (item 5 only)

Jon Rattenbury, West of England Combined Authority (item 6 only)

Apologies:

Cllr Kevin Guy, Bath & North East Somerset
Will Godfrey, Bath & North East Somerset

Minutes

1.	<p>Introduction from the Chair Richard Bonner welcomed everyone to the meeting and welcomed Cllr Duguid, Chair of Scrutiny Committee who will be attending LEP Board meetings as an observer.</p> <p>Apologies were noted.</p> <p>Members were then given a brief update on the LEP recruitment - 23 expressions of interest for the LEP business positions were received. We are currently looking at these applications and screening them against the criteria set to create a shortlist for the Business Nominations Committee to consider and take forward to interview.</p>
2.	<p>Minutes of the meeting of 6th October 2021 Richard Bonner noted that Chris Grier had commented during AOB on work around the decarbonisation plan for aviation. Stephen Bashford confirmed that he and Chris Grier have been working together in compiling a membership list for the working group to take this forward.</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on the 6th October 2021 were then agreed as a correct record.</p>
3.	<p>Declaration of Interest</p>

	<p>The Chair reminded Board members that they had a responsibility to treat all proposals/projects equally and impartially and must therefore declare whether they or their organisation had either a direct or indirect interest in any of the projects to be considered by the Board.</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
<p>Items for discussion</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Implications on the region At the end of last year Government announced a return to work-from-home guidance in England, in response to rising COVID-19 infection rates and the increasing prevalence of the Omicron variant.</p> <p>In the lead up to December the general consensus was that the economy was showing strong signs of recovery at a regional level and confidence was coming back. However, the effects of Plan B have impacted some sectors, particularly those customer facing services - hospitality, culture, tourism.</p> <p>Observations made by the members were centred around recruitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are challenges around the availability of specialist staff leading to lengthy vacancies due to issues in finding suitable candidates for interview. ▪ High turnover is making recruitment a challenge and there are concerns that the pay packages being offered are not sustainable. ▪ In terms of wage pressures and competition there is a national issue to recruit into social care - this is the biggest impact on wages in Local Government as people choose less stressful, demanding, and flexible employment. <p>During an open discussion the following points were also noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No significant uplift in activity from the Growth Hub [compared to 18 months ago] but hearing from businesses/network organisations that the level of debt in the economy is significant- Providing support around financial resilience and medium plan planning will be key. ▪ Within insolvency the national stats were at their lowest in some time suggesting that the Government support in place had been successful, but businesses are concerned about increased energy prices, competition for employment, contracting levels being uncertain - a lot of “what if” questions. ▪ Air traffic out of the UK is lower than other European cities. This is a UK wide, not regional issue and from a connectivity and inward investment view this is a concern - Are we missing out? Is this due to our travel restrictions?
<p>5.</p>	<p>West of England Cultural Plan Richard Bonner introduced the item and invited Sue Rigby to update members on the draft summary of the Cultural Plan which has been developed by the West of England Cultural Compact.</p> <p>Members were reminded that the purpose of the Cultural Compact is to focus and amplify the role of culture in the region, as a driver for economic success, placemaking, community cohesion and personal wellbeing. The structure of the Cultural Plan is through four areas of focus and three cross cutting themes to help turn strategic ideas into deliverables which will influence and attract further investment.</p> <p>The West of England cultural offer is unique - we have everything and it’s clustered. We need to work hard to ensure everyone has access and to ensure that culture is not seen as an optional extra but something that is essential in our covid recovery and bringing money into the region.</p> <p>Additional observations made by the LEP Board were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pleased to see the importance of inclusion and recognising the barriers to culture within the plan - Access for all isn’t just about geographical space and physical distance. ▪ The pandemic has shown we cannot just hold cultural activities inside. How do we take culture outside and work with local communities to make it more inclusive?