

BOARD MEETING

Minutes of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board Meeting held 18th May 2022 at 4.30pm by video conference call

Present:

Clare Hayward (CH)	Trevor Brocklebank	Cllr Louise Gittins	Eunice Simmons
Nicola Newton	Annette McDonald	Peter Broxton	Rupert Collis
Chris Hindley (CHi)	Nicola Dunbar	Alice Choi	Kath Mackay
Cllr Russ Bowden			

In attendance:

Philip Cox	Ian Brooks	Joe Manning	Pat Jackson
Sarah Williams	Alex Thompson (CEC, s151)	Rebecca Luck	Steve Park
Charlie Seward	Jane Traverse		

Apologies

Loren Jones	Cllr Craig Browne	John Downes	
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Members of the Public (for Part A)

Jan Chillery	Martin Wood	Ellie Cox	
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Agenda Item 1: Apologies and Introductions

1.1 CH welcomed Board Members and attendees making particular note that Jan Chillery, of Aaron Partners, and Martin Wood and Ellie Cox, of CLGU, were in attendance as members of the public. Apologies were received as above.

Agenda Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

2.1 No conflicts were reported.

Agenda Item 3: Public Presentation

3.1 JC provided a short introduction to her role with the Chester Business Club, which represents approximately 200 businesses and has a good dialogue with the LEP. Her presence was primarily to observe and help network.

Agenda Item 4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th March 2022.

4.1 The minutes of 16th March 2022 were agreed.

4.2 Actions had been completed or were addressed on the agenda.

Agenda Item 5: Board Sub-committee Reports

5.1 Employers and Skills Board. KM supported by PJ and SW gave an update which covered:

- The high number of vacancies in the labour market, coupled with a falling number of unemployed.
- The importance of information flow to keep both employers and job seekers aware of the changes in the market.
- The relationship between skills attainment and personal circumstances including location, receipt of free school meals and gender disparity in Digital and STEM careers.

5.2 Government has recently published its guidance for applications in respect of Local Skills Improvement Plans, with a deadline for applications on 6th June. This mechanism for grant funding provides an opportunity for employers to be at the heart of education working with providers. DfE want applications from employer bodies, e.g., Chambers, FSB, and there is a role for the LEP and ESB to co-ordinate those groups. NN said she felt it was important for LEPs to be involved and that Chambers should welcome co-leadership on production of an application. PC confirmed he has already held meetings with Phil McCabe (FSB), Debbie Bryce (West Cheshire and North Wales CoC) and Steven Fitzsimmons (Warrington and Co). Cheshire Business Group is meeting on 25th May, to discuss the bid process and the possibility of a single application for the region.

5.3 LG mentioned that many of the recently arrived Ukrainian refugees were highly skilled, and JT confirmed CEC was also looking into the opportunities for people with skills.

5.4 CCS&W is currently in the contracting phase of I.O.T.

5.5 The LEP has received its grant offer letter in respect of skills “bootcamps” though the name is considered a possible deterrent. The grant is just over £1M, a steering and implementation team is already established, and the initial focus will be on three areas, HGV, Green Energy and Digital. DfE have indicated that further rounds of funding might be available in the Autumn. ESB would welcome views from board members and their networks as to what skills the next round should target.

ACTION: Board Members

5.6 SW showed a short video summarising some of the LGF Funded Skills projects. NN said that colleges were re-thinking their engagement with employers and combining resources with e.g. Towns Fund. Our approach had been to focus on acquiring equipment and we are making sure pupils from disadvantaged areas also benefit from access to that “kit”. CH asked MW and EC to relay the message to Government that investment should not only target floor space.

5.7 SIGC. AM provided a summary of the recent consultation exercise which had engaged over 100 participants.

5.8 Digital Connectivity Board. With next month’s board discussion session focussed on the DCB, ND asked board members to prepare by considering what the priorities should be for digital connectivity and the DCB, whether the delivery plan is comprehensive, provide evidence of business requirements in less well served areas, e.g. rural, the opportunity for public sector backbone projects etc.

5.9 Marketing Cheshire Board. TB discussed that the MC board would meet the following day and as well as discussing the budget for 22-23, would begin to look at medium term planning. Focus has been on recovery of the visitor economy, corporate communications and sub-regional place marketing. There will be a strong campaign linked to the Jubilee. However there remains uncertainty regarding the as yet unpublished DMO review.

