

West of England LEP Board

Monday 6 March, 9:30am
Meeting held “virtually” via Zoom

Present:

Richard Bonner, Atkins Global (Chair)
Prof Sue Rigby, Bath Spa University (Vice Chair)
Christopher Grier, Airbus
Joanne Rumley, Foot Anstey
David Brown, The Bristol Port Company
Neil Douglas, Viper Innovations

Ruth Jefferson, Wessex Water
Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City Council
Cllr Toby Savage, South Gloucestershire Council
Mayor Dan Norris, West of England Combined Authority

Officers in Attendance:

Richard Ennis, West of England Combined Authority
Stephen Bashford, West of England Combined Authority
Rachel Pykett, West of England Combined Authority
Stephen Gerrard, West of England Combined Authority

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

Also Present:

Cllr Winston Duguid, Chair of Scrutiny Committee
Sarah James, West of England Combined Authority [item 4]

Naomi Logan, West of England Combined Authority [item 5]
Freyja Lockwood, West of England Combined Authority [item 6]

Apologies:

Katharine Finn, PwC
Nigel Costley, TUC South West
Margot Day, Arup

Cllr Steve Bridger, North Somerset Council
Cllr Kevin Guy, Bath & North East Somerset Council
Stephen Peacock, Bristol City Council
Will Godfrey, Bath & North East Somerset

Minutes

1.	Welcome from Chair Richard Bonner welcomed members and apologies were noted
2.	Minutes of the meeting of 18 January 2023 A committee meeting was held in January to focus on ‘Supported buses’ where some difficult decisions were needed to be made. CA officers are finalising a summary on these outcomes, and this will be circulated in due course. The minutes of the meeting held on the 18 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.
3.	Declaration of Interest Board members were reminded 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. Richard Bonner informed members that he has now left Arcadis and joined Atkins Global, who have a professional framework with the Combined Authority. Richard has updated his Register of Interest form to reflect this. There were no declarations of interest in relation to today’s agenda.

Items for discussion

West of England Cultural Plan

Richard Bonner invited Sue Rigby, Chair of the Cultural Compact to introduce the item and provide a brief background on the work so far.

There are over 30 Cultural Compacts in the country, but the West of England Cultural Compact is the only regional one and due to early grant success, is seen as a national lead.

The West of England Cultural Compact has built strong networks. The main asset is the Cultural Plan which was launched in Bath around 18 months ago - Focusing on wellbeing, cultural and creative skills, placemaking and supporting creative freelancers, start-ups, and SMEs.

Sarah James, Cultural & Creative Programme Lead shared slides on the Cultural Plan and delivery so far, including the Create Growth Programme. The West of England is 1 of 6 successful regions to be awarded £1.3m from DCMS to support local creative businesses to unlock economic growth. It will build on the success of the Creative Scale Up Pilot and aim to support high-growth creative businesses to scale and become investment ready through a target business support package.

Members also learnt about a Citizen led decision making pilot - 3 sessions were held early this year with the cultural sector to begin to shape a process and methodology for a citizen led model which will enable communities to shape cultural policy and influence where regional resources are spent.

A number of funding bids currently in development were also highlighted and today, Sarah hopes to receive a decision from the British Film Institute around becoming one of their National Skills Clusters which will help support routes to employment in the TV and film industry for underrepresented groups including young people.

Richard Bonner opened to the floor for feedback and the following comments were noted.

- Great to see how we have evolved from the strategy to tangible activities, programmes, and additional funding.
- The sector is still fragile following the pandemic and key priorities are around supporting creative freelancers, diversifying the workforce and a need for more strategic interventions and to address the lack of sustainable funding to enable planning.
- An events strategy for the region is being established which will have a cultural arm attached to help bring in high profile events and promote what is here.
- It was encouraged to connect with ICS with regards to the overlap of culture and wellbeing.
- In relation to placemaking the UAs are going out with their local plans to make decisions around where to put houses, employment land, protect land for nature, leisure facilities etc so the Cultural Plan needs to interact/align with this.
- The importance to acknowledge the value of smaller, hidden heritage attractions and the potential between heritage, culture when linked with regeneration.

