

West of England LEP Board

Wednesday 30 March, 9:30am
Meeting held “virtually” via Teams

Present:

Richard Bonner, Arcadis (Chair)
Katharine Finn, PwC (Vice Chair)
Prof Sue Rigby, Bath Spa University (Vice Chair)
Joanne Rumley, Foot Anstey
Margot Day, Arup
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
Will Godfrey, Bath & North East Somerset

Dave Perry, South Gloucestershire Council
Jo Walker, North Somerset Council
Melissa Houston, West of England Combined Authority
Stephen Gerrard, West of England Combined Authority
Jack Latkovic, West of England Combined Authority
Andy Cornelius, South Gloucestershire Council

Also Present:

Cllr Winston Duguid, Chair of Scrutiny Committee
Rachel Pykett, West of England Combined Authority (item 5 & 6 only)

Andy Bates, Nuclear South West (item 4 only)
James Cooke, Western Gateway (item 4 only)

Apologies:

Christopher Grier, Airbus
Natasha Swinscoe, WEAHSN

Cllr Kevin Guy, Bath & North East Somerset

Minutes

1.	Introduction from the Chair Richard Bonner welcomed everyone to the meeting and once again welcomed Cllr Duguid, Chair of Scrutiny Committee who will be attending LEP Board meetings as an observer. Apologies were noted.
2.	Minutes of the meeting of 19th January 2022 The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 th January 2022 were then agreed as a correct record.
3.	Declaration of Interest 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. There were no declarations of interest.
Items for discussion	
4.	Step Fusion

