

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT

OCTOBER 2022

Summary

1. The Queen's funeral followed only a few days later by the party conferences means that Whitehall has struggled to get going following Liz Truss's appointment as Prime Minister. Hopefully we will begin to get a clearer sense of Ministerial priorities and approach over the next few weeks. In the meantime, we have continued to progress our internal review and made progress with the delivery of SIGC's recommendations, the Fair Employment Charter, alongside surveying business on the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Ministerial Priorities

2. The Queen's funeral and the party conferences have meant that although they were appointed over a month ago, many new Ministers are only just beginning to receive their initial departmental briefings. As a result, whilst we know that all Ministers have been told that their priority is to deliver economic growth, we have yet to get any feel for how that will translate into the detail of the portfolios for which they are responsible – for example, what planning reforms Ministers might be considering. Simon Clarke, the new S of S in DLUHC has, however, re-iterated his commitment to devolution, and told his officials that he is interested in evolution (of policy) not revolution.

LEP Review

3. The latter part of the Board meeting will review the outcome of the Board Awayday with the aim of beginning to draw conclusions about the future role of the LEP, the structure of the Board and its committees, and the shape, size and role of the Executive Team. The deadline for submitting our future plans is 25 November, though it is starting to become clear that there is some uncertainty about the information that Government Officials want as part of that submission and, as a consequence, whether the deadline will need to move.

Investment Zones

4. The Chancellor launched a new programme of Investment Zones as part of his (infamous!) mini-Budget, offering LAs the opportunity to submit Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for development areas that will attract a range of tax and other incentives similar to Enterprise Zones and Freeports. Although each LA can only submit one bid, they can cover multiple sites and, overall, DLUHC officials are expecting bids to cover 400 - 800 sites across England. All three of our LAs will be submitting bids accompanied by a overarching narrative provided by John Adlen that describes how they are broadly aligned with the Science and HS2 Growth Corridors. Officials expect EOIs to be assessed "within weeks" followed by a rather longer "delivery planning" stage. They are also making clear that it is essential that bids include a commitment to relaxing Planning regulations on IZ sites.

DMO Review

5. Trevor Brocklebank attended a round table with VisitEngland and DCMS which was also attended by Nick de Bois, Chair of VisitEngland and author of the Government's review of DMOs. The purpose was to shape the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) accreditation scheme development outlined in the government's response to that review. A formal announcement is likely to be made "imminently", with the rollout of the scheme commencing in January. We are confident Marketing Cheshire will be able to demonstrate all of the requirements necessary to be designated as an LVEP. No further funding has been set aside by government for LVEPs however the status will make it possible to draw down funding in the future.

Destination Promotion

6. Marketing Cheshire has campaigns live for Autumn in Chester and Cheshire highlighting key events including the Rugby League World Cup. For Chester we have entered into a new partnership with Transport for Wales, who have commercially contributed to the campaign as well as provided contra advertising space across their network in Midlands, South Wales and North Wales. From November, the campaigns will focus on Christmas and we will form part of Transport for Wales' own campaign activity. We are also investing in social media and digital outdoor advertising including billboards in Birmingham and Greater Manchester as well as a comprehensive PR programme.

Cost of Living Crisis

7. The Growth Hub undertook a business survey at the beginning of October designed to gain a better understanding of business confidence through the current difficulties around cost of living. With support from our colleagues in the Local Authorities we surveyed circa 5,000 businesses across Cheshire and Warrington with just short of 300 responses from across C&W.
8. The main takeaway from the results is that nearly twice as many respondents (47%) expressed some level of confidence in the future prospects for their business in the next 12 months than those (27%) who said they were not confident. The top issues identified were reduced customer demand (54%), energy costs (48%) and recruiting/retaining staff (36%). Least significant were lack of skills/training (9%) and broadband/digital infrastructure (4%). We have seen similar levels of confidence from other sources across the NW but the landscape is shifting very quickly so the Growth Hub will continue to gather intelligence.

Sustainable Business

9. We delivered a free 'Focus on Sustainability' conference in partnership with Cheshire for Good and Sykes Cottages on 13 October. The event was attended by over 50 businesses and aimed to highlight the increasingly important role of sustainability for travel consumers and inspire visitor economy businesses to demonstrate their commitment. Speakers included Graham Donoghue, CEO of Sykes Cottages and Donna Okell, Founder of UK for Good.

Staff Awayday

10. As part of our ongoing programme of staff awaydays, the latest meeting brought many of the team together at Jodrell's Bank. We were able to bring staff up to date on the LEP Review and explore how our values and culture can support people through change.

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