**WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING**

**Friday 9th February 2024**
**10:00 – 13:00**
**Venue: Council Chamber, Droitwich Spa Town Council, St Richards House, Victoria Square, Droitwich, WR9 8DS.**

**PRESENT:**

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| 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 |
| Nigel Hall | (NH) | The Digital Consiglere |
| 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:**

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| Luke Willetts | (LW) | Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP |
| Alex Price | (AP) | Communications & PR Manager, Worcestershire LEP |
| Steph Simcox | (SS) | Head of Finance, Worcestershire County Council |
| David Blake | (DB) | Managing Director of Worcester City Council (Cex Rep) |

**APOLOGIES:**

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| 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) |
| Sue Jordan | (SJ) | Non-Executive Board Member |
| Cllr Beverley Neilson | (BN) | Cabinet Member for Economy ( rep for the S Districts ) |

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| **1.** | **Welcome and Apologies** | **ACTION** |
| 1.1 | **PW** welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for any new declaration of interest. | |
| 1.2 | No new interests declared. | |
| **2.** | **Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising** | |
| 2.1 | Matters Arising<br>**PW** asked the executive team if all actions were completed from the December meeting. The only outstanding action was the assurance framework update; this will become clearer, once further guidance from government has been received, or we can decide our own processes. | |
| 2.2 | The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record. | |

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| **3.** | **Skills Delivery Plan** | |
| 3.1 | JG opened a presentation explaining the skills strategy of the WLEP. How the team hosted at the County Council, work with partners, to ensure the five areas are progressed and delivery is co-ordinated. WLEP also provide oversight of other skills opportunities that come through government routes and are led by other partnerships. | |
| 3.2 | The five priority areas have been long established in some cases, but the activity under these five themes is very responsive to the changing labour market, and programme that is dictated nationally for local delivery. | |
| 3.3 | JG explained the current position related to the data, which highlighted levels of unemployment, noted this is high in pockets in specific areas of the county. Youth unemployment also remains higher than before Covid, and therefore specific initiatives are being taken to address these issues. However, trends that were evident after Covid are now returning to normal, such as vacancy rates. | |
| 3.4 | CL asked about NEET numbers and are these dropping because we have lost some people from the system. JG replied that our NEET numbers are reasonably accurate compared to other areas. | |
| 3.5 | GW highlighted previous investments made by the WLEP, to balance the supply and demand of the skills and training system. We currently have a pinch point around engineering and manufacturing, where, despite previous investment we have a shortage of places for training more engineers. | |
| 3.6 | NH asked which sectors we have limitations on supply of training spaces? JG highlighted manufacturing and engineering. Digital and construction sectors, have greater demand for training spaces to increase the skills and competencies in the economy. JG clarified that it's physical spaces to train the people, that businesses are demanding is the 'bottleneck', Also, we have a growing demographic in Y7, which means further challenges will be seen. | |
| 3.7 | CL highlighted the challenges of the apprenticeship system, which are defined in what can, and needs to be taught. This is changing with T levels. However, we still need to improve careers advice and parental knowledge. JB also highlighted the value of placements as part of a student course, in terms of adding to their experience, but also potential future recruitment and job opportunities. | |
| 3.8 | JG highlighted the Local Skills Improvement plans (this has been led by HW Chamber of Commerce in Worcestershire). This has identified a list of priorities, which fit within the partnerships Skills Strategy. The Chamber has established a number of industry councils to discuss skills, these cover construction, engineering, health and social care and business and professional. This links employers to the curriculum delivery. CL identified that a low number of employers engaged in these Industry Councils. It was | |

