



**LEP Strategy Committee
MINUTES (DRAFT)**

Meeting Held: Friday 4th December 2020
Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Robert Mee (Chair)
Philip Cox (part)
Steve Park

Nicola Dunbar
Charlie Seward
Connor Diskin

Robert Davis
Peter Skates
Andy Hulme

Apologies:

John Downes

Attending:

N/A

Agenda Item 1: Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from John Downes.

Agenda Item 2: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The Committee approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2020.

Matters Arising

A19 – Planning Reform – It was noted that the background paper on ‘Planning for the Future’ was still to be circulated. ***Andy Hulme to action.***

A18 – AOB – It was confirmed that the slides on over-50s claimant count data was still to be circulated (*post-meeting note – now complete*)

Agenda Item 4: Public Speaking Time

No members of the meeting were present at the meeting.

Agenda Item 5: Cross Border Investment Programme

Charlie Seward, Deputy Chief Executive Place at Cheshire West and Chester Council provided an update on the current focus of the Mersey Dee Alliance, and in particular the work to develop a cross-border investment programme in response to the economic effects of the Coronavirus and Brexit.

The Mersey Dee area is centred on the four local authorities of Cheshire West and Chester, Wirral, Flintshire and Wrexham with its activities supported by a wider partnership including the LEP, Welsh Government and business groups. It is an area of almost 1 million people with significant economic interdependencies, with particular strengths around manufacturing, finance and business services and renewable energy.

Ensuring that the national border running through the MDA area doesn't become an economic barrier is a key objective of the Alliance. Currently Covid and Brexit are two key economic issues that require a joined up approach and response. 80% of the area's exports are to the EU, and recently one of its biggest employers – Airbus – announced some 1,500 redundancies due to the suppression of air travel because of Covid-19.

Recent examples of cross-border collaboration include the development of the Growth Track 360 rail prospectus ([west and wales rail prospectus – Growth Track 360](#)) which sets out the case for improved rail connectivity including enhanced links to the HS2 hub at Crewe.

Currently the MDA is appointing consultants to support it in the development of an investment programme to put to both the UK and Welsh Governments in March 2021 as part of a potential fiscal stimulus package. This work is designed to complement existing LEP and North Wales Economic Ambition Board programmes and add value to them. Ensuring effective engagement with business during development of the programme is a key task for the consultant team.

Robert Davis extended an offer to facilitate engagement with the members of the Cheshire Energy Hub.

Action: Robert Davis and Charlie Seward to have follow up discussion on business engagement

Nicola Dunbar suggested that more needed to be done on the softer aspects of improving knowledge and awareness of the MDA and its priorities and that the power of the MDA partnership could be better leveraged to boost key messages.

Agenda Item 6: Freeports

Philip Cox updated on progress with Freeports. Government has now released its prospectus inviting bids for up to 10 Freeports across the UK, with a deadline for submissions of 5th February 2021.

The bidding criteria are onerous and it is likely that any successful bid would likely need to involve the Port of Liverpool. Initial discussions have been held with neighbouring LEP / CA areas to establish their position on bidding, and the scope for Cheshire and Warrington to form part of the geography of any bid.

Feedback is that there are a number of concerns about the Freeports policy that need to be overcome before commitment to a bid could be made, certainly from a Liverpool City Region perspective, although should the LCR CA decide to bid they would be open to working with Cheshire and Warrington.

Agenda Item 7 – Recovery and Growth Plan

The contents of the report were noted.

The Committee was supportive of the work programme and timescales as set out. There was a discussion about how, in developing the details further, a clearer understanding and set of measures looking at the impact of the different activities could be developed.

It was agreed that such measures would be beneficial in helping the Strategy Committee ‘close the loop’ and understand the benefits of the proposals they were supporting.

Andy Hulme informed the Committee that given the recent indications around direction of travel of the national Industrial Strategy, a rethink on approach to the LEP’s recovery and growth plan was needed. The stop-start nature of recovery efforts to date and the establishment of the Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission (SIGC) meant that it would be more effective to aim to publish a short term Recovery Plan in the New Year covering the priority actions for the next couple of years. This could then be followed by a longer-term Growth Plan later in 2021 (possibly linked to a refresh of the SEP) reflecting the proposals set out by the SIGC when it reports next year on delivering the new sub-regional vision.

Agenda Item 8 – Strategy Work Programme

The contents of the report were noted.

Andy Hulme updated on the status of the Strategy work programme and Delivery Plan, noting that the majority of the current programme was drawing to a conclusion.

It has been confirmed that the bid to Innovate UK for funding under the Industrial Decarbonisation Challenge Fund to develop an **Industrial Decarbonisation Roadmap** has been successful, although formal public announcements can’t be made until mid-December. The project will mobilise in January with the LEP a key partner alongside Net Zero North West.

Charlie Seward asked if effort could be made to strengthen the LEP’s messaging around the energy opportunities across the sub-region and offered to support any efforts to do so. The Committee expressed the strong belief that Cheshire and Warrington has a number of significant, linked energy and clean growth opportunities. In response it was noted that the recently announced 10-Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution was to be considered at the next meeting of the LEP Board and this would include an assessment of how Cheshire and Warrington could respond and lead.

The final report of the **Digital Infrastructure Plan** was considered, and the main areas of focus and initial priority were accepted. There was a discussion on the progress of establishing a dedicated sub-committee of the LEP to lead the Digital agenda and whether the impending Board recruitment process should include appointment of a Digital Champion.

Action: Andy Hulme to confirm the current status of the proposed Digital Board.

The **Natural Capital Audit and Infrastructure Plan** is running slightly behind programme, with a key stakeholder workshop held on 26th November. The relevance of this work is growing, given the implications of the new Environment and Agriculture Bills, and the need to demonstrate Environmental Net Gain as part of a more sustainable approach to growth and planning.

It was agreed that the findings and recommendations of the study should be considered in detail at the February meeting of the Strategy Committee.

Action: Andy Hulme to include Natura Capital on the February Agenda of the Strategy Committee.

A number of suggested priorities for the **2021-22 work programme** were considered and agreed. These were: -

- A review of our strategic positioning on **science and innovation**
- Further work as part of the **Quality of Place** Strategy focussed on the potential of the cultural, creative and digital economy to drive growth and support levelling up
- Reviewing and reflecting on the emerging recommendations of the **Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission** for the LEP's growth plans
- Potential reframe of the Local Industrial Strategy as the position on the national Industrial Strategy becomes clearer.

The Committee also suggested that, as part of the Quality of Place activity, there should be some specific work to look at the future of high streets and town centres. The need for a specific group to provide oversight to the science and innovation work was also discussed.

Action: Andy Hulme to discuss options for a science and innovation steering group with the LEP Team and Chief Exec.

Part B Agenda Items (Non-Public Items)

Agenda Item 9 – Non-public items.

There were no items for discussion under this agenda item.

Agenda Item 10 – Any Other Business

All Board sub-committees were asked to review the **LEP Vision and Purpose** 'pyramid' as discussed at LEP Board earlier in the year. The Committee considered the impact of the changes and challenges of the last few months and concluded that the pyramid remains relevant, particularly the need for the LEP to retain 'planful agility' was particularly appropriate.

There was a brief discussion about the key announcements unveiled as part of the **Comprehensive Spending Review** statement on 25th November. Particular attention was paid to the new Levelling Up Fund, revisions to the Treasury Green Book and confirmation that more details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be released in the New Year.

Agenda Item 11 – Date and Time of Next Meeting

Next meeting: Friday 12th February 2021, 9:00am, via MS Teams.

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