WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 23rd January
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: University of Worcester, Severn Campus, WR2 5JN.

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
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College.
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair/Lead for WLEP Innovation Board
Cllr Beverley Nielsen	(BN)	Rep for SW Districts
Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Rep for NW Districts
Cllr Alan Amos	(AA)	Rep for Worcestershire County Council
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Jane Britton	(JB)	Pro Vice Chancellor of Communications and External Affairs at the University of Worcester

IN ATTENDANCE:

Alex Price	(AP)	Communications & PR Manager, Worcestershire LEP
Helena Augousti	(HA)	WLEP
Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP
Judy Gibbs	(JG)	Director of Skills, LEP
David Blake	(DB)	Managing Director of Worcester City Council (Cex Rep)

APOLOGIES:

Jeremy Cieslik	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
Cllr Sharon Harvey	(SH)	Rep for N Districts
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon
Alex Collins	(AC)	Area Lead, DBT

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	**ACTION**
1.1	**PW** welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were given.	

1.2	**PW** asked for any new declarations of interest. No new interests declared.	
2. 2.1	**<u>Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising</u>** Minutes were read and confirmed to be accurate.	
3. 3.1 3.2	**<u>LIPF update</u>**. **LW** presented the updated LIPF bid information to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions. <u>LIPF comments/thoughts</u>: • BN queried that a number of the Health & Social Care (H&SC) jobs in Worcestershire economy are public sector, therefore in Worcestershire what is the potential for growth and innovation in this sector. 60% of Worcestershire firms in this sector are innovation active. Evidence from MediLink Midlands, who report demand from Worcestershire and Herefordshire health and care firms seeking access to accelerator and innovation support programmes they run. • Advanced Manufacturing (AM) can be put into the definition of the sector, as some of the businesses are AM by default. • Advanced Manufacturing: what sector are we talking about, the more we drive towards decarbonisation we are driving more businesses towards China and the Far East, opportunities in this sector are disappearing. Figures are using the SIC classifications, therefore talking about classic manufacturing businesses. • Agreed that Worcestershire manufacturing sector (and digital and tech sector) should be positioned within the bid as enabling wider cluster growth using Health and Life sciences as the 'spearhead' sector – so it responds to the LIPF eligibility criteria for triple helix support. • Health and Life Sciences is aligned with one of the Industrial Strategy 8 sectors. • LW acknowledged that LIPF bid forces places to make a choice about the cluster they are seeking to grow and support – Worcestershire is a broad and diverse business base, and historically business support has typically been generalist to enable cross-sector support. Must make a choice of sector to be the spearhead but doesn't mean that we lose sight of other opportunities, as Worcestershire is so diverse, we need to pick and show that we know our strengths. • Defence is one of the IS-8 and we are strong in that area in Worcestershire; the triple helix must still apply and in defence there	**<u>ACTION</u>**

3.3	aren't the strong links with local Further Education (FE) & Higher Education (HE). LW referenced Defence and Security national deals which are still being planned by Government for in Autumn 2026. Worcestershire will continue to monitor these developments.
	• Acknowledgment that the bid needs to try and address following points:
	  o Need to make sure that we're not just looking at the sector, but clusters of business that are in the sector and their supply chain, so the definition is not too narrow.
	  o SIC codes and the other data sources need to be considered by also local knowledge.
	  o Sectors will change in the next 5 years and the SIC classifications are very traditional, clunky and miss certain businesses.
	  o Need to cross analyse between SIC codes with high growth businesses in Worcestershire.
	• MD made the point about proposed academia partners: don't forget Worcester Sixth Form College and WCG (Pershore College).
	• Timescale: Innovation board meeting taking place next Friday (30th January), stakeholder engagement to continue before EOI deadline on 12 February. Will provide an extraordinary update to the LEP board before EOI submission.
	• DB made observation about whether Life Sciences has featured historically in our growth strategy(s). LW referenced Health & Social Care is a cornerstone sector in our Plan for Growth; the label of health sciences is the National IS label, but clear cross-over. Needs to be linked back to the strategy in the bid, to show we have always had this sector at the forefront and is not latest 'fad'.
	
	DECISION: Board agreement to proceed with Health & Life Sciences sector for the LIPF bid.	

4. 4.1 4.2	**Get Worcestershire Working update:** **JG** presented to the Board on the Worcestershire plan. The meeting was then opened to questions. Comments: • Pride in Place funding for Worcester city: £20M over 10 years, the plan is being formulated now, but it must be community led. • The statistics for the % of adults who have never been in any form of employment in West Warndon is 30%. • Youth unemployment is going to get more significant for employers down the line, some youths are not getting either entry level or skilled roles, so when employers need them, they won't be there. Needs to remain a key priority of LEP's strategy.	**ACTION**

