

Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board

Meeting Note

Date: Wednesday, 11 December 2024

Time: 3:30–5:30pm

Venue: The Park Royal Hotel, Warrington

Attendees – Business Advisory Board (BAB) Members:

Steve Purdham (Chair)	Gaurav Batra	Trevor Brocklebank
Jill Jones (via Teams)	Annabel Turpin	Ian Traynor
Paul Taylor	Jan Chillery	Annette McDonald
Peter Broxton	Andrea Stott	Jane Hough
Terry Hayward	Yannis Loucopoulis	Nichola Newton (via Teams)
Helen Tonks	Helen Gbormittah	

Apologies:

Adrian Curry, Maggie Chen, Rupert Collis, Chris Hindley

Attendees – Others:

Philip Cox, CEO Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (ECW)
Paul Chapman, Growth Hub Manager ECW
Pat Jackson, Director of Skills and Education ECW
Colin Billingsley, External Relations, Department for Work and Pensions
Sarah Callendar-Beckett, Marketing Cheshire Board
Debbie Simpson, Interim FD ECW (via Teams)

1. Apologies, welcome and introduction – Steve Purdham

- 1.1. Steve welcomed the members of the BAB and noted the recent CBI Economic Forecast for December 2024 (previously circulated) which indicated that the business environment continued to prove challenging with lack of investment and low consumer spending.

2. Conflicts of interest – Steve Purdham

- 2.1. No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 6th November 2024, agreed actions and matters arising – Steve Purdham

- 3.1. Notes from the BAB meeting on 6th November 2024 were agreed as accurate.
- 3.2. Actions from the last meeting have been completed or will be completed during this meeting.
- 3.3. Meeting notes and agendas will be published.

3.4. Links to items referenced during this section:

[BAB web page including board papers & relevant publications](#)

4. Updates on Joint Committee Meeting 29 November 2024 and other matters – Steve Purdham & Philip Cox

4.1. The Board received an update on relevant discussion from the recent Local Authorities Joint Committee meeting covering devolution, the Cheshire and Warrington response to the Government's recently-announced Modern Industrial Strategy and the Business Advisory Board Network.

4.2. Devolution:

- Members were updated on devolution. The forthcoming Devolution White Paper will set out the Government's thinking and will be key to further discussions about the opportunities it might offer to C&W
- A Devolution Summit is planned for Tuesday 21st January at The Park Royal Hotel & Spa, Warrington

4.3. Modern Industrial Strategy:

- Following the previous BAB meeting, members were thanked for their contributions to developing a response on behalf of Cheshire and Warrington to the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy Consultation.
- The response has been submitted to Government and the consultation has now closed. Updates will be provided at future meetings.

4.4. Business Board Network:

- The Business Board Network (BBN) has been formed to support the needs and priorities of the business and economic boards being established in local authorities tasked with driving local economic growth and delivering Local Growth Plans under Chair, Mark Bretton and Chief Executive, Mark Livesey.
- Currently membership numbers 28 boards. Although each sub-region will form a board that they feel meets their local needs, they are broadly similar in structure and purpose to the C&W BAB.
- Future funding for the BBN is uncertain since at the Budget on 30 October 2024, government announced its intention to consult on ending funding for Pan-Regional Partnerships. This consultation ended on 16th December and the outcome is awaited.

4.5. Links to items referenced during this section:

[English Devolution White Paper](#) (published 16th December 2024)

[Minutes of the Joint Committee meeting on 29th November 2024](#)

[Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy](#)

[The Business Board Network website](#)

[Government pan-regional partnership funding consultation](#)

5. Get Britain Working: DWP White Paper – Pat Jackson

- 5.1. Members received a briefing on the context and content of the recently published (26th Nov) 'Get Britain Working' Government White Paper.
- 5.2. Observations from members included:
 - Need to close some of the loopholes allowing long-term claiming of benefits.
 - Several comments seeking to understand the data better, including demographics and the reasons behind economic inactivity.
 - A suggestion to understand what businesses need and focus training for older people in those areas
 - Young people require support to become more work ready
 - Suggestion that older people who have voluntarily retired could be encouraged to act as mentors for young people
 - The BAB Community and Employment working group is looking into how local support provision may be better joined up, but finding that this is not an easy task as offers and providers change frequently
 - Need for additional provision training softer skills such as employability and communication in addition to specific specialised technical skills
- 5.3. **ACTION:** Circulate presentation slides.
- 5.4. Links to items referenced during this section:
[Get Britain Working White Paper](#)

