**Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board Meeting**

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| **Agenda Item:**  | **5** |
| **Subject:** | **Chief Executive’s Report May 2019** |
| **Author:** | **Philip Cox** |
| **Date:** | **16 October 2019** |

Summary

1. The political landscape is no clearer than it was when I wrote my last report. Ministers are continuing to make spending and other commitments – including to publishing a White Paper on devolution, even though few, if any, of them will be implemented before a General Election. Similarly, the Growth Hub is working hard to prepare C&W’s businesses for a “no deal” Brexit, even though such an event seems to be ruled out by the Benn Act! Alongside this, we have had excellent news on funding for Accelerate and Marketing Cheshire is playing an ever stronger rule in delivering Cheshire and Warrington’s economic objectives.

Devolution

1. Following on from the Prime Minister’s speech at the NP11 conference in Rotherham, at the Conservative Conference, Sajid Javid, the Chancellor, committed the Government to coming forward with a White Paper on further devolution in England, which he positioned as a key plank in rebalancing the economy.
2. Everything that Ministers have said recently suggests that they have decided to put their weight behind the Mayoral devolution model, in contrast to Theresa May’s administration which was beginning to accept that other models could be just as effective. There have also been suggestions that the Government is interested in adjusting some boundaries, in particular allowing some cities to expand.
3. In light of Government’s renewed interest in devolution, the three LAs and ourselves have been looking at how a future devolution deal for Cheshire and Warrington would be shaped. The starting point is the devolution proposal submitted to Government in 2017, but updated to take account of everything that has happened over the last two years, including our emerging Local Industrial Strategy. In the current febrile political environment, the key is to be as well prepared as possible for any eventuality.

Brexit

1. The Growth and Skills Hub has taken the lead on Business Readiness across Cheshire and Warrington in preparation for a no deal BREXIT on 31st October. We have a specific web page which has had almost 1,000 views over the last 3 weeks. The social media campaign we have run has also been viewed over 2,000 times.
2. The LEP has supported Chambers to access Business Readiness Funding which has now been approved. Coverage for the entire Cheshire and Warrington area has been secured and businesses will be able to attend several events which will be publicised over the coming days as well as access one to one support from the Growth Hub on BREXIT related issues. We these have undertaken more than 20 of these face to face diagnostics in the last 3 weeks.

Accelerate

1. DWP last week approved the funding for Accelerate – our virtual Institute of Technology. This is excellent news and reflects an incredible amount of hard work by Pat Jackson and by Charlie Woodcock at the University, the Accountable Body. There is still some work to do to get the formal funding agreement signed, but once that is in place we will be able to publicly launch the programme, which will provide training in STEM and digital skills to 19000 learners over the next three years.

Thomas Cook

1. Figures provided by DWP suggest that more people were made redundant in Cheshire and Warrington than in any other area as a consequence of the closure of Thomas Cook. We were therefore invited to join the Ministerial Task Force set up to deal with the closure. With our area creating jobs twice as fast as the population is growing, our main focus is on making sure that employers and the people who have lost their jobs are put in touch with each other, with our Accelerate programme offering a potential route to help people get any additional training they need for new roles they are offered.

AGM / Economic Summit

1. This year, for the first time, every LEP is required to hold an Annual General Meeting. Ours takes place on 17 October at Alderley Park, and to avoid it being a dry and, frankly, rather boring event attended by about three people, Catherine Walker and the Marketing Cheshire team have put together an exciting and engaging Economic Summit, with keynote speeches from Mark Gregory, Chief Economist at EY, and Julian Stubbs, who, having successfully branded Stockholm as the capital of Scandinavia, will talk about the role of place in economic development. All Board members received an email from Christine inviting them to the event, so hopefully as many as possible will be able to attend.

Chair and Deputy Chief Exec Appointments

1. Odgers Bernstein have been appointed to help us find a replacement for Mark as our Deputy Chief Exec and have given us a timetable which envisages an appointment being made in the first week in December. In the meantime, Andy Farrall is back from the Greek Islands and, alongside work he is doing for us on the sub-region’s housing strategy, has already begun having meetings to ensure that he can “hit the ground running” when he takes over , temporarily, from Mark on 2 December.
2. We have also received bids from three firms interested in running the search for Christine’s replacement. These are being assessed and an appointment will have been made by the time of the Board meeting.

Marketing Cheshire

1. Marketing Cheshire’s new approach to Business Tourism is already paying dividends.  Since the appointment of our new Business Tourism manager we have secured three conferences for the region.  One of those is an international Hydrogen Mission Innovation event, which will bring experts from around the globe (from USA, China, India, Saudi Arabia etc.) to the sub-region next month, an event that aligns perfectly with our Local Industrial Strategy.
2. Following discussions with Arts Council England, Creative England and other industry bodies, Marketing Cheshire is beginning to think about a cultural strategy for the sub-region and in so doing will fulfil the commitment the LEP made in the Quality of Place Strategy.  The strategy will be developed alongside the work that MC are doing on Place Marketing and Inward Investment.
3. In the more immediate term MC hosted their annual awards at the Mere Hotel on 3 October. They were very successful, and included the presentation of a special award to Jodrell Bank in recognition of its World Heritage Site status. Next up is the Christmas Market in Chester. The chalets sold out in record time (we even have a waiting list) and we will be looking to build on the success of last year, when we were listed in the UK’s top 10 Christmas markets.

Committee Appointments

1. A full list of members of our sub-committees, including the local authority members, is attached. We are currently canvassing a date for an opportunity to get all the board and committee members together.