**Note of Meetings of LEP Board and Board Committee Members to Discuss Economic Impact of Covid - 19**

1. LEP Board members had a virtual meeting on 24 March to discuss the economic impact of Coronavirus, and then a further meeting on 26 March at which non-Executive members of the Board’s sub-committees were also invited to attend. This note summarises the discussions and conclusions from both meetings

**Summary of Action Points**

* All Board and Committee members to use their business networks to share information and signpost support;
* LEP Committees to meet to discuss how their programmes could be adjusted to respond to the immediate impact of the crisis, including re-prioritising or re-directing funding, and to begin debating and planning for recovery;
* Committees to develop and share their initial ideas for recovery over the next two weeks in the form of a one page note, to be tabled in advance of the meeting setting out:
* Emergency response actions
* Recovery phase options
* Philip Cox to liaise with NPIF about their reluctance to engage with new clients

**Board Members Meeting 24 March**

1. Clare Hayward (LEP Chair) Chaired the meeting and outlined that its purpose was to focus on LEP activity in response to COVID-19 with particular reference to the Growth Hub and business support.
2. Philip Cox outlined the national context and the activity of the LEP network and NP11.
3. Andy Farrall outlined the response of to the pandemic from Local Authority partners and other public agencies, in particular their implementation of existing emergency pandemic plans focussing on public health, people care and children’s services, community infrastructure and essential practical public services. He also outlined the important but different role of the LEP, the Growth Hub and Marketing Cheshire in supporting businesses and in leading the recovery of the local economy.
4. Andy also outlined the activity of the Growth Hub in its support of businesses:

* Acting as a trusted source of information and advice:
  + Providing daily updates
  + Undertaking a business survey
  + Supporting businesses to access Government finance and funding
  + Supporting the hospitality and tourism sectors via Marketing Cheshire

1. Louise Gittens expanded on the work of the LAs:

* Treating COVID-19 as a public health emergency focusing on:
  + Adult Social Care
  + Supporting others in isolation
  + Community response to the most vulnerable, Home Shielding (home deliveries)
  + The over 70’s
  + Volunteering via Voluntary Action
  + Logistics
* Working closely with the Growth Hub and the Government to provide financial support to business. She also suggested that the largest employers should be approached to build up a picture of potential lay-offs

1. Stephen Kinsey, Chair of the Business Growth Committee applauded the work of the Growth Hub and its web-based information and advice. He said it was well put together with very helpful links.
2. Stephen also outlined his key concerns about the impact of the pandemic:

* The classification of ‘essential’ businesses is causing confusion and needs clarification
* Rents and leases and the recent Government advice re leases.

1. In further discussion, the following points were made by Board Members:

* The Charities sector was being hit hard through;
  + Loss of fund raising
  + Loss of commercial income
  + Much higher workload
  + As with other businesses, needing to rapidly adapt to remote working
* Business Support needs to be clear, quick and simple;
* Colleges are endeavouring to provide as normal as possible learning environment albeit on-line;
* Concern about special needs groups;
* Mental health is a clear emerging issue;
* Implications for Apprentices of the withdrawal of on the job training;
* The logistics sector has had to deal with a massive increase in food deliveries, although that was beginning to subside;
* The logistics sector has been recruiting drivers from bus companies;
* The need to help smaller companies by reducing payment timescales;
* The visitor economy is almost fully closed, including the Chester Visitor Information Centre;
* Marketing Cheshire is focusing on providing the communications hub role for the LEP, the Growth Hub and the visitor economy;
* Speed and ease of access to Government support packages will be key;
* The speed at which the NHS has transformed its operations has been very impressive;
* There is a major issue with the staffing of the care sector. One option would be to re-employ staff from the hotels sector;
* The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund is unwilling to engage with new clients. Philip Cox undertook to liaise with NPIF.

**Board and Sub-Committee Members Meeting 26 March**

1. The following additional points were made during the meeting of Board and sub-committee members:

* Craig Brown briefed the meeting on Cheshire East’s Business Helping Business Platform;
* Processes developed to help businesses were confusing and overcomplicated. Speed and minimisation of audit requirements are very important;
* The LEP could play a role in helping firms re-think their business models;
* C&W should look across the country to identify and emulate areas which are finding innovative ways of supporting businesses;
* A number of firms in C&W could help with the production of ventilators;
* The tourism and hospitality sectors face very real challenges;
* The need to match businesses needing people and technology to businesses shedding people and with technological solutions;
* the need for a fair deal for the self-employed, albeit that a Government announcement was expected the following day which the Growth Hub needed to publicise;
* the need to develop a plan for recovery;
* Good news stories will emerge of companies that have been helped through this crisis by the LEP and the Growth Hub. These should be highlighted in the LEP’s communications

1. Summarising both meetings, Clare Hayward said that the LEP needs to look at its priorities during this time and be agile and pragmatic to reprioritise as required. She also asked:

* All Board and Committee members to use their business networks to share information and signpost support;
* LEP Committees to meet to discuss how their programmes could be adjusted to respond to the immediate impact of the crisis, including re-prioritising or re-directing funding, and to begin debating and planning for recovery;
* Committees to develop and share their initial ideas for recovery over the next two weeks in the form of a one page note, to be tabled in advance of the meeting setting out:
* Emergency response actions
* Recovery phase options

1. It was agreed that a further Board meeting would be held just before or just after the first weekend in April to review proposals from Committees to re-prioritise their programmes