5.10 Business Growth Board. AC updated the board on a meeting with Ian Cass, Forum for Private Business, who has offered to survey his membership or disseminate messages regarding economic activity. Typically, he expects 400-500 responses to surveys they carry out.

5.11 LG mentioned that CWaC is offering seminars about social value and running a conference on the subject.

Agenda Item 6: Chief Executive's Report

6.1 PC added to his written report by highlighting that the LEP had been asked to support Local Authorities on their work towards SPF bids, with evidence gathered to prepare the LIS and more recently by Metrodynamics. There is an opportunity to emphasise the voice of business in setting priorities.

6.2 He confirmed that AECOM have been appointed to update the strategic outline business case on re-opening the Middlewich line to passenger traffic which, if it goes ahead, would connect Northwich and Sandbach and open up direct access to HS2 at Crewe for more towns in Cheshire.

6.3 The w/c 23/5 would see the launch of our plans for a Marmot region. 700 people have registered.

6.4 JT said CEC are waiting to hear if Crewe has been shortlisted for the GBR HQ and hopes to get further details for the format of ministerial visits. She emphasised the importance of spreading the message about Crewe beyond the immediate locality in advance of the public voting round, including to those areas that are unsuccessful in making the short-list.

6.5 PC/CH had attended an NP11 call recently and wished to pass on their thanks to the LA for the strong relationships which exist in the sub-region, which are often not matched in other parts of the country.

Agenda Item 7: Budget 2022-23

7.1. IB presented an updated version of the LEP and MC budgets which reflected the final settlements from DLUHC/BEIS for Core (-25%) and Growth Hub (-50%) funding for 2022-23 and included the agreed allocation (£1.05M) from DfE for skills bootcamps. Preparation of the budgets were continuing on the basis of retaining operational capacity through 2022-23. The latest changes had led to increases in the forecast deficits for the LEP to £586k and for MC to £114k. While these deficits were affordable from existing reserves, the estimates would reduce LEP reserves to £190k, £110k below the previously agreed minimum, and bring MC reserve close to the minimum of £130k.

7.2 While the board was generally supportive of the principles applied to prepare the budget, TB cautioned that for both organisations the % of reserves being utilised in a single year was high and that given the associated risk, the budgets should not be seen as a target. Rather that the executive should commit to mitigating the scale of the deficit and keep operational results under constant review during the year. IB explained that two possible mitigations would depend on the outcome of funding discussions with the Local Authorities in the context of the LEP review and for the LEP to avoid the use of the contingency expenditure budget.

7.3 AT agreed that an early approach to the LA to confirm their contributions to the LEP. He added his support to the proposal to avoid the use of cost contingency emphasising that the use of reserves in 2022-23 was something only available for one year only.

7.4 The budgets were approved by the board on the understanding that sufficient mitigation would be found to improve the out turn for 2022-23 to preserve operating reserves for the LEP at £300k or greater. TB would discuss the MC budgets with the MC board the following day.

Agenda Item 8: Delivery Plan

8.1 RL presented an updated version of the LEP/MC delivery plan 2022-23 which reflected further discussion and validation by the various sub-boards and the latest budget allocation. The formatting and imagery would be updated to achieve a publishable standard and final sign off will be requested

from the board at the June meeting. June’s board meeting will therefore be amended to have a public session.

Agenda Item 9: Any Other Business

9.1 The board was reminded of several events taking place within a few weeks, including the Pledge Showcase at Alderley Park, COP-26 follow on, Green Expo and Life Sciences Fund 2 launch.

Agenda Item 10: Date and Time of Next Meetings:

Board Additional Meeting and Discussion Forum: 13th June 2022, 4:30pm– 8.00pm at the Academy. Cheshire College South and West, Ellesmere Port – Forum Topic: Digital Connectivity – Priorities. ND and Ian Brooks to facilitate.

Board Meeting: 13th July 2022, 4:30pm– 6:30pm (Virtual MS Team)

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action arising	Action	Who	Complete?
16/3/22	Take forward recommendations to improve interaction with engagement board members:	Board members	Ongoing
16/3/22	Sub-boards to review and comment on relevant sections of delivery plan	Sub-board chairs	Complete
16/3/22	Circulate a list of events (being attended by LEP Board members)	Joe Manning	Ongoing
18/5/22	ESB would welcome views from board members and their networks as to what skills the next round of skills bootcamps should target	Board members	