4.3	• Which of those priorities will have the biggest impact on the 80% employment target: youth should be the overall priority, because this will impact in the future. But it all intertwines. • Looking at the challenges of the curriculum reform, we run the risk of it getting even worse due to the confusing landscape of changing qualifications. • Long term sickness equates to 30% of economic activity, in Worcestershire that is 23k people. • Worcestershire economic inactivity has increased by 10k more than COVID, and is continuing to grow, that it isn't sustainable as the money isn't there. • Is there a solution to this. Sometimes the barrier is the people themselves, a change in their attitude and values needs to be addressed as well as we are doing what we can to help them. • We are lacking behind the rest of Europe with activity levels back to pre-covid levels, why are ours increasing? • 10-year programme in deprived areas, but we need to be engaging with the 8-year-olds now, who in 10 years will be the 18-year-olds thinking about their future. We need to safeguard against the next generation having the same issues. <u>Keep Britain working</u>. <u>Comments</u>: • This work looked at agile and flexible working and the impact of it. • Need to develop the right workplace culture and ethos, the connections made when being in the office are important – particularly for young people, as they are new into the 'world of work'. • The ability to get support is lessened with hybrid or remote. • When talking to the young people at the youth hub, the biggest issue being found is isolation in the workplace, social media and the negative comments etc. • Young people don't learn as much from 'not' being in the workplace.	
5 5.1 5.2	**<u>Communications/Re-branding Update.</u>** **AP** presented a general communications update to the Board outlining recent and planned activity across the LEP agenda. This was followed by a more detailed proposal about potential WLEP re-branding options.	**<u>ACTION</u>**

5.3	The meeting was then opened to questions.
	
	<u>Comments</u>:
	
	• The LIPF bid is not going to be adversely affected by utilising the LEP terminology within bid – this has been confirmed to the LEP Exec Team by UKRI – which neutralises immediacy of implementing any LEP rebrand.
	• Three proposed names were suggested:
	  o WEGB: Worcestershire Economic Growth Board (WEGB)
	  o Worcestershire Growth Company (WGC)
	  o Worcestershire Economic Partnership (WEP)
	• WGC discounted initially as felt it could lead to confusion with Worcestershire Growth Hub
	• Board was split between the other two options – however public sector reps in particular were supportive of rebranding away from LEP and urged Board to make the change (does not need to be linked to LGR)
	• Short discussion held about dynamic of rebranding as a Board, but having staff employed underneath the Board…some felt this was not an issue.
	
	<u>DECISION</u>: Option C: Worcestershire Economic Growth Board (WEGB) and Worcestershire Economic Partnership (WEP) were favoured options of the Board as the choice for re-branding going forward.
	
	<u>DECISION</u>: April 2026 decided as the launch by the WLEP Board.
	
	<u>ACTION</u> – work up a proposal for what these options would look like.
		AP

7 **7.1** **7.2**	**<u>Forward Planning:</u>** **LW** outlined LEP's forecast financial outturn position for 2025/26 and status for identifying income streams for a proposed 2026/27 LEP budget and forward plan to the Board. End of 2025/26 will see the cessation of UKSPF funding, and therefore Board was updated on collaboration exercise between LEP Exec and the Local Authorities following Worcestershire Leaders Board request to explore options for mitigating the impact of no UKSPF in 2026/27. The meeting was then opened to comments. <u>Comments</u>:	**ACTION**

7.3	• Forecast: issues: at this point, there is only £330k committed but 2025/26 budget was £2.2m, that leaves a big gap. • In previous years WLEP has had the certainty that comes with funds from government, but that is not the case for next financial year. • Need to think about this as a responsible employer. • Coming to the end of financial year (March 26) where we can make decisions – the one-off reserve provides short-term mitigation to the March cliff-edge funding scenario but need to be planning service provision 2026-2028 • The LIPF decision comes after the financial year ends. • DB asked whether the LEP reserves will be fully utilised: GW responded that the plan is to discharge all reserves by March 2028 and undertake activity to support the local economic growth and business support agenda. But current LEP reserve is not enough to maintain existing activity/service levels until March 2028. • What we have done in 25/26 will not carry on in the current situation. • If we've got to scale down, we need to be clear on what the priorities are. There was then a discussion with District stakeholders. <u>Comments</u>: • District Councils: there have been cuts to our budgets as well, they were keen to understand what they would get for the additional investment. • Might be a good idea to give the districts a menu or priority list with costs, to allow the districts to choose what they want to invest in. The letter before Christmas did this, we are looking for investment in Growth Hub, Betaden and Skills support. • Need to bring a narrative to the districts with a timeline etc. Resources are limited, so to do 6 different proposals across circa twenty project lines of activity would be too much. • In principle the districts want to carry on supporting WLEP but need relevant information to support their respective budget setting processes. The Board encouraged the districts to individually give an indication of potential funding, then further work could be untaken in partnership with the Districts to work up the required amount of information for a decision to be made.	

	• WLB process will provide clarity on LA engagement/appetite and information requirements – working with LEP Exec Team and LA Economic Development Officers • The outcome will inform future update to LEP Board, and 2026/27 LEP budget setting process.	
	Dates of Next meeting 2026: 5th March (Thursday) 29th May 31st July 25th September 20th November	