WORCESTERSHIRE LEP BOARD MEETING

Friday 28th March
10:00 – 13:00
Venue: Phase 3 Board Room, MHSP, Geraldine Road, Malvern, WR14 3SZ.

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
Michelle Dowse	(MD)	Principal, Heart of Worcestershire College.
Sue Jordan	(SJ)	Non-Executive Board
Jane Britton	(JB)	Pro Vice Chancellor of Communications and External Affairs at the University of Worcester
John Dillon	(JD)	Managing Director, GJS Dillon (ONLINE)
Carl Arntzen	(CA)	Managing Director, Worcester Bosch Group
Jeremy Cieslik	(JC)	Non-Executive Board Member
Cllr Simon Geraghty	(SiG)	Leader of WCC and Cabinet Member for Finance
David Blake	(DB)	Managing Director of Worcester City Council (Cex Rep)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Luke Willetts	(LW)	Deputy CEO, Worcestershire LEP
Alex Price	(AP)	Communications & PR Manager, Worcestershire LEP
Helena Augousti	(HA)	Executive Assistant, Worcestershire LEP
Judy Gibbs	(JG)	Director of Skills, LEP
Darren Schrouder	(DS)	Worcestershire Growth Hub Manager
Jamie Clyne	(JCL)	Account Manager, Worcestershire Growth Hub

APOLOGIES:

Steph Simcox	(SS)	Head of Finance, Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Karen May	(KM)	Leader of Bromsgrove District Council (Rep for N Districts)
Nigel Hall	(NH)	Chair/Lead for WLEP Innovation Board
James Speller	(JS)	Managing Director, Speller Metcalfe
Cllr Douglas Godwin	(DG)	Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, Economic Development and Tourism (Rep for the S Districts)
Alex Collins	(AC)	Area Lead, DBT

1.	**<u>Welcome and Apologies</u>**	**<u>ACTION</u>**
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.	**<u>Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising</u>**	
2.1	Actions from previous meeting:	
2.2	**GW** informed the Board that BetaDen will be present at the next Board Meeting. The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.	
3.	**<u>Verbal update on devolution position</u>**.	**<u>ACTION</u>**
3.1	**SG** updated the Board on the status of the devolution and local government reorganisation.	
3.2	Main headlines being: • Govt guidance states unitary councils to have minimum 500k population and strategic authority to have a population of 1.5m, with an elected mayor. • Ministers have recently made comments which suggest these figures could become an 'average' rather than a 'minimum' • 21 counties identified as 2-tier local government structures in the UK. • Government have asked these Counties to put in an interim plan by 21st March 2025 and a full business plan by 28th November 2025. • In Worcestershire the relations between the 2 tiers remains good, and something that everyone agrees on, is that services must carry on in the short-term. • What is not yet clear, is the strategic footprint. We are staying open minded and need to continue to work together on this. • Important to bear in mind that nothing is going to happen soon, things will likely continue until 2028. The meeting was then opened to comments and questions.	
3.3	**SJ** asked if due to the government's devolution plan, the local Elections will be delayed.	
3.4	**SG** replied that upper tier authorities got invited to put in proposals in early January for a mayoral electoral path, WCC did not, the alternative was to fast track Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and suspend elections, the government took very few on board, southeast mainly taken. Therefore county elections going ahead as planned in May 2025.	

3.5	**JC** asked what the devolution template is.	
3.6	**SG** replied that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) want to continue to work with their partners and new authorities, as depending on the footprint the county could be split into different areas such as Warwick and Gloucestershire. The business case analysis is not being looked at yet but might be in the next stage.	
3.7	**SG** stated that his main worry, is that disbanding one set of support will lead to a gap before the new support starts.	
3.8	**JB** asked if the governments population count of 500k or more is rigid.	
3.9	**SG** replied that he believed it would be perfectly fair to propose different numbers. Resource is currently being put to this, when it should be on local economic issues. Not ideal, but the business cases will be useful. Important Worcestershire services already with WCC and to change that would cause big disruption, that's why utilitarian council has been suggested.	
3.10	**JD** asked if devolution was inevitable whichever government had gained power.	
3.11	**SG** answered that interestingly no manifesto mentioned devolution and stated some of the reasons for arguing for a utilitarian council: with a £33m gap, money will be a driving factor both locally and nationally. Disruption to services a factor too, must keep things going whilst planning this.	
3.12	**BN** stated that with no Midlands Engine going forward, there is now a strategic opportunity to take control of local growth and think more strategically, with a range of assets to use to lever for growth.	
3.13	**PW** finished by stating that those who are engaged, understand that local uncertainty on top of the current economic uncertainty will not benefit businesses.	
. 34.	**<u>HMG Policy Changes around Skills and Employment:</u>** JG presented to the Board.	**<u>ACTION</u>**
4.1	The meeting was then opened to comments and questions.	
4.2	**GW** stated that we need to convert all this information into a conversation with employers. This is a priority for the next 3 years.	
4.3	**SJ** stated that she thinks we need to make the offerings simpler.	
4.4	**PW** asked, how are we're going to achieve this is the issue. **PW** also noted his thanks to **CA** and **JG** for their continued work in this area.	