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| | agreed that we need to work with the Chamber to increase employer engagement in these meetings. | **WGH** |
| 3.9 | SG highlighted the challenges against the funding models, that are often short term, and chop and change. We need to create a 3-to-5-year view, and try to balance the activity needed, against the funding backdrop, to fill the gaps. The County Council has done this, and the support of the District Councils through UKSPF, gets us to March 25. But we need to plan for the medium term. | |
| 3.10 | Two areas of funding that are delivering programmes responding to the LSIP; these are delivering increased capacity through capital funding at FE Colleges totalling £2.5m, and revenue-based funding through UK Shared Prosperity Fund. To deliver those projects, that were previously funded by the European Social Fund. All six District Councils have agreed to fund a similar suit of projects, which will avoid any postcode lotteries, and provides a co-ordinated message to the business community. | |
| 3.11 | JG and LW explained how the skills offer is being integrated into the Growth Hub and the business engagement approach. | |
| 3.12 | Workstreams:<br>Careers and Enterprise Company – Worcestershire remains in the top 3 in the county measured against the national benchmarks. This work has been focused on the most vulnerable – therefore giving them the best chance of finding a career path.<br><br>GW highlighted the new work related to training teachers, as a module within their teaching course at the University of Worcester. Also taking the Skills Show from a 1 day to 2-day event. (6th / 7th March 2024)<br><br>Careers Worcestershire<br>Contracts are in place to deliver the Worcester Youth Hub at the Hive, which has supported 900 young people - recently a visit from a national DWP official, rated the Hub as one of the top 10% in the country for delivery. In the next couple of months, we will see the Redditch Youth Hub open and us step up our support in all the districts, especially focused on health and wellbeing, back into work, and training.<br><br>Worcestershire Apprenticeship - 10-year celebration of the brand and the WA awards. Continuing to work in schools, and influence teachers, and parents through new funding to develop communication. So they have the confidence to advise young people into the apprenticeship programme.<br><br>Skills Bootcamps – despite some of the challenges with the programme and the criteria behind the government funded scheme. We have seen an expansion of funding, and areas that we are delivering in 2024 – with key courses like welding and construction available in the county. | |

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| | Inclusive Worcestershire - was a programme to expand the 'good practice' around recruitment, retention, and retainment of employees. A series of workshops have taken place, and these were well attended. There is also the possibility of a Premier Inn training programme, to be hosted in Worcestershire.<br><br>Finally, a focus on Workforce Planning by local employers, through support of the District Councils and UKSPF. Which will see skills boost programme, that with the aid of an online tool, will encourage the completion of a skills need analysis. This will allow us to map against training providers provision. | |
| 3.13 | PW highlighted the success of the team against a budget, which is always based on short term funding. JC asked if these schemes fit together in a plan on a page. JG to try and explain this with a simple guide. | **JG** |
| 3.14 | JS highlighted the way skills and training could be cascaded through the sectors and industries. JG to investigate further, although it was agreed some sectors may be better suited to this approach – ie construction. | **JG** |
| 3.15 | JL highlighted the possibility of using partners such as Microsoft, to use their content to digital businesses and online training providers. | **JG** |
| **4.** | **Q3 Finance Report** | |
| 4.1 | SS outlined a positive report. At the start of 23/24 the expectation was that the LEP would use its reserves. This position had changed in Q3, that the LEP may be putting financial resources back into reserves. This was against a backdrop of continuing to deliver what we stated we would deliver. | |
| 4.2 | This was due to expenditure and priorities, moving across into the next financial year, and positive vacancy management. The earmarked reserve remains in place and fit for purpose in case, and to protect partners, against redundancy costs. | |
| 4.3 | This means we are working up a 24/25 budget, which is positive, although we cannot bring this position to the Board yet, as government funding is still unknown. Also, the scale and priorities of the Board will be resourced accordingly. However, the aim is to keep the LEP operation in place until at least March 25 in its current guise. This is due to the UKSPF running until this period. | |
| 4.4 | The Cricket Club's social value loan is having a positive impact, both in terms of activity and support for the community, and for the profile of the Cricket Club to various organisations and communities. | |
| 4.5 | PW asked how long the social value contract lasts and how is this measured. SS replied that it was a 5-year contract that was evaluated each year, with the potential to extend by a year. WCC procurement was keeping a running total | |