6. The Economy in C&W's Rural Areas – Sarah Callendar-Beckett

- 6.1. Members received a briefing on the rural economy in Cheshire and Warrington, including:
 - The rural economy is about far more than just farming with increasing diversification providing leisure, housing and business parks.
 - There is a lack of data about the rural economy.
 - Transport links are poor meaning that rural residents are hindered from contributing to the economy.
 - Broadband coverage has improved in recent years but mobile phone network coverage is very poor. This is a key enabler of remote/hybrid working and adoption of mobile technologies and therefore limits rural businesses and adds considerable costs to overcome. Suggestion that network providers should be required to address mobile blackspots as a condition of expanding networks.
 - Large venues in rural areas require large, sometimes seasonal workforces and rely predominantly on parents of young people to enable work in these locations.
 - There is a Rural Strategy Group which communicates with Local Authorities and the private sector to support the development of the rural economy. This group has recently re-framed its terms of reference and is keen to engage with the BAB.

7. BAB Working Group Updates

- 7.1. Members received updates from the leads of each of the BAB working groups, highlighting early emerging themes as follows:

7.2. Net Zero

- Skill gaps are an issue in almost all areas, including future skills.
- Need to link rural economy issues to rural CO2 emissions.
- Consider renewal of emphasis on nuclear sector as an enabler of net zero.
- The group is making links to stakeholders in LAs, ECW, etc, and prioritising sub-topics with a view to assembling a 'focus pack' on key areas in Feb and input into Local Growth Plan in March.
- Further details are contained in the Net Zero group presentation slides, which will be circulated.

7.3. - Community & Employment (Skills)

- Need for a sub-regional digital hub which signposts effectively and easily where information is on skills / career advice / jobs etc.
- Encourage businesses to engage more with education to solve long term recruitment problems.
- Delivering skills training is hindered by lack of instructors and instructors with industry knowledge. We have to solve this bottle-neck.
- Digital skills in context - training to improve job-readiness, inclusion, upskilling. Adaptability for evolving job roles.
- Need to foster a "culture of lifelong learning and adaptability.
- Potential to promote 'AI fluency' as a key benefit for C&W

7.4. Sectors and Investment (Funding)

- 3 priority areas - funding, inward investment and productivity.
- Develop a ECW funding 'eco-system' equivalent to other local CA's.
- Develop an ECW 'Agency' to handle cross sector Inward Investment enquiries.
- Our offer and digital presence is weak compared to other regions and we are too dependent on developers attracting businesses into their facilities
- Productivity – Increase within businesses and also efficiency enabling infrastructure such as transport links.

7.5. Infrastructure

- More collaboration between LAs
- New housing targets will be challenging
- Anecdotal evidence points to a shortage of light industrial and light manufacturing space, further data needed
- Ensure full involvement from C&W in strategic rail projects, e.g. Liverpool-Manchester
- Advocate for EV infrastructure and public transport improvements
- Improvement needed when it comes to high-speed internet and 5G coverage
- Consider planning reforms to enhance collaboration & speed processes

7.6. Observations from members included:

- Constraints on energy networks are holding back development and progress towards net zero
- Need to maintain the importance of and support for the export of physical products alongside digital and services

7.7. ACTION: Circulate presentation slides where applicable.

8. AOB:

- 8.1. BAB working groups to continue to engage with their corresponding Growth Plan group lead(s) to develop their proposals.

9. Next meeting dates:

Wednesday, 15th January, 4:30–6:30pm (Teams)

Devolution Summit, Tuesday 21st January, 8:30-12:30 (Park Royal Hotel & Spa)

Wednesday, 12th February, 4:30–6:30pm (Teams)