	<p>In response to an action from January’s LEP Board to share further details on the STEP Fusion programme, Richard Bonner welcomed and invited Andy Bates from Nuclear South West to take members through the Severn Edge proposal - A bid for this region to host the UK’s first fusion energy plant.</p> <p>Andy took members through the challenges ahead, including the need to de-carbonise to mitigate climate change and the role of nuclear and then gave an outline of the opportunities and next steps.</p> <p>We are one of five shortlisted sites around the UK and there is widespread alliance of support and co-operation for the programme. There have been a number of successful public engagement events including drop-in sessions at Oldbury, Berkley and Thornbury and community webinars, all seeing 100+ people attend each event.</p> <p>The consensus from the Board was this is an exciting opportunity and Toby Savage reiterated that the project plays on our strengths as a region and although the site is in England, in terms of supply chain benefits [particularly from Welsh steel making] from an infrastructure project of this size has meant our colleagues in Wales are just as enthusiastic.</p> <p>An open discussion developed, and the following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The importance of understanding the selection criteria. Although not currently defined, there is likely to be an emphasis on levelling up ▪ Members voiced the importance that skills will play - If successful it could potentially result in over 30,000 jobs for the area. Therefore, a detailed mapping exercise around skills, jobs and accessibility will need to be developed. ▪ There is a legacy from Hinckley as a lot of infrastructure was built around skills - FE colleges and HE sectors can provide an important platform to promote jobs in STEP. <p>Observations around the topic of “nuclear” were also made. Noting that there will inevitably be objections to nuclear and we will encounter the negative argument. Andy stressed that to reduce this, engagement is key - it is important to understand what people are opposed to and the drop-in sessions are an opportunity to reach out to communities and hear any concerns.</p> <p>Along with engaging with communities close to the sites, there is also a need to understand the wider community. Due to the misconception of nuclear, developing a PR campaign around the energy crisis and to help people understand how nuclear could help.</p>
5.	<p>Levelling Up White Paper Government published the Levelling Up White Paper in early February and Richard highlighted the importance of identifying things that will be important to government and to us as a region.</p> <p>The White Paper highlights the value LEPs have created over the years. Government sees a valuable role for LEPs, working closely with their partners to provide independent business perspective. In a recent call Richard and Patricia had with Neil O’Brien the significance of the value created from our contribution was recognised.</p> <p>The Levelling Up White Paper made it clear that funding will flow through the UKSPF and those LEPs within Combined Authority areas will be integrated into the CA. Patricia therefore emphasised the need for Board members to think about governance arrangements, future of the LEP, what works well etc and setting up a LEP Board subgroup will help to shape and work through this.</p> <p>In discussion the following comments were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ our LEP is not coterminous with the CA. Careful thought and consideration is needed to ensure support and engagement continues across our functioning economic area including North Somerset. ▪ A need to ensure the LEP’s activities and strategic direction benefits the citizens and businesses of the West of England ▪ requirement for a structure that is lean and nimble, particularly with regards to governance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The LEP should be aligned to future funding programmes, particularly focussing on future opportunities linked to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund ▪ Whilst we need to look back to reflect on the areas where we have been successful, we also want to capture opportunities for improvement - use these experiences to develop and grow to ensure we effectively address the regional challenges that are ahead of us ▪ Being clear on how we interface with the Western Gateway, contributing and engaging where we have alignment and common interest - the STEP Fusion bid is a good example of effective collaboration. ▪ A need to focus on delivery [both to programmes that we influence/lead, but also to major bids and opportunities - Freeport is an example where we could have been more effective] and focussing on the big challenges like decarbonisation and route to net zero, as well as securing inward investment and creating an effective pan regional transport network. <p>Members also expressed the importance of engagement with key stakeholder to help broaden and strengthen relationships - creating a supported approach with a clear and unified voice. How do we create a consistent message, engage across our region, how do we debate and align on the issues of Levelling Up / Levelling Out?</p> <p>To note: A letter from Government setting out the details is expected imminently.</p> <p>ACTION: Board members supported the recommendation and a LEP subgroup will convene to help shape and respond to the government’s direction once we have received the letter advising on next steps.</p>
6.	<p>UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) THE UKSPF is a £2.6bn funding stream to replace the EU structural funds and will be targeted in building pride in place, supporting high quality skills training and supporting pay, employment and productivity growth.</p> <p>We are still waiting further information from Government on the UKSPF, guidance and funding allocations are due to be published in the coming weeks. Members were therefore provided with high-level headlines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ministers and officials have been clear that there is an ambition for the UKSPF to be more flexible than EU structural funds, enabling greater integration or alignment with other funding streams in the region. ▪ £560m has been top sliced to fund a programme called Multiply, which is focused on boosting adult numeracy. ▪ Investment priorities over the first 2 years will be around pride in place and the final year will have a focus on skills - supporting disadvantaged people and reducing levels of economic activity and move those furthest from the labour market closer to employment etc <p>In discussion, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We will look at refreshing the Local Industrial Strategy and bring various strands together, along with our evidence to develop a plan that will add value for our region, make a real difference and create jobs. ▪ A forum for engagement will be created [potentially a LEP subgroup] to help work up what our ask will be. ▪ To make sure the Unitary Authorities are involved in this process to ensure joined up working. <p>ACTION: A framework on next steps and engagement to be created and shared with the LEP Board</p>
7.	<p>Appointment of LEP Business members A recruitment exercise to fill vacant positions on the Board has been run and 23 expressions of interest were received. The Business Nominations Committee [BNC] then shortlisted to 5 candidates for final interviews. The business nominations committee would like to recommend the appointment of two business</p>

	<p>members for a term of three-years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ruth Jefferson, Wessex Water. ▪ Nigel Costley, TUC <p>Subject to circulating further details on the named candidates, the LEP Board provisionally agreed on the recommendations made.</p>
Items for information only	
8.	<p>Papers for June Committees</p> <p>Richard Bonner will be attending the WECA Committee and Joint Committee on the 8th April. Business members were asked to provide any feedback to Richard by Wednesday 6 April.</p>
9.	<p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marvin Rees informed members that following a procurement process, City Leap have announced Ameresco Ltd as its strategic partner. The City Leap partnership is aimed at delivering low carbon energy infrastructure and when it lands has an opportunity to be a national exemplar in how you create new financial relationships to develop the pace and scale of change needed. ▪ David Brown highlighted a jobs fair for Afghan resettlers happening on Friday 1 April, 4pm at the Mercure Hotel in Bristol. ▪ Toby Savage gave members his thoughts on MIPIIM - Although numbers were down, the event was vibrant, and the calibre of attendees was strong. It will be interesting to see if UKREiiF is a successful and going forward how do we want to take forward inward investment activities? ACTION: Inward Investment opportunities to be discussed at a future LEP Board meeting.