WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 22nd November 2024
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: Heart of Worcestershire College Business Centre, Worcester, WR1 2JF.

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
Jeremy Cieslisk	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College.
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Leader of Bromsgrove District Council (Rep for N Districts)
Sue Jordan	(SJ)	Non-Executive Board Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

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

APOLOGIES:

James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Steph Simcox	(SS)	Head of Finance, Worcestershire County Council
Jane Britton	(JB)	Director of Communications & Participation, University of Worcester
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon
Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch Group
Cllr Julie Wood	(JW)	Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Economic Development and Tourism (Rep for the S Districts)
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair/Lead for WLEP Innovation Board

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.	**Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**	
2.1	The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.	
3.	**Central government update:**	**ACTION**
3.1	**LW** presented to the Board on budget headlines related to LEP funding from Chancellor's October statement, and Industrial Strategy green paper. The meeting was opened to comments and questions.	
3.2	**AC** commented that it will likely be a reduced budget position in 2025/26, and it's possible that UKSPF will still go to District Councils for 25/26.	
3.3	**SG** commented that UKSPF might be more targeted going forward, and if it comes through WCC it will be pushed through the LEP. **SG** then asked **DB** if there is the same thought at district level and are the districts happy with what they're getting.	
3.4	**DB** answered that it will depend on the rules come with it, last allocation had to state how it was going to be split between communities, business and people and skills. Will it be the same this time or just an allocation which can be spent how the districts want. But must bear in mind that there are pressures elsewhere now and that members might decide to use money for these pressures.	
3.5	**GW** commented that there are new projects about to start that focus on supporting those with health issues back in to work, these could take some of the funding pressures off the districts.	
3.6	**JG** commented that it would help to understand what the districts are already funding, and then it can be worked out what might be able to be funded elsewhere. Then it was put to the Board that **Midlands Engine** have reached out and asked for letter of support. The question was then asked: Is the Board ok with this?	
3.7	**SJ** asked if there was no Midlands Engine, what would the risks of this be?	
3.8	**GW** commented that there are 3 things that Midlands Engine do well: transport – a good view of whole of the midlands, trade and investment, access to finance.	
3.9	**SG** declared an interest as a Midlands Engine board member. **SG** then commented that Midlands Engine gives a good regional view which will be a loss, change isn't always good, and you can lose some good pots of money with change.	
3.10		

3.11	**PW** commented that a letter of support from WLEP should be issued on behalf of Board and capture the feelings of **SG** and **GW**.	**GW / LW**
3.12	**KM** commented that her concern is that Redditch is on the edge of Birmingham and therefore residents look to Birmingham (believe they are part of Birmingham) with **SG** being on the Board, Redditch and Bromsgrove have benefited.	
3.13	**KM** then commented that there have been UKSPF challenges in Bromsgrove, local businesses are not investing in the workforce since the new government came to power. Looking at going outside of the country instead, with the majority of these being big employers.	
3.14	**SJ** asked if there are any specific local projects that were/are in partnership with Midlands Engine, that rely on their funding or input, that can be quoted in the letter.	
3.15	**KM** answered that it is mainly focussed on infrastructure, to build thousands of new homes in the districts, and that there still needs to be a clear network and support for this, Midlands Engine is part of this. Need a joined-up picture, losing Midlands Engine would only add to this.	
3.16	**SG** also answered that knowledge transfer from the universities to business is facilitated by Midlands Engine.	
3.17	**AC** commented that the devolution framework, which was published in December, looked at Combined Authorities taking on what the PRP's are currently doing.	
3.18	**SG** stated his concerns, that it takes time to set up a Combined Authority and it doesn't look at a wider view, this needs to be fed back to the government.	
3.19	**JL** commented that from a small business point of view, the governments brand for 'Plan for Growth' with hikes in costs with business rates etc, if it's a plan for growth where is the growth. **JC** commented that in the Aerospace industry 10% level of redundancy, and these are highly skilled workers.	
4.	**Investment prospectus:**	**ACTION**
4.1	**GW** presents to the Board. The meeting was then opened for questions.	
4.2	Q4 & Q5: any feedback will be included in LEP response.	
4.3		

4.4	**PW** commented that the input from the LEP must be coherent with Worcestershire and align to some of these headings within our investment proposal. Our proposal wherever it is delivered, will be seen to be supporting the growth strategy. **GW** commented that we have no dominant sector in Worcestershire; we have several clusters in all directions. If you haven't got the structures to support this investment and the tech, then not going to work.	
4.5	**SJ** commented that the Worcestershire SME's need to be referenced too, focussed too much on the big businesses, somehow in our response we need to make the point that our growth comes from the SME's. Make it too difficult and businesses will go elsewhere, it needs to be simpler.	
4.6	**SG** commented that the questions need answering, but with a Worcestershire voice, made up of different ideas. Need to make sure we are reflecting what our strengths are in Worcestershire.	
4.7	**JC** asked what the output for this exercise is e.g. extra funding, extra resources for these sectors? **PW** answered that it might help the government to decide on where investment and funding goes.	
4.8	**DB** commented that in Trafford, did a walking tour around regeneration sites, all the regeneration sites are owned by the combined authorities, as this is where the money is coming from. What will happen here, if you look at CAs with the lions' share of these sectors, rural places like Worcestershire might be in trouble.	
4.9	**MD** asked if business start-ups are included? **LW** answered that there's a small section, government have stated that the industrial strategy is only a part of their plan for growth. Other pieces of work might look at this e.g. Angel Investment Network.	
4.10	**SJ** commented that Ireland did this 20 years ago, life science was their sector, millions invested in it, creating highly skilled jobs with lots of investment into FE's. They got skills right, got logistics right etc. **PW** added that it created very attractive inward investment opportunities, and they strategically created a cluster that then got investment for. **MD** also added that this then creates start-ups around these big businesses.	
4.11	**PW** commented that we need to focus only on the things that we can influence, for example with SME's, we don't need central government to support them, the big businesses need Worcestershire County Council & districts etc to let them know they are important, and feedback their issues to government, something the LEP can't really help with.	
4.12	**DB** commented that Worcestershire has twice the national average for employment in advanced manufacturing, we need to shout about this and get Worcestershire on the map for one sector and focus on it.	
4.13		