Skills Update

Naomi Logan, Head of People & Skills introduced herself and provided members with an update on the progress so far - presentation circulated with minutes

Naomi highlighted the complexity of the landscape and gave an overview of the national context, the needs of people and businesses, and the partners and stakeholders the CA work with.

There is a need to simplify the skills ecosystem to help individuals and businesses navigate with ease, and this will be achieved under Skills Connect - the provision has been mapped and will be available online for businesses, organisations and individuals to interact with the skills landscape - a combined approach of support [both online and offline] until March 2025.

As co-chairs of the Skills Advisory Panel [SAP] both Chris Grier and Joanne Rumley shared the following observations:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a multitude of programmes and activities happening across the region. ▪ The SAP meet quarterly and aim to provide a wide sectoral view but there is a need for representation from the Tourism/Hospitality sector ▪ Keen to understand trends for the future to help predict more and to be reactive to demand. ▪ Support is predominantly through a digital interface; we therefore need to do more for those harder to reach communities that may not have access. ▪ Seeing a lot of economic pressure in adult education providers - there is a need to ensure our providers are sustainable and robust to avoid disruption for those people on their learning journey. <p>A discussion developed around whether measures were in place to look forward. We have the information and data to track trends but being tied to funding models [designed for a particular purpose] does not enable us to target as specifically as we would like.</p> <p>The following comments were also noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is excess demand for Post 16 courses and apprenticeship courses are being oversubscribed - this is an ongoing issue. How do we “get a grip” on this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A Post 16 report was published last year, providing a backdrop. The team continue to work closely with the four colleges and there will be a refreshed Employment & Skills Plan. ▪ Marvin Rees chairs the LGA’s City Regions Board [Toby Savage is also on the Board] and is working on “Work Local” [looking at over 40 different funding pots for skills] and suggested MCAs and LGA join up to set out what the future workforce looks like. ▪ In addition to anticipating the landscape there is also a need to respond quickly to immediate challenges, for example the recent bus driver and HGV driver shortages.
6.	<p>West of England Digital Plan</p> <p>Richard introduced Freyja Lockwood, Digital Transformation Programme Manager who took members through a short presentation to set context to the Digital Plan - a high-level document that sets out a collective ambition, along with highlighting the challenges, priorities, and strategic objectives.</p> <p>The digital plan is place based to ensure our residents, businesses and wider organisations can operate effectively in this digital landscape which is essential to our economic recovery and long-term prosperity. Digital transformation impacts and enables almost everything we are trying to achieve, and therefore supports all strategies and plans [for example the Cultural Plan].</p> <p>Next steps include further engagement with different stakeholders to obtain feedback and support, as well as working with a wider group of stakeholders to develop a joint delivery plan with a view to understanding who is best placed to deliver different elements of the plan.</p> <p>During an open discussion the “meet and exceed the national 85% gigabit connectivity by 2025 target” was challenged - is this ambitious enough? Freyja explained that there is a mixed picture and a digital divide across the region. Although South Gloucestershire and Bristol are close to meeting the gigabit target, other areas tell a different story and without interventions these areas won’t meet the target and location will continue to be a barrier.</p> <p>The following comments were also noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need to improve and strengthen our regional productivity. Stephen Bashford flagged ‘Tech for Growth’ [working with techSPARK], as an important example of a programme for small businesses to increase their digital footprint. ▪ Prioritise connectivity - the link between travel and digital is key in ensuring our residents are well connected ▪ Meetings have been scheduled to engage with the ICB. <p>The Digital Plan is looking to launch late spring, early summer.</p> <p>Action: A request from Richard Bonner for an engagement session with the business board.</p>
7.	AOB

Mayor Marvin Rees suggested a running item be added to the LEP Board agenda. There is a need to talk about transport and housing as core aspects of economic development and therefore should be under discussion at LEP Board meetings.

Items for information only

- 8. Papers for March Committees**
Richard Bonner will be attending the Combined Authority Committee and Joint Committee on the 17th March. Business members were asked to provide any feedback to Richard by **Wednesday 15 March**.