

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2021

Summary

1. August is supposed to be a quiet month as everyone across central and local Government takes a break that, this year, was particularly well earned. In fact, we were swamped with a flurry of key Government announcements and visits from Ministers and officials whilst Marketing Cheshire was extremely busy promoting the area as we emerged from the Covid restrictions.

Government Announcements

2. The period since the Board meeting in mid-July has seen a deluge of Government announcements that impact the LEP. The most significant was the Prime Minister's speech on levelling up, which included an invitation for local areas to discuss devolution deals – now known as County Deals. C&W has come close to agreeing devolution deals with the Government on a couple of previous occasions, so following an invitation from MHCLG officials, officers from the local authorities and the LEP have agreed to meet them to explore what could be on offer for areas that enter into such an arrangement.
3. Other announcements from the Government in late July and early August included:
 - Its Hydrogen Strategy, setting out how it will achieve a total of 5GW of Hydrogen production through Blue (requiring Carbon Capture and Storage (CCUS) like Hynet) and Green (through electrolysis) methods.
 - Its Innovation Strategy, setting out how it will work towards its vision of making the UK a global hub for Innovation. We had been expecting the Strategy to invite a few places to enter into an Innovation Deal with the Government so were working up a proposal, jointly with Greater Manchester and Liverpool, to establish the area as an innovation hub for life sciences and green technology. We now expect that invitation to be issued after the Spending Review.
 - That the Spending Review will conclude on 27 October and will cover three years from 2022/3 – 2024/5. The announcement also set out the priorities for the review, including levelling up, the transition to Net Zero and cementing the UK as a scientific superpower. LEP officers have been updating the economic sections of last year's sub-regional submission to the CSR. This is due to be signed off by the Sub-Regional Leaders' Board on 17 September.
 - A delay to the LEP Review, which will now be concluded at the same time as publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, around or a little while after the Spending Review. The announcement was accompanied by a letter to LEP Chairs from Paul Scully, the Minister in BEIS leading the LEP review, thanking them for the work LEPs are doing and confirming that BEIS and MHCLG would be making a

payment to us of half our core funding. We have also been asked to provide an impact assessment should the remainder be withheld or paid in December.

4. More locally, Joe Manning arranged for the Cabinet Office Levelling Up Unit to spend a day in and around Ellesmere Port to help them develop ideas for the Levelling Up White Paper. It included a visit to the industrial facilities in the area and a meeting with a number of companies at Thornton, followed by a tour of the town centre with Charlie Seward and Gemma Davies explaining Cheshire West's plans for its regeneration.
5. On the same day as the Cabinet Office visit, I was invited to join Andrew Stephenson, the Rail Minister, on a tour of Crewe Station to give him an understanding of how it will be re-developed as part of HS2. The Minister also unveiled a plaque celebrating Crewe's place on the HS2 route and announced that HS2 Ltd expect that construction of the new line will create 6000 more new jobs than their original estimate. There is a meeting in the diary with HS2 Ltd to make sure that people in C&W can take advantage of these opportunities.

PR Support

6. Over the past eighteen months we have received PR support from the Influential agency. We re-tendered the contract recently and although Influential put in a strong bid, we decided to appoint Social Communications. One of Social's strengths was the understanding they have of the LEP agenda arising from the support they already provide to other LEPs and to NP11. Social will be providing support across the whole organisation, in contrast to previous arrangements in which Marketing Cheshire and the LEP obtained support from different firms.

Growth Hub

7. As COVID related enquiries have begun to subside, the Growth Hub's focus has switched back to helping firms to grow. There has been an increase in businesses requesting support in accessing finance and investment and this has resulted in further resource being deployed in this area. At the same time, the Peer Network programme has continued to build momentum with over 50 ambitious SMEs signed up, ahead of the schedule agreed with BEIS. The Growth Hub has also been heavily involved in the designation and launch of the South Manchester and North Cheshire life sciences cluster as a High Potential Opportunity for foreign investment by the Department for International Trade.
8. The mid-year review of the Growth Hub by BEIS has also taken place since the last Board meeting. As well as acknowledging the continuing progress and reach of the Growth Hub, BEIS passed on their gratitude to the team and the entire LEP for the leadership and intelligence gathering through the pandemic and EU exit.

Marketing Cheshire

9. Unsurprisingly given the circumstances, Marketing Cheshire (MC) has been extremely busy over the past couple of months. In particular it has been promoting staycations in Chester, Cheshire, and Warrington. It hosted a number of journalists including The Telegraph and the I newspaper in Chester, building on the Staycation City of the year award and had a number

of articles to promote the Sandstone Ridge following its short listing as a potential Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

10. MC has also been delivering tailored activity for specific events and locations including the Tour of Britain's Cheshire and Warrington leg on the 9th September for which it wrote the helicopter script for the day and supported Warrington Borough Council with the promotion of the events in the town. In Chester, through MC's Destination Chester network MC developed a new creative events programme 'Chester designed by nature' and supported Chester BID to deliver a TV advert for the City.
11. The annual Marketing Cheshire awards were launched on the 6th September with the event due to be held at Nunsmere Hall on the 24th March. Some new categories have been introduced to promote businesses efforts throughout the pandemic and to highlight people working in the industry.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12. As Board members are aware, every LEP has to have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide independent assurance and scrutiny of our role. It has recently undertaken a review of its effectiveness and is keen to engage more fully with the board. It began this process at its meeting on 2nd September by inviting the Alice Choi and Kath Mackay to discuss their roles as chairs of the Business Growth and Employers' Skills and Education Boards. Initial feedback from those sessions was the emphasis the Scrutiny Committee would like to put on identifying the impact of our activities. We are also proposing that Laura Crane, the Chair of Committee and a Cheshire East Councillor, should attend a board meeting to discuss the role of scrutiny as part of our governance arrangements.

Corporate Services

13. The work we are doing to create a single Corporate Services to support the LEP and Marketing Cheshire took a large step forward over the summer with the appointment of Kirstin McCallum as HR Advisor and Office Manager. This has enabled Jocelyn Milne to provide finance support to both organisations and to allow Steve Jones' to expand his knowledge and experience. The move towards common operating procedures is achieving efficiencies and has identified several savings for Marketing Cheshire. In addition, in support of our Equality and Diversity actions Kirstin has signed us up as a Disability Confident employer.

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