WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 1st December 2023
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: Speller Metcalfe Small Works Office, Chequers Close, Malvern, WR14 1GP.

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
Cllr Tom Wells	(TW)	Leader of Malvern Hills District Council (ONLINE)
Jeremy Cielisk	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
Nigel Hall	(NH)	The Digital Consiglere
Sue Jordan	(SJ)	Non-Executive Board Member
Cat Lewis	(CL)	Principal, Kidderminster College.
Jane Britton	(JB)	Director of Communications & Participation, University of Worcester
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon

IN ATTENDANCE:

Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP
Helena Augousti	(HA)	Executive Assistant, Worcestershire LEP
Alex Price	(AP)	Communications & PR Manager, Worcestershire LEP
Emma Hamer	(EH)	The NFU Representative.
Michael Goodall	(MG)	The FSB Representative (ONLINE)
Sharon Smith	(ShS)	The Chamber of Commerce Representative.
Jim McBride	(JM)	The Worcestershire Ambassadors Representative.
Steph Simcox	(SS)	Head of Finance, Worcestershire County Council

APOLOGIES:

Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch Group
Cllr Dan Morehead	(DM)	Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning & the Green Agenda (Rep for N Districts)

1.	**Welcome and Apologies**	**ACTION**
1.1	**PW** welcomes the Business Representative Organisations (BROs) to the Board Meeting.	
1.2	No new interests declared.	
2.	**Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**	
	Matters Arising	
2.1	**PW** agreed all actions done.	
2.2	The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.	

3.	**LEP Integration Plan**	
3.1	**GW** updated the Board on the Devolution Map, informing them, it shows the differing things happening with LEP's around the Country. It also shows that Worcestershire is in a stable position.	
3.2	GW updated Board that WLEP and WCC have submitted an Integration plan template as requested by Government, in compliance with 30 November deadline. This deadline meant that it was not able to circulated to Board beforehand.	
3.3	**GW** confirms that he will bring the emerging Budget & Forecast for 2024/2025 to the Board meeting on 26th January 2024 and further details on the integration of LEP functions to the March Board meeting. .	
4.	**Q2 Finance Report**	
4.1	**SS** confirmed that the WLEP's Q2 financial position is an improving one, an overspend was forecast when budget was set at start of the year with an agreed mitigation to draw down on reserves. Therefore, in Q2 the LEP budget position is reported as on track.	
4.2	**SS** also confirmed to the Board that the reserves are being held on WCC balance sheets, should they be needed for additional costs in the future, including for example, potential redundancies.	
4.3	**SJ** asked what **SS** thinks the key risks are financially? **SS** answered, that in her opinion, inflation, and the lack of clarity around timing and quantum of Central Government Funding are the main risks.	
4.4	**GW** mentioned the Autumn Statement, and that in it, the Government committed LEP core funding to LAs in 2024/25, Growth Hubs will have an allocation too, but at this point, there is no idea how much this will be. The WLEP are airing on the side of caution with the amount of funding that will be available and scenario planning for 24/25 budget setting.	
4.5	**SJ** enquired about the 'Levelling Up' policy and wonders if the North/South divide still exists. **SG** confirmed that the 'Levelling Up' is now tending to be project focussed.	
4.6	**PW** then talked about the LEP going forward with positivity with what they want to do when the funding arrives. Creating a plan now, which can be executed quickly when this happens.	

