

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (BLEP)
BOARD MEETING**

Held Friday 8 April 2022 from 9.30am via Teams

Present: Andrew M Smith, Pinewood Studios (Chair) (Part meeting)
Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First
Adrian Brown, The Berkeley Group plc
Richard Harrington, BLEP Chief Executive
Eman Martin-Vignerte, Bosch
Clare Pelham, Epilepsy Society
Martina Porter, All Spring Media
Prof James Tooley, University of Buckingham (Part meeting)
Cllr Steven Broadbent, Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies: Lucy Edge, Satellite Applications Catapult
Hiren Gandhi, Blaser Mills
Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council

In attendance: Kevin Hctor, BEIS/DLUHC, Cities and Local Growth Unit
Robert Curtis, BEIS/DLUHC, Cities and Local Growth Unit
Richard Ambrose, Buckinghamshire Council (Section 151 Officer)
Lisa Michelson, Buckinghamshire Council
Ian Barham, BLEP, Partnership Director
Sarah Fraser

SUMMARY MINUTES

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- There were no new declarations of interest at this meeting.
- Following discussions with the Section 151 Officer, it had been agreed that, as conversation would remain in general terms, LEP Directors also sitting on the Buckinghamshire Business First Board could take part in the conversation around agenda items: “Draft Business Plan & Budget”, and “Bucks Growth Hub Review and Future Sustainability”.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – 11 February 2022

- The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2022 were agreed as an accurate record; all actions arising having been completed, to be discussed within the context of the current agenda, or ongoing.

3 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET 2022/25

- Principles agreed for construction of the LEP’s business plan were restated as being a multi year plan, utilising BLEP management reserves towards the operation of the company whilst work continues to progress development of the Enterprise Zones in order to provide possible future income.
- The Memorandum of Understanding guiding the next five year period, including future distribution of Enterprise Zone income, is shortly to be ratified by Buckinghamshire Council, with distribution away from the Enterprise Zone programme unlikely to take place in the next 5 year period.
- The budget presented reflected the assumptions that loan repayments will start to mature in the period, that income from Broadband gainshare will be received, and that the LEP will utilise the capability to draw down up to £5000k per annum operational costs (of £750k annually available) for the Enterprise Zones.
- The budget also ringfences c £500k reserves against winding up costs, if required in the future.
- Government has now concluded the LEP Review and confirmed reduced core funding for 2022/23 (from £500k to £375k), with no certainty re Government funding beyond this point.

- Funding for Growth Hubs has seen 50% cuts on 2021/22 levels (15% reduction on pre-pandemic levels). Provision has been made within the BLEP business plan to prioritise business support and skills activity, as it is considered these activities will be core to the LEP's work going forward.
- The business plan outlined the future scope of activity for the LEP as:
 - Maximisation of Enterprise Zone returns.
 - Monitoring capital programmes/confirming lessons learned for future use, if required.
 - Production of local market intelligence/data.
 - Support for the skills agenda.
 - Support for SMEs and start up organisations, with a particular emphasis on innovation.
 - Continued work to support County Deal discussions with Government.
- The budget has been prepared on a flat line basis for both staff and programme costs and reflects an increased number of staff, recruitment planned to roles around Strategy, Finance & Assurance, and Enterprise Zone support. The LEP will also, in the future, be building capability around business case/business proposition creation, including commercial propositions which will allow greater freedom in constructing programmes which will meet local needs.
- Programme costs will be allocated to business support and the skills agenda, and discussions will be held at a future meeting regarding sustaining business support activity.
- Work to establish definitive outputs against which the LEP will be monitored and evaluated, will be developed as part of the delivery plan for Government, triggering the release of core funding.
- Metro Dynamics are examining economic development structures within Buckinghamshire and how these can best be aligned to support achievement and delivery of a County Deal.
- The Board recognised the executive team has been operating in a period of great uncertainty and commended the business plan and budget presented as a good foundation for work going forward, welcoming the focus on evaluation and lessons learned, and noting the annual review process to ensure the business plan/budget remain fit for purpose.

