

## 6 Worcestershire LEP Chair Recruitment

### **WLEP BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

The Board is asked to:

- Note that the current WLEP Chair is approaching end of term, and that the WLEP Board meeting in May 2022 will serve as Chair's final meeting;
- Review and discuss future recruitment strategy for a replacement WLEP Board Chair in context of National LEP Review outcome; and
- Agree next steps and timeline.

### **6.1 Background**

- 6.1.1 In accordance with the National MCA/LEP Assurance Framework (NAF) published by Government, and WLEP's own Local Assurance Framework (LAF), WLEP Board members (or Non-Executive Directors, (NEDS)) are initially appointed on a three-year term of office. This can be extended by up to a further three years, subject to WLEP Board and BEIS agreement.
- 6.1.2 Where there are extenuating circumstances, this can be reviewed with BEIS on a case-by-case basis to allow for additional extension to a NED's individual term of office.
- 6.1.3 In 2020, and again in 2021, the UK government published several exemptions to the NAF due to the impact of COVID-19. This included matters relating to Board composition and extending terms of office and relaxing the requirement to fill vacant roles due to the difficult circumstances initially associated with COVID-19 but then latterly the lack of clarity surrounding the outcome of the National LEP Review.
- 6.1.4 In March 2021, Nick Baldwin and Chris Walklett both stepped down from WLEP Board due to coming to the end of their term. Nick Baldwin also served as vice-chair to the Board (private sector). Julie Snell and Jeremy Cieslik were appointed to the WLEP Board in April 2021 as replacements to the vacant roles, but it was decided not to reassign the vice-chair responsibility until the outcome of the National LEP Review.
- 6.1.5 Later that year, in July 2021, Nicola Whiting stepped down from the WLEP Board, due to relocating outside of the county. Nicola also served as Diversity champion for WLEP Board.
- 6.1.6 Due to the ongoing National LEP Review, WLEP Board decided not to appoint a replacement NED until the conclusion of the Review was known. The Diversity champion role also remains vacant. Therefore, the WLEP Board are currently operating with 1 vacancy.
- 6.1.7 Finally, in March 2021, Mark Stansfeld agreed to extend his term of office as WLEP Chair until the conclusion of the LEP Review. Each of these changes to the WLEP Board governance structure have been discussed, agreed and formally communicated to BEIS along the journey, including at Annual Performance Review (APR) and Mid-Year Conversation (MYC) meetings.
- 6.1.8 Now that the Levelling Up White Paper (LUWP) has been published and Government have committed to a continued role for LEPs, Mark has formally communicated to the WLEP Board his intention to step down and let someone new take this fantastic opportunity forward.

6.1.9 The LUWP stated *“The UK Government is encouraging the integration of LEPs and their business boards into MCAs, the GLA and County Deals, where these exist. Where a devolution deal does not yet exist, LEPs will continue to play their vital role in supporting local businesses and the local economy. Where devolution deals cover part of a LEP, this will be looked at on a case by case basis. Further detail on this transition will be provided in writing to LEPs as soon as possible.”*

## **6.2 Next Steps and Timeline**

- 6.2.1 The letter from Government which outlines further guidance on the next steps for closer integration between LEPs and local democratic institutions was received at the close of play on Thursday 31 March 2022, which has not provided a great deal of time for its content to be reviewed and digested.
- 6.2.2 In response to the Levelling Up White Paper and central government’s framework for devolution, it is important to note that the immediate view of the political leadership across the seven Local Authorities in Worcestershire is not to pursue a devolution deal in the short-term.
- 6.2.3 In light of the WLEP Board’s decision, taken in January 2022, to maintain local LEP delivery and momentum into 2022/23, the Board are now asked to consider the preferred local approach for addressing the following roles:
- Appointment of a replacement WLEP Chair
  - Appointment of a vice-chair (private sector)
  - Appointment of a Diversity champion
- 6.2.4 The proposed recommendation is to proceed with a recruitment process for Mark’s successor with the intent they will be in position for May/June. It is also proposed that the Chair role is recruited on a fixed term 2-year commitment to ensure we attract candidates that can see longevity in the opportunity.
- 6.2.5 It is intended that the recruitment process would be managed using internal resources and on the following timeline:
- 5 April 2022 – WLEP Board decision
  - w/c 11 April – Advertise vacancy
  - 15 May – Deadline for applications
  - 16/17 May – Shortlist candidates
  - w/c 23 May - Interviews
- 6.2.6 Following the outcome of the National LEP Review, it is important that messages are managed proactively to continue to champion the role of the LEP, as defined by Government:
- Embed a strong, independent and diverse local business voice into local democratic institutions.
  - Carry out strategic economic planning in partnership with local leaders that clearly articulates their area’s economic priorities and strengths
  - Continue to deliver several functions on behalf of government departments, shaped by the local business voice where relevant i.e. Growth Hubs, International trade and

investment activity, local business intelligence, careers hub delivery, local skills analysis, and monitoring and assurance re: existing local growth programmes/funding

- 6.2.7 The WLEP Executive Team have drafted a proposed recruitment pack for the WLEP Chair role, for consideration by the Board, to support the discussion. This is attached as a separate appendix.

**Luke Willetts**

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