
Title: “Economy Team Bucks” Development

Purpose: To advise Board members of the progress being made in aligning the “Economy Team Bucks” working alongside local authority colleagues and other local partners and to highlight a potential growth opportunity linked to closer Growth Hub alignment across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

Recommendation: That Board members note and endorse the content of this report and agree the principle of a Buckinghamshire LEP investment to help secure an enhanced business support service in combination with neighbouring LEPs across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

1 Economy Team Bucks Alignment

Significant progress has been made in the operational alignment of the “Economy Team Bucks” since our last board meeting. A strengthened joint leadership team are now meeting regularly, and the integration of the Skills Hub and Growth Hub teams is almost complete. An updated copy of the team transition plan and future timeline is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report. The current years business plans are now being aligned and a new combined three-year business and operational plan commencing from April 2020 will be produced following approval from the BLEP and BBF Boards.

A recent awayday by the senior management team highlighted opportunities for closer alignment and identified areas for future investment and opportunities to strengthen Buckinghamshire’s delivery role within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. Part of the objective of this day was to further develop effective and transparent structures and to work towards a formalised memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Buckinghamshire LEP and Buckinghamshire Business First, documenting many of the informal arrangements that have been established between the teams. A copy of the draft MOU is attached as **Appendix 2** to this report, Board members are asked to review and comment on the draft MOU.

In addition to the alignment issues highlighted above, BLEP has been working with its accountable body on transition arrangements following incorporation. The Board signed off a financial MOU between the two parties at its last meeting. Recent discussions have been held on budget transition, pension and TUPE arrangements for staff. Buckinghamshire County Council have agreed that the LEP can have admitted body status for the Local Government Pension scheme and have invited an application for admitted body status, meaning that comprehensive employment offers can be made for seconded BCC staff transitioning to BLEP employment. Members are asked to support the establishment of a task and finish group to look at the financial arrangements needed to enable Buckinghamshire LEP to directly employ staff following the changed arrangements with the accountable body.

2 Supporting the establishment of the Buckinghamshire Council

Both Richard Harrington and Philippa Batting are supporting the transition programme for the Business & Economy teams within the Buckinghamshire authorities identifying areas for future collaboration and support in the establishment of the Buckinghamshire councils.

A summary of the economic development functions currently undertaken by the different organisations is attached as **Appendix 3** to this report, this summary clearly highlights the strengths of the combined BLEP and BBF operations in developing economic strategy, providing research and economic insight and in delivering business support and skills services in Buckinghamshire. A proposition paper is expected shortly from the transition team that will signal the future direction for economy and regeneration functions.

3 Realising the Arc Business Support Opportunity

A number of LEPs in the Arc have expressed an interest in developing Growth Hub services similar to those in Buckinghamshire and BBF has been approached as a potential provider services for both the Greater Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CA and SEMLEP areas.

A more closely aligned “Economy Team Bucks” will help ensure that Buckinghamshire will play a central role in the Arc joint activity and in particular future Growth Hub delivery. The Buckinghamshire Business First Growth hub, backed by the Ngage group structure, is widely recognised as the strongest within the Arc with a significantly more extensive track record of delivery and business engagement than neighbouring operations.

With the potential national funding opportunity arising at the end of this year with the European Funding Reserve Round there is significant scope to build on this success by establishing a joint purpose vehicle, operating as a silent brand behind the individual LEP area Growth Hubs. Such a vehicle could be supported by direct capital investments being made by all of the Arc LEPs. Such a vehicle would benefit from a strengthened balance sheet, which is a current constraint on growth, enabling it to bid for greater amounts of European reserve funding and other income sources when they become available. Blue Marble are advising Arc LEPs on the scope of enhanced growth services as part of the joint business plans referenced earlier. Furthermore, there is scope that the main administrative base for the expanded operation could remain in Buckinghamshire meaning that Buckinghamshire businesses remain at the heart of delivery.

Attached as **Appendix 4** is a summary of a joint vehicle proposal. Members are asked to consider the principle of a Buckinghamshire LEP investment into developing an enhanced capacity and to consider on what basis such an investment should be considered including whether all Arc LEPs need to contribute equally. If members are in agreement to the principle of investment, a detailed proposition will be brought back for consideration and approval.

Board members are asked to:-

- **Note and endorse the content of this report.**
- **Agree the principle of a Buckinghamshire LEP investment to help secure an enhanced business support service in combination with neighbouring LEPs across the heart of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.**