The Board:

- **Agreed the draft business plan and budget, as presented.**
- **Requested that clarity be provided to the Audit & Finance Sub Group on how Enterprise Zone funds drawn down against operational costs will be utilised.**
- **Requested the executive check and confirm the level of reserves required in the event the LEP ceases operation.**

4 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE GROWTH HUB - 2021/22 DELIVERY AND FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Further to the presentation provided, the following was noted:

- Growth Hub core funding has been cut by 50% on 2021/22 levels (15% on pre-pandemic levels).
- Government is yet to confirm outcomes to be delivered for core funding but it is anticipated Growth Hubs will be expected to continue to provide a "first stop shop" for businesses seeking support.
- The number of businesses contacting the Growth Hub during the pandemic increased enormously and it is anticipated this will continue as a result of pressures around Brexit, inflation and Ukraine.
- The BBF funding model shared highlighted the issues in balancing eligible/ineligible costs through differing funding regimes, recognising that without ineligible costs (usually for back office support) Growth Hubs would be unable to run programmes. This also highlighted the benefit of seeking commercial funding without restrictive covenants.
- Buckinghamshire is well-placed through its Skills Advisory Panel and Sector Sub Groups to take advantage of skills opportunities arising.
- Government recognises the excellent work undertaken by Growth Hubs but is restricted in revenue funding available to support this work.
- Government is prepared to be flexible in how Growth Hub funding is utilised and the team was encouraged to discuss suggested uses with the relevant Government department representatives.

- The Board offered its thanks to the BBF Growth Hub team for their work and the impressive activity undertaken during the pandemic and more recently, including the Bucks Skills Show, Business Festival and Tourism Summit.

5 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Further to the report previously circulated, the Board noted:

- 5.1
- **Skills:**
 - The Skills Advisory Panel and Sector Sub Groups are working more collaboratively and aligning to be able to respond to short notice funding opportunities arising eg the recent call for bids to run Bootcamps. Two bids have been submitted from Buckinghamshire; the outcome is awaited.
 - There is likely to be funding coming forward for skills development within the Creative Industries recognising the extreme shortage of talent in the sector; c50k people required by 2025. This may be an opportunity to work collaboratively cross borders with other LEPs.
 - There continues to be a disconnect between jobs available in the county and those seeking employment in the local labour market.
 - More support is needed in schools to help young people seek and apply for jobs available. It was suggested it is a role for governing bodies to build resource into schools' budgets to facilitate this.
 - It would be useful to have flexibility from DfE around apprenticeship start times enabling students finishing courses in spring/early summer to take up opportunities immediately rather than having to wait until September, for example.
- 5.2
- **Capital Programme:**
 - The Getting Building Fund programme successfully completed virtually 100% delivery of expenditure by 31 March 2022. This funding has gone into some innovative businesses and the LEP will be tracking progress of these projects.
- 5.3
- **Communications & Events Update:**
 - 28 April – BLEP/Innovate UK event seeking to support businesses applying for innovation funding.
 - 28 July – Westcott Space Cluster event showcasing new facilities created through GBF funding.
- 5.4
- **Bucks Advantage/Woodlands**
 - **Richard Harrington to gain approval from the Bucks Advantage Board for Adrian Brown/Clare Pelham to attend future meetings to help steer discussions on development of Woodlands site.**

The Board:

- **Noted the Chief Executive's report.**
- **Noted and approved the updated Risk Register, as previously circulated.**

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Ministerial Visits to Buckinghamshire

- AS updated the Board on a number of upcoming Ministerial meetings/visits to Buckinghamshire.

6.2 Data Centres

- The Board noted the increasing number of data centre planning applications coming forward in Buckinghamshire and that, whilst these facilities are important nationally and globally, they traditionally offer low employment opportunities for the space occupied. Applications coming forward need to demonstrate benefits to local businesses and to the local economy, as well as answering questions on energy usage and innovative use of renewable energy, eg hydrogen use.
- The digital agenda is one of Buckinghamshire's top priorities and the need for this type of facility (providing local resilience) will increase globally by around 45% in the coming years.

It was agreed:

- **The executive team will research the benefits and impacts from data centre construction, providing an independent assessment for use by the Planning Authority to help inform the process.**

6.3 East West Rail

- Information to be sent to Beth West, Chief Executive for East West Railway, on the Aylesbury link.

(Andrew Smith left the meeting)

Chair Recruitment

- 6.4
- Following the conclusion of the LEP Review, it was reported LEPs are now in a state of transition. For Buckinghamshire it is not clear, as yet, what this will mean.
 - **It was agreed to extend the tenure of the Chair and those Board members who might otherwise be stepping down at this point, until there is clarity around transition arrangements and discussions with the Local Authority have progressed around devolved structures.**

7 **FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS**

- **Board meetings** (9.30am-12pm) - 27 May, 22 July, 30 September, 9 December 2022
- **AGM** (9.30-11am) – 15 November 2022