WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 29th May
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: Malvern Hills Science Park, WR14 3SZ.

PRESENT

Paul Walker	(PW)	Chair Worcestershire LEP
Jennifer Long	(JL)	Vice Chair- Director, Ice Blue Marketing and Design
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair for WLEP Innovation Board
Steve Munn	(SM)	Worcester Bosch
Ben Mannion	(BM)	Managing Director, Hewett Recruitment (ESB Chair)
Sharon Smith	(SS)	CEO, H&W Chamber of Commerce
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Leader, Bromsgrove District Council
Cllr Daniel Walton	(DW)	CMR Economy and Tourism, Malvern Hills District Council
Cllr Lynn Denham	(LD)	Leader, Worcester City Council
Cllr Paul Middlesborough	(PM)	Substitute, Wychavon District Council
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College (ONLINE)

IN ATTENDANCE

Gary Woodman	(GW)	Chief Executive, Worcestershire LEP
Alex Price	(AP)	Marketing, Communications & PR Manager, WLEP
Helena Augousti	(HA)	WLEP
Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, WLEP
Judy Gibbs	(JG)	Director of Skills, WLEP
Ryan Protheroe	(RP)	Innovation Project Manager, WLEP
Ian Edwards	(IE)	Director of Economy & Environment, Malvern Hills & Wychavon District Councils (OBSERVER)
Sian Stroud	(SiSt)	Corporate Director, Planning & Governance, Worcester City Council (OBSERVER)

APOLOGIES

Jeremy Cieslik	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Jane Britton	(JB)	Pro Vice Chancellor of Communications and External Affairs, University of Worcester
Cllr Matt Dormer	(MD)	Leader, Redditch Borough Council
Cllr Adam Kent	(AK)	Deputy Leader, Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Richard Morris	(RM)	Leader, Wychavon District Council
Cllr Dan Morehead	(DM)	CMR Economic Regeneration, Planning and the Green Agenda, Wyre Forest District Council

1. Welcome and Apologies **ACTION**

1.1 **PW** welcomed the new board members to the meeting and board members introduced themselves.

1.2 **PW** asked for any new declarations of interest.

No new interests declared.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

2.1 No formal minutes recorded for March meeting, due to format being a presentation from the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) on work experience reforms for secondary school pupils, delivered as part of the Skills Expo event in March.

3. WLEP Board Governance.

3.1 **GW** presented the Governance proposal to the board.

The meeting was then opened to questions.

3.2 Governance comments/thoughts:

- MD reflected that the LEP's importance was local stability during a turbulent economic period globally, and nationally, alongside local government reorganisation (LGR) and retaining a focus on economic growth strategy.
- Role of WLEP to broker stakeholders and foster collaboration – there doesn't seem to be enough reference to that in the paper, LEP Board are doing this
- PW responded and acknowledged that LEP does this implicitly but agreed could be made explicit
- PM referenced the LGR period between May 2027 and March 2028, when there will be shadow authorities (either one or two) – suggested there is a **rationale to have shadow members from new Unitary(s) to have a seat but not have a vote. The Board Agreed.**
- JD made an observation, as one of the longest standing private members - in last 6 years the landscape has changed a lot, but the USP here is the long-term vision, we used to say what would the county look like in 10 years, want to see more of that.
- JD added no other forum in county is doing what the LEP does, which is business focused and strategic in terms of taking a long-term view about what the county should look like in 3, 5, 10 yrs time
- We need ideas and projects that are ready to go when funding and LA structure is decided.
- JL added that as a business the economic landscape and market conditions is so up and down at present, changes happening are stopping businesses from investing in their long-term future, but WLEP Board give that stability and it's important to the county.

- KM noted concerns that with no Mayor currently, and potentially not in place until 2030 or beyond, that someone needs to look at the local business picture, which WLEP does. Long term unemployed / NEET situation is concerning, need a long-term vision and plan.
- NEET issue requires multi-pronged effort between partners. Level of political uncertainty but economic development continues and that will move into the new structure.
- MD requested a review of ESB membership – to consider adding all FE colleges to group alongside Chamber due to LSIP alignment. JG responded and said review underway and will communicate outcome shortly.
- PW summarised this is an important paper that moves us forward, happy with the recommendations, collaboration and joint working should explicitly be referenced in future communications.
- Apparent that the key point is consistency for the board, there are significant change points coming up and will need to be disciplined with each change and understand that there might be subtle changes to WLEP governance arrangements needed at key milestone points in future (e.g. LGR decision, shadow elections etc.) suggest a formal review at each of these points to make sure that we are still on the right path.

DECISION: All recommendations within paper unanimously agreed by the board.

4. LIPF Bid decision and feedback: **ACTION**

4.1 RP presented to the Board on the Worcestershire LIPF bid, outcome, feedback and next steps.

The meeting was then opened to questions.