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| | of the value of costs if these were booked at costed. A report will be brought to a future Board meeting. | **SS** |
| 4.6 | NH answered what was being deferred in terms of expenditure. LW answered that the FAR committee, was looking at this issue yesterday. LW indicated that several income streams are coming together. Therefore, some of the external funding can be spent before our own resources, to hit the outputs and spend. Some of our venue costs have been negotiated due to the social value contract, we have held vacancies and negotiated a more favourable rate regarding oncosts with the Chamber. Also, supporting a growth hub diagnostic, which WLEP have held off until clear about the benefits. SS reported that this will balance between 23/24 and 24/25. | |
| **5.** | **<u>WLEP Strategic Comms Update</u>** | |
| 5.1 | AP opened with the focus on Conference delivery since the last LEP Board meeting. We have a confirmed audience across the physical and virtual platforms. We have two speakers confirmed. About 75% are the business community, which is a mixture of large, small and medium. The key message has been defined, and is explained within the appendix of the Board papers. So, final preparations are being made between now and the 23rd Feb 2024. | |
| 5.2 | GW highlighted that we are pleased with where we are at the moment, and feels that the structure of the event, is the start of a conversation with business over our 3-to-5-year delivery plan. | |
| 5.3 | The Chamber are holding an economic conference on the 14th March, where we will present the findings and headlines from the conference. Therefore, this is very much a call for feedback compared to previous conferences, which were structured around a pre-determined narrative. | |
| 5.4 | The consumption of the hybrid element will be something we are monitoring and will be driving the audience to after the event. This is important to any future communications strategy. | |
| 5.5 | AP confirmed that other partners will have an area of overflow and partner displays. | |
| **6.** | **<u>LEP strategy priorisation</u>** | |
| 6.1 | LW opened the session with a small number of slides, which explained the government guidance around the functions that will transfer from the LEP to the Upper Tier Local Authority (UTLA – Worcestershire County Council, in our case) in April 2024. | |
| 6.2 | LW also highlighted the strategic approach, given the LEP priorities and focus on Skills, Innovation and Business Support. This was the case, given | |

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| | the funding position, which since 2021 has changed from the LEP to Local Government. This means the LEP's role has changed, moving the leadership of infrastructure development and place shaping, to closer align to the local government partners statutory functions. | |
| 6.3 | One of the key requirements from the guidance, was to ensure a smooth transition process, with requirements now on the UTLA to decide the future delivery agreements and provide an updated economic strategy for the geographic area by September 2024. | |
| 6.4 | The LEP Board had previously confirmed that the Plan for Growth 2020-2040, will remain our strategy, with no changes required to this document. The Board also decided to create a delivery plan, which covers the next 3 to 5 years. Which shows ambition, maintains the strategic direction, and allows for renewed focus on areas of the wider plan to explained, clarified, and emphasised. | |
| 6.5 | It was acknowledged that we would need to gather partner feedback on this delivery plan. Yet, the partnership needs to be clear about its role and the contribution of others. This was like previous delivery plans, where it was not all on the executive team to lead on all items across the whole strategy. | |
| 6.6 | DB asked for clarification, that if the functions are transferring to the County Council, how are the other partners being engaged in this process of delivery, particularly the economic strategy. | |
| 6.7 | SG answered by being clear that all local authorities in Worcestershire are supportive of the LEP, and they recognise there is change in the system. But, the LEP model, has the full support of Councils and therefore the current arrangements will remain in place for 24/25. Changes after this period may be required, but these would be reaction to changes in government policy. | |
| 6.8 | The partnerships' role was to act as a true partnership, by bring people together, joint working to set an ambitious delivery plan for a period of 3 to 5 years. To keep delivering 'value to the business community' and seize growth opportunities. This will be challenging but remained the partnerships focus. | |
| 6.9 | GW presented a 'straw man', across the areas where the partnership should act as a leader, investor, supporter and conveyor.<br><br>A positive discussion took place, questioning the role of 'investor' and may be this was better described as an 'influencer' of partners to spend their funding and resource on the barrier to growth in the economy. | |
| 6.10 | Suggestions that the Partnership need to promote this existing vision, provide stability, whilst creating an ambition that partners can 'buy in to' and trust to be involved. Understanding of the LEP remains high amongst those who have followed its delivery over the past 10 years. It has a brand. that a | |

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| | business audience can understand if they have been engaged with or proactively sort out its work. | |
| 6.11 | Therefore, there is a value in the partnership management, and the fact it has no conflict of interest. The brand remains softer to business than a local council, because councils must regulate, as well as promote its area. | |
| 6.12 | It's therefore the role of the partnership, to share knowledge and intelligence. It should also be recognised, that without the private sector engaged in terms of committing their time and resources to create the jobs locally. | |
| 6.13 | Future meetings will bring forward the delivery plan. They will shape the work of the partnership and form a view on the key areas of investment, which is supporting the business community to invest and grow in the County. Therefore, it will need to be SMART in its objectives and be able to measure success. | |
| | **Dates of Next meeting**<br><br>**7 March @ the Skills Show 10:00 – 13:00**<br><br>**17 May 2024 10:00 – 13:00**<br><br>**19 July 2024 10:00 – 13:00**<br><br>**20 Sept 2024 10:00 – 13:00**<br><br>**29 Nov 2024 10:00 – 13:00** | |
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