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With regards to freelancers there is value in continuing to think about how we sustain their development and build an infrastructure for future support. <p>North Somerset informed members of an exciting opportunity. SEE MONSTER will be the world’s first and only repurposed North Sea offshore platform and the largest outdoor installation ever seen in Weston-super-Mare, located at the Tropicana site. There is inequality in parts of North Somerset, the challenge will be how we utilise culture in its broader sense to maximise the benefit of the installation for all the residents.</p> <p>Overall, the LEP Board continues to support the proposed direction of travel and next steps which includes the launch of a high-level prospectus to help implement the Cultural Plan.</p>
6.	<p>Increasing Investment and Scale of Net Zero Energy Projects</p> <p>With COP26 taking place last year and the vital work around our green recovery, Richard Bonner felt it would be helpful for Jon Rattenbury to come and talk to the LEP Board about the South West Energy Hub and to share headlines.</p> <p>The Energy Hub is hosted by the West of England Combined Authority and LEP but operates across a much wider area across the South West - A partnership of 7 LEPs [soon to be rebranded as Net Zero Hubs]. The purpose of this initiative is to support the identification, development, and implementation of energy projects and the programme has six core objectives aimed at stimulating local investment.</p> <p>Jon took members through a short presentation to showcase the Energy Hubs services and programmes, along with its challenges and project highlights.</p> <p>During an open discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This is one of the most significant issues for the region and we need to consolidate all of our thinking to leverage public and private sector funding towards the big investment propositions. ▪ Access to investment is a key challenge. Does existing private money have the ability to work with cities? It was suggested the LEP could play a key role in developing a pipeline of potential investments. ▪ Bristol City Council were involved in the Catapult work with Greg Clark [UK Cities Climate investment Commission] and Jon was advised to speak with officers to link up the work. ▪ South Gloucestershire Council informed members of recent success with an innovative renewable energy scheme with The Wave. Using investment funds set aside to partner with organisations and share risk to bring forward projects that support renewable energies. ▪ Being ambitious and driving change behaviour [not just declaring an emergency] is vital in reaching net zero. <p>LEP Board members expressed an interest in engaging further with the Energy Hub activities and to work with Jon to help bring to scale, speed and investment to place-based energy projects to achieve the region’s Net Zero ambition.</p> <p>ACTION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Energy Hub and officers to consider how LEP Board members can continue to be involved in this work, potentially via a sub-group of members. ▪ South Gloucestershire Council to present the Step Fusion bid at a future meeting.
7.	<p>Local Growth Fund and Getting Building Fund</p> <p>Malcolm Coe gave a brief update on the Local Growth Fund [LGF] and Getting Building Fund [GBF].</p> <p>There is still some residue with the GBF [just over £6m] but the LGF concluded in March 2021 [£202m] and the full amount was spent - we did not need to return anything to Government. The team will continue to report on the LGF in terms of the outcomes it has delivered and Appendix 3 within the papers gives an overview of where we are.</p> <p>Richard noted brilliant progress against skills and transport but with regards to housing and jobs we’re</p>

	further behind and wondered whether there were any lessons learnt from the programmes we can reflect on for future success?
Items for information only	
8.	<p>Subgroups Summary Within the papers the LEP Board were provided with an update on the progress of organisational subgroups (Business Insights Panel, Skills Advisory Panel and Cultural Compact)</p> <p>No discussion needed</p>
9.	<p>Papers for June Committees Richard Bonner will be attending the WECA Committee and Joint Committee on the 28th January. Business members were asked to provide any feedback to Richard by Wednesday 26 January.</p>
10.	<p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ben Mosely has circulated a paper around a proposed Governance review - This is moving at pace and contains a timetable of engagement. A report will be taken to Joint Committee in March. ACTION: Richard Bonner will convene the LEP business members to discuss. ▪ Stephen Bashford gave a brief update on the Digital Connectivity Bid to DCMS. ▪ Jess Lee informed the LEP board that a draft copy of the LEP Delivery Plan will be circulated for feedback. The Plan is a summary on LEP delivered projects and will be a useful resource when showcasing what the West of England LEP has achieved.

Next LEP Board meeting: Wednesday 30 March.