4.7	**JC** commented that he thinks it's a good idea to run through scenario's based on risks. **PW** confirmed this is already happening.	
5.	**<u>WLEP Strategic Comms Update</u>**	
5.1	**AP** updated the board on the following for the 2024 WLEP Conference: 1, The venue: Worcestershire County Cricket Club has now booked. 2. Date: has been decided and 'Save the Date' messages have been sent though the WLEP network and on social media – Friday 23 February 2024. 3. There will be two delivery partners, The Chamber of Commerce and Mercia Event Management who will support the hybrid element.	
5.2	**AP** then stated that the engagement work will start in a couple of weeks, the target list for this is currently being created.	
5.3	**AP** then listed the events going on around the county that WLEP have been involved in, main ones being The Worcestershire Apprenticeships Awards, Engineers Week, 'Life Beyond Schools' event and the Inclusive Worcestershire programme.	
5.4	**AP** ended the agenda item by confirming to the board that the WGH website is currently developing a 'one stop shop' page, with all county wide business events of WLEP + partners.	
5.5	**JD** then asked if there are any confirmed key speakers for the Conference. **AP** answered that intelligence gathering will direct who is approached. **AP** confirmed that communications to encourage attendance and viewing will be through social media, the 5,500 WLEP contacts and through WGH business visits.	
5.6	**NH** asked when an agenda will be available. **SG** raised a concern, that keynote speakers diaries can fill up quickly, and therefore urged **AP** not to leave it too late to enquire.	
5.7	**JC** then suggested that the contacts that the board members have, could be given to **AP** as some ideas for keynote speakers.	
5.8	**SJ** raised the issue of on average a 1/3 'drop out' on the day, she suggested one way to combat might be to have breakout sessions, so attendees, once committed are more likely to turn up.	
5.9	**SG** stated that the WGH message needs to be clear, therefore could they have a stand. He believes that there needs to be a shell plan shown to the board. **CL** then asked if there is the possibility of using a conference app.	

5.10	**PW** then ended the agenda item, by stating that AI could be the main focus of the conference, that there should be a compere on the day to help with 'flow' and that there could be 4 keynote speakers.	
5.11	**Action** – Agenda/template to be sent to the Board ASAP – AP for comments and speaker suggestions. Marketing and comms plan continue to build over December for delivery in the New Year	**AP**
6.	**Business Representative Organisations (BROs) Intel and Insights**	
6.1	**LW** started this agenda item by giving some background as to why the BROs are presenting to the Board. They were asked to present to the board on any challenges they face and business support that they might need, which the WLEP/WGH can help with. Intention was to help Board get a greater understanding of the Business Environment of Worcestershire via lens of the BROs and how we can potentially work better together.	
6.2	**PW** then carried on by stating the aim of the WLEP is to grow the local economy and address the low GVA p/head in the county. The BRO's might be able to give the board a clearer understanding if the WLEP are using their resources in the right way or help to identify how WLEP can better do this. First to present was Emma Hamer (**EH**) from the NFU. (presentation slides in appendix 1) The meeting was then opened to questions for **EH**.	
6.3	**JC** asked, has BREXIT been a threat or benefit for farmers. EH answered that it depends on the sector, labour has been detrimental, however it might also open them up to new markets, the trade deals can be damaging – this is a threat depending on the details.	
6.4	**PW** asked if 1 NFU member asks for support to improve productivity what would **EH** do. **EH** referred to the 7 point plan in her presentation, and three areas can really be improved by the local stakeholders, digital connectivity, access to grants and funding and local food supply chains., Next to present is Sharon Smith (**Shs**) from Chamber of Commerce. (presentation slides in appendix 1) The meeting is then opened to questions for **ShS**.	
6.5	**NH** asks what **ShS**'s top 3 priorities are for future working between WLEP/WGH/CoC etc. **ShS** answers with the following two: 1. Clarity on roles – so less duplication. 2. Referrals – the CoC is a membership organisation, given the not-for-profit legal status of the Chamber. .	

