

Agenda Item 6

Title:	Chief Executive's Report
Purpose:	To update board members on the main operational issues that have developed since our last board meeting in March 2023.
Recommendation(s):	That board members note the contents of this report and support the following recommendations. i. Approve the updated Risk Register, incorporating the changes linked to the latest position on Government funding and Integration Planning. ii. Approve a new scheme of delegation for the Westcott Incubator and Accelerator Programme (WIAP) and to approve the request to endorse the latest WIAP Panel recommendation to provide £20,000 to support Hybrock. iii. Support the proposals for Growth Hub Funding for 2023/24 incorporating both Government and LEP investment.
Response To Risk Register	The Risk Register is included as part of item 1 within this report.

1 Risk Register

The LEP Risk Register has been updated to incorporate the latest position relating to LEP core funding and the development of an place based programme incorporating integration. A copy of the updated Risk Register is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

2 Enterprise Zone and Westcott Incubator and Accelerator Incubation Funding

The strategic approach and key objectives for the Buckinghamshire Enterprise Zone across 2023-24 were presented at our March Board meeting, board members are reminded that no new development will be complete in 2023-24. Annual income growth will, however, occur from floorspace completed in 2022/23, therefore the programme focus for 2023-24 is to accelerate pipeline development opportunities through planning to construction stages to ensure another round of income growth, and priority sector growth from 2024-25 onwards.

Westcott: The Westcott Hub/DISC Business Case is underway (see Item 5). Options, including a grant funded option (bid to UK Space Agency), and pure commercial investment are being considered, with Bucks EZ as a potential co-investor in both options. The business case will be completed by July, a round of stakeholder engagement is underway and discussions are ongoing with a potential anchor tenant.

Patrizia's design team is now in place to develop the Masterplan for the EZ and considering site capacity.

Bucks LEP are sponsoring the 'Race to Space' Rocketry Competition for undergraduate students from across the UK. The completion will take place at Westcott from 3-7 July and finish with a Symposium on developing a talent pipeline for the sector and ensuring direct links to industry. This is a key opportunity to attract future talent to Westcott. We are also working with Patrizia and the Satellite Applications Catapult on a potential 'Westcott Showcase Event', currently planned for 12th September.

Silverstone: The potential US investor discussed at the March meeting, will not now be taking the first unit in Phase 5 and as a result the construction programme has altered to focus on smaller units where demand is higher. Construction of Phase 5 (last EZ phase) is now more likely to commence midway through 2024-25. Two units remain available at Phase 3 (3,724sqm and 8,405sqm) and we are working with MEPC and Department of Business and Trade to highlight these site opportunities where possible and influence the construction timeline positively.

Woodlands: 102,000sqm of commercial floorspace remains consented, but without a clear timeline for delivery. Correspondingly, approximately £3.7m each year in business rate revenue is forgone on this consented floorspace total. The Planning submission of the first reserved matters application Phase 1A comprising the A41/Woodlands Roundabout will be submitted in June, meaning a relevant planning permission should soon be in place that will trigger disposal and implementation obligation within year. Failure to meet these obligations may result in the promotion agreement framework unravelling which would put EZ delivery at risk. Bucks Advantage is also at an advanced stage in acquiring a 38Ha site required for Biodiversity enhancement, working closely with Bucks Council.

Westcott Incubation and Accelerator Programme (WIAP)

The WIAP Panel meets monthly to consider applicant pitches and to evaluate them for approval. This battle rhythm means that it could be possible to have a period of 6-8 weeks between Panel and formal Board approval. It is felt that this is a lengthy delay, given contracting also needs to take place between applicant and Catapult, and applicant and BLEP (funding repayment). These risk delaying proposals that rely on first/early mover advantages.

There are two options to improve this process, whilst ensuring the appropriate level of Board oversight.

- a) Continue the virtual approval process by unanimous decision, ahead of Board Meetings where needed. This creates the need for every Board member to review a decision that has already been reviewed by an expert panel. Furthermore, our Governance framework outlines that virtual decisions should not be routinely deployed and the unanimous decision requirement can lead to delays if any Board Member is away on leave or unwell.
- b) Nominate and delegate authority two Board Directors (Vice-Chair and one other) to review and approve panel decisions, in consultation with the Head of Enterprise Zone Development. The executive officer will provide the information required to support effective decision making. This should ensure decisions are made effectively and quickly, with an adequate level of governance and oversight in place.

Option B is recommended for approval, providing the appropriate level of scrutiny following an expert panel review and remain in compliance with the LEP Governance & Assurance Framework. All funding decisions will be reported to this board as part of the Enterprise Zone Update.

Following the latest meeting of the WIAP panel meeting on May 17th, board members are also asked to consider the approval of the funding of £20,000 to support Hybrock a British aerospace engineering company seeking to gain access to the Incubator Programme to support their investor readiness. Hybrock aim to provide fully integrated space logistics services to deliver small satellites and payloads into Low Earth Orbit (LEO) via the design and manufacture of high-tech, reliable, cost-effective rockets, and a

complete on-demand service. A copy of a report supporting this request is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report.

3 Growth Hub Funding

At the last meeting of this board the board considered the good performance of the Bucks Business First Growth Hub against the agreed KPI's. It was agreed that the criteria for funding for 2023/24 focus more on the impact of the Growth Hub activity and that any investment be aligned to Buckinghamshire Council investment, As a result we will be seeking to ensure that a detailed stakeholder report is completed for 2023/24 incorporating greater analysis on the impact of activity delivered from LEP and Council investment in addition to the KPI output metrics previously reported. A copy of a draft Stakeholder Report completed for the current year is attached as **Appendix 3** to this report, the format of this year's report will be agreed jointly with BBF.