	SG commented that we need to have wider thinking (regionally) projects such as the A46 & Cotswold Line play into other regions and their agenda's, the right projects are in this document. **ACTION**: Board to give written feedback on the Investment Prospectus by w/c 16th December.	**ALL**.
5	**Strategic comms update:**	**ACTION**
5.1	**AP** presented to the Board. The meeting was then opened to comments.	
5.2	**PW** commented that the AI message from the Strategic KAM Dinner speaker was about how we find or integrate AI. **MD** commented that the Heart of Worcestershire Innovate project: AI Centre Of Excellence is looking at this. Showing them it in action. There was then a discussion on the WLEP Conference.	
5.3	**PW** asked if there is a Venue. **AP** answered that the venue will either be the university arena or sixways etc.	
5.4	**MD** asked if there will be online attendees as well as in person. **AP** answered that this time there will be no virtual element but will be recorded for people to watch later.	
5.5	**SJ** asked about the timeline, think we need more time to promote and invite, if you want top speakers etc, then need to give more time for space in their diaries. Could tech be used to meet people in the room.	
5.6	**JC** asked how many follow the LEP on social media? **AP** answered 1,500 on LinkedIn which is the biggest platform, there has been 20% growth over the last 12 months. **JC** commented further that maybe the LEP needs to get more followers and be more active on social media, 30,000 businesses in Worcestershire and only 1,500 following.	
5.7	**SG** commented that a good venue is the start of a good conference. We need to get the 'save the date' out now, other businesses want to hear other businesses success stories. **Action**: send a plan to the Board before Christmas.	**AP.**
6.	Innovation update:	**ACTION**
6.1	LW updated the Board.	

	The meeting was then opened to comments.	
6.2	**SJ** commented that there needs to be a case study done on where BetaDen started and where they are now. **LW** commented that BetaDen have commissioned an external partner to do an evaluation, the case study can come from this piece of work.	
6.3	**DB** commented that was at old fire station this week, two new businesses are moving in downstairs, both are tech businesses. Also met a tenant of the apartments, one works in IT, partner was in year two of the new university medical school, both are working and living in a new apartment with high value jobs, it's a good example of where Worcestershire is working.	
6.4	**SG** commented that maybe the podcast could make the most of these stories. Inspirational stories and local success stories.	
6.5	**JG** commented that this has just been done with Worcestershire Apprenticeship, this is one of Worcestershire's success stories. Made a booklet to shout about it.	
6.6	**PW** commented that the Malvern Festival of Innovation has now launched, but it's been a bigger struggle reaching out and getting businesses to pay £250 per virtual table than anticipated. Content will be added over the next couple of weeks, from this, there was a hope to create virtual clusters, it's a new concept, see if it works.	
6.7	**GW** commented that innovation is coming to fruition, skills and WGH (Business environment) are more mature.	
6.8	**SG** asked about the communications around this, are we telling people about it? How are we bringing communications into everything we do; a part of all budgets should include communications.	
6.9	**SJ** commented that businesses can take an apprentice/work placement for 12 months, they will make a difference. Businesses can take new ideas from these young people.	
6.10	**SG** commented that businesses are in the phase of deciding where to invest, need to jump on this and get our message and success stories out there, even more important for inward investment.	
6.11	**PW** commented that we need to decide what we are trying to achieve through it? Then the communications will be easier to create and will get the most impact.	
6.12	**JL** commented that it comes down to having a robust marketing strategy, need different ones for WLEP, Innovation etc.	

6.13 6.14 6.15	**MD** asked what we can do to drive more innovation among young people, e.g. the young people that think 'people like me don't go to university' We need a long-term strategy to support innovation with year 6 students. **JG** commented that 400+ businesses have used the Workforce Planning Tools, 200 completed skills needs analysis, we can see themes e.g. sizes of businesses and whether they have workforce plans etc. an issue in Worcestershire is that most don't often have a HR manager or department and are more likely to pay high wages than take on an apprentice. **SJ** commented that the barriers to young people taking up jobs and apprenticeships might be transport etc, we need to identify these barriers and try to alleviate these. **Action**: item for the next Board meeting. **Action**: workforce planning analysis for next Board.	**JG**.
7. 7.1	**25/25 Budget report:** **LW** updated the Board. The meeting was then opened to comments. No comments.	
	AOB None.	
	Dates of Next meeting 2025: 31st January – 10am – 1pm. 28th March – 10am – 1pm. 16th May – 10am – 1pm. 18th July – 10am – 1pm. 26th September – 10am – 1pm. 28th November – 10am – 1pm.	