

## MINUTES OF WLEP FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK (FAR) COMMITTEE

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September (10:00 – 12:00)

Meeting at Bishop Fleming Offices, Worcester.

### PRESENT:

Chris Walklett (Chair)	(CW)	Partner, Bishop Fleming
Tony King	(TK)	Private Sector Representative
Cat Lewis	(CL)	Kidderminster College
Steph Simcox	(SS)	Worcestershire County Council (ONLINE)
Gary Woodman	(GW)	Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership

### APOLOGIES:

N/A

### IN ATTENDANCE:

Luke Willetts	(LW)	Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership
Helena Augosti	(HA)	Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership

AGENDA ITEM	ACTION
<b>1. Welcome and Apologies</b>	
1.1 CW welcomed the FAR Committee members.	
1.2 CL was welcomed to the committee as the new FE rep, introductions were made.	
<b>2. Notification of Declarations / Conflicts of Interest</b>	
2.1 CW declared interests in Worcestershire County Cricket Club in fact they are a client of Bishop Fleming.	
2.2 TK declared that his son is now working for The Careers Hub.	
2.3 No other interests declared by FAR Committee.	
<b>3. Actions from Previous Meeting</b>	
3.1 GW confirmed that the WCCC Social Value Loan has been completed, to include rooms, packages, use of players and advertising boards etc.	
3.2 WLEP Chair Paul Walker has now been appointed and has started.	
3.3 GW also informed the committee that WLEP passed the annual performance review, as in met requirements.	
<b>4. OSPB Update</b>	
4.1 LW discussed the annual assurance process, commenting that it's focus of questions from the Panel seemed to be on District Council Representation on the WLEP Board. This would have to be considered against forthcoming government guidance on transition of LEP responsibilities into upper tier authorities. Retaining the balance of the Board as a business-led entity	

would therefore increase the size of the Board. Further information is likely to follow in the form of correspondence from the District Councils to the LEP.

4.2 LW also informed the committee that Local Councillor Richard Udall had suggested to LW that he was keen to work with the WLEP on the possibility of co-operatives in Worcestershire.

4.3 The committee discussed this possibility and concluded that there were already major players already nationally and in industry, such as agriculture, food & drink etc, so they believed there was no need for another.

4.4 TK & CW believe that a partnership route would be a better approach. This would also help others to understand the value that the WLEP adds.

**LW / GW**

**Action** – report on progress related to these two matters at the next FAR Committee.

## 5. **Government Letter**

5.1 At the Chancellor's budget on 17<sup>th</sup> March at the Chancellor budget, the government announced that they were 'minded to' ceasing funding for LEP's.

5.2 Following evidence gathering exercise, Government wrote to LEPs and Local Authorities confirming that they set to move LEP functions to upper tier authorities, which means the LEP's going forward will be under control of combined authorities, in our case Worcestershire County Council, this will happen in April 2024, meaning the WLEP is currently in a transition period.

5.3 The WLEP Board are aiming to keep the current structure and funding in place until March 2025. This puts us in a better position than other LEP's in the England, with some closing and some only operating Growth Hubs moving forward.

5.4 TK asked the committee if WLEP is a full legal entity, to which the answer was no.

5.5 GW confirmed that a transition plan would be required to manage the process and ensure loose ends are tied up.

5.6 GW also stated that the partners still see the WLEP as the facilitator and view it as neutral, while this is still the case, then it's still got a role.

5.7 CW asked GW & LW if they wanted him to take these thoughts to the Chamber of Commerce Board, GW responded that there needs to be a conversation with Business representative organisations to ensure co-ordination, collaboration, and communication.

5.8

CW discussed the future of WLEP, in that there will always be stakeholders, education, business and a need for infrastructure – where someone will need to bring these stakeholders together, maybe moving forward WLEP becomes a convenor, bringing the right people together for a conversation when needed.

**5.9**

CW then asked SS what the Council's view on this was.

**5.10**

SS replied that while there is a Director of Economy that has an interest in the WLEP's work, then they can absorb this when the changes are made. SS has consulted the legal department on the operation of the WLEP, this still needs to be decided, however, the boards will more than likely switch to advisory boards only and not be the decision makers.

**5.11**

SS also wanted it noted that when the transfer is made, that everyone needs to be happy, and no partner put in a vulnerable position.

## **6. Q1 Report**

**6.1** SS updated the committee on the WLEP's current financial status, informing them that it is a positive report Q1 report, mainly down to LW & GW's hard work.

**6.2** There has been an underspend on the budget, so no need to pull from reserves (£1M in there) and in fact money has been added to the reserves.

**6.3** SS also informed the committee, that she has recommended to Cabinet that the reserves are ring fenced for the continuation of the WLEP from April 2024 onwards, however it is a recommendation only.

**6.4** CW asked if there is funding to invest in the legacy of the future LEP branding, SS confirmed there may be from the Growing Places Fund.

**6.5** CL then suggested that moving forward there needs to be consistency between the districts in their strategies. GW & LW confirmed they are working hard to get this done.

**6.6** The committee then discussed outstanding loans to the WLEP that will need work on before the switch to WCC in April.

**Action** – to meet with Richard Barnes from Select Research.

**GW**

## **7. FAR Committee**

**7.1** LW confirmed that TK is stepping down and therefore there was a vacant seat on the committee. He also confirmed that the WLEP Board agreed to take the seats down from 7 to 5 and that Chris will remain as Chair for another 12 months – CW agreed to this.

The committee thanked TK for his service.

7.2 CL took a seat on the committee from the WLEP Board – the committee welcomed her.

7.3 LW put the remaining vacant seat out to the WLEP Board to volunteer, no-one did.

**Action** – Co-opt a new member to the committee.

**LW & GW**

## 8. Risk Register

8.1 LW presented the Risk Register to the committee and between them, adapted and changed the register, based on the current situation of the WLEP and its transition period.

8.2 Updated Risk Register is attached

**LW**

## 9. Forward Plan for Next Meeting

9.1 GW believes that the FAR Committee performs the function of being able to deep dive across the WLEP, reports (E.G. Growth Hub report) can be brought to the committee as there is more time to review than at the WLEP Board meeting.

9.2 The committee were asked what they would like to see.

9.3 CL replied that she would like to see UKSPF reports, as they are new and complex. Also there needs to be clarification of what the purpose of the WLEP is going forward and where it sits next to the CoC.

9.4 CW wants the committee to carry on supporting the board maintaining key stakeholders to get together to help with the transition.

9.5 SS is not available for the next meeting, so Roxanne Small (RS) will be covering this meeting.

**Action** – UKSPF Reports to be brought to the committee and the committee to let RS know if there is more needed at the next meeting than just the report.

**LW & GW**

## 10. AOB

10.1 None.

## 11. Date of Next Meeting

11.1 **8<sup>th</sup> November (Q2 2023/2024) 10:00 – 12:00 pm.**