6.6	**JB** asked **ShS** if she can see any obvious duplications that the WLEP don't need to be doing. **ShS** answered that herself, **SG** & **GW** are conducting work on this and there is a shared understanding of role and remit between the partners.	
6.7	**PW** stated that together we need to try to get to the point of a single pathway, although this might not be possible 100%, can the WLEP make it more so, with an end plan that everyone works towards.	
6.8	Jim McBride (**JM**) from Worcestershire Ambassadors was next to talk to the WLEP Board. The main headlines from **JM** were: 1. Potential for inward investment trade delegation to appropriate international market. 2. Invited a discussion on inviting to Worcestershire vs sending delegation out (or both). 3. Potential of better signposting of BROs presence on Internet so can all be joined up.	
6.9	The meeting was then opened to questions from the Board.	
6.10	**JL** noted that through Midlands Cyber, there are contacts/connections in Baltimore, Braveria, S. Ireland and France, these connections can be used if necessary.	
6.11	**SJ** also noted that she believed that S. Ireland was an interesting proposition, with increased Growth in scale-ups and in Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals.	
6.12	**PW** then commented that we need to decide what Worcester is good at, then we can look to increase export or know what can be showcased to a delegation. **JC** suggested a trade fayre in the County and invite delegations.	
6.13	It was agreed that WLEP would bring an evidence base to the matter of inward investment and sector specialisms. Plus draw on Midlands wide data re investment and trade.	**GW**
6.14	Michael Goodall (**MG**) from The FSB (Federation for Small Businesses) was next to present to the WLEP Board (presentation slides in appendix 1)	
6.15	The meeting was then opened to questions from the Board.	
6.16	**JC** asked the question, as a small business owner, which would I join: CoC/FSB or NFU. **ShS** answered that it depends on which is most relevant to you, noting that some are members of all of them. What is clear is that NFU, FSB and Chamber have policy and lobbying powers through to government that the WLEP could utilise.	**GW**

6.17	**PW** then commented that farmers have the NFU, small businesses have the FSB etc, as they are sector specific, the WLEP need to fill the gaps, but it isn't obvious how to do this.	
6.18	An open discussion was then had around future working of the NFU, CoC, The Worcestershire Ambassadors, The FSB and the WLEP.	
6.19	**JL** stated that the memberships of the BROs only account for around 10% of the 30k businesses in the county. She believes that we could use the WLEP to get in front of the 30k businesses, promoting the BROs and Midlands Cyber.	
6.20	**NH** commented that for the innovation agenda, you need an inward investment model that offers incentives to investors, **NH** used the example of Birmingham where technology is a growing sector and they are given incentives. He then said that we need a model here.	
6.21	**EH** commented that she liked the idea of a trade mission, and wondered if there was the opportunity to promote the food of Worcestershire as part of this.	
6.22	**SG** then talked to **EH** about what can be done at WCC to help alleviate some of their members issues, stating that they might be able to support with better access to broadband, and the WLEP can help with the skills shortage. **EH** then asked if he could arrange a meeting with the District Council planners, so she can go along and talk/train them.	
6.23	**JC** wondered if there was any pattern in the issues that the 4 BROs have mentioned or are experiencing. Are there any gaps or something that none of them are already doing.	
6.24	**NH** suggested the possibility of a 'one stop shop' where all information is available in one place.	
6.25	**PW** commented that some of them are sector specific (NFU) and some are generalists (CoC) but that the WLEP can start to help linking them all together.	
6.26	**ShS** suggested a campaign aimed at those that don't engage currently with any of the BROs or the WLEP, showcasing all of them and what they offer.	
6.26	**SG** commented further that targets need to be chosen, looking at those businesses with 50 – 240 staff for example, where the WLEP can engage and gather intelligence on their issues etc. This was agreed as a topic for the next meeting.	**GW**
6.27	**Action** – Agreed to crystallise the discussion into a single record and share with BROs along with suggested actions / next steps.	**GW**

7.	**<u>WLEP Strategy: Prioritisation Update</u>**	
7.1	This agenda item was postponed until 8th January 2024.	
8.	**<u>AOB</u>**	
8.1	**LW** updated the board that the GBF programme outcomes are now starting to be delivered and can be seen on the dashboard circulated. There will be a full report on LEP capital programmes progress given to the board at January 2024 meeting.	
8.2	GW told the board that at the May Board 2023 – Alison Dickinson and Kerry Mashford explained the Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) process, producing a static map of the county, showing homes that are fuel poor and off the grid. WCC have started to use this for the local plan e.g. infrastructure of EV charging points, Net Zero agenda. Report circulated is an update on progress made.	
8.3	AOB from the Board:	
8.4	**NH** noted that he was sent the WLEP Local Assurance Framework including a number of policies etc, but some seemed out of date and therefore need updating and innovation adding.	
	Action – review the relevance of the Local Assurance Framework, following the government guidance, yet to be received, on the approach given the transfer of functions. .	**GW**