WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 26th September
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: HoW College, Deansway, Worcester, WR1 2ES.

PRESENT:

Jennifer Long	(JL)	Vice Chair- Director, Ice Blue Marketing and Design (CHAIR)
Paul Walker	(PW)	Chair Worcestershire LEP (ONLINE)
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College.
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon
Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch (ONLINE)
Jeremy Cieslik	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Rep for NW Districts
Cllr Alan Amos	(AA)	Rep for Worcestershire County Council
Jane Britton	(JB)	Pro Vice Chancellor of Communications and External Affairs at the University of Worcester
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Sue Jordan	(SJ)	Non-Executive Board Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP
Alex Collins	(AC)	Area Lead, DBT
Alex Price	(AP)	Communications & PR Manager, Worcestershire LEP
Darren Schrouder	(DS)	Worcestershire Growth Hub Manager
Helena Augousti	(HA)	Worcestershire LEP
Helen Mulvenna	(HM)	SkillsBoost Project Manager

APOLOGIES:

Steph Simcox	(SS)	Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Gary Woodman	(GW)	Chief Executive, Worcestershire LEP
Cllr Sharon Harvey	(SH)	Rep for N Districts
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair/Lead for WLEP Innovation Board
Cllr Beverley Nielsen	(BN)	Rep for SW Districts
David Blake	(DB)	Managing Director of Worcester City Council (Cex Rep)
Judy Gibbs	(JG)	Director of Skills, LEP

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	**ACTION**
1.1	**JL** welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were given.	
1.2	**JL** asked for any new declarations of interest. No new interests declared.	
2.	**Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**	
2.1	Actions from previous meeting: Previous actions will be covered in the agenda items for this meeting.	
3.	**SkillsBoost Update**.	**ACTION**
3.1	**HM** presented to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions.	
3.2	Question was asked around why the criteria for SkillsBoost was based on an employees address rather than the business, as this meant some employees could be upskilled and others couldn't. **LW** answered that that the UKSPF funding criteria was dictated by central Government and in case of skills funding, this was resident-focussed, which unfortunately has resulted in some cases where some employees in a business can be recipients and others (if non-resident to Worcs) may not.	
3.3	**KM** asked **AC** a question, after hearing the positive feedback/results for SkillsBoost (a UKSPF funded project) what the plan is for replacement UKSPF revenue funding to support these positive projects.	
3.4	**AC** replied that the current information from Central Government suggests that the UKSPF replacement will be built into new programmes and will feedback regarding the neighbourhoods.	
3.5	KM responded that the Government's plan for neighbourhood groups are a good idea (i.e. Pride In Place programme), but those groups won't necessarily understand business needs or skills needs and so unlikely to see similar projects conceived.	
3.6	• **MD** commented that from a provider point of view it would be helpful to understand what training has been sourced out of county and the reasons why? Could help local providers understand whether they could offer this within Worcestershire. LW responded, aggregated	

	information can be shared with local education and training providers (i.e. GDPR compliant) – and access will be equal to all providers.	
4.	**<u>Angels Network update:</u>**	**<u>ACTION</u>**
4.1	**CO** presented to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions.	
4.2	Board was very positive about progress made and felt this presents great opportunity for local businesses to access investment – something we know is a huge issue for local businesses.	
4.3	Calibre of the founders will be crucial – so Board agreed with principle of ensuring high quality founders are prioritised. Any drop in quality risks dissuading investors and undermining the angel network – particularly at this early stage.	
4.4	**LW** referenced that as the network develops, the team will naturally build up a better understanding of the angel investor profiles and their interests – which should hopefully aid the team's ability to serve up suitable founders and businesses at pitching events.	
5	**<u>Communications Update.</u>**	**<u>ACTION</u>**
5.1	**AP** presented to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions.	
5.2	**MD** asked if there was a SEND school event regarding Careers and whether this could be expanded to include FE colleges too.	
5.3	**AP** answered that there will be SEND version of the Skills Show and that the 'Life Beyond School' event is aimed at SEND students. Agreed to explore possibility of including FE colleges in event and/or looking at building this in for future events.	
6	**<u>Forward Planning.</u>**	**<u>ACTION</u>**
6.1	**LW** presented to the Board. The meeting was opened to comments and questions.	
6.2	**AA** commented that at the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting the message about the WLEP and its work was well received and positive – and that local argument was won in terms of local partners valuing the activity undertaken. Now the issue is funding. **AA** then offered that if there was anything he could do directly then he would.	

