WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 20th September 2024
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: Worcestershire County Cricket Club, New Road, WR2 4QQ.

PRESENT:

Paul Walker	(PW)	Chair Worcestershire LEP
Jennifer Long	(JL)	Vice Chair- Director, Ice Blue Marketing and Design
Gary Woodman	(GW)	Chief Executive, Worcestershire LEP
Cllr Simon Geraghty	(SiG)	Leader of WCC and Cabinet Member for Finance
Jeremy Cielisk	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Cherie Clements for Michelle Dowse)	(CC)	Vice Principal of Heart of Worcestershire College (sub

IN ATTENDANCE:

Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP
Helena Augousti	(HA)	Executive Assistant, Worcestershire LEP
Steph Simcox	(SS)	Head of Finance, Worcestershire County Council
Christopher Day	(CD)	Leader of Wychavon District Council
Ian Edwards	(IE)	Director of Economy (Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Council (sub for Cllr Julie Wood))
Alex Collins	(AC)	Area Lead DBT

APOLOGIES:

Sue Jordan	(SJ)	Non-Executive Board Member
Jane Britton	(JB)	Director of Communications & Participation, University of Worcester
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College.
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon
Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch Group
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Leader of Bromsgrove District Council (Rep for N Districts)
Cllr Julie Wood	(JW)	Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Economic Development and Tourism (Rep for the S Districts) (ONLINE)
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair/Lead for WLEP Innovation Board
David Blake	(DB)	Managing Director of Worcester City Council (Cex Rep)

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	**ACTION**
1.1	**PW** welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
1.2	**PW** asked for any new declarations of interest.	
1.3	No new interests declared.	

2.	**Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**	
2.1	**Matters Arising**: Innovation catapults: **JC** clarified that he was talking about possible parallel activity, and tapping into what government is already doing. Work in progress. Will be visited again at the upcoming Innovation Board.	
2.2	The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.	
	Action: bring information on Innovation Catapults to next meeting.	GW/LW.
3.	**Investment prospectus**:	
3.1	**GW** presented to the Board an outline of the findings from the evidence base review and the continued relevance of the Plan for Growth 2040 strategy, in relation to the Worcestershire priorities and key issues that need addressing. During the presentation the following comments were made:	
3.2	**JC** commented on the core metrics and are they, still the same metrics now as 4 years ago, because if so we have to focus on these core elements. Innovation within the County is challenged, Worcestershire Growth Hub (WGH) is doing a great job, Skills is market leading. The metrics though need updating.	
3.3	**PW** commented that there needs to be context around the plan, what is it we are looking to do, once we know that, it will make a difference to the metrics. Is what we're proposing with investment and the focus of the plan, going to drive economy for the county? Need to keep that in mind.	
3.4	**SG** commented on the metrics: a new government, means a new policy framework will impact the plan. We have already seen announcements on housing numbers, therefore the LEP could change its metrics across a 2030 and 2040 timeframe. Where the LEP has a role to play is in ensuring the employment site needs to match the expansion of housing.	
3.5	**JL** commented on productivity and if this was still at the heart of the new government policy, there are a number of barriers still impacting business performance; still coming out of Covid; the introduction of hybrid and home working. This affects productivity also added energy costs, minimum wage rises means businesses are paying more to do business.	
3.6	**CD** commented that the government tax policy can mean some businesses, who will keep below the VAT thresholds etc which in turn affects growth.	
3.7	**CD** then commented that maybe we need to look at what other LEP's are doing. Are they doing better than us? What do our customers want and are we filling these needs.	

3.8	**PW** commented that there is a distinction between the things that the WLEP can do, to have a direct impact on our economy and what our partners can do to have a direct impact on our economy. Partners can lobby government for changes e.g. VAT. **PW** then commented that benchmarking against other regions and LEP's, we have done better than average.	
3.9	**CD** commented that the County Council and District Councils are responsible for the local infrastructure and to support businesses to grow. As we expand, we need to make sure that the infrastructure and jobs also grow.	
3.10 3.11	**PW** commented that housing alone doesn't drive growth, it is the people in those houses that drive growth. Inward investment is a huge part of this, there needs to be more inward investment. Is there the ability, currently, to make an offer for big companies to come to the County. **PW** clarified that the Investment Plan makes some assumptions on what the possible outcomes/criteria will be, for any funding that might come from the new Government	
3.12 3.13	**SG** commented that the Investment Plan, needs to shout about the Partnership, most regions don't have one and so we shouldn't underestimate the impact of this, when selling to companies & Government. Government might decide to invest in regions who already have this in place to achieve their outcomes in a small timeframe.	
3.14	**CD** commented that he also sits on a number of local Health Boards and on the whole, we are a healthy County, so this could be shouted about too. The Council can deliver a great place to live, but business has to create the job and the wealth.	
3.15	**SG** commented that it's not just about the metrics, but can be about health, education etc. Need a narrative around the Worcestershire environment and investors wanting to bring their families.	
3.16	**PW** commented that the story of Worcestershire based on the evidence report, therefore highlighting the opportunities and the areas that need improvement.	
3.17	**JS**: commented that some local projects are relying on Government funding, and if these projects don't go ahead then potential investors in the County might lose confidence.	
	Action: **Agreed** – the need to translate this into a compelling case for investment - to tell our Worcestershire story. The timescale for production will be early / mid-October - to produce initial 'glossy' document which tells the story. There is a need to augment the story with key priority projects list for investment (cap and rev), which will follow by late Oct.	**GW/LW**

