

Agenda Item 7

Title:	Integration Plan Update
Purpose:	To inform members of the process being undertaken to consider further Economic Development Integration in Buckinghamshire in light of the Levelling Up White Paper and LEP Review.
Recommendation(s):	That board members note the content of this report and support the following recommendations: - <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Formalise a Joint Growth Partners Steering Group across the LEP and Growth Boards to undertake the development of an Integration Plan to include both governance, programme and membership arrangements to ensure that future levels of economic development funds and activity are locally determined and enhanced.2. Convene an Integration Working Group to focus on the mechanics of integration. This will be a joint operational group, working across the Council and LEP, reporting to the Joint Growth Partners Steering Group. This Integration Working Group will define the benefits of early integration and carry out a 'due diligence' review. Draft Terms of Reference (Appendix 3) to be approved.3. Submit a joint letter from the Growth and LEP Boards to government signalling our direction of travel and desire for an Integration Plan to be submitted and finalised. This Integration Plan would be developed in parallel and in support of engagement with government in pursuit of a County Deal for Buckinghamshire.4. Develop an Integration Plan and timetable through the Joint Growth Partners Steering Group for decision by both boards before 25th November 2022. In order to ensure that we have a fully coordinated submission to government, agree the Integration Plan together with the LEP Delivery Plan and any other required government submission at both the Growth Board and LEP Board meetings.
Impact on Risk Register:	Close collaborative working is essential to the efficient delivery of the Economic Development function in Buckinghamshire.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Levelling Up White Paper and supporting draft legislation provides Buckinghamshire with the opportunity to voluntarily address levelling up, regeneration and innovation priorities. Buckinghamshire is looking to build a case for a LEVEL 2 plus County Deal (LEVEL 2 with the addition of an investment fund) that could result in devolution of both capital funds and powers through the award of new funds, local flexibilities and freedoms.

- 1.2. As part of the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper in February 2022 an initial list of 9 pathfinder County Deal agreements were announced. Buckinghamshire was not included in this list despite early work on the County Deal concept throughout 2021.
- 1.3. In March, government issued a guidance letter to LEPs which outlined a framework for integration (**Appendix 1**) with the emphasis on balancing the accountability of local growth institutions, government's objectives on devolution and the need to retain a local, independent, business voice. Within this framework, core funding for BLEP was confirmed along with most other LEPs. The nine LEPs that are part of current County Deal arrangements are to receive transition funding. It is important that existing government funding arrangements are not jeopardised.
- 1.4. In May 2022, Government released the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. This new legislation, amongst other things, proposes new devolved powers and devolution arrangements which aim to empower local areas to drive economic growth and improve public services via the new County Deal framework.
- 1.5. Notwithstanding the extraordinary government events that followed, which has resulted in a new DLUHC ministerial team the above direction of travel remains, government policy of course could change depending upon the choice of the new Prime Minister and composition of the Cabinet.
- 1.6. Adapting this to a Buckinghamshire context may present the opportunity to pool resources previously dispersed between local authority, LEP and Growth Hub and instigate an ambitious levelling up and economic development programme that pairs our collective assets with new commercial and government support.
- 1.7. Consultants Metro Dynamics have been jointly commissioned to advise on the options for governance around a Buckinghamshire County Deal (**Appendix 2**). Given recent developments it may prove beneficial for partners, in the context of the changing landscape, to actively explore integration and establish a task and finish group to advise on an approach prior to any future decision on integration.

2. Commissioned Governance Options Report

- 2.1. In March 2022, Buckinghamshire Council and the LEP jointly commissioned Metro Dynamics to undertake an options review for future governance and delivery models which respond to the evolving Levelling Up national policy. This report sets out a direction of travel for Buckinghamshire to align ourselves into the path of the emerging national policy priorities. 'Combining a County Deal with LEP integration – the Buckinghamshire model for Economic Governance and Levelling Up' sets out an initial proposal for Buckinghamshire to pursue two processes in one: the rapid agreement of a County Deal and LEP/Council integration.
- 2.2. The options report sets out the benefits of this approach to catalyse funding and investment; consolidate and strengthen capacity, knowledge and expertise; focus on the key sectors to drive future growth; maintain first class business support; and put skills and regeneration at the heart of growth and levelling up.

2.3. Proposed new arrangements could include a strengthened and expanded 'Growth and Levelling Up Board' with a broader scope and remit across all areas of economic, place and levelling up policy. Underneath this new board a number of supporting sub-boards could be created to drive particular aspects of our collective ambition for Buckinghamshire. These may include an Investment Board, a Business and Sector Growth Board providing a business advisory voice, a Levelling Up Programme Board, Skills Board, and Place and Regeneration Board.

2.4. The new model would provide the foundations for the rapid agreement of a 'LEVEL 2 plus' County Deal with Government. It will build on the collaborative and partnership approach that has been a hallmark of Buckinghamshire's economic success. It will also bring together the best of Buckinghamshire's current arrangements into a form of more integrated governance and delivery that can drive economic, place and levelling up activity for the county.

Indicative Timeline:

July 2022	Joint Letter of Integration Intent Submitted by LEP & Growth Boards
September 2022	Progress report from Joint Partners Steering Group considered by LEP & Growth Boards
November 2022	Final Report from Joint Partners Steering Group considered by LEP & Growth Boards – potential early-stage integration activities underway.
November 2022	Submission of Integration Plan alongside LEP Delivery Plan for 2023/24
January 2023	Integration Plan included within updated County Deal Level 2+ submission
April 2023	Integration Completed

Board members are asked to support the following recommendations:

- 1. Formalise a Joint Growth Partners Steering Group across the LEP and Growth Boards to undertake the development of an Integration Plan to include both governance, programme and membership arrangements to ensure that future levels of economic development funds and activity are locally determined and enhanced.**
- 2. Convene an Integration Working Group to focus on the mechanics of integration. This will be a joint operational group, working across the Council and LEP, reporting to the Joint Growth Partners Steering Group. This Integration Working Group will define the benefits of early integration and carry out a 'due diligence' review. Draft Terms of Reference (Appendix 3) to be approved.**
- 3. Submit a joint letter from the Growth and LEP Boards to government signalling our direction of travel and desire for an Integration Plan to be submitted and finalised. This Integration Plan would be developed in parallel and in support of engagement with government in pursuit of a County Deal for Buckinghamshire.**
- 4. Develop an Integration Plan and timetable through the Joint Growth Partners Steering Group for decision by both boards before 25th November 2022. In order to ensure that we have a fully coordinated submission to government, agree the Integration Plan together with the LEP Delivery Plan and any other required government submission at both the Growth Board and LEP Board meetings.**