4.2 Comments:

- GW referenced that the winners all have a substantial back history, whilst we have typically been broad and diverse (reflecting business base). For LIPF, we picked something new (Health and Social Care), trying to move it forward and other geographies trying to do also, seemed to lose out too.
- LD commented that it is true to say that this was constrained as had to be aligned with national priorities – however supportive of health and social care focus due to strengths in city and wider county economy.
- RP stated that going forward government funding will be linked to the IS-8 priorities, so need to look to the future and work on accelerating our research ability.
- Acknowledgement from WLEP Board that a huge amount of work has gone into this, but the work that went into it can be built on for future bids. Back to earlier point on collaboration – MD queried whether we should get people around a table and see if there are any more bids available and use our expertise and experience to get it moving.
- LD stated that University of Worcester may not have the longest history in applied research but there are pockets of new and leading research projects in future areas such as dementia, sports and disability aids.

- Enormous potential to build on this bid – WLEP Innovation Board will do a lessons learned and next steps session to report back to WLEP Board in future.
- We have a large acute hospital networked with other hospitals. Research based consultants come here to carry on their research.
- NH closed item by reminding Board that it is important to remember that we are at the start of innovation journey here in Worcestershire, need to continue to add to the building blocks within the local innovation ecosystem which will drive innovation-based economic growth.
- Recommend a deep dive on this and can look at the future and what our strengths are.

ACTION: WLEP Innovation Board to undertake lessons learned exercise to inform future plan and start to develop consortium of local stakeholders to build vision and plan for sectoral focus (acknowledgement Worcs may need to nail our colours to a sectoral mast(s) in terms of innovation strategy). **LW / RP / NH**

5 Communications/Re-branding Update. **ACTION**

5.1 **AP** updated Board on key communications and events activity across the LEP since last meeting, and a forward look.

5.2 This was followed by presentation by **AP** & **JL** on proposals for rebranding WLEP.

The meeting was then opened to questions.

5.3 Comments:

- BM commented that Government can see that we are moving forward to grow, I like it, people don't recognise LEP's any more
- Even when called LEP's some didn't understand the enterprise part. So, this says exactly what we do.
- IE commented I don't think you can have growth without economy, can it just be economic growth partnership without the &?
- MD stated that she really liked it and the tagline 'Driving Worcestershire Forward' shows our message and our ambition especially outside of Worcestershire.
- LD felt driving may conjure images of cars which is not inclusive – suggested growing as alternative.
- However JL expressed marketing view that 'driving' in business terminology meant something different and would connect with businesses. From a business POV, in business you're driving forward all the time, change, evolve, adapt etc, that is something that businesses understand. Growing is more associated with nurturing and suggests taking more time.

- SiSt commented that whilst the implementation timescales seem sensible, the timing could potentially cause confusion if we launch single Worcestershire WLEP rebrand, at a time when potentially, Government make a decision on LGR. Need to consider messaging when implementing to avoid confusion.

DECISION: approve the transition from WLEP to WGEP (Worcestershire Economic Growth Partnership): **APPROVED**.

7 WLEP Budget 2026/27 / Delivery Plan. **ACTION**

7.1 **LW** presented report on 2026/27 budget and delivery plan to the board**.**

7.2 The meeting was then opened to comments.

Comments:

- PW thanked LW and team for work undertaken and made an observation that with increased number of different funding streams with ringfenced outcomes, WLEP are at risk of no longer being able to be as strategic, due to operational focus – risk that we are becoming constrained by the funding.
- JD stated that nationally, politically, the Government's priority has to be growing the economy, I think funding will come as otherwise we're going to struggle as a nation.
- LD asked a question on the Worcestershire Growth Hub criteria from DBT – have we now got the KPI's? LW explained that forward looking criteria from DBT yet to emerge. WGH is funded by both central government and local government partners. Local government and WGH have agreed local KPIs, so those will be delivered by team as agreed – this will need to be managed alongside national requirements once known. Will share updated on national piece once received.

DECISION: All recommendations within paper unanimously agreed by the board.

8 **County Economic Profiles and Insights.**

8.1 **GW** presented two newly developed data dashboards to the board. One on LGR geographies and one on potential devolution geographies.

8.2 The meeting was then opened to comments.

- JL questioned whether Beauhurst data, can be overlapped with WGH intelligence, which is 'real-time' via AI – to better inform future delivery. GW advised this is potential area to explore but we are constrained by resources. This is an area we are aware that MSA geographies are exploring using their funding.
- GW advised we are always testing and making sure the data is accurate. Accessing robust evidence beyond the normal accessible figures is important to economic strategy of the county, to drive conversations, interventions and priorities

- PW queried to what degree would our options of LGR, mean we need to do something different in terms of economic strategy, if there are 2 Worcestershire's (north/south)?
- PM advised that if there are 2 unitary councils, they are councils and have a wider remit around social care, transport, waste etc. There is still one Worcestershire, and there is still the need for a strategic economic voice from the WLEP.

Action: GW to distribute dashboards to the Board. **GW**

9. **AOB**

9.1 MD advised that this is her last meeting on WLEP Board as FE Principals attend on a rotational basis. FE Principals to agree new rep and communicate to WLEP in time for next meeting.

PW and Board members thanked MD for her contributions and support to WLEP Board during her term of office.

Dates of Next meeting 2026:

31st July
25th September
20th November