4.	**<u>Service Delivery proposals 2025/26</u>:**	
4.1	**LW** presents to the Board the national context and the impact this was having on local uncertainty – meant that in order to keep the services together for another financial year – whilst central government policy and decision making around funding becomes clearer. The meeting was then opened for comments and questions.	
4.2	**SS** commented that the delivery proposal will exhaust majority of reserves, meaning there will be no more available if WLEP want to carry out additional projects etc. Worcestershire County Council will need a cabinet decision within the finance paper.	
4.3	**PW** commented that the staff need confidence that they have a horizon to March 2026, otherwise will lose their confidence and expertise, and then services will struggle to recruit.	
4.4	**SG** supported the paper and its positioning of the worst case scenario of zero government funding to back economic growth. This was unlikely but nevertheless the ability to take the risk out of the system, with this decision and not be beholden to the government timings will be helpful.	
4.5	**PW WLEP** Board agreed **with the recommendation**: - To, in principle, proposed use of reserves to underpin delivery in 2025/26 - To continue to monitor/note future HMG budget and policy announcements re: LEP transition, GH, KAM, and UKSPF plus any new associated funding streams/policies - This proposal is based on a working assumption that any HMG cash allocated is to be used before local sources - To seek agreement in principle from DC partners re: commitment to existing WLEP services in event of UKSPF extension – i.e. BetaDen, WGH, SkillsBoost - To note existing skills initiatives are outside scope of this budget - skills budgets have historically been matched by WCC e.g. Youth Hubs, CEC, Employability (DWP) - And finally, retain existing WLEP brand until further clarity/mandate from HMG.	
5	**<u>Business lists</u>**	
5.1	**LW** presented the previous discussions held on this topic, and proposed a list of 67 potential high-growth companies was targeted by WGH with a report back to WLEP Board on progress in early 2025.	

	The meeting was opened to comments and questions.	
5.2	**PW** commented that Worcestershire Growth Hub (WGH) can't help a business that doesn't want help, so should focus on those that do want the support, which puts our limited resources in the right place. The better that we understand the business market, the better support we can offer through the WLEP/WGH and the better evidence for steering future direction.	
5.3	**IE** commented that it would be interesting to talk to the businesses that have grown and didn't want help from WGH.	
5.4	**JL** asked what the measures are for quantifying a growth business. If it is just measured on employee numbers and turnover, are we potentially missing out on recent growth businesses – because the data might not be available yet. Also, might be worthwhile to focus on growth sectors and the companies within these identified sectors e.g. IT.	
5.5	**GW** clarified that the Business List is dynamic data and can be changed and adjusted accordingly.	
	It was agreed that feedback from the list would come to a future Board meeting to discuss findings.	LW
6	**<u>Comms Update</u>**	
6.1	**GW** presents to the Board.	
	The meeting was opened to comments and the Board supported the activity and note the success of various events and campaigns.	
7	**<u>AOB</u>**	
7.1	**PW** updated the Board on The Malvern festival of Innovation, which is virtual this year Malvern Hills District Council (MHDC) supported with MSHP as well.	
	It launches on 1st October.	
	<u>Action</u>: email with access link once it's gone live.	HA/PW
7.2	**LW** updated the Board on developments to explore potential of an Angel Investment Network which has an initial cohort of 25 HNWs, and a deal with British Business Bank (BBB) to give funding to provide capacity. The partners are WLEP, Herefordshire Council and BBB to develop a strategy for what a network would like, legal structure, focus etc.	LW

	Action: Update to be reported to the Innovation Board and WLEP Board.	
	Dates of Next meeting **29 Nov 2024 10:00 – 13:00**	