6.3	There was a discussion around District Council membership of the WLEP Board, headlines being: • Concern from private sector that previous discussions on this matter have intimated public sector wishing to take full control on decision-making which could undermine the value and time provided by private sector risking their dis-engagement from the partnership • Triple-helix partnership model of private, local government, and further and higher education sectors, is valued and key to supporting economic growth – but private-sector led nature of the LEP is a key principle which should be retained moving forward • Lack of DC membership on the Board means less understanding of the WLEP and associated activity from their perspective. • General consensus from LEP Board was that the Board were open to a discussion with DC's about extending membership, but that this should be reviewed once the future funding of the WLEP was secured.	
6.4	**SJ** commented that WLEP has a local voice through **PW** during the transition of local government reorganisation.	
6.5	**PW** responded that this transition may take years to embed, but in the meantime the priority must be to continue activity and get the message across to those that decide on funding streams, that without funding, activities cannot be maintained. This message has been magnified nationally through the Business Board Network, which has access to meetings at Ministerial level, with lead civil servants and other key partners.	
6.6	**LW** updated Board that plans are in progress to secure briefings with local Worcestershire MPs. All six have been written to in September, and dates being sourced for follow-up discussions.	**LW**
6.7	**JC** asked if there was scope to re-brand to a Business Board for example, if this would help to open more funding streams.	
6.8	**JL** responded that without knowing the focus of government or funding yet, there is the risk that WLEP re-brand and then have to re-brand again.	
6.9	**LW** reported still a handful of LEPs remain but will speak with others nationally which have re-branded to understand the impact of their decision.	
6.10	**JD** commented that it feels as though LEP has lost focus of the strategic economic outlook. **LW** responded and acknowledged this has in part occurred as a result in funding and policy changes from central government. Current focus is to try and secure continuation funding to ensure Worcestershire does not get left behind during Local Govt Reorganisation (LGR). Post-LGR and ahead of potential future devolution arrangements, the partnership will naturally then align to a more strategic overview.	

6.11 6.12	**PW** commented that the other risk of such short funding cycles is that skilled and knowledgeable staff leave WLEP and go elsewhere. **AC** confirmed that he would escalate the feedback to central government. There was a discussion around WLEP funding and central/local government, main headlines being: • There needs to be conversations with local Labour MP's in particular to find out what they would need to engage with the WLEP. • Articles picked up by local papers around the OSPB meeting has made the WLEP staff feel uncertain. • The case at the OSPB was made very well, local government is onside, however decisions will be made ultimately at central government level. **LW** confirmed that there are three sectors that need to input to get our message across to central Government. Representatives from LEP Board were asked to share key messages from their respective sectors to help inform the narrative that WLEP will utilise when briefing local MPs and wider stakeholders: • Public Sector. • Business. • Education. **Action**: A case be made for the impact of loss of funding for the WLEP and its activity. Those representatives on the WLEP Board from the three sectors, send LW impact statements to help with message to government.	**LW/Board**
7	**AOB** Board Decisions: 1. WLEP Board – proposal to extend membership for District Leaders. a. Open to discussion with DC's, once future funding of the WLEP is secured, but with proviso that there is a unified approach and recognising that there may be the need to then increase private business membership proportionately to maintain the Business led principle of the WLEP Board. 2. WLEP re-branding. a. **Action**: paper on re-branding at National Level to bring to the Board.	**ACTION** **GW/LW**
	Dates of Next meeting 2025: 28th November – 10am – 1pm. Venue: Thorlux Lighting (Redditch)	