

CHESHIRE & WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

JUNE 2022

Summary

1. Over the past month we have “ticked off” a number of important milestones on several of our programmes. We have moved into the delivery phase of Skills Bootcamps, we’ve worked with the business representative organisations on the submission of an EOI for local skills improvement plans, we’ve launched our second life sciences fund, Marketing Cheshire has launched our “Escape to Chester and Cheshire” campaign and the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission has completed the consultation on its draft report and is preparing to submit its conclusions to the Sub-Regional Leaders’ Board.

Skills

2. Officers are currently evaluating the bids we have received from training providers looking to run green skills, digital and HGV driver training courses as part of our Bootcamps programme. We hope that by the time the Board meets that we will have formally commissioned courses that will provide 65 places for what we see as an initial pilot phase for the programme. The next stage will be to commission the main programme, where DfE’s objective is to have most of the students studying by 30 September. Alongside this, DfE are making encouraging noises about further funding assuming our first phases are successful.
3. Pat Jackson has also been liaising closely with the business representative organisations (BROs) in C&W about the invitation issued to them by DfE to bid to take responsibility for Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) for LEP areas. All the BROs agreed to support a single bid from the West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber of Commerce which will work with all the members of the Cheshire Business Group to produce the LSIP for this area once it is formally commissioned by DfE in the Autumn.

Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission (SIGC)

4. The six events that were arranged to consult on the initial recommendations from the SIGC have concluded. 125 people participated and there were a further 25 responses to the online consultation. Some of the key pieces of feedback were the importance of ensuring that people have the skills to take advantage of the green economy, and of the need to sell the Commission’s conclusions to businesses and members of the public.
5. The Commission met just after the Jubilee break to consider the feedback and will meet again in early July to finalise its report for submission to the Leaders’ Board meeting at the end of July. In parallel, the LA Growth Directors are looking at the Commission’s recommendations and considering which of them could be delivered early.

LEP Business Case Fund

6. At its last meeting the Board agreed that Marketing Cheshire should be given a budget of £100k for place marketing funded from Enterprise Zone proceeds. Over the past three years, the Board has also agreed to use a further £400k of EZ receipts annually to fund the development of business cases for capital funding projects by the LAs and others, and I undertook to come back to the June meeting of the Board with some clear proposals on whether and how that funding should be deployed in 2022/3. Discussions over the past month with LA colleagues have focussed on how the sub-region can get the best value out of this funding, including whether it would be better to wait until we have further clarity about LA funding priorities following the submission of their UKSPF investment plans. Those discussions are still ongoing and I will keep the Board posted on progress.

Marketing Cheshire

7. Marketing Cheshire launched our 'Escape to Chester & Cheshire' campaign with £100k funding from VisitEngland. As part of this we have set up a new platform to sell bookable experiences on our website <https://www.visitcheshire.com/book-experiences>. We held a familiarisation visit for Irish travel agents and tour operators at the end of May in partnership with Marketing Liverpool, Liverpool Airport, Derry Airport and Loganair. This forms the start of our active work programme to bring back international and travel trade markets to Chester, Cheshire and Warrington. MC also promoted Jubilee activity across Cheshire and Warrington, from Beacon lighting to parades to community events.
8. I am also delighted to report that Chester Zoo won Large Visitor Attraction of the Year at the Visit Britain awards on 8 June. The Zoo were entered into the awards by virtue of being the winners of this category at the Marketing Cheshire Awards at Nunsmere in March.

Launch of Life Sciences Fund 2 (LSF2)

9. Praetura Ventures hosted an exceptionally well attended launch on 24 May of LSF2, the life sciences fund we jointly own with Greater Manchester and Bruntwood. Clare and Kath MacKay both spoke alongside Andy Burnham, and we heard from Maxwellia, a firm that received investment from LSF1 to develop a version of the female contraceptive pill that can be purchased over the counter and is now available in pharmacies.

Green Expo

10. The Chester Green Expo is due to be held from 15 - 18 June by the Old Dee Bridge in the City. It starts with an awards dinner at Eaton Hall on 15 June at which Clare will be presenting an award and then runs for three days and includes an Investment Conference at which I will be giving a presentation on the investment opportunities in C&W offered by the net zero agenda; a youth conference on Friday 17 June run by the University; and an exhibition open to the general public that concludes on the Saturday.

Visit from BEIS Officials

11. A steady stream of BEIS officials have been visiting C&W since lockdown was lifted. The latest team received an excellent overview of the contribution that C&W can make to delivering the UK's net zero target by spending an afternoon at Protos and Thornton looking at our net zero industrial cluster juxtaposed the following morning with a visit to Grosvenor Farms looking at how they are reducing emissions by bio-digesting cow slurry.

PHILIP COX