Buckinghamshire Council have agreed that their investment for 2023/24 will be £400k and it has now been confirmed that the Growth Hub Funding allocated to Buckinghamshire for 2023/24 will be £261k, a slight increase on the previous year, to secure this Government funding the LEP will need to completed a delivery schedule for the Department of Business and Trade (DBT) although the template for this submission has yet to be received. It is therefore proposed that this year's LEP contribution to the Growth Hub programme should be **£190k** to be paid quarterly and subject to progress of the Buckinghamshire integration proposals. This additional LEP contribution to Growth Hub will come from the EZ programme as in 2022/23.

4 Core LEP Funding

I can report that the LEP Core Funding for 2023/24 has now been confirmed at the reduced rate of £250k due to a reduced obligation on function and role requirements. The funds will be released for payment in mid-June. In the correspondence received on May 18th and attached as **Appendix 4** to this report it was confirmed that the Local Growth Assurance Framework for LEPs remains valid, that delivery plans for the year ahead will need to be published at the conclusion of the future funding information exercise and that the exemptions in relation to LEP Board membership remain in place. We will work closely with the Cities and Local Growth Unit team to ensure that we remain in compliance with these requirements.

5 Bucks Health and Social Care Academy

The Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Academy (BHSCA) exists to unite Buckinghamshire's healthcare, social care, social work, primary care, community care and education providers by way of optimising the skills, education, training, and development of the workforce. It is a key county-based delivery vehicle for the Integrated Care System.

Working alongside the Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust, Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire New University, the University of Bedfordshire and the Buckinghamshire College Group the LEP has been a member of the Academy Steering Board since inception. The Academy has provided a valuable training platform for this important business sector and has helped crucial provide labour market and sector insight for both the LEP and BBF.

The Academy has recently changed its governance to operate as a Community Interest Company to provide greater flexibility within its operating model and to improve access to resources. BLEP have supported this process and will continue to be a non-funding member of the Steering Group. A summary of the Academies impact is attached as **Appendix 5** to this report for information.

6 GDP Data

Since the last March board meeting, new local-level GDP data has been released by the Office for National Statistics. The data shows that the Buckinghamshire economy was hit harder by the Covid-19 pandemic than the national (England) average, and in 2021, was experiencing a slower recovery.

Further details are available here: <https://www.buckseconomy.co.uk/blog/new-gdp-data-shows-slow-recovery-in-bucks/>

A series of maps showing the latest GDP data for Buckinghamshire and surrounding LEP areas can be found here: [Economic Output & Productivity - Dashboards, charts and maps - Buckinghamshire Economic Intelligence Observatory \(buckseconomy.co.uk\)](#)

7 Research Forward Plan / Year Timetable

Research Plan

We have developed a research plan for 2023/24. This can be found in **Appendix 6**.

The research team has the following broad priorities for the year ahead:

- Maintain a high quality, up-to-date and holistic economic evidence base for Buckinghamshire.
- Undertake research to fill economic evidence gaps.
- Monitor national and international economic growth policy.
- Inform the establishment and delivery of the Buckinghamshire Pooled Investment Fund.
- Maximise the utilization of economic evidence.

The plan lists the activities proposed to deliver these priorities.

AI Plan

The LEP has been considering the implementation of the recent rapid developments in relation to AI in terms of their impact on:

- The work of the LEP
- The economy of Buckinghamshire

Over the next 12 months, the LEP will explore how AI can be used to automate processes and improve efficiency. This will include using AI in-house (e.g. reading our internal files) to help assist with corporate memory and policy development, along with using AI such as ChatGPT and BingAI to review publicly available information. We will also explore the use of AI in drafting text and undertaking research.

The implications of AI for the Buckinghamshire economy will be monitored and articulated to wider partners by the LEP research team.

8 Accounts Preparation

The process for completing the LEP Annual Accounts for 2022/23 has now commenced. Richardsons Accountants are once again undertaking this process with the support of Buckinghamshire Council as our accountable body. It is anticipated that the Accounts preparation and subsequent audit will be completed by September for reporting to the Audit & Finance Sub-Group.

9 Staffing Update

The RemNom Sub Group met on April 26th to receive the summary of the appraisal staff reviews and to consider the annual pay review for the Executive Team. The Sub Group were also informed of two instances of illness within the team that are resulting in long term cover requirements that are being managed on an ongoing basis.

I am pleased to say that David Reilly has joined the team as the Digital Innovation Manager, due to the ongoing integration discussions this appointment has been made on an initial 12 months fixed term basis.

10 Communication / Events

I attended the opening of the new Drone Port facility on May 17th. The facilities, which have been supported by Getting Building Fund investment are generating a lot of interest within the drone and innovation communities, with the opening attended by over 150 business representatives including many prospective future users of the new facilities.

BLEP have also been supporting the launch of both the Kings Awards and Buckinghamshire Business Awards where we will be sponsoring the innovation category. We are currently working alongside a number of Enterprise Zone businesses to support their application process.

Board members are asked to:

- i. Approve the updated Risk Register, incorporating the changes linked to the latest position on Government funding and Integration Planning.**
- ii. Approve a new scheme of delegation for the Westcott Incubator and Accelerator Programme (WIAP) and to approve the request to endorse the latest WIAP Panel recommendation to provide £20,000 to support Hybrock.**
- iii. Support the proposals for Growth Hub Funding for 2023/24 incorporating both Government and LEP investment.**