4.5	**JG** stated to the Board that the Careers & Enterprise Company have £300k a year to do all their work, lack of resource is part of the issue.	
4.6	**SG** stated that we are currently absorbing different challenges, the work that we can't we do, is it going to be important? Need to analyse this and bring it back to the Board/WCC and can then look to see if it can be supported. Also, a challenge must go back to the government.	
4.7	**JG** stated that she believed if we're not in a combined authority, then we might be pushed back in progress.	
4.8	**DB** stated that with UKSPF money coming to an end in 25/26, some of which is being used to support the skills agenda, upskilling etc. it currently stands at £1.8m, but reduces to £700k in 25/26, therefore we need to decide where the priorities lie. There will soon be a £5m gap (across the districts) so need to work hard on lobbying government to see the gaps.	
4.9	**MD** stated that with the power of JG's network, we need to come together and get around a table and decide on what we are doing, how we pool resources and what our priorities are.	
5	**Strategic comms update:**	**ACTION**
5.1	**AP** presented the feedback of 'The Big Conversation' to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions and comments.	
5.2	**JD** provided feedback to the Board: I talked to a few businesses, and they commented that they felt there needs to be more 'conversation' with the audience and more audience participation. Possibly a professional host next time who is good at doing this.	
5.3	**MD** provided feedback to the Board: the feedback from one of the employers on my table, was that while they felt the WGH is amazing, the young people/businesses that they work with are they finding it hard to engage with the WGH, is the WGH utilising social media platforms such as Tik Tok? We need to tap into this age group.	
5.4	**DS** replied that a conversation about how to utilise social media more is ongoing with Marketing.	
5.5	**MD** commented that she felt the feedback doesn't cover the impact of the event, maybe post event there needs to be a process whereby WLEP get some more in-depth feedback. MD had 4 good leads from the event and that isn't captured in current feedback.	
5.6		

5.7	**DB** stated that in Worcester City Council contracts, they agree to be a case study for us if asked, this might be something that can be done within WLEP/WGH.	
5.8	**PW** stated that it might be an opportunity to create a 'self-help' local business community.	
5.9	**JC** commented that if he was looking at re-locating a business to the Midlands, he would ask the question, is it better to come to Worcestershire or WMCA. When businesses are trying to grow, boundaries do make a difference.	
5.10	**AP** presented the proposed re-branding to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions and comments.	
5.11	**SG** stated that the difficulty is, that there needs to be an overall brand, which is more difficult because the landscape is changing completely. A Mayoral authority will mean a split of some services, so there will be different brands. **SG** believes we need to hang on to the brands that people understand, and the ones that will attract the money. Mindful, don't want to change the brand twice in the next 18 months.	
5.12	**PW** believes that it needs to be a driver for businesses, there was confusion before with different programmes and logos. Now making it more streamlined and clearer. Businesses need to know where to go.	
5.13	**SJ** commented that the use of the WGH as the point of contact for businesses makes sense, as some still believe that all LEP's have ended. Employers need to know we're still here.	
5.14	**PW** commented that maybe there is a use of the WLEP brand to get funding, but WGH is used to local businesses. Part of this is us understanding where everything sits and can then better explain it to businesses.	
5.15	**JL** commented that whilst it's a really good idea, if we're going to change, have we done a marketing strategy on what we are aiming to do this for/how/why. If businesses are looking to come into Worcestershire for innovation, it isn't as clear through WGH. Now is the time that we can put time into getting this right. **LW** stated that the re-brand has started to align WLEP with national government offerings and them seeing the GHs as the local conduits for their agenda. There are now three headlines as most brands fit under them.	LW/GW/AP

	Action: keep the board updated on this, with a proposal.	
6.	WGH update:	**ACTION**
6.1	**DS/JCL** presented the Benchmarking results to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions and comments.	
6.2	**BN** asked with the Growth Hubs that are Limited company's, what are the commercialisation they are pursuing, what are they trying to achieve?	
6.3	DS replied that they wanted to move away from the constraints of UKSPF outcomes and want to be able to deliver the support they want in their own way.	
6.4	**SJ** commented that they thought the regular stakeholder round table is a good idea, but we might need to re-evaluate who our stakeholders are annually and ask ourselves, are we currently engage everyone we should.	
6.5	**LW** agreed and added that we are engaging with the Business Representative Organizations (BROs), they contribute to a quarterly report that WLEP produce for government.	
6.6	**DS/JCL** presented the recommendations to the Board. The meeting was then opened to questions and comments.	
6.7	**JC** commented that attendance numbers at events is not necessarily success, need to analyse visits, jobs created and how many companies have been saved. Look at how many companies we've helped to grow, we need to shout about our hard measures, these are what show true success and wealth creation.	
6.8	**DB** commented that while not always happy with commercial models and using private funding to compete with commercial businesses, with public funding going down, WGH will need a plan B, when UKSPF stops.	
6.9	**JD** commented that the real success of the WGH, is the Account Manager's, award of grants is currently district based, so is complicated and can feel rushed. But to be on the award panels, so the businesses have a voice, is a good idea.	
6.10	**LW** asked there seems to be a rejection of high growth businesses, why?	
6.11	**JC** replied that sometimes you can't contact them, some of them don't want to engage, you try but you must draw the line at some point.	
6.12	**DS** replied that some have the attitude of, 'we've already got what we want, why do we need you?'	
6.13		

6.14 6.15	**JL** commented that for those that say 'what do we want from you' we need to market the GH better to answer these questions. **BN** stated her congratulations to the WGH team, and that feedback from businesses is very good. The high growth focus, is a way to get out of challenges ahead, growth will generate more rates etc. Key messages from business which is not in your report is business ambition. Who wants to grow 5% in the next 5 years, identify these businesses and see what they need. **DS** replied that the conversations around this are starting to be had and will start to give this information and feedback to districts.	
	AOB None.	
	Dates of Next meeting 2025: 16th May – 10am – 1pm. 18th July – 10am – 1pm. 26th September – 10am – 1pm. 28th November – 10am – 1pm.	